

'Parked' in the new Parliament, Opposition sees ulterior motive in Ambedkar statue shift

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi may have held the Constitution to his head in a show of reverence last week but it hasn't stopped his government from going ahead with a plan to relocate the prominently located statue of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, chairman of the committee that drafted the Constitution, at the Parliament complex.

It has been moved to a newly prepared enclosure within the premises where all statues — including that of Mahatma Gandhi — have been shifted from the sprawling lawns.

Ambedkar's statue, which was on a frontside lawn of the Parliament complex near the library, had in recent years become a second protest site after the Gandhi statue, which has been relocated for a second time in three-and-a-half years.

Both statues now stand in Prerna Sthal, which has been set up in what can be regarded as almost the rear side of the circular Parliament House since it is on the other side from the front portico.

Prerna Sthal is to be inaugurated on Sunday evening by the Vice-President and it has upset the Opposition, which views this relocation of Gandhi's and Ambedkar's statues along with many others as an attempt to rob them of their protest sites within the premises. For years, the Gandhi statue has been the most preferred protest site for Opposition MPs.

"The whole idea of this relocation and giving it a grandiose name is to ensure that the statues of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar are not in a prominent place right in front of Parliament House where MPs could conduct peaceful and democratic protests as and when required - and with the Modi regime they are required very frequently, almost on a daily basis," Congress media-in-charge and Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh posted on X.

Trinamul Congress Rajya Sabha MP Jawhar Sircar posted: "This surreptitious shifting of the statues of the Mahatma and Babasaheb is this minority government's first step to test its muscles! And to stop any protest! Let us not take it lying down! — demand these be reinstalled. @Jairam_Ramesh @AITCOfficial."

The two statues have been clubbed together with others on a landscaped patch of greenery of almost the same size as each had once occupied individually on the front side. The Gandhi statue was first moved in January 2021 to a green patch near the Speaker's Gate to facilitate the construction of the new Parliament building.

Apart from the protests, the shift could also affect the Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations on April 14, a date on which Ambedkarites used to throng the complex to pay homage to their icon.

It was a day when some of the historically most marginalised segments of Indian society could walk into the high-security complex without too much hassle.



New Delhi: Statues of Mahatma Gandhi and others during relocation within the Parliament premises as part of the redevelopment project. **PTI**

Last week, amid protests by Opposition politicians over the shifting of the Gandhi and Ambedkar statues along with those of Shivaji and Birsa Munda, besides others, the Lok Sabha secretariat had said that “due to location at different places in the Parliament Complex, visitors were not able to view these statues conveniently”.

It had added: “For this reason, all these statues are being respectfully installed in a grand Prerna Sthal in the Parliament House Complex itself.”

Ramesh had dismissed this clarification last week. “Rattled by photographs of these shifts that were also put out, late last night, well after 8PM, the Lok Sabha Secretariat was forced to issue a wholly bogus and clearly manufactured explanation for the shift. There has been NO discussion with any political party on these shifts,” he had posted.

“The real reason for the shifts can now be revealed. These statues were places where for the past 10 years Opposition parties — including the TDP and JDU — would stage peaceful and democratic protests against the Modi Government. Clearly the incoming ‘ek-tihai’ (one-third) PM wants no place next to where Parliament meets where protests, even in a Constitutional manner, against him and his Govt can take place.”