

SHUT ON JAN 18 DUE TO BIRD FLU OUTBREAK

Repairs on Red Fort nearly done, set to reopen soon

DIVYAA &
ANANYATI WARI
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THE CALL to reopen Red Fort will be taken soon as repair work on the entrance area is nearly complete, officials at the Archaeological Survey of India told *The Indian Express*.

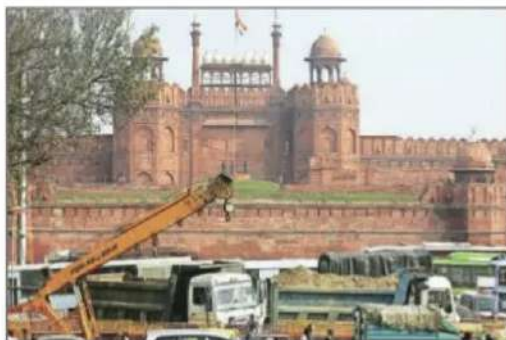
The Red Fort was shut on January 18 due to the outbreak of Avian Flu detected there by the district administration and Delhi's disaster management authority. The order was continued "till further notice" on February 1 citing the same reason. Around 60 birds have been found dead at

the monument since January.

On January 26, hundreds of people part of the tractor rally carried out by farmers had stormed the Red Fort and vandalised the entry security counters and porta cabins used by officials.

Machines, CCTV cameras, metal detectors, glass windows and security equipment at the entrance of the Red Fort, where visitors deposit their baggage and are cleared by the security, were ransacked. Two of Lahori Gate's brass finials, which had gone missing, have been found in the wreckage.

On the monument's first floor, said Union Culture Minister Prahlad Patel after a recce, an un-



The Red Fort suffered damage during the tractor rally by farmers on January 26. *Praveen Khanna*

der-construction interpretation centre had suffered massive damage across its 6-7 blocks.

The centre is being developed by the Dalmia Bharat Group, which had won the contract for the Fort's maintenance, development and operations in April 2018 under the 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme.

As per sources at the ASI, most of the repair work at the entrance area has been completed and the decision to reopen the monument will be taken eventually.

Dr Rakesh Singh, the animal husbandry officer at the north district, said, "Avian flu was detected in the samples collected around a month ago. Sanitation

and sterilisation work is going on inside. Though no new incident has been detected of dying birds, only after two consecutive negative results can it be declared infection-free. The round two of testing is set to happen soon."

A spokesperson of the ASI told *The Indian Express*, "The major focus right now is to mitigate the bird flu there. People should not be fearful. The area is closed as per regulations so that the infection can be disposed of and controlled."

As of now, personnel of the Delhi Police and the CISF have barricaded all entry points to the monument. No visitors are permitted inside the grounds.