

COMING SOON: THE INDIAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Relevant for: Indian Culture | Topic: Promotion and Preservation of Culture Incl. UNESCO

Jurassic find:An excavated ichthyosaur fossil found near Lodai village in Kutch district of Gujarat in 2017.AFPHANDOUT

From dinosaur fossils to pre-human skulls, India is home to a vast treasury of geological and palaeontological specimens that contain a wealth of scientific information about the planet and its history. But these rare specimens are scattered in different labs all over the country. So, to better conserve this prehistoric heritage, the government is planning to house them in one place — an ‘Earth Museum’.

This museum will be modelled on the American Museum of Natural History, or the Smithsonian museum in the U.S. The museum, which will be set up as a public-private partnership, would be located somewhere in Delhi, Noida or Gurugram, said G.V.R Prasad, head of the Department of Geology, University of Delhi.

K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) to the Prime Minister, said at a press conference on Wednesday that such a repository was necessary to make people aware of India’s palaeontological and geological wealth. “There is a lot of history here, but somehow it hasn’t been communicated well,” he said. Another concern, he added, was that several collections of fossils and important geological specimens weren’t properly organised, and they survived only due to the efforts of individual researchers who maintained them within their labs. A single site, accessible to the public as well as researchers wanting to investigate rare and important finds, was necessary, Mr. VijayRaghavan said.

Plan takes shape

The PSA led a meeting of the Prime Minister’s Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) last November, where the need for such a museum was endorsed. A meeting of experts from the U.S., the U.K, and South Korea to discuss the practical aspects of developing and maintaining such a museum is scheduled to be held in Delhi in the first week of April, Mr. Prasad told *The Hindu*. “India doesn’t have a single such museum of repute, or a repository where new finds may be compared to those already discovered. I’m not too sure about the future of the collections in my own department in Delhi University once I retire,” he added. India has a rich geological history and fossils dating back to the breaking up of the Gondwanaland super-continent nearly 150 million years ago. Prominent fossils include the jaw of an extinct ape, *Gigantopithecus bilaspurensi*, dinosaur eggs so large they were mistaken for cannon balls, and the skeleton of a horned carnivore, *Rajasaurus narmadensis*, or the royal Narmada dinosaur.

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