DoA hiring experts to study the condition of Singha Durbar

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KATHMANDU, Jan 12: Amid the ongoing debate over whether to retrofit or rebuild the Singha Durbar, the Department of Archaeology (DoA) has set up a new plan to conduct further study of the administrative building which was damaged during the April 2015 earthquake.

The Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) carried out a research to check the condition of the building and the study concluded that the building should be demolished and rebuilt in the same form. However, the DoA said that the final decision regarding the issue has not been taken but it has little hope that the government will preserve the archaeological values of the Rana-era building.

The DoA is planning to hire some experts to conduct its own research for the first time. The DoA decided to hire experts from Japan, UNESCO and some national experts after many experts from the country raised objection to the findings of the study conducted by the MoUD.

"Singha Durbar has its own value of ancient arts, culture and architecture,” said an official at the DoA requesting anonymity. “So, it should not be demolished but it should be preserved using latest technology.”

According to an official, the team of Japanese experts will arrive within a month. “After their arrival, we will make a committee. The UNESCO is also interested to help us,” said the official.

Bishnu Raj Karki, former joint secretary and conservationist, argued that demolishing every historical building is not a good decision if we want to preserve our culture and arts.

He said that Singha Durbar should be preserved through proper conservation methods and the country should preserve its historical property.

“Conservation of historical property is a big challenge at a time when the country is conducting conservation works of various monuments. Of them, Singha Durbar is a major complex which has precious artistic values and we have to save it at any cost,” he said.

“So, we should not be in a hurry to demolish Singha Durbar and should conduct in-depth research to know the condition of the building after the earthquakes.”

The Singha Durbar, which is the main administrative building of the country, was damaged during the disaster prompting the government to shift the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Defense, the National Planning Commission and other key government agencies away from the building. Currently, the Ministry of Supply and some sections of National Reconstruction Authority and some other offices are serving from the Singha Durbar.

As the earthquakes badly damaged the Rana-era building, the offices were shifted to other buildings inside the Singha Durbar premises.

The then Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana had built the Singha Durbar in 1903 as his residence. It was designed in a neo-classical design. The palace had over 1,000 rooms arranged around seven quadrangles and was among the largest buildings in South Asia. The front wing of the palace was destroyed by fire in 1973.

Last year, the government had allocated Rs 5 billion for the reconstruction of all the government buildings. According to the government, at least 2,688 government buildings were fully damaged while other 3,779 government houses were partially damaged by the earthquakes.