

Jantar Mantar - Astronomical Heritage and the Debate Over Its Role as Delhi's Protest Site

August 9, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Jantar Mantar Latest News

- The Delhi High Court has questioned the continued use of Jantar Mantar Road as Delhi's designated protest venue, reviving the debate over balancing the right to protest with public order.

Jantar Mantar: An Architectural and Scientific Heritage

- **Jantar Mantar** is an 18th century astronomical observatory built by **Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II of Jaipur**, one of medieval India's foremost astronomers and patrons of science.
- It reflects India's rich tradition of astronomy, mathematics, and scientific observation.
- **Historical Background**
 - Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II constructed five astronomical observatories between **1724 and 1735** at Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi and Mathura (now demolished).
 - The observatory at Delhi was the **first Jantar Mantar** to be built and later served as the model for the larger observatory at Jaipur.
- The term "**Jantar Mantar**" is believed to be derived from the Sanskrit words:

- **Yantra**: Instrument
- **Mantra**: Formula or calculation
- Together, the name refers to instruments used for astronomical observations and calculations.

Architectural Features

- Unlike modern observatories that rely on optical instruments, Jantar Mantar consists of **large masonry structures** designed for naked-eye astronomical observations.
- These instruments were constructed with remarkable geometric precision to measure celestial movements and improve the accuracy of astronomical calculations.
- Some important instruments include:
 - **Samrat Yantra**: A giant sundial used to measure time and the Sun's declination
 - **Jai Prakash Yantra**: Used to determine the position of celestial bodies
 - **Ram Yantra**: Measures the altitude and azimuth of celestial objects
 - **Misra Yantra**: Used to determine the shortest and longest days of the year and compare local time with other locations

Cultural and Scientific Significance

- Jantar Mantar represents the fusion of:
 - Indian astronomical traditions
 - European scientific developments available during the 18th century
- The observatories demonstrate India's advanced understanding of astronomy before the widespread use of telescopes in the subcontinent.
- Among the five observatories, the **Jantar Mantar at Jaipur** has been designated a **UNESCO World Heritage Site (2010)** due to its outstanding scientific and architectural significance.
- The **Delhi Jantar Mantar** is protected by the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** as a monument of national importance.

News Summary

- On 7th August, while hearing a petition seeking permission for a protest at Jantar Mantar, the Delhi High Court expressed concern over the continued use of the site for demonstrations.
- The Court observed that Delhi should not be "put to ransom unnecessarily" through repeated protests.
- The hearing followed a recent Supreme Court direction asking the Centre to consider a plea seeking the removal of Jantar Mantar as Delhi's designated protest site and to instead make Ramlila Maidan the principal venue for demonstrations.
- It is important to note that protests are not held inside the historic Jantar Mantar monument.
- The designated protest site is located on the road opposite the monument, at the intersection of Jantar Mantar Road and Sansad Marg, allowing demonstrators to remain close to Parliament while staying outside the high-security zone.

Evolution of Jantar Mantar as Delhi's Protest Site

- During the first few decades after Independence, **Boat Club lawns** (now along **Kartavya Path**) served as Delhi's principal venue for political rallies.
- A turning point came in **1988**, when a massive farmers' rally led by **Mahendra Singh Tikait** attracted lakhs of protesters. Along with heightened security concerns during the **Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid movement**, this prompted the Delhi administration to discontinue large demonstrations at the Boat Club.
- By **1993**, Delhi Police had begun directing protests towards **Jantar Mantar**, primarily to improve traffic management and crowd control.
- Initially, there was **no statutory notification** declaring Jantar Mantar the official protest site. Instead, it gradually acquired this status through administrative practice before being formally recognised through Delhi Police Standing Orders.

Regulatory Framework for Protests

- The protest site was formally regulated through Delhi Police Standing Order 309 (2003).
- The order prescribed different venues based on the expected size of the gathering:
 - Up to 5,000 participants: Jantar Mantar
 - 5,000 to 50,000 participants: Ramlila Maidan
 - Above 50,000 participants: Burari Grounds
 - Larger gatherings: Narela
- Following the National Green Tribunal (NGT) order in 2017 and the Supreme Court judgment in 2018, Delhi Police issued Standing Order 10 (2018).
- Under the revised framework:
 - Jantar Mantar can accommodate protests of up to 1,000 people.
 - Larger demonstrations are permitted only at Ramlila Maidan.
 - Organisers must comply with conditions relating to crowd size, duration, loudspeakers, and security arrangements.

Why Has the Site Become Contentious?

- Jantar Mantar has become synonymous with several major public movements, including:
 - Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement
 - Nirbhaya protests
 - One Rank One Pension (OROP) protests
 - Demonstrations by farmers, students, women, persons with disabilities, and civil society organisations
- However, its central location has also generated concerns regarding Traffic congestion, Noise pollution, Security near key government institutions and Inconvenience to nearby residents.
- In **2017**, the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** directed that protests be stopped at Jantar Mantar, citing three reasons:
 - No executive order formally declaring it a protest site.
 - The area is being designated as **residential** under the Delhi Master Plan.
 - Noise pollution caused by prolonged demonstrations.
- The order was criticised by activists, who argued that it curtailed the constitutional right to peaceful protest.

- In **2018**, the **Supreme Court** held that protests could not be completely prohibited at either Jantar Mantar or Boat Club.
- Instead, it directed authorities to frame guidelines that balance the **right to peaceful protest** with the rights of local residents and the need to maintain public order.
- Today, **Jantar Mantar remains Delhi's primary protest venue**, while **Ramlila Maidan** continues to serve as the preferred location for larger demonstrations.
- Unlike Jantar Mantar, however, Ramlila Maidan is a paid venue, with charges of approximately **Rs. 50,000 per day**.

Source: TH

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/jantar-mantar-heritage-site/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.