

National Museums Given Revenue Quotas; Failure May Trigger Reorganization

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The Agency for Cultural Affairs has, for the first time, set numerical targets for self-generated revenue in the five-year medium-term goals for national museums and art galleries starting this fiscal year. The targets require that by fiscal 2030, more than 65% of operating costs related to exhibitions be covered by self-generated income such as admission fees. Museums that remain below 40% as of fiscal 2029 will be subject to reorganization. Amid expected declines in tax revenue due to a shrinking and aging population, core national institutions responsible for promoting culture and the arts have effectively been given a “quota” to earn money.

“Only a limited number of museums will be able to achieve this.” While confusion and concern are spreading among museum staff, expert opinions are sharply divided. “Closing Down Museums and Art Galleries”? The Agency for Cultural Affairs sets medium-term goals every five years for the three independent administrative institutions that operate national museums and art galleries: the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, the National Museums of Art, and the National Museum of Nature and Science.

In February this year, it released the goals for fiscal years 2026–2030. The numerical targets were set specifically for the “exhibition” category among the four main museum functions (collection and preservation, education and outreach, research, and exhibition). The agency requires each institution to cover 65% or more of its exhibition operating costs with self-generated revenue (admission fees, merchandise sales, etc.) by fiscal 2030, and aims for 100% by fiscal 2035. Currently, all three institutions remain in the mid-50% range.

The most controversial point is the severe consequence for failing to meet the target. Museums other than the National Museum of Nature and Science that fall below 40% in fiscal 2029 — or are judged as “not sufficiently fulfilling their socially expected roles” — will become targets for reorganization. Regarding reorganization, the Agency explains that “we are not assuming any closures; we will review the division of roles among the museums.”

However, many social media posts criticize the move as “shutting down museums and art galleries.” The agency also set ambitious targets for future visitor numbers: 12 million (FY2024: approx. 4.11 million) for the five museums run by the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, and 10 million (approx. 3.23 million) for the six museums of the National Museums of Art — roughly three times the current figures. The National Museum of Nature and Science is expected to reach 4 million visitors (approx. 2.41 million), about 1.6 times its current level.

To boost revenue and attendance, the agency called for measures such as introducing “dual pricing” (higher admission fees for foreign visitors than for domestic residents),

extending exhibition periods for National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties, and expanding nighttime openings.

“100% Self-Generated Revenue Is Going Too Far” This is the first time such a “quota” has been imposed, and it has triggered confusion and alarm on the ground. An official from one of the corporations operating national museums said, “Even now, some special exhibitions are so overcrowded that visitors cannot properly appreciate the works. If we have to increase visitor numbers and admission revenue further…”