

## **Italian minister slams move to cover up nude statues**

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**Rome:** Italy's Culture Minister on Wednesday said a decision to cover up nude statues during a visit to Rome's Capitoline Museums by Iran's President Hassan Rouhani was "incomprehensible".

"Choosing to cover up the statues is incomprehensible. There are many other ways of respecting the sensitivities of an important foreign visitor," tweeted Franceschini.

Later, after accompanying Rouhani on a visit to Rome's ancient Colosseum monument, Franceschini said that neither he nor Italy's Premier Matteo Renzi had been informed about the decision to cover up the nudes.

Rouhani dismissed the controversy over the move to cover up the nude statues with wooden cartons during his visit to the Capitoline Museums on Monday.

"There were no talks about this," he told a press conference on Wednesday.

But Rouhani said he had appreciate the gesture.

"All I can say is that Italian people are very hospitable. They try to do everything to put you at ease and I thank you for this," he told journalists.

The nude cover-up made world headlines worldwide and prompted astonishment and ridicule within Italy.

It outraged some rightwing lawmakers, who portrayed it as a grovelling nod to the Islamic Republic that undermined the nation's cultural identity.

Conservative senator Maurizio Gasparri said on Wednesday he would question Renzi in parliament over the cover-up, which Rome's archaeological superintendency has denied authorising.

"This measure was not approved by us but was organised by the prime minister's office," the archaeological superintendency stated on Wednesday as a blame game appeared to get underway.

Renzi and Rouhani made speeches at the Capitoline Museum on Monday after a signing ceremony that saw Italian companies seal some 20 billion dollars worth of deals with Iran.

Rouhani is on a landmark visit to Italy and France this week as he seeks to rebuild Iran's economic and political ties with the West after the ending of international sanctions against the Islamic Republic last week.

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