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**A DETAILED STUDY ON CENTRAL VISTA PROJECT**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Central Vista Redevelopment Project was proposed in September 2019 by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. It was proposed to give a facelift to Lutyens' Delhi and make it an important tourist attraction in India as well as to equip the country's central administration with modern facilities. Under this project, a new Parliament building, a new Central Secretariat and a new Rajpath will be built at a distance of 3 km from India Gate to Rashtrapati Bhavan. Along with this, the North and South blocks will be converted into museums. The estimated total cost of this redevelopment project is Rs. 20,000 crore and is expected to be completed by 2026. The raw materials used for construction are sourced from different parts of India. Sandstone and granite are obtained from Dholpur and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan. The timber for the wooden structure for the new Parliament House is procured from Nagpur and is being designed by craftsmen and artisans from Mumbai. The hand-woven carpets are from the city- Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh.

**DESIGN FOR CENTRAL VISTA**

Central Vista refers to the area extending from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate in Delhi. Though this remarkable and historical complex was constructed during the British Raj, it gained its nurturing and importance in the post-independence era. Part of the Central Vista includes the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament House, North and South Blocks and the Central Government Secretariat Building along the Rajpath. Institutions like the National Museum, National Archives, Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts (IGNCA), Udyog Bhawan, Bikaner House and many other nearby plots come under the umbrella of Central Vista.

This redevelopment includes two main features- a new Parliament building and a new common Central Secretariat. The new Parliament building will be constructed at the intersection of the triangle of Red Cross Road and Raisina Road. The new Parliament has a seating capacity of about 900 to 1200 Ministers of Parliament. This proposed capacity is sufficient to allow a joint session of both the Houses. Another new feature includes the PM's residence and his office which is to be located at the back of the South Block. The main objective of a PMO in the vicinity is to improve efficiency. PM's house to be connected to his new office and new Parliament through nuclear attack resistant underground tunnels. Similarly, the new residence of the Vice President will be located behind the North Block.

Keeping the Rashtrapati Bhavan untouched, the North and South blocks will be converted into museums showcasing the 'Making of Modern India' and 'India at 75'. The current National Museum will be demolished and relocated. There shall be no other building higher than the structure to ensure the prominence of the India Gate and to maintain the splendor of the war memorials. The plan also includes demolition of some existing secretariat buildings such as Rail Bhavan, Shastri Bhavan as well as the Ministry of External Affairs building, the Vice President's residence and other buildings along the Rajpath.<sup>1</sup>

The new Secretariat of the Central Government will have eight buildings, each with eight floors, which will take over the place where IGNCA and Raksha Bhavan are currently located. The entire house is able to house around 25,000 to 32,000 employees belonging to different ministries.

**HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF CENTRAL VISTA**

In the colonial era, after King George V announced the shift of India's capital to Delhi from Calcutta (now Kolkata), the Delhi Town Planning Committee was set up in 1912. Prominent

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<sup>1</sup> *Central Vista Project: The Central Vista Redevelopment Plan*. Rethinking The Future. <https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com>

British architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker envisaged the Central Vista Complex as the center of administration in India to house all the facilities needed for the efficient functioning of government. It was inaugurated in 1931 and consists of the building namely Rashtrapati Bhavan, parliament House, North and South Blocks and Record Office (later renamed the National Archives) along with the India Gate memorial and civic gardens on either side of the Rajpath. Together they designed the Parliament House Building. In addition, Lutyens designed the Rashtrapati Bhavan and Herbert designed the North and South Blocks. The plan was based on traditional urban planning tools, consisting of a strong axis, an emphasized focal point, the formation of important nodes, and a fixed end point. At that time, it was one of the largest projects of its kind in the world, conceived and designed to reflect India's spirit, progress and global importance.

Central Vista's design is influenced by India. This includes the use of red and beige sandstone that was used for the monumental architecture of Delhi since the 13<sup>th</sup> century; Modelling of the Viceroy's House dome on the Great Stupa at Sanchi, ancient Indian bell capitals for the pillars of the Dominion located between the Secretariat blocks; and countless feature of Indian architecture- jaali (perforated stone screens), chhajja (perforated overhangs), chhatris (pillared domes) and more.

### **FROM KINGSWAY TO RAJPATH TO KARTAVYA PATH**

The section between Rashtrapati Bhavan and the grand Chhatra below the iconic India Gate has been renamed as "Kartavya Path". Built by British architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, the British called it "Kingsway" in honour of king George V, the then Emperor of India. After independence, the name of this section was changed to Rajpath, which literally translates to Kingsway in Hindi. Since that time Rajpath has become synonymous with the annual Republic Day parade. On this year's Independence Day, PM Narendra Modi in his address to the nation underlined the need to let go of the colonial burden. The renaming of Rajpath is being seen as a step in the same direction. It marks a change in the Kartavya Path from the erstwhile Rajpath as a symbol of power to being an example of public ownership and empowerment. According to a statement issued by the PMO, Kartavya Path will have improved parking spaces, new pedestrian underpasses, exhibition panels and improved night lighting. For the annual Republic Day parade, the Ministry of Urban Affairs has announced that seating arrangements will be made in place of the temporary structure that comes up every year.

### **NETAJI'S STATUE AT INDIA GATE'S GRAND CANOPY**

PM Narendra Modi unveiled the 28 feet tall statue of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose at India Gate on September 8. This statue has been installed at the grand Chhatra of India Gate. The statue is carved in jet black granite, the 65,000 kg statue replacing the 50-foot marble statue of King George V that was added to the India Gate complex in 1936 as a tribute to the deceased Emperor. It was removed in 1968 and has been vacant since. Netaji's statue will stand where his hologram statue was unveiled on his 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary.<sup>2</sup>

### **AIM OF CENTRAL VISTA PROJECT**

This redevelopment project aims to redevelop the Central vista which serves as the country's central area of administration.<sup>3</sup> With this reform, India will get a place that will meet the needs of the future, the work of an architectural genius that will attract tourists and a place for the smooth functioning of India's central administration.

### **NEED FOR CENTRAL VISTA PROJECT**

#### **1. GOVERNANCE BENEFITS**

Improving the productivity and efficiency of administration, providing it with highly functional and purpose-designed office infrastructure is the main objective of the Central Vista

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<sup>2</sup> The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com>

redevelopment Project. There are many contingency government benefits. Some of which are discussed below:

There will be an easy movement of personnel, documents and goods, thereby increasing administrative efficiency. The proximity and ease of inter-departmental movement along with flexible and modular floor plans enable the government to function in a more efficient and productive manner by aggregating all 51 Central Government Ministries including 10 Common Central Secretariat buildings.

Another benefit is the increase in office spaces which will bridge the huge gap between current and future demand and existing availability. With the help of this modern workspace will be created with latest technology for better productivity and efficient use of human resources. The infrastructure and facilities will be made at par with global standards. The redevelopment project will strive towards sustainable development with the creation of green buildings and clean transport. The overall redevelopment will accelerate efficiency and synergy in government functioning.

The Prime Minister's Office, the residence and the Vice President's residence are proposed to be built near the South Block and North Block respectively, adjacent to the Parliament and the General Central secretariat which will help in addressing the security and logistics arrangements in a comprehensive manner without any interference with regular movement of traffic.

## 2. SOCIAL BENEFITS

Improved public spaces in Central Vista, including the National Museum, IGNCA, revamped Central Vista Avenue, India Gate Plaza and Lawns will be accessible to the public. About 80,000 sq. m. of government spaces in the North and South Blocks will open as public spaces due to be converted into the National Museum Complex. An underpass is also being constructed within Central Vista Avenue to ensure road safety for visitors to the iconic location while easing traffic congestion. People can access Central Vista Avenue via public transportation or park their vehicles at the dedicated parking space available on site. In addition, dedicated spaces for social gatherings in the refurbished avenue will provide leisure and entertainment opportunities to tourists.

## 3. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability is at the core of the Central Vista Redevelopment Master Plan which has a comprehensive approach to harnessing centralised systems and infrastructure, promoting the use of public transport and upgradable technology, systems and services. Simultaneous strict measures are also being taken to reduce the environmental impacts of the Central Vista Project during the construction phase. Steps are being taken to reduce air emissions, noise, waste water discharge, soil erosion as well as construction waste at the site. The projects will result in an increase in green cover. Trees will not be cut in any project in Central Vista. Trees will be planted in the eco-park being developed by NTPC at Badarpur after the permission of the competent authorities.

3,230 trees are proposed to be transplanted at Eco-Park, NTPC, Badarpur after obtaining EC from Ministry of Environment & Forests and permission of Forest Department. 1,753 new trees will be planted within the project sites of CCS and other buildings and 2,000 new trees are to be planted in the Central Vista area.<sup>4</sup>

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF CENTRAL VISTA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN**

#### 1. RESTORING THE ORIGINAL SYMMETRY AND LAYOUT OF THE CENTRAL VISTA:

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<sup>4</sup> [www.centralvista.gov.in](http://www.centralvista.gov.in)

The Central Vista was originally designed with a strong underpinning geometry, spectacular symmetry and a carefully choreographed processional route (axis, focal, point, nodes and termination). The master plan aims to restore the original symmetry and order while respecting the heritage of the building and the spaces.

**2. STRENGTHENING THE FUNCTIONING OF LEGISLATURE:**

The first purpose-designed parliament for independent India, equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure to meet all the needs of an expanded Parliament is proposed by the Master Plan. After the current building is renovated and refurbished, the two will be used in conjunction. In addition, a separate building is also planned for the offices for the Members of Parliament. The existing Parliament House, library and annex, along with the new Parliament House and chambers for Members of Parliament will form an integrated Legislative Enclave.

**3. IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY OF ADMINISTRATION:**

The planned Common Central Secretariat (CCS) will consist of 10 office buildings and a Central Convention Centre. Presently, 39 Ministries are in Central Vista, while 12 Ministries have their offices outside Central Vista. All the 51 Ministries are envisaged to be set up in 10 CCS buildings to improve coordination, cooperation and administrative coordination. Office spaces are being planned with ample space with modern technical facilities and amenities. The existing buildings of Central Vista will be replaced with modern office buildings with a capacity of about 54,000 personnel, which will meet the present and future needs of the ministries.

**4. CONSERVATION AND REJUVENATION OF CULTURAL AND HERITAGE FACILITIES:**

Central Vista Avenue will be renovated, its infrastructure upgraded and new social amenities provided while maintaining its essential character in order to use it with adequate infrastructure for national events and of a suitable quality to be made more comfortable. The magnificent North and South Blocks will be renovated as the National Museum. They will hold exhibitions of 'India till 1857' and 'India from 1857' respectively. IGNCA will continue its important cultural agenda in expanded, purpose-designed, world class facilities at a new location opposite Hyderabad House on the Hexagon. In addition, a purpose-designed facility has also been envisioned next to the historic building of the national Archives of India (NAI) to house state-of-the-art facilities.

**5. PROVIDING ADEQUATE AND SECURE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR EXECUTIVE OFFICES:**

A modern, secure and properly equipped Executive Enclave is planned to house the executive offices and facilities of the Prime Minister's Office, the Cabinet Secretariat and the National Security Council Secretariat. Secure residential facilities for the Vice President and the Prime Minister have been planned at the back of the North and South Blocks which have all the necessary facilities for their daily functioning.

**6. ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY, EXPANDING PUBLIC SPACE AND EXTENDING THE CENTRAL VISTA AXIS:**

The overall objective of the planned works on Central Vista is to ensure environmental sustainability, expand and improve the public space and expand its axis. New India Garden is being planned near Yamuna River. Thus, extending the present Central Vista axis to 2.24 km to realize the vision of 'Ridge to River'. In addition, a publicly accessible National Biodiversity

Arboretum is planned to the west of the President's estate to showcase India's endangered plants in high-tech greenhouses set amidst indigenous forests.

**7. PROVIDING ADEQUATE AND SECURE FACILITIES FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT AND THE PRIME MINISTER:**

Modern, adequate and secure residential facilities for the Vice President and the Prime Minister are planned in the North of North Block and South of South Block respectively. These new residential facilities will be highly functional and will be equipped with all necessary amenities. Establishing offices and residences of all the dignitaries at one place will reduce infrastructure constraints and improve traffic management of the city.

**8. PROMOTING TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT:**

The Central Vista Redevelopment Project is envisaged by integrating the principles of transit-oriented development. An Automated People Mover of about 3.1 km length will be built underground to connect and integrate all the buildings of the Common Central Secretariat. It will run in a close loop to meet the transportation requirement of government employees working in these buildings. It will provide connectivity to the existing metro network at Udyog Bhawan and Central Secretariat stations on the Yellow and Purple lines of the Delhi Metro, further connectivity from the National Capital Region (NCR) and will reduce the need to commute to office using private vehicles. All the buildings of the Central Secretariat will be connected to each other and to Delhi's Metro network through a secure underground people mover and with the city's bus network via grade shuttle. As a result of the adoption of shared transit facilities, the overall emissions and air pollution levels from private vehicles are expected to come down, resulting in an improvement in the overall air quality of the capital city.<sup>5</sup>

**WHY THE CENTRAL VISTA PROJECT IS BEING OPPOSED**

Critics pointed to the project with several flaws in the approval process at the wrong time. The notification for the project was issued in April and was immediately cleared by the Expert Appraisal Committee of the Environment Ministry at a time when the country was reeling from the COVID pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

➤ **LACK OF TRANSPARENCY:**

According to reports, the planning of the project has been going on since 2015, but behind the scenes. There is no information about the tender floated, either the procedure followed, or the criteria for selection of the companies that made it. No exhibition of the proposed buildings was held, no data was disclosed, no models or drawings were displayed.

➤ **CHANGES IN HERITAGE STATUS:**

Central Vista has been awarded the highest grade 1 heritage status by the Unified Building Bye-laws of Delhi. Grade 1 classified buildings cannot be changed and "no interference can be made unless it is in the interest of strengthening and prolonging the life of the buildings". However, later, the heritage Conservation Committee made a distinction to redefine the status of 'heritage' between pre-independence and post-independence buildings, leading to post-independence buildings built by Indian architects and engineers in the 60s. The building was allowed to be demolished. This, in effect, allowed the demolition and replacement of buildings

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<sup>5</sup> [www.mapsofindia.com](http://www.mapsofindia.com)

<sup>6</sup> <https://zeenews.india.com>

such as Krishi Bhawan, apart from the National Museum and the Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts (IGNCA).

➤ **LAND USE CHANGES:**

In 2020, the Delhi Development Authority made land use changes to convert public open spaces such as district parks and children's play areas for use as government offices. Before the notification, there was a 60/40 split between public/semi-public (60 per cent) use and government (40 per cent) use including museums, galleries, art centres, national library, (Delhi) High Court, etc. After the notification, it was reduced to 95 per cent for government use and 5 per cent for public and semi-public use.

➤ **ENVIRONMENT CLEARANCE:**

On April 22, the new Parliament building was given environmental clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change without any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

**CASE FILED**

*RAJEEV SURI v. UNION OF INDIA*

This case was filed in the Delhi High Court in March 2020 against the land use change and another petition regarding the violation of Central Vista's heritage status. The petitions were transferred to the Supreme Court and are now under the jurisdiction of the Apex court.

**CONCLUSION**

The Central Vista Project should be projected as a project that fulfils the aspirations of the people and not as something imposed on the people. All valid concerns should be taken into account and a proper assessment should be made to ensure that the project will not have any negative impact.