

New Vista has a sense of ownership, responsibility

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In my forty years as a public servant, I have shuffled back and forth between the buildings of Central Vista— North Block and South Block; and Shastri Bhawan and Nirman Bhawan. I can tell you definitively that the time had come for a new Kartavya Path for a new and aspirational India.

The 3-km-long stretch, home to several iconic structures has been undergoing a major revival for the past two years. The Central Vista redevelopment project was a bold and timely decision by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It provided much-needed resuscitation to these colonial-era buildings. As the PM unveiled the newly revamped Kartavya Path, one was reminded of the timeless tussle between legacies of the past and aspirations for the future.

Imperial architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker designed the Central Vista in the 1920s, inspired by the US Capitol Complex and France's Champs Elysees. They imagined a grand avenue—or what was then known as the Kingsway (now known as Kartavya Path)—flanked by massive lawns. The focal point was the Viceroy's House, which later became the Rashtrapati Bhavan, and the North and South Blocks. At the other end of the avenue was a war memorial, or the India Gate. A Council House, which later became the Parliament of India, and an Imperial Records building, which is now known as the National Archives of India, were also planned.

Although embraced by Independent India as the seat of the government, Central Vista underwent many unplanned constructions, additions, and encroachments. From barracks on either side of the Kartavya Path to the haphazard construction of many Central government office buildings, to the addition of streets to dispassionate attempts at modernizing and increasing the capacity of the original buildings, Central Vista devolved into chaos and dis-

order. The conversation around a complete revamp of the Central Vista had been going on for decades. However, little was done till we finally shook off the inertia and decided to tackle the issue head-on. Why did we need a redeveloped Kartavya Path?

For the people

Kartavya Path symbolizes a shift from the erstwhile Rajpath being an icon of power to one that signifies public ownership and empowerment. The new Kartavya Path is a broader, greener, cleaner avenue with well-lit and well-paved streets and red granite walkways—this means more space for public events, including the Republic Day parade. It will bring both a sense of ownership as well as responsibility for the citizens of India. Netaji Bose's statue at India Gate is a tribute to one of our greatest, iconic freedom fighters.

Developing a new Parliament

Lutyens' Council House was never intended to be the seat of an independent democratic nation with a population-proportioned bicameral legislature. The purpose of the building, a century later, is in jeopardy as the structure lacks the space even to house the existing members. Currently, the strength of Lok Sabha is 543 and that of Rajya Sabha, 245 — this is based on the 1971 census. The numbers are expected to increase significantly after the freeze imposed by the Constitution (Forty-Second Amendment) Act, 1976, is lifted—which is due in 2026. The new Parliament building will house this larger group of parliamentarians besides providing a location for the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

Conservation of heritage

Historical landmarks such as the Rashtrapati Bhavan, North and South Blocks, Parliament House and National Archives have been conserved. The newer additions will only endeavour to enhance the overall precinct, without affecting the heritage of the existing buildings. Relocating the National Museum to a prime location was long overdue, and what could be better than the North and South

Blocks, the focal point of Lutyens' Central Vista. This is a nod to India's rich and vibrant history and democracy—at the heart of the seat of the government will be a modest reminder of where we come from, our struggles, victories, defeats, the rise and fall of civilizations, monarchs and ordinary people who lived and died before us.

Administrative difficulties

As Central Vista was supposed to be the administrative seat of colonial India, office buildings along the Kingsway were also planned. These offices were, however, not built at the time, and came up many years later, in post-Independent India. Although they were envisioned to be in one place, most government offices are currently scattered around Delhi. The new Central Secretariat, as imagined by architect Bimal Patel, brings together all the ministries of the Central government at one location for greater administrative productivity and efficiency. It will complement the city's high density by propagating structures that can vertically accommodate more offices and people without suffocating them in less space.

Contribution to green infrastructure

The redeveloped Kartavya Path is expected to reduce the overall energy expenditure and embed building envelope efficiency to improve the cumulative energy budget of government buildings. With better and improved technology and equipment in the new buildings, the overall energy consumption will radically fall. Besides, housing different administrative units in close proximity will reduce travel and fuel-related pollution that Delhi is already reeling under.

Our colonial legacy cannot be a millstone around our neck. The soul of a civilization lies in its architecture. The redeveloped Kartavya Path will bridge the historical past and the dynamic present. It will infuse harmony and balance by embracing the future.

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