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CENTRAL VISTA COMPETITION DEBRIEFING THE DESIGN BRIEF

In recent months, Notice Inviting Bids was announced by the Government of India internationally to appoint a design consultant for the Redevelopment of Central Vista, the historic cultural core of New Delhi Capital City, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker in the early twentieth century. The absence of a clear intent, or a well-articulated brief and questionable process of conducting the competition about the redevelopment of an area of such imminence and significance has raised serious questions about the State's intellectual capability of understanding the finer nuances of history, heritage, identity, environment and public space. Above all, it has received much public criticism about the way the whole process is being conducted. Many eminent voices from civil society including historians, conservation architects, urban designers, social scientists and writers have raised serious concerns about various related issues on different forums.

In word, wisdom

If a government intends to conduct an international competition, the very first step is the constitution of a Competition Secretariat under the concerned Ministry—an experienced panel of people from various related disciplines. When an area as significant and large as Central Vista is under the ambit of redevelopment, it becomes imperative to have a multidisciplinary discourse across all sections of society to take in views and ideas about the new character of the proposed development before the competition is even announced. Such a place of national importance belongs to all, not only to politicians, bureaucrats and designers but to society at large—people of all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, who come here for earning their livelihood, who come here to take inspiration from the historical architectural assemblage, who come here for recreation, who come here to mark protests against the State's policies and for whom it is a symbol of national identity and pride. Therefore for the formulation of the Design Brief, in this context, it becomes important to consider *Why* and *How* rather than *What* and *When*.



In life, service

Delegating eminent organizations working in the areas of built heritage, landscape architecture, urban design, regional planning, environment and ecology, humanities, civil engineering, infrastructure and technology to organize structured and well curated discourses with the participation of thinkers, academicians and practitioners on the subject is the foremost task of the Competition Secretariat. Knowledge of relevant observations and suggestions from prior studies, proposals and nominations to international organizations like UNESCO, by professionals either independently or for government, offer a wider perspective of understanding the site. Inviting views and suggestions from the general public by open invitations, organizing open workshops and presentations about the intent of the development makes the idea of redevelopment / development a democratic one and strengthens its ideals. Unfortunately, the competition as organized turned a blind eye to these vital aspects.

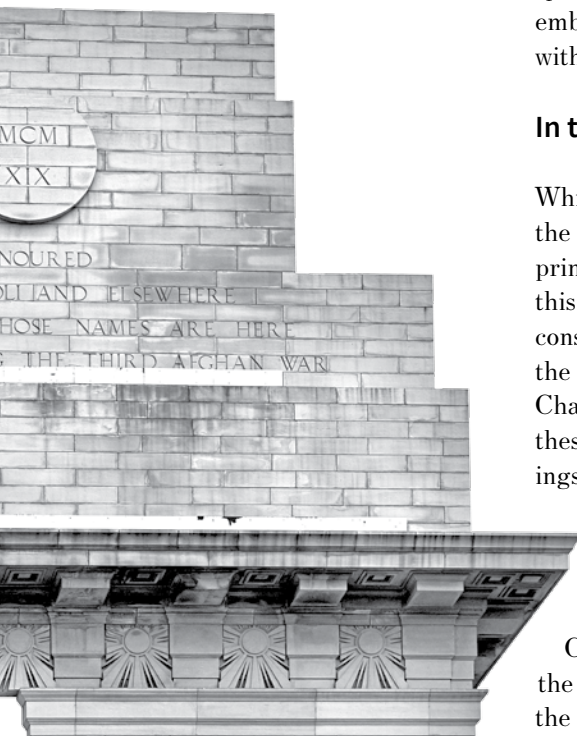
Based on the described discourse, the Competition Secretariat should draft a detailed competition brief which becomes an articulated vision of the new development that leads to a well formulated design program. A competition dossier of the important existing attributes of the site—topography, built-up forms, open space structure, vegetation, surface and sub-surface water ways, landscape elements, and circulation networks among other aspects in collaboration with public agencies will provide important background data.

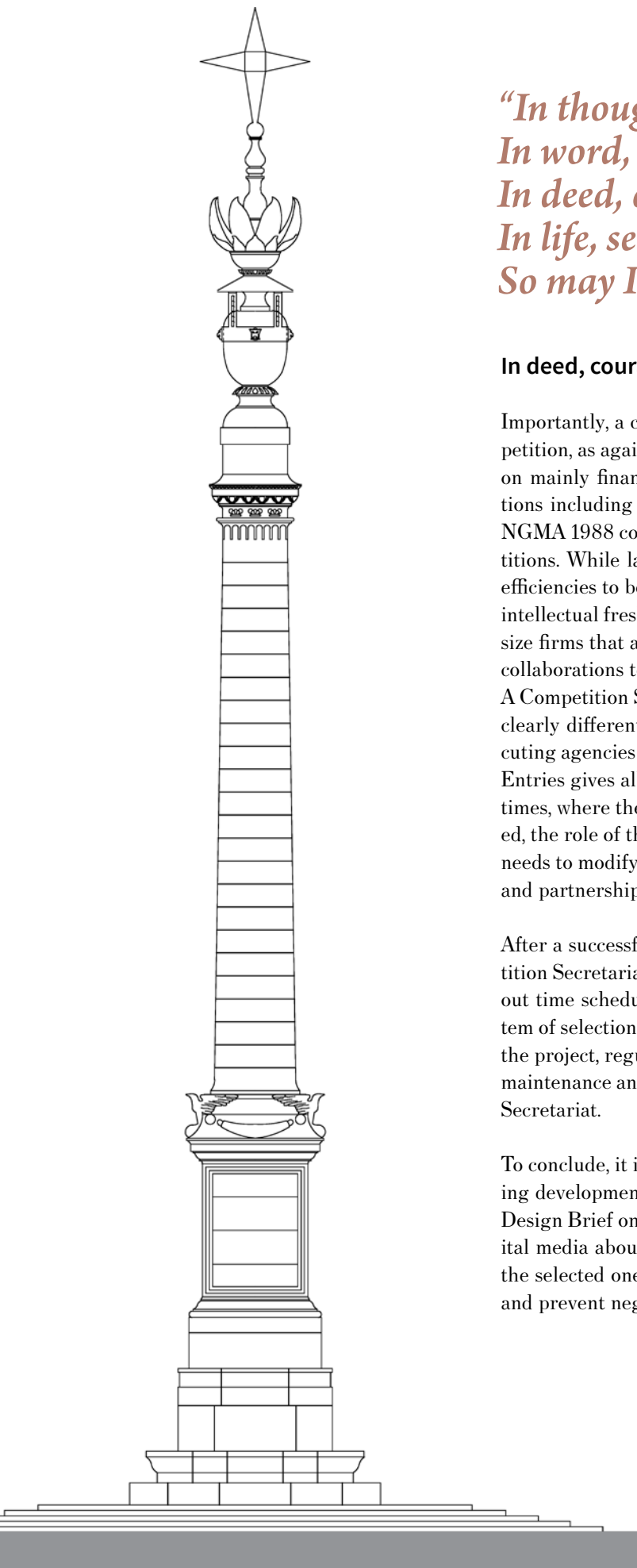
The vision statement of the Design Brief should impart a strong sense of historical and cultural significance. It will encourage participants to imbibe this knowledge to respond to cultural, functional and aesthetic requirements of the intended development, embedded in philosophical clues. The Design Brief should address the site as a place with strong unique moorings based on its context.

In thought, faith

While stating the design program of the development of a public space, reinforcing the idea of safe guarding the public realm becomes one of the most important guiding principles of the redevelopment. This has remained totally neglected and ignored in this case. An equal emphasis should be provided to a sense of control and restraint; conservation and preservation and retrofitting and reuse hold relevance especially in the historic context. They become contextual in present times with regard to Climate Change and Sustainable Development Goals. In case of the Central Vista competition, these ideas have remained limited and unimaginative, with the historic grand buildings being proposed as museums.

The next important role of the Competition Secretariat is to select a panel of jurors of related disciplines and of national and international repute with respectable credentials. The final jury panel may have few representatives from the Competition Secretariat. Disclosing names of the jurors in the Competition Brief at the time of Call for Entries encourages a sense of credibility and transparency about the process while generating confidence amongst the participants and the public.





*“In thought, faith
In word, wisdom
In deed, courage
In life, service
So may India be great”*

—Inscription on the base of the Jaipur Column by Lord Irwin, the Governor General and Viceroy of India [1926-1931]. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and completed in 1930, the monumental column stands in the middle of the courtyard in front of Rashtrapati Bhavan, the presidential residence in New Delhi.

In deed, courage

Importantly, a competition of this stature should be an open design competition, as against the present practice of short listing the entrants based on mainly financial standing of consultants. Previous national competitions including those in this very area such as the IGNC A in 1986, and NGMA 1988 come to mind as examples of successful open design competitions. While large firms with huge annual turnovers may have greater efficiencies to be able to deliver the project design on time, they may lack intellectual freshness and creativity. On the other hand small and medium size firms that are capable of coming up with new radical ideas may need collaborations to handle complex large development projects of this sort. A Competition Secretariat as described here will be in a sound position to clearly differentiate between professionals' services and services of executing agencies or contractors. As an open design competition the Call for Entries gives all types of offices a chance to participate. In these complex times, where the scale and complexity of the brief are often unprecedented, the role of the regulatory body of Council of Architecture is crucial. It needs to modify its rules so as to facilitate a tradition of such consortiums and partnerships to participate in such large scale competitions.

After a successful conclusion to an open design competition, the Competition Secretariat should work out a list of deliverables and a well thought out time schedules for the whole process. A robust document about system of selection of project management team, stages of implementation of the project, regular inspections and approvals, the site's post construction maintenance and management are an integral part of responsibility of the Secretariat.

To conclude, it is of utmost importance to keep the whole process regarding development of the public realm completely transparent. Posting the Design Brief on inclusive platforms, regular updates in the print and digital media about the whole process, an exhibition of proposals including the selected ones are some of the ways to encourage larger participation and prevent negative speculations.

Held in 1986, the international design competition for Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts [IGNCA] located in the New Delhi Capital City north of Central Vista, is often regarded as a landmark endeavour sponsored by the State to conceptualize a cultural centre based on the Indian ethos. The competition conditions were based on the regulations for international architectural competitions laid down by the International Union of Architects [UIA] Paris. With a well formulated and detailed design brief, it drew 194 entries from 37 countries. The jury comprised of A. P. Kanvinde, B. V. Doshi, Geoffrey Bawa, Habib Rehman, James Sterling, Fumihiko Maki and Olufemi Majekodunmi. The First Prize was won by Ralph Lerner, the Second Prize by Gautam Bhatia and the Third Prize was shared by Francoise Helene Jourda et Perraudin [France] and David Jeremy Dixon [UK] and Alexandros Tombazis [Greece].

India's diverse cultural traditions have led to the evolution of a number of distinct regional schools in all the arts. Now, for the first time, a Centre has been conceived to be built in the capital city, New Delhi, as a nucleus drawing together in one place the knowledge and skills that comprise India's cultural heritage. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts [IGNCA], established in the memory of Indira Gandhi, is visualised as a Centre encompassing the study and experience of all the arts, especially in their dimension of mutual interdependence, interrelated with nature, social structure, world view and cosmology. The fundamental approach of the Centre in all its work, emphasized in the competition brief, will be interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. The Centre comprises five divisions, Sutradhara, Kala Nidhi, Kala Kosha, Janapada Sampada and Kala Darshana. The complex task of expressing the interdependent components of this Centre to be situated in the heart of Lutyens' New Delhi posed a great challenge to the designer. The outlines of the conceptual model given in the competition brief were specific- and despite its demanding guidelines participants from all over the world reacted to it with an amazing repertoire of design concepts. Nevertheless, one could isolate these motifs and influences which formed the basic framework through the range of designs. The linearity of the site, archetypes of Indian planning and design, the concept of the walled fortress city, the expression of the 'inner life of reflection' and the outer life of extensive participation and, of course, the ever present face of Lutyens' National Archives and the Secretariat building complex, were some of the dominant parameters dictating expression.

The programme lays stress on the historical growth of Delhi which has been the capital of various rulers, each of whom had his own citadel in what is now the present city of Delhi. Although situated within such a strong historical context, it is hoped, in time the Centre will dissolve into the cultural and architectural canvas of the area. Almost all the entries recalled the rich building past of India. References to historical landmarks such as Ajanta and Ellora, Fatehpur Sikri, Khajuraho, Jaisalmer, the palace of Orchha and the temples of South India, and to building principles such as the Vastupurushamandala, were also clearly evident.

It has not been an easy task to make a representative selection of designs for the purposes of this book. During the judging of the entries by the Jury, common points had been scrutinized: a) land utilization, particularly the organization of activities in relationship to one another, to road arteries and to the Central Vista; [b] the relationship of the total urban form to the immediate environment; [c] the relationship of landscape within the site to landscape without; [d] vehicular and pedestrian circulation systems; [e] reference to the local and regional context and [f] the symbolic image of the concept. In the designs included here, an attempt has been made to primarily show the vast range of approaches to a common brief, expressing a variety of cross-cultural responses. The disparate design solutions provide a comment on the currents and cross-currents contributing to the debate on what is architecturally appropriate [or not] for a particular place at a particular point in time. The range of vocabulary used by participants to create a convincing interpretation of the conceptual model of the IGNCA points to the remarkable capacity of man to continuously redefine and express an architecture for contemporary times.

— A. P. Kanvinde, Jury Member



CONCEPTS AND RESPONSES

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