

Central Vista revamp: Environmentalists and landscape experts write to CPWD

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LANDSCAPE ARTISTS and environmentalists have written to the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) over what they say are issues with the redesign plan for the Central Vista Avenue.

The plan, released by the ministry of urban affairs and housing, foresees multiple changes to the Avenue — with pedestrian underpasses, wide walkways or footpaths, bridges across canals, new parking lots, and more trees, along with more lawn area, an irrigation system and specific vending areas.

Phase-I of the project was awarded by CPWD to construction major M/s Shapoorji Pallonji Company (Pvt) Limited at a cost of Rs 477 crore through competitive bidding on January 8. Work began last Thursday.

Anuj Srivastava, from LokPATH, an organisation which submitted some objections, told *The Indian Express*, "They have not followed proper procedural norms. The Heritage Conservation Committee (which cleared the proposal) is filled with bureaucrats; CPWD is heading the projects — they will not speak against the government. They are supposed to function in-



Barricades being placed along the Rajpath to begin work on the project. Ananya Tiwari

dependently."

LokPATH said the Central Vista precinct, and not just individual buildings, is protected as a grade 1 Heritage site, which includes "plots, boundaries, landscape and streetscape elements and natural features such as trees and water bodies", and not just the buildings situated in it. "No information has been shared about the Automated People Mover... this APM physically endangers various heritage elements and structures of the Central Vista," it said.

Objections were also raised

over removal of pedestrian movement on Rajpath by removal of zebra crossings, and changing the red *murum* into hard pavements, which can increase the risk of flooding as it restricts rainwater run-off and also disrupts "both the recreational use of the green and its grandeur".

With regard to 16 bridges proposed across the canals, LokPATH states it is "interventionist encroachment on top of the heritage structures and a clear violation of grade 1 heritage protection given to the Central Vista".

LokPATH also wrote that hard paved parking "will cause a huge reduction in water table replenishment, endangering the entire plantation of Central Vista... and unmitigated flooding in the region. No water drainage plan has been submitted."

"Demolition and reduction of the length of historic water bodies at Man Singh Marg is a clear violation of grade 1 heritage protection under the law," it said.

The Indian Society of Landscape Architects (ISOLA) also submitted its objections, stating that "issues of mainte-

nance exist, and the lack thereof has rendered the space undesirable in parts. These aspects are easily remedied within the larger spatial design through a maintenance and management regimen and do not demand any attempt to redesign the entire precinct." It also raised the issue of walkways, stating: "Bridges, additional footpaths, etc, contribute to a disjointed, incohesive space..." and the APM "does not consider the construction and operational impact on the existing trees and landscape."

Placing vendors at the ends, stated ISOLA, can lead to their "marginalisation... vendors are an integral part of the experience... adding to the cultural experience that will be lost..."

ISOLA also raised ecological concerns, saying "depletion of groundwater recharge because of added basement and underground structures, amphitheatres, toilet blocks and hard paving... needs urgent attention".

Madhav Raman from LokPATH told *The Indian Express*: "CPWD could have organised a public meeting for this, or taken cognizance of these objections."

A senior CPWD official said, "We have submitted our response to each objection to HCC." An official of the HCC did not respond to calls seeking a comment.