

Memorial can be built on MoD plot near Cantonment

Identified 2 Decades Ago, 32-Acre Area Is Easily Accessible

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We take pride in our armed forces and whether the National War Memorial (NWM) should be built or not is not what this entire controversy is all about. It is about

where it should be built. The defence minister seems to have set his heart on India Gate while the chief minister is desperately trying to protect the greens as a public place.

Is there any need for the memorial, which should get its due place in the capital, to be built in a manner that would be in conflict with the magnificent heritage of the Central Vista?

Over two decades ago, the ministry of urban development and DDA had identified a piece of land near the Dhaula Kuan Jheel, located just off the Dhaula Kuan junction of Outer Ring Road and NH-8, adjacent to the Cantonment, R & R Hospital and the Subroto Park Air Force station. It was allotted to the ministry of defence. This 32-acre land parcel has the Cantonment on one side and the city on the other. It is easily accessible from both Outer Ring Road and now the Dhaula Kuan Metro station. Adjacent to it is a small natural lake.

This would be an ideal location for the war memorial since it is just a kilometre or so from the Diplomatic Enclave area, on the main road and rail spine of the city and near the Cantonment. It is also large enough to accommodate an iconic memorial structure as well as a befitting museum to go with it.

The ministry of defence's insistence on using the India Gate park and Central Vista goes against all principles of urban planning, redevelopment and renewal for the following reasons:

Firstly, the superimposition of another memorial over India Gate, which itself is a memorial at the eastern focal point of Lutyens's Rajpath Vista, will adversely af-



CONTENTIOUS PATH: The defence ministry's insistence on using the India Gate park and Central Vista goes against all principles of urban planning, redevelopment and renewal

fect its position and stature. India Gate's height and magnificence give it prominence on the Vista but without interrupting the Vista. One of the primary reasons for creation of Lutyens Bungalow Zone – with its attendant restrictive regulations and the Central Vista Committee to oversee any development in the area – was to ensure that this one-of-its-

A few years ago a committee of high-ranking officials of the ministry of urban development and professionals (who had been tasked with examining this location for the proposed National War Memorial) was rudely asked by defence personnel at Amar Jawan Jyoti to leave the area since a senior naval officer was coming to visit the place. They protested in vain. The common man will not even raise his voice.

Thirdly, the track record of the ministry of defence on vacating lands which had been only temporarily given to them is dismal. Two of the 10 plots meant for princely palaces during World War II, allowed to the MOD for building barracks to house British and US soldiers and pilots – now Princes Park and Raksha Bhawan facing the Vista, besides several others in the capital, have not been vacated till now. The Master Plan of Delhi – since it came into force in 1962 – designated these plots for PSP (public and semi-public) or green. Other examples are Race Course and the Santushti complex.

A national war memorial

FIRST CHOICE



deserves to be iconic and, therefore, should command a large enough space to express its magnificence and glory. Attempting to create it at India Gate would mean that it will be always overshadowed by the magnificence of the former. The Dhaula Kuan Jheel land parcel is conveniently located and accessible and will allow unrestrained creativity in its design. Its proximity to Delhi Cantonment shall help in organizing all military ceremonies which come as part and parcel of such a memorial.

The solution to this seemingly vexatious issue is rather simple. The ministry should understand that Central Vista Park belongs to the aam aadmi and take a look at the Dhaula Kuan Jheel plot.

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kind urban vista is conserved in consonance with the original intent and vision.

Secondly, this green lung is one of the few open public spaces left in the city, the others being Lodhi Gardens and the Chanakyaपुरi Vista. It has over the decades become the natural green lung for the old city, a place where families seek refuge after escaping from their congested habitat. If the war memorial were to be allowed here, the fauji could shoo away the common man from the place.