

REVITALISATION OF COMMERCIAL COMPLEXES

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Over the years the growth in urban population and business has lead to an acute shortage of commercial space and inadequate infrastructure in these cities.

Eventhough policy makers and planners have conceived commercial spaces in the right earnest, lack of continuing development has lead to a problem of serious degeneration of these complexes. Proper attention and care has not been taken for regular upkeep and maintenance. Related issues like civic space, car parking, power, environment and law and order are ignored. The government normally takes the view that its role in such commercial complexes gets over after the auction of land to private builders. There is no post operation care resulting in the patient (complex) degenerating over the years like Nehru Place, Bhikaji Cama Place, etc.

Consider the example of Nehru Place in Delhi, which was conceived and developed as a prime integrated commercial complex and a unique model aimed to be amongst the best in Asia. The government after approving the master plan auctioned the land to developers to build and sell. The commercial areas were developed and kept under the common maintenance of MCD/DDA. Lack of regular monitoring of a central agency has lead to the complex including the external façade detriorating over time.

The commercial squares and parks have been encroached on by hawkers with disregard of master plan. There is an acute power shortage in the prestigious complex leading to installation of small kerosene generators in the common areas by each individual owner. Lack of continuous upgradation has lead to choking of commercial facilities like car parking, water supply, hygiene and sewerage, fire hazards, poor street lighting and underutilisation of civic areas and squares.

The complex is totally deserted on weekends and evenings leading to a law and order risk. Even though South Delhi has an acute shortage of weekend recreation shopping complexes and car parking, the potential of Nehru Place is not leveraged for reasons unknown. This has lead to Nehru Place being an officegoers nightmare leading to an exodus of MNCs and business houses. The major reason for this is the lack of a unified common full time centralised administration with the sole objective of renewal and maintenance of the complex. Nehru Place, which was conceived with so much enthusiasm, is today nobody's baby.

A workable model towards finding a solution to overcome the problems not only in Nehru Place but other commercial complexes in India would be through the promotion of a joint venture company. The proposed company would have the right of using the civic areas like car parking, parks, commercial squares, etc. and would be responsible for the restoration, enhancement and maintenance of the complex. It would provide a strategic framework to facilitate infrastructure, development with emphasis on value enhancement, revenue generation, quality of life, continuous power supply, additional employment and business. The proposed joint venture company would be as a result of privatisation of these revenue and maintenance facilities where a private corporate would be selected through an independent transparent selection process. It is proposed that this private corporate would through a bid hold around 40 per cent shares of this company. The balance shareholding could be in the hands of institutions, existing building societies, government authorities and the public. This would infuse funds required for capital

upgradation and the development of commercial spaces for revenue generation and maintenance.

If the city authorities can install the above way of management and revitalization of commercial complexes, the civic authorities will do a great service to urban India and also have access to alternative sources of revenue.