Rapid urbanization abroad threatens old buildings, traditional markets

Cities rush to build office blocks and rail networks

By Rina Chandran, Thomson Reuters Foundation, April 1, 2020

“Delhi was established as the capital of the Indian empire in 1911, when the colonial British rulers moved the capital from the eastern city of Calcutta, now called Kolkata.

“A two-mile stretch in Delhi featuring some of India’s most iconic landmarks is to be redeveloped, angering historians and conservationists who say the move will rob the country of its heritage and valuable public space.

“Federal authorities last month said they would change the land use for the 86-acre (35-hectare) area that includes Parliament House, the presidential palace, and the India Gate war memorial to ‘government use’ from recreation and public facilities.

“Conservationists fear that the Central Vista redevelopment project will obliterate the history and character of the area, which also has among the biggest public spaces in a city of more than 20 million.

“‘The Central Vista is significant for historical, lived, and architectural heritage. Equally importantly, it is a public-use area for tourists and residents, and a green area,’ said Kanchi Kohli, a senior researcher at the Centre for Policy Research.

“In India, as in many countries, rapid urbanization is putting greater pressure on governments to build office blocks and rail networks, which has led to the razing of old buildings and traditional markets.

“Shashi Tharoor, a member of the opposition Congress party, said in a recent tweet that the money earmarked for the project must instead be used to deal with the pandemic, which has devastated the country’s poor communities.”

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