

The Modi Government's Blatant Disregard for Regulations in the Making of Kartavya Path

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Narendra Modi is not all oratory or glory with trumpets – he has a long track record of boasting and bungling, and sometimes just disregarding rules and conventions as well.

No, we are not talking of him addressing his buddy Trump as 'Dolan'; nor are we referring to his profound knowledge of science in [declaring that Ganesh's elephant head was grafted on by plastic surgery](#), or even how he [beat Pakistan's radars by hiding Air Force jets in the clouds](#). There are too many of these instances and we do not want to waste time on a man who cannot produce as proof a single classmate from his school, college or university days.

We are not even talking of all his bluff and bluster (and unprecedented money power) in the last [assembly elections in West Bengal in 2021](#) – for which he neglected his duty to fight COVID-19 and devastated the nation – and how he returned to Delhi with his tail tucked between limping legs.

People have largely forgotten how, so soon after his stunning victory in the Lok Sabha polls in 2014, he was [beaten in the Delhi assembly elections of 2015](#). And we are certainly not reminding anyone of how he crushed the most sensitive parts of the economy with his ruthless pincers of a [mindless demonetisation](#) and a [half-baked, premature GST](#).

Watch: [Why Demonetisation Is One of the Biggest Economic Disasters Post Independence](#)

We are referring to his damp squibs that are usually erased from public memory with the assistance of an obliging media and of courts that are either on his page or are too hesitant to ask probing questions. Remember his swagger about how India would storm its way into the world's most exclusive clubs like the UN Security Council and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) that had once declared India as a pariah?

He could get into neither.

Coming closer to home, many have forgotten how he [chickened out of drastically changing the land acquisition laws](#), even after a lot of noise. But we do manage to remember Modi's [withdrawal of the three farm Bills](#) after a year of stubborn refusal and the deaths of 700 farmers. One of the worst kept secrets of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government is that these farm laws were pushed by certain crony big capital manipulators who decide and frame important economic policies for their most user-friendly government.

The Delhi whisperati say all that a bureaucrat has to do now is ensure that the tell-tale computer fonts used by these Indian chaebols when sending their ready-to-cook proposals are replaced with the usual *sarkari* fonts. One can never be too careful.

Despite the setback on the farm laws, one of these chaebols recently made whopping profits from the highest-ever international prices of grain. Its procurement of hillocks of wheat in a tough market was obviously well-timed and under the indulgence of the regime. This crony exported one-third of India's huge wheat shipment – despite no previous experience in this trade – with clock-work timing, in that short window that the government had decided to permit exports before banning them.

The mainstream and social media maintained an eerie silence over this blatant crony-enrichment issue as none desired to be visited by Income Tax Department or the Enforcement Directorate.

But these setbacks – there are many more as well – are, however, obscured by the glare of dazzling spotlights marking Modi's successes to emphasise that he is, indeed, a messiah who can do no wrong.

The latest example of brazenness to be added to this list is the [massive and expensive 'renovation' of Rajpath](#) that was, even before this splurge, the best avenue in this whole country. The reason for tinkering with this heritage avenue is that it is the prestigious 'spine' of India's capital that he was itching to run his razor over threateningly, just to demonstrate the conqueror's might.

Also read: [Forget Your Rights And Do Your Duties: Modi's 'Kartavyapath' Is A Road Paved With Bad Intentions](#)

For two years, the lungs of hapless subjects of Delhi suffered choking dust and impermissible loads of particulate matter. Traffic was thrown haywire. The delays generated even greater curiosity and when the curtain was finally removed, the lapdog media went into raptures – reminiscent of the courtiers in *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

But 'costly cosmetics' is the mildest term that the saner commentator can use to describe the end result. Under no stretch of the imagination can this tinkering tot up a bill of Rs 600 crores and even a minimally free audit would make the housing minister and his cohorts squirm and sweat.

Why, then, was this exercise undertaken, other than for the perverse pleasure of imposing Modi's hegemony over an already bludgeoned Lutyens Delhi? It is more than just his visceral hatred towards whatever Delhi stands for – Sultanate, Mughal and British architecture, and Nehruvian traditions. He despises the better-educated class of much-hated liberals and secular folk who live in Delhi, though they constitute a hopeless minority.

Deprived as he surely was from a decent educational system that this English-speaking class obtained (often with great sacrifice by their families), he decided to go beyond the loudly articulated angst of the Hindi-Hindu-Hindutva (HHH) diehards and teach the 'elite' a lesson that they would not forget. In this task, he relies, quite paradoxically, on members of the elite; products of good colleges and the three great universities of the capital who have sold their souls to India's most intolent ruler since Aurangzeb, for ministerships and other plums. It is perhaps on their advice that the Central Vista project has violated a whole forest of prohibitions, rather imperiously.

To begin with, the housing ministry deliberately avoided screening the Central Vista project through a proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as mandated under paragraph 8(b) of the schedule to the [Environment Ministry's 2006 notification on EIA](#) (which deals with townships and area development projects greater than 50 hectares).



An aerial perspective of the entire Central Vista project. Photo: HCP Designs

Instead, it has continuously fudged the figures of the project's actual area, which is well over 50 hectares. The housing minister repeatedly denied this, even after massive amounts of evidence were sent to him along with my letters from December 2021-July 2022. Strangely enough, the environment minister, who is meant to uphold the country's strict environmental laws, kept insisting that he accepts the interpretation not of environmentalists but of the 'accused', the housing ministry. He has said so in his letters to me on February 10 and March 9 and also in a reply to my parliament question of December 9.

Also read: [How the Delhi High Court Dismissed Concerns Over the Central Vista Project](#)

Other than avoiding environmental clearance, the minister has merrily played around with 'permissible Floor Area Ratio (FAR)' and 'ground coverage' rules. When confronted with calculations that the different sets of numbers he has presented contradict each other, he claims that a colonial-era Act of 1899 empowered the government to do whatever it felt like with municipal rules.

We are not sure if this applies here, but he has surely betrayed his duty to be the national guardian of building rules. Such insensitive responses from the two ministers could normally be attributed to unusual denseness in getting into details, but then, the environment minister is reputed to be sharp.

This is only Chapter One of Modi's version of Shahjahanabad; the Central Vista planned by him and his favoured architect from Gujarat who, surprisingly enough, bags all his pet projects – from Ahmedabad to Varanasi, and now the Vista. Their joint sense of aesthetic and architecture would soon be thrust upon an unsuspecting nation that was never consulted, and the next edifice to gulp down would be the new Parliament building.

Its entrance looks like the snarling front grille of an old automobile and its interiors are not known to any MP, though they shall soon be herded into it, to gaze and gasp and accept without demur. After that, I fear we could witness those hunky, unimaginative, sandstone barracks for government servants come up, one by one, on both sides of the princely Rajpath or 'Kartavya Path'.

Existing historic buildings shall be torn down to feed an ego that is far greater than competence. And now that Modi has taken shelter behind a deeply colonial law, the Government Buildings Act of 1899, to cover up FAR violations, he has no business to rant against [colonial mindsets](#).

Delhi has, of course, a precedent in one Tughlaq sultan. The renovated Rajpath is now open to citizens – but with cold sandstone all over and the lawns much too manicured. An odd-sized Netaji with squinty glasses stands under the canopy, saluting edifices of the British Raj. More importantly, with no ice cream sellers and their warm green lights, the very soul of Rajpath has taken leave of the loveliest spot for children and families. The infallible one has bungled yet again.

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