



A view of the National Tax Headquarters, the face of finance in the modern Indian economy.

Rajaswa Bhawan: National Tax Headquarters

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In 2009, the current Union Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee—along with Home Minister P. Chidambaram, Delhi CM Sheila Dikshit and Urban Development Minister Jaipal Reddy—laid the groundwork for the 'Rajaswa Bhawan,' a new National Tax Headquarters building to be built in New Delhi. A 5.65-acre plot located in a heritage area on the Kasturba Gandhi Marg in the national capital has been allotted for the purpose of erecting this structure. The building complex will house various offices for the Finance Minister, Minister of State and Department of Revenue. In addition to these offices, the Chairpersons, Directorates, Members, Staff and offices of CBDT and CBEC,

along with support facilities and the G.A.R Section, are to be housed in the same complex. The programmatic requirements dictate a provision for future expansion and flexibility in space planning. Five distinguished architects and four representatives of the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance comprised the jury. The jury's expectation was for a building designed with an understanding of local climatic conditions, leading to an energy-efficient building. Ease of public access, design adaptability and flexibility, and sensitivity to site and heritage, were other factors considered when judging the proposed designs.

Design Strategy

Two key ideas drive the design: First, the context of the trees on the site; and, second, the metaphor of transparency used in tandem with the structural inversion of political hierarchies. These two ideas meshed perfectly with the ideals of the prospective clients, who sought to use such metaphors in redefining popular perceptions of government.

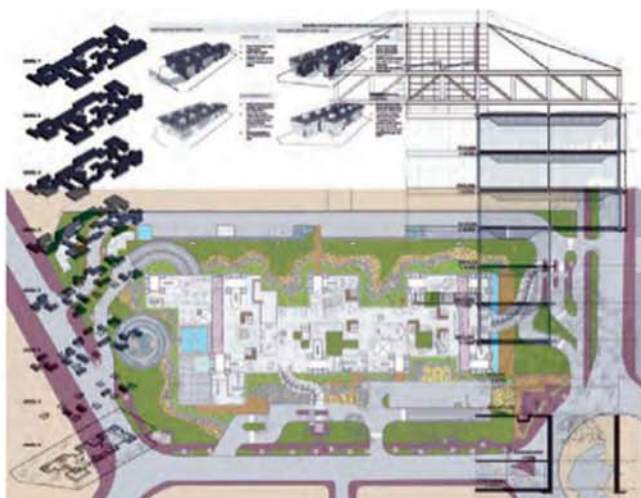
Respecting the surrounding trees, with the intent to build around them without destroying them, the design thus defers to their venerable age. Pragmatically, the building's form—in both elevation and plan—directly responds to the size and location of the trees on the site.

The structure is suspended from a roof truss system, in a manner similar to that of limestone stalactites, that grow downward from the roof of a cave. From this truss, the networks of inverted pods are designed to be denser toward the top of the structure, with all general staff and services being placed near

the supporting truss. The order of conventional spatial organisation is thus inverted, by placing the greater occupational density toward the top of the structure. The structure, thus de-materialises with the lower office pods, hanging between the canopies of the trees.

Employees and officers are housed in $7.5 \times 7.5 \times 4.0 \text{m}^3$, that are either contiguous at upper levels, or linked via a series of connecting pathways at the lower levels, symbolic of the bonds that tie together the diverse Indian nation. The first two floors above the ground plane, hold the offices defining the higher echelons of government. These floors remain visible from below, thereby visually and symbolically re-enforcing trust in government. The ground floor, is then restored to the populace as a public domain, a 'tabula rasa' left free of any office functions.

The 'Rajaswa Bhawan' is envisaged as an edifice epitomising India's changing attitudes. The use of glass, fosters a belief in the public's perception of government, as moving from a closed, opaque and stoic system to a more open and transparent one. The inversion of conventional hierarchies lays foundation to the strength, that common Indian's have in their resources, and encourages their use in a manner, that supports open and effective government. ■



SITE PLAN