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Rs 45-cr facelift for Park Mansions

Subhro Niyogi | TNN

2010 Deadline For Ambitious Project To Coincide With Building's Centenary

Kolkata: Park Mansions, the nearly century-old grand building at the intersection of Park Street and Free School Street, is getting a major makeover. The Apeejay Surendra Group that owns the building is renovating it and hopes to complete the ambitious project by 2010 to coincide with the building's, as well as the group's, centenary.

The Rs 45-crore project undertaken by the proprietor of Apeejay Surendra group include reversing the aging effect of the building, correcting the stress imbalance caused by a fire in the early 1990s, creating a two-level parking facility in the compound and a Louvre-type steel & glass destination zone above the parking lot.

MAKEOVER MAGIC

"The most ambitious part of the project is to utilize the central courtyard of, the U-shaped building to create a two-level underground car-park and a contemporary space on the surface. The plan is to utilize the space for an open-sky restaurant, coffee shop, library and art gallery," said architect Dulal Mukherjee, the man in charge of the project.

Developed by Armenian jute merchant TM Thaddeus in 1910, Park Mansions was constructed as a rental property with mixed-usage comprising both residential and commercial segments. The building, spread over 5 bigha, had a central courtyard and a garden. The architecture is a mix of Victorian and Indo-Saracenic style, with a bulbous dome on the roof, a British interior with a touch of Indian on the façade.

While age and disrepair took its toll on the

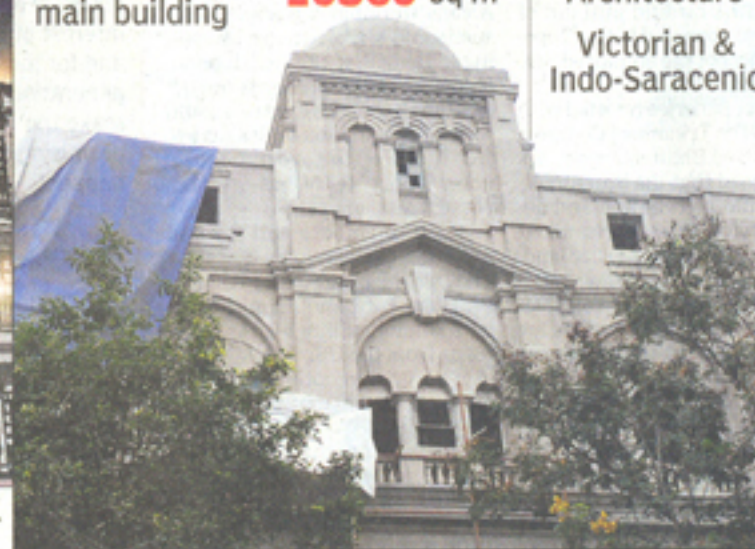
An artist's impression of how Park Mansions will look after the makeover



Repair work has already started

PARK MANSIONS

Constructed	1910	Floorspace of outhouse
Plot size	1.78 acres	516 sq m
Floorspace of main building	10560 sq m	Architecture
		Victorian & Indo-Saracenic



building, a devastating fire at Alliance Francaise (AF) damaged sections of the structure. The heat led to excessive stress on the structure, weakening the building's northeast corner. Following the fire, AF shifted out of the building for the first time since 1945. The French consulate has already agreed to be housed in Park Mansions post-renovation.

Efforts are on to woo back AF post-renovation. Incidentally, the oldest existing tenant in the building is S Mathews & Co, whose tenancy dates back to 1931.

Architect firm Dulal Mukherjee & Associates is currently engaged in reversing the aging process and reinforcing the sections that had been weakened by the fire. Escalators and overhead water distribution system will be modernized; the drive and lighting arrangements will be upgraded.

One of the major challenges that Mukherjee's men face is to restore the building without compromising on safety and mobility of tenants. "The building is inhabited and there is no provision for rehabilitation of tenants during restoration. So, it is a huge challenge," Mukherjee explained. The restoration of the main building is expected to be completed within June 2009 and the new mid-section by December 2009.

Two other big properties along the stretch — Queen's Mansions and 20 Park Street — have already been renovated. The remaining two — Stephen Court and Karnani Mansions — are yet to be renovated. While the exterior of Stephen Court has been repaired in patches, owners of Karnani Mansions plan to undertake a major renovation next year. Once that's through, all colonial structures along Park Street would have received a fresh lease of life.