

CHANDERNAGORE'S FRENCH HERITAGE AWAITS FACELIFT

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Registry Building in Chandernagore that is awaiting restoration for the past few decades. Debasish Bhaduri | Photo Credit:

The Registry Building, a two-storey structure at Chandernagore built in 1875 and a symbol of French settlement of the colonial town, has been awaiting restoration for a long time.

Architects, heritage enthusiasts, West Bengal government officials and diplomats, on several occasions in the past few years, visited the crumbling building located on the strand opposite the Rani Ghat jetty on the banks of the Hooghly and promised to restore the structure.

French Ambassador to India Emmanuel Lenain, who recently visited Kolkata, expressed hope that the restoration was "moving forward nicely". Emphasising that the structure needed an urgent facelift, he said that the restoration of the building would be completed in two or three years.

There were plans for having a café, restaurant and a boutique hotel with the architectural principle that the original structure remained unchanged. Mr. Lenain said that officials of the French Institute in Delhi and those of the West Bengal government and experts were going to meet soon to decide on the restoration.

Architects from France and India were working on the project, and the French Embassy, the State government and other stakeholders had identified a prominent hospitality group as a sponsor of the project.

Proposal extended

Officials of the French Consulate in Kolkata said that an agreement for the restoration project was drawn up in February 2019. After the memorandum of understanding lapsed in March 2021, as not much progress could be made because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proposal was extended for another 30 months.

Chandernagore, or Chandannagar, was the first trading post on the eastern bank of the Hooghly, set up by the French in 1696. There are several buildings in the town that are a reflection of the rich architectural heritage of the town. Other than the buildings and structures that have been given the heritage tag, 99 Indo-French heritage structures have been identified to be restored.

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