**Hon’ble Lt. Governor**

**Lt Gen Ajay Kumar Singh**

September 22, 2015

**Dear Sir,**

**Sub: Re-construction of the Mairie Building in Pondicherry**

Pondicherry, known as “the window of French Culture”, attracts people from around the world for its unique French architectural heritage. The collapse of the Mairie building, one of the most prominent landmarks on the beach promenade, saw thousands of people expressing their shock and anguish at the sheer neglect of this iconic building. ***People for Pondicherry’s Heritage*** (PPH), a group which got formed spontaneously, met you and handed you a petition requesting you not only to take urgent action for the reconstruction of the Mairie building to its original glory but also take immediate measures to protect and restore other endangered Government Heritage buildings. We were happy with your reassurance that you had already initiated steps in that direction and also asked the Secretary of Art & Culture to call us to a meeting with all concerned departments to discuss this.

In the meeting held on 12.12.2014, PWD stated that reconstruction of the Mairie would be done using conventional RCC construction and PPH, PondyCAN and INTACH held very firmly that the reconstruction **must** be done as per original drawings using traditional materials and construction techniques as proposed by INTACH. As there was no consensus it was decided to meet again. Unfortunately no follow-up meeting was held and we are yet to receive the minutes of this meeting despite regular reminders from us to the secretary as well as your office. Our requests to be included in the State Level Heritage Advisory Committee (SLHAC) were also ignored. PWD also wanted to demolish many other heritage buildings which have since been declared safe for restoration by national experts from IIT and ASI. It is well known that buildings using traditional materials have stood the test of time much better than their modern counterparts, particularly in Pondicherry which has a corrosive sea front.

At the recent meeting of the SLHAC, the govt. officials again insisted that the reconstruction of the Mairie be carried out with RCC which was opposed by the others. The emails sent to the GOP by 4 of the members of the committee and that of INTACH is attached herewith.

The Heritage festival organised by ***People for Pondicherry’s Heritage*** in association with the Govt., PondyCAN and INTACH in February’15 was a huge success. All the eminent people, including the French Ambassador, have lauded the efforts of GOP in preserving Heritage buildings. The Heritage festival has now become an annual event, with the next one scheduled in Feb’16.

As the Chief Administrator, we are certain that you are not insensible to the cultural, spiritual and natural heritage of Pondicherry or the aspirations of the people of Pondicherry to preserve their architectural heritage, which not only gives this town its special ambience but also fuels its economic prosperity. A fake heritage building with a concrete look-alike structure would not have the original proportions and features. This will not only be a cheap imitation of the past but will be judged by all as a failure on the part of the Pondicherry administration to preserve its rich heritage. A reconstruction based on the original drawings, using traditional materials can easily be adapted to have modern interiors to suit any planned usage of the buildings as is done the world over, as has been done in our very own Rashtrapati Bhavan and in several of Pondicherry’s restored Heritage Hotels and other private buildings. It is our collective responsibility to preserve and support the knowledge and skills of building in traditional styles which is fast disappearing in India today. Moreover the funds are being given by the World Bank so why can’t we reconstrcut the Mairie in its original form with traditional materials and do it in the right spirit?

We trust you will not fail Pondicherry and its people and ensure that the reconstruction of this historic building is rooted in the principle of “preserving the past to serve the future” and becomes a living example for the whole country.

We will deeply appreciate if you can fix a meeting to discuss this matter with some eminent people and organizations who are involved with the heritage of Pondicherry.

With regards,

Signed by key stakeholders of Pondicherry, members of People for Pondicherry’s Heritage.

(See attached page)

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