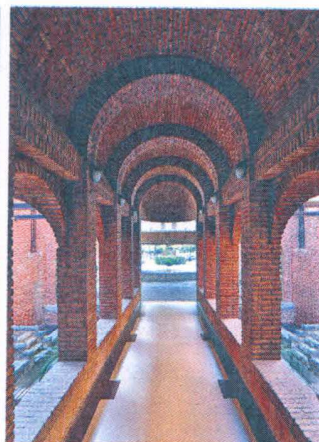


Lalit Verma's photo exhibition gives an exclusive glimpse of the never-before-seen areas of New Delhi's Diplomatic Enclave



(From left) French embassy; entrance to the Belgium residence; residence of the French Ambassador

# Life in Chanakya's land

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VISHAV

THE ASIAN AGE

**A** drive, or even better, a walk through the tree-lined avenues of Chanakyapuri makes one wonder what's behind the large gates of those embassies. Yes, you know what's there conceptually, but that, in no way, quenches your curiosity to have a peep inside and see it with your own eyes in all its physical glory. For most, it's like an island of foreign entity in their own land locked away from them. But "Delhi's Diplomatic Domains", a photo exhibition by Lalit Verma at the Alliance Francaise offers just that — a rare opportunity to peep beyond those gates of New Delhi's purpose-built foreign missions.

Lalit Verma, the photographer who made it all possible, shares, "India wanted to do something unique when she won independence — to create an enclave where embassies from all over the world exist in one place. It was an idea that was non-existent anywhere else in the world at that time. So there was this huge land right next to the Rashtrapati Bhavan that was given to different nations. The idea was that they could have a representative area of their country and people could go there,



Turkish embassy; (right) Lalit Verma; (below) embassy of Pakistan

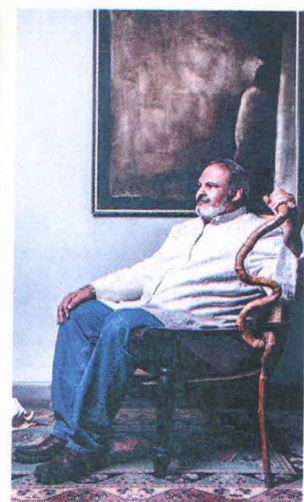
see and experience different cultures. But it so happened that due to security reasons, the doors were shut and they became the residence of ambassadors and the chanceries."

This led to the idea of a book on the diplomatic enclave of Delhi by Gladys Abankwa-Meier-Klodt, wife of the deputy ambassador of Germany. Gladys had the privilege of having an insider's view of that domain having spent her life among missions.

"And I was chosen to take pictures for the book," says Lalit. "After the book was launched, people wanted to see the photographs properly. So I blew them up and decided to have an

exhibition of all the pictures that I had taken. My intention was to show the essence of the place and not just the architectural shots. Sure that is there, but there are also some finer nuances like light falling in a particular way creating beautiful imagery."

Asked about the most striking features that he witnessed during the shoot, he adds, "First and foremost, you get surprised by the beauty of the place. And then, you get amazed by the size. The average size is five acres and some are as big as 35 acres like the US embassy or the Chinese one. And each embassy has some special features, like Sudan has a mosque, Slovakia has a theater



and the Finnish embassy has a sauna. The gardens, particularly, are fantastic. It was interesting for me as a photographer to see how each embassy has played with the light. I used to go at different times of the day to click those photos in different light conditions."

Lalit runs Aurodhan Art Gallery in Pondicherry and frequently photographs temples. "Those are temples where gods live and this where ambassadors live. Their houses are so grand that even the gods would love to live there," he ends.

