



3/2013

CityMatters



Choosing between a Snake and a Scorpion



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Opinion polls taking place in view of the ensuing elections in Rajasthan and India have thrown up two issues vigorously: inflation and corruption. While inflation is stubborn, hovering around 10 percent, many food items are touching new heights. Onion prices have gone up by more than 300 percent recently. Traders are colluding by taking advantage of poor vision of government functionaries and slack enforcement of laws which need to be used to curb hoarding and black marketing. Poor enforcement also happens due to corruption at the lower levels as traders grease their palms and get away with their malpractices. Consequently, farmers do not benefit and consumer end up paying through their noses.



In so far as corruption at high places is concerned, less said the better. While corruption is as old a phenomenon as prostitution, ever since our civilisation began, the tales of scams beats the moral standards of simple prostitutes. A survey says that corruption costs the country three per cent of our GDP (i.e. total wealth of the nation). In my opinion, it is much more if one calculates the impact of corruption. Inflation is certainly one outcome of malgovernance, i.e. corruption.

The "India against Corruption" movement of two years ago did raise the ante on corruption but its impact has fizzled out with Anna Hazare taking a back seat. Arvind Kejriwal has entered politics and there is nothing wrong with that.

Another outcome of corruption is the policy paralysis which has seized governance and thus projects do not move forward in the manner they should. If new projects do not move forward, our growth rates suffer and we cannot create more wealth or jobs to employ a large number of youth entering the job market. Unemployment of youth is also an important factor in increasing violence against women. India has now become one of the most unsafe countries for women. The *Nirbhaya* episode did lead to a national outcry and the laws were strengthened, but the crime rate has not come down perceptibly.

That said, in the last edition of this newsletter I had written on this page about the policy paralysis with the title: "We are watching our backs, instead of files" narrating how bureaucrats are not taking decisions and thus everything gets delayed. One cannot blame many of them because of several enquiries against them for the Coalgate, Spectrumgate etc. coming up out of the woodwork for wrongs done when they were in service or even if they are still in duty.

It does not matter whether they were also partaking in the gravy train or not, or were just obliging their political masters. Many say that taking no decisions is the best way forward in their careers. Many do not succumb to this inaction and thus the administrative machinery trundles along.

We need better accountability of our civil servants and politicians, and voting is no panacea. More often than not, the choice is between a snake and a scorpion. Or casting our vote in the form of 'None of The Above', as per the Supreme Court's decision, too is no solution.

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Pradeep S. Mehta
Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General

60 billion planets hold life

Scientists have discovered that there are 60 billion potentially habitable planets in the Milky Way alone. These planets in the habitable zone of a parent star may have the ability to sustain liquid water on their surface.

A new study that calculates the influence of cloud behaviour on climate doubles the number of potentially habitable planets orbiting red dwarfs, the most common type of stars in the universe.

Researchers at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University based their study on rigorous computer simulations of cloud behaviour on alien planets.

This cloud behaviour dramatically expanded the estimated habitable zone of red dwarfs, which are much smaller and fainter than stars like the Sun.

Current data from NASA's Kepler Mission suggest there is approximately one Earth-size planet in the habitable zone of each red dwarf.

The study roughly doubles that estimate. It also suggests new ways for astronomers to test whether planets orbiting red dwarfs have cloud cover.

(BL, 02.07.13)

Why Friday the 13th is considered scary

The number 13 has been notorious for a long time, and when it combines with Friday, it is considered worse. In Christian tradition there were 13 guests at The Last Supper, the 13th being Judas



and tradition also has it that Jesus was crucified on a Friday. Therefore, Friday and 13 together have the double whammy of superstitions.

It was also reported that another reason behind this belief is that Friday used to be called hanging day as it was customary to execute criminals on this day. There were 13 steps up to the scaffold, 13 turns in a hangman's noose and 13 pence and a halfpenny paid to the hangman.

According to Flight comparison website Jetcost.co.uk, flight inquiries for this particular day dropped by up to 27 percent as people are frightened to travel in aeroplanes on Friday the 13th.

Meanwhile, insurance company Norwich Union revealed that they

received more accident claims for Friday the 13th than on any other day. It has also been revealed that more murders are committed on Friday the 13th.

(BL, 12.09.13)

The red beacon of official identity

It is one of the mysteries of *babudom* whether there ever were important persons (IPs) before we had very important persons (VIPs). Perhaps the thinking was that since all other citizens, the *aam aadmis*, were already IPs in this great democracy, the next step could only be VIPs.



These would, in ordinary street life, be differentiated from the IPs by the red beacons atop their cars. With a red beacon, for instance, you need not utter the "don't you know who I am?" question, ever, against an errant member of the IP in public. The beacon says that.

Then came VVIPs. This is a different set. They get pilot vehicles with more beacons. This lot never needs to ask the identity question as all the IPs are restrained on roads when they breeze past. Now, a fight seems to be on among the VVIPs. Some ministries want the red beacon list to be pruned. (ET, 26.07.13)

Man dies after seeing electricity bill

A Sri Lankan man suffered a fatal heart attack after being presented with a shocking electricity bill. The 61-year-old victim had protested at the Ceylon

Electricity Board in Colombo that his bill had suddenly spiked.

It said the man was told that the bill was due to a hefty tariff increase and suffered a heart attack on the news, collapsing at the electricity board headquarters. The victim's bill amount was in line with the new 50 percent tariff increase.

The man identified as S P Samaradasa collapsed on a chair. The cause of death was identified as a heart attack.

Sri Lanka is one of the most expensive countries in Asia for electricity with a kilowatt hour costing up to US\$0.37.

(IE, 29.06.13)

London bans public spitting

If a proposal by British ministers and parliamentarians goes through, spitting on sidewalks or anywhere in public could land a person on the wrong side of the law. A council bylaw in the works could lead to a ban on public spitting, a common practice among South Asian communities.



The London Borough of Enfield has applied to Secretary of State for Local Government Eric Pickles for provisional approval to the new law prohibiting spitting on the streets. The bylaw was supported by Labour and Conservative groups on the council.

The bylaw makes it an offence to spit on the streets "without reasonable excuse". However, it would not cover spitting into a handkerchief or a tissue.

(ToI, 20.07.13)

Let all red VIP beacons be green

In Trinamool Congress's West Bengal, there is no place for red. Following a Supreme Court directive to limit the use of red beacons on cars, the state government has set in motion a process to change beacons into green.

Madan Mitra, Minister for Sports and Transport said, "Earlier, we removed red flags and now it is the turn of red beacons.

Except the one on the car of the Governor, all other red beacons on the cars of VIPs, who are entitled to have such cars, will be turned green".

The government has already painted the walls of several buildings and government offices with green and even asked owners of private buildings to follow suit.

(IE, 17.08.13)



S. Korea to tax lip jobs and priests

The South Korean government plans to exploit the country's obsession with plastic surgery by extending taxes to popular procedures like lip jobs to help fund spiralling social welfare costs.



The proposed new tax codes slap a 10-percent value added tax (VAT) on procedures like lip augmentation, double-jaw surgery and body hair removal beginning 2014.

Until now, VAT has only been levied on the so-called 'big five' treatments – nose jobs, liposuction, facelifts, breast jobs and double-eyelid surgery.

The new code will also impact previously untaxed religious leaders like monks and priests who will face a 4.0 percent levy on religious honorariums beginning 2015 after a year-long grace period. (BL, 08.08.13)

Donate a patch of life

Mumbai alone gets nearly 1,000 severe burn cases annually. In most of the cases, there is high mortality and morbidity due to infection and dehydration. These patients also suffer from severe pain. Human skin is a lifesaver for these severely ill patients.



Skin harvesting is a simple procedure. Within six hours of death, relatives of the deceased can call the helpline and a doctor and a technician will arrive within 45 minutes. It takes 45 minutes to take the skin with a special instrument called dermatome. It is harvested from the legs, thighs and back.

Only an eighth of the thickness of the skin is removed and there is no bleeding. After that, the body is bandaged and no disfigurement is noticeable.

The skin is preserved in glycerol solution and transported to the skin bank. All that the relatives need to do is have the death certificate of the deceased and sign a consent form. Anyone over 18 can donate. No donor-recipient, blood or colour matching is required. (Tol, 05.08.13)

One-stop centres in Chennai

The Chennai Corporation is looking at setting up urban common service centres that will provide a one-stop solution to civic needs of residents.

The centres, to be set up across the city, will be run by private agencies identified by the Corporation and



facilitate easy access to services of all government departments.

The Chennai Corporation commenced talks with Central and state government agencies to commission such centres under the public-private-partnership mode in 2013. The Corporation is expected to be the nodal agency for the centre.

Residents of the 200 wards in the city will be able to avail themselves of services in railways, telecom, passport, Corporation, Metrowater, electricity and transport, at the centres. (TH, 12.08.13)

Replicas of wonders of world

After being labelled as the coaching hub of the country, Kota is poised to become a major tourist attraction in the state. Built at an estimated cost of ₹20 crore, the project is likely to be a first in the country and is expected to draw tourists, including students from other cities, in large numbers.

The project is the brainchild of urban development and housing minister Shanti Dhariwal who has been regularly



following its development. The idea was executed and funded by UIT, Kota

Besides Taj Mahal, other replicas being sculpted are Great Pyramid of Giza, Christ the Redeemer, Leaning Tower of Pisa, Statue of Liberty and Colosseum. The replicas though are smaller in size. (Tol, 10.09.13)

Soda linked to aggression in kids

Heavy soft drink consumption is associated with aggression, attention problems and withdrawal behaviour in young children, a new study has found. The study by researchers at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, University of Vermont, and Harvard School of Public Health assessed approximately 3,000 5-year-old children.



The researchers found that 43 percent of the children consumed at least 1 serving of soft drinks per day, and 4 percent consumed 4 or more. Aggression, withdrawal, and attention problems were associated with soda consumption.

Children who drank 4 or more soft drinks per day were more than twice as likely to destroy things belonging to others, get into fights, and physically attack people.

They also had increased attention problems and withdrawal behaviour compared with those who did not consume soft drinks. (BL, 16.08.13)

60 New AC Buses

The Jaipur City Transport Services Limited (JCTSL) introduced 60 new low-floor AC buses to its existing fleet of buses. The JCTSL has given the control of these buses in the private hands for first time.

Some of the new buses will be plying on *Hirapura-Jawahar Nagar* route. This bus service will cover *Chitrakoot Nagar, Vaishali Nagar, Khatipura, Hasanpura, Railway Station, Khasa Kothi, MI Road, Ajmeri Gate, Sangneri Gate, Ghatgate, Govind Marg, Burfkhana* and *Mama Ka Hotel*.

From 6.14 am till 9.10 pm, a total of 14 buses (one after every 14 minutes) will be plying.

The number of buses will be increased to 16 on the route of *Dadi Ka Phatak* to *Agarwal Farm*. Besides, now 11 buses each will be plying from *Joshi Marg* to *Mahatma Gandhi Hospital* and *Sanganer* to *Kukas*. (DNA, 08.09.13)

LPG Portability in Action

On the lines of mobile number portability, the LPG distributor (dealer) portability is also coming soon.



This scheme would be extended to at least 25 cities, including Jaipur. Under this scheme, if a consumer is not satisfied with the services of his present LPG distributor, he can dump

him and choose another distributor and/or the company.

This will put a check on the existing unfair practices of distributors as well as delay in the distribution of cylinders. The Ministry of Petroleum launched this scheme in Chandigarh in January 2013 in which LPG consumers were allowed to change dealers, but not the oil company.

This means that if a consumer is availing services from Indane gas from Indian Oil Corporation, he can only choose from Indane gas dealers in the locality. (DB, 29.08.13)

'Smart Card' on the Anvil

The State Transport Department is now planning to issue new smart plastic card licences soon in the state which will be more user-friendly. Like the ATM cards, these plastic card licences will first be issued in Jaipur from October 2013 and be made available in other parts of the state as well.

The new licence will have a micro-chip fitted in it which will have all the information about the holder of the licence. When scanned, it will show all information pertaining to the holder of the licence.

The card will also have a hologram and State Transport Department's logo. These will be more durable and secure than the licences issued presently because of various features and be a solution for the old licences which get damaged over a span of few years. (DB, 13.07.13)

Jaipur Autos, Taxis to get GPS

Auto rickshaws and taxis in Jaipur will now have Global Positioning System (GPS) trackers installed. A blueprint has been prepared for installation of GPS in all autos.

The new system will be introduced in Jaipur and later will be extended to other cities, such as Jodhpur and Kota.



The Traffic Control Board comprising officials from police, Transport Department and Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) has given its nod for implementation of GPS.

The Pink City has over 12,000 autos for which there will one control room. Many states including the national capital Delhi have implemented GPS in autos and others have also initiated the process. (NN, 20.07.13)

Free CFLs for Consumers

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot will distribute free compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs to all domestic power consumers in rural areas and below poverty line consumers in cities in Rajasthan. They will get two free CFL bulbs each as a part of the

Grey Areas in Pink City



The civic maturity of any city is manifested most visibly in its residents' quality of life and their access to basic urban amenities. The Union Urban Development Ministry ranks Jaipur 230th on a list of 423 Class-I cities in terms of sanitation conditions. While the challenges faced by the JMC are monumental, the existing state of civic amenities in the city raises concerns about whether the JMC is prepared to meet these challenges.

CUTS recently undertook an initiative 'My City', in partnership with The Asia Foundation, and came up with some interesting numbers on the Pink City's urban life. The study found, among others, that 52 percent residents

of Jaipur were forced to dump their garbage in the open while 34 percent faced insufficient water supply.

Only one percent people were satisfied with the condition of roads in their areas while a staggering 29 percent of the surveyed population continued to live in areas with no road connectivity.

36 percent complained of poor or no road lights, while only 21 percent had a park in their neighbourhood. About three-fourth of the people surveyed admitted to facing constant problems with stray animals while over half of them grappled with vehicle parking problems every day. (TH, 24.08.13)

State Government's endeavour to save electricity and reduce transmission and distribution losses.

The State would save 150 MW power with the supply of lamps. The scheme would benefit 47.78 lakh consumers in villages and over 6 lakh BPL consumers in towns.

The State Government has asked all the five public sector power discoms to get CFL bulbs of 20 watts each for distribution under the scheme. (RP, 05.09.13)

BRTS Extension gets JDA Nod

The JDA gave a green signal to extend the Bus Rapid Transit Service (BRTS) route to *Sanganer airport* via *B2 bypass*. Considering the airport to be an important point, the JDA has decided to provide an alternative

route to it and the proposed construction of the BRTS (phase-IV) corridor.



The proposal will be sent to the Centre and it is estimated that the cost of the project will be ₹174 crore. An elevated road with an estimated cost of ₹90 crore has been proposed above B2 bypass. From the *Tonk Road* end, it will be constructed till the end of *New Sanganer Road*. Similarly, from *New Sanganer Road*, the elevated road will be constructed till *Amanishah Nullah* and will be 1,200 metre long. (Tol, 02.08.13)

Foundation for New Airport

Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India laid the foundation stone for an airport in *Kishangarh* in *Jaipur*, about 100 km from *Jaipur* and 35 km from *Ajmer*.

It will cater to demands of pilgrims who visit *Ajmer Dargah* and *Pushkar*. The new airport, estimated to cost ₹160 crore, is likely to start operation in 2016.

He also dedicated to the nation a solar power plant constructed under *Jawahar Lal Nehru Solar Mission* in *Jaipur*. (PTI, 20.09.13)



Metro Updates

Metro to ease Poor Public Transport

The Jaipur Metro project has come at the right time to ease the poor public transport in Jaipur. Relating the project to boom in population, private vehicles, industrialisation and employment in the recent times, the Asian Development Bank compiled several reports to find that the existing public transport system is inadequate in terms of quality, quantity and coverage, which could not cope with the increasing pressure. The project will benefit all sections of the society, especially the weaker ones as they will use the metro at a low cost. (Tol, 25.09.13)

Gehlot Flags off Metro's Trial Run

A new era in public transport began in Jaipur when Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot flagged off the trial run of the Jaipur Metro at the newly constructed *Mansarovar station*. The trial run took place on a 2.4 km track between *Mansarovar* and *Shyam Nagar* via *New Atish Market* and *Vivek Vihar* stations. The Metro will start running between *Mansarovar* on the outskirts of Jaipur, and *Chandpole* in the walled City, in the first phase, late in 2013 or early 2014. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh laid the foundation stone for underground construction of the Metro proposed near the *Chandpole station* to be built by Continental Engineering Corporation at a cost of ₹507 crore over the next three years. (PTI, 20.09.13 & TH, 18.09.13)



provide more comfort to the elderly and women and have comfortable seats for senior citizens and women. The fully air-conditioned compartments would be high on security as well. The trains would be equipped with four CCTV cameras. An automatic feature called *Passenger Information System* would update the passengers about the nearby stations both verbally and visibly. During any emergency, the passengers would be able to use the 'passenger emergency alarm handle' to talk directly to the train operator. (DB, 07.07.13)

Metro gets Technical Clearance

The much-awaited Jaipur Metro Rail Project has got the green signal from the Railway Ministry on technical clearance for its operations in signal, telecom and electricity expansion system. For every technical point, the Railway Ministry's approval is a must. The Research Design and Standard Organisation undertook research and assessment of the ongoing metro project, and gave its technical approval. The metro would be able to function later in 2013. The Phase-I of JMRC would cover 12.6 km from *Mansarovar* to *Badi Chaupar* in the city. (www.zeenews.india.com, 22.07.13)

World-class Features to Add to Metro's charm

The Jaipur Metro would have some power-packed, world-class features to make people's journey a pleasure. The trains would be equipped with better features to

Jaipur Metro to Replicate Model of Metro Cities



It is very unfortunate that the Central Government is not providing either financial or technical support to the Jaipur Metro project. The Planning Commission, Government of India, should approve the long pending proposal of the State Government of Rajasthan by providing viability gap funding (VGF) for the development of Jaipur Metro as had been done for other cities, such as Cochin, Hyderabad etc. so that Jaipur Metro project, which is suffering from severe financial constraints and feasibility is attended to.

Jaipur Metro Rail Corporation (JMRC) is just a funding/coordination agency on behalf of the State Government of Rajasthan, while the actual work is being carried out by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC). Therefore, JMRC would always be guided by the relevant expertise and experience of DMRC.

Jaipur is at least 10 years late in terms of development in comparison to all those cities and urban areas where the metro is up and running. Why is Jaipur Metro project running so much behind the schedule? It seems that the Jaipur Metro project is not meticulously planned/conceived and developed.

The State Government of Rajasthan should have opted for Central Industrial Security Force, which has the required expertise in providing safety and security to high value strategic installations of national importance rather than opting for Jaipur/Rajasthan police, which have no such expertise.

Jaipur Metro should be handed and taken over by the Central Government of India for its planned development in phases from the State Government of Rajasthan, which has no prior experience in this sector. Kolkata Metro was given the status of the 17th zone of Indian Railways on December 29, 2010. The making of Kolkata Metro as an independent zone notified by the Railway Board made it an open line like other zones and raised the status of the Metro workers on par with those of the zonal railways. Jaipur Metro should also emulate the same.

Jaipur Metro should have 100 percent equity distributed among the Ministry of Railways, Government of India; Railways Board, Indian Railways, Rail India Technical and Economic Service, Research Design & Standards Organisation, Lucknow; Planning Commission, Government of India; DMRC so that it can sustain itself for futuristic development both from the technical feasibility angle as well as the financial viability criterion.

There is a need to build awareness on the concept of existence, availability, option and usage of Mass Rapid Transit System so as to ensure ridership and footfalls in Metro lines and routes and also to harmonise it with the Jaipur City Transport Services Limited local low floor and not so low floor (A/c & non A/c) bus services to cover Jaipur city and its suburbs in an integrated, and systematic manner. This would make Jaipur Metro a sustainable and environment friendlier proposition leading to reduction in pollution and emission of chlorofluorocarbons in city's atmosphere.

— Manish Agarwal, a concerned Jaipurite

Sources: BL: The Hindu Business Line; DB: Dainik Bhaskar; DNA: Daily News and Analysis; ET: Economic Times
IE: Indian Express; NN: Nafa Nuksan; PTI: Press Trust of India; RP: Rajasthan Patrika; TH: The Hindu; Tol: Times of India