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Roads to a world class city?

“Where is the road in this otherwise beautiful city” – lamented a foreign tourist visiting the Pink City in September – a sentiment that was echoed by Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot, months later when he commented in the presence of the heads of the Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) and Jaipur Municipal Corporation (JMC) at a public function that the monsoon, diwali and *maavat* have all come and gone but the condition of the city roads remain pathetic with potholes, loose pebbles and soil and dumps of garbage.



This subtle name-and-shame attempt expectedly threw the cat amongst the pigeons within the cadre of responsible officials/departments. A three-day deadline was given for repairs and maintenance of all roads in the city to the engineers after the Commissioner, JDA and the Mayor of Jaipur, made a whirlwind tour of the city. It needed one such visit to discover that one out of two *damar* mix plants was shut down at Harmada! Subsequently, the deadline has been extended till January 15, 2011.

It has been widely reported in the local media and can be seen by all road users that the hurried attempts to fill up the potholes is being carried out by circumventing the guidelines laid down by the Indian Road Congress and would certainly be short lived. Such half hearted patchwork carried out after the monsoon season was threadbare soon thereafter.

Besides, only the large potholes are being repaired leaving the smaller ones unattended. Fresh layers are being carpeted over the old ones (at some places even where not needed, for example, at the Jawahar Circle), thereby raising the level of the road itself. At many places such frequent re-layering over the previous roads has raised the level of the roads to the height of the dividers and pavements on the one hand and has lowered the houses along the roads on the other with attendant difficulties. The manholes and drainage covers over the roads are similarly either too low or high causing serious unevenness and a threat of accidents to particularly two-wheel drivers.

Part of the problem lies in the fact that many departments and agencies are involved in the maintenance of city roads and each looks to pass on the buck to the other. Besides, the JDA and the JMC, the Urban Development and Housing (UDH) Department, the Public Works Department (PWD), Housing Board, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), etc exercise overlapping jurisdictions. The roads near the Harmada Expressway are in a dilapidated condition as the NHAI and JDA each refer to the other's responsibility to repair the same. When questioned by media on the poor quality of road repair, a senior engineer of JMC tried to shirk the responsibility by saying that more than 90 percent of the city roads are under the JDA.

It is possible to ensure coordination amongst various departments as has been evidenced recently. The Jaipur City Transport Services Limited, established in the city recently under the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) scheme, has bagged the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) Urban Mobility Award-2010 for the new technological applications and innovations.

The Congress MLA has threatened that MLAs and MPs from the state will take to the roads if the bureaucracy fails to improve civic amenities. He has also warned the civic bodies otherwise to be ready to 'face adverse result.'

(Compiled from Tol; HT; RP; DNA and DB)

Pradeep S. Mehta
Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General

INSIDE

- ◆ When action is not in public interest...
- ◆ Water Policy an Eyewash
- ◆ Traffic Chaos in the City!
- ◆ Polybags in Use Despite Ban



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When action is not in public interest...

Undertaking major high cost infrastructural activities in public places, ostensibly in public interest, without proper and transparent consultation with people's representatives has been known to cause avoidable problems but the administration often disregards this necessity. Recently, Jaipur has seen two such plans run into virulent public backlashes, one of which eventually had to be abandoned.

Jaipur Metro: The Jaipur Metro project has witnessed its share of birth pangs and more. After the debate on the model to be adopted for its implementation was somehow addressed, there are now frequent but regular public outcries reverberating across the city ranging from questioning the very need for it ('Jaipur Metro is a lopsided priority') to opposition for land acquisition and construction of the 'casting yard' in the Mansarovar area. The common thread in all these discordant notes is lack of public consensus at the planning stage.



While a ruling party MLA openly criticised the government for sidelining people's representatives on major issues, the opposition has labelled the ₹12,000-crore project as a lopsided priority based on fictitious projections of passenger load. He further argues that a transport system requirement of a few thousand commuters of a big city was gross injustice for the rest of the population in the state.

Further, as the work on the Metro project advances, many residents along the proposed corridor are worried and protesting against the proposed land acquisition comprising 74 properties between Mansarovar and Chandpole. The trade organisations that are spearheading the opposition say that the government had earlier assured that only open spaces would be acquired and, therefore, they would not now allow their shops and residences to be acquired.

Residents of Mansarovar and the staff union of Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB) have taken up cudgels against the proposed 'casting yard' to be constructed on VT Road of RHB in Mansarovar. The casting yard of the Metro project is needed for preparing girders, pre-cast pillars for the elevated stretch of the Metro line, beams, etc. The residents argue that the proposed casting yard would result in the movement of heavy vehicular traffic such as trucks, cranes, trailers etc in a residential-cum-educational area and would jeopardise their safety and peace. The staff union of the RHB is agitating citing that the project has been awarded land valued at ₹500 crore

but no other land has been allotted to RHB in compensation.

Due to the above emergent situation, it is feared that the project may be delayed as some of the aggrieved parties have lodged cases in the High Court.

Statue Circle: The Statue Circle, other than being a prominent landmark and a popular tourist spot, is regarded as a heritage cite by the citizens of Jaipur. On their own accord, the JDA and the UDH Department were all set to revamp the same with a view to enhance its beauty, make it more spacious and provide for underground parking. It proposed to acquire a strip of 25 metres around the existing periphery from the Birla Auditorium, Income Tax office, Hotel Haveli and two private bungalows by offering additional floor area ratio and other relaxation in compensation for the acquired area.

The State's Tourism Department was soon joined by a city-based historian, the author of Jaipur Nama, the Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and the ruling party's legislator against the proposal. The legislator strongly remarked: 'The common man has never asked for changes and nowhere has been involved in the plan, still the Minister and the Chief Secretary have the temerity to call it in public interest.' Allegations of attempting to favour certain builders were also reported.



Not tampering with the historical Statue Circle was strengthened by the fact that it is a problem-free area where there is no traffic congestion and that it represents an iconic part of post independence development. Others felt that 'beautification' should be carried out in newly developing places and that the amount of money budgeted (₹25 crore) should be used for more pressing needs of the city, such as, drinking water, repair of broken roads, proper drainage and sewerage system, etc.

The public outcry resulted in shelving of the plan by the government.

(Inputs from Tol; TH; RP; and DB)

JDA's Clarification on BRTS

The Union Urban Development Ministry has asked the JDA for clarification on the amendments proposed in the development plans of the BRTS Package II. Estimated to cost around ₹600 crore, the amended proposal for the project has been waiting for the Ministry's clearance for over three months.

The difference of opinion between the Central and state authorities in Package II pertains to a 19-km-long corridor proposed between *Pani Pech* to *Sanganer Airport* with 17 major intersections. The route overlaps with the Metro corridor proposed on the *Tonk Road* from *Durgapura* to *Ajmeri Gate* and the road width varies between 20-40 metres. The BRTS faces a similar difficulty on the 21-km-long package III proposed between *New Sanganer Road* and *Transport Nagar*.

(ToI, 27.11.10)

Water Policy an Eyewash



Just before a good monsoon in 2010, the water crisis in the State had deteriorated to a level that the Rajasthan High Court directed the government to spell out a strategy. Of the 237 blocks in the State, 207 had been declared in dark zone as per groundwater availability.

The Bisalpur water pipeline finally arrived in Jaipur after over a decade, but soon its source dam dried up! In a knee-jerk reaction, the government ordered confiscation of tubewells in public parks and allowed acquisition of private borewells for maintaining drinking water supply in the cities. The government released a new water policy for regulating proper use of water in February 2010, but failed to ensure its strict execution.

The fact that water connections and drinking water pipelines laid down barely four years ago in many parts of the city at a cost of ₹50 crore are again in need of replacement exacerbates the problem.

(ToI, 13.12.10; RP, 24.12.10)

JDA to Tackle Land Disputes



Investigation of land-related cases in the city will now be dealt with by the special unit of JDA police station. The complaints can directly be filed there or at the concerned local police stations. The reports will be directed to the newly created JDA police station and investigated on priority basis. It is the first time in the State that a special police station has been set up in coordination with a local development body. The police station is located at AC Market, *Raja Park*.

The police station will provide relief to those people affected by land frauds and especially help to control those involved in duping people's aspirations for owning a house. It has a staff of 35 and the station can be contacted on phone number 2625168. Land fraud complaints within 3,000 sq km of the JDA region will be registered in it along with those areas under JMC. Cases outside the JDA and JMC jurisdiction will continue to be registered as per earlier procedure. The JDA police station will ensure a higher level of coordination between the police and development authority.

(ToI, 18.11.10)

Developers' Parking Delayed

The JMC has agreed to create no-parking zones in the walled city of Jaipur. Consequently, users will make hefty payments in the parking spaces being constructed every time they visit the walled city.

The UDH Minister Shanti Dhariwal laid foundation stone for three major parking projects at *Ramleela Ground*, *Ashok Marg* and near *Mall-21* in April 2010. The estimated cost for these projects was over ₹160 crore. The projects were supposed to get completed under public-private partnership (PPP) model and aimed to provide parking facilities to more than 3,000 vehicles. However, the work for construction of parking could not be initiated as the developers had tabled additional

conditions before the civic body.

The principal condition was that there would be a no-parking zone within a distance of half a kilometre from the location of the three parking projects.

(DNA, 26.12.10 & DB, 16.12.10)

Civic Bodies to Phase out Slums

The JMC and the JDA have bagged another sanction of ₹180 crore for the facelift of slums. The sanction has been allotted to create hygienic living conditions for the slums under the JNNURM funded scheme Basic Services to Urban Poor'.

After the completion of the project, 11,000 registered houses will be allocated to slum-dwellers. The two-storied two-BHK houses will have proper sanitary systems. The city will also try to phase out *kachchi bastis*. At least 17 slums under the JMC and 14 from the JDA will be allotted new houses. Land



for the project has been identified. The houses will be constructed without hampering the current template of these areas. Proper infrastructural facilities will be built around these areas to protect the livelihood of the dwellers.

(ToI, 22.11.10)

800 Cops to Tackle Vehicles

With 14 lakh vehicles to manage, the city roads have never been so crowded. And to add to the woes of the city police department, responsible for ensuring smooth traffic flow, there are just 800 cops to do the job!

However, SP (traffic), acknowledging the lack of manpower, said that the Department is trying its best to ensure a safe and smooth drive on the city roads. He said that there is a great need to spread awareness among the city commuters. Recently, the number of traffic accidents has also gone up. Besides, traffic offenders usually cause traffic hurdles and not only risk their lives but put others at risk too. It is very necessary that people are duly educated about traffic rules.

(ToI, 27.11.10)

Traffic Chaos in the City!



The city traffic police have stressed on traffic management on city roads to deal with jams and congestion. Engineering solutions like construction of flyovers and broadening of roads and slip lanes etc., according to experts, cannot provide immediate solutions to the messy traffic.

The city traffic police has introduced red light-free junctions and some diversions to smoothen traffic flow. Although the police maintain the new systems, particularly at *Khasa Kothi Circle*, *Bais Godaam Circle* and newly added *Government Hostel* crossing have improved traffic flow, it has evoked mixed reactions from commuters. However, commuters as always had to adjust to the new pattern of traffic. Since the engineering solutions to the traffic congestion is time consuming, traffic managers have to rely on the option of astute management of existing movement with given scarce resources.

(RP, 17.12.10)

An International Convention Centre

The State Government has cleared the way for the International Convention Centre to be built at *Pratap Nagar* in Jaipur. This is going to be a landmark complex which would give the historic city a new identity.

This Centre would not only serve as a conference venue, but also as a complex that provides for hotels, both starred category and business class with exhibition space and a 5000 capacity divisible auditorium. The divisible auditorium would be such whose size and capacity could be ideally reduced looking at the demand. Jaipur would be playing host to the *Pravasi Bhartiya* International Convention in 2012 and it is expected that the Centre would be ready by then.

(Tol, 27.11.10)

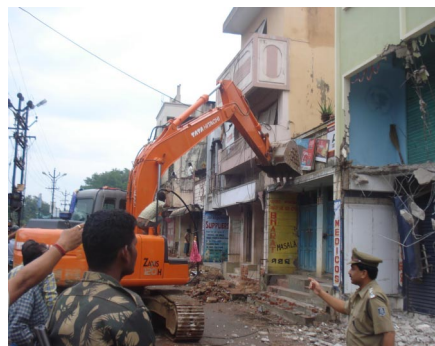
Riders' Close Watch on Littering

The civic body is set to launch its special sanitation drive called 'Watch Rider Scheme' in which the city would be under the scrutiny of 77 bike-riders. They have been empowered to charge fines from anyone who indulges in nuisance under sections 232 and 233 of the Rajasthan Municipal Act 2009.

All the bikers will wear a blue uniform and a JMC badge as they ravel across the city to create awareness and fine offenders. These men will hand over the receipt of fine on the spot if they find residents littering and dirtying their neighbourhood. Any littering by pets can also prove costly to the pet owners. All preparations have been completed for the launch of the scheme.

(RP, 30.12.10 & 22.12.10)

JDA to Tighten Encroachers



Encroachment on government land and commercial activities in residential areas would cost dearly in future as the government, armed with an amended JDA Act, is coming down heavily on the violators.

With the new JDA (amendment) Act 2010 coming into force on September 15, development agencies like Urban Improvement Trusts (UITs) and JDA are empowered to act against the violators of the land use in the urban areas, which till now fell in the exclusive purview of the local bodies.

Stringent penal provisions were also incorporated in the Act. Illegal constructions and illegal activities in the residential premises would attract a punishment of 15-45 days imprisonment and a minimum penalty of 25,000 as against the earlier penal provision of ₹5,000.

(DB, 16.12.10)

Polybags in Use Despite Ban



Jaipur has started using plastic bags again. From big shops to street vendors, people have been found using the plastic carry bags in violation of the August 01, 2010 ban imposed by the State Pollution Control Board. The Board in its operation against the offenders issued notices to hundreds of establishments and warned them of strong action.

Be it chemists, sweet shops, book stores or big shopping malls, the use of polybags continues unabated. Finding loopholes in the provision of ban, now the shopkeepers have started selling items in polybags without any handle, as the ban code does not include use of plastic in packaging.

Meanwhile, JMC cries foul about the lack of legal muscle to deal with the violations. Health Department of the civic body has also found the gross violation of the ban.

(DB, 15.12.10)

Ghat ki Guni Project Soon

The *Ghat ki Guni* project, aimed at providing an alternative to the narrow portion of the Jaipur-Agra road in the city, is ready to take off. The project, which was hit by technical problems earlier, has been revised and approved by the government.

The project, which is the first of its kind under the design, built, finance and transfer mode in the state, has been approved by the government. The 150-crore project is now being executed by the Rohandas Rajasthan Infra Project Private Limited and the project period is 13 years five months and 20 days including the construction period of one-and-a-half years. Under the project, a four-lane underground tunnel is proposed from *Jawahar Nagar bypass* to *Agra Road (NH-11)*.

(Tol, 21.10.10)

Sources: DB: Dainik Bhaskar; DNA: Daily News & Analysis; HT: Hindustan Times; RP: Rajasthan Patrika; TH: The Hindu; Tol: Times of India