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Potholes Gives Motorists the Jerks



CUTS

Have you recently travelled in an auto rickshaw and had the jerky experience on Jaipur roads? Commuting on Jaipur roads has become a nightmare as the roads are riddled with craters, potholes and make for a very rough ride. Though the condition of roads has worsened during the monsoon, the repair work undertaken by authorities has accomplished nothing significant. The tardy repair job has made roads worse and the unfinished work unsafe to drive. Drivers have been negotiating potholes and uneven roads along their routes for many days now. Since the repair work is progressing at a snail's pace, people are facing hardship every day.

Jaipur Development Commissioner, Kuldeep Ranka expressed dissatisfaction over the poor condition of roads and directed the engineering wing to take up repair of all major roads. October 20 has been set as the deadline to finish repairing. Shanti Dhariwal, UDH Minister claimed that roads would be free of potholes, and strict action would be taken against the concerned officer if the work was not completed within the deadline. After the given deadlines, the MPs are expected to monitor city roads on motorbikes and if they find any laxity in the work, prompt action will be taken, said Dhariwal.

Waterlogging due to inadequacy of drainage during rains is another worry for commuters. Waterlogging in the face of construction of the Metro with the roads already narrow because of the barricades has exacerbated the problem. Jaipur Municipal Corporation (JMC) claims to have completed patch work in the walled city but the opposite is true. The main roads at Johri Bazar and Hawa Mahal are still full of potholes. Accidents occur on such roads every now and then. However, chief engineer of JMC said that they were trying their best to get the work done but it was not possible for them to cover all areas at one go. Uneven roads are posing problems for daily commuters. Tar carpeted Tonk Road and the road connecting Delhi by-pass are uneven by 13 cm at some places - enough for any vehicle to turn turtle. Similarly, a drive on the New Sanganer Road, through Sodala to *Gujjar ki Thadi* is a nightmare and driving on an auto rickshaw from Collectorate on Kabir Road is back breaking despite patch work done.

CUTS organised a Pothole Contest campaign in Calcutta in the early 90s. In October 2011, an online social action group called Jaipur Development Circle (www.facebook.com/jaipurdevelopmentcircle), comprising young professionals from Jaipur organised a similar campaign called Pinkcity Pothole Contest. Residents of Jaipur, who have to negotiate these potholes everyday clicked pictures and shared them online. Over 100 pictures were gathered and shared with the relevant authorities.

Jaipur's claim for a world class city falls flat on its face with the city roads remaining pathetic with potholes, loose pebbles and soils and dumps of garbage. There is an urgent need for planned and coordinated action with involvement of all civic bodies for well carpeted roads throughout Jaipur. This is the only way to attract more tourists and provide relief to the citizens. Just blaming the administration will not be sufficient, there is a need to create awareness among the general public.

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Water Crisis – a Worsening Problem in Jaipur



Diminishing resources of drinking water, the attitude towards water conservation is not changing. Change in lifestyle is also contributing in the increase in water consumption. The use of potable water for washing clothes, gardening, washing of cars and use in desert coolers are some of the reasons for increased consumption. Urbanisation strongly affects ground water recharge flow and quality thereby creating serious impact on urban infrastructure that may lead to socio – economic and environmental degradation of the area

With the traditional water sources such as Ramgarh lake drying up, Jaipur's is now dependent mainly on groundwater which, too, is depleting very quickly. Despite the commissioning of Bisalpur water project to supply water to several areas, including the walled city, water-related protests have become a regular phenomenon during peak summer months.

Jaipur is a fast growing city, with a population of 66.67 lacs in 2011. There has been a growth of 26.91 percent in the population compared to population as per 2001 census. The groundwater is depleting as a result of the growing population. Scientists at the water department are concerned with the decline of water table in Jaipur which is alarming at six metre per year during last three years. The water quality is also deteriorating due to disposal of sewerage through soak-pits.

Unfortunately, with diminishing resources of drinking water, the attitude towards water conservation is not changing. Change in lifestyle is also contributing in the increase in water consumption. The use of potable water for washing clothes, gardening, washing of cars and use in desert coolers are some of the reasons for increased consumption. Urbanisation strongly affects ground water recharge flow and quality thereby creating serious impact on urban infrastructure that may lead to socio – economic and environmental degradation of the area.

The monsoon is becoming scarce, unpredictable and erratic. At the same time recharging of ground water has also not been planned and executed. Recently, the state groundwater department has sent a design to Public Health Engineering Department to construct water harvesting structures near the abandoned hand pumps and bore wells. The state government is also contemplating conducting a survey in the city to gather from the households how much water they are getting and consuming. On this basis there may be an increase in the water rates based on consumption. Further, the state government has made water harvesting structures mandatory for over 300 square meters houses. Also, new projects such as flyovers, underpasses, airports should have water harvesting structures.

Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission accepted the fact that Rajasthan faces acute water crisis. He promised that the state would get assistance through many government schemes on water.

In order to improve the water availability in the city, there is a need to conserve available water, and harvest rain water to the maximum extent possible through various measures. Organising mass awareness campaigns with community involvement is called for. Local by-laws are required to promote rainwater harvesting and ground water recharging.

Efforts are also required for recycling waste water and recharging the industrial effluent after treatment. Soft parking, landscape and pavements filled with pebbles and coarse sand to allow percolation should be considered. Percolation structures, wherever suited, be encouraged in open grounds and road sides that will help recharge bore-wells and provide water for gardening, car washing etc. Time has come to start special campaigns on water conservation. The efficiency of utilisation in all the diverse uses of water should be improved and an awareness of water as a scarce resource should be fostered. Conservation consciousness can be promoted through education, regulation, incentives and disincentives.



Metro on Fast Track...

- Mishaps continued at the Metro construction sites. About seven major accidents have occurred in the last eight months. In July two labourers were electrocuted and subsequent investigations revealed that 'wrong techniques' were being used.
- The state government has given the green signal to provide land to Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB) for its housing schemes in return for land which has been acquired for the Metro project.
- In response to a petition claiming that more land has been acquired than required by the government for the metro project, the Rajasthan High Court sought details of land needed for construction in Sodala area. The Court has also stayed on auction of agriculture varsity land allotted to Jaipur Metro Rail Corporation (JMRC). The Court has also asked for the metro rehabilitation policy realistic.
- A common mobility card would be provided to get access to dedicated parking spots along the metro route under the common mobility plan of the Central government. Meanwhile the state has sought central aid for developing parking areas near the metro. A common transport card for Jaipurites is also being contemplated which would be used on multiple modes of transport.



- While the civil work of Jaipur metro is at its peak, the JMRC has prepared a draft to recruit staff for its operation and maintenance, which would be sent to the state government for approval.
- Metro man, Sridharan said in September that 20-25 percent of the work on the metro project has been completed.
- Meanwhile, girders are being put in place in preparation for laying down the metro track at a height of 28 meters on Ajmer road.

(Tol, 11.07.11; 23.07.11; 25.07.11; 23.08.11; 26.08.11; 15.09.11; 28.09.11; DNA, 23.08.11; DB, 23.08.11; 22.09.11; RP, 22.09.11)

...but Other Projects Lagging

The Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) has asked the companies working on the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) to explain the slow pace. The deadline for completion of elevated roads and the BRTS corridor is December 2011, yet only 35 percent of this work has been completed since 2007 at Durgapura.

Similarly, the deadline for Ramniwas Bagh underground parking has been extended from May to August 2012 which might result in cost-overrun by 10 percent. The underpass at *Gurjar ki thadi* is running late by about 14 months having an implication of increase in costs by 15-20 percent.

Various reasons such as delay in land acquisition, limited time period available to transport raw material to the sites, changes over the original plans, shifting of power and water lines and inadequate inter-departmental coordination have been stated.

The ropeway project between *Kanak ghati* and Nahargarh/Jaigarh has been pending for 13 years and the film-city project on Agra road since nine years. The International Convention Centre and the Ring Road projects, too, are moving at snail's pace.

(Tol, 05.08.11; DB, 29.09.11; RP, 23.08.11)

Relief for Consumers

The State Food Department has directed all the district collectors and the district consumer protection councils to strictly enforce guidelines that make it obligatory on shopkeepers to accept returned goods from the consumers after sale. Shopkeepers have also been restrained from printing on their bills 'goods sold once shall not be taken back' or anything else that means the same. (DB, 28.09.11)



Jaipur 4th at E-Commerce

Jaipur has emerged as the fourth largest e-commerce centre in the country according to the ebay census, 2011. Jaipur follows close on the heels of New Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore respectively. There are an estimated 3311 centres across the country where e-commerce is being conducted that includes 1267 rural centres. Country-wide the most popularly traded items are electronic whereas in Jaipur, life-style products such as clothes, chocolates, toiletries, etc. lead.



(NN, 29.09.11)

Saving the Girl Child

Jaipur has been in the news for all the wrong reasons as far as the health sector is concerned. However, recent disclosures that Jaipur, which boasts of the most-educated citizenry in Rajasthan, is at a low 25th position as far as saving the girl child is concerned is shameful for Jaipurites. In 1971 for every 1000 boys up to the age of six years, Rajasthan had 932 girls. Now the girls have fallen to 883 and in Jaipur to 852 for every 1000 boys. Even the backward districts of the state such as Pratapgarh (929), Banswara (928), Nagaur (894) are above the state capital's average.



The Panel for 'Vision 2021' sought public opinion on saving the girl child. Hundreds of suggestions have been received by the government-formed committee which is now in the process of designing Vision 2021 of the Medical and Health Department. Among the suggestions received, installation of CCTVs at all sonography centres, proper implementation of the pre-conception and pre-natal diagnostic techniques (prohibition of sex selection) act, more intensive consultations etc. have been proposed. (DB, 28.09.11 & Tol, 22.07.11)

Migration of Doctors

Doctors in Rajasthan are migrating to other states. A lot of 40 doctors have joined as medical officers in Gujarat government service and the Rajasthan government had to cancel the appointment of 271 doctors when they did not join the services. In Jaipur alone, against 41 appointments of doctors as medical officers, only 31 joined. The All Rajasthan in Service Doctors' Association has claimed that pay packages in Rajasthan are lower than in other states. The high capitation fee and costs of completing the MBBS course do not match the post-qualification packages in Rajasthan.

Meanwhile the real estate major, Ansal API, plans to set up an Ansal Medical Institute in Jaipur with an investment of ₹10 crore in collaboration with the US-based Hope Medical Institute which would be operational in two years and would accept no capitation fee.

(Tol, 05.07.11 & 09.08.11)

Curbs on Parking?



While the city police is taking several steps to ensure disciplined parking in Chaura Raasta and Johari bazar, the recently inducted low-floor buses have nowhere to park overnight and are exposed to thefts, etc. (please see CityMatters No.2-2011). Recent media reports of private buses being 'allowed' to park on government land on Parivahan Marg has thrown the cat amongst the pigeons. It has been reported that private buses have been allowed to park free of cost on government land while the government-owned and operated low-floor buses remain open to vandalism.

(Tol, 21.07.11 & RP, 29.09.11)

CAG Report Blasts Raj Government

During the fiscal year 2009-10, nearly ₹200 crore public money was spent in non-productive works due to failure of governance and oversight. In the CAG report tabled in the state Assembly recently, the losses due to indecision, lack of administrative oversight and concerted action at various levels were higher than those of fraud and unjustified expenditure. The report refers to pervasive irregularities in printed ration cards that crossed their three-year expiry period without being distributed, unproductive expenses on a hospital building which remains non-operational, granting affiliation to private colleges without recovery of penalties, awarding road-building contracts on land not acquired and excess payment to contractors against procurement, etc.

Interestingly, the CAG report was presented within a couple of days of the government deciding in a hurriedly convened meeting to bring forth the *lokseva guarantee kanoon* in the current Assembly session itself.

(DNA, 27.08.11 & RP, 25.08.11)

The Bane of Pinkcity – Sanitation

Despite being a tourist attraction, Jaipur has no focus or scheme on sanitation. Jaipur ranks 230th out of 423 class I cities in the Union Urban Ministry's ranking. National Urban Sanitation Policy refers to a city as 'sanitised' when it meets the following:

- ◆ free of open defecation;
- ◆ free of manual scavenging and adequate and well-equipped personnel;
- ◆ safe management of municipal waste water and drainage;
- ◆ recycling and reuse of treated waste water for non-potable usage;
- ◆ full and safe solid waste collection and disposal;
- ◆ sustaining results in services to the poor, and
- ◆ improved public health outcomes and environmental standards.

Even the existing meagre facilities are lying in limbo. For instance, 15 years ago, the JMC constructed 65-70 toilets and for the past 10 years these are being maintained by a NGO. However, this NGO has not been paid the maintenance charges, despite a contract with the JMC. Another 38 toilets constructed under build-operate-transfer are lying unused for several years awaiting decision on who would maintain them. Even these would require another ₹50,000 per toilet to make them usable as their condition has deteriorated. Similarly in all the 742 parks in the city, tree-plantation and upkeep is also in a sorry state.

The on-going tussle between the Mayor and the JMC and shortage of staff has been cited as the main reasons for the pathetic condition. Funds crunch has also been mentioned as one of the constraints though the Mayor has gone on record saying that even if 70 percent of the resources are used, the sanitation work could be completed. Reportedly an amount of ₹20 crore is being spent annually yet results are not visible.

(Tol, 04.08.11; 10.08.11; 11.08.11; 28.09.11; RP, 29.09.11)



Sources: DB: Dainik Bhaskar; DNA: Daily News and Analysis; RP: Rajasthan Patrika; Tol: Times of India