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CityMatters

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The cacophony of the 2019 general elections is probably the loudest that I have heard in the 70+ years of my life. What is worse is the level of the discourse and debate which has become so terrible, with each party trying to out beat the other in the mud slinging which has gone on. I am non partisan and do not subscribe to any particular party's views, but cast my vote to the best candidate, and his party. I have voted in every election, be it parliament or assembly or municipal. Alas, one is not so sure about the outcome of the elections whether a clear mandate will emerge in favour of the existing regime or we get a coalition of disparate regional and national parties.



The other day I went to an intellectuals gathering called by the Pradesh Congress Committee to hear Sam Pitroda in April in Jaipur. Sam is an old friend who has taught me many things and I am deeply obliged to him. In fact he has addressed at least two public events of CUTS in Jaipur in 1988 and 2013. In 1988, Sam addressed our networkers meeting as the telecom czar of India. In that address he had called upon our networkers to create a questioning society and that is what I am doing through my work as head of CUTS.

There are many factors which will be viewed by voters when they cast their votes, or not: "None Of The Above". NOTA is a good option for citizens to exercise their right of dissent. On the other hand, many of us have been campaigning for long to have the Right to Recall a legislator if s/he has been found to be useless. Hopefully, this will be a reality one day. Like many I too had a thought of casting a NOTA this time, but I will not. I would rather vote for a strong opposition or continuity of the present regime because of its pluses. All have too many minuses so I would choose the known devil with the highest net strength. In either case, the results would be satisfactory to many of us.

In the State, we did change the party in government this time and one is sure that the Gehlot Administration will do better than its last or even Vasundhara's regime. Rajasthan has proved to be one of the best states in India to practice true democracy by alternating between Congress and BJP, rather than one going on beyond five years term. Alas, the treasury of Rajasthan is not in the best condition due to several factors but one is the power sector which has the highest debt burden in the country. Efforts are being made to correct the situation but it is a Herculean task.

Secondly, if there is a BJP-led government in the centre then too it will not be an easy ride for Gehlot due to dirty politics. One hopes that all parties will work together to move the economy so that more jobs are created for our huge youth population and farmers' distress is reduced.

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Pradeep S. Mehta
Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General

China to Complete Artificial Sun Device

China plans to complete the construction of the artificial sun in 2019, achieving an ion temperature of 100 million⁰C.

The HL-2M Tokamak device is designed to replicate the nuclear fusion process that occurs naturally in the sun and stars to provide almost infinite clean energy through controlled nuclear fusion, which is often dubbed as the “artificial sun.”

Achieving an ion temperature above 100 million⁰C is one of the three challenges to reach the goal of harnessing the nuclear fusion and the core of the sun is widely believed to be 15 million⁰C, meaning that the ion at the device’s core will be seven times higher than that of the sun.

The other two challenges are containing the fusion within a limited space in the long term and providing a sufficiently high density profile.

(PTI, 06.03.19)

Man Cleared after 40 Years in Prison

The city of Simi Valley, California, has reached a US\$21mn settlement with a man who spent almost 40 years behind bars in the 1978 killings of his girlfriend and her four-year-old son.

Craig Coley, 71, was released from the slammer in 2017 after being pardoned by then-Gov. Jerry Brown, who said that DNA evidence and a

thorough reinvestigation of the murders proved his innocence.

The city said the settlement would mitigate lengthy and unnecessary legal proceedings and will be on the hook for about US\$4.9mn, while the rest is expected to be covered by insurance and other sources. (Tol, 26.02.19)

Sued for Giving Birth without Consent

A 27-year-old man Raphael Samuel, resident of Mumbai is going to drag his parents to court — for giving birth to him without his consent.

He said that as children are powerless to decide whether to come into this world or not, the parents should support them for life. His protest is about procreation, which puts a strain on earth and skews ecological balance.

“I want everyone in India and the world to realise that they are brought in this world without their consent...they do not owe their parents anything and if we are born without our consent, we should be maintained for our life. We should be paid by our parents to live,” he said. (BBC, 07.02.19)

Skyscrapers Make a Return

More than a century after steel and concrete became the standard for building high-rise buildings, the humble tree is making a comeback.

Sidewalk Labs LLC, a unit of Google parent Alphabet Inc, is planning to use



timber to construct all of its buildings for a mixed-use community along Toronto’s eastern waterfront. Meanwhile, Oregon became the first state of US to amend its building code to permit taller buildings made from timber.

Karim Khalifa, Director of Buildings Innovation at Sidewalk Labs, said that the material can contribute to people’s wellness, is easy to assemble and strong enough support to build dozens of stories. And unlike concrete and steel, which are very carbon-intensive to produce, using timber in buildings takes carbon out of the atmosphere.

The push comes as timber becomes more cost competitive as steel prices rise and the use of pre-fabricated wood panels allows for quicker construction with less labour. (BL, 08.02.19)

Tuna Sold for a World Record

The owner of a Japanese sushi restaurant chain set a record by paying more than US\$3mn for a Bluefin Tuna in the year’s first auction at Tokyo’s new fish market, exceeding his own record price of 2013.



Kimura had held the record for top price paid for a single fish at the new year’s auction for six straight years until 2017. But in 2018, the owner of a different fish restaurant chain paid the highest price.

After the auction, the fish was taken to one of Sushizanmai’s branches located in the old market of Tsukiji. Tuna is prized around the world for its use in sushi, but experts warn growing demand has made it an endangered species. (WP, 05.01.19)

Uncovering the Indus Valley Couple

About 4,500 years ago, a man and a woman were buried in a grave together in a sprawling cemetery on the outskirts of a thriving settlement of one of the world’s earliest urban civilisations.



In 2016, archaeologists and scientists from India and South Korea found these two ‘very rare’ skeletons in a Harappan (or Indus Valley) city – what is now Rakhigarhi village in the northern Indian state of Haryana. For two years, they researched the ‘chronology’ and possible reasons behind the deaths; and the findings

have now been published in a peer-reviewed international journal.

Archaeologists say this unique ‘joint grave’ was not an ‘outcome of any specific funeral customs commonly performed at that time’. They believe that the man and the woman ‘died almost at the same time and that, therefore, they had been buried together in the same grave’.

(Tol, 08.01.19)

Feroze Gandhi's Grave Lies Forgotten

Feroze Gandhi may be the patriarch of the Congress's first family, but the party as well as his family members seem to have neglected his cemetery in Allahabad, now rechristened as Prayagraj. As per records, Congress President Rahul Gandhi last visited the grave of his grandfather way back in 2011.

The tombstone of Feroze, considered India's original anti-corruption crusader, sits in a neglected state in a corner of the Parsi cemetery at Stanley Road on Allahabad-Lucknow Highway. It is just miles away from Anand Bhawan, once the seat of Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.

Tourists visit Anand Bhawan, the ancestral home of the Gandhi-Nehru family, but anyone hardly goes to Feroze's tombstone. The cemetery has nearly 100 Parsi graves.

(DNA, 08.01.19)

Chinese Most Widely Spoken

A report described how Zhou Xin of Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) uses the film *7aum Arivu* (2011) and works of literature to teach her students Tamil. BFSU also has courses in Hindi and Bengali.

The latter two Indian languages happen to be among the 10 most widely spoken in the world, while Tamil too features in the top 25. The list is headed by Chinese, a broad category that includes a number of dialects and variants.

Against the broad head for Chinese (macrolanguage), which includes individual languages such as Mandarin and Yue (Cantonese), Ethnologue gives a worldwide total of 1,311 million speakers, as first language. (IE, 19.03.19)

1st Cruise to Commence Operations

Jalesh Cruises is our first brand that will offer multi-destination cruise line. 'Jalesh' means 'Lord of Water', which is designed to offer a rich experience of



Indian culture, hospitality and food to domestic and international travellers.

The first cruise started from Mumbai on April 17, 2019 and headed to Goa.

According to the plans, Jalesh Cruises will offer onshore destinations and excursions across Indian port cities of Mumbai, Chennai, Kochi, Mormugoa and Vizag. The international locations include Abu Dhabi, Colombo, Dubai, Muscat, Penang, Ras Al Khaimah and Singapore.

The plan is to operate two luxury liners. The first vessel, Karnika commenced operations in April and the subsequent ship is likely to arrive either by the end of 2019 or early in 2020.

(DNA, 08.01.19)

'2018' Fatal for Island Birds

The year 2018 was yet another testament to the rapid decline of wildlife in a world that constantly faces the growing challenges of climate change, large-scale deforestation and anthropogenic pressures.



Conservation groups, such as Birdlife International, said in its study that three bird species went extinct in 2018. Of the three, two species – Cryptic Treehunter and Alagoas Foliage-gleaner – were songbirds native to Brazil, while the third species was an insect-eating forest-bird, Po'ouli, endemic to Hawaii.

Besides these three species, 2018 also saw the extinction in wild of Spix's Macaw, the attractive blue-coloured bird which gained popularity due to the 2011 animated film *Rio* based on the bird. Ironically, a few of them are still found in captivity. (DNA, 02.01.19)

Authors Writing Debut Novels

Older authors have a wealth of experience, at a basic level, simply because of the changes they seen. Inspired by her reflections about how much India has changed since she was a child, Shukla Lal enjoys writing historical romance novels.

Lal may be unique in the sense that writing seems to be a meditative experience for her, but she isn't the only Indian author who has penned their

first book at an older age. Jharna Banerji, 82, began writing her novel, 'Perched on the Periphery,' while her husband was



ailing with Parkinson's disease. Her book is about an older widow who has been made to immigrate to live with her children, and how she grapples with finding her own identity.

Parth Mehrotra, commissioning editor of publishing house Juggernaut, says, "Especially in non-fiction, an older author brings a lifetime of experience. A journalist or a civil servant or a politician or a doctor, looking back on their career can have invaluable insights." Kamal Meattle, 74, is perhaps the ultimate exemplification of this kind of non-fiction writing. (Tol, 28.02.19)

Jhajharia Awarded for Scaling Mt. Everest

Asha Jhajharia's (40-year old), confidence was soaring high as her dream of scaling the Mount Everest was fulfilled. She works as a government staff nurse at a Primary Health Centre in Alwar district of Rajasthan.



Jhajharia completed her Mount Everest journey in 40 days, and made the state proud. She is one of the eight women, who was

awarded by the Department of Women and Child Development on the occasion of International Women's Day at Jaipur, on March 08, 2019.

She realised that the society has an inclination towards the male child. To spread the message of saving the girl child, she took a banner of 'beti bachao, beti padhao' during her Mount Everest journey. She said that still women are not treated as equals with men in the society. (Tol, 08.03.19)

Airport-like Feel for Train Stations

After promoting local art at various railway stations in North Western Railway, the lighting and illumination at Jaipur junction has been given a major improvement by



railways now. High quality LED lights have been installed at various points at Jaipur junction and its now giving the feel of illumination like Jaipur Airport.

In all these stations, railway board had decided some set standards regarding illumination of lighting at main places like concourse hall, platform, waiting hall, reservation office, parking space, escalators, etc.

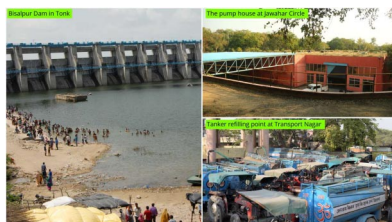
A 100-foot long national flag has also been installed at the railway station and it has continuously been beautified in recent years and achieved the second position in the Cleanliness Survey Report 2018.

(DNA, 19.01.19)

Mumbai Model to Serve Jaipur

A new model of water supply and sewerage management to be carried out by a dedicated water board is being planned in Jaipur city and in adjoining areas. The functions related to the water distribution will then be taken over by the new Board.

Currently, water supply for different parts of Jaipur is being carried out by multiple agencies, such as the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), Jaipur Nagar Nigam (JNN), Jaipur Development



Authority (JDA), Rajasthan Housing Board, Rajasthan Urban Drinking Water, Sewerage & Infrastructure Corporation and Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project. However, the water production work is carried out by the PHED.

With the growing water demand in the city, it was, therefore, felt that there is a need to take cohesive approach for planning, development, implementation and management of activities related to water supply and sewerage services in Jaipur city and adjoining areas.

(DNA, 09.02.19)

Congestion at Airport Halls

The situation of congestion at the arrival and departure hall of the Jaipur Airport will be reduced as the expansion work going on at the airport will be over soon.

Number of passengers using the airport has been constantly rising at Jaipur airport. In November 2017, 419,613 passengers used Jaipur airport while during April-November 2018, 3,547,882 passengers used the airport compared to last year in the same duration when 2,971,975 passengers used Jaipur airport. This means that there has been an increase of 19.4 percent change in passengers using this airport.

After completion of this work, it will bring relief to passengers. With efforts to increase the potential of the state in the tourism sector, it is expected that the number of tourists using airport will grow in the future who are coming to Rajasthan.

(DNA, 16.01.19)

Metro to Lease Parking Space

The underground Metro station at Chandpole will rise vertically to generate more commercial space for the Jaipur metro. The expansion of the station is planned as part of Jaipur Metro Rail Corporation (JMRC) plans to develop more than 20,000 square metre of space available adjacent to its seven operational stations at Phase I.



The rail corporation is in the process of feasibility study to develop the properties on public-private partnership model. The parking areas to be developed with a smooth interface of the adjoining metro stations are envisaged to serve a double purpose by drawing more footfalls and improving commuter numbers.

(DNA, 10.02.19)

Garbage Collection Firm to Close Services

Jaipurites will soon have to face difficulty in disposing of the garbage as the firm handling door-to-door garbage collection will be closing



down the services. The firm's representative said that around ₹98 crore is due from Jaipur Municipal Corporation (JMC) since May 2017 and after constant notices the firm has decided to stop giving the service.

JMC authorities, however, said that the firm is not fulfilling its duties properly and many complaints have been received against them of not being regular in collection of garbage.

Vinod Purohit, Nodal Officer of Swachhta Survey in the city, said "The company should first of all fulfill its duties before claiming the money. We have been repeatedly receiving complaints against the firm but they have not changed. We have received complaints that they were picking up the garbage from the depots instead of collecting from the houses. So, we are looking into it."

(TNN, 09.02.19)

Schools to be Named after Martyrs

The Rajasthan government has issued an order to name 15 schools run by the state government after martyrs. Govind Singh Dotasara, Education Minister of Rajasthan, said that honouring martyrs was one of the top priorities of the Congress-led government in Rajasthan.

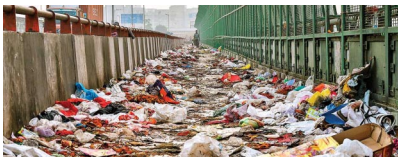
He further said that the state government salutes the martyrs who laid down their lives for the country. Three schools in Churu, three in Nagore and three in Jhunjhunu districts would be named after the martyrs. While in Alwar and Sikar, two schools each would be re-named. In Jaisalmer and Jodhpur, one school in each of the districts would be named after martyrs.

He said that the government now has moved the file and schools would be re-named after martyrs soon.

(Tol, 22.02.19)

Plastic Ban Only on Paper

Local bodies in different cities of Rajasthan have seized about 2,793kg of plastic bags till now in a drive against the usage of plastic which



commenced on February 01, 2019 and concluded on February 15, 2019.

On July 26, 2010, Rajasthan government passed a notification declaring the state as a 'plastic carry bag free zone' making it a part of 25 states in India where plastic is banned.

However, people are still carrying polythene bags without any fear as state government is facing a challenge of plastic being supplied from other states like Gujarat where the ban is partial. (TNN, 09.02.19)

Helpline Numbers for Students

Every school has launched helpline numbers for students to ensure that they get timely support. In most cases, the class teacher is given the charge of handling his/her class. The aim is to build a quick rapport with the student in need.



Underlining the importance of helpline numbers, Vice Principal of St. Xavier's School, Nevta, C K Punnose, said this mechanism helps in identifying the problem.

"The first and foremost thing which we try to read is the level of

stress and what kind of thoughts are running in the mind of a student. Accordingly, we decide the line of action," said Punnose. (Tol, 05.03.19)

JDA to become Environment-friendly

The JDA is all set to become climate-friendly as it is planning to run headquarters and two big parks (Central Park and Jawahar Circle) on solar power, replacing the conventional system.

With this initiative, this will become state's biggest public building energy efficient system. The power generated by 730 kwp 'Rooftop Solar Power Plant' in Phase-I will be used to meet maximum requirements at the JDA headquarters and two parks and reduce its dependence on non-renewable sources.

Panel on World Heritage City Status

To bag the prestigious World Heritage City status, Gehlot has given nod to constitute a State-level Heritage Committee on the recommendation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The Committee will devise policy to conserve heritage in the Walled City area and JMC will constitute a heritage technical committee. Before launching any infrastructure project, a heritage impact assessment will be carried out. (Tol, 03.03.19)

Making Jaipur Child Labour-free

In a unique initiative to curb child labour in Jaipur, Rajasthan government, industry representatives and civil society have come together



to launch Child Labour Free Jaipur (CLFJ).

The initiative has been aimed at positioning Jaipur as a city with unprecedented commitment to stopping child labour by strengthening its industries and serving as a model for other cities to follow.

As part of the initiative, CLFJ is strengthening partnerships between Rajasthan and Bihar governments to allow smooth repatriation of trafficked children from Rajasthan to their home state of Bihar. (IE, 18.01.19)

2nd Modern Hospital on Cards

Chief Minister of Rajasthan Ashok Gehlot inaugurated Rajasthan University of Health Sciences (RUHS) and its affiliated medical college, which is said to cater a large population.

Having an advanced structure, RUHS will be the most modern hospital and medical college in the state. While its construction cost is ₹500 crore, it is expected to have a Spinal Injury Centre and Super Specialty Cancer Hospital as add on.

RUHS is the second medical college and hospital in Jaipur, after SMS Medical College and Hospital, making the city first in Rajasthan to have two such hospitals. (IT, 05.03.19)

Jaipur Roads Lack Safety Parameters

A road safety survey conducted on 10 roads in Jaipur found the city roads are lacking in road safety parameters. The lowest score of 1.4 out of 10 was given to the road from Jaipur Railway Station to Sindhi Camp, followed by Jhotwara-Khatipura road with 2.5 points. The survey was based on parameters like footpath, pedestrian crossing and street lighting.

The Street Audit was conducted by CUTS as per the guidelines of the Indian Road Congress (IRC). Jan Path and Tonk Road were scored 9 and 6.3, respectively, for pedestrian-friendliness.

Many obstructions, such as public encroachments, electricity boxes, open drainage, garbage, and parked vehicles were seen on the roads. The cement tiles were

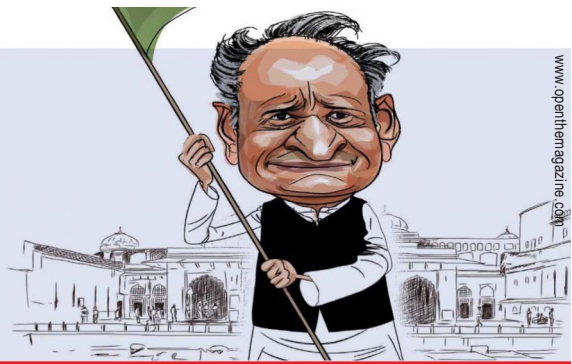


damaged at many places. There are no proper footpaths and street lights are missing. There is zebra crossing but no pedestrian signals.

Therefore, the guidelines of the IRC should be followed strictly to make footpaths safer for pedestrians, especially senior citizens, children and disabled people.

Ashok Gehlot Funds his Poll Promises

Gehlot tables vote-on-account in the Assembly; makes provision for farmers and above poverty line families; announces pension scheme for old farmers; and dedicates funds for free medicine scheme



The Ashok Gehlot government presented the vote-on-account of ₹86,906 crore, for the first four months of the current fiscal, which was passed by a voice vote. Gehlot presented budget estimates for 2019-20 taking the total expenditure of the state to ₹2,31,654 crore.

The government has made a historic decision to give pension to old farmers. It will be first time in Rajasthan that small and marginal farmers will get monthly pension. Female farmers above 55 years and male farmers above 58 years will be eligible for the pension. The government has provisioned ₹750 per month to farmers below 75 years and ₹1000 for farmers whose age is 75-plus.

Gehlot announced that 600 new drug centres under Free Medicine Scheme will be set up. New medicines will be included in Mukyamantri Free Medicine Scheme for Cancer, Heart, Respiratory and Liver related ailments. Also state-run drug testing laboratories at Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner will be strengthened and made functional. Infectious Disease Institute attached to Jodhpur Medical College will be developed as high-level research institute.

Under *Mukyanmatri Dugdha Utpadak Sambal Yojna*, the government will give ₹2 per litre bonus to all milk producers who supply milk to the cooperative dairy federations. More than 5 lakh milk producers will be benefitted under this scheme.

The government has, in addition, budgeted ₹115 crore additionally for National Food Security Scheme. The government will give one kg wheat at ₹1 to BPL, state BPL and Antodaya families in place of ₹2 per kg. It came into effect from March 01, 2019 and will benefit a population of 1.74 crore. Annual additional expenditure of ₹115 crore is estimated in lieu of the decision.

Who Gets What in the Budget

Farmers: Gehlot announces waiver of all outstanding cooperative short-term crop loans in any category. More than 24 lakh farmers will benefit from the decision to make 4-lakh bigha land as mortgage-free. The government has provisioned ₹9000 crore relief for the loan waiver it has

announced and an additional ₹6000 crores for the pending waiver announced by the previous BJP government.

Elderly: The government has introduced pension for old farmers. Women above 55 and men above 58 shall be eligible for a monthly pension of ₹750. This has been provisioned in the ₹1377 crore allocation for old age pension scheme. Pensioners below 75 years will get ₹750 in place of ₹500 and those above 75 years will get ₹1000 in place of ₹750 from January 2019. The scheme covers 46 lakhs pensioners.

Youth: Around 1.6 lakh youths will benefit from the Mukyamantri Yuva Sambal Yojna. Under the scheme the government has increased the allowances for the unemployed youth by up to 5 times. It comes into effect from February, 2019 and beneficiaries will start getting allowances from March. Eligible unemployed female will get ₹3500 and male to get ₹3000.

Divyang: Reservation in government services for the specially-abled persons has been increased from three-four percent.

Girls: Nearly 2.3 lakh female students enrolled in Arts, Commerce and Science streams in graduate and post-graduate courses will get free education from 2019-20. The government has provisioned of ₹16 crore to re-open Haridev Joshi Journalism University and Dr BR Ambedkar Law University.

Industries: New policy to come in place. Rajasthan Export Promotion Council to be set up in the state to enhance exports.

Provisional Estimates for Fiscal 2019-20

₹2.31 lakh crore is the total estimated expenditure, this fiscal

₹1.67 lakh crore worth revenue receipts

₹1.90 lakh crore is revenue expenditure

₹23304 crore is revenue deficit

₹29983 crore is fiscal deficit

3 percent fiscal deficit as percentage of GSDP

33.96 percent debt to GSDP ratio

The article appeared in the Daily News and Analysis on February 14, 2019

Sources: BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation; BL: The Hindu Business Line; DNA: Daily News and Analysis; IE: Indian Express; PTI: Press Trust of India; Tol: Times of India

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