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CityMatters

CUTS
International

In this horrible world, humanism is alive



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The world is going through an unprecedented health emergency which is worse than a world war. Some have dubbed it World War-3. The pandemic has touched nearly all countries of the world maiming and killing thousands. Furthermore, production has suffered hugely due to lockdown, reverse migration, social distancing etc. Now everyone is trying to work out ways of resuscitating the economy, both at the Centre and states.

In Rajasthan, plans are being made by the new CM's Economic Transformation Advisory Council, of which I am a member, and the noted econocrat, Dr Arvind Mayaram its vice chair. Along with others, we too have submitted two serious notes on logistics and rebooting the economy which are helping the state. I am sure the state's machinery will act and deliver looking at the way they are working hard and round the clock in dealing with the ugly situation. Undoubtedly the leadership provided by our popular Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot is exemplary.

That said, there is another area where we at CUTS are proud of our contribution in the massive drive to save lives. One of the Self Help Groups that we are assisting in Chittorgarh district is that of specially-abled people lead by an enterprising Muslim lady, even though she is handicapped as well. Her spirits are charged. They have been engaged in making cloth masks for the district administration and getting a decent earning. This SHG was provided with sewing machines and training by our centre in Chittorgarh with the help of NABARD and others. Our Centre has now planned to scale it up by roping in more SHGs to make cotton masks, sanitisers etc.

Due to the lockdown our supply chains have been severely affected as goods are not able to travel easily between one point and another. E-commerce is the way forward for consumers because visiting shops or malls will be restricted. During this period, we have also signed a partnership agreement with UNIDO, Vienna to work on ecommerce in the developing world, among other things.

Production is severely affected in factories or farms because in panic and in many cases due to the carelessness of employers, the migrant labour has returned to their home states in Eastern India mainly. Their journey was also a historical one with many walking for hundreds of kilometres. Once travel ban is lifted many should come back because they do not have jobs at home, but the break will have costed our economy hugely.

Few human interest stories are also appearing in the media. One lady in Mumbai tweeted to the PM that she is unable to get camel's milk from Rajasthan for her 3.5-year child who suffers from autism and severe food allergies. An Odisha-based IPS officer, Arun Bothra came to know of it through some retweets. Being a Rajasthani, he came to the lady's rescue by arranging camel's milk from Falna. To get it picked up, he also used his connections to get a train halted there. Finally, the camel's milk was delivered to the lady in Mumbai. This only shows that in spite of a future or gloom and doom there are good hearted people in this world and all is not lost.



Pradeep S. Mehta
Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General

P.S. Our gratitude to esteemed subscribers.

Pigeon poop causes lung failure

Rising levels of air pollutants are a worry in winter, but fungus growing on the walls or air-conditioner ducts and/or pigeon droppings are a perennial cause for concern for lung health, say chest specialists.

Exposure to pigeon droppings was cited as one of the main causes for lung failure in two women who recently underwent lung transplant.

These women suffered from a condition called chronic hypersensitivity pneumonitis, or environment-related lung fibrosis, for years. (Tol, 19.01.20)

Not just a space potato

Nasa has unveiled details of the most distant object visited by a spacecraft, in observations that could resolve a decades-long puzzle of how the planets first emerged from the hazy dust of the early solar system.

The ultra-red, peanut-shaped object, called Arrokoth, sits located 1bn miles beyond Pluto in the Kuiper belt, a vast donut-shaped region that is home to thousands of dwarf planets and icy objects.

Nasa's New Horizons spacecraft made a flyby on New Year's Day 2019, but the extreme distance from Earth means the probe is still beaming back data gathered during the brief encounter.

(FT, 14.02.20)

Pioneer in plastic fight

More than eight years after it became the first town in Sikkim, and arguably India, to completely ban packaged drinking water bottles, Lachen is set to introduce bamboo bottles as an alternative.



The initiative was entirely community driven, with its barely 2,500 inhabitants of mostly Lachengpa community lending support.

The bamboo water bottles have been ordered from Assam through Sikkim Rajya Sabha MP Hishey Lachungpa. (FE, 29.02.20)

Ending 'period poverty'

Scotland is set to become the first nation to provide free pads and tampons — a big win for the global movement to roll back onerous pricing for period products, including 'tampon taxes' that classify sanitary pads as luxury items.



The Scottish Parliament approved a plan to make menstrual products available free in public spaces, such as community centres, pharmacies and youth clubs.

Scotland has offered pads and tampons free of charge at schools and universities as a matter of national policy since 2018. (WP, 27.02.20)

A Future for the World's Children

No single country is adequately protecting children's health, their environment and their future, according to a recently released report by a Commission of more than 40 child and adolescent health experts from around the world. The Commission was convened by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and The Lancet.

The report, "A Future for the World's Children?" finds that the health and future of every child and adolescent worldwide is under immediate threat from ecological degradation, climate change and exploitative marketing practices that push heavily processed fast food, sugary drinks, alcohol and tobacco at them. (TH, 23.02.20)



Bittersweet journey of chocolate

Love it or hate it, the over-commercialised Valentine's Day is around the corner. And if one thing is going to be visible everywhere, it would have to be chocolates.

Did you know that the first modern chocolate bar was made by Joseph Fry? In 1847, Fry tried mixing melted cacao butter back into Dutch cocoa and then moulding the resultant chocolate paste.



Within the next two decades, a small company called Cadbury was marketing boxes of chocolate candies in England. History is full of chocolate facts as well.

(Mint 10.02.20)

Love bridge for padlocks

Arthur and Celia, a couple from Strasbourg, France are in the City of Lakes on a romantic holiday.

Walking through the heritage streets they come across a beautiful bridge at Chandpole and are surprised to see young couples clipping lock on the metal grate.

This reminds them of the famous Love Bridge back in their motherland and the two are touched. They too get a lock, clip it to the railing, kiss the key which is flung into the waters of Lake Pichhola.

(Tol, 14.02.20)

Samosas to 'chaat' with tech CEOs?

Industrialist Anand Mahindra has a taste for choice repartee, so it is not surprising that his tongue-in-cheek tweet that US President Donald Trump should consider serving samosas instead of burgers at his next technology CEOs' roundtable drew approving slurps.



The White House had ordered in piles of hamburgers, sandwiches and fries from major fastfood chains when he hosted winning sports teams from several US universities in 2019. He had said then that the choice was also meant to support American business. (ET, 17.02.20)

Fitness gets a platform

Praveen Kumar hurries into Anand Vihar Railway Station where he has to



receive a relative. After looking around for the platform ticket counter, he approaches the helpdesk for assistance.

Instead of guiding him to the relevant counter, the staff point to an electric blue machine festooned with garlands. Kumar notices the 'Fit India Squat Machine' written on it.

He was informed that if he manages 30 squats on the machine in 180 seconds, he will get a platform ticket for free.

(Tol, 22.02.20)

Follow news you can trust

Have you ever forwarded a message on social media that you found amazing, only to later discover it was false?

If you can honestly answer that with a "no", you are part of a minuscule minority. In an age in which 'information' is anything but scarce, a lot of it is also unfortunately false.

Some of the fake news is harmless, but a lot of it is created with an intent to mislead and can end in horrendous consequences.

(Tol, 20.01.20)

Skywriting could return to UK

With the coronavirus crisis hammering the aviation industry, it is



going to do all it can get to get back on its feet when the emergency is finally over.

One modest proposal snaking its way through the UK government's legislative agenda is to revive the art of skywriting – in which planes pen messages in the air with smoke. It has been banned in the UK for six decades.

(TG, 17.03.20)

Will cheetah grace Indian forests?

Can the extinct Indian cheetah be brought back? Was it really driven to extinction? Can the 'imported' cheetahs from Africa feel at home in Indian forests?

These are some of the questions that have arisen after the Supreme Court's directive giving the green signal to introducing cheetahs from Namibia into a suitable habitat in the country.

According to reports, the last Indian cheetah died around 1948. In 1952, it was declared extinct. Over the years, cheetahs brought in from abroad have been kept in zoos. Scientists have also attempted to clone the Indian cheetah.

(BL, 12.02.20)

Girl gifts sex toy to a friend

According to Kahla Maneely, her five-year-old daughter had confused the sex toy, a vibrator for a toy and gifted it to her friend at school. Post which, her friend took the toy home and proudly showed it off to her parents.

Her parents were left completely shocked when they realised that the object in their daughter's hand is not a toy but a sex toy. (www.mid-day.com, 27.01.20)

Buried in dust

Sheaves of birth and death certificates written in Urdu and dating back to 1890 lie wrapped in a dust-caked piece of cloth atop a cupboard in the basement of the Jaipur Municipal Corporation (JMC).

These are the first birth and death records of the erstwhile princely state of Jaipur, predating the national registration system by almost eight decades.

These certificates have been called a treasure that must be properly preserved for posterity.

(Tol, 11.02.20)

The Case for Namaste

From handshakes limp and bone-crushing, to kisses sloppy and airy, to bowing and scraping, with an assortment of hugs and embraces thrown in, global political elites have long deployed their body and posture to advance their and their country's agenda.

The touchy-feeliness has become particularly intense in recent years, going by the manner in which US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron patted and pawed each other in their first meeting before they fell out a few months later.

Our own Prime Minister has specialised in gratuitous bear hugs, bestowing them on everyone from Obama to Putin to Netanyahu to Zuckerberg, while forsaking our own Namaste.

(Tol, 08.03.20)

Carried by nation

Indian cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar won the Laureus Sporting Moment 2000-2020 Award. Sachin



being carried on their shoulders by his teammates including current skipper Virat Kohli after India's historic win over Sri Lanka in the 2011 World Cup final was nominated for the best sporting moment category.

The moment was titled 'Carried On the Shoulders of A Nation.' Sachin's moment of glory beat nineteen other contenders to claim the prestigious award.

(Tol, 19.02.20)

Dog-directed praise

Spotify has made playlists and a podcast for dogs to listen to in their owners' absence, after finding that nearly



74 percent of UK pet-owners play music for their animals.

The Swedish audio-streaming business company has launched a podcast featuring soothing music, 'dog-directed praise', stories, and messages of affirmation and reassurance narrated by actors to alleviate stress for dogs who are home alone.

(Reuters, 15.01.20)



Restaurants to get liquor licence

Forget the talk about alcohol prohibition in Rajasthan. Now, restaurants without having commercial conversion approval can now get a liquor licence.



As per the government notification 1, restaurants will be given licence for six months with the payment of 75 percent of the existing licencing fee and the period can be extended by paying another 25 percent of the fees. (Tol, 04.01.20)

₹10-₹200 more for rail trips

After the newly introduced fares, rail passengers will have to pay from ₹10 to ₹200 more in various classes of trains for different destinations.

For Delhi, train passengers will have to pay at least ₹50 extra, while for other destinations including Howrah, Mumbai and others, passengers will have to pay ₹100 or more extra. The fares of the trains were increased last in 2014-15.

(Tol, 05. 01.20)

Plastic bags flood markets

Swachhta Survekshan 2020 is going on and right under the nose of the administration, the ban on plastic bags is being violated.

Strict orders, blanket ban and many notifications have been issued but the use of plastic bags is still rampant.

Plastic bags have been banned since 2010 by the Rajasthan government and many times, drives have been organised by the JMC and State Pollution Control Board (SPCB), but they do not seem to be having any effect. (Tol, 06.01.20)

Online attendance of teachers soon

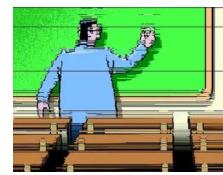
The government school teachers' attendance will soon be registered online on the Shala Darpan portal, which will help the government to keep a watch on the presence of teachers in the schools.

At present, biometric machines have been installed in the schools, but

the teachers' salaries are not dependent on it. After this system starts on Shala Darpan,

the attendance sheet has to be filed on the portal every day. This record will be used to calculate the salaries of the employees every month.

(Tol, 11.01.20)



'Ghoonghat Mukt Jaipur' drive

Following Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's call to eradicate the practice of 'ghoonghat' in the state, the district administration kicked off its 'Ghoonghat Mukt Jaipur' campaign in the city.

Under the campaign, awareness will be created among both men and



women about the regressive practice which stands as an obstacle to women empowerment and gender equality in society.

Women in the district will also be motivated not to wear ghoonghat when they come to vote during panchayat elections.

Besides, awareness will be created through WhatsApp and other social media platforms, Gargi and Meena manch in schools and Mahila gram sabhas in the villages. (Tol, 14.01.20)

Swasthya mitras at the grassroots

Swasthya Mitras will be deployed in every village of the state to bridge the gap between the health department and patients.

There are more than 40,000 villages in the state. Each village will have two swasthya mitras—one man and a woman. A total of 80,000 swasthya mitras, on voluntary basis, will be selected from the villages.

Swasthya mitras must possess knowledge of national and state's health programmes and medical policies launched by the state government. (Tol, 12.01.20)

Removal of BRTS corridors

The Rajasthan State Road Safety Council proposed the removal of the bus rapid transit system (BRTS) corridors from the roads in Jaipur.

The Council has found that the ill-planned BRTS corridors is one of the main reasons for accidents in the city and recommended to the Urban Development and Housing Department to remove the BRTS corridors on city roads. (Tol, 18.01.20)

A public garden on the anvil

Jaipurites will soon have another public garden, 10 acres larger than the present Central Park. The park will come up on the 52.42-acre land in the middle of VT Road and Aravali Marg, constructed under the Mansarovar scheme by Rajasthan Housing Board.

This new park has been named as 'City Park' and will be bigger in area with more facilities for the residents.

This will not just be a park for morning exercises, but there would be recreational facilities and interactive features for the people.

(Tol, 01.02.20)

Raj 5th unsafe state for women

Rajasthan ranks fifth in the country when it comes to crime against women, according to the data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for 2018.

With 27,866 cases registered, the number of cases spiked by 1,873



as compared to previous year. The state had the highest number of cases of abduction of women for reasons other than ransom.

Rajasthan topped the list in indecent representation of women, though the number cases lodged was in single digit. (Tol, 10.01.20)

'Mukti Caravan' flagged off

Rajasthan Director General of Police Bhupendra Singh flagged off 'Mukti Caravan', organised jointly by the State Police and Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, to raise awareness about social evils such as child abuse, child labour and child trafficking.

The 'Mukti Caravan' will travel across the state in the next three months to raise public awareness about child rights.

The initiative is part of a nationwide campaign that will go from village to village across India raising awareness about such social evils. (Tol, 01.02.20)



Healthcare to transform

The city got two more janta clinics — one at Eidgah Colony and another at Azad Nagar. The state government is aiming at setting up 100 such janta clinics in the state.



As of now, 12 more janta clinics are ready for inauguration in Jaipur and three in Jodhpur. These clinics are planned with an aim to bring a transformation in healthcare in the state.

On the lines of Delhi's Mohalla Clinics, the first Janta Clinic of the state was inaugurated in Valmiki Nagar on the completion of one-year of the government. (Tol, 09.02.20)

Track waste pick-up vehicles

Residents of city will be able to track the location of garbage pick-up vehicles on their mobile phones soon.

BVG Company, responsible for door-to-door garbage collection in the city, is developing an application for the citizens called Nuevas GPS system which at present is just for official use.

As per the information provided, people would have to register their house through KYC on the application and then they would be able to locate the vehicles in their ward. (Tol, 14.02.20)

New departure at Jaipur airport

In a move to decongest the Jaipur airport during rush hour, the Airports Authority of India (AAI), Jaipur has started a new departure hall in an area of 2,700 square metre. The new hall has eight check-in counters, extra washrooms and other passenger's amenities.

However, various airlines are yet to open their counters due to technical glitches. According to sources, 3.9 million passengers had travelled from Jaipur airport from January to December 2019.

(Tol, 16.02.20)

Jaipur airport 3rd cleanest

The terminal 2 of the Jaipur airport has secured third position in cleanest and safest airport category, handling more than 50 lakh passengers per year.

The survey was conducted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and it was named as Swachhata Awards 2019. The airport authorities would be getting an appreciation award in this regard. Kolkata secured top slot, while Chennai came second. (Tol, 23.02.20)

Prototype of electric buses

The Rajasthan State Roadways Transport Corporation (RSRTC) is going to procure 48 electric buses and expecting to get the prototype of the bus. After suggesting modifications and requirements, the final fleet of buses is expected by July 2020.

Out of the 48 buses to be bought by the corporation, 22 would ply on

the Jaipur-Delhi route so that these buses will operate between Sindhi Camp (Jaipur) to Bikaner House (New Delhi). (Tol, 09.02.20)

1st organ transplant hub

Jaipur's first institute of organ transplant will come up in July 2020



with facilities for all kinds of organ transplants such as kidney, liver and heart along with post-operative care facilities.

Around 150 cyclists participated in a cyclothon in support of organ donation drive. Gehlot while supporting the drive, said, "Today on organ donation cyclothon drive, we should spread awareness and highlight the message that donating one's organs is the biggest gift, which can save someone's precious life."

(Tol, 11.02.20)

Of, by and for the women

Around a century ago, when purdah was the norm and women empowerment didn't enjoy the socio-political currency it does today, a group of ladies in the city came together to call for a change in their everyday lives.



Club members are now trying to expand its building but their map is yet to be approved by the Jaipur Municipal Corporation.

The club today stands as a symbol of the spirit of those women of Jaipur, who were ahead of their time and who defied all odds to give a free space to women to express themselves. (Tol, 08.03.20)

Positive Possibilities of Pandemics Pandemonium



Cancelled flights. Crackdown on trade in wild animals. Mount Everest closed to climbers. Early impact in developed, high-consumption countries. Even earlier impact in China, which supplies these high-consumption societies. The COVID-19 virus seems designed to deliver the agenda of the green movement.

This is not meant seriously, of course. While COVID-19 has reversed a common idea of viruses spreading from hot, poor, tropical areas to cooler, more affluent places, we still do not know if this is just a quirk of its place of origin and the networks stretching from there, and also better detection systems in western countries.

It is quite possible, at the time of writing this, that the virus is moving, relatively undetected, soon to explode in tropical areas like India. And if the impact has fallen first on the relatively affluent areas, which moved quickly to curtail activities in an attempt to contain the virus, there is little doubt that the less affluent will be savagely affected, as layoffs ensue and send them falling, without the economic safety nets that the wealthy possess.

But the point is that, inadvertently and imperfectly, one effect of COVID-19 has been to deliver a number of things that the green movement has been advocating. Many of these, like the fall in flights, will be temporary, and changes in behaviour that take place under duress aren't likely to be lasting. Marketers are probably already counting on a postpandemic boom in consumption to make up their current fall in business.

Yet some changes might last. China might now truly end the horrific trade in wildlife for consumption that seems to have caused the virus to jump to humans. This could be boosted by international pressure to give real teeth to the CITES convention that regulates trade in endangered plants and animals, with systems for monitoring and punitive actions for wildlife trade wherever it occurs, including India.

A year ago, Ogilvy & Mather vice chairman Rory Sutherland, who specialises in the application of behavioural

economics and evolutionary psychology to advertising, wrote a column in the Spectator proposing an Institute of Underrated Technology.

In the constant drive to reach higher technology standards, he pointed out, we often fail to make the best use of the technology we already have.

Sutherland argued that video-conferencing was one example: "If the internet had never been invented, but we had only invented video-conferencing, we would have regarded it as the crowning technological achievement of the age. Instead, it came free with the internet, like a cheap toy stapled to the front of a magazine."

Another example Sutherland gave was the sound quality of mobile phones: "Bizarrely, despite a 1,000-fold increase in bandwidth, the sound quality of a phone call has not improved in 50 years. Mobile phone and landline networks still compress and frequency-chop the human voice to within an inch of its life — to a point where words are just about intelligible, but where timbre and resonance are completely lost."

Now, with millions told to stay at home and work remotely, and with conferences being cancelled across the world, there is obvious need to deliver on both these issues. If fear of contamination by COVID-19 can push us to use video-conferencing more effectively, and also push mobile companies to invest in high-quality audio delivery, it will show how, for all the horror they cause, pandemics can also lead to positive change.

Abridged from an article appeared in The Economic Times on February 14, 2020.

Sources: BL: The Hindu Business Line; ET: The Economic Times; FE The Financial Express; FT: The Financial Times; TG: The Guardian; TH: The Hindu; Tol: Times of India; WP: Washington Post

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