

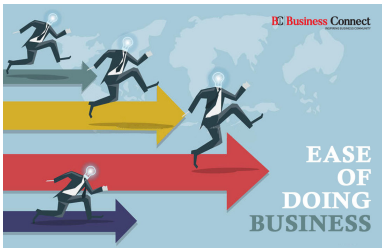


3/2022

CityMatters

CUTS
International

Improving Rajasthan's Ease of Doing Business



In 2021, Rajasthan slid from being a Leader in the Ease of Doing Business (EODB) ranking of states to being an Aspirer. Considering its poor unemployment and fiscal situation, Rajasthan must attract more investment into labour-intensive sectors, making better EODB essential. The state has taken radical steps in the past, such as allowing small units to start without entry formalities for five years, but more needs to be done.



One such step is reducing the number of documents required to apply for a Certificate to Establish and a Certificate to Operate (CTO/CTE). In Punjab, CTE needs only four documents (site plan, board resolution, document indicating the designation to land, and a land document such as registration or rent deed). Andhra Pradesh requires details of potential water sources in addition. However, in addition to these five documents, Rajasthan asks for acknowledgement from the DIC/Secretariat for Industrial Assistance (Ministry of Commerce and Industry), and a project report signed by a CA, even though these do not add value to the evaluation process.

Second, the state government has prescribed timelines for each authority to screen CTE and CTO applications. However, such timelines are not necessarily adhered to. Third, the land use change in Rajasthan was to be completed in 60 days, never adhered to in practice. However, in Haryana, this is to be completed in 45 days. Given 'change of land use' certificate is essential, the direct and indirect costs of the delay are likely to be substantial.

Fourth, Telangana grants NOC based on Third Party Verifications for fire clearances, and Rajasthan does not provide. Here, the municipal councillors have a role, and thus rent-seeking takes place. These inconsistencies and procedural hassles in Rajasthan could be caused by oversight. It would be wise to adopt the best practices from other states for better procedures.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman released the Business Reform Action Plan (BRAP) 2020 report in June 2022, listing the top states to do business in India. Rajasthan does not figure in the top 13. Unnecessary and avoidable compliance requirements are a key reason for many investment commitments not materialising.

A CUTS International study, Doing Business in Rajasthan, undertaken with the support of the CM Rajasthan Economic Transformation Advisory Council (CMRETAC), focuses on compliance and regulatory philosophy. Reviewing the frameworks adopted by different countries to enhance EODB and reduce compliance burden, CUTS zeroed in on the globally recognised Regulatory Guillotine framework to design a methodology for Rajasthan.

Rajasthan can adopt and implement the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) to improve the ease of business and introduce better regulations. RIA is a globally recognised process that involves estimating and comparing the costs and benefits of different regulatory proposals and their likelihood of achieving objectives. The aim is to enhance investor confidence and augment the EODB. For this, civil society and research groups' engagement could contribute significantly.

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Pradeep S Mehta
Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General

'Aggressive' Lions Atop Parliament Building

A controversy has erupted after Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the cast of the national emblem on top of the new Parliament building, with opposition leaders and historians accusing the government of modifying and "distorting" the emblem and giving a "ferocious" look to the sculpture. Opposition leaders said the emblem, unlike the original, showed the "aggressive" and "muscular" Ashoka Lions "baring their fangs".

While the government has yet to issue any statement, several Union ministers have defended the move, saying that the national emblem atop the new Parliament building was an "adaptation" from the Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka.

Now, the development raises the question of whether the Centre can make modifications to the design of the national emblem?

(<https://news.abplive.com>, 13.07.22)



Now the mother and daughter have set their sights on the South India Competition organised by the Tamil Nadu Powerlifting Association in Chennai. (ToI, 26.08.22)

Researchers made Wireless Charging

We could one day charge our phones and tablets wirelessly through the air, thanks to newly developed technology.

Researchers have used infrared laser light to transmit 400MW of light power over distances of up to 30 meters (98 feet). That's enough juice to charge small sensors, though, in time, it could be developed to charge up larger devices such as smartphones.

All this is done safely – the laser falls back to a low-power mode when not in use. (DB, 04.09.22)

'Feel the Campaign' in Kerala

According to a government report released in 2015-16, 50 percent of women aged 15-24 in the country use cloth instead of sanitary napkins or menstrual cups during periods.

Suffers unbearable pain; sometimes, the infection caused by this also becomes fatal. At the same time, the 'Feel the Pain' campaign is being run for awareness of periods in Kerala.

During the experiment, men were made to sit on a chair and make them feel pain, similar to period cramps, with an electric current. Most of the men who participated in this experiment groaned in pain, while the women did not even notice a wrinkle on their faces. (DB, 06.09.22)

Actor Kanishka Soni marries self

Television actor Kanishka Soni has shared that she married herself recently. This is the second Indian woman who has come out after opting for sologamy or self-marriage.

Previously, a 24-year-old woman, Kshama Bindu, from Gujarat, grabbed headlines when she announced that she had married herself.

After marrying, Kanishka shared pictures of herself wearing sindoor on her forehead and donning a mangal sutra around her neck. Recently, the actor reacted to people questioning her decision to marry herself instead of a man. (IE, 21.08.22)

World Book of Records - 123 degrees

A practicing doctor from Lake City has made it to the World Book of Records for holding the most significant number of academic and non-academic degrees.

Dr Arvinder Singh, CMD and CEO of Arth group of companies in Udaipur, who has earned 123 degrees, diplomas and certificates, was handed the certificate for this excellence at a ceremony.

Dr Singh, who is physically challenged, was also the first Indian doctor to top IIM in 2009. He is said to be the first medical doctor who,

along with medical sciences, has mastered fields like management, law, cosmetology, cosmetic dermatology and digital marketing. (ToI, 23.08.22)

Genetic & Lifestyle Similarities

The height, breadth, habits and temperament of people with the same appearance are also almost the same. That too when they are not twins, do not know each other and do not even live in the same locality. Despite this, there are many similarities in their habits.

This research by researchers from Spain's Josep Carreras Leukemia Research Institute has been published in Cell Reports. Researcher Dr Manal Esteller found in the study that people who look alike, no matter where they live, have almost the same habits and way of life. (NYT, 25.08.22)



Making a mark in powerlifting

Masilamani, who works as domestic help for two families in Coimbatore, hit the gym after work to lose weight, motivated by one of her employers. She won the gold medal at the Tamil Nadu Powerlifting Association's state-level competition in Trichy with a deadlift of 77.5kg in the 63kg category. And her 17-year-old daughter Dharani won the bronze in the 47kg category with a lift of 72.5kg.



Boycotted Oscars 1973

On March 21, 1973, during the Oscars ceremony, actor Sacheen Littlefeather announced that Marlon Brando was declining his best award for 'The Godfather' to protest Hollywood's treatment of American Indians.



(ToI, 17.08.22)

Earth is now our only shareholder

In an attempt to 'reimagine capitalism' and save Earth, the founder of American outdoor clothing retailer Patagonia, Yvon Chouinard, and his spouse and two adult children are giving away their ownership in the apparel maker he started some 50 years ago.

Chouinard is transferring his family's ownership to a charitable trust, making Earth the sole shareholder and beneficiary of any profits not reinvested into the business.

However, the extraordinary move from the 83-year-old former mountain climber is not completely unheard of.

(ET, 17.09.22)

Samosa Everywhere

Be it in India or Uzbek, Samosa has its unique appeal. Samosa was a big hit with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the SCO leaders retreat organised by host Uzbekistan. Belarus President was seen wearing a local Uzbek cap at the retreat, which was given a miss by the Chinese President curiously despite being in the city.

(ET, 18.09.12)

Wife finds husband was a woman

What could be termed as an incredible incident, a 40-year-old woman from Gujarat's Vadodara was shocked to find out that the person she married seven years ago in 2014 was earlier a woman and had undergone a sex-change operation.



The woman accused her husband of 'unnatural sex' and cheating in a first information report. It was a matrimonial website that brought them together nine years ago. The woman's ex-husband died in a car accident and she had a 14 year old daughter then.

(ET, 17.09.22)

AI-generated picture wins US art prize

The Colorado State Fair's Annual Art Competition in 2022 gave out prizes in all the usual categories: painting, quilting, and sculpture.

But one entrant, Jason M Allen of Colorado, did not make his entry with a brush or a lump of clay. He created it with Mid journey, an AI programme

that turns lines of text into hyper-realistic graphics.

Allen's work, "Theatre D'opera Spatial," won the fair's contest for emerging digital artists and a US\$300 prize — making it one of the first AI-generated pieces to win such a prize. The win sparked a fierce backlash from artists who accused him of essentially cheating.

(Tol, 04.09.22)

Described as a servant of the Mughals



In the Samarkand inscription in Uzbekistan, Sawai Jai Singh II, the king of Jaipur, has been described as a servant of the Mughals.

On this objectionable remark, a heated debate was going on about the Raja of Jaipur. Historians say that Sawai Jai Singh was not a servant of the Mughals, but a commander, an advisor and the Mansabdar.

(DH, 17.09.22)

Doctor runs for 45 min to do surgery

Dr Govind Nandakumar, a gastroenterology surgeon with Manipal hospitals, got stuck in traffic in the Sarjapur-Marathahalli stretch while he was on his way to perform a scheduled gallbladder surgery.

Mindful that his first patient for the day was already prepped for surgery and others were also expecting their procedures to be performed later, Nandakumar got out of his car and ran to the hospital, around 3km away. He has been performing critical surgeries for the last 18 years.

(Tol, 12.09.22)

Tirupati to pay devotees for 14-year wait

A consumer court in Salem has directed the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams to either facilitate "Vastralankara Seva" or pay ₹50 lakh to a devotee in a year. It is popularly known as "Melchat Vastram Seva" and is the most sought-after and costliest Arjitha Seva at the temple. The special Seva is held every Friday at the hill temple.



KR Hari Bhaskar had booked a Vastralankara Seva by paying ₹12,250 to TTD in 2006. The TTD allotted July 10, 2020, as the Seva's date to Bhaskar, 14 years after his booking.

(Tol, 04.09.22)

Man of the Hole

A body was found hanging in a forest in Brazil. Along with that, an entire human race ended. A language has died. Over thousands of years, the knowledge of many generations has also been lost. He is the last man of our human race. He has not spoken to anyone in 26 years.

We used to dig pits about 10-10 feet deep, and an arrow was planted in it for hunting. So people called him 'Man of the Hole'.

His age should be around 60 years. He had built a hut for himself. His ornaments and utensils were similar to those of other human tribes. In 2018, it was depicted by a Brazilian government agency. A bird's wings were also found with his body. It is estimated that he was waiting for his death.

(DB, 31.08.22)



Chowpatty in World Book of Records

Jaipur Chowpatty, developed by Rajasthan Housing Board in Mansarovar and Pratap Nagar, is a hit among foodies and also breaking world records. They have been recognised by the World Book of Records for attracting a record number of visitors in the past five months.



In the past five months, as many as 6.10 lakh people visited Jaipur Chowpatty at Mansarovar and Jaipur Chowpatty, Pratap Nagar, from November to March. (DB, 24.08.22)

JDA to finalise Heritage City plan

The Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) will soon finalise the plan to develop a Heritage City on Agra Road on the lines of Parkota (Walled City).

The civic body will lay the road network of the Heritage City in the grid iron pattern, where the intersections and the entrance will replicate the Walled City. After receiving approval from the Urban Development and Housing (UDH) Minister, Shanti Dhariwal, the civic body is preparing a roadmap for the proposed city.

A planning wing official said, "A total of nine entrance gates have been proposed to enter the Heritage City. The dividers and boundary walls of plots and buildings will be constructed as per Rajasthani architecture. The civic body will earmark mixed land use of the Heritage City. (Tol, 05.09.22)

Accountability Law to be enacted

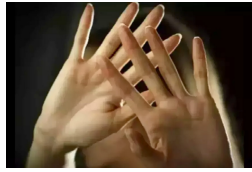
The second phase of 'Jawaabdehi Yatra', run by Suchna Evam Rojgar Adhikar Abhiyaan, demanded the passage of a social accountability law in Rajasthan.

People from 25 districts of the state participated in a demonstration held at Saheed Smarak, and a letter was sent to Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot demanding the passage of the law.

But the law is yet to be introduced. It is binding upon the government to fulfil whatever announcements are made in the Assembly. (Tol, 20.09.22)

Raj men most violent to wives

Among north Indian states, Rajasthan's men are physically violent toward their wives. In the state, 23.1 percent of ever-married women aged 18-49 have experienced physical violence committed by their husbands, according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data collected in 2019-21. The national average of such women, however, is 28.3 percent.



The latest data on spousal violence places Delhi in second among northern states. In Delhi, 20.4 percent of ever-married women have experienced physical violence. The states/UTs mentioned in north India in NFHS are Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Punjab.

However, compared to central, eastern and southern states, Rajasthan is a better place for women as the percentage of women who experienced physical violence is much higher in other states. (Tol, 25.08.22)

An app to help report traffic violations

Irrked at cars blocking your gate? You may soon send a picture to the traffic police, and a challan will be sent to the violator.



Citizens will soon be able to report a traffic violation by simply posting a picture on a mobile application provided by the police.

Additional DG (Traffic) V K Singh said that the police are developing a new application that will allow people to report different violations. The new initiative will work as a force multiplier. It will also address the grievances of people. (Tol, 14.09.22)

Airport with new facilities

Ahead of peak tourist season, which is likely to be high this year after two years of the pandemic, the Jaipur International Airport is ready to welcome passengers with new facilities.

To ease passenger travel, the airport has increased its seating capacity, a baby care room has been set up for passengers travelling with toddlers, and extra security counters have been set up with one counter for women.

With more security counters, the arrangement will be smoother for international and domestic passengers.

(Tol, 30.09.22)

₹1,000 aid for 100% disabled

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot approved monthly financial assistance of ₹1,000 in addition to the pension to specially-abled persons with 100 percent disability in the state.

For this, he approved the draft guidelines of the Monthly Financial Assistance Scheme-2022 for specially-abled persons in need of more support. Gehlot had announced this during the discussion of the Finance and Appropriation Bill 2022-23.

There are 21,717 pensioners with 100 percent disability to whom this additional financial assistance will be provided. A pension of ₹750 is provided to specially-abled persons with 40 percent disability. (Tol, 22.09.22)

₹35 crore women will have smartphones

Under the Mukhya Mantri Digital Sewa Yojana (MDSY), the state government would offer free mobile phones with Internet connectivity to 1.35 crore women for three years.

The Chiranjeevi scheme has enabled the distribution of smartphones to women registered as family heads. For the first phase or



first year of free distribution of smartphones, ₹1200 crore has already been allocated in the budget, bringing the total amount to ₹3500 crore.

The phones will have applications that provide users with information on government programmes such as e-mitra, e-dharti, and RajSampark.

(Tol, 24.09.22)

Cheetahs return to India

The news of eight cheetahs from Namibia released into Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park by Prime Minister



Narendra Modi brought sparkles to the eyes of the residents of Nizam Mahal in Cheetahwalon-ka-Mohalla in the walled city here.

Once a training centre for cheetahs, Nizam Mahal is now an abandoned building. Cages used to keep the wild cats are now being used as almirah, on which utensils and other household items are placed.

Nizam Mahal got its name from the last cheetah trainer, Nizamuddin. Four cheetahs brought from Gwalior at ₹640 in 1858 were kept here and trained by Nizamuddin.

His son, Mohammed Azizuddin, had kept all his belongings, like the cart used to transport the animals for hunting, training items and some rare photos, until his last breath, hoping to see cheetahs again.

Nizamuddin's descendants have urged the Central and state governments to allocate a few cheetahs to Jaipur. (Tol, 18.09.22)

e-Gram Swaraj Initiative

Under the e-Gram Swaraj Initiative of the Government of India, Jaipur and Jodhpur districts are yet to upload their development work plans (for the financial year 2022-23) on the portal for online payments and sanctions.

To strengthen e-governance in Panchayati Raj Institutions across the country, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has launched e-Gram Swaraj, a user-friendly web-based portal. (Tol, 05.09.22)

38 EVs can be charged at Airport

After the introduction of seven electric utility vehicles (EVs) at Jaipur International Airport (JIA), seven EV charging points have been installed there. Up to 38 EVs can be charged at these points in a day.

Work has also been started to install EV charging stations on the city side. The presence of an EV charging station at a public utility will only reassure EV owners to use this green mode of transport while planning their next ride to the airport.

The EV charging stations have been installed as part of JIA's initiative to reduce carbon emissions and switch to green energy sources. (Tol, 04.09.22)

Garbage bins to last 30 years

The district administration is seriously trying to keep the city clean as the tourism season starts. Innovations are being made to put Jaisalmer on the list of garbage-free cities.

On the lines of Finland, garbage bins made with the latest technique worth ₹45 lakh are being placed at many places in the city as a pilot project.

One such garbage bin was inaugurated, which will remain safe for 20-30 years. If this pilot project is successful, then more bins will be placed. Three underground bins have been placed in the city; now, garbage heaps will not be seen in the open. (Tol, 30.08.22)

Free Education for girls in schools

The state government has decided to extend the reimbursement of fees for girls admitted to private schools under the Right to Education Act (RTE) till Class 12.

The Central Act mandates that the respective governments reimburse the fees to private schools against the admissions made under RTE.



The move is aimed at stopping the dropout of RTE admissions after Class 8 due to their inability to pay fees. Sources opined that the government is coming up with an administrative order which must pass judicial scrutiny. (Tol, 11.08.22)

E-vehicle policy of Raj comes into being

The state government has developed an e-vehicle policy to encourage the purchase of electric vehicles.

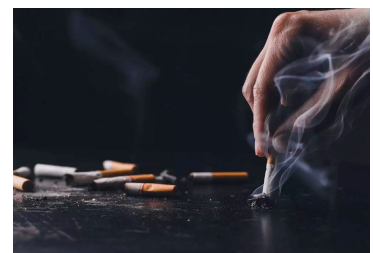


The Rajasthan Electric Vehicle Policy (REVP) came into being, under which the government has sanctioned a fund of ₹40 crore for contribution to purchasing electric vehicles.

Under this, the government approved the proposed one-time contribution on purchasing electric vehicles and an additional budget provision of ₹40 crore for reimbursement of SGST. (Tol, 02.09.22)

Raj has the highest tobacco users

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has praised the state government's efforts in tobacco control, but the state has a lot to do in this



direction and should not stop here. Figures released by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) India report show that the state has the highest tobacco consumption among states in northern India.

Not only men but also women consume tobacco in different forms. NFHS-5 India report shows 6.9 percent of women in the state consume tobacco, while 41.9 percent of their male counterparts consume tobacco, the highest in 9 UTs/States in north India. (Tol, 11.08.22)

Underground Metro gifted to Jaipurites

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot inaugurated Phase I-B of Jaipur Metro. This underground metro service started after a long wait, will provide



special facilities to the people living in Parkota area in Jaipur.

After this phase's start, the Jaipur Metro now has 11 stations instead of nine. Phase I-B phase of Jaipur Metro was to be completed in March 2019. But it has now been completed. Now the number of passengers travelling by metro is also being speculated to increase drastically. (AU, 23.09.22)

Raj set to bring Road Safety Act

The State Transport Department has released the draft of the Rajasthan Road Safety Act 2022 to improve road safety measures and reduce accidents. The draft Bill proposes establishing a State



Road Safety Authority, Rajasthan Public Transport Authority, Dedicated Road Safety fund and public transport fund.

This policy would be issued every five years. After completion of the specified period, the policy shall be updated and re-issued according to the prevailing road safety scenario. (Tol, 04.08.22)

Bhatesari Khatipura as satellite station

The North Western Railway is developing Bhatesari Khatipura as a satellite station in the city after increased traffic in the region. This station, which will act as a terminus, will reduce the traffic load for the Jaipur junction.

In the coming days, a few Delhi-bound trains will no longer start from Jaipur junction but from Khatipura station. This will help reduce the load of Jaipur junction, which is witnessing an increase in traffic.

Khatipura station, being an important common point, will help cater to the population who will not have to travel to Jaipur junction.

The estimated budget for the project is ₹193.59 crores. At present, work in progress for four additional loop lines. (Tol, 28.07.22)

'Eat Right Station' certification

The Jaipur railway station got the 'Eat Right Station' certificate from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). With this certification, it became the first such station in Rajasthan and north western railway.

FSSAI awards this certification to those railway stations that set benchmarks in providing safe and wholesome food to passengers through restaurants, food kiosks, and fixed or moving stalls.

The station has been awarded this certificate after an FSSAI-empowered third-party audit agency gave it 5 stars. The certificate to Jaipur railway station is valid for two years till July 26, 2024. (Tol, 27.07.22)

Clean drive flagged off

The Mayor and Commissioner of JMC-Greater flagged off 65 new waste collection vehicles for 26 wards of Malviya Nagar zone as part of a new cleaning system being adopted in the city, said officials.

Under the new sanitation system, the city's cleanliness system will get a new impetus. In the vehicles launched today, there are separate compartments for wet and dry waste, hazardous waste and even a box for giving rotis to cows, a practice followed in many households. (Tol, 26.07.22)

India's 1st high-speed train test track

India's first dedicated high-speed train test track is being constructed in Nagaur district and will be ready by 2024. The project's total cost is estimated to be around ₹819 crore.

This would be the first electrified dedicated test track in the world after its completion. Testing of broad-gauge

high-speed trains can be done here. Rajasthan will be on the top of the global railway map.



The total length of the testing track is around 59km and work is being done in two phases. The work for testing will be done by the Lucknow-based Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO), which identified this site under the NWR, a first-of-its-kind project of Indian Railways. (Tol, 21.08.22)

New Innovations Required for Sustainable Urban Governance

CUTS organised an expert consultation under a project entitled 'Improving City Governance through Enhancing Knowledge of Urban Local Bodies in Rajasthan,' on September 02, 2022. The Australian High Commission is supporting the project under its Direct Aid Programme.

Hridesh Kumar Sharma, IAS, Director cum Joint Secretary, Department of Local Self Government (LSG), Government of Rajasthan,

stated that all stakeholders need to work together to strengthen the urban governance in Rajasthan through research and capacity building of local bodies. He further added inclusive and sustainable governance is the need of the hour, and LSG is working towards improving the performance of local bodies.

He highlighted that urban growth should be inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable and appreciated CUTS' work in urban governance.



Bulchandani is Ogilvy global CEO

British advertising agency Ogilvy has announced the promotion of Devika Bulchandani as the global chief executive officer of the WPP network company.

Bulchandani, the agency's global President and CEO of Ogilvy North America before her elevation, will take over the CEO's role from Andy Main, who will serve as a senior adviser until the year-end.

She will now be responsible for all aspects of Ogilvy's business across 131 offices in 93 countries which look at advertising, public relations, consulting, and health units. Bulchandani will also join WPP's executive committee.

(Mint, 09.09.22)

Football is helping girls find their feet

In Alakhpura, daughters are not seen as a liability anymore. After all, 20 of those trained in the village football field



have government jobs in the Indian Railways, paramilitary forces such as Central Reserve Police Force, Sashatra Seema Bal and Assam Rifles, and even Haryana's education department.

The jobs mean a lot because most girls are from families classified as 'below the poverty line'. They cannot afford a domestic plane ticket, but most have passports to represent the country at international events.

Change arrived in Alakhpura when Gordhan Dass, a physical training instructor posted at the village's government school, introduced football for girls in 2006. He prepared the ground for football with the help of Alakhpura residents and motivated girls to play football.

(Tol, 16.09.22)

Housewives, labourers turn entrepreneurs

Several women who worked as labourers, cleaners or housewives have now become entrepreneurs with a nationwide market selling handicrafts, handmade soaps, and spices in Rajasthan. These women are



Why India has many more female airline pilots as the US

India has the greatest proportion of female pilots in the world at roughly 12.4 percent of all pilots, compared to 5.5 percent in the US, the largest aviation market in the world, and 4.7 percent in the UK, according to the International Society of Women Airline Pilots.

In 1989, Nivedita Bhasin became the youngest commercial airline captain in the world. Still, the Indian pilot vividly remembers those formative years when other crew members would nudge her into the cockpit so that passengers would not feel uneasy seeing a woman piloting their aircraft.

But, now, Indian female pilots are no longer a novelty three decades after Bhasin's career began, making the nation a success story regarding diversity in the airline business.

(Mint, 10.08.22)



Why India produces twice as many women airline pilots as the US

further generating employment for others through self-help groups under the Rajeevika scheme of the Rajasthan government.

An MoU has also been signed between Rajasthan Grameen Ajeevika Vikas Parishad and Amazon India to support the growth of women artisans and SHGs across the state.

The Panchayati Raj Department said it is trying to work with them to help them get the correct price for their products.

(Tol, 29.08.22)

Jaipur granny excels in cycle race

She is 57, but she pedals with the steely enthusiasm of a teenager. Renu Singhi became the first Indian woman to complete the gruelling, 1,540km 'London-Edinburg-London' cycle race in the UK within the designated time.



A time limit of 128 hours was fixed for LEL, considered one of the most challenging cycling events in the world. Singhi completed the race, in which nearly 1,900 cyclists from across the world participated, in 124 hours and 32 minutes, adding one more feather to her impressive cycling crown and proving yet again that age is just a number.

(Tol, 22.08.22)

Stellar role in the freedom struggle

As the freedom movement gathered pace in the early 1900s, a middle-class woman in Jaipur enamoured by Gandhian values started wearing only khadi and sold all her jewellery.

She did not keep even a nose ring or a bangle for herself. She was later instrumental in leading the campaigns of the Jaipur Prajamandal. Her name was Ratan Devi Shashtri, who many know today as the founder of the iconic Banasthali Vidyapeeth.

Ratan Devi had served the families of freedom fighters who went into hiding and participated in the Quit India movement while hitting the roads. Like her, many women played leading roles in the freedom struggle.

(Tol, 14.08.22)

'Mahila Nidhi' to help entrepreneurs

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has launched 'Mahila Nidhi', a loan scheme for women's social and economic development through loans. Under the scheme, apart from everyday necessities, easy credit will be available to women for business expansion and starting new businesses.

In the budget 2022-23, the government said it would establish 'Mahila Nidhi' through Rajasthan Rural Livelihood Development Council. Rajasthan is the second state in the country after Telangana, where Mahila Nidhi has been established.

(<https://currentaffairs.adda247.com>, 01.09.22)

Consumer Protection: India's Redressal Mechanisms Being Destroyed by Apathy

By Pradeep S. Mehta*

Instead of making too much noise on service charges, the Department of Consumer Affairs should focus on how the redressal machinery is functioning. Not that the levy of involuntary service charges at eating joints is fair, but bigger elephants in the room act against consumer sovereignty.

The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 (COPRA) was amended many times before and even replaced in 2019 to make it more effective and consumer-friendly. Significant obstacles remain to be addressed to further deal with the newer challenges. Powerful institutions that benefit from the status quo resist any effort to bring in reforms.



Counterfeits get a boost from pandemic

Consumer issues were sidelined and got a low priority during the pandemic. Counterfeit products have existed in our markets for a long time. However, the spread of COVID-19 saw an increased circulation of fake products in every nook and corner of the country, putting consumers' health and safety at risk. The crisis acted as a convenient shield to flood the market with counterfeit products and enforcement officials failed to foresee and act on time.

Failing to take effective action nationwide against such fraudulent market practices makes one wonder if the consumer affairs and related departments at the Union and state governments even considered consumers as rightful citizens, if not as King. From the beginning, consumer protection is often seen as secondary and less important.

In the aftermath of the COVID crisis, government bodies are focused on reviving the economy and appeasing business interests rather than on the larger interest of consumers. They fail to recognise that consumers are the *raison d'être* of an economy and by failing to ensure adequate consumer protection, they fail to buttress the economy any further.

Redressal mechanisms being destroyed by apathy

Despite the long 36 years since COPRA was put in place as a uniquely benevolent social legislation offering 'simple, speedy and inexpensive' consumer protection, all three characteristics seem to have disappeared today. This was earlier proved by a 2016 verdict of the Supreme Court wherein it constituted a committee presided by Justice Arijit Pasayat to examine the working of consumer fora in India. The committee's findings painted a dismal picture and

showed how the redressal systems at the district, state and national levels have been losing sheen over the years.

In its report, the Committee observed that the fora do not function as effectively as expected due to a poor organisational set-up, grossly inadequate infrastructure, absence of adequate and trained manpower and lack of qualified members in the adjudicating bodies.

Ineffective utilisation of Funds

The Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF) was set up in 1992 to provide financial assistance to voluntary consumer organisations (VCOs) to create consumer awareness and strengthen the consumer movement in the country, particularly in rural areas. This is also in a dismal state.

Financial assistance from CWF is being given to Central/State Governments/Government Bodies, Institutions including Universities, PSUs, and autonomous bodies, but not to VCOs, thus defeating the purpose it was established for. Even the utilisation is inadequate.

As per a recent statement made by the Department to CWF, only 17 States have established CWF (Corpus) in their respective States and the remaining states and union territories like Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, etc., are yet to establish one.

It is high time for the officials to wake up to these realities and focus more on addressing the root problems to strike a balance between protecting the economy and the health and well-being of the consumers. No government can afford to be high-handed one way or the other for too long.

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This article can also be viewed at: www.policycircle.org/ on July 13, 2022

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ET: Economic Times; IE: Indian Express; NYT: New York Times; Tol: Times of India

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