

CityMatters

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Road safety needs closer attention and policing



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A few years ago, I was being driven by a taxi in Mumbai when it landed in the slip lane while we had to go straight. Since we were in the left lane, a constable standing there insisted that we turn left. That is the discipline, which is lacking seriously in Jaipur. The other day, the Times of India carried a big story about how drivers flaunt this rule and that prevents drivers from turning into the left lane freely.



Once a police officer's car broke the same rule. When I reprimanded the driver, a senior lady officer sitting inside apologised to me, with genuineness. More often the senior police officers would be arrogant. Her defence was that she was getting late for a meeting. My response was that her official car could have jumped the red light also so why stand on the wrong side?

Thank God, that increasingly drivers follow the red-light rule but yet break the discipline by crossing the stop line, which is also a punishable offence. However, the traffic police standing around the crossing do not bother about it.

Recently, the proactive Commissioner of Police of Jaipur, Biju George Joseph has promised to work *inter alia* on traffic issues. I do hope that he can get more constables and sub-inspectors with motorcycles to assist the Jaipur Police. Now that the new budget will be placed, we will appeal to the government to provide better budgets to the Jaipur Police for traffic management but that they are used for people and not VIP movements.

Mr. Joseph might consider inviting renowned police officers from across the country to train local officers on traffic management. For instance, Satyendra Kumar Garg, a retired Special Commissioner of Delhi Police, effectively managed traffic during the 2010 Commonwealth Games and implemented initiatives to reduce road fatalities and drunk driving. Another option is Safeen Hassan, the youngest IPS officer, who, as DCP (Traffic) in Ahmedabad, has reduced serious road accidents by 36 percent in two years.

In order for traffic police management to succeed, it must be accompanied by good flanking measures such as CCTVs and effective prosecution; proper marking on pothole-free roads, and better enforcement with education. For example, Garg during his tenure in Delhi as traffic supremo had trained his constables to hand out rose flowers to drivers on the busy road with an appeal to drive properly.

Over to Biju George Jacob for a safer Jaipur city.

INSIDE

- ◆ 12 Dead, Many Critical In Huge Jaipur Fire
- ◆ 'Find Pothole: Win a Prize' – CUTS Contest
- ◆ India Win Inaugural Women's U19 T20 Asia Cup
- ◆ Rakhi Sawant's Heated Argument
- ◆ Right to food: Tackling malnutrition and diet-driven diseases
- ◆ A judiciary that refrains from judicial overreach can better serve the cause of justice

Pradeep S. Mehta
Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General

12 Dead, Many Critical In Huge Jaipur Fire

At least 12 people were killed in a massive fire following a truck collision outside a petrol pump on Ajmer Road in Jaipur, Rajasthan, this morning. The fire erupted around 5:30 am when an LPG tanker caught fire after being hit by a truck, causing explosions that engulfed nearby vehicles.

Over 40 people were injured, with 28 in critical condition. The blast heard up to 10 km away, caused multiple explosions as fuel tanks burst. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Droupadi Murmu expressed condolences, while Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma visited the hospital and ensured rescue operations were underway. (NDTV, 20.12.24)



279th Anniversary of Jaipur

The Jaipur Festival hosted over 40 mayors from India and abroad, including from South Africa and Nepal, for a four-day summit that began on 16th December.

The event, marking Jaipur's 297th anniversary and the completion of one year of the state government, featured cultural activities such as the Prem Ramayan performance, a Heritage Walk, a Plantation Drive, and a musical night with Sukhwinder Singh.

The mayors also visited Jaipur's temples and tourist attractions, exploring the city's history, Vastu planning, and modern-day concepts introduced by Sawai Jai Singh II. The summit aimed to address urbanisation challenges and share best practices. (ETV, 14.12.24)

PM Modi highlights India's growth

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit 2024 in Jaipur, highlighting India's economic growth and investment potential.



Rajasthan's Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma set a target to double the state's GSDP to US\$350bn in five years, with new policies to boost investment.

The summit, attended by top industrialists and representatives from 32 countries, saw memorandums of understanding worth ₹35tn signed. (BS, 09.12.24)

Jaipur's air quality 'very poor'



On November 21, Jaipur's air quality deteriorated to the 'very poor' category, with an AQI of 344 in Mansarovar. Other areas of the city had AQI levels over 200, placing them in the 'poor' category.

Several other cities in Rajasthan, including Jhalawar, Sikar, Sawai Madhopur, and Sri Ganganagar, also experienced poor air quality, with AQI levels ranging from 204 to 324. Experts warned that sensitive groups could experience immediate health effects, while prolonged exposure could lead to difficulty

breathing and throat irritation in healthy individuals.

Due to increasing pollution, schools in the Khairthal-Tijara district were closed, and children from classes 1 to 5 attended online classes. (DW, 21.11.24)

CUTS as Expert in MoHUA

Amar Deep Singh, Senior Programme Officer at CUTS, has been selected as an expert in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) Working Group on Urban Governance Reforms.

This group aims to drive sustainable governance reforms to strengthen the structure, authority, and democratic empowerment of city governments across India.

CUTS, with its strong background in urban governance, has been actively engaged in policy research to promote effective, inclusive, and accountable urban governance.

Singh's involvement will support MoHUA's mission of inclusive policy-making and evidence-based reform, contributing to the empowerment of city governments and local democracy. (RP, 09.11.24)



Jaipur Festival 2024 Celebrates 297 Years

The Jaipur Municipal Corporation-Greater organised a month-long festival to commemorate the city's 297th foundation year. The celebrations included cultural programmes such as puppet dances, Kachhi Ghodi dance, and devotional song competitions.



A unique feature was the use of invitation cards made from recycled paper embedded with seeds, promoting sustainability.

(Tol, 16.11.24)

Jaipur History Festival 2024 Focuses on Financial Literacy

From December 03-06, 2024, the City Palace hosted the Jaipur History Festival, India's largest history festival.



The event uniquely integrated financial literacy into education through folk tales, aiming to impart essential financial skills to over 10,000 students and educators. The festival featured plays, traditional art forms, and workshops.

(SN, 24.11.24)

Farmers Shift from Rapeseed

In November 2024, farmers in Rajasthan reduced rapeseed and mustard planting despite higher prices, due to soaring temperatures hindering germination and growth.

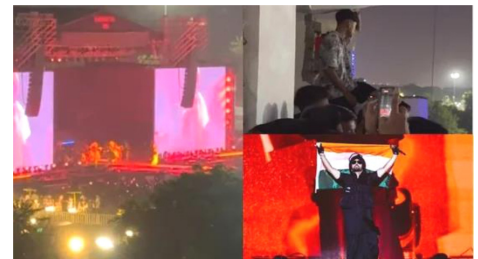


Many farmers switched to crops like wheat and potatoes that are less affected by heat, impacting the region's agricultural dynamics.

(RT, 25.11.24)

Fans Enjoy Concert from PG Balcony

During Diljit Dosanjh's concert in Jaipur, a group of fans watched the performance from their paying guest accommodation's balcony, which was adjacent to the venue. They humorously noted that they saved ₹25,000 by not purchasing tickets.



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(HT, 04.11.24)

'Find Pothole: Win a Prize' – CUTS Contest

CUTS launched the "Find Pothole: Win a Prize" contest in Jaipur to gather data on pothole locations, encouraging participants to submit photos with area and road names.

The goal was to assist local authorities like JMC and JDA in identifying areas needing repairs and raising awareness on the right of a pothole free road. A total of 191 photos from 10 contestants submitted, covering 41 locations. These were compiled into an album and presented to JDA and both JMCs to prompt road maintenance.

The top two contestants, Arun Joshi and Banwari Lal Saini, received certificates and cash prizes. This initiative highlights CUTS' commitment to improving urban infrastructure through community engagement.



India Win Inaugural Women's U19 T20 Asia Cup

India won the inaugural Women's U19 T20 Asia Cup by defeating Bangladesh by 41 runs in the final. G Trisha's 52 off 47 balls helped India post 117/7, despite a strong performance from Bangladesh's Farjana Easmin, who took 4/32.

In response, Bangladesh was reduced to 76 all out in 18.3 overs, thanks to brilliant spin bowling from Ayushi Shukla (3/17), Sonam Yadav (2/13), and Parunika Sisodia (2/12), securing India's victory.

(ET, 19.11.24)



'Helmet Man' Raghvendra Kumar

Raghvendra Kumar, the 'Helmet Man of India', launched a nationwide road safety campaign after losing his friend in a helmet-less accident.



Selling his house and ancestral land, he has distributed over 65,000 helmets, saved 35 lives, and raised awareness across 22 states. A Supreme Court advocate, he promotes helmet use nationwide.

(ETV, 10.11.24)

Hyderabad's 2024: Wrapped

A satirical roundup of Hyderabad's events in 2024 entertained readers with witty commentary on local and national issues.



From political blunders to cultural quirks, the article cleverly captured the lighter side of the

city's happenings, leaving readers laughing at relatable scenarios and cleverly disguised criticism.

(TNIE, 28.12.24)

Diwali 2024 vs Halloween 2024

Diwali and Halloween coinciding in 2024 led to an outpouring of creative memes comparing traditional Indian festivities with spooky Western traditions.



Social media was abuzz with jokes about firecrackers, costumes, and sweets, sparking humorous cultural exchanges and laughter as users debated which festival was more exciting.

(Tol, 29.10.24)

Bill Gates Collaborates with Dolly

Bill Gates ordering tea from Dolly Chaiwala, a vendor in Nagpur, became an internet sensation.



The video showed Gates enjoying a cup of chai, boosting the vendor's popularity overnight. Social media celebrated the heartwarming moment, hailing it as a story of simplicity and global connection.

(IE, 28.12.24)

India's First Floating Hotel in Kerala

Kerala launched India's first floating hotel in its picturesque backwaters. This luxurious accommodation offers guests a unique experience of staying on water, surrounded by serene landscapes.



The floating hotel became a popular tourist attraction, combining natural beauty with opulence to elevate Kerala's reputation as a travel destination.

(RW, 31.12.24)

Pizza Delivery by Air

In an experimental feat of service delivery, a pizza company in Pune took to the skies in June 2024 by delivering pizzas via drone. This move was part of a pilot project aimed at testing the feasibility of air-based food delivery.



The company announced that it would use drones to deliver pizzas to select customers in the city, cutting delivery time and bypassing traffic congestion. Notably, the experiment was ultimately termed as a successful one, though it remained limited to a small scale.

(RW, 31.12.24)

Mysterious Fish Rain In AP

In a strange incident, fish rain was reported in several villages of Andhra Pradesh's East Godavari district in August 2024. Residents of the area reported finding fish scattered all over the roads and fields, with some even claiming to have seen fish falling from the sky.



While the exact cause of the phenomenon is still unknown, experts speculate that it could be due to a rare weather event known as "animal rain". (RW, 31.12.24)

India Approves \$119 Million Fund

The Indian government has approved a 10 billion rupee (\$119 million) fund dedicated to supporting its growing space sector



startups, aiming to bolster its share in the global commercial space market by 2033. (RT, 24.10.24)

Illegal Immigrant Jailed for 5 Years

Karandeep Singh, an illegal immigrant from Punjab, was sentenced to nearly five years in prison for his involvement in a violent robbery at a Wickes store in Slough, where he assaulted an employee.

Despite claiming to be 18, the judge noted discrepancies in his age and background. (HT, 20.12.24)

Age-Reversing Millionaire

Bryan Johnson, a millionaire pursuing anti-ageing, discussed his



project 'Blueprint' at a Mumbai event hosted by Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal.

Johnson's regimen, focusing on diet, exercise, and AI-driven health optimisation, aims to reverse ageing. Attendees, including doctors and health tech developers, were inspired by his pioneering approach.

(HT, 01.12.24)

DU student reimagines Mona Lisa

A Delhi University student, Rashi Pandey, used AI to create an Indian version of the Mona Lisa.



The artwork reimagines the iconic painting with the subject dressed in traditional Indian attire, including a dupatta, maang tikka, and jewellery, blending global art with Indian cultural elements. (HT, 01.12.24)

Children lack WHO-suggested diversity in diet

A recent study reveals that over 77 percent of children in India do not meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended dietary diversity.



The states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh reported the highest levels of inadequate diet diversity, with over 80 percent of children in these regions lacking variety in their meals.

In contrast, Sikkim and Meghalaya were the only states with less than 50 percent prevalence of this issue, showing comparatively better dietary diversity among children.

(TH, 14.12.24)

Mysore Sandal Soap to Revamp

Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited (KSDL) is set for major changes in 2025, including expanding its distributor network, redesigning its branding, and partnering with e-commerce platforms.

With Mysore Sandal Soap as its flagship product, KSDL aims for nationwide reach, building on record sales of ₹1,500 crore in March 2024. (HT, 20.12.24)

Rakhi Sawant's Heated Argument

The drama unfolded on "India's Got Latent" when Rakhi Sawant clashed with a fellow judge, culminating in a chair being thrown.

The incident, though controversial, became a talking point, with viewers debating whether it was staged or spontaneous. It added an unexpected dose of entertainment to the show. (N18, 09.10.24)



Right to food: Tackling malnutrition and diet-driven diseases

By Amrat Singh* and SimiTB**

World Food Day 2024 arrives as India grapples with malnutrition and a rise in non-communicable diseases, both stemming from unhealthy diets. This year's theme, 'Right to Food for a Better Life and a Better Future,' highlights the need to make access to nutritious food a fundamental right for a healthier future.

Despite its agricultural abundance, India faces a paradox, with over 55.6 percent of the population—more than 788 million people—unable to afford a healthy diet, according to the 2024 SOFI report. This alarming situation is exacerbated by rising costs and the prevalence of unhealthy, ultra-processed food options.

Right to food and unhealthy diet

Obesity rates in India are rising sharply, especially among children. The SOFI report indicates that 2.8 percent of children under five are obese, up from 2.2 percent in 2012, while adult obesity has increased from 4.1 percent to 7.3 percent in just two years. This increase is largely due to the consumption of ultra-processed foods high in sugars, salts, and unhealthy fats, which are more affordable and convenient than nutritious options.

The report also analyses 35,550 products from leading food and beverage companies in India, Brazil, China, and South Africa, showing that only 4-12 percent of their sales come from healthier items. This trend makes unhealthy foods readily available and cheap, while nutritious foods remain expensive, contributing to rising diet-related non-communicable diseases and straining the healthcare system.

Role of front-of-pack warning labels

To address the rising consumption of unhealthy foods, Front-of-Pack Warning Labels (FoPWL) should be implemented to help consumers make informed choices. These labels provide clear visual indicators of harmful ingredients like sugar, salt, and saturated fat in packaged foods, which is especially helpful for busy young consumers and those with limited literacy.

Some countries have adopted FoPWL systems with positive outcomes. India has proposed a star-rating system for packaged foods, but it has faced criticism for being less effective than warning labels, as it does not clearly differentiate between healthy and unhealthy options. A more effective approach would use distinct symbols or colors to indicate high levels of harmful ingredients, guiding consumers away from unhealthy choices.



Measures to ensure right to healthy food

Ensuring the right to healthy food requires comprehensive policies that address food insecurity and unhealthy diets, beyond just labeling systems. This involves regulating the marketing of ultra-processed foods, promoting healthier options, and making nutritious foods more affordable. The aggressive marketing of unhealthy foods, particularly to children, presents significant challenges that require stricter regulations and better access to healthy foods.

The National Multisectoral Action Plan (2017-2022) recognised unhealthy diets and aggressive marketing as critical issues. India's rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) threatens the healthcare system and future generations. The right to food encompasses access to nutritious, safe, and affordable options, essential for achieving Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 2, which aims to eradicate hunger and malnutrition by 2030. However, India is falling short in meeting this target compared to other goals.

As we observe World Food Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to ensuring the right to healthy food for all Indians. Regulatory measures like FoPWL are essential, but broader strategies—such as public education and industry accountability—are also critical. Only through comprehensive efforts can we secure a better life for ourselves and a brighter future for the generations to come.

Abridged from an article that appeared in the Policy Circle on October 16, 2024

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A judiciary that refrains from judicial overreach can better serve the cause of justice

By Vijay L. Kelkar* and Pradeep S Mehta**

The suo moto powers of courts are essential to secure justice and the public interest in many cases, but their overuse can have adverse consequences. These powers must be exercised judiciously.

In recent years, the Indian judiciary's use of suo motu powers has sparked significant debate. Originally intended to protect the public interest, ensure justice and address issues that may otherwise go unnoticed, this power is now being scrutinised for its potential misuse.

The increasing use of Supreme Court intervention in cases already handled by lower courts, especially when political motivations are suspected, risks fostering public cynicism toward the justice system. This not only leads to redundancy but also delays case resolutions. For instance, in the tragic rape and murder of a trainee doctor in Kolkata, the Supreme Court stepped in after significant progress by the Calcutta High Court, raising questions about the necessity of its involvement. Such actions can overshadow the critical role of high courts, which are better equipped to address regional issues, and may create jurisdictional tensions that weaken the overall effectiveness of the judicial system.

The downside of suo motu powers lies in the courts' inability to effectively follow through on interventions. The Supreme Court's suo motu cognisance of the

COVID-19 crisis showcased the urgency of protecting the right to health under Article 21 of the Constitution. While it initially raised hopes and highlighted systemic healthcare gaps, the lack of concrete results diminished faith in the judiciary's effectiveness.

A similar issue arose with the pollution of the Yamuna River, where a 1994 intervention took over two decades to transfer to the National Green Tribunal, showcasing the weaknesses of the suo motu approach. Prolonged inaction often frustrates citizens, particularly in a context rife with environmental degradation and social injustice.

The exercise of suo motu jurisdiction can sometimes lead to judicial overreach, as seen in the Ramlila Maidan incident, where the court created a new Fundamental Right to Sleep. While progressive, such expansive interpretations can blur the boundaries of judicial authority and raise concerns about the potential usurpation of high court jurisdictions.

High courts are often better positioned to handle local matters, offering more timely and cost-effective responses to legal challenges without overburdening the Supreme Court's docket. This can lead to a more balanced and equitable judicial process overall.



In conclusion, while the courts' suo motu powers are an essential tool for ensuring justice and safeguarding the public interest, their injudicious use can have serious consequences. Intervening in cases that are already under process or raising expectations without providing effective solutions only puts public trust in the judiciary at needless risk.

To maintain its integrity and uphold the rule of law, the judiciary must invariably exercise its suo motu powers judiciously, with a clear focus on delivering justice in a timely and effective manner.

Ideally, the Supreme Court should frame guidelines for dealing with such matters both for itself and our high courts. The exercise must also provide a feedback mechanism to check if the same has been followed properly. Such a step will aid the cause of judicial credibility and effectiveness.

Abridged from an article that appeared in the Livemint on December 18, 2024

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Sources: BS: Business Standard; DW: Daijworld; ET: Economic Times; HT: Hindustan Times; IE: The Indian Express; N18: News 18; RP: Rajasthan Patrika; RT: Reuters; RW: Republic World; SN: Scoo News; TH: The Hindu; Tol: Times of India; TNIE: The New Indian Express

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