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EXCUSE ME WHILE I KISS THE SKY

By far the most important development in the nation's capital was the opening of the Airport Metro, known as the Sky Train, even as the state government went ahead with the New Delhi centenary celebrations

By Syed Ali Ahmed

WHEN did Delhi become the capital of India? A 100 years ago in December, 1911, when the Durbar was moved from Calcutta by the then British rulers or nearly 500 years ago when the Mughals made it their capital? Even as the controversy raged among historians and intellectuals, the Delhi Government went ahead with 'centenary celebrations', launching a book and a photo exhibition for starters. A slew of other events are planned over the next one year.

To be fair, the Delhi government has also earmarked Rs 1,500 crore for 'beautifying' the Chandni Chowk and adjacent areas in the old city. A Shahjahanabad Development Board has also been set up to initiate similar schemes in the walled city.

The most important development during the year, however, was the opening of the Airport Metro. Even as the Metro is changing the travel habits of residents, the hassle-free and fast ride to the airport has brought back smiles to the visitors and residents alike. The check-in facility introduced at the New Delhi Railway Station has meant that travelers can check in their

baggage at the station and then take a smooth ride to Terminal 3 to catch their flights.

While Delhi residents are generally the privileged lot, the commissioning of the gas based Bawana power plant has added to the cheer by adding 1,500 MW of power to the grid. The inauguration of the Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial at Singhu on the outskirts of Delhi was also a landmark event. The Delhi Government also implemented the 'Service' Act to guarantee time-bound public services like the issue of ration cards and driving licences.

The terror blast outside the Delhi High Court, fire in the trans-Yamuna area in which 14 cunuchs lost their lives, and more lives lost when old and unsafe houses collapsed in the walled city and Uttam Nagar, exposed the creaking civil services and relatively slow response of disaster management teams.

The flavour of the year was, however, the anti-corruption agitation launched by Anna Hazare. The Ramilla Ground and Jantar Mantar were the places where people, especially the young,

descended, waving the tricolour, enjoying patriotic songs, partaking food, raising slogans and having the time of their lives. There was high drama when the police cleared the ground in a midnight swoop and Baba Ramdev put on a salwar kameez and tried to escape with a group of women devotees. A middle-aged woman, who sustained injuries in the stampede actually died.

There was little that happened to redeem Delhi's reputation as a city unsafe for single women. Abductions, rapes in moving cars and murders sullied the city's name even as the incidence of road rage increased in proportion with the rush-hour traffic moving bumper to bumper, despite the Metro. Finally, the trifurcation of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi meant that there will be separate elections next year for South Delhi, North Delhi and for Trans Yamuna areas, with each getting a Mayor and functioning independently of each other. 50 per cent reservation for women will ensure greater participation by Delhi's women.



MAKING TRAVEL EASY: Opening of the Airport Metro was a signature event for Delhiites, as it ensured a hassle-free and fast ride to the airport

Dividends of peace

After a long time, J&K was largely peaceful, enabling the state to claim a booming tourist season

By Ehsan Fazlil & Jupinderjit Singh

KHUSHAMDEED. Welcome to Jammu and Kashmir. The year was marked by a record number of tourists visiting the Valley and a record number of pilgrims turning up to have a darshan of the shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi. After three consecutive years of turmoil (Amarath row, Shopian rape and killing, stone pelting), the year was largely peaceful, enabling the government to hold as many as 250 cricket matches in the Valley for the Kashmir Premier League and hold panchayat elections in the entire state after 33 years.

The opening of the Banihal tunnel, an engineering feat,

reduced the distance between Qazigund and Banihal from 35 km to just 11 km. The Central University finally began functioning and the three interlocutors appointed by the Union Home Ministry submitted their report and recommended a road-map for the state.

For the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, however, it remained a roller-coaster ride. His tweets kept him in the news even as he managed to introduce e-tendering in some of the departments and launch 'Project Himayat', under which 1,00,000 Kashmiri youth will be trained by the government

and employed in the private sector, mostly outside the state. But his determination to see the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from four districts run into opposition and the death under controversial circumstances, of a party worker, who was allegedly beaten up in the CM's residence, cast a cloud that the next year may clear.

Srinagar, however, remains the only city in the country to have no cinema hall and just a few liquor vendors. A suggestion to have more of them sparked a controversy with fundamentalists opposing the move.

WELCOME LULL: A record number of devotees visited Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu. The Dal Lake, too, saw a record number of tourists



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