

**By Sidharth Mishra**



While sharing a picture of a family outing from the memory lane on the Facebook, one captioned it as 'when Delhi was not a gas chamber.' This had an immediate response from a naysayer friend asking when Delhi was not a gas chamber.

Well if we talk about air quality, I am very sure as per the measurement standards it must never have been good and always rested in the bad, worse, alarming categories. But despite that Delhi in the pre-Covid days was a city to be in. The wide expanses hosting huge fetes and fairs were worth a visit.

Before the onset of Omicron one had thought that Delhi's winter would be back to normal with 'mela' grounds hosting people in large numbers over the weekends. Alas that was not to be. The new strain has put paid to any ideas one had about 'enjoying the winter.'

Take a drive through the city, the deserted and haunting images of Delhi Haat, Nehru Stadium, Connaught Place, Lodhi Garden, Sundar Nursery, would all lead to a heartbreak. Even on Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, where the newspapers still have their offices, the bus loads of children to visit the Doll's Museum have not arrived for the past two year. The trips to Children's Park at the India Gate is over. One wonders if the Centra Vista project has spared the Children's Park, after all it has a Nehruvian connect.

The winter exhibition-cum-sale at Mandi House, Garhwal Bhawan, Aga Khan Hall and milling crowds at the Khadi outlets too seem to have become part of a distant history. So have the private winter lunches hosted by some of the Delhiwalas of the older genre. Delhi's balmy winter of course is being missed.

## Winter gloom killing effervescence

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The absence of chirp on the campuses too is bewildering. Those who have graduated from the colleges this year, did not have access to their classrooms during half-of-their stay. There are those who joined in 2020 and all this while have been longing to be in the classrooms.

We are getting to see huge hoardings in the city on some government scheme, which has unearthed big business ideas from the government school students. One wonders if these fertile minds did not have an idea on how to get the classrooms going.

The long spell of winter rain this week, which came with the weekend curfew has added to the gloom. One wonders what purpose does a weekend curfew in Delhi serves, if the same is not extended in its suburbs under the administration of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana governments.

It would be difficult to have such curfew in poll-bound Uttar Pradesh, which has the largest share in the daily migrants who come to the national Capital for work. The poll panel for now has said that there would be no rallies till January 15. One wonders what the parameter was to decide on this date as there isn't any other indicator the Omicron surge would start to recede after January 15.

Delhi's own administrators would also be busy in these polls, violating all the Covid-related protocols. It's very convenient to put the city under curfew and travel to a poll-bound Uttarakhand and Punjab fetching for votes addressing public rallies. They in fact went a step forward, Delhi Government was quick enough to relax curfew on Sunday to allow birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh, lest the voters in Punjab get hurt.

Such slipshod measures in prevailing extra-ordinary circumstances makes Delhi a worse gas chamber indeed than it was a few winters ago. Delhi actually needs some fresh air aka fresh ideas to make it breathe lest it loses on its vibrant character.

(The writer is Author and President, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice)