



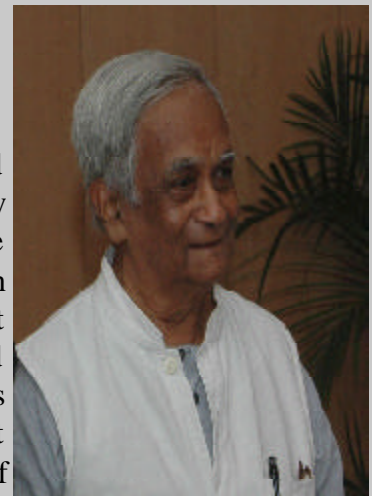
Transparency Review

Journal of Transparency Studies

Ajitji is no more, His inspiration is

Ajit ji, as he was popularly known, Bhattacharjea (87) is no more. He was the Editor of Transparency Review for last five years. Ajit ji was part of the National Campaign for the People's Right to Information (NCPRI) from the very outset and was involved even before in bringing together the Press Council of India (PCI) and initiating the movement for the Right to Information and seeing it through. Attending some of those early meetings at PCI, I too benefited and contended my concerns. He had the distinction of editing most mainline English dailies including HT, IE, Statesman and TOI. He was well known as Director of Press Institute of India for some years. In the last issue of Transparency Review of April 2011, I wrote how even when he was confined to his room, Ajit ji was concerned about the citizen

Rights and Transparency movement in the country. Being an advocate until last he was writing and reviewing in this publication about twists and turns of these movements.



All of us at CMS continue to get inspiration from Ajit da. It is with that spirit I take the responsibility to edit this Journal. Ajit's concern for standards and accuracy is not easy to emulate. Since I am also associated with the rights movements from grassroots, I will continue the agenda set by Ajit ji for this journal – with your cooperation.

Census 2011

2011 Census brings out an amazing story of an emerging nation and of a nation in transition. Firstly, it confirms that, for sure, we were able to moderate our population growth, including in BIMARU States. For no other social behavioural change, independent India had put in so much effort as to bring down the growth rate in population. But it took four decades of policy and programme initiatives of more than a dozen governments. Realization of people, cutting across socio-cultural-economic strata, age groups and

regions, in favour of a small family is what caused this decline in growth across the country.

As a member of the team that launched social marketing campaign (1970 – 72) with red triangle symbol and later doing first ever research on “vasectomy camps” in Kerala and Gujarat (1973-74), I recall the kind of experiments for mass mobilization that had gone into at several levels. The two research reports, “The Missing Link in the Indian Family Planning Programme” and “Family Planning Communication in Retrospect”

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(1993) and later as a member of India's first population policy body, with Dr M S Swaminathan as its head (1995), I am reminded of the kind of research that has gone in combating resistance to that process.

2011 census also brings out that all efforts for gender sensitivity have a long way to go to achieve the desired trend. Child sex ratio has dipped. The trend is disturbing. The numbers have consistently declined in the past decades from 978 girls in 1961 to 914 now in 2011. The phenomena is not limited to poor or any particular region. This brings out that our efforts against discrimination against girl child have fallen short or not good enough. And that our policies and priorities for social development cannot be secondary. But, on the other, we need to understand how some districts, even within a region,

had different pattern. For example, out of 10 districts of Vidharba, in seven districts girls ratio had improved and in three it declined in the last decade.

2011 Census has reminded as never before that we have a long way to go on social development aspirations and that neither economic growth nor education are a guarantee for such a behavioural change. Census should help us review how far we have come in our endeavours and achievements at various levels – national, state, and district. Equally important, 2011 Census should enthuse us to set out goals for 2021 and chalk our strategies for catching up towards a holistic, equitable and inclusive development.

In a special write up for Transparency Review Prof. Ashish Bose expressed his satisfaction with the over all results of Census - 2011.

Census 2011

A new India, but old worries persist

Anil Padmanabhan

While literacy numbers from the census are cause for cheer, child sex ratio shows female foeticide is on the rise

The first set of results of the 2011 Census is a mixed bag on new India: a cause for worry and a reason to be pleased.

On the one hand, it shows that the transition of India—with a population of 1.21 billion—to a younger population profile is on course, nearly three out of four Indians are literate, and the gender gap in literacy is narrowing rapidly. At the same time, the 15th census shows that the practice of female foeticide is on the rise, and worse, is now no longer confined necessarily to a clutch of states or to particular income classes, signalling that it may be time for a radical review of existing public policy that sought to reverse the trend of the declining sex ratio.

Similarly, the continued growth in population, which bumped up population density to 382 persons per sq. km, is a reminder that policy responses, especially in urban areas, to address constraints in transport and housing can no longer be business as usual.

The provisional data was released by census commissioner C. Chandramouli in the capital on Thursday. It showed that the decadal rate of growth of population decelerated further to 17.64% and that the gap with China, the world's most populous country, narrowed to 131 million in 2011 compared to 238 million in 2001.

The Census, a once-in-a-decade effort and conducted for the first time in 1872, canvassed at least a billion people, spanning 28 states and seven Union territories, 7,742 towns and 608,786 villages, using questionnaires drafted in 18 languages, and involved 2.7 million personnel.

The data roll-out will continue over the next two years with the next batch focusing on the rural-urban population profile, gradually unravelling the changing socioeconomic fabric of a country that has seen rapid economic growth in the last decade expanding its gross domestic product to \$1.7 trillion (Rs75.99 trillion).

The big question was whether this was accompanied by a social transformation, particularly in overcoming prejudices. While the overall sex ratio of the country improved by seven points since Census 2001 to 940 in Census 2011—the highest since 1971—it was overshadowed by the continued decline in child sex ratio (for the age group 0-6 years), dropping by 13 points to 914; internationally, a ratio of 950 is considered acceptable. That is, while the sex ratio, females per 1,000 males, has increased for the entire population, it has continued to decline for the category of 0-6 years.

This is the outcome of two phenomena. The improvement in overall sex ratio is because women are now beginning to outlive men. On the other hand, the decline in child sex ratio is primarily because of pre-natal sex selection and the relatively high mortality rate for female children—while for male children it is 64 per 1,000, it is 73 per 1,000 for females.

According to Marc Derveeuw of the United Nations Population Fund, the declining trend continues to point to discrimination against girls, “though there are some improvements in the child sex ratio in some states such as Punjab and Haryana. However, this improvement in ratios in these states is still far below the normal mark.”

A disconcerting feature was that in states such as Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Goa, the situation went from bad to worse, while in those such as Andhra Pradesh it reversed from a healthy situation to drop below the national average.

More worrying is that declining child sex ratios are now spreading to other states. Demographers such as Saraswati Raju, professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, believe that easier availability of technology is the prime reason and that this is not necessarily confined to the higher income groups. Interestingly, this trend is despite the fact that the country has in the last decade witnessed a big jump in literacy levels. While literacy rates for males was up to 82.14%, it was 65.46% for females. More significantly, the gender gap in literacy narrowed. Out of a total of 217.7 million literates added in the decade, females at 110.1 million outnumbered men at 107.6 million. As a result, the gap between male and female

literacy has come down in 2011—states with a gap of less than 10% include Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and Kerala.

“In the last one decade, women’s literacy has increased more than male literacy in terms of percentage points,” said Narendra Jadhav, member, Planning Commission. “This is great news and we hope it will gradually change the education scenario of the country. India needs more women in classrooms.”

Arguing similarly, Vinod Raina, an education expert, said women doing well on the literacy front indicates that efforts to bridge the male-female literacy gap were moving in the right direction. “Though states like Bihar are still behind the national average, they have shown commitment to do well in education. I think by the next census, you will see a paradigm change in literacy, especially female literacy.”

Courtesy: The Mint (1 April 2011)

The Index of Inequality

Ravinder Kaur

First the good news: the overall sex ratio improved from 933 in 2001 to 940 in 2011. There are more women in the Indian population than there were ten years ago. The bad news: there are even fewer girls in the 0-6 age group than there were in 2010. The number went down from 927 in 2001 to 914 in 2011 — a decline of 13 points.

While the perennial question — why don’t Indians want daughters — continues to stare us in the face, we need to dissect the provisional child sex ratio figures released by the census commissioner a little carefully to understand the implications.

One positive trend that may go unnoticed in the swirling sea of declines in 24 out of our 35 states/

UTs is the improvement in many of the forever guilty northern states — especially Punjab and Haryana. Chandigarh and Delhi, the two much maligned cities, have also shown improvement even though Delhi’s — by only one point — hardly calls for celebration. But there is improvement in Himachal Pradesh as also in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu; the latter two are in many ways similar to the northern states. Haryana and Punjab at 830 and 846 still remain states with the worst sex ratios and with J&K joining them, continue to contribute a large share of the country’s female deficit; but their upward movement finally should make us take heart.

How about the rest of the country? It seems that while the north may be improving, the rest of the

Ashish Bose, on Census 2011

1) On the over all direction of population growth

It is a welcome sign and the direction is indicative of eventual population stabilization by 2045 or so

2) Policy initiatives called for to correct girl child birth ratio

We need a variety of interventions by the governments, NGOs, civil society and above all, the people themselves. Bureaucrats cannot usher in social transformation. Some initiatives taken by the government must have helped to fight the phenomenon of vanishing girls but these are not enough.

Besides, the impact will be felt after a time lag and not immediately. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar gave free cycles to school girls, which pushed up the school enrolment rate of girls but Bihar has still the lowest female literacy rate, slightly higher than Rajasthan as per the 2011 census.

3) In the context of BIMARU states

My analysis confirms that what I told Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi about focusing attention on BIMARU states in 1985 still holds good today. In support I just give you some figures for literacy and you can see for yourself that the BIMARU states are at the bottom. For social change, I attach more importance to female literacy rather than male literacy.

country is resolutely marching on the path of daughter elimination, continuing trends that began as early as 1971 in some states. It is difficult to explain why north-eastern (and largely tribal) states such as Nagaland, Manipur, Sikkim and Tripura should be showing further and large declines from 1991 and 2001 figures. Other eastern states, Assam and Meghalaya, also show smaller but definite declines. States in this part of the country are generally taken to be more female friendly than the rest of India. And even though most of them continue to have above normal sex ratios (higher than 950) the declines need to be taken as warning signals. West Bengal and Orissa have also continued their 2001 downward trend. Another shocker is the continuing dips in the central Indian tribal states — Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have declined and so has the hill state of Uttarakhand. STs, as a social group, have had robust sex ratios even though there was a decline between 1991-2001, from 985 to 973. The declines in both the north-eastern and central Indian states, states with tribal populations, means that ST ratios are likely to fall further. Then there are the outliers: A huge drop of 78 points in J&K? And small UTs like Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu have dived by 66 and 16 points respectively.

Can there be one common explanation as to why child sex ratios have been dipping around the country for several decades? Despite all our differences — of language and culture, kinship and marriage, wheat growing and rice growing areas, lower and higher castes, nomadic, tribal and hill people — are we now simply united by our desire to get rid of our daughters?

Unfortunately, the census has as yet not published the critical sex ratio at birth (SRB) figures for 2011, that is, answers to the census question: children born, by sex, in the year immediately preceding the census. This ratio will tell us whether the promising signs of a turnaround shown by the sample registration system (SRS) data are corroborated across the country. If the sex ratio at birth for 2011 does show an improvement, then there are two — good and bad news — conclusions to be drawn: sex selective abortions may have reduced but neglect continues unabated with post-birth discrimination leading to

further attrition of girl children up to age six (and perhaps higher). Many rich states like Punjab and poor states like Madhya Pradesh show higher girl child mortality. Madhya Pradesh continues to record cases of female infanticide.

There is also an alternate explanation. The statistic on the sex ratio, 0-6 years, in 2011, is actually an average of sorts of the SRB in the previous seven years. These seven years are centred in 2007, and if there has been an improving trend then the 2004-2010, average of 914 means a higher number for SRB

for 2010. The Census 2001 number for SRB was 906, that is, the census SRB in 2010 will most likely be in the high 920s, possibly higher. So while the child sex ratio shows a decline, the SRB will show an improvement provided the census data reflects the trend upwards in the SRS data. This would be reason for hope that the trend perceived at the tail end of the last decade could become long-lasting.

But to return to the million dollar question on everybody's mind — why does a growing India continue to discriminate against girls? Interestingly, we are not alone in this — China, growing faster than us has a worse problem while rich countries like South Korea have only recently managed to get normal sex ratios at birth. New work by French demographer Christophe Guilmoto shows that the malady may be spreading to other parts of Asia — Vietnam, Singapore,

Armenia, Albania, Azerbaijan and Georgia show masculine child sex ratios. But this should not be cause for comfort to us!

The new dip in the child sex ratio also signals a general policy failure and an inability to control sex determination. Can laws and palliative policies address the root causes of the malaise? The answer is no. As I have reiterated several times, it can only be the hard work of ensuring equal rights for girls and women — whether in property or in other entitlements such as education, nutrition and health care that will drive the turnaround. Parents have to value daughters — only then will they survive. Also, society has to learn to acknowledge the contributions of women and girls — and this has to be learned behaviour as the market doesn't seem to be doing it very well.

Courtesy: The Indian Express (4 April 2011)



Maharashtra way behind in budget transparency

Meena Menon

Study ranks states on availability of budget documents, completeness of information

Maharashtra ranks seventh among 10 States in a study of transparency in State budgets released in February.

The State plan does not provide much information on the Scheduled Caste sub-plan and does not share details of government strategies and programmes for the development of the Scheduled Castes.

The study was conducted by the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA), New Delhi, and Samarthan, Maharashtra, in collaboration with other organisations. Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh were selected for the study, an attempt at gauging government practices and processes. The scope for budget transparency refers to the openness of the budget process and the scope for public involvement in this process, the report said.

Researchers looked at reports of various types since 2007-08 and circulated questionnaires to the government and people's representatives. Gujarat comes first in the overall budget transparency, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The study has ranked States on the basis of the availability of budget documents, completeness of the information, facilitating understanding of this information, timeliness of information, audit and performance assessment, scope for legislative scrutiny, practices relating to budgeting for disadvantaged sections and fiscal decentralisation.

The report concludes that all State governments need to adopt a wide range of practices and processes to improve public access to budget information and develop strategies to make these documents available to the public. They should also bring out a key to budget documents, a separate statement on funds received from the Centre or external agencies, a statement on revenue foregone due to tax concessions and an action taken report on the observations of the Comptroller and Auditor-General on the budget.

The report also advises governments to hold consultations with legislators on the demands

submitted by the State to the Finance Commission and the Planning Commission and present detailed information on fund allocations to the Scheduled Caste sub-plan, tribal sub-plan, women's component plan, besides presenting disaggregated information on devolution of funds from the State budget to the local bodies and a district-wise breakup of allocations and expenditures in the budget.

While Maharashtra has constituted a State Finance Commission (SFC) at regular intervals, it does not make public the memoranda submitted by the State to the Finance Commission or the Planning Commission, the report says.

It also provides for a district-wise breakup of allocations and expenditures of the plan budget.

However, it does not present the action

taken report or the recommendations of the SFC to the legislature; when it does, it is delayed. The executive does not hold consultations with representatives of the rural and urban local bodies while formulating the budget.

Maharashtra's budget documents do not provide information on the district-wise break-up of the non-plan allocations and expenditures. There is no information on women's component plan or gender budgeting, and there is no separate statement for the Scheduled Caste sub-plan. Furthermore, it does not share complete information on funds received by the State from the Central government or external agencies which are routed outside the State treasury and not reflected in the budget.

The State government does not release to the public any report on the steps taken to address audit observations, for example, in the CAG reports, or give information on revenues foregone due to tax concessions.

The positives, the report says, are that Maharashtra's treasury is linked to the Internet and detailed information on receipts and disbursements are provided on a monthly basis.

All CAG reports are made public in a timely manner, and there is a district-specific economic survey and information on the tribal sub-plan.

Courtesy: The Hindu (4 April 2011)

- **These States should adopt practices to improve public access to budget information**
- **They should also produce a key to budget documents and a statement on funds**

A year on, a long way to go on RTE, says HRD Report

Express News Service

The Union Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry's first report card on the nationwide implementation of the Right to Education Act shows that while small steps have been taken across states, there is still a long way to go.

The RTE came into effect on April 1, 2010, and promises free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14 years.

Step one towards implementation requires each state to notify RTE rules. But while only 10 states have done it over one year, 15 states have only managed to prepare drafts rules.

A mere 11 states have set up the State Commission for Child Protection Rights (SCPCR), which will operate as the grievance redressal authority in each state.

According to 2009-10 data compiled by the Ministry, total enrolment at the primary level is 133 million. But there are still 8 million children out of schools between 6 and 14 years — the target age group.

Twenty-one per cent teachers do not have professional qualifications, 9 per cent schools have single teachers and 41 per cent primary schools have a pupil-teacher ratio of over 40:1.

While these factors obviously require attention, state governments have been more active on other counts.

Sample this: as many as 27 states have announced a no-detention policy in keeping with RTE provisions, another 28 states have banned corporal punishment and in 26 states, there will be no board examination up to elementary level.

As many as 18 states have banned private tuitions and another 18 have banned screening procedures and capitation fee for admissions.

Bringing in greater accountability and better work ethics for teachers, 21 states have specified minimum working days and teaching hours.

Union HRD Minister Kapil Sibal has expressed optimism about the way RTE is being implemented and pointed to the increasing literacy figures thrown up in the latest Census.

He said while some international organisations had said India would not be able to meet the Millennium Development Goals of 72 per cent literacy by 2015, the country had already notched a 74.4 per cent literacy rate in 2011 itself.

The Centre on its part has claimed a number of logistical issues have been sorted out in the first year.

With the Centre assuring a financial commitment of Rs 2.31 lakh crore over five years starting from 2010-2015, the HRD Ministry has also finetuned the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan framework to correspond with RTE provisions.

Of the 5.08 lakh teachers estimated to be required over the next three years, recruitment plan for 4.55 lakh teachers has been approved.

There is, however, a definite shortage of classrooms. According to estimates, 14.25 lakh additional classrooms would be needed while the Centre has managed to approve construction of only 2.74 lakh classrooms.

Courtesy: The Indian Express (3 April 2011)

Women empowerment still a distant dream, lament activists

Ananya Panda

Amidst all tall talks of women empowerment, the ground reality seems to be discordant even in the country's Capital where the Mahila Panchayats seem to have added some verve to the movement, but it is still a long way to go.

The contradiction found clear resonance on the eve of International Women's Day at Talkatora Stadium where hundreds of women, from various resettlement colonies and panchayats gathered to celebrate the spirit of women. The empowered lot might have managed to convey a hunky-dory picture as far as the women's status is concerned.

On the occasion, the Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit pointed out that the contribution of women goes unrecognised even as more than 75 per cent of work is done by them.

"They work both within households as well as outside, but their share doesn't come to the focus, especially because their labour is covered under the unorganised sector. It is important to value their work by quantifying their output through monetary compensation," stressed Dikshit.

According to women activists, the major roadblock in achieving the desired status for women, be it on

income, respect or overall rights, is the patriarchal society where women are considered to be a burden and a sympathised lot.

What's more, families marry off their daughters early to avoid investment in education and dowry, with more than 50 per cent of marriages involving girl children below 18 years, said director of Centre for Social Research Ranjana Kumari, while speaking to The Tribune.

"With an alarming dowry death happening every day in the country, still the urban rich and the educated class marry off their daughters with dowry," observed Kumari.

She expressed concern over the dilution of the dowry laws, with the proposed amendments of making the IPC section 498 (a) non-cognisable, bailable and compoundable.

While regressive attitude and male-dominance of men over family matters poses a major hurdle to women's coming forward for their rights, prevalence of dowry practice irrespective of class and income ladder along with insecure spaces are the main factors behind the disturbing trend of rising crimes against women.

Citing a recent study by International Centre for Research on Women, Kalpana Vishwanath of Jagori,

an NGO, said, "Indian men constitute the highest percentage among men who do not believe in women empowerment, thus highlighting the duality existing in society. The way to a dignified and secured future is still distant and for this the operational network has to be widened."

In view of the increasing cases of women assault and sexual harassment, measures like involving women in the transport sector would help as a majority of such incidents are reported from buses and public spaces.

While admitting to the fact, the chairperson of Delhi Commission for Women, Barkha Singh said, "The rising crime against women needs to be addressed and on our part we have been mobilising women through security training of 43 Mahila Panchayats."

"By broadening the network of safety steps, women would have safer access to public places. Conditions have to be created and in this regard, there have been transport training programmes for women.

The idea is to get women into transport sector so that public places and vehicles would be more accessible. This would bring about an image change," asserted Vishwanath.

Courtesy: The Tribune (7 March 2011)

Two Indias in the making: IPL India and BPL India: Yechury

Opening the reply to the President's Motion of Thanks on behalf of the Left parties in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Sitaram Yechury, demanded the stopping of the "loot" of public money in the form of concessions to corporates and high-end taxpayers.

This relief, worth several lakhs of rupees, should be used to narrow the rich-poor divide, he added.

"There are two Indias are in the making — IPL (the Indian Premier League) India and BPL (Below the Poverty Line) India," he said. "If this tax concession had been collected and invested in food security and health, we would have generated employment-demand and growth."

Courtesy: The Hindu (23 Feb 2011)

'Poor can't lose land to benefit wealthy'

Times News Network

Courts shouldn't be mere umpires, must test legality of acquisition: SC

The Supreme Court has said it will subject the government's land acquisition drives to strict scrutiny as it does not want poor people to be rendered landless to benefit a few wealthy or influential people.

"If public purpose can be satisfied by not rendering the common man homeless and by exploring other avenues of acquisition, the courts, before sanctioning

an acquisition, must exercise its power of judicial review, focus its attention on the concept of social and economic justice," said a bench comprising Justices G S Singhvi and A K Ganguly.

Quashing acquisition of land by Uttar Pradesh government to set up a jail in Shahjahanpur, the court said though right to property was not a fundamental right, enjoyment of most other rights were closely

related to property rights. “It has to be accepted that without right to some property, other rights become illusory,” the bench said.

It noted that citizens’ fundamental rights have been expanded by judicial interpretations. “This court is of the opinion that the concept of public purpose in land acquisition has to be viewed from an angle which is consistent with the concept of welfare state,” the court said.

“Any attempt by the state to acquire land by promoting a public purpose to benefit a particular group of people or to serve any particular interest of a large section of people especially of the common

people defeats the very concept of public purpose,” said Justice Ganguly, writing the judgment for the bench.

Justice Ganguly said courts, especially high courts and the Supreme Court, while examining the question of public importance on the touchstones of constitutional ethos and expanded fundamental rights, “cannot afford to act as mere umpires”.

“In other words, public purpose must be viewed through the prism of constitutional values,” the bench said while suggesting that courts subject action under Land Acquisition Act to close scrutiny.

Courtesy: The Times of India (9 March 2011)

The siren song of cash transfers

Jayati Ghosh

Cash transfers cannot and should not replace the public provision of essential goods and services, but rather supplement them

Cash transfers are the latest fad of the international development industry, as the preferred strategy for poverty reduction. And now Indian policymakers are busy catching up. The idea was mooted in the Government’s Economic Survey for 2010-11, and the Finance Minister made an explicit announcement in his budget speech for replacing some subsidies on goods with cash transfers.

So what exactly is this strategy all about? In the recent international experience, cash transfers can be conditional (subject to the households meeting certain demands) or unconditional; targeted (given only to households or individuals meeting particular criteria) or universal. But essentially they amount to just what they sound like — the transfer of money to people by governments, rather than the provision of goods and services.

The basic idea sounds so simple and easy that a toddler could think of it: Why are people poor? Because they have no money. So let’s give them money — then they won’t be poor anymore!

The proponents of cash transfers tend to present this as a radically new idea, but it actually has a long history. Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* specifies a system of taxation payments from the rich in order to enable transfer payments to the poor, including not only financial assistance during calamities but welfare payments to the chronically indigent and those unable to earn their own livelihood. Islamic rulers in the Middle Ages were required to follow the tenets of *zakat*, using state revenues to provide income transfers for the poor, the elderly, orphans, widows and the disabled. Other historical examples abound.

The purpose of cash transfer schemes is to provide poor people with money and give them the freedom to choose what to do with it. Of course, this then

generates other choices that have to be made: Who gets the transfers? How much do they get? If they are universal, that usually spreads the money around rather thinly, so they account for very little. But if they are targeted, then the familiar problems of targeting (unfair exclusion, unjustified inclusion, large administration costs, possibilities of leakage) all become significant.

If they are to be effective at all, cash transfers have to be assured, relatively easy to deliver and monitor, and large enough to affect household income. But that also means that they have to be reasonably significant chunks of public spending. And this begs the question of what expenditures they are replacing.

Several of the more well-known recent “success stories” involve targeting and conditions on recipients that range from light to onerous. Brazil’s *Bolsa Familia* is a grant provided to families with less than a threshold monthly income, with the requirement of attendance at government clinics and 85 per cent school attendance. The *Oportunidades* programme in Mexico is a highly conditional cash transfer system based on a complex system of eligibility (age, gender and level of education of each family member, electricity and tap water, household assets) and requiring family members, especially mothers, to meet various time-intensive conditions like attending meetings and providing “voluntary” community labour.

There is no doubt that progressive redistributive transfers are desirable. Indeed, redistribution is a major, even critical element of any fiscal system of taxation and public expenditure. Minimum income schemes for the destitute, pension payments for the elderly, child support grants, unemployment benefits and other forms of social protection are obviously desirable in themselves and constitute requirements

for any civilised society, even the poorest one. They also contribute in the short term to more effective demand and therefore have positive multiplier effects, and in the long term to healthier, better educated and more secure populations.

So the question then is not whether or not to oppose cash transfers in general, but rather what specific importance to give them in an overall strategy of development and poverty reduction. Cash transfers cannot and should not replace the public provision of essential goods and services, but rather supplement them. However, the current tendency is to see this as a further excuse for the reduction of publicly provided services, and replace them with the administratively easier option of doling out money.

In many countries, the argument has become one of encouraging governments to give the poor cash transfers that will allow them to access whatever goods and services they want that are generated by private markets, rather than struggling to ensure public provision.

Such a position completely misses the point. In Brazil, for example, *Bolsa Familia* can be based on minimum school attendance only because there are enough public (and free) schools of reasonable quality that children of poor households can attend, which in turn means prior and continuing public investment in quality schooling and teacher education. Similarly, providing small amounts of cash to allow people to visit local private quacks will hardly compensate for the absence of a reasonably well-funded public health system that provides access to preventive and curative services. Cash transfers are less effective in periods of rising prices of essential goods. And so on.

This is important, because ultimately social and economic policies are all about choices, and this is most starkly evident than in the allocations of public expenditure. Governments typically do not have the luxury of being able to ensure enough spending to provide good quality public services and provide cash transfers that are large enough to be at all meaningful.

In most developing countries, the choices to be made are not only about having good quality schools versus transfers that incentivise parents to send their children to school but even more basic choices: road or health clinic; electricity or piped water; schools or higher education institution; one airport or many railway stations; this region or that one?

It is evident that the agenda of the UPA government is to bring in cash transfers to replace public distribution of various essential items, including food. To begin with, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee has proposed that the existing system of subsidies for kerosene and fertilizers be done away with and

replaced by direct cash transfers to chosen beneficiaries.

In his speech, he said “The government provides subsidies, notably on fuel and food grains, to enable the common man to have access to these basic necessities at affordable prices. A significant proportion of subsidised fuel does not reach the targeted beneficiaries and there is large scale diversion of subsidised kerosene oil... To ensure greater efficiency, cost effectiveness and better delivery for both kerosene and fertilizers, the government will move towards direct transfer of cash subsidy to people living below poverty line in a phased manner.”

There are two immediate problems that are evident in this approach. First, what ensures that the amount of the transfer will be sufficient to fully compensate for any price increases in the newly deregulated markets of these goods? Second, how will the government ensure that the cash transfer actually goes to those who were intended to be the beneficiaries of the subsidised kerosene and fertilizer?

The second problem is well known in India, where all public delivery systems have some element of leakage and diversion. How much simpler and easier it will be to divert cash than goods that have to be stored and resold!

The government seems to be under the delusion that a technological fix (such as a Unique Identity number provided to all residents) will somehow eliminate all the potential problems of targeting. But determining who is actually poor and which farmers deserve the cash subsidy are socio-economic decisions that are affected by a complex set of political and social forces as well as power relations. Technology simply cannot address those, they require very different responses.

In India, where much of this basic part of the development project still remains woefully incomplete, the urge to adopt this latest international development fashion involves several risks. In the case of choice between direct public provision of some essential goods (like food and fuel) and cash transfers to consumers instead, the most immediate threat is that the rising prices in these deregulated markets will make such goods unaffordable for those who need them most.

Posing the problem in this way is also misleading, because it completely leaves out the feasible and much more just alternative of universal provision of some essential items, which would ensure better access and create public pressure for greater accountability in public delivery.

Courtesy: The Hindu (2 March 2011)



Annual Report of Information Commission – AP State

The number of appeals against officers not willing to give information under the RTI Act is a good indication for how entrenched the Act is at grassroots and how enthusiastic people are about its reliability. Andhra Pradesh being one of the States where civil society has been active, since the Act in the last five years, should provide a good indication. Going by the annual report of the Information Commission of AP for 2010, the number of appeals from rural had increased only by one percent over 2009. But, 43 percent of total appeals the Commission received in 2010 were from rural.

Even more encouraging is that 87 percent of appeals during the year were from ordinary citizens, 4.4 percent were from media, 3.5 percent from employees, 2.3 percent from civil society groups and, interestingly, 1.7 percent were from political parties. What changes will come in this trend in the coming years need to be seen.

Of 4863 appeals received, in addition to pending 2679 appeals from previous year, the Commission could take up (2640) hardly around half. Most of these appeals involve revenue departments, Municipalities, Panchayatraj and education departments. Officers in these services were reluctant to give information.

And yet the Commission recommended action during the year against only one officer. But although showcause notice was issued against 430 officers of these departments, 10 percent of them were imposed personality. The AP Commission is having only the Chief for the last six months and almost defunct as the State Government could not appoint new Commissioners in place of the three who retired in November 2010. Andhra Pradesh has 1,67,417 PIOs in all; of them hardly ten percent had ever any training in RTI. During 2010, they all received 1,01,453 applications under RTI.

NBR

RTI: NAC gets DoPT on board

The National Advisory Council led by Sonia Gandhi has been successful in bringing the department of personnel and training (DoPT) on board on the amendments to the RTI Act suggested by it.

In the meeting of the NAC on Thursday, the working group on RTI headed by Aruna Roy informed that the DoPT had agreed to most of the recommendations suggested by it after several rounds of arguments.

Harsh Mander, convenor, Working Group on National Food Security Bill (NFSB) briefed the NAC on the progress made in the drafting of the bill.

It was agreed that the NAC should reiterate its earlier recommendations on inclusion of SC/ ST and specifying the priority and general categories under the NFSB to the ministry of rural development.

Members of the NAC will also give their inputs to the formulation of BPL survey methodology so that the recommendations of the NAC are operationalised.

The convenor of the Working Group on Land Acquisition and Resettlement and Rehabilitation made a presentation on the outstanding issues related to proposed bills on the subject.

Courtesy: The Asian Age (25 March 2011)

RTI activists: Civil society cadre!

It was RTI activists across the country who spearheaded the recent crusade for Lok Pal Bill culminating in the mass mobilization at Delhi's Jantar Mantar under the leadership of Anna Hazare. That week long countrywide showcasing of concern against corruption signaled the arrival of a new and proactive cadre of RTI volunteers the kind that the country has not seen before in recent years in any other context said Dr N Bhaskara Rao addressing one of the gathering at Hyderabad on April 6, 2011.

CIC firm on nodal officers

Tanu Sharma

Despite the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) objections, the Central Information Commission (CIC) is unwilling to soften its stand on the appointment of transparency officers in each ministry and public department for the effective implementation of RTI Act.

The CIC insists the government must rise above technicalities and appoint these officers who will act as a “single nodal point” for initiating changes to bring in more transparency and accountability envisaged in the Act.

Conveying its decision to the government, the commission said: “The appointment of transparency officers will pave the way for the public authorities to bring in systematic changes in their working.”

In its reply, the CIC took exception to the DoPT’s objection that the suggestion to appoint these officers was “innocuous” at this stage.

The CIC in its full bench meeting in November 2010 had “desired” that the government designate one senior officer as transparency officer who will be the interface for the commission and oversee implementation of Section 4.

Chief Information Commissioner Satyananda Mishra said there is tardy implementation of Section 4 despite that fact that the RTI Act is more than five years old.

Raising the red flag, the DoPT had said the appointment of such officers had the potential to create “a new bureaucracy within ministries/ public authorities” but the CIC brushed aside the objections.

“We see no reason to change our view. Our intention was not technical and the government must not get into technicalities and should focus on earnest implementation of Section 4 and appoint transparency officers,” Mishra said.

Courtesy: The Indian Express (30 March 2011)

Citizens may get RTI info for PPP projects

Chetan Chauhan

Pvt players have been reluctant to provide info though they have received land or funds from Govt

The private players in the government’s public private partnership (PPP) programmes may soon have to furnish information under the Right to Information Act.

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has asked the Planning Commission to make a suitable RTI clause in agreements being signed with the Private partners under the government’s PPP schemes.

“We feel, once such conditions are built into the PPP agreements and the private parties willingly subject themselves to these conditions, a lot of confusion in this regard will go and the citizens will have the access to vital information regarding projects which affect their lives,” said Chief Information Commissioner Satyendra Mishra, in a letter to Planning Commission deputy chairperson Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

The RTI Act provides that private parties, which are substantially financed by the government will have to appoint public authorities to provide information to citizens under the law.

However, the private parties have been reluctant claiming that they are not covered under the RTI law

even through they have received land or funds from the government. The CIC to its astonishment has found that even the ministries have not been willing to provide information regarding the PPP projects claiming that the private bodies were outside the government control.

To end the confusion, the CIC has suggested that every PPP project including draft agreement should be published for inviting public comments and objections before finalizing them. The CIC had suggested two options to implement the RTI law for PPP projects.

The PPP agreement should include a necessary condition that the Special Purpose Vehicle or any other entity which comes into being as a result of the PPP would be a public authority within the meaning of section 2 (h) of the RTI Act.

Second, the Central Public Information Officer of the ministry or department undertaking a PPP project will be equally responsible for providing the information sought.

The move, the CIC believes, will improve the accountability of such entities to both the government and public at large.

Courtesy: The Hindustan Times (2 March 2011)

Public interest outweighs privacy concerns: Outlook

J. Venkatesan

The public interest outweighs private interest and even assuming that there are some so-called private conversations in the Niira Radia tapes, their publication could not be challenged, Outlook magazine told the Supreme Court on Wednesday.

In its response to the notice on industrialist Ratan Tata's petition questioning the publication of the tapes on the ground that his right to privacy had been violated, the magazine said: "There are no conversations that are strictly private or separate from the other conversations that have been reported."

A Bench of Justices G.S. Singhvi and A.K. Ganguly posted the matter to February 24 after senior counsel Harish Salve, appearing for Mr. Tata, sought time to file an additional affidavit. The court took on record the affidavits filed by Outlook and Open magazines.

Earlier, Attorney-General G.E. Vahanvati produced in a sealed cover the original complaint on the basis of which income tax authorities tapped the conversations of the corporate lobbyist.

Vinod Panicker, authorised signatory of Outlook, in his affidavit said: "The recorded conversations that are [the] subject matter of the present proceedings evidently deal with matters of serious public interest and concern, since these conversations relate to matters of good governance, possible corruption in the highest echelons of government, and secret and baleful influences on centres of power. It is absolutely essential that such matters be open for public debate."

The affidavit said Mr. Tata "is a public figure, being a captain of industry who controls influences and affects the fortunes of widely held public

corporations, and who has by his own volition entered into public debate by writing open letters on the subject matter of 2G spectrum allocation to other public figures."

On his allegation that corporate houses owning media businesses were conducting surrogate corporate wars against companies in which he had an interest, the affidavit said: "The petitioner fails or deliberately omits to spell out any specific facts or connection or nexus between the media houses that have released the petitioner's conversation and the alleged corporate wars being waged against his companies."

It said: "Ms. Radia was suspected of being involved in a criminal conspiracy which makes it in the highest public interest to disclose her activities and conversations. The petitioner has sought to block and gag the media by indirectly asking governmental authorities to do so, while saying that it is not his intention to block the publication of certain conversations."

Contending that the "law does not permit imposing of prior restraint upon publication of matter which is the subject matter of this writ petition," the affidavit sought the dismissal of Mr. Tata's petition.

Open magazine publisher R. Rajmohan, in his affidavit, said: "The conversations published were in the context of a public debate regarding the role of lobbyists and their proximity to influential people, and therefore, the public had a legitimate interest in receiving information regarding the same."

It said: "The publication of the conversations was only to show the influence commanded by lobbyists, and an integral part of establishing the said influence was to show their relationship with corporate entities among others which enhanced their influence".

Courtesy: The Hindu (3 Feb 2011)

States fail to utilise crores meant for urban poor under JNNURM Schemes

ENS Economic Bureau

What are they?

BSUP: Basic Services to the Urban Poor is a sub-mission under JNNURM. With a mission period of seven years (2005-12), BSUP aims at focusing attention on integrated development by providing improved housing, water supply and sanitation.

IHSDP: Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme, another sub-mission under JNNURM, aims at combining existing schemes for having an integrated approach in improving conditions of urban slum dwellers who do not possess adequate shelter.

The housing and urban poverty alleviation ministry has said 25 states and Union Territories covered under the Basic Services for the Urban Poor (BSUP) scheme have utilised less than 50 per cent of funds allocated to them. In her reply to Parliament, housing minister Kumari Selja on Tuesday said the government has issued advisories to all states to draw up action plans and “expedite the commissioning/ implementation of projects”. States have also been told to submit plans for cancellations of projects by March 31.

The BSUP scheme, a sub-mission of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), was launched by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in December 2005, to improve conditions for urban slum dwellers in 63 identified mission cities in 31 states and UTs. For the seven-year period (2005-12), the government had sanctioned 479 projects for over 10 lakh dwelling units at an approved cost of Rs 27,813.58 crore under BSUP. Similarly, of the 33 states and UTs covered under JNNURM sub-mission Integrated Housing and Slum Development Programme (IHDSP), 21 have utilised less than 50 per cent of allocated funds. With Rs 9,957.72 crore to be disbursed under the IHDSP for 977 projects to build over 5 lakh dwelling units in the 2005-12 period, the government had Rs 37,771.30 crore for the two schemes under JNNURM. Selja told Parliament that while utilisation of funds under the schemes has been satisfactory, “the progress is uneven” between states and UTs. The minister, enumerating the reasons for under-utilisation of funds, said it was due to non-

furnishing of project proposals for sanctioning; slow progress of projects due to procedural problems; lack of availability of litigation-free land; lack of capacity of local bodies to implement projects; and lack of additional financial resources to meet cost escalation.

The worst performing state under BSUP is Punjab, which utilised just Rs 26.4 crore of the allocated Rs 444.46 crore as on February 18 this year from December 2005, a mere 6 per cent, government data showed. However, according to data released by the Planning Commission in 2007, Goa utilised 10 per cent of its allocated funds, Rs 1.15 crore of Rs 11.43 crore, in the same period. Other states that have performed poorly are Bihar, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh, which used 15 per cent of their allocated funds. States that utilised over 50 per cent of allocated funds under BSUP include Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Kerala, Nagaland and Sikkim.

All UTs under-utilised funds allocated under the IHDSP. While Chandigarh and Lakshadweep didn’t utilise a paisa of the Rs 20.56 crore and Rs 21.03 crore allocated to them respectively, Daman and Diu utilised 1 per cent (Rs 0.29 crore of Rs 21.97 crore) and Dadra & Nagar Haveli just 8 per cent (Rs 1.68 crore of Rs 20.56 crore). Among states, Punjab was once again the worst performer, utilising Rs 16.89 crore of Rs 172.56 crore allocated, just 10 per cent.

A technical group constituted by the ministry had estimated a shortage of 2.47 crore urban housing units at the end of the 10th Five Year Plan (2007-08).

Courtesy: The Indian Express (24 Feb 2011)

Digitised info will support RTI mandate, says Pitroda

The govt is contemplating launching an e-office drive where files will go electronic. With 32 million cases pending in courts across the country, courts will be computerised for speedy delivery of justice

In the age of Right to Information (RTI), all information must be digitised, believes Sam Pitroda, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Infrastructure, Innovation and Information.

Addressing parliamentarians on Thursday, Pitroda said, “Information is not available in the format that we need. We need to digitise information and make it available in real time to meet the needs of the 21st century and in keeping with the mandate of RTI”, said innovation is key, if information infrastructure is to be geared towards providing better services.

The Government, he said, is contemplating launching an e-office drive where files would go electronic. With 32 million cases pending in courts across the

country, he added, courts would be computerised for speedy delivery of justice. While some parliamentarians expressed doubts on how information infrastructure would help solve water scarcity, Pitroda replied, “satellite imagery and geo-hydrological survey are key to finding water”.

He said, “Today there is technology in everything we do, be it is health, governance”. Stressing on optimum utilisation of the over one million kilometres of fibre optics laid by telecom companies across the length and breadth of the country, the IT czar added that the purpose is to use them for data connection. As on date, 250,000 villages are connected through fibre optics while there are plans to build a GIS

platform to identify every asset available in the country. "This will be launched on a nation-wide platform at a cost of `1,000 crore", he said.

Later in the day, Pitroda presided over an official ceremony organised at the French Embassy where a C11 telescope was presented by French company Uranoscope de France to the BM Birla Science Centre at Hyderabad. Speaking on the occasion, he said, "If inclusive innovation and the spirit of scientific inquiry are to continue to flourish in India, it is essential for young Indians to look beyond existing tools and technology towards next generation advances and opportunities".

Pitroda informed the parliamentarians that the National Innovation Council set up by the Prime Minister would focus on aspects like making innovation a platform, linking it to inclusive growth, creating right ecosystem to encourage innovation and increasing discourses on innovation. The council will raise "a billion dollar innovation fund" through private funding and set up innovation councils in states. "We have identified 40 innovation clusters like diamond clusters and jute clusters and universities will be brought closer to these clusters," he said.

Courtesy: The Pioneer (25 March 2011)

When politics helps

Political parties must step in to protect whistleblowers and activists

Niyamat Ansari, an activist monitoring the use of NREGS funds in Jharkhand, was murdered after he unearthed massive embezzlement of funds from the government's flagship scheme for the rural poor. This is probably the fifth NREGS-related murder in the last four years. Most of the victims are whistleblowers, killed by locally powerful people who have their hands in the till. In India, whistleblowing is a risky proposition. Today, the right to information (RTI) is guaranteed by law, but at least 10 RTI activists have been killed in the last two years trying to exercise this right. In a horribly tragic way, the spate of killings of people exercising their right to information to expose wrongdoing shows that the RTI is working and starting to hurt the corrupt. NREGS-related killings are more complicated, and the victims, like Ansari, are almost always members of voluntary organisations that are trying to make this vast scheme more efficient and free of leakages. The perpetrators, it can safely be assumed, want just the opposite: to siphon away as much cash as possible. How can these killings be stopped?

Many people, including Aruna Roy, the pioneer of the RTI legislation, believe that the establishment of an antigraft ombudsman called the Lokpal at the Centre and the states will help. It could, only if the government can stop dithering over the draft Bill and make it into law. But the Lokpal will not be sufficient to protect whistleblowers and those exercising the RTI to unearth wrongdoing. That can only happen at a political level, with parties putting their organisational strength behind the activists. Today, the monitoring of many schemes including the NREGS is done by small groups of well-meaning people who take great risks to do what they do. They need to be backed by local political forces to go about their task fearlessly. This might sound contradictory, because local elites are nearly always behind corruption rackets. But since politics abhors a vacuum, there will always be a political force opposed to the corrupt one. Political empowerment emancipates, and mobilisation for NREGS and RTI is a means to empowerment.

Courtesy: The Economic Times (5 March 2011)

RTI campaign changed the face of Chhattisgarh village panchayat

Moch village panchayat in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh has written a positive script – greater political accountability, transparency and social change using RTI as a means of change. Earlier, elected officials avoided the area. "The conflicts and clashes, mostly caste-based and political, were so frequent that the administration was forced to set up a police chowki here," said Shiva Dhruve (35), a resident of Moch, Moch panchayat consists of two villages and Moch is the larger of the two villages, around 140 km east of Raipur. The light

at the end of a seemingly endless tunnel came in the form of a campaign by the NGO Chhattisgarh Citizens' Initiative. Initially, there was resistance to change.

Moch panchayat's bad image followed the NGO volunteers. "Our pleas were seldom heard by ministers or officials – till we began filling RTI application," said Janki Kashyap (37), a member of a self-help group that serves mid-day meals to schools in the villages. "Everyone listens now," she added. The volunteers slowly gained the trust of the villagers

as their problems were addressed. RTI applications came in handy when faced with official apathy. A drive to end social disputes also began. During the panchayat elections in January, the RTI volunteers compiled a development pact, listing issues faced by the villagers after discussions with them. Appeals were made to candidates to sign it a part of their declarations to fulfil after winning. Not everyone obliged. But the voters made it clear whose signed the pact. Of them, 14 winners, including 20-years-

old Rameshwari, who was elected sarpanch, were RTI volunteers. Leading by example, Rameshwari set up an RTI centre at her home. "You name any welfare or development scheme – villagers are no longer deprived," said Prateek Pandey, convener of the Chhattisgarh Citizens' said J.D. Madawi, manager at a local bank. "Any delay in their payment under the welfare programme is inquired". The villages' example has stirred the administration into informing the panchayat about the various schemes.

Pvt Cos outside RTI purview

Montek rejects CIC request to make PPP agreements public

The CIC had written to the Plan panel that all future contracts under PPP should be made public since taxpayers' money is involved. At present, the RTI Act does not refer to PPP contracts

The Planning Commission has rejected the Central Information Commission's suggestion to bring public-private agreements (PPP) under the ambit of the RTI Act.

Reacting to Chief Information Commissioner Satyananda Mishra's letter asking for PPP documents to be made public, Plan panel deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia said: "Right to information is not right to information of private companies. It is right to information on public authorities."

"How can a concessionaire, a private company under PPP, perform its job? What it does to perform this...is not a relevant issue from RTI Act's point of view," Ahluwalia said.

Disagreeing with the contention of the CIC, Ahluwalia said, "RTI applications do not apply to the person who is performing the contract, that is a private

company. These (RTI requests) should concentrate on the public sector component of a PPP project."

Mishra had written to the Planning Commission that all future contracts under PPP should be made public since public money is involved. At present, the Act does not refer to PPP contracts. He had asked the Plan panel to consider a PPP entity to be deemed to be a public authority for the purpose of the RTI Act.

A public authority under the RTI Act can include a non-governmental body only if it is substantially financed by the Central government. Mishra used this argument to make his case saying that in all projects handed over to a PPP entity for building, operating or maintaining, the land, if not any other resources, given by the government form a vital component of the project and to that extent, can be said to be substantial financing.

Courtesy: The Times of India (4 March 2011)

Karnataka Govt to pioneer BPO for RTI filing

Pradeesh Chandran

The project, called mahiti, will be launched in June. The BPO is to be clubbed with a grievance redressal supervision and monitoring system, to track the RTI complaints

In an innovative departure, the government of Karnataka is set to outsource to experts all citizen queries against itself.

It says it has planned a Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) centre, first of its kind in the country, exclusively for filing petitions under the national Right to Information (RTI) Act. Citizens need only call the centre, expected to be located here, to file RTI applications, for a fee.

"We will open a call centre in Bangalore for the process and a person can call up the centre and file an RTI against any department in the state. Unlike

other BPO calls, the user will be charged. The charge will be considered as the fee for filing an RTI (application)," MN Vidyashankar, principal secretary of the e-Governance department told Business Standard.

Called 'Mahiti' (information in Kannada), the project will be launched in June. The BPO is to be clubbed with a grievance redressal supervision and monitoring system, to track the RTI complaints. Vidyashankar said the BPO is to work for 12 hours a day. "After studying the response, we might extend the timing to make it available round-the-clock. With this, more

people can seek information through the RTI route,” he said. One may file RTI queries in both n Kannada and English.

Karnataka presently sees 60,000 to 65,000 RTI filings every year.

According to highly placed sources, leading Indian and global information technology companies which also offer BPO services have expressed interest in the project. The selected one is expected to be announced later this week.

OTHER IDEAS

Apart from this, the state government is planning to make all financial transactions of the finance department, paperless. The department has initiated the project and has received preliminary bids. It is

understood that nine companies (including India’s top IT service providers Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys and Wipro) have expressed interest in participating.

When asked about enrollment in the Unique Identification project (‘Aadhaar’), Vidyashankar said 1.5 million people had been added in the first phase. The government is planning to appoint an agency each in the four revenue divisions of Bangalore, Gulbarga, Belgaum and Mysore for the process. “We expect to launch the enrolment drive in Bangalore from April 1. There will be one permanent enrollment centre in all districts,” said Vidyashankar. The e-governance department is to shortly commission its second data centre, with an investment of Rs 53 crore. It will be maintained by TCS for five years.

Courtesy:Business Standard (9 March 2011)

Purpose of RTI will be lost unless Govt ACTS now

Dr EAS Sarma

There has been an alarming rise in the number of attacks on Right to Information (RTI) activists. It is not just goons who are persecuting them but government officials also subject whistleblowers to threats of various kinds

Activists in several states such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan and other places have been brutally attacked by criminals, leading permanent disabilities and loss of life. In some cases, the activists are also framed in false cases.

In Andhra Pradesh, we have come across two such incidents in the recent past. In one incident, Doddi Ramanna, an RTI activist from Gajuwaka area of Visakhapatnam, was threatened with dire consequences by police officers for filing an RTI application. He sought information on the reported permission given to a Telugu film unit for erecting a at the Sambuvanipalem reservoir falling under the Kambalakonda wildlife sanctuary forest department.

The police threatened to either eliminate him in a false encounter or frame him in a fake narcotics case. He is now running from pillar to post for security.

In another incident, Emmanuel from Chirala in the Prakasam district was threatened by a police official for seeking information on works undertaken by a local MLA. The police accused him of seeking information with the intention to pass on the same to Maoists. The police had also not acted on his complaint against the MLA’s followers who had attacked his house last month.

The whole purpose of enacting the RTI Act would be lost if the government itself encourages such attacks on the information seekers and whistle blowers. The Act was enacted under mass pressure

after a fundamental right under Article 19 of the Constitution.

In fact, Section 4 of the RTI Act clearly states that the government should provide information to the people even before somebody seeks it by filing an RTI application. And once the information is provided to the RTI activists, it should be declared a public property and made available to everybody. But no department has ever done it so far.

Unfortunately, the government always takes recourse to excuses to deny information sought by the people on various matters of public concern.

The spate of attacks on RTI activists is part of this strategy.

Instead of parting with the information on crucial subjects, the government, through police machinery, is resorting to intimidating tactics to frighten RTI activists. On many occasions, the activists are being linked to Maoists or other extremist elements.

Apart from killing the activists in “encounters”, the threat of implicating them in false cases continues. There have been instances of the state authorities trying to intimidate officials and causing distress to them.

Unfortunately, the system of redressing the grievances through the Right to Information commission has also been faulty. The appointment of RTI commissioners is also a part of a conspiracy. The government appoints retired bureaucrats as

commissioners, as they know how not to divulge information than how to.

Why can't the government think of people with a clean image, like retired judges, as RTI commissioners? It is because the government only wants those who would dance to its tunes.

At present, there is no way to prevent the attacks on RTI activists except from taking legal recourse.

The collectors have to be empowered with judicial powers to provide security to activists under threat. Otherwise, the victims have to go back to the same police who threaten them, for protection.

The Union home ministry has to take an initiative in making stringent laws to prevent recurring attacks on the RTI activists and instill confidence in them.

Courtesy: The Mail Today

Many abusing the powerful Act to make a quick buck

D.P. Bhattacharya

MORE and more people are using the Right to Information (RTI) Act as a tool to expose corruption. At the same time, the legislation is also being misused by a dishonest few to make money.

A number of RTI users in Surat are 'charging' several government departments, including the police and the municipality, to not file petitions under the RTI Act, sources said.

An official explained the modus operandi of such 'RTI blackmailers'. He said the unscrupulous information seeker first establishes some contact within the department to get information on malpractices. On finding a loophole, he or she establishes contact with the authority and threatens to expose them through an RTI application. "The obvious result follows and the game of money begins," he added.

Such syndicates exist all across the state and not only in Surat. A public information officer (PIO) of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) said similar syndicates are in place in the AMC too. "There are people who seek information with malafide intentions but we can do little about them," he said.

A block development officer (BDO) from north Gujarat said: "I had a case in the Ranavav block of Porbandar, where a man filed a petition under the RTI Act seeking some information from the village

level revenue officer. However, when the information was given to him, he kept on dodging it and when a registered post was sent to his house, he got it received by a child. Later he approached the local media and complained that he has been denied the information," he said.

Subsequently, the commission sought explanation from the BDO and he went on to meet the information seeker. "The man asked me to negotiate with the sarpanch to get him `5 lakh in cash and a job in exchange for the information," the officer said.

"Such cases are getting rampant and people are displaying shrewd wit in abusing the Act. The Act is serving as a tool to enhance a person's bargaining power against the system. However, such a practice, though rampant, is only going to hurt the democratic spirit in the long run," eminent RTI activist from Gujarat Harinash Pandya said.

"The nature of the Act is such that the probability of its abuse cannot be eliminated under its existing provisions," Gujarat chief information commissioner R.N. Das said.

"But I personally feel that the information should not be withheld and be brought out in the public domain. If such a provision of publicising any information is made, the use of RTI as a tool of blackmailing will decrease considerably as there would be no way of retracting the same," Das added.

Courtesy: The Mail Today

Shillong RTI Convention concludes

Raju Das

Going with its slogan: "Our money our right," the Shillong declaration of the 3rd National Right to Information Convention today resolved that the Central Government must subject "all public expenditure under social audit."

It was by far one of the most crucial of the other 11 resolutions passed in the Shillong Declaration and was only included after the strong insistence of RTI

activist, Aruna Roy. She was amply supported by some of the country's prominent figures in the field of judiciary, media and bureaucracy.

Initially, it was decided that just ten resolutions would be passed and those were read out and adopted. But Roy in the end intervened and strongly advocated that the social audit of all public expenditure must be included in the list of resolutions.

“It is important, we are here to fight corruption...If the government can have social auditing in the case of NREGA then why not for all other programmes,” she reasoned. Eventually, the resolution was adopted.

Apart from, the social audit, some other very crucial resolutions were passed having direct bearing on the northeast.

One of them being security and intelligence forces must not be exempted from scrutiny under Section 24 of the RTI Act and this exemption must be removed immediately so that these agencies fall directly under the purview of RTI. “It is irrational to exempt security and intelligence agencies under section 24 of the Act. This is not in the interest of national security,” said the speaker while announcing the resolutions.

Another vital piece of resolution was that there must be transparency in religious institutions and they must also be brought under the purview of RTI on how they use “public money.”

It goes without saying that many religious institutions have kept their accounts under a strict code of secrecy and many feel they are not used for the purpose they are meant for, hence the resolution.

The other important resolution includes bringing banks, international financial agencies, private sectors, NGOs under the RTI. The resolution also said all private-public-partnership and public-private projects must be brought under the Act.

Setting up of a Right to Information Council to better implement the Act, circulation of draft legislations for wider consultations, transparency in the appointment of State and Central Information Commissioners, protection of RTI applicants and activists, creation of anti-corruption commission like Lokpal, Autonomous Councils under RTI and suo moto disclosure of government schemes and programmes were the other resolutions adopted after the deliberations.

RTI: Officials face action for giving wrong information

Providing wrong information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act could prove costly. A senior Haryana official has directed that action be taken against erring staff.

Chief Secretary Urvashi Gulati has issued directions to all the departments to fix responsibility and take action under the Government Employees Conduct Rules, a spokesman said on Sunday.

The move follows the realisation that several departments were spending more money in getting

discrepancies removed and appearing before the information commission after being accused of providing wrong information. He said: “Directions have been issued to calculate the expenditure incurred by way of touring allowance and daily allowance, fuel charges and time taken while locating the discrepancies.” The amount spent will be recovered from the official concerned within one month, the spokesman added. — IANS

Courtesy: The Hindu (21 March 2011)

Need to create awareness about RTI Act: CIC

The lack of awareness among public and the bureaucracy about the Right to Information Act is the major stumbling block in seeking information under the Act, which came into force in the state two years ago.

In the absence of Public Information Officers (PIO), the state Information Commission has been flooded with complaints from individuals, mainly government employees, seeking redress of their grievances.

Talking to mediapersons here today, GR Sufi, Chief Information Commissioner (CIC), said most of the people were not aware about the contents and

provisions of the Act. He said the RTI Act was still in its infancy and there was need to create awareness among people and the bureaucracy about the Act and the process of seeking information under it.

“The RTI is a power given to people for seeking information from any public authority, both in the state and Central governments,” he said during his maiden interaction with the media.

“For obtaining any information they have to follow a procedure,” he added, saying the applicants needed to seek information through the PIOs of various government departments.

Courtesy: Tribune News Services (19 March 2011)



Media and Entertainment sectors to grow 13% this year

Television expected to account for half of overall revenues: Report

According to a FICCI-KPMG report, the Media and Entertainment (M&E) sectors in India grew by 11 per cent in 2010 to Rs 65,200 crore. The report estimates that the sectors will grow at 13 per cent in 2011, before reaching Rs 1,27,500 crore by 2015.

Television is expected to account for half of the overall revenues of the M&E industry.

The net DTH subscriber base stood at 2.8 crore at the end of 2010, an addition of 1.2 crore subscribers or a growth of 75 per cent.

The television industry grew by 15.5 per cent in 2010 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 16 per cent to touch Rs 63,000 crore by 2015.

The medium of print is second largest by revenue, though it is only 'about half the size of television'.

The print sector grew by 10 per cent in 2010, and is expected to continue to grow at the same rate and touch Rs 31,000 crore by 2015.

The report also notes that barring film, all other sectors grew in 2010. Advertising — across sectors — grew by 17 per cent in 2010 to Rs 26,600 crore, accounting for 41 per cent of the M&E industry.

“Sectors such as gaming, digital advertising, and animation VFX grew at a faster rate and show tremendous potential in the coming years,” adds the report.

BIGGER PICTURE	
📺	TV households to surge to 15.6 crore by 2015
📺	TV advertising revenues to touch Rs 21,400 crore by 2015
🎬	Films estimated to grow from Rs 8,300 crore to Rs 13,200 crore by 2015
🎵	Music industry expected to register 17 per cent annual growth to reach Rs 1,900 crore by 2015

“The full report is to be formally unveiled at FICCI Frames in Mumbai on March 23.

GROWTH DRIVERS

Dr Amit Mitra, Secretary General, FICCI, said, “The key industry highlights are the growing potential of the regional markets, increasing media penetration and per capita consumption and increasing importance of new media driven by changing media consumption patterns”.

Mr Rajesh Jain, Head of Media and Entertainment, KPMG, added, “The resurgence in advertising, growth in subscription revenues, thrust on digitisation, and emerging avenues for content monetisation were the key growth drivers in 2010. Going forward, it will become imperative for media companies to reset their business models and build greater focus on profitability and changing consumer preferences.”

Courtesy: Business Line (21 March 2011)

Distribution of Pak channels to become cognizable offence

Ashish Sinha

India is set to counter the continued information war waged in Jammu & Kashmir and other border states by Pakistan by making the carriage and distribution of Pakistani channels in India a cognizable offence. So far, a number of Pakistani channels are freely available in border states of J&K, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat even though they are not permitted by the Indian government.

As a result, 3,000-odd cable operators in J&K, parts of northern Punjab and Rajasthan would be jailed for up to five years and fined up to R5 lakh if found distributing Pakistani channels. FE was first to report in October that stricter norms were on the anvil for cable operators carrying illegal channels.

A cognizable offence is one in which the police is empowered to register an FIR, investigate and arrest

an accused involved in cognizable crime without a court warrant. In this case the errant cable operators will also be banned from re-entering the cable business and their equipment will be confiscated by the security agencies.

In order to make the law effective across the country, the necessary amendments to the Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act, 1994, are going to Parliament in next few days, a source in the I&B ministry told FE. So far, Indian cable laws did not have this provision applicable on a pan-India basis even though a number of non-permitted international channels are available to consumers via local cable operators.

This comes after the security agencies zeroed in on 25 foreign channels, with over half from Pakistan, that are being illegally transmitted in Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, parts of West Bengal, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and parts of Uttar Pradesh apart from J&K and Punjab.

Pakistani channels that are freely available in parts of India include PTV World. Apart from these, several private channels including Dawn News, Express News, Waqt TV and Geo TV are among others. Rest are from Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan, official sources told FE.

Even Al Jazeera News is illegally being shown in India while the government granted permission to only Al Jazeera International in December 2010 which is yet to become operational.

In a similar move in August last year, the Supreme Court of Pakistan had ordered for the ban on the carriage and distribution of all Indian television channels and films. According to reports, the carriage and distribution of Indian channels in Pakistan attracts jail term and financial penalty.

Sources said there was a fundamental difference between the carriage of Indian channels in Pakistan and the Pakistani channels in India. "Indian channels like Star, Zee, Sony and others have a loyal viewers base in Pakistan. Therefore, their distribution is demand-based. In J&K and elsewhere in our country, the distribution of Pakistani channels is at the behest and financial cost from across the border. The objective is to show how bad the state of affairs are in India over a long period of time to mould public opinion," a government official said.

But why can't India block such channels electronically?

Experts said blocking was not feasible as the border areas get the channels from Pakistan due to overlapping signal footprint. "But cable operators tuning in to such channels and distributing them to the consumers can not happen without any incentives being offered by someone," a government official said. "The analogue spectrum in J&K can only carry 45-50 channels from operator to consumer of which one-fourth are Pakistani channels then there is a definite problem," the official added.

Courtesy: The Financial Express (14 March 2011)

“Media must do its bit to get people to Vote”

Urvashi Sarkar

Voter participation has not been an area of keen media interest: N. Ram

The need for the media to take voluntary, not paid, ownership of creating awareness for better participation of voters in the election process was recommended at a roundtable on the "Role of media in building voters' awareness" here on Friday.

The recommendation was part of a national consultation on voters' participation organised by the Election Commission (EC). Other roundtables at the consultation pertained to fighting urban apathy, connecting with youth in the above 18 category, engaging civil society in voters' education and electoral participation, challenges for women's participation, using social marketing strategies to enhance participation, bringing the excluded population into the fold, and restructuring curriculum to inculcate values of democratic and electoral practices.

At the roundtable on the "Role of media in building voters' awareness" moderated by Editor-in-Chief of The Hindu N. Ram, it was noted that voter participation had not been an area of keen media interest and that it had focused more on the politics of election and election dramas.

Voter participation was described as voters participating in "an informed way in elections that are free, fair and socially just". It was emphasised that developing a sense of citizenship, overcoming feelings of alienation and marginalisation was also integrally connected with voter participation.

Participants in the discussion said that there was also a need for greater and sustained interaction between the EC and the media at various levels — working journalists, senior editors and media proprietors.

It was pointed out that the print medium had been used extensively but invariably through paid advertisements.

“This needs to change and all the media should do more in this regard on a voluntary and unpaid basis,” the group recommended.

‘UNEXCITING EXERCISE’

EC Director-General Akshaya Raut noted that encouraging voter participation was not a very exciting exercise for the private media.

According to Mr. Raut, rather than the media writing on their own about encouraging voter participation, they preferred advertisements from the EC so that they could take payments for them. The Hindu came in for praise for taking up on its own stories regarding paid news and electoral reforms.

Chairman of the Centre for Media Studies Bhaskara Rao said that “pre-emptive reporting” was a reason for less voter participation, especially in areas where television viewership was high. The print medium has to take more responsibility as its credibility is relatively more, he added.

According to Dr. Rao, the paid news phenomenon was not new but was linked to opinion polls.

The EC’s efforts in engaging largely on an unpaid basis with the All India Radio, Doordarshan and the field publicity division of the government to spread voter awareness were appreciated.

At the inaugural session, Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi said: “Elections should not just be free and fair but also socially just and participative to make democracy more meaningful.

“In terms of electoral participation, we are still ahead of many democratic countries in the world,

but we are still short of the ideal. In several parts of the world, particularly developing countries, voter participation has been quite high compared to India.”

Mr. Quraishi also listed the various initiatives taken by the EC to encourage voter participation.

Emphasising on the youth as a crucial element of participation, the former President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, said: “The message from the youth, based on interactions with them, is that the youth of India want to live in an economically developed state. The leaders must speak about their vision for the nation and should work and succeed with integrity.”

He further emphasised the importance of developmental politics.

Dr. Kalam, who also interacted with the audience, took a number of questions related to voting, politics, politicians and paid news.

Speaking about paid news at a separate session, Mr. Ram noted that paid news, as a phenomenon which came to the fore during the 2009 Lok Sabha elections and also in some Assembly polls, had given a “very bad name” to the press.

Quoting Vice-President Hamid Ansari, Mr. Ram said: “Paid news created double jeopardy. It wrecked the concept of a free and fair press and undermined the democratic electoral process...this should not be looked at in isolation but as part of a larger problem which includes private treaties.”

Journalists P. Sainath and the late Prabhaskar Joshi were lauded for their role in fighting the paid news phenomenon.

Mr. Ram said: “There is a need to join hands to eliminate and crack down on paid news through discussions involving working journalists and media organisations, and drawing up some code of practice relating to this.”

Courtesy: The Hindu (5 March 2011)

Exploiting the idiot box

Annam Suresh

Television in Chennai has managed to accomplish what consumer groups and opposition parties together haven't ~ get mundane but critical problems addressed promptly

What would you do if your neighbour stealthily connects his drainage through your pipes without making separate connections for his house? People dump their garbage outside your gate instead of in the vat a three-minute walk away? The approach to your colony has been left dug up and slushy? The street lights in your colony don't work? Your set of apartments does not receive regular water supply? Garbage collection is erratic?

You would perhaps complain over the telephone, in person or in writing to the municipal departments concerned. Many times. And almost always in vain. Sometimes you may pick a fight with the garbage collector or the erring neighbour. Again with no solution. Most of the time, you would grin and bear it, maybe grumble about it to friends, write an odd letter to the newspaper, but, by and large, resign yourself to your urban hell.

Unless you happen to be living in Chennai. Because if that is the case, you sit in front of your TV on Sunday morning prime time and wait for your problems to be resolved. Almost immediately. By the mayor himself, no less. MM or Makkalin Manasaatchi (conscience of the people) is one of the most popular programmes on Sunday prime time in Chennai. In fact, 9.30 on a Sunday morning is prime time. Even when it is not a star-studded programme.

For this is where, for almost a year now, mayor M Subramaniam has been responding to about 50 telephone calls from citizens who call in with their problems — which are resolved, in most cases, within hours of the programme. This is the brainchild of business head Prem Menon and producer K Karuppasamy, chief reporter at Zee Tamil, who felt the media owed more to society than just entertainment or news bulletins that were made of “he-said, she-said” bytes. Although the programme was initially launched despite having no commercial support, the tremendous viewership response from Chennai has brought in sponsors.

According to S Ramsubramaniam, the programme is a huge success and they foresee little competition. “There are several reasons for this. One, almost all the other channels are politically polarised and are either affiliated or identified with specific political leaders and parties. And none of these channels seem keen to air a programme that may give one political player, even within their own party, any mileage — there is too much ego and envy at work. Those that are apolitical are all entertainment channels and do not hold a newscast licence and therefore cannot produce this kind of a programme.

“Second, most people are vain and like to be on TV — however briefly. So whether they are complainants or officials sorting out a mess, they like the publicity. Only officials found shirking hate the glare — so they do their best to avoid the publicity by solving problems in their area even before it is raised in the programme,” says Ramsubramaniam.

The programme is meant only for residents of Chennai, the mayor’s jurisdiction. MM is so successful that the channel may eventually start similar dial-ins for other towns. Karuppasamy explains how, every Sunday, people start dialling in from nine in the morning. These calls are handed to the mayor on a first-come-first-heard basis.

With so many people waiting for their problems to be solved, the anchor is careful to ensure that callers

do not digress from the focus of the programme. So anyone praising or making unnecessary comments, either about the programme or the mayor, is instantly disconnected and the next caller takes over. It is a programme that means business.

In most instances, the mayor promises a remedy within hours — unless there is major work involved. A team from the channel keeps tabs on the complaints and the action taken, contacting the callers for a satisfactory closure. Any complaint not attended to is again aired during subsequent episodes till it is sorted out. Some of the action taken is also aired.

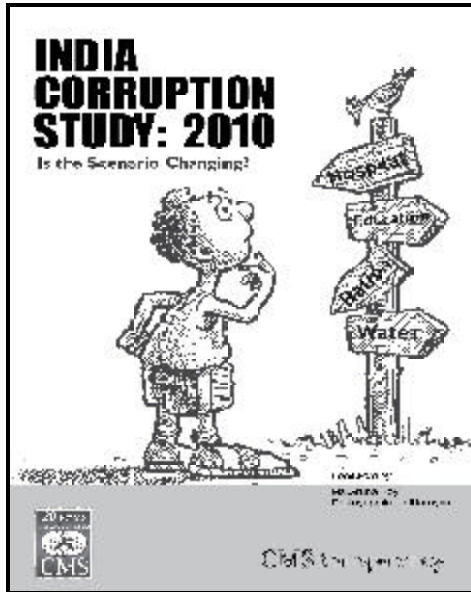
In the beginning, problems would be resolved within hours of the programme. But of late these are resolved even before the programme ends since the officers concerned are called by the mayor during the programme. It is compulsory for the municipal ward officers to watch the programme and address every complaint emanating from the area under them. Finding mention on the programme is not a matter of pride, hence many officials visit their wards on Thursdays and Fridays looking for potential complaints like unattended sewage, faulty street lamps, uncleared garbage, etc, and these are set right by Saturday morning, pre-empting any complaints. The percentage of achievement is very high when complaints fall in the jurisdiction of Chennai’s mayor. There are a couple of complaints like as law and order issues and pockets of anti-social elements near colleges or colonies that are referred to the appropriate authorities.

According to Ramsubramaniam, “It is a win-win situation for all. The mayor certainly gets visibility on a popular channel — but he has to produce a good report card every week, or the brickbats will follow soon. The municipal officers have to ensure not only that the complaints are attended to promptly and satisfactorily, but ensure that such complaints are not repeated from their area. But the biggest gainer is the citizen who has found an effective and quick way to resolve problems that used to otherwise fester for months.”

The channel itself has a captive viewership on Sunday prime time, even if it is only limited to Chennai. The most important lesson is for people in all other cities: that the idiot box need not remain idle, it can be made to work for us.

Courtesy: The Statesman (6 March 2011)

INDIA CORRUPTION STUDY (ICS) 2010



This is the seventh edition of studies undertaken by CMS since 2000 and fourth in the last five years. CMS has been constantly experimenting with the research methodology to focus on regions and sections of the society that desire specific attention on the extent of corruption in public services. The present report, based on ICS 2010 undertaken by CMS, focuses on household level survey in rural areas of twelve states. The four public services covered in this round are public distribution system (PDS), school education (up to class 12th), water supply services and hospital services.

This report brings out, first, general perception (P) of rural India about corruption in public services and in specific context of the four public services. The second section discusses rural households experience (E) again in general and specific context of each of the four public services. The third section brings out the estimation (E) of bribe amount paid by rural households of the twelve states in the four public services covered in ICS 2010.

Further, to bring out a comparative picture, the present report has compared with ICS 2005 round data of only rural households of the eleven states, covered during the round. Tripura was not visited during ICS 2005. For highlights: www.cmsindia.org

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