



Transparency Review

Journal of Transparency Studies

The President's Address to the Nation On the Eve of Republic Day of India 2014

My Fellow Citizens:

1. On the eve of 65th Republic Day, I extend warm greetings to all of you in India and abroad. I convey my special greetings to members of our Armed Forces, Paramilitary Forces and Internal Security Forces.

2. The Republic Day commands the respect of every Indian. On this day, sixty-four years ago, in a remarkable display of idealism and courage, we the people of India gave to ourselves a sovereign democratic republic to secure all its citizens justice, liberty and equality. We undertook to promote among all citizens fraternity, the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation. These ideals became the lodestar of the modern Indian State. Democracy became our most precious guide towards peace and regeneration from the swamp of poverty created by centuries of colonial rule. From within the spacious provisions of our Constitution, India has grown into a beautiful, vibrant, and sometimes noisy democracy. For us, the democracy is not a gift, but the fundamental right of every citizen; for those in power democracy is a sacred trust. Those who violate this trust commit sacrilege against the nation.

3. Some cynics may scoff at our commitment to democracy but our democracy has never been betrayed by the people; its fault-lines, where they exist, are the handiwork of those who have made power a gateway to greed. We do feel angry, and rightly so, when we see democratic institutions being weakened by complacency and incompetence. If we hear sometimes an anthem of despair from the street, it is because people feel that a sacred trust is being violated.

4. Corruption is a cancer that erodes democracy, and weakens the foundations of our state. If Indians are enraged, it is because they are witnessing corruption and waste of national resources. If governments do not remove these flaws, voters will remove governments.

5. Equally dangerous is the rise of hypocrisy in public life. Elections do not give any person the licence to flirt with illusions. Those who seek the trust of voters must promise only what is possible. Government is not a charity shop. Populist anarchy cannot be a substitute for governance. False promises lead to disillusionment, which gives birth to rage, and that rage has one legitimate target: those in power.

6. This rage will abate only when governments deliver what they were elected to deliver: social and economic progress, not at a snail's pace, but with the speed of a racehorse. The aspirational young Indian will not forgive a betrayal of her future. Those in office must eliminate the trust deficit between them and the people. Those in politics should understand that every election comes with a warning sign: perform, or perish.

7. I am not a cynic because I know that democracy has this marvellous ability to self-correct. It is the physician that heals itself, and 2014 must become a year of healing after the fractured and contentious politics of the last few years.

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Form IV

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|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Place of Publication | : | Centre for Media Studies
(CMS), Research House,
Community Centre,
Saket, New Delhi - 17 |
| 2 | Periodicity of its
publication | : | Monthly |
| 3 | Printer's Name | : | Dr. N Bhaskara Rao |
| | Nationality | : | Indian |
| | Address | : | Centre for Media Studies,
Research House,
Community Centre,
Saket, New Delhi - 17 |
| 4 | Publisher's Name | : | Dr. N Bhaskara Rao |
| | Nationality | : | Indian |
| | Address | : | Centre for Media Studies,
Research House,
Community Centre,
Saket, New Delhi - 17 |
| 5 | Editor's Name | : | Dr N Bhaskara Rao |
| | Nationality | : | Indian |
| | Address | : | Centre for Media Studies,
Research House,
Community Centre,
Saket, New Delhi - 17 |
| 6 | Name and address of
individuals who own the
newspaper and partners
or share holders holding
more than one percent of
the total capital | : | Dr. N Bhaskara Rao
Centre for Media Studies,
Research House, Community
Centre, Saket, New Delhi - 17 |

I, N. Bhaskara Rao, hereby declare that the particulars given
above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dt: 01/3/2014

Sd/-
Signature of Publisher
N. Bhaskara Rao

Editor: Dr N Bhaskara Rao

8. The last decade witnessed the emergence of India as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The slowdown of our economy in the last two years can be some cause for concern but none for despair. The green shoots of revival are already visible. The agricultural growth in the first half of this year has touched 3.6 per cent and rural economy is buoyant.

9. 2014 is a precipice moment in our history. We must re-discover that sense of national purpose and patriotism, which lifts the nation above and across the abyss; and back on to the road of prosperity. Give the young jobs and they will raise the villages and cities to 21st century standards. Give them a chance and you will marvel at the India they can create.

10. This chance will not come if India does not get a stable government. This year, we will witness the 16th General Election to our Lok Sabha. A fractured government, hostage to whimsical opportunists, is always an unhappy eventuality. In 2014, it could be catastrophic. Each one of us is a voter; each one of us has a deep responsibility; we cannot let India down. It is time for introspection and action.

11. India is not just a geography: it is also a history of ideas, philosophy, intellect, industrial genius, craft, innovation, and experience. The promise of India has sometimes been mislaid by misfortune; at other times by our own complacency and weakness. Destiny has given us another opportunity to recover what we have lost; we will have no one to blame but ourselves if we falter.

12. A democratic nation is always involved in argument with itself. This is welcome, for we solve problems through discussion and consent, not force. But healthy differences of opinion must not lead to an unhealthy strife within our polity. Passions are rising over whether we should have smaller states to extend equitable development to all parts of a state. A debate is legitimate but it should conform to democratic norms. The politics of divide and rule has extracted a heavy price on our subcontinent. If we do not work together, nothing ever will work.

13. India must find its own solutions to its problems. We must be open to all knowledge; to do otherwise would be to condemn our nation to the misery of a stagnant mire. But we should not indulge in the easy option of mindless imitation, for that can lead us to a garden of weeds. India has the intellectual prowess, the human resource and financial capital to shape a glorious future. We possess a dynamic civil society with an innovative mindset. Our people, whether in villages or cities, share a vibrant, unique consciousness and culture. Our finest assets are human.

14. Education has been an inseparable part of the Indian experience. I am not talking only of the ancient institutions of excellence like Takshashila or Nalanda, but of an age as recent as the 17th and 18th centuries. Today, our higher educational infrastructure consists of over 650 universities and 33,000 colleges. The quality of education has to be the focus of our attention now. We can be world leaders in education, if only we discover the will and leadership to take us to that pinnacle. Education is no longer just the privilege of the elite, but a universal right. It is the seed of a nation's destiny. We must usher in an education revolution that becomes a launching pad for the national resurgence.

15. I am being neither immodest, nor beating a false drum, when I claim that India can become an example to the world. Because, the human mind flourishes best when it is, as the great sage Rabindranath Tagore said, free from fear; when it has the liberty to roam into spheres unknown; in search of wisdom; and when the people have the fundamental right to propose as well as oppose.

16. There will be a new government before I speak to you again on the eve of our Independence Day. Who wins the coming election is less important than the fact that whosoever wins must have an undiluted commitment to stability, honesty, and the development of India.

Our problems will not disappear overnight. We live in a turbulent part of the world where factors of instability have grown in the recent past. Communal forces and terrorists will still seek to destabilize the harmony of our people and the integrity of our state but they will never win. Our security and armed forces, backed by the steel of popular support, have proved that they can crush an enemy within; with as much felicity as they guard our frontiers. Mavericks who question the integrity of our armed services are irresponsible and should find no place in public life.

17. India's true strength lies in her Republic; in the courage of her commitment, the sagacity of her Constitution, and the patriotism of her people. 1950 saw the birth of our Republic. I am sure that 2014 will be the year of resurgence.

Jai Hind!

Implementation of Citizens' Charter of Central Depts: An Independent Audit

Alok Srivastava

Government of India's ministries/department's are mandated to develop Citizens'/Clients' Charters (CCC). This exercise in fact marks the culmination of a process whose origin can be traced to the Conference of Chief Ministers of States and Union Territories held way back on May 24, 1997, in New Delhi and presided over by the then Prime Minister of India. In this Conference, an 'Action Plan for Effective and Responsive Government' at the Centre and State levels was adopted. One of the major decisions taken in the Conference was that Departments would formulate Citizens' charters starting with those sectors that have large public interface. However, overall not much progress was made in this direction.

Given the unsatisfactory track record of implementation of CCC and the uneven quality of CCCs, which were neither useful for measuring the performance of departments with respect to this important aspect of departmental performance nor was there any consequence for ignoring the commitments listed in CCCs, the High Power Committee on Government Performance, chaired by the then Cabinet Secretary, in its meeting of May 28, 2010 decided to include "Development of Citizens'/Clients' Charters" in Results Framework Documents (RFDs) as a mandatory indicator for all ministries/ departments.(Table 1).

Subsequently, departments have prepared CCCs and all CCCs that were found to be of acceptable quality have been published as a compendium and are also available on the website of Performance Management Division (PMD), Cabinet Secretariat (CS), GoI, which is the nodal agency for ensuring the approval of CCC by respective ministries and departments. CCC of respective ministries and departments are also available on their websites.

Independent Audit

An independent audit of implementation of CCC under the leadership of Dr. Prajapati Trivedi, Secretary, Performance Management Division, Cabinet Secretariat, was carried out by the **Centre for Media Studies (CMS)** in mid-2013. Fifty nine (59) ministries/departments of the Central Government, whose CCC have been approved by PMD were included in this audit. The exercise was intensive which included



physical visit to each ministry/department's office, interacting with nodal officers of 2-3 services provided by the respective ministries/departments, observing the display of CCC, making the phone calls for checking the response rate and accurateness of contact details of the nodal person and analyzing the quality of self-assessment report of each ministry.

With the expectation that a shared understanding of the proposed methodology and the process would ensure transparency, objectivity and fairness of the proposed independent audit, all the ministries and departments were informed well in advance about the audit methodology and process. The Audit was participatory in nature as it included not only ranking of ministries/departments on the basis of visits by CMS audit team members (*Success indicator A to E in Table 2*) but equal weight

Table 1: Mandatory Indicator in REDs

Actions	Success Indicator	Unit	Weight	Target / Criteria Value				
				Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
				100%	90%	80%	70%	60%
Independent Audit of implementation of Citizens'/ Clients' Charter (CCC)	% of implementation	%	2	100	95	90	85	80

	Success Indicator	Unit	Weight	Target / Criteria Value				
				Excellent	Very	Good	Fair	Poor
				100%	90%	80%	70%	60%
A.	Degree of visibility of CCC in relevant area	%	10	100	85	75	60	50
B.	Awareness of departmental officers/staff about CCC	%	10	100	85	75	60	50
C.	Degree of accuracy of the numbers and names of the contact persons mentioned in CCC	%	10	100	85	75	60	50
D.	Response rate for the phone calls made to contact persons	%	10	100	85	75	60	50
E.	Quality of the self-assessment report	%	10	100	85	75	60	50
F.	CCC Score as calculated by the ministry/ department	%	50	100	85	75	60	50

was given to Self-assessment reports of respective ministries/departments (*success indicator F in Table 2*). Being the first year of audit, it was decided to restrict the audit process only to assess the preparedness and practice of ministries and departments as far as CCC is concerned. The indicators, weights assigned and target/criteria value used for audit of ministries/departments status on CCC is shown in the Table 2:

Overall Score/Performance-Ministries/ Departmental Rating

The composite score of the Ministries/ Departments on the six success indicators of Independent Audit present not so satisfactory picture.(Table 3).

Departmental Rating	Composite Score Rating (in %)	Number of Ministries/Departments
Excellent	100-96	1
Very Good	95-86	14
Good	85-76	14
Fair	75-66	9
Poor	Below 65	21

Some Insights

* Considering the fact that in case of most of the ministries/departments, implementation of

CCCs has completed about an year or so, the efforts made by departments/officials to make CCC visible is encouraging.

* At the same time it is observed that CCC is yet to sink in among different level of functionaries including reception desk. Orientation of staff is desirable to give the message that CCC is for bringing both transparency and accountability in service delivery. It is more for self-assessment and improving departments' performance and less as an additional burden.

* The perception that ministries/departments do not interact directly with public but has more inter-departmental interaction at centre and as a partner with states, hence there is no need for CCC, has to be addressed for making CCC more effective.

* Regular, may be every six-month update of designated officials' name and contact details in CCC uploaded on respective ministries/ departments' websites is desirable. As most of the clients' are state departments and institutions, they will be more of a 'virtual visitor' to the ministries/ departments through the websites for required information.

* Last but not the least, this round of audit due to paucity of time did not take the feedback of service seekers. Next round of audit should factor in the experience of service users' (institution/individuals) as well to assess implementation of CCC in spirit and action.

Women's Perceptions and Experiences with Public Services

CMS-India Corruption Study 2013

The ninth round of the CMS-India Corruption Study (CMS-ICS 2013) has specifically focussed on women in their availing certain basic and essential public services. Women constitute around 49 percent of India's population (Census 2011); play a greater role in managing the household affairs than the counterpart and therefore directly or indirectly are subject to far more negative consequences of ineffective governance not only individually but at household level. The uniqueness of CMS-ICS is its methodology. It captures peoples' Perception (P) and Experience (E) with Public Services and further Estimates (E) the amount paid as bribe by common citizens of India to avail basic and essential public services.

It is pertinent to mention that CMS-ICS is a self-initiated initiative and not sponsored by any funding agency. Using CMS resources, this round covered eight states, at least one state from each region of the country. While selecting states, it was also ensured that states have notified the Right to Public Services Act (RTPSA), which is an important tool to ensure timely delivery of services. The states covered are Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan. Though Maharashtra had not introduced RTPSA, it was included to have a state from western region of the country; Gujarat and Goa the other two states from Western region of India notified RTPSA later on but after the survey was completed in Maharashtra, hence could not be included in this round.

From each state, a sample of around 300 households was covered. Households representing different Socio-Economic Categories (SEC) had almost similar representation in the sample. From each selected household, an adult female member was interviewed. The study focused on eight public services namely, Drinking Water, Electricity, Public Distribution System (PDS), Public Health/Hospital care, Housing, Municipal, Police and Judiciary.

The data collection was carried out between April and September 2013.

To assess the change, if any the findings are compared with the earlier round conducted in 2007-08. It has been ensured that only women respondents are included in the sub-sample created from that round. However, it is pertinent to mention that 2007 round covered only BPL households and

hence the socio-economic status may have some bearing on the findings. Although in 2009 as well as 2010, CMS-India Corruption Study was conducted but the sample did not include urban population while 2012 round covered only slum population from nine cities.

KEY FINDINGS

Usage of Public Services:

* Majority of women during the last one year had interacted with at least half of the eight public services covered in this round.

* On an average, she or any member of the family had interacted with around four services; with highest in Maharashtra (5 nos.) followed by Bihar, Karnataka and MP (4 each).

* In PDS and Public health/hospital services, in 60 percent cases, the women respondent herself has interacted with the service provider of these public services at least once during the last twelve months.

* Among the most interacted services include, Electricity (77%) followed by PDS (60%), Water Supply (51%) and Public health/Hospital services (49%). Other public services, which are mainly Need-based services, had comparatively lesser interaction: Police (29%), Municipal (26%), Judiciary (22%) and Housing (18%).

Women's Perception about Corruption-for Public Services in General-2013 vis-a-vis 2008

* More than 67% of the women opined that level of corruption in general has 'Increased' in Public Services in the last 12 months.

Table 2: Women's Perception of Corruption in Public Services- in General (in %)

Rounds	Increased		Decreased		Remained the Same	
	2008	2013	2008	2013	2008	2013
Bihar	26	77	46	10	28	13
Chhattisgarh	63	54	11	15	26	31
Delhi	44	57	21	5	35	38
Karnataka	46	58	32	9	22	32
Madhya Pradesh	45	65	10	9	44	26
Maharashtra	26	70	13	1	61	29
Punjab	28	71	26	13	46	16
Rajasthan	46	85	6	2	48	13
Total	40	68	21	7	39	25

Source: CMS-ICS (2008/2013)

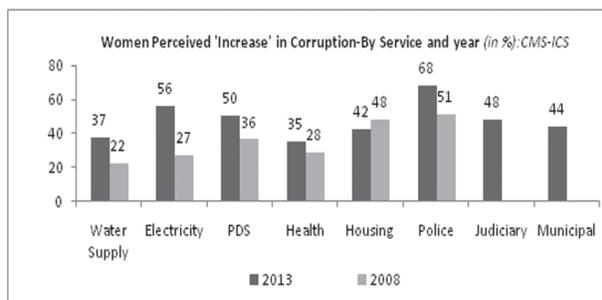
* No significant difference in perception of women belonging to different socio-economic classification (SEC) was noticeable.

* In Delhi and Rajasthan, perception about increase in corruption level in public services could be one of the reasons for change of political party in power in the two states where elections were held after the survey for this round of CMS-ICS was conducted.

* Similarly in Chhattisgarh, the incumbent political party coming back to form government could be correlated with lesser percentage opening increase in corruption in public services in the state. In Madhya Pradesh, however, despite the opinion about increase in corruption in public services, the incumbent government was voted back to power.

Women's Perception of Corruption- by Public Services and Year

* Two out of every three women perceive an 'increase' in the corruption level in the Police services. Electricity, PDS and Judiciary were the other three public services in which nearly half of the women opined an increase in corruption level during the last twelve months prior to the survey.



Experienced Corruption at Household level

* More than half of the women (56%) shared that **they or any member of the household experienced corruption** at least once during the last 12 months. In 2008, the percentage of women who reported experiencing corruption in public services was around 44 percent.

* In CMS-ICS 2013, among those who were asked for a bribe, 66% women shared that either she or any member of the family experienced the demand for a bribe at least once during the last 12 months while another 24% came across such situation twice.

* 8 out of every 10 households, who were asked to pay bribe, had no option but paid bribe to avail the desired public service.

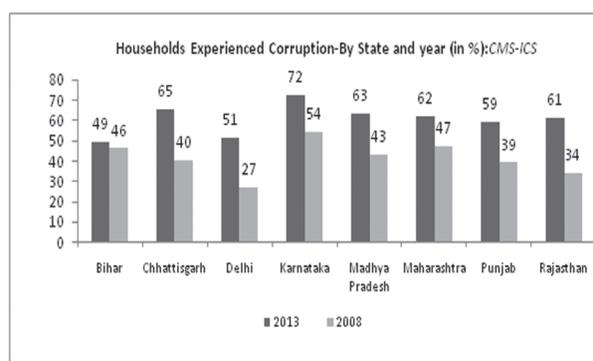
* Women respondents shared that in five out of eight public services, between 20 and 25% of their families had to pay bribe or use influence to avail the services.

* In all the states except Bihar and Delhi, nearly two-third or more of the women reported experiencing corruption either by them or any of their family members while interacting with the public services covered in CMS-ICS 2013.

* In Delhi and Rajasthan, compared to 2008, the percentage of women reporting 'experienced' corruption in public services was almost twice.

Could not Pay, Could Not Avail the Service at Household level

* Around 5 percent of the women informed that their families were denied services because they could not pay a bribe.



* Highest service denial rate was in Karnataka (8%) and Madhya Pradesh (7%) despite the Right to Public Services Act in place.

Bribe Amount Paid and Reasons for Paying Bribe at Household level

* State wise highest amount as bribe in any of the public services is Bihar (INR 10000-Housing); Chhattisgarh (INR 30000-Police verification for Job); Delhi (INR 10000- for Police Verification); Karnataka (INR 10000-Police for removal of name as accused); Madhya Pradesh (INR 5000 in Housing for Transfer of Ownership); Maharashtra (INR 400000 for Job in Police); Punjab (INR 5000 for House registration) and Rajasthan (INR 6000 –Electricity for restoring connection).

* On an average, the households have paid as low as INR 10 in PDS shops to get their ration or as OPD patient and as high as INR 400 thousand (4 lakh) for job in Police department.

(For more info, please write to info@cmsindia.org/ alok@cmsindia.org)

Average size of corporate fraud rises 80% since 2009

Corporate fraud in India has grown both in size and number since 2008-09, when B. Ramalinga Raju of Satyam Computer Services Ltd confessed to have manipulated accounts by almost \$1.5 billion. The number of swindles detected since then has increased significantly in number and value, from Rs.10,739 crore worth of frauds being reported in 2008 to Rs.1,38,074 crore in 2009. In 2010 and 2011, frauds worth Rs.30,403 crore and Rs.66,880 crore were reported, while in 2012, detected frauds added up to Rs.15,440 crore. Part of it could be due to better oversight, according to the Thought Arbitrage Research Institute, a New Delhi think tank working in the areas of corporate governance.

Before 2009, the average size of frauds was about Rs.282 crore. With a number of high-profile and large frauds detected between 2009 and 2012,

the average has risen to Rs.502 crore, an increase of around 80%. To be sure, barring a few exceptions, most swindles tend to be of low value, with 83% of those detected since 1997, being of amounts less than Rs.200 crore and 5% involving amounts greater than Rs.1,000 crore, said the study supported on data collection and primary analysis by Grant Thornton, a consultancy. Contrary to common perception, the prevalence of fraud was evenly distributed among public and private companies, with siphoning off of funds being the most common method. Despite disclosure and corporate governance norms imposed on listed entities, 44% of the companies surveyed in the study where fraud was detected were listed on stock exchanges. In nearly two-thirds of these firms, promoters had a shareholding of more than 50%.

Courtesy: The Live Mint (04 February 2014)

RTI appeals mount as 5 of 7 info chief posts lie vacant

Clara Lewis

In an attempt to save the RTI Act from becoming a victim of systemic failure, state chief information commissioner Ratnakar Gaikwad has appealed to governor K Sankaranarayanan to prod the government to appoint information commissioners.

In his letter to the governor, Gaikwad has said that four of the seven regional information commissions in the state have been headless-in Greater Mumbai, Konkan, Nagpur and Amravati-for the last three years. "The Pune information chief is seriously ill... so, there are effectively five vacant posts. Complaints and appeals have been pending for nearly two years," he said. "Maharashtra is the pioneer in RTI and today it is a sorry state of affairs. Nearly 30,000 appeals and over 3,000 complaints are pending. People have to wait as long as two years for justice using the Act."

Gaikwad said when former state information chief Ramanand Tiwari was suspended for his role in the Adarsh case, in 2011, the cabinet had created a new post till his retirement, but it was never filled.

But he pointed out that all cases up to last December have been cleared at the headquarters,

and appeals for this month will be heard from January 21.

"Nearly seven lakh RTI queries are filed and 25,000 appeals cleared every year. I have written to the CM on several occasions urging him to fill up the posts; I don't know

why it is not being done," Gaikwad said.

Former central information chief Shailesh Gandhi warned that the state's apathy could sound the death knell for the RTI Act in Maharashtra. "The CM, the Opposition leader and a minister decide on the appointment of information chiefs. Why are they not making these political appointments?"

Courtesy: The Times of India (16 January 2014)

Worrying numbers			TIMES VIEW: The lack of information chiefs is now having a direct impact on the functioning of the panels. The RTI Act is one of the few laws, promulgated in the recent past, that have really helped citizens in distress. Starving them of logistical help is one sure shot way of killing the sunshine law by ensuring people lose confidence in its power to help.
Area	Appeals pending	Complaints pending	
HQ	140	148	
Greater Mumbai	5,394	550	
Konkan	3,741	107	
Pune	5,937	220	
Aurangabad	3,262	493	
Nashik	4,803	62	
Nagpur	1,591	582	
Amravati	4,184	1,252	
Total	29,052	3,338	

Few takers for the RTI Act

Rohini Kejriwal

The Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005 is a blessing in disguise. While the procedure may seem tedious to some, the fundamental right that it stands for puts power into the hands of the common man.

This Republic Day, Metrolife speaks to RTI activists in the City to understand how the act is being used by the people in the City.

According to RTI activist Umapathi S, only a limited percentage of people are using the act.

“The current approach is to file applications only when services aren’t being met as a means of addressing public grievance. But the purpose of RTI is to ensure accountability and transparency. The problem is that people don’t know that it has a wider scope. The awareness isn’t up to the expected level and the responsibility of doing that should be placed on the state government. Another issue is that people are scared of exposing officials as they feel they’ll be threatened even though this rarely happens,” he says.

N Vikramsinha of Mahithi Hakku Adhyayana Kendra has been an RTI activist since 2000. While he acknowledges that Bangalore has an active RTI community, he finds that ‘the current trends are nullifying the effect at every stage’.

“The activism is higher than other cities but people are only making applications about the BBMP, BDA and BSNL. The biggest problem is that we cannot get any authentic statistics or information in Karnataka. Unlike the Central information website where all the information is available with one search, the Karnataka Information Commission (KIC) website requires the applicant to know the name of the petitioner, responder or case number. We keep reminding them to re-design it but they’re

not inclined to for obvious reasons. The information we get is mostly from our own sources,” he informs.

In 2011, a forum was created to facilitate dialogue between the KIC, active citizens and the department of personnel and administrative reforms.

“We met quarterly but that system has been discontinued since the appointment of the new chief information commissioner AKM Nayak. *The problem most applicants face is delay in the process and eventually, no information being procured. Rectifying this will require continuous vigilance and persuasion on the part of citizens,*” adds Vikram Sinha.

R Manohar, an independent RTI activist for the last 20 years, notes, “It’s a fundamental right that needs to be enforced. Some activists and NGOs are using the act. But it’s essentially been ineffective in the recent past because officers know how to manipulate the situation. They frequently reject the application and render the file ‘untraceable’, which leaves the petitioner with nobody to blame.”

However, Ravindra Nath Guru, who runs an NGO called Coalition against Corruption, is optimistic about the RTI community and says that not only activists but common people are also using it. “There’s no point in playing the blame game till people start asking questions about why concerned authorities aren’t doing their job. For example, if garbage isn’t being collected, citizens can apply for the work order and make sure that it’s followed. There needs to be an increasing awareness about the RTI Act with the increasing number of information seekers,” he says.

Courtesy: Deccan Herald (27 January 2014)

Information on mining leads RTI attacks

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative lists sand excavation, PDS queries as other reasons.

A private study about the attacks on Right to Information (RTI) activists has found that most of the information they had sought should have been disclosed by the authorities on their own in the first place.

According to the report by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) which studied the

cases of death and attacks on RTI activists in India, the information they applied for was of public interest and was almost certainly the cause of the attacks.

The big issues that likely resulted in harassment and even murder were illegal mining, sand excavation, encroachment, police inaction, and the

public distribution system, the report pointed out. Many of the activists tried to expose corruption by ministers and government staff, or simply tried to get information from the schools where their children studied. “Most of the information for which the activists have been attacked are of public interest and should ideally be up as suo moto disclosure by public authorities on their web sites,” said Venkatesh Nayak, author of the report and

The report commonly uses the word ‘allege’ because the causes of death cited are from preliminary findings and that the number of cases might not be accurate. This information is based on reports in the English media and does not take into account regional media reports and may therefore differ. There is no study on this by the government. “In the Shehla Masood case, it was first reported that she was killed because of the

Attacks on activists in the country					Top five states				
252	Total number of cases of alleged murders/attacks/harassment in India		4	Alleged assault on gangster and rowdy-sheeter RTI activists (2 cases)		States	Alleged murders/attacks	Alleged murders only	
32	Alleged murders	2	Alleged suicides	18yrs	18	1	Maharashtra	53	9
				Youngest to be assaulted	Women assaulted	Differently abled assaulted	Bihar	13	4
							Gujarat	34	3
214	Alleged assault or harassment		6	Number of cases NHRC took cognizance of		Uttar Pradesh	15	3	
						Karnataka	14	3	

coordinator of CHRI’s access to information programme.

The report is titled “Attacks on Users and Activists of the Right to Information in India and Role of the National Human Rights Commission”.

In the most recent case in Thane district, Abrar Shaikh was killed after he applied for information about an allegedly illegal construction. The death of the 32-year-old takes the total number of alleged murders of RTI activists in Maharashtra to nine since the RTI Act came into force in 2005. The state has recorded a total 53 attacks, the highest number in the country, during this period. The total number of deaths in the country stands at 32. There have been four deaths in Bihar. Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Jharkhand each registered three deaths. (See box for details)

issues she pursued on the environment. But later reports suggested the reason for her death could be other than the RTI applications she filed. Hence, we have used ‘alleged murder’,” Nayak said.

While there is apathy from the government, Nayak said lately some positive steps had been taken by the government and the National Human Rights Commission.

“The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has recently come out with a template that authorities should follow. NHRC on the other hand has taken up causes of RTI activists as Human Rights defender cases,” Nayak said.

A DoPT circular issued last month gives templates for suo moto disclosure on primary and secondary schools, as well as the public distribution system, panchayats and the MNREGA scheme.

Courtesy: DNA (23 December 2014)

CIC ‘misplaces’ file with order to bring parties under RTI

Himanshi Dhawan

After dragging its feet on action against political parties for not complying with the RTI Act, the Central Information Commission (CIC), has “misplaced” the file related to its landmark order on the issue. Worse, it came to light only after an RTI applicant filed a complaint with the Commission alleging that the file was missing and a police complaint should be filed.

Denying that the file was missing chief information commissioner Sushma Singh said, “One file related to the order had been misplaced. I have ordered an inquiry to locate it.”

Alleging that this was a “cover-up” exercise, A K Jain who filed a complaint, said, “The fact that the files and records related to the case are missing had been kept a well-guarded secret. This is a matter of concern and point to some conspiracy and enforcing the RTI act on political parties”.

Courtesy: The Times of India (14 February 2014)

CIC puts 6 parties on notice for not implementing RTI

Mohammad Ali

The Central Information Commission on Monday issued notices to the Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Nationalist Congress Party, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India and Bahujan Samaj Party asking them to furnish details of action taken by them to implement the Right to Information Act as per the Commission's order. The CIC gave the six political parties four weeks to submit their replies.

The Commission's order came in response to a representation by RTI activist Subhash Agrawal seeking compliance of its earlier order asking the political parties to implement the RTI Act.

The CIC, which is a quasi-judicial body on matters relating to the RTI Act, in June last year had declared that the parties were "public authorities" under the RTI Act arguing that they were "substantially funded" indirectly by the Central Government. It had given them ten weeks to implement the law by appointing Public Information Officers to respond to RTI queries, but so far none of the parties has followed the CIC direction.

"It is directed that the detailed comments on the said representations received from Mr. Agrawal

and the details of the action taken on the directions contained in the Commission's order of June 3, 2013, may be furnished to the Commission within four weeks," the CIC said in its notice issued to the parties. The full bench of the commission, comprising the then Chief Information Commissioner Satyananda Mishra and Information Commissioners M.L. Sharma and Annapurna Dixit had declared on June 3, 2013, "We have no hesitation in concluding that the INC/AICC, the BJP, the CPI (M), the CPI, the NCP and the BSP have been substantially financed by the Central Government and, therefore, they are held to be public authorities under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act." The Commission then directed the presidents and general-secretaries of the six political parties to designate Central Public Information Officers and the



Appellate Authorities at their headquarters in six weeks and to respond to RTI queries in the next four weeks. The CIC had also directed the parties to comply with the provisions of mandatory proactive disclosure by putting those details on their websites. But none of the political parties followed the order so far.

Courtesy: The Hindu (11 February 2014)

Our Permanent Revolutionary

Saubhik Chakrabarti

Kejriwal is Indian democracy's Trotsky. He's good at interrogating power but it is bad news when he has power

A slightly longer version of this piece appeared in the Pure Politics section of The Economic Times on December 18, before Kejriwal became CM. It has assumed greater relevance in light of recent events

His announcement interrupted by bouts of coughing, Arvind Kejriwal today sought to introduce a radical element in Indian democracy that'll produce a few coughing fits in India's political establishment. His plan to ask people of Delhi

whether Aam Aadmi Party should rule Delhi has only two major parallels in our times: the Swiss system of direct democracy via referendums and signature campaigns, and state and local level votes on propositions in US politics.

These are alien to India's and most democratic countries political practice. But they are consistent with Kejriwal's thinking. Before he became the politician du jour, Kejriwal had written a slim book in 2012 Swaraj: Power to the People.

Among its many arguments was a strong pitch for the Swiss model of direct democracy. Much more important, that book shows why it's in India's best interest that Kejriwal doesn't actually wield power. Swaraj is Kejriwal's call for nothing less than a revolution. Or even better described, a permanent revolution everything must be challenged all the time, because political status quo can corrupt anything. But, while permanent revolutionaries can be useful in changing establishment thinking, they are unsuitable at being the establishment. They do us a favour when they closely look at power but stay out of it.

Permanent revolution as a concept entered political discourse thanks to Leon Trotsky. Brilliant and ruthless, Trotsky, with Lenin and Stalin, made up the three kings of Soviet revolution. To cut a long Soviet story short, post Lenin's death Stalin outwitted and then exiled Trotsky, and ultimately had his rival murdered. But it's not Soviet communism's flaws that are relevant here. Trotsky's idea of a permanent revolution is relevant to understanding Kejriwal because, like Trotsky, Kejriwal seems to think incremental change is as bad as status quo. And like Trotsky, Kejriwal seems incapable of understanding that people aam aadmi are unwilling and uninterested in being instruments of continual change. They all of us lack abilities required for playing this fantasy revolutionary role. Trotsky wanted working classes everywhere to lead an almost global communist revolution.

This was hopelessly impractical for Soviet communists. Stalin, though a dictator, was from the point of view of Soviet communist ruling

classes, more sensible he said let's build a new society in USSR first.

Look at Kejriwal. He can form a government, do good things and, given the nature of any system, make compromises. But nope Kejriwal wants to take government formation to the streets. Is that practical 280 public meetings and voice vote decisions Are text messages the way to democratic deliverance Is that even right.

It is to avoid such situations that we have electoral democracy and organized politics. Yes, there are scoundrels in organized politics.

But unilaterally imposing a Swiss-style referendum on Delhi over a weekend is not a solution it is the playing out of a permanent revolutionary's fantasy. Kejriwal's many policy recommendations share the same symptoms of permanent revolution. Worryingly impractical, they are based on an assumption that negotiated change or an appreciation of complexities is just cowardice.

Kejriwal in government is, therefore, bad news. But Kejriwal interrogating governments is great news. If Soviet communism wasn't a criminal enterprise, Trotsky could have been a check on someone like Stalin. Someone like Kejriwal can be very useful for India's system. He thinks seriously about serious issues, has the power to mobilize and the power to pose sharp questions to an establishment that needs plenty of interrogation.

Our very own permanent revolutionary should stay out of power. He'd do us more good by permanently remaining a powerful, non-establishment dissenter.

Courtesy: The Times of India (22 January 2014)

Claiming NREGA from below

Akansha Yadav

Social audits should not be judged by state response alone. They create awareness about rights and create engaged citizens.

This article is in response to Farzana Afridi's 'Social audit isn't enough' (IE, January 22). Social audits have been enshrined as one of the transparency and accountability tools in the MGNREGA. Such accountability mechanisms aim to strengthen the otherwise weak institutions of delivery as they engage the beneficiaries in the process of implementation, who participate, measure and raise concerns related to the implementation. The mere provision of a scheme does not necessarily

guarantee its access, and certainly not where the awareness on rights and entitlements is lacking. It cannot be truer than in the case of India, which has a set of well-designed social policies suffering from major implementation failure. Among other things, it is a stark manifestation of the existing top-down approach that has failed to deliver at the grassroots level and needs to be addressed on priority. The lack of involvement of beneficiaries, who are systematically disempowered and discouraged from questioning service delivery and

holding implementing agencies accountable, is one of the key reasons for implementation failure.

It is important to differentiate between the structural- and the process-related barriers to implementation that lead to financial and non-financial irregularities and the scope of social audits to impact them. Structural barriers arise from within the social, economic and political contexts within which the scheme operates, which shape and define the constraints of implementation. On the other hand, process-related barriers refer to issues of awareness, access to information and overall participation that impact implementation. As a community-monitoring tool, while social audit reveals large scale corruption in the implementation of MGNREGS, it also redefines and strengthens people's engagement and participation. Thus, in assessing the credibility of social audits, it is imperative to look at these through a qualitative lens throwing light on people's engagement with the state at the grassroots level, beyond measuring corruption.

The public hearing forum in the social audit process is one of the few platforms at the grassroots level where beneficiaries can voice their concerns and negotiate their entitlements directly with senior state officials. In Andhra Pradesh, where the process of social audits has been institutionalized, so far more than 6,000 public hearings have been held, related not just to MGNREGS but also other schemes, such as Social Security Pensions, Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana, Mid-Day Meal Scheme and the Integrated Watershed Management Programme. Through this, the state has reached out to more than one crore beneficiaries and trained more than 1.5 lakh village youth — of which approximately 20 per cent are women and the majority belongs to SC/ ST/ backward communities — in conducting social audits. In FY 2012-13 alone, public funds to the tune of Rs 50 billion have been audited in Andhra and 35,000 members from the families of beneficiaries have been trained.

Furthermore, prior to the public hearing, the scheme beneficiaries are trained to form a

collective capacitated to voice and negotiate entitlements at the forum. This includes training in filing RTIs, accessing scheme-related records, verifying the records and conducting door-to-door beneficiary verification, alongside worksite verification. Here, the role of citizens in monitoring the enforcement of entitlements and in demanding public scrutiny and transparency comes into sharp focus. It brings the local government and implementing agencies directly under the radar for provisions, such as the number of works completed, quality of work undertaken, expenses incurred on projects, appropriate facilities offered at worksites, etc, by bringing in credible and well-scrutinized evidence.

This is one of the few instances where the beneficiaries reflexively engage with issues of governance and power that play out at the field level and sharpen the political edges of participatory democracy. Alongside unearthing corruption related to labour and material, social audits offer the finer details of corruption, such as specific tasks where delays have been observed, tasks not recorded, or reasons for payment delays. Thus, social audits present firsthand ground-level challenges and policy-level issues that need to be addressed by the state.



It is true that social audit is an excellent community monitoring tool, but judging its effectiveness by looking only at corruption data is to overlook the process of gradual empowerment it brings about at the grassroots level. It provides a mechanism to those currently not getting served, or are underserved, and negotiate services meant for them. Field observations also suggest a phenomenal lack of awareness about scheme-related entitlements that social audits address. Particularly, in door-to-door verification, social audit gram sabha and public hearings, the auditors bring to light various MGNREGA guidelines not being adhered to. This creates awareness regarding rights and entitlements. It also serves as an empowering tool that encourages rural citizenry to participate in local governance and creates a sense of civic responsibility.

Across the six rounds of social audits conducted in Andhra, financial corruption of up to 72 per cent and non-financial of up to 22 per cent (maximum 35 per cent) of total issues have been brought to the state's attention. The break-up of these financial and non-financial deviations has also been specified. This includes benami names (down from 52 per cent to 11 per cent in six rounds), extra measurements (up from 3 per cent to 47 per cent) and ghost work (more or less constant at 15 per

cent across the six rounds). Moreover, implementation-related issues have been classified under 150 categories and presented in detail at various public hearings. Reports have been submitted to the vigilance wing for follow-up action. Judging the credibility of the social audit process led by beneficiaries by analysing it against the post-audit follow-up led by the state and its larger impact on the scheme's workability is a short-sighted proposition.

Courtesy: The Indian Express (28 January 2014)

MGNREGA: A tale of wasted efforts

The scheme represents Rs.2.3 trillion spent on wasteful rural consumption

This week marked the eighth anniversary of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's key rural intervention, launched in 200 districts initially in February 2006.

To the extent that such populist schemes helped raise wages without raising productivity. They have contributed more to inflation than to rural wealth. Worse, such schemes have undermined rural prosperity by cornering resources that may have been better utilized in projects such as rural roads, water systems, cold storage facilities and agricultural research that could have sustained rural growth over the long term.

The government has spent roughly Rs 2.3 trillion cumulatively on the scheme, without creating any durable assets that could spur rural growth on a sustainable basis. To be sure, those at the bottom of the rural pyramid did witness a turnaround in fortunes over the past decade. Wages of rural labourers have seen a sharp spike since the mid-2000s, after years of stagnation. However, estimates by the chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, Ashok Gulati, show that the fast rise in farm wages owe more to the "pull effect" of growth (the construction boom, for instance, raised demand for labour and thereby wages) than to the "push effect" of interventions such as MGNREGA.

The UPA's strategy of artificially boosting rural consumption through subsidies and doles seems to be reaching its logical limits now, with the rural economy slowing after years of steady growth. Three pieces of evidence attest to the turning tide in rural India. First, data from the labour ministry shows that wage growth of rural unskilled

labourers has fallen to 15% in end-2013 after scaling a peak of 22% in mid-2011. Adjusting for inflation, the fall looks even more dramatic. After witnessing average real wage growth of 11% and 10% respectively, in 2011 and 2012, rural labourers saw an anaemic wage growth of 3% in 2013. Real wage growth now seems to be lower than what it was when the UPA first assumed power in 2004.

Second, the earnings of consumer goods companies show a marked deceleration in rural sales compared with the past few years. In a December interview to *Mint*, Dabur India Ltd's chief executive officer Sunil Duggal said that rural growth had flattened out after several years of rapid growth. Other companies have echoed similar concerns over the past few weeks. Third, the December assembly election results suggest that inflation has become the key concern of voters in urban and rural areas alike, as voters face a bleaker economic future. Even in rural Rajasthan, the Congress-sponsored entitlement raj failed to douse the fires of discontent arising from slowing income growth and rising inflation. It is still too early to say if 2014 will be the ultimate moment of reckoning for the myopic UPA leadership. But it is quite evident that the neglect of rural investments in favour of short-term palliatives to prop up consumption has begun to extract a heavy toll.

After the disaster of the Bharatiya Janata Party's "India Shining" campaign, the UPA rightly identified mitigating rural discontent as a key priority. Yet, it failed to develop a strategy to raise rural productivity, which would have ensured that the rural gains are self-sustaining. The Rs2.3 trillion wasted on the MGNREGA programme could have been used to build roughly 45,000 kilometres of rural roads (assuming road construction costs of

Rs5 crore per kilometre). The multiplier effect would have raised rural incomes far higher, and by linking farms to markets better, it would also have curbed rather than stoked inflation. One can offer similar examples in public health or water systems. The UPA chose to fritter away the resources generated by high growth on shoddy populist initiatives. Most of the “radical” solutions the government advocated, ranging from the employment guarantee programme to farm loan waivers were aimed at providing temporary relief rather than addressing the structural problems of agriculture and rural development. The rural

vulnerabilities remained hidden during the phase of high growth, only to resurface now. With economic growth slowing, global commodity prices stagnating, and a mounting fiscal deficit limiting the possibility of sharp hikes in farm support prices, the risks to rural incomes have spiked sharply. What has started off as a slowdown in wage growth may eventually turn into a correction in real wage levels. It is ironic how the clumsy efforts of the UPA to address rural discontent have led to the persistence of the problem after nearly a decade of wasted efforts.

Courtesy: The Mint (07 February 2014)

Social audit isn't enough

Farzana Afridi

It hasn't led to reduced corruption and improved MGNREGA delivery

The recent pronouncements by the AAP on measures to hold public officials accountable have brought into sharp focus people's participation and social accountability as mechanisms to foster transparency and improve the delivery of public programmes. However, so far, there has been an absence of rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of the country's sole community monitoring initiative espoused by the MGNREGA back in 2005 — social audits. Mandatory social audits prescribed by the MGNREGA intend to empower beneficiaries to scrutinise expenditures and keep track of delivery. In spite of the widespread acclaim of social audits as low-cost and powerful participatory tools, a key question is whether community monitoring has reduced corruption and improved MGNREGA delivery. The assessment of the impact of the only large scale and systematic social audits in the country, in Andhra Pradesh, raises some key issues.

Even if a state government publicly announces regular social audits, the first round of auditing, because of limited state credibility, is likely to take public officials (or transgressors) by surprise and reveal large irregularities in basic programme delivery. Furthermore, local MGNREGA beneficiaries are expected to have high stakes in employment availability and in timely payment, while having sufficient initial capacity to detect transgressions. We can thus anticipate an evolving dynamic process, with more effective local participation through learning, and improved auditing after repeated audits. The drawback is that transgressions may also become more sophisticated. Monitoring may result in the

substitution of one type of irregularity for another, as transgressors learn to manipulate the new system.

Given these assumptions, if audits effectively detect malpractices and the threat of punishment is credible, the easy-to-detect irregularities (non-payment of wages or ghost projects) should decline. At the same time, we can expect more hard-to-detect irregularities (those related to procurement of materials) in later audit rounds.

Analysis of data from official audit reports of almost 100 mandals during 2006-10, however, shows that repeated social audits of MGNREGA projects did not reduce the number of corruption-related labour complaints, while there was a substantive rise in material-related complaints. While a modest decline in administrative complaints related to the non-provision of work was observed, there was an increase in complaints of missing records on material expenditures. The impact of audits on other programme outcomes — employment generation, targeting of the SC/ST population — was absent. Increase in local stakeholders' awareness levels or in the number of MGNREGA projects, selective repeated audits in the more corrupt mandals and possible biases in complaint registrations do not explain this.

The findings suggest that, despite increasing awareness of beneficiaries and the greater capacity of the audit process to detect irregularities, the overall social audit effect on reducing easy-to-detect malpractices was mostly absent. One can interpret the rise in irregularities as an underlying change in the anatomy of corruption and a failure of the social audit process to deter leakage of

programme funds. What explains the apparent lack of effectiveness of social audits in reducing malpractice? The analysis of administrative data on social audit findings in Andhra Pradesh suggests that follow-up and enforcement of punishments was weak. While it is possible that this weakness has been mitigated by the establishment of vigilance cells post-2010, less than 1 per cent of irregularities, for which one or multiple functionaries were held responsible, ended in dismissal, removal or criminal action. Even modest punishment — such as suspension, show-cause, or being deemed ineligible for contractual work — was meted out for less than 3 per cent of detected irregularities. Further, 87 per cent of the missing amount was yet to be recovered.

The responsibility for the implementation of a project under MGNREGA is held collectively by grassroots and block-level functionaries. Yet, the responsibility for most irregularities was pinned on a single gram panchayat level, contractual functionary — the field assistant, typically a resident of the panchayat. “Naming and shaming” might act as an effective deterrent for this particular functionary. However, social sanctions are unlikely to curtail malpractice among other functionaries, who often escape responsibility (such as the block development officer or assistant programme officer) and/ or are panchayat non-

residents (like branch postmasters). The effectiveness of social audits in deterring theft and other malpractices may thus be undermined by a single design weakness or slip-up.

A key lesson from the data analysis would thus be to ensure social audits culminate in the type of enforceable and credible “contract” that allocates responsibilities, defines timelines and ensures that those found guilty are promptly penalised. The credibility of the social audit rests ultimately on the ability and willingness of the political and bureaucratic establishment to take effective remedial action against offenders. A second, critical takeaway is that, without sufficient institutional support, the expectation that beneficiary-led audits should spontaneously arise is unsustainable. Systematic and regular audits with beneficiary participation have not taken off in other parts of the country. To ensure effective bottom-up involvement, beneficiary participation must be induced and strengthened through a combination of top-down and grassroots approaches. While the potential benefits of public programmes are large, the costs of ensuring that those benefits are realised through beneficiary-led audits are low.

But before community monitoring can be scaled up in other parts of the country or for other public programmes, we must strengthen its credibility.

Courtesy: The Indian Express (22 January 2014)

Transparency Through Digital Revolution – Unstoppable!

N K Mathur

The Hon’ble Finance Minister’s advice a few months ago to Banks to gear up for the Direct Cash Transfer (DCT) scheme of the Government was pioneering on several counts. This scheme would ensure that the money reaches the citizen for whom it is meant – it thereby fills a long standing latent gap between the source and the delivery point. ‘AapKa Paisa ApkeHaath’ (Your Money In Your Hands) is an important agenda from a national perspective. However, the time-frame envisaged for implementing this ambitious scheme would have to be about a year, not a few months.

It has rightly been pointed out that there is a lot of work to be done to put this scheme on-the-ground even in some selected revenue districts of the country, and later, all over the country. First and foremost, every prospective citizen has to have

an ‘Aadhaar’ card on the basis of which he/she can open a bank account. And he must have a computerized connection, or easy access to such a point. These two activities form the starting point for successful implementation of the DCT scheme. Foodgrain distribution is also proposed to be similarly undertaken – which would ensure that the PDS outlets can also get connected to the concerned citizens. It has been expressed by other public authorities that similar schemes shall encompass the whole country and would, thereby, introduce a sea-change in the style of performance of several activities in the life of citizens. This is the *avante-garde* phase of a **digital revolution** – after the ‘green revolution’ and ‘white revolution’ that the country had earlier witnessed. All such activities indicate the introduction of a vital chapter in the life of the Nation which would enable

inclusive nation-building, embracing all citizens and all activities – whether industrial, commercial, individual or interpersonal.

These functions would, *inter alia*, include several services and facilities like tele-health, e-governance, e-education, and many others, and these would result in, innovatively, other on-line shared services and facilities. Initially these might commence in some geographical regions in the shape of community access to digital services and thereafter move forward to individual access. These activities would be performed using the ‘digital’ medium made available by today’s technology encompassing all telecommunication services and applications, including services like ‘PURA’, police records, ‘SWAN’ and other similar Government initiatives at both the Central as well as State level.

The I&B Ministry has already decided to convert radio as well as TV broadcasting to digital mode pan-India, and has progressively started implementing the policy. The Direct Cash Transfer (DCT), Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme and National Digital Literacy Mission are among several other important steps in the same direction. For all these activities nationwide ‘broadband connectivity’ is a must – it can be provided either by wireless medium or on fibre or a hybrid of these media. In order to extend such connectivity to all ‘Village Panchayats’ of the country, the telecommunication wing of the Government has already commenced on an ambitious national optical fibre network project which is being implemented by the public sector organisation ‘BBNL’ and expected to be completed during next year. It therefore becomes imperative that these projects and activities of several Ministries be integrated and coordinated as a **National Digital Mission** – like several other countries have decided to launch. Here, note must be taken of the fact that such countrywide interconnection is possible only through the digital medium. When we talk of ‘*establishing a digital India*’ we talk of it being a digital economy, a knowledge society which, inclusively, creates, manages and communicates information digitally. However, in order to realise such a goal, the country would also need robust digital communication processing devices working via a broadband infrastructure, with adequate precautions for cyber security of the nationwide network and content. This would have to take into account not only cyber theft/attacks but also its inroads on other areas like intellectual

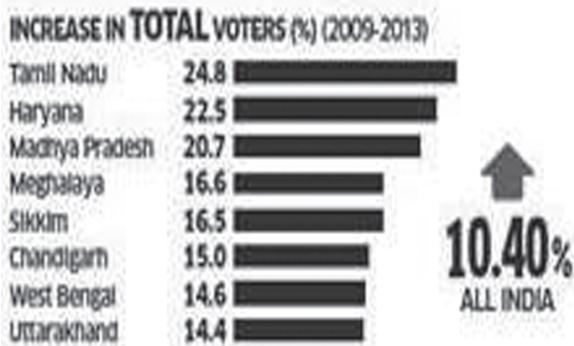
property and sensitive data. Moreover, all information should be in affordable digital form, which would include creation of appropriate content in local / vernacular languages, in keeping with regional literacy levels. This would, naturally, form a big employment potential for the youth all over the country. New technologies for various applications are being implemented / developed in India as well as other countries, and India can easily lead with the innovative power of the literate youth.

These activities would need to be monitored and completed in a coordinated fashion, and in a realistic time-schedule. The employment potential of such a nationwide project is obviously immense and would embrace all levels of the citizenry. Employment for setting up countrywide banking facilities - in the proximate future - is easy to foresee, as also for hardware and software development for making available to the citizen/user the facilities and services earlier alluded to. Not to forget the economic advantages of such a national project. These include, *inter alia*, benefits to large, small and medium business, increase in productivity, efficiency in transport services, enhanced financial services and many more benefits - besides reach of Government databases and facilities to the citizen. All activities being conducted ‘digitally’ would bring us an important side-benefit of helping towards eradication of corruption; this is going to be a great boon and might be the beginning of anti-corruption revolution! These advantages, coupled with instant and transparent availability of several databases, would lead to distinctly better services and facilities, including cultural benefits which could elevate the nation’s status vis-à-vis the rest of the world. These are some of the tangible and intangible benefits which would inclusively and collectively accrue to the Nation. Implementation and monitoring of this gigantic **national project** would naturally require coordinated action by the several concerned Ministries of the Government and, most importantly, the help of the bountiful ‘gold mine’ of brain power that India is endowed with.

It can be said with confidence that several amazing and useful discoveries would come up - many of which we cannot even foresee! Let us jointly put our best foot forward to implement this transparency and digital revolution in the service and overall betterment of India.

*Former Civil Servant, and presently
Chairman – Infocom Think Tank, New Delhi*

How many new voters have been added since last general polls?



CONSTITUENCIES WITH BIGGEST INCREASE IN ALL VOTERS (2009-14)

STATE	CONSTITUENCY	INCREASE (%)	SITTING MP
Uttarakhand	Nainital-US Nagar*	57.3	KC Singh Baba (CONG)
Uttarakhand	Tehri Garhwal	52.2	Mala Rajya Lakmi Shah (BJP)
Jharkhand	Giridih	41.2	Ravindra Kumar Pandey (BJP)
Tamil Nadu	Sripurambudur	29.9	TR Baalu (DMK)
Haryana	Faridabad	29.4	Avtar Singh Bhadana (CONG)
Jharkhand	Ranchi	27.7	Subodh Kant Sahai (CONG)
Tamil Nadu	Chennai South	26.8	C Rajendran (AIADMK)
Haryana	Gurgaon	26.5	Inderjit Singh Rao (CONG)
Madhya Pradesh	Dhar (ST)	26.3	Gajendra Singh Rajukhed (CONG)
Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	25.2	PR Natarajan (CPIM)
Jharkhand	Lohardaga (ST)	24.9	Sudarshan Bhagat (BJP)

Courtesy: The Economic Times (03 February 2014)

Social Networking making people more stupid

PTI | London

Social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook may be making us stupider by making it hard for people to think for themselves, a new study suggests. Speed, volume and ease with which information is shared through social networking sites may be making it more difficult for us to think analytically, researchers say.

Scientists including Dr Iyad Rahwan, an Honorary Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, investigated if networks help us imitate analytical thought processes from our peers. To carry out their experiment they tested university students with a series of brain-straining questions. As many as 100 volunteers were separated into five social networks each with 20 individuals. Connections between the people in the networks were assigned randomly by a computer to fit five different network patterns.

At one extreme all the people in the network were connected directly to all the others, and at the other extreme there were no connections at all. To test how these networks helped the people in them to learn, the scientists quizzed the volunteers with a “cognitive reflection test”, a series of questions which rely on analytical reasoning to overcome incorrect intuition.

To see if the social networks helped the people in them to improve their answers the volunteers were asked each of the questions five times.

The first time the volunteers had to figure it out on their own, the next five times they were allowed to copy the answer from their neighbours in the network. The researchers found that in well-connected networks volunteers copy-cats got better at giving the right answer the more times they were

asked and the more opportunities they had to steal their neighbours’ answers.

This result showed that when the students had lots of connections to peers they could recognise where they had given a wrong answer and swap it for the right one, proving to the scientists that well-connected networks can help us get the right answer because we can copy from our peers.

The scientists compared how well the volunteers fared in the three consecutive questions to see if the volunteers were actually getting better at figuring out the problems themselves or just at copying the right answers.

They found that there was no improvement from one question to the next; even when individuals had realised in the first round of questions that finding the solutions required deeper thought, in the next question they were back at square one.

The team said the results show that whilst social networks helped the volunteers choose better answers they didn’t prime them to answer more logically themselves, showing that “social learning does not seem to help individuals bypass their bias in favour of intuition but rather help society as a whole thrive despite this bias.” The study was published in the Journal of the Royal Society Interface.

Courtesy: The Pioneer (10 February 2014)

Facebook's 10th anniversary: 10 interesting facts

Alice Yehia

Today marks the 10 year anniversary of the world's most popular social network: Facebook. It was on this day, in 2004, that Mark Zuckerberg's project was launched from his Harvard dorm room. What better way to celebrate its birthday, than finding out 10 interesting facts about the decade old network.

1. The 'like' button, the feature most associated with Facebook, has been hit 1.13 trillion times since its launch 10 years ago, with an average of 6 billion likes per day as of December 2013.

2. According to Divorce Online, a third of all divorce filings in 2011 contained the word 'Facebook', as the social network has become one of the main reasons for breakups and relationship problems.

3. In 2011 Iceland used Facebook to rewrite their constitution. The draft of the new constitution was uploaded on the social media site by the council to allow users to make suggestions and amendments.

4. Zuckerberg decided to make Facebook's logo blue because of his red-green colour blindness condition. The colour has now become extremely popular, and Facebook's campus store sells nail polish in the same shade named 'social butterfly blue'.

5. The United States is Facebook's biggest market with 146.8 million users according to research firm eMarketer. The US is followed closely by India (85 million), Brazil (61.3 million) and Indonesia with about 60 million.

6. Adding the number four at the end of Facebook's URL will redirect you to Mark Zuckerberg's personal wall. Adding the numbers five and six will take you to the respective profiles of Zuckerberg's former college roommates, Chris Hughes and Dustin Moskovitz, while number seven will redirect you to Arie Hasit's profile, Mark's good friend from Harvard.

7. Many companies still block Facebook access on their employees computers, fearing a lack of productivity. Statistics show that nearly 60 per cent of Facebook users are active at least 20 minutes everyday.

8. A couple of Princeton scholars have published a study entitled "Epidemiological modelling of online social network dynamics", which

compared the cycle of an infectious disease to the proliferation of Facebook. The study also predicted that the social network will lose 80 per cent of its users between 2015 and 2017.

9. Prior to its major redesign in 2007, the Facebook homepage featured a man's face, known as 'the Facebook guy'. It was later revealed in the book "The Facebook Effect" that the image was a manipulated photo of a young Al Pacino.

10. Aged 22, Zuckerberg turned down Yahoo's \$1bn (£612m) offer to buy Facebook. "I don't know what I could do with the money. I'd just start another social networking site. I kind of like the one I already have."

Courtesy: Real Business (04 February 2014)



Facebook battles to stay young and cool

Sixteen-year-old Owen Fairchild doesn't hang out at Facebook as much as he did when he was just a kid.

It is not that he and his friends are abandoning the social network. They are spreading their love to rival networks like Twitter, Pinterest, SnapChat, Instagram and blogging platform Tumblr.

Newer contenders

"I've moved on," the teenager said. "I go to Tumblr a lot more; there is a lot of funny stuff.

Snap Chat is super-fun because you can send really unattractive pictures of yourself and they will delete after a few seconds." Contrary to what grownups might think, teens sometimes prefer to catch up on life face-to-face in the real world, he added.

"I think Facebook is still very popular even though some people might be losing interest," added the Grade 11 student. Facebook, born on a college campus a decade ago, has grown to 1.23 billion

active users worldwide. But as it prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary, Facebook is now facing challenges in keeping its original base of young users as new social networks vie to be the coolest on the Internet.

A social networking trend set in motion by Facebook has been accelerated by soaring popularity of smart phones that let people share images, videos, thoughts or observations at any moment.

Shifting demographics

Facebook's demographics appear to be shifting as adults, even seniors, use the network to catch up with long-lost friends and stay connected to family and colleagues. Princeton University student Susannah Sharpless said she and friends have stopped letting Facebook consume their lives.

"Everyone in my friend group went through this stage where we hated Facebook and deleted it," Sharpless told AFP. "I was one of the first people to get it back. Slowly, everyone did."

Breaking from Facebook served as a detox period during which she and friends got a better handle on what was a daily habit, the college junior said. "I check my Twitter feed all the time; there is nothing that I definitely need to know on

Facebook." She also finds more interesting fare on Instagram, which Facebook bought in a billion-dollar deal. But Sharpless also said, "Facebook isn't done... I think it is just changing in the way people use it."

Interactions at Facebook by people ages 13 to 24 grew about 29 percent last year, according to Social bakers. "Teens are definitely not leaving en masse as some reports would have you believe," Social bakers data specialist Ben Harper said. AFP

Quick facts

** Facebook had 1.23 billion monthly active users at the end of 2013, based on company data, or roughly one-sixth of the world's population. Some 945 million of the users were accessing Facebook on mobile devices.*

** The biggest market for Facebook is the United States, with 146.8 million users in late 2013. Next was India (84.9 million).*

** The age range of Facebook users is seen as a key topic. The consultancy iStrategy Labs reports Facebook has lost three million teens in the United States since 2011, while the number of over-55 users rose 80 percent. Some other research challenges the idea that Facebook is losing teens.*

Courtesy: The Hindu (03 February 2014)

Data geeks make TV ads for voters

Philip Elliott

The days when political campaigns would try to make inroads with demographic groups such as soccer moms or white working-class voters are gone. Now, the operatives are targeting specific individuals.

And, in some places, they can reach those individuals directly through their televisions.

Welcome to Addressable TV, an emerging technology that allows advertisers — Senate hopefuls and insurance companies alike — to pay some broadcasters to pinpoint specific homes.

Advertisers have long bought ads knowing that only a fraction of the audience was likely to respond to them. Allowing campaigns — political or not — to finely hone their TV pitches to individuals could let them more efficiently spend their advertising dollars. "With a traditional TV buy you can end up paying for a lot of eyeballs you don't care about,"

said Chauncey McLean, chief operating officer of the Analytics Media Group, an ad and data firm. "Addressable TV is a powerful tool for those that are equipped to use it. If you know who you want to talk to and what you want to say, you can be much more precise."

Data geeks look at everything from voting histories to demographics, magazine subscriptions to credit scores, all in the hopes of identifying their target audience. The advertiser then hands over a list of targets and, without the viewer necessarily realizing it, the ads pop on when viewers sit down to watch a program if their broadcaster has the technology.

"This is the power of a 30-second television commercial with the precision of a piece of direct mail targeted to the individual household level," said Paul Guyardo, chief revenue officer at DirecTV.

Courtesy: AP (18 February 2014)



Is media regulator good or bad news?

Editors discuss freedom in news dissemination, accountability, and the case for an independent ombudsman

Does the news media need an external regulator? Is the concept of following an internal code before writing and uplinking workable? What should the role of the State be in ensuring fair and ethical reportage?

The fourth estate in the country is increasingly facing such questions, even as it holds up a mirror to ascertain its nature. "Uncertain about where it is now and where it is headed" is how Sashi Kumar, Chairman, Media Development Foundation, describes the current state of Indian news organizations.

In the backdrop of the 2,000-page Leveson Committee report on the behaviour of news organizations in the UK, Indian editors and media observers today deliberated on freedom in news dissemination, accountability, and the case for an independent external regulator at the 'Media, Public Interest and Issues of Regulations: Indo-UK Perspectives' conference in Chennai on Monday.

N. Ravi, Editor-in-Chief, The Hindu, said more of both freedom and accountability was needed.

Legal Shackles

He would prefer a media free of legal shackles: the laws need to be loosened up, especially criminal defamation, in which the rigmarole of the judicial process was punishing enough. "The writer, the editor, and the publisher could be asked to make an appearance in court in any corner of the country. In fact, we have had cases filed in Srinagar, and Guwahati."

He said the International Human Rights Committee in a ruling in February 2012 had recommended decriminalizing defamation.

Similarly, contempt of court laws have been left to varied interpretation by judges: "Some judges seem to ignore strong observations, while others seem to be touchy".

In the same breath, why should journalists, who are professional such as doctors and chartered accountants, not be regulated by an external body?

Should such an institution be formed, the extent of regulation and the composition of its board are paramount, said Ravi.

"It would be impossible to expect such an institution to be free of the State and the industry. The second-best option to look for is operational independence and insulated appointment systems." It may mandate that all publications enrol and advocate arbitration instead of litigation to solve cases.

Shekhare Gupta, Editor-in-Chief, The Indian Express, said no such regulator was needed. The need of the hour is to infuse some ethics into journalists, checks the spread of sponsored news, and build solidarity within media groups. Krishna Prasad, Editor-in-Chief, Outlook, said the media is just flagellating itself.

Contemplating content regulation at a time when issues of ownership monopolies, unfair trade practices, cross-media ownership are still raging was not on, he said. Trying to emulate a British model of regulation here was not prudent – "we don't have headlines that read 'gotcha'."

Courtesy: Business Line (04 February 2014)

Mahatma Gandhi's Dictums

Should have one more now!....Freedom without responsibility

- * Wealth without work
- * Pleasure without conscience
- * Knowledge without character
- * Commerce without morality
- * Science without humanity
- * Politics without principles
- * Worship without sacrifice

If you think TV isn't an Idiot Box, Read This....

News channels carry BJP, Congress produced footage of Modi and Rahul events

Sruthijith KK & Aman Sharma

It's Modi live or Rahul live on your screens - but it's also, effectively, 'BJP TV' or 'Congress TV' for the duration of that live coverage.

Election rallies and meetings are now an almost daily affair, and will continue to be so till polls are over. These events are often broadcast live by television news channels. But increasingly these days, when you think you are watching a particular channel's coverage of a Narendra Modi rally or a Rahul Gandhi meeting, you are in fact watching live coverage produced by a team hired by Team Modi or Team Rahul - the broadcaster isn't producing the footage, it's just carrying it.

Fine for costs and convenience of broadcasters, but the party-produced footage raises some questions about TV journalism. Both Congress and BJP have hired professional firms to produce live coverage of political rallies with a sophistication that matches large-scale award functions. There are many kinds of cameras dedicated to capture every angle. Expensive equipment, large cranes, high-definition cameras and live production control all deliver an enhanced audio-visual experience for the audience. Therefore, a news channel only has to send an outdoor broadcasting van or a device the size of a backpack that can take a feed provided by the party and beam a link up to a satellite. Congress, which started the practice after BJP, has now gone a step further. News channels can now receive a live feed by entering satellite parameters into their systems. Nobody needs to step out of the channel's offices to cover a rally happening thousands of kilometres away.

Channels are happy and as are parties. But this relatively new practice in political journalism in broadcast media poses some obvious problems. The production crew hired by the party aims to produce flattering coverage-they won't show the warts. If there are thin crowds or other unflattering visuals at the rally, viewers won't get to see it.

VERY FEW DISCLOSURES

Besides, viewers ought to be informed that they are not watching the editorial coverage of the

channels. "First of all, I don't think it should be done. But if for whatever reason you are taking footage from political parties, there must be a clear disclosure. This is an issue on which the News Broadcasters' Association must evolve some standards in the run-up to the elections. News channels should not let political parties use them," media critic Sevanti Ninan said.

Manika Raikwar Ahirwal, managing editor at NDTV 24x7, said that at most events of consequence, the channel's team is present. "Party productions are rare and most of the rallies even if not covered by channels, are covered by ANI." Ahirwal added that "effectively immediately, NDTV will always make it clear if the video feed is obtained from a political party".

Some disclosures of this kind have happened. IBN 7 and ABP News have disclosed that footage of recent Modi rallies is "courtesy BJP". But this is not a widespread industry practice.

News Broadcasters Association president KVL Narayan Rao, who is executive vice-president at NDTV, was not available for comment. Broadcast Editors Association chairman Shazi Zaman, who is also group editor at ABP News, did not respond to calls and an email. Vinay Tewari, managing editor, IBN, also did not respond to emails from ET. Times Now could not be reached for comment; the news channel is part of the Times Group, which also publishes The Economic Times.

Multiple editors at leading news channels, who asked not to be named, said that nearly every major rally now is being covered in this manner.

India TV chairman and editor-in-chief Rajat Sharma said the practice has stemmed more out of logistical compulsions than anything else.

"It's a practice that has risen out of logistical reasons. It is limited to large-scale news events where same pictures are available to all and there is no exclusivity. When there are 15-20 news channels and everybody wants multi-cam coverage, there are issues related to space and security. But there is no obligation to take the feed. If you don't want it, don't show it. Also our cameras are usually there to catch anything that goes wrong. That is how we had the footage of

the blasts during Modi's Patna rally. Reporters and camerapersons will not miss anything unflattering."

This is a problem that has been tackled overseas. In the US for instance, channels either pool resources and share the feed, or take visuals from a television wire service. But Sharma says that in India's competitive television news industry, it's hard to forge such partnerships.

"Channels here won't come together to arrange for a joint coverage. Yes, ANI could do it, but it

will add to the cost of production. Most of the news channels can't afford to add to their costs." ANI is Asian News International, a television news agency.

The practice is now extending itself to no-media events as well. The Congress party did not allow the media at recent interactions Rahul Gandhi had with party functionaries, but subsequently provided channels with footage of his talk, shot by in-house cameras.

Courtesy: The Economic (07 February 2014)

Tight spot for women journalists in conflict zones

Preeti Mehra

In conflict areas like Jammu & Kashmir, the media gets squeezed into a tight spot, is subjected to different pulls of political arm-twisting and often offers a divisive discourse rather than playing a bridging role, said *Kashmir Times* executive editor Anuradha Bhasin. She was speaking at a session on 'Women in Conflict Zones at the National Consultation on Women and Media', organised by the government's high-level committee on the status of women on Thursday.

Ms. Bhasin felt it was important to locate how the media is positioned within the State. Between the three narratives — of India's nationalist interest, Pakistan's nationalist interest and the Kashmiri nationalist interest — the human element often gets diluted. This is further reinforced by inherent societal prejudices and the landlocked geography of the region, which results in lack of gender sensitivity.

The editor recalled incidents of sexual violence in Kunan Poshpora village in 1991 and in Shopian in 2009 that are "etched deeply in the psyche of women in this militarised zone". She said apart from being the symbol of vulnerability of women, the Press Council report on Shopian had not helped.

Syeda Afshana, who has been teaching media students in Kashmir for a decade, said though women are now more visible in classrooms and also as journalists, there is a serious lack of them in the peace process. In the same way, there is less coverage of women within the social dynamics of change and conflict — whether it is about widows, rape survivors, missing husbands or orphaned girls. She said conflict-sensitive reporting should be such that it does not escalate violence and instead tries to achieve conflict transformation.

Jharkhand-based Adivasi journalist Dayamani Barla said forest and water rights were the conflict

zone for villagers fighting for their land. While the national media focusses on women when sexual violence takes place, it fails to cover important social issues like anaemia and malnourishment. Ms. Barla said there was a need to understand that the rural population also wanted progress, but not at the cost of serious violations of community rights.

Teresa Rehman, who runs online newsmagazine *Thumbprint* which focusses on the northeast, felt those reporting from this conflict zone were mostly left to their own devices by media managements. She said the region was ghettoised as a monolith and was out of the radar of the national media. Only myths and stereotypes appear on the region. She gave the example of the shooting incident involving *Arunachal Times* Associate Editor Tongam Rina and the trauma she is still going through due to a complete lack of support system.

The two-day national consultation saw participation of women journalists from all over the country. The valedictory function was marked by the presence of senior and young journalists looking back and at the future. Among others, the most noted was veteran journalist Usha Rai, who related her 50 years in the profession and how the scenario had changed for women.

"There were two kinds of biases that the early woman journalists had to confront — that of their male colleagues who questioned their seriousness and ability to do a "man's job", and that of parents who insisted that even if they worked in a newspaper they must return home before sunset". She pointed out that though women in English journalism had gone far, their regional language counterparts were still struggling for rights and recognition.

Courtesy: The Hindu (08 February 2014)

Published, owned & printed by Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao, CMS, Research House, Community Centre, Saket, New Delhi and printed at Pearl Printers, 52, DSIDC SHED, Okhla Phase-1, New Delhi

CMS IN MEDIA

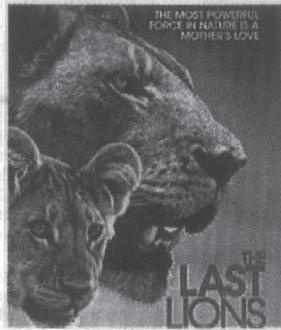
'The Last Lions' bags CMS Vatavaran Wildlife Film award

NEW DELHI: "Char... The No-Man's Island", and "The Last Lion" bagged the best of festival awards in both Indian and International category respectively during the 7th CMS Vatavaran International Environment and Wildlife Film Festival held here. "Char... The No-Man's Island" was screened under the category of Indian films category on Environmental Conservation and "Last Lions" under the category of International feature film.

A total of 33 awards were announced in 11 categories here late on Sunday evening on the last day of the Festival.

The awards were handed over by Union minister KS Rao and former Delhi Chief Minister Shiela Dixit.

The awards were selected by a



jury of 13 personalities headed by film maker Amol Palekar. Award-winning filmmaker Ramesh Sharma chaired the jury for international

awards.

The other Indian films which bagged awards in the festival includes "The Flight" directed by Saransh Sugandh under animation category and joint awards for "Chilika-Jewel of Odisha" directed by Shekar Dattari and "Tiger Dynasty" directed by S Nallamuthu in the category of Biodiversity..

A special Jury Special Mention Award was received to "Gaur in my Garden" directed by Rita Banerjee and "Mangroves - Forests of the Tide" directed by Suresh Elamon.

In the feature film category, "St-halam", directed by Shivaprasad got recognition.

The festival also saw the emerging directors who bagged the new-comer awards both in the adult and

children's categories. The award was bagged by Anjali Nayar for "Jal Khet" (Water Fields) and Laxmikanta Jena for "A Story" in the category of adult and children respectively. The Series awards based on Environment and Wildlife was bagged jointly by "Greeny the Great" and "Saving the Ganga" directed by Dhananjay Bhopale and Bahar Dutt respectively.

The documentary "Dammed by Nandan Saxena and Kavita Bahl also got high appreciation during the festival which bagged award under the category of "Water for All".

The five day film festival screened was classified around four sub-themes - Blue Agenda, Forest Biodiversity, Mountain Biodiversity and Inland Waters and Wetlands Biodiversity. PTI

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Common man feels corruption has increased: Study

PTI Dec 7, 2012, 02:58PM IST

Tags: Lok Pal Bill | Garbage | [CMS-India Corruption Study 2012](#) | Centre for Media Studies

NEW DELHI: India may be witnessing popular agitations against graft but there is no respite for the common man from the menace with over 60 per cent of slum dwellers in major cities feeling that corruption has indeed increased in the past one year, a new study says.

The 'CMS-India Corruption Study 2012' says majority of the slum dwellers surveyed felt that corruption in public services has grown in the last 12 months, the season of protests against graft and scandals that rocked the country.

About CMS Transparency

The CMS Transparency team focuses on issues of good governance, raising awareness about the Right to Information Act (RTI) and empowering citizens to benefit from the legislation.

The Right to Information Act 2005 represents a historic breakthrough in recognising the citizen's democratic rights to monitor measures affecting the public good. Following adoption of the Act by the Parliament of India, the CMS has set up a Transparency Studies wing to document, examine and publicise the interrelation between governance and society in all its aspects. It facilitates dissemination of relevant material, confers with experts and field workers and networks with the media to promote implementation and awareness.



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