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Demons around us



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I write this on Saturday 17th July morning when I read some shocking news. I shot out from my chair after reading the headlines on the front page of *Dainik Bhaskar*: Rape of the system in Sirohi.

A 17-year-old girl was picked up by four persons on 6th June in Mount Abu and raped under the influence of smack. A video was also shot to threaten the girl that she should keep quiet. Her father went to the police station, headed by a woman cop: Saroj Bairwa, to lodge a report but was shunned away.

Emboldened, the demons picked up the girl again on 15th June and took her to a forest area. Here she was given smack and raped again by these four and few others for four days. Once again, the father went to the police station and was successful in lodging the complaint this time.

The outcome: the arrested parties threatened the father; maligned him for asking for ₹15 lakhs settlement money; the cops said that the girl was a habitual addict and goes out of her house regularly.

The last nail in the coffin: the family was boycotted socially and the girl's engagement broken up. Demons committed the crime and the victim is the young girl. All this under the nose of a woman cop, who would be expected to be gender-conscious.

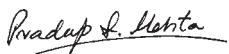
I narrated this at length because of twists and turns in a matter, which is becoming the new norm. Young girls continue to be molested/raped by demons who the press call 'animals'. They are demons and should be punished unforgettably. Even animals are not so cruel.

On the same day, I read another report in the *Times of India* where the bloody rapist of a two-and-a-half-year-old girl would have got away scot-free because of a typo. The rape had taken place in 2017. The perpetrator, S. Prakash, was arrested and charge-sheeted in a Woman's Court in Tiruvarur district in Tamil Nadu.

Instead of mentioning in the charge sheet that the victim girl's genitals had traces of 'semen' a typo occurred. The document said that 'semman' (red sand in Tamil) was found. It was argued that the girl must have been playing in the mud and hence the sand in her private parts. The court freed the accused S Prakash from the case.

Fortunately, the Madras High Court (MHC) stepped in and said that the offender could not take the advantage of the typo. The MHC punished Prakash to a five-year prison term and directed the Tamil Nadu government to pay ₹1.00 lakh compensation to the girl's parents. Here again, see the insensitivity of the Woman's Court, who did not see the apparent typo and freed the perpetrator until the MHC stepped in.

Secondly, how can a 5-year prison sentence be of any significant nature to give the bastard a good lesson? Just imagine the plight of the young girl who would grow up with this nightmare in her mind. Let me end with a prayer for all victims of sexual nature and that perpetrators should be sent to hell.


Pradeep S. Mehta,
Secretary General

Good News during COVID-19

Seniors get free rides for vaccination

A clutch of companies in the mobility and travel sector has announced special cab-hailing services,



particularly for senior citizens looking to get vaccinated or need medical assistance.

The services include ambulance for COVID-19 infected patients, vaccination centre ride, drive through oxygen centres, and hospital and medical equipment transfer, such as oxygen cylinders and concentrators, and medicines.

Currently, the platform lists transport leads and sources in New Delhi, Ghaziabad, Noida, Gurugram, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Agra. It will be expanding its reach to other cities shortly. (Mint, 18.05.21)

Lending a helping hand with oxygen

During the first wave of COVID-19 in 2020, Gurugram-based NGO Hemkunt Foundation, along with distributing at least 360 tonnes of



cooked meals among migrant workers and labourers, also arranged for oxygen cylinders.

Now, in the second wave, too, it is procuring oxygen cylinders for those

in need. But the difference is only 100 calls a month for oxygen were received. Now, at least 15,000 calls a day from all over India have been received.

Initially, the foundation insisted on patients' test results to provide the cylinders, but now, since even testing is complex, they check the patient's oxygen level. (www.forbesindia.com, 30.04.21)

Giving unused medicines to the needy

A doctor couple in Mumbai is collecting medicines from those who have recovered from COVID and providing them to needy patients.



Dr Marcus Ranney and his wife Dr Raina, started Meds For More - a citizen initiative to collect unused medicines from COVID-19 recovered patients.

The idea came when one of their staff members got infected from COVID and needed medication. As medicines can be expensive, hence at that time, there were a few people who had recovered from COVID, so they decided to take their medicines and donate them. (DB, 13.05.21)

JCB machine contributed to vaccine drive

A Health Department team was ferried in a JCB machine bucket to remote Sartoyala panchayat under the Karsog Assembly segment of Mandi district to vaccinate senior citizens. These people were unable to visit the nearby vaccination centre due to the lack of road connectivity.

People of Mandi are appreciating the health employees for their courage and dedication towards their duty.

(DB, 29.05.21)

Pregnant DSP urges people to follow lockdown norms

In a bid to ensure that people follow COVID-19 lockdown measures in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, a five-month pregnant DSP, Shilpa Sahu, came out on the road to create awareness among the people to follow guidelines issued by the State government to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. (DB, 20.04.21)



New car tuned into 'moksha vaahan'

During these difficult times of the pandemic, when COVID patients are consistently losing battle with the deadly virus, the ordeal of their families does not appear to cease there only.

When hospitals hand these families over the bodies of their near and dear ones for the last rites, a significant difficulty they face is the arrangement of a vehicle for transportation of the deceased to the cremation ground.

In this context, a scrap dealer of Jodhpur, Suresh Acharya, converted his one-month-old SUV into a 'moksha vaahan,' offering free services to the needy ones to take the deceased to the crematoriums. (Tol, 12.05.21)

WhatsApp group to facilitate patients

Sodala ACP Bhopal Singh Bhati, who faced many problems in getting a bed for his COVID positive wife, has a WhatsApp group to help people in crisis.

There are over 125 people comprising doctors, students, teachers, and blood donors who help the senior police officer arrange whatever requirements a patient needs in the group.



Bhati stated that the journey had not ended yet as we are trying our level best to help people fighting with mucormycosis. (Tol, 07.06.21)

Good Samaritans help virus-hit families

There are tales showcasing acts of kindness to extend relief to thousands of families affected by the pandemic.

While there are people who have started free food packets delivery services to households hit by the virus, organisations are also providing help by distributing COVID kits for those tested positive.

Looking at the increasing demand for oxygen, a youth Mukesh Sharma has offered free refills of oxygen cylinders at doorsteps. Anyone calling on his number can avail help by giving the empty cylinder, which Sharma would return filled. (Tol, 07.05.21)

Good News during COVID-19

Lone warrior keeps test going

By 6am every day, Jitendra Devrari, 33, is at work. Over the next 16 hours, he gets down to testing COVID-19 samples at breakneck speed. He is the only man in Almora who can.

The hill town of Almora does not have a private testing facility. The only state-run testing centre is at the Almora Medical College, where Devrari is the sole microbiologist among 21 doctors who have been recruited.

Devrari has been working with four lab technicians who collect samples and compile reports without a day off.

(Tol, 25.04.21)

Cylinder waali bitiya

Breathing hope into people's lives in need of oxygen amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, 26-year-old Arshi has earned the sobriquet of 'cylinder waali bitiya' - the daughter with the oxygen cylinder.



What began as a struggle to procure the life-saving gas for her COVID-positive father, who managed to beat the viral disease. He has now turned into a mission to save as many lives as possible.

She has distributed around 20 oxygen cylinders for free and is helped by her two brothers and some other associates.

(ET, 16.05.21)

Complimented for a social cause

Rehana Shaikhis fondly called 'Mother Teresa' by her cop-husband Nasir in Mumbai. Not only does she look after their family of six, manages her job as a police naik and recently passed the sub-inspector test, but Rehana has also shown rare humanity to help those in need during the pandemic.

If it started with adopting 50 needy children in a school, it naturally expanded to helping over 54 people with plasma, hospital beds, blood and oxygen.

Acknowledging her zeal for social work, Police Commissioner Hemant Nagrare complimented her with a certificate of excellence. (Tol, 10.06.21)

Under a tree!

In a village in northern India engulfed by COVID-19, the sick lie on cots under a tree, glucose drips hanging from a branch. Cows graze all around



while syringes and empty medicine packets are strewn on the ground.

There is no doctor or health facility in Mewla Gopalgarh in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh. There is a government hospital nearby, but it has no available beds and the villagers say they cannot afford private clinics.

Instead, village practitioners of alternative medicine have set up an open-air clinic where they distribute glucose and other remedies to patients with symptoms of COVID-19.

Some believe lying under the neem tree, known for its medicinal properties, will raise their oxygen levels.

(Reuters, 17.05.21)

Is 3rd wave dangerous for children?

People in India are now anticipating the third wave. They fear whether the third wave will target children. No vaccines are available for children.



A sero survey conducted among 10,000 participants across five states by AIIMS has shown exciting results in collaboration with WHO.

The findings reveal no statistical evidence to show that children in the 2-17 years age group are especially vulnerable to a potential third wave.

The children had as many antibodies as adults above the age of 18. This means that 50 to 60 per cent already had COVID infection earlier. Therefore, the chances of getting them infected are meagre. (www.indiatvnews.com, 18.06.21)

A tribute to a renowned neurologist

Eminent neurologist and Padma Shri recipient Dr Ashok Panagariya died of post-COVID complications.

Panagariya held major top positions, including Vice-Chancellor of Jaipur's Rajasthan University of Health Sciences and a member of Rajasthan's Planning Board.



He was a Dr B C Roy Award recipient, the highest Indian award in the medical category. Dr Ashok was awarded Padma Shri, the fourth highest Indian civilian award by the Government of India in 2014. (IT, 11.06.21)

Mylab rolls out 'Coviself'

Biotechnology company Mylab Discovery Solutions has commercially rolled out India's first COVID-19 self-test kit CoviSelf. Designed as the mid-nasal swab test, CoviSelf shows results in just 15 minutes. It is priced at ₹250.



The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) approved CoviSelf in May 2021. Mylab will distribute the self-test kit to 95 percent of the PIN codes in the country. The kit can be availed at e-commerce marketplace Flipkart and from pharmacies and drugstores across India. (https://zeenews.india.com, 04.06.21)

Indian lives matter

Karachi-based humanitarian group Edhi Foundation wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, offering a fleet of 50 ambulances and services to address the COVID crisis.

The foundation wants permission to enter the country and necessary guidance from the local administration and police department to provide services.

After the letter was circulated on social media, many in Pakistan took to Twitter offering help or writing about help to India. The two hashtags of #IndiaNeedsOxygen and #IndianLivesMatter too went viral in Pakistan. (Tol, 24.04.21)

Covaxin vs Covishield – What is the difference?



The COVID-19 vaccination drive has already begun in India, and many people are still unaware of how the two vaccines – Covaxin and Covishield – are different from each other. Currently, the government has not allowed people to decide which vaccine they want to get. Still, the result of the first phase suggests that both the vaccines being inoculated in India are safe and effective.



What vaccines are available in India right now?

Currently, two vaccines are available to the public-Bharat Biotech's Covaxin and Serum Institute-Oxford University-AstraZeneca's Covishield vaccine.

Is one better than the other?

Covaxin and Covishield are both homegrown vaccines that have driven India's vaccination drives. While Covaxin is entirely made, developed and produced in India, Covishield is manufactured by Pune-based Serum Institute of India.

Yet, there are some dissimilarities and benefits which peg them apart. Covishield or the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab remains to be the popular choice, used in maximum countries. Covaxin, on the other hand, is now considered one of the most influential and tolerant vaccines against mutant strains.

How are they made?

Covaxin and Covishield are both similar vaccines made using inactive/modified versions of the virus.

While Covishield is a viral vector vaccine that uses an adenovirus found in Chimpanzees, ChAD0x1, to deliver spike proteins and mount a tolerable immune response in response to a live virus. On the other hand, Covaxin is also a traditionally made vaccine but uses an inactive viral strain. It makes use of a deadly virus that drafts an immune response.

How many doses of the vaccines are needed?

Both the vaccines work as two-dose vaccines, administered weeks apart. They are also injected intramuscularly, administered in the upper arm muscles.

While Covaxin's second dose needs to be given 4-6 weeks after the first one, Covishield's second dose could be delayed, i.e. given 6-8 weeks after. The recommendations came in after experts observed a strengthened immune response when the dosing was delayed.

How effective are they?

When it comes to mapping effectiveness, both the vaccines have been found to be well-effective, matching WHO standards and prompting definite immune responses.

Covishield carries an efficacy rate of 70 percent, which could be further scaled up to 90 percent if the dosing is given half a dose, followed by a full dose a month later. The tolerability and protection have also been well-suited and thought to reduce the risk of symptomatic infections and speed up recovery timelines, which has been discussed recently.

As per interim results and clinical studies, Covaxin was found to carry over 78 percent efficacy. Additionally, there has also been clinical evidence that suggests that Covaxin could reduce severity and mortality risk by a whopping 100 percent.

Pricing and availability of the vaccine

Both Covaxin and Covishield are now available in the open market for states to procure. Serum Institute of India has marked Covishield to be sold at ₹300 for the government, while ₹600 to private facilities.

In comparison, Covaxin is slightly expensive and the public might have to bear the cost. For state governments, it will be marketed at ₹400, while for private hospitals and facilities, it will be priced at ₹1200.

Are there people who may be advised to not take these vaccines?

People who have been given monoclonal antibodies or plasma therapy may also not be suitable candidates for vaccination right now. Both vaccines should also be monitored and then given to people with low platelets or steroid treatment.

Conclusion

Both the vaccines, as mentioned above, have more similarities and fewer differences in question. Covaxin and Covishield both work effectively to reduce the risk of symptomatic infections, severity and mortality, which is a major problem being faced right now. Therefore, getting vaccinated and following COVID-appropriate behaviour is the need of the hour.

The rat's race has ended

For the first time, a rat has won a British charity's top civilian award for animal bravery, receiving the honour



for searching out unexploded landmines in Cambodia.

Magawa, a giant African pouched rat, was awarded the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), Gold Medal for his 'life-saving bravery and devotion after discovering 39 landmines and 28 items of unexploded ordinance in the past seven years.

Magawa is the group's most successful rat, having cleared more than 141,000 square meters of land, the equivalent of some 20 soccer fields.

(ET, 06.06.21)

Milkman becomes a 'pad man'

A milkman in Hanumangarh, Rajasthan, India, has taken it upon himself to single-handedly ensure that girls do not miss school due to the menstrual cycle. He has been distributing



free sanitary napkins in the district and adjoining states like Haryana and Punjab for over a year.

Since January 2020, Rajesh Suthar has distributed around 12,000 sanitary napkins, which started before the pandemic and continues even now.

Travelling almost 100 km daily, Suthar goes to slums and small rural colonies to give sanitary napkins to all women under 40. (Tol, 05.05.21)

Is Lucknow's 'rogini roti' vanishing?

In the age of sourdough and intermittent fasting, the ghee-laden nawabi bread seems to be losing its millennial kitchens, writes Sadaf Hussain, who searched the streets of Lucknow last month for the flaky roti.

He finally found it in a home-style restaurant in Qaiser Bagh and learned that very few still make the roti once a staple in Lucknow homes, often served with aloo ki qatli.

Its popularity has dimmed due to lifestyle changes and health reasons – it is impossible to consume bread with so much fat daily.

The elders are left with memories, whereas the young have not even heard of it. (Mint, 10.04.21)

Ancestral homes to become museums

The ancestral homes in Peshawar of Bollywood legends Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor are now owned by the Pakistan's local government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province and will be converted into museums.

The ownership of both properties has been transferred to the Director of KP's Archaeology and Museum Department.

According to the government, Dilip Kumar's house was valued at US\$50,517 while Raj Kapoor's home was valued at US\$94,061. (IT, 03.06.21)

PS: Now that Dilip Kumar is dead, we hope his museum will be expedited.

Minister quits after kissing row

Embattled UK Cabinet Minister Matt Hancock resigned as Health Secretary amid mounting calls for him to step down over his admitted breach of COVID-19 lockdown rules with a kiss involving a close female aide.

In a letter to the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Hancock said the government 'owe it to people who have sacrificed so much in this pandemic to be honest when we have let them down.' (BS, 27.06.21)

Fined for virus rules violation

Norwegian police had fined Prime Minister (PM) Erna Solberg for breaking COVID-19 social distancing rules when she organised a family gathering to celebrate her 60th birthday with 13 family members, despite a government ban on events attended by more than 10 people.

The fine is 20,000 Norwegian crowns (\$2,352). While the police would not have issued a fine in most such cases, the PM has been at the forefront of the government's work to impose restrictions. Though the law is the same for all, all are not equal in front of the law. (ET, 16.04.21)

When an elderly couple ties a knot

Two elderly grandparents have married each other in a heartwarming



ceremony after meeting at their aged care home and falling in love.

Marie Hill, 93, met Ron Hedley, 100, during a group exercise class at Cameron Park Care Community in Newcastle, UK.

The pair exchanged rings and vows in front of their families on the lawn of the care home. (DB, 19.04.21)

Disability is not inability!

The 46-year old Chinese Zhang Hong has scaled the tallest peak in the world from the Nepal side, becoming the first blind man in Asia and the third in the world to climb Mount Everest.



Zhang said that no matter if you are disabled or normal, whether you have lost your eyesight or have no legs or hands, it does not matter that you can always complete a thing that other people say you cannot.

He completed the 8,849 metre-high Himalayan feat, three high altitude guides and returned to the base camp. (Reuters, 02.06.21)

Miscellany

Thai monks light candles on Earth Day

Buddhist monks in Thailand marked the occasion of Earth Day by lighting 3,30,000 candles, and the stunning photos and videos have taken social media by storm.



In an attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the largest flaming image, monks at the Wat Dhammakaya Buddhist temple on the outskirts of Bangkok simultaneously lit candles across a 78-acre compound.

In a special message, their illuminated candles formed a Buddhist monk meditating within the Earth.

(IE, 25.04.21)

Pervasive racism in honouring war dead

British authorities apologised after an investigation found that at least 161,000 primarily African and Indian military service personnel who died during World War I were not honoured adequately due to 'pervasive racism.'

The investigation found that those service members were either not commemorated by name or commemorated at all, according to a report commissioned by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

(ET, 23.04.21)

Auckland ranked the most liveable city

Auckland in New Zealand has been named the world's most liveable city, in an annual ranking that the COVID pandemic has shifted.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) survey ranked 140 cities on factors including stability, infrastructure, education, and access to healthcare.

Auckland topped the list, followed by Osaka in Japan, Adelaide in Australia, Wellington in New Zealand, and Tokyo's Japanese capital. No UK cities made the top ten. (BBC, 09.06.21)

Library received a book after 70 years

A Michigan library received a long-overdue book in the mail along with a letter from Kari Magill, daughter-in-law of Mary Rowland Fischer, who checked it out in the 1940s.



The book was checked out by Fischer, who worked as an art teacher at Tappan Middle School and Northside Elementary in Ann Arbor until retiring in 1966. The library would not attempt to collect any fines for the late return. (https://borneobulletin, 27.06.21)

Woman gives birth to 10 children

A South African woman claims to have given birth to 10 children in what would be the world's largest-ever live birth if confirmed by doctors.

Sithole had previously claimed the pregnancy was 'natural'. Still, such extreme births are almost always the result of fertility treatments, with multiple fertilised embryos inserted into the womb to increase the chances the patient will fall pregnant. (TG, 08.06.21)

60-year old made 'Udan Khatola'

60-year-old Dayaram Gurjar of Madhogarh village, about 31 km from the city, has prepared Udan Khatola (flying machine) by spending ₹15 lakh from his pocket.

Dayaram tried this flying kite in a field in the village. During the trial, he flew up to about 300 meters in the sky for 5 minutes in this flying machine.

Kuldeep Tank, a paragliding pilot from Sirsa, was also with Dayaram. However, the local administration has barred him from not flying it again. (DB, 24.04.21)



Mars Rover Extracts First Oxygen

An instrument on Nasa's Perseverance rover on Mars has made oxygen from the planet's carbon dioxide



atmosphere. It is the second successful technology demonstration on the mission, which flew a mini-helicopter.

The oxygen generation was performed by a toaster-sized unit in the rover called MOXIE - the Mars Oxygen In-Situ Resource Utilisation Experiment.

It made 5 grams of the gas - equivalent to what an astronaut at Mars would need to breathe for roughly 10 minutes. (DB, 23.04.21)

Head of 'world's biggest family' dies

A 76-year-old man who had 39 wives and 94 children and was said to be the head of the world's biggest family has died in northeast India.

With a total of 167 members, the family is the world's biggest, although this depends on whether you count the grandchildren, of whom Ziona has 33.

Ziona lived with his family in a vast, four-story pink structure with around 100 rooms in Baktawng, a remote village in Mizoram that became a tourist attraction as a result. (GN, 15.06.21)

Meet the female Hindu priest in the US

As a Hindu pundit, or priest, who focuses on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) population, Sushma Dwivedi is a rarity in the wedding industry. It's close to impossible to find a woman pundit in the States. There are less than 10, and none of them cater to the gay and transgender community.

In 2016, Dwivedi founded the Purple Pundit Project in New York, which offers various "progressive, inclusive, LGBTQ+-friendly" religious services like baby namings, house warmings and business blessings to people who are "straight, gay, having an interracial marriage or want a female pundit."

(IE, 24.06.21)

City Briefs

Genome lab functional at Jaipur

Rajasthan has become the first state in the country to have the facility of Total Genome Sequencing at the state



level. Genome sequencing (genetic sequencing) facility has been started at SMS Medical College, Jaipur.

The technique of genome sequencing can provide information about new variants of viruses. This facility had been set up by spending about ₹1 crore.

Till now, samples from the state were being sent to the IGIB lab in Delhi, set up for Rajasthan by the Central Government's Indian Council of Medical Research. (ET, 25.06.21)

More infra funds for maintenance

Cash-strapped Jaipur Metro Rail Corporation has again demanded an increase in the Rajasthan Transport Infrastructure Development Fund (RTIDF) share from the state government.

The demand has been put forward as the department is planning to create a depreciation reserve fund for smooth operations and maintenance.



Unlike other Metros, the maximum share of operational losses of Jaipur Metro is borne by residents since the state government is raising money for RTIDF by levying cess on several services. (Tol, 24.06.21)

Revenue collection drive on the anvil

JMC-Greater will now start collecting revenues from commercial properties that remained open during the pandemic.

As all shops and commercials properties were shut down due to lockdown, it seems difficult to get urban development tax from the owners. However, grocery, private hospitals, pharmacy and other essential businesses that remained opened will now be asked to pay tax.

It is expected the state government to give them relaxation by waiving the penalty and 50 percent interest rate.

(Tol, 23.06.21)

Fourth tiger reserve receives nod

Rajasthan is poised to get its fourth Tiger Reserve after Ramgarh Vishdhari wildlife sanctuary received a nod from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)'s technical committee.

The tigers were believed to have disappeared from the sanctuary in 1999. The total area of 1,017 sq. km has been identified as the reserve area comprising two forest blocks of Bhilwara, territorial forest block of Bundi and Indargarh, which falls under the buffer zone of Ranthambore Tiger Reserve.

(Tol, 23.06.21)

Now, pink sarees for sanitation workers

Women sanitation workers deployed in JMC Greater areas will be seen in pink sarees representing the colour of the pink city. Pink is the city's identity and this should be represented by the workers who are the pillars of keeping it clean.

Currently, the corporation pays ₹1,700 to male workers and ₹1,600 to female workers. While the dress code for women has been fixed, there is a demand to decide on a uniform for male sanitation workers. (Tol, 16.06.21)

Rehab of orphaned kids matters!

The Child Commission will formulate a proposal for the welfare of orphaned children during the pandemic and send it to the state government.

The Commission has already received a list of more than 1,500 children and more are being added almost daily. It will also provide for the children who have lost one parent or been abandoned by their families for various reasons.

Officials claimed that they would incorporate government policies like the Palanhar scheme and others to facilitate the process. (Tol, 06.06.21)

Coaching scheme for poor students

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot announced the Mukhyamantri Anuprati Coaching Yojana implementation for students hailing from economically weak backgrounds.



The scheme aims to provide help to students who cannot afford coaching classes to crack competitive and entrance exams. It will be applicable for families whose annual income is below ₹8 lakh. The coaching assistance is available for one year.

The scheme is intended to have at least 50 percent of girls as beneficiaries. The selection of candidates will be made on the merit list based on their academic scores in classes 10 and 12.

(Tol, 06.06.21)

Inclusion of PwDs in urban development

Anjana (42), is 82 percent disabled and a social worker. She has been nominated as a councillor of Kherli municipality in Alwar district, it is a dream come true, as the Department of Local Self-Government has begun the process of nominating persons with disabilities (PwDs) to every urban local body (ULB) as members.



Out of 213 ULBs in the state, PwDs have already been nominated in 73. The state government had amended the Rajasthan Municipal Act in March 2021 to introduce this provision of nominating PwDs to the ULBs as members, making it the first in the country. (Tol, 20.06.21)

Bringing Back the Focus on Good Governance in Rajasthan

George Cherian*

Since independence, India has undertaken many institutional reforms that have significantly changed its governance architectures and put in place better governance. Most of the states too have similar institutional structures and practices in terms of administrative structures and delivering services in general and governance in particular to the citizens. Still, despite such commonalities, there have been variations in the progress seen in different states.



Rajasthan: A Birth Place for Progressive Laws

Rajasthan has a well-defined legal framework to determine how public decisions are made and actions are carried out, upholding constitutional values. More powers are granted to elected local bodies as it would, make public officials answerable and accountable to the people. Its people are legally bestowed with the right of access to information that are held by the government or a public institution as it is an indispensable tool to engage and empower them to demand accountability from government authorities and fight corruption.

Weak Implementation and Dismal Performance

Over the last few years, Rajasthan's overall performance in sound governance and responsibilities in relation to delivering public services has remained minimal or become worse. There is a high level of dissatisfaction with regard to the implementation of most of the laws. Regulations are often seen to be weakly applied, drastically slowing down the government responsiveness and accountability towards the people.

Recent Initiatives

The Jan Soochna Portal (JSP) launched by the Government in September 2019 is a remarkable achievement in furtherance of RTI, especially Section 4 of the RTI Act that deals with proactive disclosure of information.

In February 2019, the Government decided to bring a 'Rajasthan Social Accountability Bill, 2019'. The draft bill aims at ensuring provision of quality individual goods and public goods and services in a time bound manner. It is proposed Guaranteed Delivery of Public Services Act and the Right to hearing Act to merge with the new Act.

In October 2019, a committee was constituted to ensure the finalisation of the bill and enactment in a time bound manner, which had its meeting December 2019. However, it

is yet to be enacted, the shift in the focus due to pandemic might have slowed down the process.

In October 2020, Gehlot announced conducting a social audit of COVID-19 welfare programmes with the help of NGOs, a first of its kind for the country. However, there is no information about the formation of the governing body to carry out the same or execution of the social audit.

Importance of SDG-16

India is committed to achieve 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the most important of all the goals is SDG 16 which talks about accountability, transparency, participation, effectiveness and inclusion within the government institutions both at national and local level.

Since achieving each of the other SDGs depend on effective government institutions, the role of SDG-16 or good governance to achieve 2030 Agenda cannot be overlooked. If adequate focus is not given to improve governance, it is quite unlikely that the state will progress towards achieving most of the targets set out in SDGs by 2030.

The Way Forward

Merely passing a law is not sufficient to ensure the establishment of the principles of openness, transparency or efficiency. It needs to be effectively implemented and for that various factors need to be relied upon, including high political will, increased awareness, availability of adequate funds, proactive bureaucracy and well-trained personnel for its implementation, dynamic and active civil society groups and increased capacity development of the citizens to benefit from the law.

*Director, CUTS International
Abridged from an article that appeared in Ismarika, 2021
Full article can be viewed at:
<https://cuts-cart.org/pdf/bringing-back-the-focus-on-good-governance-in-rajasthan-ismarika-2021.pdf>

Sources: BS: Business Standard; BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation; DB: Dainik Bhaskar; ET: Economic Times; GN: Global News; HT: Hindusthan Times; IE: Indian Express; IT: India Today; TG: The Guardian; Tol: Times of India

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