

Grievance Redressal System revolutionized through CPGRAMS



*Amitabh Shukla

For the last several decades several changes have been brought about to improve transparency in the functioning of the government and bring accountability. Cumulatively, these have helped the common man find his groove in a maze of laws and indifference of the lower bureaucracy and the response time for the solution of his or her grievance has improved significantly.

However, nothing has revolutionized accountability, transparency and the response time of the government departments than the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), brought in by the Narendra Modi government.

Web based CPGRAMS has been designed and implemented in all the Ministries and Departments of Government of India. Moreover, a customized software with local language interface has also been designed for the state governments too called CPGRAMS - States. This provides online access to all citizens, including those in Armed Forces personnel, to report their grievances. The new system allows the Ministry to monitor the grievances and ensure their time-bound redressal.

A Public Grievances Call Centre has also been set up for reminding the Ministries and Departments concerned receiving bulk of the grievances in the Central Government, for expediting action on grievances pending on CPGRAMS for more than two months. Guidelines have been issued to all the Ministries and Departments of Central Government to ensure that their Citizens' Charter, incorporating list of services, service standards and timelines, are duly uploaded and updated on the respective websites.

As the Modi government has completed three years, I would limit myself to CPGRAMS which shows how penetration of Information Technology has overhauled grievance redressal mechanism in the country. While some say this is "revolutionary", my personal experience with the system reinforced my belief that indeed the government departments have started working very fast in the last over three years.

I have two experiences to share and both relate to the postal department. In the first instance, my father, who left for his heavenly abode, left a very old Post Office savings bank account in his files. Several visits to the post office did not help as the staff found some excuse or the other to deny payment to the nominee, my mother. Several months passed and correspondence with the postal department did not yield anything. The Post Master of the small post office in Bettiah, Bihar, would not clear the papers. Enquiries were tiresome and time consuming and the staff would demand one paper or the other consistently.

It was then that I came across the PG Portal—pgportal.gov.in—and how it is meant exactly for

cases like this. I opened it one fine morning and gave the account details in the complaint section and wrote a brief description about the problem and the harassment I went through. It took me all of five-seven minutes to lodge a complaint with my e-mail ID and Mobile number given.

I logged into the portal again using the number sent to my mobile phone and e-mail after two hours. It had the details and said that the complaint is lying with the Public Grievance Officer of the postal department, with an office at Parliament Street, New Delhi. Next day, in the morning, when I again opened the portal to see the status of the complaint, it had been sent to the Public Grievance Officer at Patna GPO. In the next three hours, the complaint had reached the Superintendent of the West Champaran postal Circle in whose jurisdiction the account existed. It was actually so fast.

In the evening, I got a call from the Superintendent of Posts that the matter has been processed and my mother is welcome to visit the post office next day for collecting the cheque which now totaled Rs 39, 480 after adding interest. I was elated as the system had worked so efficiently. The cheque was collected by my mother the next day. For the first time, I saw how this system cut through all sorts of hierarchies, paper work and obstacles and delivered to the common man.

The second matter also pertained to the postal department. This time, it was the NSC of my father which had matured at the end of March 2016 and I was the nominee. The agent, through whom my father used to invest in small savings scheme of the post office, got the paperwork done and deposited in the Lal Bazar post office from where the NSC was purchased.

But the post master would have none of it. He simply sat on the papers and did nothing. Lodging a complaint with the PG Portal was a click away. This time, in three days flat, cheque was given to my representative.

CPGRAMS is the new hope for redressal of any grievance - related either to the central or the state government. While the grievances related to departments of central government are handled quite efficiently, those pertaining to the states are passed on to the respective state governments. An officer of the Indian Revenue Service said, "The monitoring of the system is done at the highest level and no laxity on the part of the officials tolerated". As monitoring is done at various levels, there is an unusual hurry on the part of the officials to dispose the complaints as everyone would now know at which end the problem exists.

That to me is indeed a revelation and my personal experience with the CPGRAMS has been extremely pleasant.

**The author is Resident Editor, The Pioneer, Chandigarh.*

Views expressed in the article are author's personal.

(This article has been contributed by PIB Chandigarh)

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Probe assets of politicians: SC

The Supreme Court on Wednesday criticised the government for not investigating the huge increase in assets, by up to 500%, of politicians from what they show at the time of nomination.

A Bench of Justices J. Chelameswar and S. Abdul Nazeer said the government had been saying it was in favour of electoral reforms, but it was not forthcoming when it came to revealing details about such massive rise in assets.

CBDT affidavit

Even the affidavit filed by the Central Board of Direct Taxes leaves a lot to be desired.

“The information in the CBDT affidavit is not complete. Is this the attitude of the Government of India,” the Bench asked.

“The government is saying they are not averse to some reform. Necessary information should be there on record [in the court],” the court said.

It directed the government to file a detailed affidavit by September 12.

The top court was hearing a plea disclosure of sources of income by the candidates contesting elections when they file nomination for elections.

The court was hearing a petition filed by a non-governmental organisation, Lok Prahari, for the inclusion of a column in the nomination form seeking details of the sources of income.

The plea has claimed that the candidates while filing their nomination papers were disclosing their assets, assets of their spouse, children and other dependents, but they do not reveal the sources of their income.

The government says it is not averse to some reform; necessary information must be on record

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Can't we work on Saturdays, says CJI

Chief Justice Dipak Misra

Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra has written to the Chief Justices of the High Courts to explore the possibility of constituting special Benches on Saturdays to hear criminal and jail appeals in which legal aid has been provided.

"This will go a long way in ensuring speedy disposal of criminal appeals/jail appeals," the Chief Justice of India said in the letter.

He pointed out that some of the Chief Justices of the High Courts had already agreed to go ahead with the project from September 9. The High Courts of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Patna, Jharkhand and Karnataka had constituted special Benches to hear these appeals on Saturdays, the Supreme Court's public relations officer, Rakesh Sharma, said. "I am sure you will also join them," Chief Justice Misra told the Chief Justices of the remaining High Courts.

Huge pendency

In the letter, Chief Justice Misra reminded them that a "large number of criminal and jail appeals are pending".

"Delay in disposal of these appeals raises questions about the efficacy of the administration of justice as a whole and the criminal justice system in particular," he wrote.

He said the top judiciary had taken several steps to fast-track the justice delivery system, including judges working during vacations.

"May I therefore impress upon you to explore the possibility of hearing such criminal appeals/jail appeals, in which legal aid counsel has been provided on Saturdays by specially constituted Bench after obtaining the consent of the legal aid counsel and State counsel concerned," Chief Justice Misra said.

This will go a long way in ensuring speedy disposal of criminal appeals and jail appeals

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State on the other side

Supreme Court

Human rights activists often advance the claim that government is an anti-liberal establishment. During a discussion on individual liberty and state intrusion, a friend raised a counter-question: Why is the government always perceived as an institution resisting individual rights? His point was that government, after all, is a community of individuals who constitute it.

In India, however, the current trends would indicate that state seems to take an increasingly apathetic stand on fundamental rights issues in legal adjudication. Three recent examples are instructive.

On the question of criminalisation of marital rape, the [Centre made several regressive arguments](#) before the Delhi High Court. It was argued that what might appear to be marital rape to an individual wife might not appear so to others. With this argument, the government sought to make a distinction between marital rape and other kinds of rape. However, the fact that the offence is committed in a marital union does not change the character or the nature of the offence. Only non-consensual sexual acts will qualify as rape and not all sexual acts. It is consent that reverses the equation.

The second claim was that penalising marital rape would [destabilise the institution of marriage](#). Now, whatever the benefits of collective institutions are, the value of individual liberty ought to triumph them. Individuals are the ultimate bearers of rights and duties in a constitutional system. They are the morally significant units in a liberal democracy and the political authority of the state is always constrained by them.

The Supreme Court is currently examining the legality of an unusual judgment passed by the Kerala High Court of nullifying the marriage of a 24-year-old girl called Akhila/Hadiya. In the high court, Akhila's parents, who were the petitioners, argued that their daughter had been subject to indoctrination and forced conversion to Islam and that she was unable to take an independent decision in the matter. The marriage of their daughter, they submitted, was bogus and void.

On Kerala conversion case: Choice & conversion

Quite controversially, without any proper medical examination or other authentic evidence, the government argued that Akhila was unable to make an informed decision about her own life. The basic assumption that certain adults are incapable of making decisions about their own life offends individual freedom. It is important to respect the fact that individuals can also make wrong decisions. It is quite crucial that adults are able to think freely and the state is bound to protect and preserve their capacity to do so. Only when the state system ensures individual self-governance can collective democratic self-governance be meaningfully exercised. Even further, it is correctly argued by scholars that the legitimacy of the state is heavily dependent on its respect for individual autonomy.

The [Supreme Court verdict on privacy](#) was certainly momentous in Indian constitutional law. However, the stand of the Central government regarding the right to privacy was not impressive. The then Attorney General argued that privacy does not enjoy the status of a fundamental right under the Constitution. By relying on two earlier decisions of the Supreme Court, it was asserted that "Indians could claim no constitutional right of privacy".

Though the arguments are less bizarre than the first two cases, this claim is vulnerable. To put it

simply, constitutions are not to be read like commercial contracts. Constitutions talk about rights in an abstract language and the Indian Constitution is no exception. Article 21 merely states about non-deprivation of life or personal liberty. What constitutes personal liberty, for instance, is a matter of constitutional interpretation and context. Merely because a right is not expressly conferred by the Constitution, it does not cease to exist. Many unwritten rights are, after all, manifestations of written provisions.

It might be argued that these are three dissimilar incidents. But the fact remains that in such prime issues of debate, the stand taken by the executive has far-reaching repercussions on politics and law. The current pattern of governmental approach to rights shows opposition to individual rights. Perhaps, one cannot expect an executive that is politically averse to personal liberty to be a strong defender of constitutional rights in law courts.

Thulasi K. Raj is a lawyer at the Kerala High Court

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

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Combating Corruption



V.Srinivas

India's fight against corruption is led by a robust and time tested institutional and legislative framework including the Prevention of Corruption Act, an independent Central Vigilance Commission, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Judges (Inquiry) Act, the Lok Pal and Lok Ayukta Act 2013, Whistle Blowers Protection Act 2011, Prevention of Money /Laundering Act, Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act which cover a number of areas of criminalization and bribery. All civil servants are mandatorily required to declare their assets on an annual basis. The Elected Representatives are required to declare their assets every election cycle.

India's "zero tolerance to corruption" approach, as well as "minimum government and maximum governance" approach resulted in simplification of the governance model in recent years. Some of the steps included abolition of the system of attestation/ authentication by Government servants for submission of certificates, abolition of personal interviews for recruitments to lower level posts and weeding out inefficient public servants and those of doubtful integrity above the age of 50 years, prematurely. Further the Government demonetized high value currency to eliminate black money and corruption. A special investigation team was constituted to fight black money. Government also conducted online auctions of coal blocks. Government sought international cooperation in G-20 meetings on ending tax havens in Europe and other countries. In bilateral meetings with Swiss authorities India has said combating the menace of black money and tax evasion was a "shared priority" for both the countries.

In a recent visit to Jharkhand, the Prime Minister gave away a few smart phones to *sakhi mandals* (self help groups) in Jharkhand and said he was surprised by the answers he got from the villagers about the usages of smart phones. India's focus on "making government smarter" has been at the forefront of the Nation's Fight against Corruption. The same quantum of subsidy could benefit could be far more efficiently spent by a "Smarter Governance Model" than in a manual system.

The Jan Dhan Yojana provided universal and clear access to banking accounts with overdraft facility. In 2016, the Aadhar Act was promulgated to ensure targeted delivery of financial and other subsidies, benefits and services. The Act provided for an efficient, transparent and targeted delivery of subsidies to individuals, through assigning aadhar identification numbers. The third major step

initiated by the Government was the introduction of BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money) which is a mobile application developed by National Payments Corporation of India. The BHIM application facilitates e-payments directly through banks and can be used on all mobile devices. Collectively the Jan Dhan Yojana—the Aadhar Act and the BHIM Application have provided for a *smart government* where subsidy flows reach the beneficiary in a timely and effective manner.

The Government has sought to promote preventive vigilance through the Central Vigilance Commission. Several preventive vigilance measures have been introduced by the CVC. Measures like Government E-Market (GEM) have helped improve the accountability and integrity in public procurement. The Commission has sought to promote ethics through education of students and youth, observance of vigilance awareness weeks, process simplification to reduce discretion and interface with public servants, focus on training and skill development and awarding exemplary punishment in all cases of proven misconduct to create deterrence. The CVC has sought to create a people's movement against corruption through an e-pledge to be voluntarily taken by the citizens and organizations.

Further the Government has sought to strengthen the auditing and accounting processes. Some of the big changes introduced in financial governance are amalgamation of the Railways and General budgets, the merger of plan and non-plan expenditures, opening up of a number of sectors for foreign direct investment and the introduction of Goods and Services Tax. Looking at the enormity of the flow of funds to urban and rural local bodies, the C& AG has identified their audit as a critical area. The C& AG has also focused on the large volumes of digital information emerging from increasing automation of tax filing, assessment and recovery procedures.

There have been significant efforts made to promote transparency in Government. The Right to Information (RTI) Act is a rights based law that has created a durable stake for citizens in the administration of the Nation. The RTI Act has led to improvements in governance. By sharing information, the citizens have become part of the decision making process, which leads to creation of trust between citizens and Government. The Prevention of Corruption Act is an Act to consolidate the law relating to the prevention of corruption. The law provides for punishments for taking gratification other than legal remuneration in respect of official acts. The investigative powers have been given to the CBI and State Police Authorities. Government has said that accountability standards for public servants have to be kept at realistic levels so that officers do not hesitate in taking honest decisions.

In order to give statutory protection to whistle blowers in the country, Government made amendments to the Whistle Blowers Act in 2015. The amendments addressed concerns relating to national security and strengthened the safeguards against disclosures, which may prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of the country. Further the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, 1988 was amended to empower the Income Tax authorities to attach and confiscate benami properties. Besides, if a person is found guilty of offence of benami transaction by the competent court, he shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment and shall also be liable to fine. Several benami transactions have been identified since the coming into effect of the amended law.

To conclude, it may be said that India continues the Fight against Corruption and Black Money. These efforts led by the focus on smart governance are yielding positive results.

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Views expressed in the article are authors' personal.

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Corrupt MPs, MLAs return to power: SC

MLAs and MPs who face investigation for possessing wealth disproportionate to their known sources of income, always tend to bounce back to power. This is a phenomenon seen in the past 25 to 30 years, the Supreme Court observed on Tuesday.

The hearing, on a petition filed by Lok Prahari seeking a mechanism to investigate the source of income of politicians, saw the Centre give details of a probe into the assets of 26 Lok Sabha members, two Rajya Sabha members and 215 MLAs in a sealed cover.

A Bench of Justices J. Chelameswar and S. Abdul Nazeer asked if this phenomenon of returning to power, coupled with the mercurial rise in the assets of politicians just within a span of five years between two successive elections, was a product of ineffective investigation or of some “immunity” provided to them.

“If an MLA’s or MP’s assets have seen a 10X [10 times] rise in 2019 from what he revealed in 2014 should you not conduct an inquiry into the very propriety of a person holding public office enjoying such phenomenal rise in his assets ... The moment a candidate has shown 1,000% increase in his income in the past five years, please have a mechanism to conduct an enquiry,” Justice Chelameswar addressed the government.

“Income under each head should be probed. All these should be inquired. The public needs an answer. The people should get to know the state of affairs. It is not enough that a legislator discloses a legitimate source of income. It is important to inquire that how did the person get in that position to earn that income.”

‘Notify Fast-track courts’

The Bench observed the government should notify special fast-track criminal courts to try MPs and MLAs in corruption cases. Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal responded that prompt criminal action for disproportionate assets is taken whenever the source of income of an MLA or MP is found bogus.

“Law enforcement agencies take action. Perhaps they would straight away, even without a preliminary enquiry, register an FIR...,” the Attorney-General submitted. Scoffing at this assurance, Justice Chelameswar said “in the past 25 to 30 years, we have seen investigative agencies take no action against such MLAs and MPs.”

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Swachhta Hi Seva**Swachhta Hi Seva****Unprecedented nationwide campaign on Swachhta: India responds to Prime Minister's Call**

Starting tomorrow, the whole country will take up sanitation initiatives, for over 15 days, in an unprecedented campaign to highlight, once again, the *jan* andolan that is the Swachh Bharat Mission. This follows an impassioned call by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, ahead of the 3rd anniversary of Swachh Bharat Mission that falls on 2nd October. The Prime Minister has named the nation-wide sanitation campaign from 15th September to 2nd October 2017 as "Swachhta Hi Seva". This is being coordinated by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the convening Ministry for the Swachh Bharat Mission.

The objective of the campaign is to mobilise people and reinforce the "Jan Aandolan" for sanitation to contribute to Mahatma Gandhi's dream of a Clean India. Swachhta Hi Seva campaign will see large scale mobilisation of people from all walks of life to undertake shramdaan for cleanliness and construction of toilets and to make their environments free from open defecation. There will be targeted cleaning of public and tourist places. The participation will range from the President of India to the common citizen and would involve Union Ministers, Governors, Chief Ministers, legislators celebrities and top officials. Celebrities, faith leaders, corporate honchos etc. are being mobilised to spearhead the campaign in their respective areas of influence.

Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has made elaborate plans along with the State Governments to involve people from various walks of life and make this an unprecedented people's campaign. Reaching out to the poor and marginalised and providing them with sustainable sanitation services would be the hallmark of this campaign.

The campaign is scheduled to be launched by President of India on the 15th of September 2017 from village *Ishwarigunj* in Kanpur that has attained the status of open free defecation status. The President would administer nation-wide "Swachhta Hi Seva" pledge thereby initiating parallel action in all the 250,000 plus Gram Panchayats and cities in India. The launch campaign will be joined by Sushri Uma Bharti, Union Minister for Drinking Water and Sanitation; Shri Ram Naik, Governor of Uttar Pradesh; Shri Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and 7 persons representing various sectors of society, who are involved in supporting Swachh Bharat Mission.

Arrangements have been made to ensure formal launch of "Swachhta Hi Seva" campaign in all States and Districts involving Governors, Chief Ministers, State Ministers, MPs, MLAs and District Collectors. Pledged will be taken and Shramdaans done in Panchayats and other places simultaneously.

Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has identified special dates during the campaign period. It includes three Sundays, 17th, 24th September and 1st October when people are being mobilised to do large scale shramdaan for toilet construction, cleaning of public places, bus stands, school and colleges, statues, hospitals and ponds in rural and urban areas. A special cleanliness drive is planned in 15 identified tourist places on 1st October 2017.

Vice President, Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, is scheduled to visit a village in Karnataka on 17th September 2017, which is being celebrated as "Seva Diwas" and offer shramdaan for toilet construction and general cleanliness. A large number of Union Ministers, MPs and MLAs are also scheduled to offer shramdaan across the length and breadth of the country on this day.

On Seva Diwas, 17th September, Doordarshan has organised a World TV Premiere of "Toilet: Ek Prem Katha", a film that has an overwhelming message about access and usage of toilets on

Doordarshan, at 11am. Community viewing of the telecast is being mobilised to effect positive behaviour change. Several media houses have voluntarily come out to mount special campaigns for Swachhta during the fortnight.

At the culminating event of the fortnight on October 2 Gandhi Jayanti, which is also the Swachh Bharat Diwas, national awards for essays, films and paintings, and other Swachh Bharat awards will be presented to Swachhta champions from across the country and all walks of life. The fortnight was preceded by a countrywide essay, short films and paintings competition, especially focused on schools, youth organisations, central police forces, besides general citizens.

The Ministry has created a special portal and web page on MyGov.in facilitating people to upload pre and post intervention photos of their shramdaan and other interventions.

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National effort needed for further strengthening democratic foundations: Vice President**National effort needed for further strengthening democratic foundations: Vice President****Releases the Book 'Loktantra ke utsav ki ankahi kahani'**

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that a national effort is needed to further strengthening country's democratic foundations. He was addressing the gathering after releasing the Book 'Loktantra ke utsav ki ankahi kahani' authored by Dr. S.Y.Quraishi, here today. The Chief Election Commissioner, Shri A.K. Joti and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President underscored the need for people to vote for candidates based on the four positive Cs – 'Character, Calibre, Capacity and Conduct' and not on the basis of three negative Cs – 'Caste, Community and Cash'. He further said that there should be a debate on electoral reforms that can transform India into a more vibrant democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"On this International Day of Democracy, let me extend my warmest greetings and good wishes to all of you and all the people of India who are shaping the largest democracy of the world.

I am also very happy to release, on this occasion, **Loktantra ke utsav ki ankahi kahani**, the Hindi version of Shri S.Y. Khuraishiji's book "An undocumented wonder: The making of the great Indian Election".

It is a very lucid account of the extraordinary manner in which elections are conducted in our country. The Election Commission of India has rightfully gained worldwide appreciation for its extremely professional conduct of elections in a complex and vast country like India.

The author has shared his insights and experiences in a gripping narrative that captures the challenges and achievements of election management. It is a book that can provide valuable guidance to those conducting elections as well as enhance general awareness about the systematic and systemic way in which the Election Commission of India addresses all the key challenges. It also reflects the agility and responsiveness of the Commission that keeps innovating to respond to new challenges. Transparency and accountability are the hallmarks of a functioning democracy. The proposal to introduce Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) in all polling booths from 2019 elections is another step in the direction of strengthening our democracy, which has to be nurtured and preserved by constantly reforming the electoral system.

I compliment Dr S Y Quraishi ji on this excellent publication and the National Book Trust for bringing out the Hindi translation. I wish and hope that the National Book Trust will make this book available in all other Indian languages so that the information and ideas contained in this book reach a wider public.

Conducting elections well is an important and integral part of democracy. Each citizen must be

able to vote for the candidate and the party she or he likes without any fear of intimidation. Nor should there be any inducement. Each individual is important in a democracy and each vote is important. In a robust democracy, the voice of the people is heard and the choice of the people is respected. The transfer of power takes place peacefully based on the popular mandate.

Brothers and Sisters, we should be proud of the fact that we are not only the largest democracy in the world but also that we are constantly striving to make it more meaningful. We gave universal franchise right from the time we became independent and decided to adopt a democratic form of government. As compared to many fledgling democracies, we have been able to hold elections to the national Parliament and State Assemblies as well as to the local bodies fairly regularly.

However, a little critical introspection and honest review of the past and current electoral processes makes us realize how much we all collectively need to do to improve the system. Clearly, there are a number of areas in which we have to bring about changes.

On this International Day of Democracy, my thoughts turn to the **quality of our polity**. How well are we nurturing and nourishing this plant of democracy sown with great expectations by the founding fathers of our constitution? Are we living up to those ideals? Are our thoughts and actions breathing life into the constitution we gave ourselves in 1950?

India has committed to the United Nations Charter that aims to build a world on the values of 'peace', 'justice', 'respect', 'human rights', and 'tolerance' and 'solidarity'.

India's glorious cultural heritage is also dotted with a number of thought leaders who have eloquently espoused these values for over a million years. The village republics and the Bhikshu Sanghas of ancient India, as Dr.B.R.Ambedkar points out, functioned on democratic principles.

The essence of all religions is the quest for peace and harmony. A few days ago, we commemorated the 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's historic speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. In that speech, Swami Vivekananda touched upon the essence of Hinduism as "a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman."

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore had forewarned against the temptation to break up our world into fragments by erecting narrow domestic walls. But we are still grappling with the divisions based on caste, creed, religion, sex and language. It is, however, heartening that the youth of our country is aspiring to see a new India where these distinctions become irrelevant. We are trying to create a new India where key democratic principles are actively practiced in daily life.

The India we want is a democratic, developed, inclusive, peaceful, harmonious India that **celebrates** diversity and plurality not merely **tolerates** them.

I want each citizen of our country to strive continuously through thought and action to transform our country into a vibrant democracy. A democracy in which leaders should be elected on the basis of character, calibre, capacity and conduct and voters should choose the candidates who have discipline, dynamism, dedication and devotion. Politics of caste, community and cash should be totally rejected.

Elections are the touchstone for a democracy. The regularity and the fairness of elections is an indication of the health of any democracy. Elections are an expression of individual freedom and potentially give each Indian a sense of participation in the governance of the country.

We must deepen this bond between people and leaders through a respectful responsiveness to public opinion. We must enhance the trust and confidence in the citizens that the political executive will deliver on the promises made during election campaigns.

All this requires a rethinking about our electoral processes. I would suggest that we, as a nation, should engage in this collective reflection and ponder over five aspects I wish to outline.

First, I feel the time has come to take a serious look at the possibility of conducting **simultaneous elections** for the parliament and various Assemblies. The current practice of conducting elections in one State or the other at different times tends to focus the attention of the country away from development and slows down progress.

As the former President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee had stated:

“Throughout the year, some election or the other is happening and regular work comes to a standstill with the code of conduct being implemented. The time is also ripe for a constructive debate on electoral reforms and a return to the practice of the early decades after Independence when elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies were held simultaneously. It is for the Election Commission to take this exercise forward in consultation with political parties.”

Second, if the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have to be implemented in letter and spirit, we should ensure that **elections to local bodies** should be held every five years. Ours is a three tiered democratic polity and we must strengthen democracy at the Union, State and local body levels.

Third, I would suggest that we should have a time limit to dispose of election petitions. If necessary, special election tribunals must be set up for disposing of election petitions.

The fourth aspect and perhaps the most important of all is the need to **curb the influence of money power** in elections to set a truly level playing field. Various solutions have to be thought of including State-funding. In addition, the new trend of paid news has to be completely eliminated.

The fifth aspect is an imperative need for revisiting the Anti-Defection law. We must examine as to what extent it has served its purpose. If needed, it has to be amended further and made more stringent.

We are at the cross roads of our country's history. The citizens, especially the youth, are looking for a future that guarantees them the freedom to grow, to contribute to and be a part of the new India's growth story. The country is looking for a new paradigm in governance that focuses on achieving tangible development outcomes. The direction set by the government seeks to make a collective effort to transform the development trajectory encapsulated in the overarching principle of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'. As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his closing speech of the first Constituent Assembly said:

“If we wish to maintain democracy not only in form but also in fact, what must we do? We must make our political democracy a social democracy. It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life”.

Free and fair election process is the foundation for a political democracy. The ultimate purpose of democratic governance is social democracy, to ensure inclusive development and improvement in the quality of life of all citizens; especially those who are the poorest of the poor and those who have been left out of the democratic processes.

I do hope the book will stimulate further thoughts and action. Inspired by the Prime Minister's mantra of “reform, perform, transform” as the guiding principles, the people and their elected representatives have the ability to transform our largest democracy into a more lively democracy that welcomes people's participation in all spheres of nation building. Let us accelerate this process by moving from precept to practice and collectively shape the India we all want.”

KSD/BK

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President launches nationwide Swachhata Hi Seva jan aandolan from Kanpur**President launches nationwide Swachhata Hi Seva jan aandolan from Kanpur**

The President Shri Ram Nath Kovind today launched the nationwide jan aandolan, Swachhata Hi Seva, from Iswarigunj, a village in Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. With this the whole country swings in to mass Shramdaan for toilet making and cleaning of public places for next two weeks.

“Swachhata Hi Seva” Campaign is an unprecedented campaign to highlight, once again, the jan aandolan that is the Swachh Bharat Mission. This follows an impassioned call by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, ahead of the 3rd anniversary of Swachh Bharat Mission that falls on 2nd October, 2017. The objective of the campaign is to mobilise people between 15th September and 2nd October, reigniting the “jan aandolan” for sanitation. Union Ministers, MLAs, MPs, iconic celebrities of India, sports stars, inter-faith leaders, corporates, etc. have been appealed to join in this campaign towards swachhata.

The President administered the nation-wide “Swachhata Hi Seva” pledge in Kanpur, which simultaneously initiated parallel action in all Gram Panchayats and cities of the country. He honoured village level champions from Uttar Pradesh who have contributed to making various villages, including Iswarigunj, open defecation free. The President also launched the Solid and Liquid Waste Management activities in the village which is the next major step in Swachhata after getting the villages Open Defecation Free.

Speaking on the occasion, the President said that every citizen who works for Swachhata is a rashtr-nirmata (nation builder). He called upon all citizens to join the Swachhata Hi Seva movement and become a rashtra-nirmata. He congratulated all award winning Swachhata champions present and said that they were the real heroes of this jan aandolan. He quoted a World Bank study that says that lack of Sanitation costs the country 6% of GDP annually, adding that the weakest sections of society are the ones most affected by this problem. He spoke about diseases transmitted by open defecation, concerns around dignity and safety of women, and economic loss to the family.

He called upon people from all sectors - elected representatives, corporates, NGOs, women, children, senior citizens, Panchayati Raj institutions, media and the youth - to come forward and contribute to the Swachh Bharat movement with vigour and enthusiasm.

In his address, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, welcomed the President back to his native village and said that Swachh Bharat, when it was first launched by the Prime Minister, had seemed like an impossible goal. He said, that Swachh Bharat is a critical component of the development of the country, and reaffirmed his government's commitment to achieve an Open Defecation Free (ODF) Uttar Pradesh by October 2018. He said that such an ambitious goal cannot be achieved without people's participation and partnership. For this, he mentioned that he is reaching out to grassroots leaders and elected representatives personally to involve all sections of society in this movement. He announced that Shamli, Bijnor, Hapur and Ghaziabad have

already been declared ODF, and that 30 districts will be declared ODF in the State by December 2017.

Sushri Uma Bharti, Union Minister for Drinking Water and Sanitation, in her address, said that she felt great pride that the President's first public appearance after taking office was for the launch of the Swachhta Hi Seva campaign. She spoke about the crucial role of public participation in making Swachh Bharat a reality. She said that Swachhta was both, a right and responsibility, of each and every citizen of the country, and that this was fundamental to the realization of the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi's vision of Swachh Bharat.

The occasion was also marked by experience sharing by 7 persons representing various sectors of society, who have been involved in supporting the Swachh Bharat Mission. These were Ms Anuradha Joshi Sarpanch, Kodariya, Indore; Ms Lavanya, school student, Karnataka; Mr Banzop Kharrymbal, Sarpanch, Mawlynong (cleanest village in Asia), Meghalaya; Mr Bindeshwar Pathak, Founder, Sulabh International; Ms Naina Lal Kidwai, Chairperson, India Sanitation Coalition; Mr Sanjay Gupta, Executive Editor, Dainik Jagran, Kanpur and Cadet Mansi Dwivedi, 17 UP Girls Battalion, NCC. They each represented different sections of society and took the Swachhta pledge symbolically on behalf of their respective sectors. They also made short addresses at the occasion, highlighting the work done by them in the past, and their Swachhta commitments for the upcoming fortnight and beyond.

In his welcome address at the inauguration, Secretary, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Shri Parameswaran Iyer spoke about the clarion call made by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, for every section of society and each and every citizen to contribute to the Swachhta Hi Seva campaign. He also gave a progress update of Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin and Urban, saying that Sanitation coverage in the country has gone up from 39% to 68% since the launch of the Mission.

This launch kicked off the nationwide campaign to mobilise people to do large scale shramdaan.

Shri Murli Manohar Joshi, Member of Parliament, Kanpur constituency, Governor, Uttar Pradesh, Shri Ram Naik, and Minister of Panchayati Raj department, Uttar Pradesh, Shri Bhupendra Singh, were also present on the occasion.

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Strong foundation in ethical values should be the basis for exemplary corporate governance: Vice President

Strong foundation in ethical values should be the basis for exemplary corporate governance: Vice President

Inaugurates ICSI Centre of Excellence

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that strong foundation in ethical values should be the basis for exemplary corporate governance. He was addressing the gathering after inaugurating the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) Centre of Excellence, in Hyderabad today. The Deputy Chief Minister of Telangana, Shri Mohammad Mahmood Ali and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that it has become imperative for professionals like company secretaries to acquire cutting-edge knowledge and skills that are not only in tune with the best practices but also facilitate and promote good corporate governance. He further said that India with its inherent spiritual strength, rich traditions and strong value systems - which form the core of many family-run businesses - can emerge as a role model for other countries in corporate governance. The practitioners of corporate governance should play a leading role in making India a global leader in their field, he added.

The Vice President said that money laundering through shell companies is one of the menaces that affect the economy of a country. He commended the decision of ICSI to sensitize all its members and other stakeholders on the deleterious impact not only of the shell companies but also of shell NGOs. He also commended the decision of making ICSI employees to wear khadi one day a week and to have a corporate anti-bribery code in a voluntary manner.

The Vice President said that a company secretary is not only the conscience-keeper of an enterprise, but he/she also has a larger social responsibility. He further said that they have to constantly update themselves with the changes in the laws for proper guidance of the management and other stakeholders. With the implementation of GST, they should be well equipped to deal with the challenges arising from its implementation, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address :

"I am extremely delighted to be amidst you and inaugurate ICSI's Centre of Excellence in this historic city of Hyderabad.

With this Centre of Excellence catering to the entire South India and similar CoEs coming up at Ajmer for Northern region and at Kolkata for the Eastern region, the Institute will be meeting the requirements for the whole country. It's Centre for Corporate Governance, Research and Training is already functioning at Mumbai and serving the Western region.

In the wake of globalization and the increasing role of corporate in driving the economies, it has become imperative for professionals like company secretaries to acquire cutting-edge knowledge and skills that are not only in tune with the best practices but also facilitate and promote good corporate governance.

Apart from setting the benchmark for high standards in corporate governance, such centres should

accord high priority to research and innovative practices.

I am told that its mandate, among others, is to undertake transformational research that aims to achieve international standing in corporate governance, build collaborative networks to address challenging research problems and achieve global competitiveness and gain recognition for Indian research.

It should be remembered that a strong foundation in ethical values should be the basis for exemplary corporate governance. But before looking elsewhere for lessons in corporate governance, one should look inwards and what better than Kautilya's Artha Shastra. The principles and practices on economic management written by Kautilya in 4th century BC are relevant even now.

I commend the Institute of Company Secretaries of India for coming out with a vision "to be a global leader in promoting good corporate governance" and a mission "to develop high caliber professionals facilitating good corporate governance". ICSI should ensure that these objectives do not remain as mere slogans and are achieved in the fullest measure.

India with its inherent spiritual strength, rich traditions and strong value systems-- which form the core of many family-run businesses—can emerge as a role model for other countries in corporate governance. The practitioners of corporate governance should play a leading role in making India a global leader in their field.

Money laundering through shell companies is one of the menaces that affect the economy of a country. I commend the decision of ICSI to sensitize all its members and other stakeholders on the deleterious impact not only of the shell companies but also of shell NGOs.

I also appreciate the efforts of ICSI in bringing secretarial standards on to statute books and paving the way for good corporate practices. Such standards are needed in the wake of corporate disputes.

A company secretary is not only the conscience-keeper of an enterprise, but he/ she also has a larger social responsibility. No doubt, company secretaries are key managerial personnel, but they also represent internal and external stakeholders and as such play a pivotal role in ensuring compliances and implementing principles of good governance. They have to constantly update themselves with the changes in the laws for proper guidance of the management and other stakeholders. With the implementation of GST, they should be well equipped to deal with the challenges arising from its implementation.

I am happy to note that ICSI is in the process of framing an international corporate governance code by bringing forth the teachings of the ancient Indian texts which hold relevance in the modern day corporate scenario.

I also commend the Institute for submitting a draft note on model code for meetings of Panchayats, which aims to promote good governance at the grass-roots levels. The other initiatives such as making ICSI employees to wear khadi one day a week and to have a corporate anti-bribery code in a voluntary manner are also laudable.

I wish the institute, all its members and students a wonderful journey ahead.

Jai Hind!"

KSD/BK

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Swachhata Hi Seva Hits a Highpoint on Seva Divas – People Driving the Movement**Swachhata Hi Seva Hits a Highpoint on Seva Divas – People Driving the Movement**

A volunteer group in Delhi called We Mean To Clean planted 600 ecologically valuable trees in Delhi. Earlier they transformed a slum in Kirti Nagar, Delhi. Swachhata Hi Seva is fast becoming a movement that the people themselves are running. Many such organisations run by common people is the feature of the overall Swachh Bharat programme – citizens becoming inspiring leaders, owning the movement and run it.

Enthusiastic cleanliness initiatives among the people have become a feature ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Swachh Bharat initiative. Lending further impetus towards a cleaner India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had appealed to the nation during his recent Mann Ki Baat address to dedicate the last few weeks of September towards Swachhata Hi Seva, an initiative to pay a real tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on Gandhi Jayanti.

On the 15th of September, 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind had launched the Swachhata Hi Seva movement in Uttar Pradesh from a village in Kanpur. Ever since, the movement started it had begun to generate action and positivity. However, with the birthday of Prime Minister Modi on September 17th, it has taken off at a higher trajectory.

Cleanliness volunteers, NGOs and many karyakartas have enthusiastically dedicated themselves to Shramdaan towards cleanliness initiatives to celebrate his birthday as a 'Seva Divas'.

It also came to light that the Prime Minister had written touching personal letters inviting people from across the nation and across domains, to participate in the movement and spread the message of cleanliness. Accomplished Bollywood actor Anil Kapoor took to social media to thank PM Modi for honouring him with an invite to participate in the Swachhata Hi Seva movement and assured he would do his best. Reports said the PM had written to Malayalam superstar Mohanlal inviting him to participate in the movement. K T Rama Rao, young politician from Telangana belonging to the TRS party also received a letter from PM Modi, reports said.

Most ministries, government departments and prominent public servants have been carrying out cleanliness activities in every state across the nation. While Vice President Venkaiah Naidu was seen administering Swachhata Hi Seva pledges to citizens, Governor of Rajasthan, Kalyan Singh was seen picking up the broom by himself to clean his office.

While it was natural for government machinery to take up cleanliness activities for Swachhata Hi Seva, well-known citizens too have ardently joined the movement. In Maharashtra, music director Anu Malik was seen cleaning a place along with a number of citizens. Telugu movie superstar couple Nagarjuna and Amala along with citizen volunteers conducted cleanliness activities in Hyderabad. Actor Ravi Kishan led

cleanliness initiatives in Mumbai. Internationally renowned sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik first led a group of citizens in cleaning up the Puri beach in Odisha and then created a sand art wishing PM Modi on his birthday.

From Kargil to Ramanathapuram, Manipur to Maharashtra, a renewed sense of eagerness was seen for cleanliness. While the cleanliness movement was kicked off in Kargil with great energy, the District Collector and municipal officials participated in cleanliness activities. Apart from the sheer geographic spread of the movement in just 2 days, yet again, just like its mothership Swachh Bharat, citizens became engines for the movement. NCC cadets of girls' wings of Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district cleaned the offices and several areas of the Poonch district. The cadets also took out an awareness rally with a message of clean India. Volunteers conducted cleaning activities in Indore. In Puducherry, a cleanliness drive to clean the beach was organised by NSS volunteers and Karaikal Municipality.

Citizens were seen cleaning the Hazrat Nizamuddin Railway Station in Delhi. Heroes from the Navy cleaned up the South Mumbai mangroves and sea front. On the occasion of International Coastal Cleanup day, citizens groups also removed trash and garbage from Mumbai's beaches. Women from Self Help Groups in Agra took Swachhata Shapath and discussed initiatives towards a clean and green India. In many places across the nation, Shramdaan and sanitation drives were held, besides activities around open defecation-vulnerable spots with participation of community, self-help groups and local NGOs.

On social media too, #SwachhataHiSeva was a top trend on the day it was launched. Subsequently, the hashtag has become a hub of positivity where people have posted their Shramdaan activities towards cleanliness using this hashtag. A heightened sense of awareness and participation has ensued since the launch of the movement on social media.

Finally, two happenings showed positive signs for the future of a clean India.

One, that NTPC has invited national and international players to set up 100 waste-to-energy pollution-free plants across the country under the Swachh Bharat mission. This bodes well for a clean and green India.

Two, the future of clean India seems to be in safe hands. The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation had announced a Swachh Bharat painting competition for primary school students from mainly government schools earlier. A total of 2.46 crore children studying in class 1-5 have submitted their entries for the Swachh Sankalp Swachh Siddhi painting competition. The enormous magnitude of participation and the awareness being created in these children towards cleanliness augurs well.

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Swachhta Hi Seva Campaign



V.Srinivas

On September 15, 2017, the President of India launched a nationwide sanitation campaign "Swachhta Hi Seva" at Iswarganj village in Kanpur. The President administered the Swachhta Hi Seva Pledge whereby the Nation resolved to create a clean healthy and new India. Addressing the gathering the President said "India is fighting a decisive battle for cleanliness and hygiene. Cleanliness is not the responsibility of only sanitation personnel and government departments; it is a multi-stakeholder national movement."

Mahatma Gandhi had once famously said "sanitation is more important than political freedom." This statement underscored the criticality of sanitation in society. Inspired by these words, on August 15, 2014, the Prime Minister gave a clarion call to the Nation from the ramparts of Red Fort to fight filth and open defecation, change old habits and achieve a Swachh Bharat by 2019, to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. He further said that "women's pride is an important issue in our villages today. The practice of open defecation must be stopped. Toilets must be built and used."

The aim of the Swachh Bharat Mission is to achieve a clean and open defecation free India by October 2, 2019. The objectives are generating demand for toilets leading to their construction and sustained use by all household members, promoting better hygiene behavior amongst the population and improving cleanliness by initiating solid and liquid waste management projects. The financial allocations under the Swachh Bharat Mission increased from Rs.2850 crores in 2014-15 to Rs.6525 crores in 2015-16, to Rs.10,500 crores in 2016-17, to Rs. 14000 crores in 2017-18. In the last 3 years, under the Swachh Bharat Mission, 48,264,304 toilets were constructed. Open Defecation Free Villages reached 2,38,966. Individual toilet coverage increased

from 42 percent in 2014 to 64 percent in 2017. 5 States have declared themselves open defecation free. The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has said that the progress achieved is encouraging to reach the goal of an Open Defecation Free India by October 2, 2019.

The Swachh Bharat Mission sought to reform the sanitation sector with the primary focus being on behavioral changes as the fundamental tool for achievement of Open Defecation Free outcomes. Inclusiveness under the Swachh Bharat Mission was achieved by designing public and community toilets keeping in mind the special needs of menstruating women, the elderly, the specially abled and small children. Further the Mission sought to promote gender sensitive information, education and communication/ behavioral changes. The Mission issued Gender guidelines in 2017 and Menstrual management guidelines in 2015.

An innovative monitoring and evaluation system was put in place. The Swachh Sarvekshan was conducted for rural India and revealed that Mandi (Himachal Pradesh) and Sidhudurg (Maharashtra) were the cleanest districts in India. The Swachh Sarvekshan assessed 22 Hill districts and 53 Plain areas. National level monitors were hired to carry out sample-based checks of sanitation coverage and open defecation free status across the country.

A massive survey covering 92000 households in 4626 villages across the country is being conducted. An additional 200 villages located on the banks of Ganga are being surveyed. Eminent personalities like Amitabh Bacchan was nominated as the Brand Ambassador for Swachh Bharat Mission and celebrities like Sachin Tendulkar and Akshay Kumar attended champion collector conclaves for motivational purposes. The Swachh Bharat Mission maintained a significant social media engagement for enhancing awareness levels and a newsletter Swachhta Samachar Patrika was published on a regular basis. A recent Bollywood film titled "Toilet – Ek Prem Katha" based on the Swachh Bharat Mission witnessed considerable box office success.

The Swachh Bharat Mission represents a national movement with diverse stakeholders comprising of Central Ministries, State Governments, local institutions, non-government and semi-government agencies, corporates, NGO's, faith organizations and media. This approach is based on the Prime Minister's call that Swachhta has to be everyone's business and not only that of the sanitation departments.

A host of special initiatives and projects have come out in quick time. The Inter-Ministerial Projects

included Swachhta Pakhwadas, Namami Gange, Swachhta Action Plan, Swachh Swasth Sarvatra campaign, School Sanitation drives, Anganwadi Sanitation drives, Railway Sanitation etc. The inter-sectoral collaborations included Swachh Iconic Places, Corporate Partnership, Inter Faith Cooperation, Media engagement and Parliament engagement. Swachhta Action Plans were developed by 76 union ministries and departments and web based portal was developed to monitor progress and highlight implementation status. Women Swachhagrahis were appointed and Swachh Shakti Awards were instituted to further enhance women involvement with the program. The Swachh Bharat success stories said that accessible and secure toilets had made a big difference to the lives of village communities, as they did not have to travel distances in the dark to relieve themselves. Further the health risks of open defecation were greatly reduced by having a toilet in the house.

The Vice President of India said that Swachh Bharat Mission is at a tipping point from where a major is expected to spiral it into a massive Jan Andolan – a people's movement. The Swachhta Hi Seva Campaign seeks to mobilize people to come out and get directly involved with the Swachh Bharat Mission by offering shramdaan for swachhta in the fortnight leading upto Gandhi Jayanti.

Come join the Swachhta Hi Seva Campaign.

**V.Srinivas is an IAS officer of 1989 batch and is currently posted as Chairman of the Rajasthan Tax Board with additional charge of Chairman Board of Revenue for Rajasthan.*

Views expressed in the article are author's personal.

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Update for the online era

Women, especially journalists, have been the targets of misogynist trolls on social media. Often hiding behind the cloak of anonymity the Internet offers, the trolls heap online abuse upon women with an independent point of view, and issue threats and conduct hate campaigns against them.

A 31-year-old law, The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, has largely proved ineffective in curbing this onslaught on the Internet. Though the Act was passed to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner, it pertains only to the print media.

In 2012, an amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament to update the law and make punishment stringent; it is still pending. The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill record the need for the amendments in the 1986 law. It says “technological revolution has resulted in development of new forms of communication, such as, internet and satellite based communication, multi-media messaging, cable television, etc. It has, thus, become necessary to widen the scope of the Act so as to cover the above forms of media.”

The government acknowledges that the law has to be more effective; stringent punishment which acts as deterrent also becomes essential. It has also been felt that the power to enter any premises and conduct search and seizure of any material, if there is reason to believe that an offence under the Act has been committed, should be made more effective and the officers conducting such searches given sufficient protection while carrying out their duties.

The Bill defines the ‘indecent representation of women’ to mean the depiction of the figure or form or body or any part thereof, of a woman in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent or derogatory to or denigrating women, or in a way likely to deprave, corrupt or injure public morality.

It amends the definitions of ‘advertisement’ and ‘distribution’ and also defines ‘electronic form’ of material. It prohibits the publication or distribution of any material, by any means, which contains indecent representation of women in any form.

The proposed law pushes for an increase in the maximum imprisonment from two years to three years and fine from 2,000 to a minimum 50,000, which may be extended to 1 lakh for the first offence. Subsequent offences would invite punishment of a maximum five to seven years and fine up to 5 lakh. The Bill wants a police officer not less than the rank of inspector to investigate offences under the Act.

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President’s plan

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Privacy and the Indian culture

Privacy is not a state of maintaining secrecy. Rather it is defined as “the state of being alone and not watched or disturbed by other people” or “the state of being free from the attention of the public”.

What does privacy mean in the Indian cultural and behavioural context?

Well, it means little.

To understand why privacy means little in India, we need to go back to the demographics of this country. Historically, India is a diverse country where diversity lies not just in its geographical landscape, topography and state boundaries but also in its culture, traditions, food habits, attire, languages, dialects, scripts, behaviour, religion and caste. As a proverb goes, “Every two miles the water changes, every four miles the speech.”

Of the 1.3 billion people who live in India, as many as 68.84% live in rural parts, according to the Census of India 2011. According to the same census, 67.77% of this rural population is considered literate; the rest are illiterate and uneducated and thus form India’s oral society. Overall, as much as 27.01% of India’s population, as per official figures (which may have a skewed mechanism of measuring literacy rates and often include those who lack functional literacy), is considered illiterate.

However, there is no denying that most of those who are considered illiterate or uneducated are financially poor, residing in rural or tribal parts of the country or hailing from backward districts.

One of the reasons why mobile penetration is high in India—mobile subscriptions in India crossed the 1.1 billion-mark in October 2016—is because a mobile phone allows people to communicate instantly and orally, without the need to write messages or take someone’s help to write messages.

For a similar reason, TV and radio transistors, too, are popular in India. According to a Broadcast India Survey, rural India has 17% more homes with television sets despite low income brackets. Further, among FM listeners, almost 76% listen to FM radio using their mobile phones, according to a study conducted by AZ Research.

In such a scenario, where most conversations and flow of knowledge is taking place through oral communication, the idea of information protection or privacy of data has little scope.

It must also be noted that while a lot of knowledge in India has been documented by scholars, researchers and writers, both online and offline, there is a lot more that is yet to be documented or explored because those who hold this knowledge are illiterate and unskilled to be able to document this information in the traditional sense.

Culturally, India has been a country where much of its knowledge has been transferred from one generation to another orally. This holds true for traditional knowledge about health, medicine, architecture, culture, craft, art, folk tales, folk music, language and more.

India has neither looked at communication nor information as “private”. There is also little understanding of private life in India where almost every part of one’s life is open to family, community, village or society.

Community practices and diktats take over personal choices and ownership. For example, a girl may have a personal mobile phone, however it is her family or even the community that decides how she can use it.

Besides, Indians have a habit of interfering in other people's lives. Ironically, we don't even consider seeking personal and private information as "interference" or "breach of privacy".

Arranged marriage, a concept alien to the West, is still a common practice in India. And if this interference in personal space is not enough, community members also want to know how much is being spent on a wedding, when the couple plan to have children and, if they're not, then why not. As children, Indians are not taught to shut their bedroom doors, even when they go to bed. In many houses, both in rural and urban India, locking your door—unless you're changing clothes—is considered an act of secrecy and not privacy.

"What do I have to hide?" is a question people often pose as a retort when asked if they would want to maintain their privacy, even the privacy of data on their mobile phones. Even in urban spaces, it is fairly common for consumers to call out their debit card pins to waiters in India.

Many Indians will justify this act, saying that they don't have too much balance in their account anyway, again confusing privacy with luxury and associating security with wealth.

Our society is at a crossroads of the digital revolution and the right to privacy. As the country moves towards the digital medium, the Indian cultural context poses challenges to understanding and implementing privacy as a right that is intrinsic to life and liberty. Indians need to understand that privacy is not about what you want to hide but what others need not see.

Osama Manzar is founder-director of Digital Empowerment Foundation and chair of Manthan and mBillionth awards. He is member, advisory board, at Alliance for Affordable Internet and has co-authored NetCh@kra—15 Years of Internet in India and Internet Economy of India. He tweets @osamamanzar.

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Generalist vs specialist

In an earlier article ('The case for lateral entry', IE, August 9), we made a case for an institutionalised system of lateral entry of mid-career professionals into the IAS. We argued that lateral entrants will not only bring in much-needed external expertise into the government but will also challenge the regular recruit IAS into continuous self-improvement. But such self-improvement will not happen automatically; the government will have to institute an incentive structure, devote greater attention to career management and provide opportunities for specialisation. How the government should approach this task is the thrust of this article.

Arguably the biggest question confronting the IAS is its lack of specialisation. The IAS was modelled on the colonial era Indian Civil Service as a generalist service to deliver the core functions of the state - collect taxes and maintain law and order. The challenge of development in a large, populous and impoverished country was probably not on the radar screen when the IAS was designed. But it soon became apparent that this development task would become central to public administration, especially at the state level. The IAS adapted to these changing dynamics by retooling itself as a "development agent", and on the whole acquitted itself quite creditably.

As economic reforms deepened and the state started yielding to the market, the nature of administration changed, demanding domain knowledge, especially at the policy level. This raised questions about the role and relevance of the IAS. Two views emerged.

The first is the argument that the best leadership is provided by generalists who have a breadth of understanding and experience. Specialists, no matter how competent, tend to have a tunnel vision and are not equipped to take a broader view. Sure, domain knowledge has to feed into policy-making, but that can be accomplished by domain experts advising the generalist leader in decision-making. In this worldview, a good IAS officer can head the Department of Agriculture as competently as she would the Department of Shipping.

The opposing view is that the IAS, as generalists, tend to over-weigh their experience of the process and form over understanding of policy content. Only someone who has learnt the subject from the trenches, as it were, can provide competent leadership in a functional area. Having the IAS head specialised areas is an inefficient arrangement.

This debate has frowned upon moderation. But there is no need to look for binary solutions. The complex and interconnected nature of policy-making demands that specialist expertise has to go with generalist experience. Notably, the Constitution Review Commission 2002 suggested the "need to specialise some of the generalists and generalise some of the specialists". That seems to be a wise dictum for the way forward.

That raises the challenge of managing specialisation. When does an IAS officer start to specialise? How will the system be operationalised?

The private sector's example is instructive. There, young professionals are typically recruited in specialised areas and they rise to generalist leadership positions negotiating their way up the hierarchy. What we have, or should have, in the public sector is in fact its reverse. Young recruits join the IAS as generalists, acquire breadth and then go on to acquiring depth.

The first decade of an IAS' career is typically spent in field postings with responsibility for policy execution which hones her administrative and people management skills, apart from imparting invaluable understanding of ground realities. From there an IAS graduates to policy formulating positions, at the centre and state levels. This transition provides the ideal marker for beginning to specialise - combining the soft skills they have learnt with the hard skills of a specialised domain.

Managing specialisation can be a complex challenge. How much specialisation should there be? How should officers be allocated among the specialisations? What should be the weightages for expressed preferences and revealed competencies? Once allocated a specialisation, how should an officer's career be managed?

A starting point can be to categorise ministries broadly into three groups - welfare ministries, regulatory ministries and economic ministries since experience suggests that each of these categories demands broadly similar behavioural attributes and aptitudes. A couple of principles should inform the process.

First, allocating officers across specialisations cannot, and should not, be reduced to a formula. It is best to work the system flexibly, allowing specialisation to emerge gradually through a process of deliberate iteration at the mid-career level. This will facilitate officers in specialising as they move up the hierarchy based on their revealed aptitude and performance record. Because the system needs to be flexible, it places the onus on the government to make it predictable and transparent.

Second, specialisation need not be mandatory. Some IAS officers may prefer to remain generalists. Indeed, the system too is always in need of some generalists. One of the tasks of cadre management will indeed be to match the supply and demand across specialisations and generalists.

Once they are allocated specialist positions, officers should be afforded opportunities to deepen their domain knowledge through study and training. Also, since IAS officers are recruited at a young age, they hardly ever experience the government from the outside. They should, therefore, be allowed, even encouraged, to work outside the government, preferably in a non-governmental organisation for a few years, irrespective of their area of specialisation. This is bound to make them more useful and relevant civil servants.

This effort to optimise generalist experience with specialist domain expertise should apply to lateral entrants as well. Just as regular recruits are required to specialise, lateral entrants should be required to "generalise" through field postings so that they have an opportunity to dirty their hands.

Giving the IAS an optimal blend of breadth and depth is a complex challenge. The way forward lies in eschewing binary solutions and embracing a nuanced, iterative process of active but careful cadre management.

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PM's interaction through PRAGATI**PM's interaction through PRAGATI**

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, today chaired his twenty-second interaction through PRAGATI - the ICT-based, multi-modal platform for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation.

The first twenty one meetings of PRAGATI have seen a cumulative review of 190 projects with a total investment of Rs. 8.94 lakh crore. Resolution of Public Grievances has also been reviewed in 17 sectors.

Today, in the twenty-second meeting, the Prime Minister reviewed the progress towards handling and resolution of grievances related to the banking sector. The Prime Minister asked the Secretary, Financial Services, to look at ways to increase the use of RuPay debit cards that have been issued to Jan Dhan account holders. The Prime Minister was briefed on the relief that has been received by the Jan Dhan account holders, as part of the insurance provisions that are linked to these accounts.

The Prime Minister reviewed the progress of nine infrastructure projects in the railway, road, power, coal and gas pipeline sectors, spread over several states including Telangana, Karnataka, West Bengal, Manipur, Mizoram, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Delhi. The India Myanmar Friendship Bridge was also reviewed. These projects are cumulatively worth over 37000 crore rupees.

The Prime Minister reviewed the progress of the National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY), and the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan (Accessible India Campaign) for the Divyang.

The Prime Minister said that while many Union Government departments are now using the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), only ten States have so far shown keenness in using it. The Prime Minister said that GeM increases the pace of procurement, and boosts transparency, besides supporting enterprise at the local level. He urged all Chief Secretaries to explore its use to the extent possible, to minimize leakages and delays.

On GST, the Prime Minister said that while traders across the country are positive and are accepting this new taxation arrangement, they need handholding so that their problems can be resolved. He urged the Chief Secretaries to use the district administration in this regard, so that small traders are facilitated to access and adopt the new system. He reiterated that small businesses must register with the GST network, to take advantage of business opportunities. He said that the common man and the trader must benefit from this path breaking decision.

The Prime Minister also called for sustained efforts to boost digital payments and work towards a less cash society.

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Special Feature: "Swachhta Hi Sewa" Pakhwada

Swacch Bharat Abhiyan giving wings to Bapu's dream of Clean India



*Vikas Khanna

It will be a stock-taking exercise for the government when India celebrates Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary this year as it will also mark the completion of three years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship cleanliness drive – the "Swacch Bharat Abhiyan". The Modi government has set an ambitious target of Open Defecation Free India by October 2, 2019 when Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary will be celebrated.

Given the giant strides made in a short span of three years, the government seems headed towards meeting the 2019 deadline of providing toilets to every household. Under the Swacch Bharat campaign, more than 4.90 crore toilets have already been constructed since October 2, 2014. According to Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, more than 2.44 lakh villages have been declared open defecation free and 203 open defecation free districts as on September 24, 2017. What makes the programme noteworthy is that several public sector as well as private institutions have joined hands with the government to make it a grand success. Many business houses have adopted several villages in this connection under the Corporate Social Responsibility. It is no surprising then that the country's sanitation coverage has leapfrogged to more than 68 per cent compared to just 38 per cent in 2012. But still much more needs to be done.

Keeping this in view, the government has launched a fortnight long 'Swachhta Hi Seva' (Cleanliness is Service) campaign which will culminate on Gandhi Jayanti next month. Under the campaign, several programmes have been planned to give a fillip to the nationwide cleanliness drive. The purpose is to reinvigorate the "Swacch Bharat Abhiyan" which was started as a national

movement three years ago. The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, which is spearheading the campaign, has been joined by various other ministries, government departments and non-government organizations to spread the awareness of cleanliness.

October 2, 2014 will go down in the history books as the biggest campaign for “Swachh Bharat” when Prime Minister Modi himself wielded a broom and swept the dirty streets of New Delhi. The people responded to his clarion call to join him in this endeavour to give a fitting tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, who wanted to make sanitation a priority for India more than a century ago. The campaign aims to end the wide-spread practice of open defecation, build more toilets and improve waste management, among other goals.

While underlining the importance of cleanliness, the Prime Minister has often said that the idea of Swachh Bharat has nothing to do with politics, as it is inspired by patriotism. One is reminded of Gandhi's saying that “Sanitation is more important than independence.”

While the father of the nation championed the cause of self-service in cleanliness and end the despicable practice of untouchability, the movement faltered after independence. Though several programmes were undertaken since then by several governments, it is a sad commentary that the twin issues of sanitation and untouchability continue to haunt the country even almost 70 years after Bapu's death.

Poor sanitation leads to several health-related diseases and untimely deaths. A charity organization “WaterAid” had painted a grim situation in one of its reports in 2014. It had then reported that less than a third of India's 1.2 billion people had access to sanitation and more than 186,000 children under the age of five used to die every year from diarrhoeal diseases caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation. It has its economic pitfalls also. It is estimated that the country is losing 6.4 percent of GDP annually as poor access to sanitation results in diseases and deaths. But all that is set to change now as various government agencies are working on war footing to meet the challenge.

Quoting the World Health Organization, the Prime Minister has said in the past that an average of Rs. 6,500 per person is lost in India due to lack of cleanliness and hygiene. He said Swachh Bharat would therefore make a significant impact on public health, and in safeguarding income of the poor, ultimately contributing to the national economy. He said sanitation should not be seen as a political tool, but should only be connected to patriotism (rashtrabhakti) and commitment to

public health.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which carried out a survey to estimate the cost of benefits of the Swachh Bharat Mission, has in a recent report said one rupee invested in improving sanitation helps save Rs 4.30. It said that each household could save Rs. 50,000 every year if there is Open Defecation Free society because the medical costs will come down, the value of time savings and the value of mortality will be averted. It also said the benefits are highest for the poorest quantile of the population.

But to make the programme successful, the local bodies and state governments will need to redouble efforts to create more awareness and educate people to change their age-old attitudes towards hygiene and purity. Despite best of governmental efforts, a large number of people in the hinterland still believe that it is unclean to defecate inside. The government and business houses may construct toilets, but one needs to draw people out from the open fields to the confines of a toilet in order to realize the full health and economic benefits of sanitation. There is an urgent need to educate people through awareness campaigns to help eliminate such negative notions. The success of the programme will be largely dependent on people's participation. It is therefore imperative that people rise to the occasion to make India clean and healthy.

**The author is a senior journalist and columnist. He has worked with several newspapers, news agency and television news channel in his 29 years career. Presently, he is a guest faculty at Indian Institute of Mass Communication.*

Views expressed in the article are author's personal.

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A people's movement

For the first 11 years of her life, Avantikapa, now 12, grew up without a toilet in her house in West Bengal's East Midnapur district. As she approached adolescence and felt increasingly uncomfortable with the multiple risks of open defecation and the sheer embarrassment of it, Avantikapa spoke to her parents and got them to build a toilet at home. "I don't have to worry about dogs, I don't have to go under the cover of night," she says happily.

In East Sikkim, a co-education school has seen attendance of girl students improve after toilets were built inside the school. "Earlier, they would go in the bushes. Many students fell ill with diarrhoea, and it became harder to find places to defecate. Now many girls who dropped out of school have come back for further studies," says school principal Aarti Gautum.

These are two heartening stories of the success of Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s Swachh Bharat Mission. But anecdotal evidence is an imperfect method of impact assessment. For decades, public discourse about the impact of sanitation programmes has been informed by anecdotal evidence from the other end of the spectrum: Toilets are constructed only in government files and, even if made, are never used for practical or cultural reasons. Whether positive or negative, this gives, at best, a skewed understanding of the impact of social sector schemes. That is why three years into the mission, the Quality Council of India (QCI) launched a massive survey of rural sanitation to gather empirical evidence and measure service levels against promises.

QCI is a national accreditation body that has been involved in most of the marquee Swachh Bharat schemes to evaluate sanitation performance through an internationally bench-marked evaluation matrix. It's an article of faith in the most reputed management courses that what gets measured gets improved. With a continent-size population of 1.3 billion plus, it is implicit that any outsize scale project like Swachh Bharat must constantly measure the right metrics.

The survey, Swachh Survekshan Gramin 2017, covered 140,000 households across 700 districts. QCI surveyors personally visited the households to physically verify if they had a toilet, and if they had one, were the toilets were being used. Every enumerated household was geo-tagged to lend the survey authenticity. The survey, conducted over six months ending in August 2017, threw up stunning results.

In their criticism of the Swachh Bharat Mission, many have cited anecdotal evidence about toilets being used to store grains, but the QCI survey gathered empirical evidence of a dramatic improvement in both coverage and usage of toilets. Three years after the launch of the mission, a behavioural change is discernible, especially in rural India.

Let the figures do the talking: As per Census 2011, more than five in 10 households did not have a toilet or individual household latrine (IHHL) in technical lingo. Further broken down, this translated to nearly seven in 10 rural homes not having a toilet and almost two in 10 urban homes where family members had to defecate in the open. Against that, the survey found, only less than three in 10 households (26.75 per cent) are without a toilet in the country (against 50 per cent as per the 2011 census). The improvement is dramatic in rural India where the number of households without toilets has come down to 32.5 per cent (from 69 per cent). That is, toilet coverage has more than doubled in rural India in these three years. For urban areas that number is 14.5 per cent (down from 18 per cent).

Now on to toilet usage. The survey found that more than nine in 10 (91.29 per cent) rural households having access to a toilet are actually using it. The results are similar for urban areas.

Of 73 cities that participated in Swachh Survekshan 2016, 54 cities have improved their score in overall municipal solid waste management in 2017. Here again, there is anecdotal evidence that open defecation persists in cities declared ODF but these are isolated cases. Even if we are not yet at 100 per cent, isn't 90 per cent plus a remarkable number, considering the daunting scale of the mission?

The Swachh Bharat urban and rural projects have set-off healthy competition among cities and districts. Self-help groups, NGOs and popular icons have pitched in and the results are showing in the form of a record number of sustainable toilets, open defecation-free towns, schools with gender specific toilets and decrease in water borne diseases in ODF villages and towns.

The public health benefits of ODF spaces far outweigh any criticism of non-compliance. Swachh Bharat is getting a state push but at its best, it's a social project where we are all conscience-keepers. If funding and resources for local bodies are one end of the spectrum, equally crucial are social factors such as caste, gender and poverty.

The three-pronged job of measuring, ranking and naming-shaming is working and we must leverage this approach across domains. Railways and Ports Authority have already begun implementing similar projects. So far, the QCI has measured toilets built, usage, ODF and structural issues such as sewage systems and solid waste removal systems. As these achieve usage at scale, we should also measure behaviour changes. Pouring concrete alone won't solve the problems of public hygiene. The combination of a people's movement and the force multipliers of infrastructure readiness and impact measurement can deliver results very quickly.

But just as real as the figure the survey has thrown up is the fact that hundreds of Indians die from preventable conditions each year even now, especially in places which have maximum incidence of open defecation. Faeces in groundwater spread encephalitis, an annual post-monsoon scourge, diarrhoea stunts children and adults and underweight mothers produce babies prone to sickness. The cycle is lethal.

The costs of public health crises are far greater than the price of fixing it. That is why Swachh Bharat must power on, its efficacy sharpened by regular impact assessment studies and the learning they provide.

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Clean India Mission prioritises behavioural change



***K V Venkatasubramanian**

Till three years ago, millions of people across India, mostly the rural population and many in urban regions, were nonchalant about performing their early morning rituals, particularly relieving themselves anywhere out in the open. They were unconcerned about hygiene, and diseases that could afflict them. Parents were exposing their children to grave dangers.

All these have changed considerably for the better following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for a Swachh Bharat with universal sanitation by October 2, 2019 (Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary). Down this period, open defecation, a way of life over centuries, has been curtailed.

Universal sanitation is at the core of India's development agenda. Till 2014, only 39 percent people had access to safe sanitation facilities. As the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) completes three years, five states, nearly 200 districts and nearly 2.4 lakh villages across the country have declared themselves open defecation free (ODF). Besides, 1.5 lakh villages have ranked themselves on the village Swachhta Index based on solid and liquid waste management in villages.

Improved sanitation has resulted in major household savings. Every rupee invested in improving sanitation leads to a saving of Rs 4.30, shows a recent independent study by UNICEF to estimate the cost benefits of the SBM. On an average, the cost-benefit ratio was 430 percent, "considering on one hand the expenditure from households and the government, and on the other hand the financial savings induced by improved sanitation," the study found. The benefits are the highest for the poorest quintile of the population.

Besides, in fully ODF communities, an average family that invests in a toilet saves around Rs

50,000 per year--considering medical costs and mortality averted, and also time savings. The study, carried out in 10,000 rural households randomly selected across 12 states, found that 85 percent of family members use their latrines. The survey was conducted to measure the economic impact of sanitation at a household level.

Parameswaran Iyer, Secretary, Ministry of Water and Sanitation, says an independent survey conducted across 140,000 households by the Quality Council of India found that "household toilet usage stands at 91 per cent."

Accessible and secure toilets have induced a big qualitative change in villagers' lives, especially women who were forced to defecate in the open in darkness, suffering mental torture—with their safety, security and dignity imperilled.

Want of access to proper sanitation prompts high health and economic outlay: it costs India 6 percent of its GDP every year. Research has highlighted an indisputable link between toilets, malnutrition and irreversible stunting. For the populace continuously exposed to a faecally-contaminated environment, absence of a toilet can have far-reaching effects. Insanitation affects children leading to 100,000 deaths due to diarrhoeal diseases. Nearly 40 percent of India's children are physically and cognitively stunted, according to the World Bank.

A major challenge facing the government is to bring about behavioural change in people's mindsets, especially among rural masses—totally different from building a toilet, an infrastructure programme, that can be accomplished. It is focusing on this most important factor, which requires dealing with a centuries-old deep-rooted habit of people going out (to defecate) and then getting them to talk about it. Several interpersonal techniques through community approaches to sanitation are being used across the country to trigger behavioural change; fundamental to the SBM.

"Beyond the hundreds of thousands of toilets being built, "a genuine prioritisation of behaviour change interventions is taking place," says Nicolas Osbert, Chief of WASH (Water, Sanitation, Hygiene), UNICEF India.

To strengthen and take the mission forward, the Centre, under an accelerated fortnight-long campaign "Swachhta hi Seva" (cleanliness is service), is executing a series of activities--such as cleaning toilets, bus stands, movie halls, railways stations, public halls and more. The campaign will culminate with Swachh Bharat Diwas on October 2.

Efforts are on to move beyond the current drive for open defecation-free cities and work towards faecal sludge management for a safe urban environment without any risk to land and rivers. Every day, India generates a colossal 1.7 million tonnes of faecal waste. About 78 percent of this sludge (human excreta and water mixture) remains untreated and is dumped into rivers, groundwater or lakes in the absence of proper treatment systems. Sludge contains disease-carrying bacteria and pathogens and poses threat to health.

Youths and other stakeholders are being encouraged to come up with innovative solutions to problems for sustainable, environmental-friendly and affordable toilet technology for hilly, dry, flood-prone and remote areas; novel technological solutions to monitor usage of toilets and bring behavioural change for toilet usage and hygiene;

They have been invited to suggest unconventional models and methods to improve operation and maintenance of school toilets; pioneering solutions for menstrual health management and innovative solutions for early decomposition of faecal matter.

Unlike earlier open-ended programmes, the mission has been put on a fast track to accomplish the sunset clause--an ODF India by constructing 12 million toilets. Realising that this is a difficult and time-consuming venture involving behaviour change, sanitation has been made everyone's business—be it the pradhan or the collector or the Member of Parliament. It is being operated through the Prime Minister, chief ministers, district magistrates, VMs (village mukhiyas). Also, an army of swachhagrahis has been created and nukkad nataks (street plays) have been promoted.

Behavioural change is being motivated through mass media and interpersonal messages communicated by celebrities, who are creating awareness about the ill-effects of open defecation.

The author is an independent journalist and columnist, with four decades of experience across media streams--print, online, radio and television. He writes on science and developmental issues.

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