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“The Rajasthan Right to Health Care Act aims to guarantee citizens free treatment and emergency care, with the state covering the cost of the medical care. The law ensures that any resident of Rajasthan can access emergency care without having to pay any upfront fees or penalties. This covers urgently required emergency medical care, critical care, including emergency obstetric care. Free outpatient and inpatient care, medications, tests, urgent transport, interventions that are all provided in public health facilities.”

First-Person

**Dr. N. Bhaskara
Rao**

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Alok Srivastava

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**Sabyesachi
Bharti**

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Will our villages ever regain pride and sustainability?

Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao

April 24th is celebrated as a Panchayati Raj Day and it also give us a chance to peep into future of villages. Mahatma Gandhi believed and hoped that 'future of India lies in its villages'.

Many people who accomplished in their career and life feel pride for the time they spent in their respective villages, as I do.

Tripuraneni Srini, a well-known tech-guru living in Florida, called me the other day, when he learned that I had founded the Library of Biographies in my village and expressed his affection for the community as a child when visiting his grandmother in the village. In contrast, hardly any people arrived to settle in a village last year, while almost 10 million people left villages for various reasons.

Despite so much talk, mostly political, there is no signs of a reverse migration can be noticed. Even Mahesh Babu's Maharshi film two years ago offered some hope.

President Abdul Kalam previously, in the past twenty years, supported policy changes to revitalise communities with specific suggestions. Yet today's concern is whether the odd circumstance we are in will ever change.

I have developed a prediction based on my decades of yearly trips to my village and more recent extended stays in the area with active projects. The patterns and the reasoning behind these prognosis or findings are explained in my book in Telugu, 'Is Gramale Purogati Questionable - My Village is Only an Example'.

Family structure and the village system were so strong that they could withstand attacks from outside sources. Threats today, however, come from inside, as if we were not well conscious of the grassroots.

For instance, if the practise of "coexistence" itself is abandoned, everything else crumbles like a house of cards. We don't seem to understand, though. Such generalisations about centuries-old villages cannot be made without confidence.

Yet, as a sociologist turned applied social researcher with 60 years of experience at the national level, it was my worry that drove me to take the risk.

My concerns are based on a book I wrote more than ten years ago called "Chronicles of a rural boy in New Delhi." The thesis that I wrote in 1961 as a part of my MA degree at Andhra University has also contributed to my current confidence and drive to revitalise the village.



Few of my concerns regarding future of villages

1. Population of villages will continue to decline. Youth tend to stay away from villages irrespective of their academic accomplishments and despite newer opportunities villages offer.

President Abdul Kalam previously, in the past twenty years, supported policy changes to revitalise communities with specific suggestions. Yet today's concern is whether the odd circumstance we are in will ever change.

Small businesses will dominate village despite viability uncertainties and as a result of increased input costs and corporatisation, villages become debt driven and traps.

2. Having lost out as (*Gram Swaraj*) “Village Republics”, villages have become increasingly dependent on the Government to the extent of eventually coming under category of “for sale”. Villagers will go into depression and deeper into dependency syndromes.

3. Vagaries of climate change and uncertainties in public policies will continue to grim farm families. Agriculture never regains pride and viability to rejuvenate the rural communities.

4. The design of lack of same type of houses being built as cubicles with cement, steel and everything from outside will make village settlements lose their character and make family living increasingly uncomfortable.

5. In the name of decentralisation, villages will become remotely managed with no local citizen involvement and participation beyond poll time.

6. Small businesses will dominate village despite viability uncertainties and as a result of increased input costs and corporatisation, villages become debt driven and traps.

7. With villages becoming more foreign driven based models, even religiously they lose their composite character to the extent of threatening harmony and productivity.

8. Family system, including the institution of marriage, declines but

religion regains staking the roots of heritage.

9. Education loses its grace as more and more young lose interest in formal schooling further.

10. Young and old will shift attitudes about work culture, especially hard effort, as a result of indiscriminate technology use. The roots of culture will be increasingly rocked and reined in by “instant satisfaction.”

11. Since “check and balance” is no longer in vogue, individual leaders now control affairs at all levels as governments become the alter ego of political parties.

12. With many toilets, villages will start stinking already languishing without drainage channels. Disappearance of trees even *neem* will further add to the quality of living.

These are but some. My fear in expressing these worries is that we will take some action—both collectively and individually—to prevent such consequences and refute my prediction.

It will be crucial to take such measures in the next 20–30 years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi did well reminding us in his speech at Palli village in J&K on April 24 towards strengthening Panchayats. No leader has echoed those views so far.

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A right step that needs right approach

Annu Anand

The Right to Health Bill, which makes access to health a legal right for every state resident, was first passed by the state of Rajasthan. The state assembly unanimously approved a bill on March 21, 2023 that seeks to protect and uphold equitable rights to health and wellbeing, including the right of every resident of the state to receive free public and private health services, including prescription drugs and diagnostic services. Under the law every person of Rajasthan is granted the right to receive emergency medical care without having to pay any upfront costs to a healthcare facility. The Bill was first presented on September 22, 2022, in the Rajasthan Assembly.

Although the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 explicitly rejected the idea of legislation on the right to healthcare on the grounds that the state might not always be able to provide it when it is guaranteed as a right, however, the argument is not supported by the evidence. Concerns were also raised in the policy about the infrastructure of our health care system, which is necessary to deliver primary care and guarantee that these rights can be upheld. Contrary to this evasive approach, Rajasthan's new Right to Health Act demonstrates transformative potential by expressly guaranteeing residents' access to health care.

What Law provides

According to the Act, doctors working in public or private health facilities must treat patients in need of emergency care without holding them up while they wait for payment or a police clearance. In fact, the Act aims to guarantee citizens free treatment and emergency care, with the state covering the cost of the medical care.

The law ensures that any resident of Rajasthan can access emergency care without having to pay any upfront fees or penalties. This covers urgently required emergency medical



care, critical care, including emergency obstetric care. Free outpatient and inpatient care, medications, tests, urgent transport, interventions that are all provided in public health facilities.

The Act also empowers the people of Rajasthan the right to access relevant documents and information regarding the type of illness, symptoms, complications, and cost of treatment. It also guarantees that patients have the right to provide their informed consent before receiving any treatment.

Two separate state level health authorities would be established under the Rajasthan statute. The District Health Authority and State Health authority. These organisations will design, carry out, oversee, and develop the systems necessary to manage public health emergencies and provide high-quality healthcare. They will address a different issue, such as treatment regimens or logistical complaints. Assisting the government with strategic planning and action for healthy food, water, sanitation, and epidemic control, the authority on logistical grievances will advise it on state health goals and get them included in Panchayati Raj institutions. It will also decide appeals against decisions made by district health authorities.

The second authority on treatment protocol will advise the government on any matter relating to preventive, curative,

and rehabilitative medicine, and the social determinants of health.

The law provides a mechanism for resolving complaints against denial of services and infringements of rights. A web portal and helpline centre will be established for filing complaints. The concerned officer will have 24 hours to respond to the complaint. The District Health Authority will take up unresolved complaints exceeding the above timeframe. If the District Health Authority does not resolve the grievance within 30 days, the complaint will be forwarded to the State Health Authority.

Major Concerns that need to be addressed

Who will reimburse the Bill

A resident of Rajasthan has the legal right to get free medical care from any clinical facility, including hospitals, clinics, laboratories, and private health facilities, as stated in the Act. However, it is unclear how the state will pay private clinical facilities for the free services they provide. In fact, the Act states that the government will compensate the medical facility, but doctors considered that the Act lacks clarity regarding the method of payment and the manner in which it will be reimbursed. Private doctors' main worry is that the reimbursement issue is not clearly defined, and it is said that this could be in violation of Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution, which ensures the right to practice any profession or carry on trade or business.

In fact private hospitals were wary of the government's meddling in their operations after the bill passed. Therefore the state's private doctors began a two-week strike within a week of passing the bill, which caused a disruption in the state's health care system and prompted the administration to explore exempting private hospitals and physicians from the law. The doctors who protested argued that the law makes no provision for paying health facilities for providing such

services and their businesses could become economically unviable as a result.

No doubt, the Act states that the government will reimburse the healthcare facility, but how and when needs to be clarified. The government's plan to pay hospitals for providing emergency care is not spelt out in the bill in detail. The government says that all that procedures will be worked out in the rules that would be notified later.

By the time this write-up is going for publication the government has reached on an agreement with doctors to consider keeping private healthcare institutions, that were unaided by the government, outside the ambit of this RTH framework a development that had health activists questioning if the RTH Bill now gets limited to being a 'public sector law'.

In fact, if private doctors kept out of the ambit of the law the whole purpose of implementing this law will be defeated. Due to many existing schemes, like the Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi Swasthya Bima Yojana, many government health institutions are already required to provide free health services to the public.

This scheme provides eligible families with a 10 lakh rupee yearly health insurance policy as well as a 5 lakh rupee accidental coverage. For various diseases, the programme offers around 1,660 packages and procedures. A significant portion of the population is also covered by the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), which pays for secondary and tertiary hospitalisation up to 5 lakh rupees.

With their limited resources and current facilities, government hospitals are unable to handle additional patient loads. They are taking on more than they can handle. Therefore, the right to health will only be a distant dream without integrating private hospitals under the law, which have much greater facilities and resources.

What defines Emergency

The bill is accused of not appropriately defining the term emergency. The Act says

Is the right to health care a guarantee of medical attention for a specific set of illnesses at the individual level, or is it the assurance of a certain set of conditions that, when met, would result in like the absence of sickness and physical, mental, and social well-being?

that every citizen of Rajasthan will have right to avail emergency treatment and care at all health care providers, without any delay waiting for prepayment or police clearance. Simply put, this section gives right to people to get free healthcare at virtually every and any institution in the state. The only thing still lacking is a clear definition. Is the right to health care a guarantee of medical attention for a specific set of illnesses at the individual level, or is it the assurance of a certain set of conditions that, when met, would result in like the absence of sickness and physical, mental, and social well-being?

Infringement of patient's right to privacy

The District Health Authority is required to upload an action taken report on the web portal for complaints. The Bill does not specify who will have access to the report on the web portal. This may infringe on the patient's right to privacy in medical cases.

In 1998, the Supreme Court held that professional doctor patient relationships are a matter of confidence. Public disclosure of such private facts may constitute an invasion of the right of privacy states, PRS Legislative Research report. It adds that in 2017, the Supreme Court held that any restriction on the right to privacy must be proportionate to the need for such state interference. This may infringe on the patient's right to privacy in medical cases.

Need to have proper representation in Redressal Mechanism

The state and District Health Authorities that Act proposes to be established for the effective implementation of the law only consist of

government and Indian Medical Health Association representative while for effective implementation it needs to include health activist or experts in the committee apart from the doctors. The law's implementation would be just another state bureaucratic framework if public health workers and the active citizenry is not involved in the state and district health authorities.

Also, for any violation under the law, a hospital or doctor will be liable to pay a fine of Rs 10,000, which goes up to Rs 25,000 for subsequent violations. Private doctors claimed that this clause will shift the state responsibility to private medical establishments, if the law will include private facilities.

Increase in Funds

Fulfilling all the obligations cast on the state under the law would require incremental funds for deployment of human resources, infrastructure development, and public health functions. The section 5 of the Act states that the state government will 'mobilise resources and frame plans or policies to carry out obligations under this Act.' The Act does not provide for such additional costs.

The state government now needs to determine a financial strategy for paying the right to health care and preparing the necessary human resources for the public system. The state will need to allocate more money for health. In Rajasthan, a budget of Rs 20,111 crore is anticipated for the fiscal year 2022-2023 for health and family welfare. The state government must also create and implement a human resources policy to guarantee the equitable distribution of health professionals.

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Digital Insecurity and Inaccessibility Impact Governance

Alok Srivastava

Digitalization of public services was one of the key factors identified to improve governance and service delivery. Gradually and in the recent past in a mission mode, digitalization of public services was noticed in India. Advocates of e-governance to a large extent considered digitalization of the service delivery as an important tool for minimizing corruption in public services by two means, one, bringing in more transparency in service delivery and two, ensuring lesser interaction between service provider and service seeker. In fact, digitalized service delivery aims to empower people by giving them access to information and services, with no middlemen to depend upon. However, numerous challenges, particularly in Indian context, in particular due to its size and volume along with poor educational and economic indicators, were often cited as a hindrance in the acceptance of digital mode for availing service benefits.

Digitalization of several public services, especially the crucial ones in areas like health, education, and financial transactions, among others, proved to be very beneficial for the general public as well as for other stakeholders like service providers, policymakers, and the government as a whole, both at the national and state levels, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In fact, the utilisation of digital and online platforms not only increased quickly over a short period of time but

also significantly forced customers to use them to access a variety of services during the COVID-19 pandemic's lockdown on visiting service delivery points. More significantly, the utilisation of digital platforms has increased across all socioeconomic sections of society, in both urban and rural areas of India.



Challenges to overcome

It is now clear that digitalization of both basic and vital services will continue in the country, but it also brings with it a host of difficulties and hazards, both known and unknown, that affect both service providers and service seekers alike.

Hacking of digital platforms: In recent past, we have come across various incidences of the digital hacking of websites, servers and database of important institutions and persons. Some of the much in news and recent ones as shown in the Table 1

With the increased usage of online and digital mediums, hacking of services is a major challenge to address, particularly for service providers, as well as the hacking of personal confidential information, which is a major concern for most of the online service users along with

More significantly, the utilisation of digital platforms has increased across all socioeconomic sections of society, in both urban and rural areas of India.

Table 1

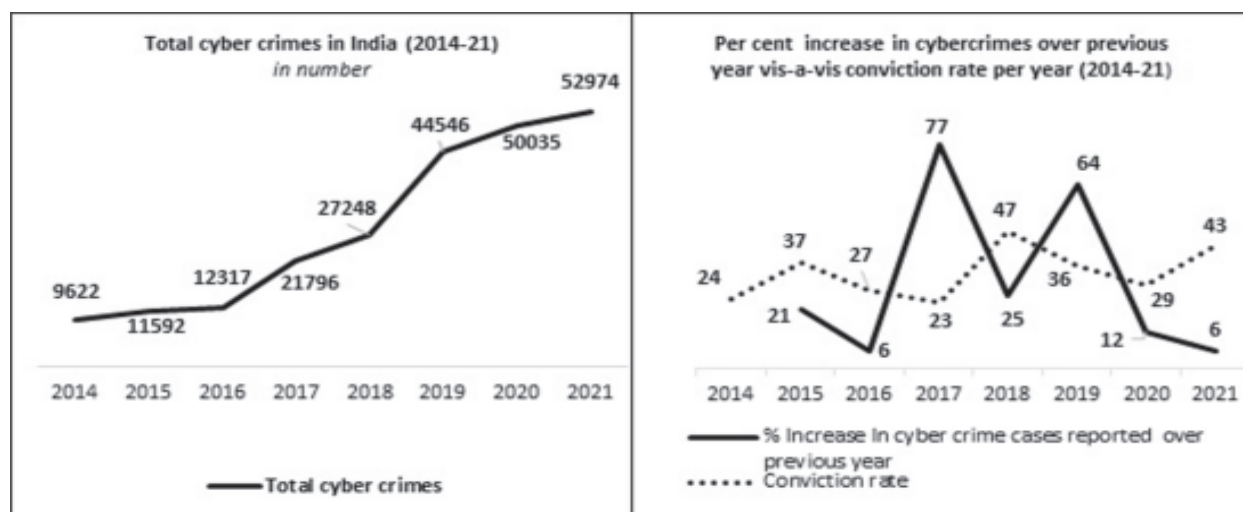
Institution/organization	Cyber-attack	Impact
All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) server	Nov-22	Data of around 30-40 million patients could have been compromised
Prime Minister of India's social media account	Dec-21	Social networking platform, Twitter account of the Prime Minister of India was hacked
Air India	May-21	personal data of 4.5 million passengers worldwide
Common Admission Test (CAT) for admission in Management Education Institutes of India	May-21	190,000 applicants' details leaked to dark web
Domino's India	Apr-21	1 million credit card records and 180 million pizza preferences
Upstox, a trading platform	Apr-21	breach of know-your-customer (KYC) data of its customers
Police recruitment examination	Feb-21	Personally identifiable information of 500,000 Indian police personnel put up for sale
COVID-19 test results of Indian patients	Jan-21	At least 1500 Indian citizens
Justpay	Jan-21	Details of around 35 million customer accounts taken from a server
BigBasket, an e-service delivery	Oct-20	20 million user accounts ,data for sale online
Unacademy, an edutech startup	May-20	22 million users' account
Health care website	Aug-19	68 lakh patient and doctor records
JustDial, a local search provider	Apr-19	Personal data of 100 million users exposed
State Bank of India	Jan-19	3 million text messages to customers revealed

Source: multiple online reports, as on April 10, 2023

the frauds related to financial transactions.

Data on cyber crimes was first published in the year 2002. The latest available report in the public domain is for the year 2021. Clearly, the data on cybercrime shows a significant increase every year. The annual data from the previous many years show, there has been an exponential rise in cybercrimes.

According to NCRB reports of different years, the percentage increase in cybercrimes over the previous years ranged between 6% and as high as 77%. In absolute numbers, the increase between 2014 and 2021 is 43,352 cases, which in percentage terms is an astonishing 450%. As per the report, the major crimes under cybercrime include, computer related offences such as,



Source: NCRB reports

cheating by personation using computer resources, dishonestly receiving stolen computer resources or communication devices, identity theft, violation of privacy, publication/ transmission of obscene/ sexually explicit acts in electronic forms etc. under IT Act 2000. While crimes under Indian Penal Code (IPC) involving communication devices as a medium or target, include, abetment of suicide (Online), cyber stalking/ bullying of women/ children, data theft, fraud related to online banking, credit card/debit card, at ATMs, OTP related, among others.

Conviction rate is worrisome: The quick redressal and strong anti-hacking measures on a war footing to dissuade the fear among users as much as possible and thereby increase the usage of online and digital services, in near future, is much needed. However, as per NCRB reports, the conviction rate is not at all encouraging with less than 50%; only 47% in 2018 and 43% in 2021, but on average around 33% only.

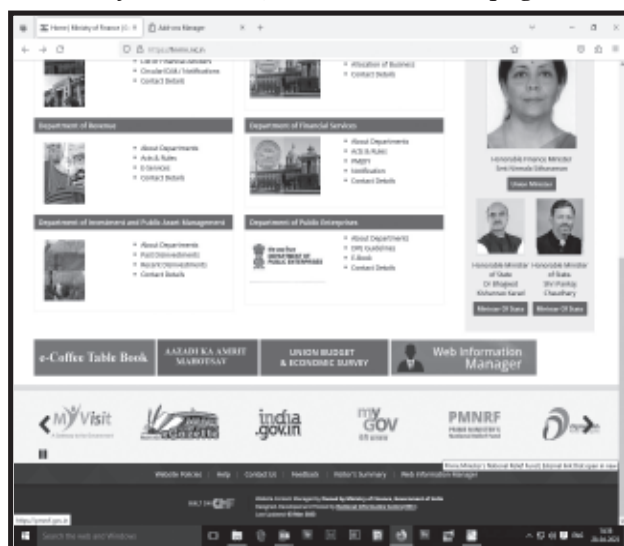
Therefore, discouraging citizens from utilising digital media too cautiously, a low conviction rate is also a bad indicator of the effectiveness of the political system as a whole. Poor conviction rates paint a very different picture from the one that is most frequently associated with digital

media, which is speed and pace of service utilisation.

Poor online service delivery: There are multiple factors, which need attention for smooth access and usage of digital platforms. For instance, many online platforms are not user friendly, which adds to the frustration of the users. Poor connectivity or many users accessing a particular web portal simultaneously slows down the website or other technical glitches. For instance, when the Central Board of School Examination announced the results or during Delhi University's online examination, the websites crashed or went off the service for some hours, which added to the anxiety and stress of the students. If one must attempt to obtain desired services repeatedly, it is not only frustrating but also places the user in a situation where they must continually visit a service delivery location for the same purposes. This is definitely not user-friendly. With the increase in usage, comes the responsibility on the part of the service providers to make digital access and usage glitch-free.

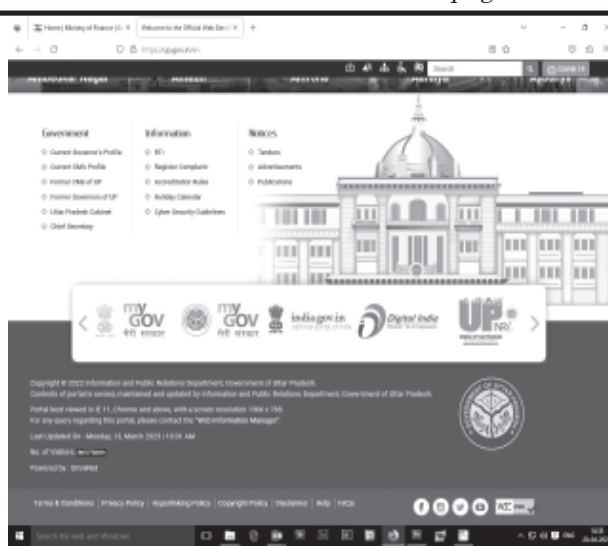
Besides the slowing down of web-based services, the updating of information at regular intervals is equally important in digitalized public service delivery system. For instance, as on April 12, 2023, while

Ministry of Finance, GoI website homepage



last updated on March 3, 2023 [accessed on April 12, 2023]

Govt. of Uttar Pradesh website homepage



last updated on March 13, 2023 [accessed on April 12, 2023]

On a regular basis and as a norm, grievance redressal in minimum time is desirable. Efforts in this direction may take some time but are not at all unfeasible.

most of the national government's ministries' websites as well as that of the state government's website were updated, a few exceptional cases were also observed. The Government of India's Ministry of Finance website was showing the last updated date as March 3, 2023 or website of the Government of Uttar Pradesh was last updated on March 13, 2023 (screenshot below). Regular update keeps citizens abreast with new policies, programmes, interventions, and achievements.

Solutions in hand

The above-discussed scenarios and challenges must undoubtedly be addressed and overcome by service providers, both public and private, in order for e-governance initiatives to be successful. This will help not only preserve the public's trust in digital platforms but also ease their access to these platforms. It is crucial that the general people choose digital access to public services, especially the poor and vulnerable population, in order to expand the reach and utilisation of digital platforms. Digital platforms and services must be secure and impenetrable in addition to being user-friendly to prevent unauthorised access to private data and information.

Expedited delivery of services on digital platforms: For marginalized and vulnerable population, which often look for compassionate consideration for their access to any public service, it is often felt that online services lack the human touch, which is otherwise available in manually managed service centres.

Online services have a fixed time for delivery of services. All services do not have the emergency option and therefore it delays delivery of required service, which otherwise might have been availed in a lesser time if one directly approaches the service providers. It is often noticed that to avail public services on digital platforms, one has to upload a scanned copy of several documents. This could be avoided by linking a central repository of all documents with various service providers, to access supporting documents, as and when required.

Digital applications like 'DigiLocker' of the Government of India are one such initiative. It is claimed as a secure cloud-based platform for the storage, sharing and verification of documents & certificates. In fact, it should be made mandatory for all public service providers at national and state levels to integrate with DigiLocker. As of now, around 2300+ issuers/service providers are making documents available through DigiLocker.

Prompt action on grievances at a faster speed: On a regular basis and as a norm, grievance redressal in minimum time is desirable. Efforts in this direction may take some time but are not at all unfeasible. In fact, the e-governance measures is expected to be a user-friendly interface with multi-linguistic web portals and easy to use for a person with even with a basic knowledge of computer operations. With the growing usage of digitalized public services including legal aid and stakeholders promoting the same, for common citizens, public services which are fully secured from cyber threat, at both front (user-end) and back-ends (provider-end) is a must.

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Why digitalisation of education in India is important for higher education

Ruchir Arora

The digitalisation of education in India has had a significant impact on higher education in recent years. With the rise of technology, online learning and digital resources have become increasingly accessible to students in India, providing them with new opportunities to access higher education.

A report showcased that online students perceive convenience, flexibility with commencement dates, and variety of study materials as being the top factors behind them adopting online channels for learning.

The government initiatives like the 'Digital India' campaign and the Covid-19 pandemic have accelerated the adoption of technology substantially while ensuring increased accessibility across the country. The recent annual report from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) states that India has one of the largest internet user bases in the world.

Effects of Digitalisation on Higher Education

One of the most significant effects of the digitalization of education on higher education in India is the increase in the number of students who are able to access it.

1. Online Learning Portals

Online learning platforms and e-learning portals have made it possible for students in remote and rural areas of the country to access educational resources that were previously only available to students in urban areas. This has helped to bridge the education gap between urban and rural areas and has made higher education more accessible to a wider range of students.

2. Increased Flexibility

Another effect is the increased flexibility that it provides. Online learning allows students to study at their own pace and on their own schedule, which can be particularly beneficial for students who are working or have other responsibilities that make it difficult for them to attend traditional in-person classes.

3. Access to Educational Resources

online learning provides students access to a wide range of educational resources, including video lectures, readings, and interactive activities. This can help to enhance the learning experience and can lead to improved outcomes for students.

Other Side of Digitalisation

However, the digitalisation of education in India also has some negative effects on higher education. One of the main concerns is that online learning may not provide students with the same level of interaction and support as in-person classes.

This can make it more difficult for students to fully engage with the material and can lead to lower levels of retention and completion. Education needs to have a blend of online and offline for maximum effect. Also, teachers need to be better equipped to make use of these technological and digital advancements which will positively affect the quality of education.

However, it is important to note that the digitalisation of education also has its challenges and further improvements are needed to ensure the best possible outcome for students.

CEO, and Co-Founder, CollegeDekho.

Book Looks at Journey of Print Media Organisations in India

The rising advent of new media is gaining traction as the most convenient and accessible tool for information dispersion, given its utility and multiway communication cycle, says a new book which takes a 360-degree look at print media organisations in India.

In “Indian Media Giants: Unveiling the Business Dynamics of Print Legacies”, Indian Institute of Mass Communication faculty member Surbhi Dahiya carries out an analytical chronicle of six Indian media conglomerates’ individual odyssey from their humble beginnings in the pre-independence era to their transformation into powerful business empires in the digitised world.

The book, published by Oxford University Press, traces Indian media metamorphosis, the birth, phase-wise contours of growth and development, travails and trajectories, organisational structures, editorial policies and business dynamics of print majors The Times Group, The Hindu Group, The Hindustan Times Limited, The Indian Express Group, Dainik Jagran Limited and DB Corp Limited.

It further analyses how innovations have been brought in the management policies of these print businesses, with respect to production, distribution, consumption, while accrediting the visionary leadership that drives each organisation forward in its endeavours.

The book focuses on the theoretical framework of media management and pays attention to the changing media management practices from one era to another, gradually orienting and reorienting the strategic positioning of respective media giants to the pulse of the media market and the opportunities under various regulatory regimes.

It also details the changing media landscape in India and underlines the

efforts of media giants in retaining print while embracing the digital. “Today, challenges are different because there is no choice but to embrace the technology of the Internet and the World Wide Web, since new media is gaining traction. There is also the challenge of the information consumer becoming the information-doer,” the book says.

According to the author, with new-age devices, traditional filters have fallen thus creating a breeding ground for evils like fake news and disinformation.

“In India, it is an even greater challenge when credible media houses fall into the trap and become purveyors of fake news. But that has not dislocated the dominant position print holds. Newspapers are still hailed as safety nets the public can fall back on for credible sources of information, something that new-age media is most susceptible to,” she writes.

Dahiya also says that in this competitive world, media organisations are under constant pressure to change, innovate, draw upon new capabilities to survive, and above all re-examine their existing business models.

“In view of the fast-moving and changing external environment and the shifting of goals of media organisations, the author tries to map the changes and innovations in managing media organisations in India by identifying the factors responsible for initiation and sustenance of these changes,” the book says.

Apart from tracking the evolution and growth trajectory of the largest Indian media conglomerates with core competencies in print media, the changes and innovations that the respective managements brought in response to the external policy environment are also highlighted.

Source: Devdiscourse, January 15, 2023

Urban Climate Film Festival unites filmmakers and environmentalists for sustainable future

The National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), India, under the City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain (CITIIS) program, has recently organized the first of a series of six Urban Climate Film Festivals in collaboration with the Center of Media Studies (CMS) and its initiative, CMS VATAVARAN, Asia's largest environmental Film Festival and Forum. The event aims to showcase the impact of climate change on cities worldwide and the lives of their citizens, contributing to the discourse on climate-centric urban development and providing a platform for filmmakers and practitioners working to highlight pressing climate concerns.

The festival's first edition took place from March 24 to 26, 2023, at the M L Bhartia Auditorium, Alliance Francaise de Delhi. A call for entry had invited

films from around the globe, resulting in 150 submissions from 20 countries. The three-member jury panel, consisting of Mr Sabyesachi Bharti, Deputy Director of the Center of Media Studies (CMS) VATAVARAN, Dr Pranab J Patar, environment and sustainability professional and Prof. (Dr) Surbhi Dahiya, Professor, Department of English Journalism at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) carefully evaluated these submissions and selected a total of 27 films from 12 countries for the festival series.

The festival was inaugurated by the Indian G2 Sherpa, Mr Amitabh Kant, and attended by several dignitaries, including Mr Hitesh Vaidya, Director of NIUA, and H.E. Mr Emmanuel Lenin, Ambassador of India in France (Embassy of India, Paris).





Mr. Amitabh Kant on his inaugural note said, "We must make sure that the cities of the future are based on principles of sustainability. This Film Festival is a great way to announce our commitments and bring new energy for driving a new model of urbanisation."

A significant highlight of the event was a panel discussion on "Lights, Camera, Climate Action: The Contribution of Cinema in the Fight against Climate Change." The panel featured National Award-winning filmmaker Ms Aparna Sanyal, award-winning filmmakers Mr Shaz Syed and Ms Akanksha Singh, communications specialist, CITIIS Project. The discussion, moderated by Mr Bharti, explored the role of films in raising awareness about the climate crisis and its impact on the film industry.

The panel discussion provided valuable insights into the challenges filmmakers

face in raising awareness about climate change and the importance of balancing climate crisis messaging with audience expectations for entertainment. The conversation also emphasized the need for urban institutions to support filmmakers addressing climate change issues, fostering a deeper understanding of the role of cinema in the fight against climate change.

As the Urban Climate Film Festival series continues in other Indian cities like Mumbai, Pondicherry, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, and Chennai, it is clear that the convergence of cinema and climate action has the potential to shape public opinion, influence policy decisions, and inspire meaningful change in the realm of climate-centric urban development.

Report by Susmita Chanda

Cinematic Catalysts for Change: The Power of Environmental Film Festivals in Shaping Relations and Advocacy Efforts

Sabyesachi Bharti

Environmental Film Festivals, also known as Green Screens, are events that have become increasingly important in raising awareness and promoting action on environmental issues and conservation efforts. These festivals serve as a platform for filmmakers, environmentalists, and the general public to come together and engage in discussions and debates about the critical issues facing our planet.

The impact of Environmental Film Festivals on shaping public opinion and promoting transnational environmental activism cannot be overstated. By providing a space for filmmakers to showcase their work and reach a wide audience, these festivals allow them to raise awareness and spark discussions about environmental issues. They also provide a platform for environmental activists to come together and work towards common goals, promoting transnational environmental activism and creating a sense of community among

environmental advocates from different countries.

Moreover, Environmental Film Festivals provide a unique space for dialogue and discussion, where the public can engage with environmental experts, activists, and filmmakers. This fosters a sense of community and encourages collaboration and cooperation in addressing environmental issues.

One such notable Environmental Film Festival is the CMS VATAVARAN Film Festival in India, which has been at the forefront of promoting environmental awareness and activism in the country. The festival showcases films and documentaries on various environmental topics, providing a platform for filmmakers to showcase their work and reach a wide audience.

Established in 2002, CMS VATAVARAN is India's premier international environment and wildlife film festival and forum, dedicated to fostering an understanding of the natural world and



Participants at International Bhutan Festival

promoting sustainable development. The festival has showcased over 3,000 films from more than 85 countries, reaching millions of people and stimulating public discourse on environmental conservation. One of its key strengths is commitment to fostering environmental awareness and action in India, particularly in the context of climate change.

As a developing nation with a complex relationship between economic growth and environmental protection, India is facing a range of environmental challenges, from air pollution and water scarcity to deforestation and habitat loss. By showcasing a diverse array of films that highlight these issues, CMS VATAVARAN is effectively engaging a wide spectrum of audiences and sparking important conversations about the need for environmental action in the Indian context.

In addition, it is also playing a crucial role in promoting international understanding of climate change and its impacts. By partnering with other environmental film festivals around the world and the organizations like IUCN CEC and Green Film Network, CMS VATAVARAN is helping to create a global community of environmental advocates who are working together to address the urgent challenges posed by climate change.

The Bhutan International Festival is another example of CMS VATAVARAN's effort for raising awareness about environmental issues in the South Asian region. In the year 2022, CMS VATAVARAN organised Bhutan's first-ever film festival and forum on Climate Action and Biodiversity Conservation. The Festival, for example, has been instrumental in raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity and conservation in the region. By showcasing films that explore themes of sustainability, environmental justice, and community-based conservation, the festival is helping to promote a broader understanding of the interconnectedness of environmental issues and their impacts on human societies.

Through its partnerships with other festivals and organizations, such as the High Commission of Canada in India | the IUCN CEC this Festival also helped the promotion of cross-cultural understanding and collaboration on shared environmental challenges.

The Green Film Network (GFN) is a coalition of 37 environmental film festivals from 28 countries across five continents, established in 2010 to promote environmental awareness and international collaboration among filmmakers, activists, and policymakers. The GFN is committed to promoting cross-cultural exchange and dialogue on pressing environmental concerns through initiatives.

The CMS VATAVARAN and Green Film Network (GFN) are two environmental film festivals and organizations that have demonstrated the power of cinema to influence international relations in both developed and developing nations. The GFN, with its film festival members from around the world, has been instrumental in raising awareness of global environmental issues, highlighting best practices in environmental stewardship, and encouraging collaboration between nations on shared challenges.

They have also provided a platform for sharing best practices in environmental stewardship, including sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and green infrastructure. By highlighting successful examples of environmental protection and conservation, these festivals have helped to foster collaboration between nations on shared environmental challenges.

As an environmental Film Festival, CMS VATAVARAN is committed to creating these public spaces, and its festival is designed to facilitate meaningful interactions and discussions around environmental issues. The Festival curates films and documentaries that focus on specific environmental challenges and offers a range of programs, including panel discussions, workshops, and masterclasses, to encourage dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders.

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Fact Check Unit: Govt to pick members; nodal officers from ministries

The Fact Check Unit as proposed in the Information Technology Rules, 2021, is likely to have four members — a representative from the IT Ministry and one from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, a “media expert” and a “legal expert”.

A senior government official said this composition would likely assuage concerns from critics about the Fact Check Unit’s potential lack of expertise. “The unit will be supported by designated nodal officers from other ministries,” the official said.

According to the official, the government is close to finalising the contours of the Fact Check Unit and its interplay with social media sites like Meta, YouTube and Twitter. “We aim to notify the Fact Check Unit and related details in about ten days.

The unit will uphold the highest levels of professional and ethical standards to ensure trustworthiness and neutrality in the identification of potentially misleading or fake content,” the official said.

The FCU is expected to require platforms to “prominently display” when they take content down on the basis of the unit’s inputs, allow for an appeal process with a government committee, and maintain a public database of content it deems as misleading. The Indian Express has learnt. Further, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) is also learnt to have finalised the broad-level processes that the FCU will follow, including granting it suo motu powers to

identify potentially misleading content, corroborating evidence across various ministries and departments, and communicating its conclusion to social media platforms.

Last week, MeitY notified amendments to the Information Technology Rules, 2021, creating a regulatory regime that will allow a fact check body it appoints to label content related to the government on online platforms as “fake” or “misleading”. Content marked as such by the body will have to be taken down by online intermediaries if they wish to retain their ‘safe harbour,’ which is legal immunity they enjoy against third-party content.

The government is also planning to establish an appeals mechanism when it notifies the unit. The general understanding so far was that people whose content may have been taken down by platforms after FCU’s inputs would have had to approach the courts to appeal the decision with no other avenue of recourse. The final notification on the unit is expected to clarify that understanding and allow aggrieved parties to seek recourse at one of three government-appointed appeal committees that the Centre had set up earlier this year. “Any person aggrieved by the action of the intermediaries, based on the information identified as fake or false by the FCU, may take the standard route of appeal as per IT Rules,” the official said.

Source: The Indian Express, April 13, 2023

The New IT Rules Herald India's 'Single Source of Truth' Governance

The Minister of State for Information Technology and Electronics has made it clear, the government is the only body with access to factual data to certify any online speech as fake or otherwise.

India is rapidly digitising. There are good things and bad, speed-bumps on the way and caveats to be mindful of. The weekly column Terminal focuses on all that is connected and is not – on digital issues, policy, ideas and themes dominating the conversation in India and the world.

If one looks into the development of all digital infrastructures that were built in India over the past decade, each of them have been built with “single source of truth” as the information model.

Every bureaucrat who was involved in digitisation of land records, identity databases and digital welfare systems was claiming to be building a single source of truth of our personal records that can be used in governance. With the new amendments to The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, the government has extended this model to social media, where it intends to verify every statement being made as true or not.

The efforts by the Ministry of Information Technology and Electronics on setting up a ‘fact checking unit’ to fact check social media platforms is clearly a censorship drive. The fact checking unit being set up to verify content on social media has one big problem though, they need to know all the facts before they censor the fake news.

Even if the fact checking unit does a great job of being impartial towards fake news, the very act of setting up this unit shows the government is monitoring these platforms and its users leading towards censorship.

The Minister of State for Information Technology and Electronics has made it

clear, the government is the only body with access to factual data to certify any online speech as fake or otherwise.

This idea of certifying truth with the state becoming the only source of truth is dangerous for any free society. It is also unfortunate the state won’t tell us what these truths are and will only censor our speech instead of educating us with facts.

Single source of truth is an informational model which ensures data from multiple databases/departments is inter-linked to create a reference database – ‘a master database’ – which is the only accepted true data in the entire organisation. To illustrate – if your land passbook says you have 10 acres of land, but the revenue database says you only have eight acres of land, another government database for welfare says you have 12 acres of land, then eight acres is considered truth no matter the actual on the ground land possession.

Here, the perceived truth by the government is not a fact measurable and quantifiable on the ground.

Disputes like this exist across all government records, which by all means are considered truth and absolute truth by the entire bureaucracy. If you are not part of these single sources of truths, you simply do not exist and your claims are wrong. Just like how you won’t be a citizen without a verified certificate and you are not a voter unless you link your Aadhaar to your voter ID. Unless otherwise certified through the new digital mechanisms in India, you are either dead, duplicate or just a fraud and now so is our speech.

In any democracy, there can be multiple truths – beliefs that are often promoted through various politics. One can have multiple beliefs of why the government ordered demonetisation or read down Article 370. The government’s version of truths are not often facts and one cannot be forced to accept them as the only truth.

The IT Rules have no provision to appeal government claims or their perceived truth resulting in executive overreach. The rules themselves have been issued under provisions of Section 79 of IT Act, which itself is being contested as ultra vires by Kunal Kamra in Bombay high court. These rules are going to further push information asymmetry between the state and the citizenry, with access to information being curtailed through censorship. It is not just freedom of speech but also our right to information that gets hampered when news reports about the government are censored.

Fake news is a problem in our post-truth world and addressing it requires education, training our population about the dangers through digital literacy. This is especially important with the rise of synthetic reality with artificial intelligence which are manufacturing

content that has never happened and is not real. The social effects of recommendation algorithms and new hyper reality that has emerged through proliferation of social media is an issue that requires serious debate. Instead we are being offered a solution that undermines free speech and sets us back as a society.

The existing censorship practices shows us the government has never explained to anyone why something needs to be censored or justified them in our courts. Takedowns and blocking of websites, bans of mobile applications have all been done through executive action with no oversight. With all the noble intentions of the government, this setup will be misused and weaponised with consequences that harm us as a free society.

Srinivas Kodali

Source: The Wire, April 17, 2023

Data bill suggests key changes to RTI law

The draft of the Digital Data Protection Bill proposes to do away with 8.1 (j) section of the RTI Act, which allows information commissioner to determine if personal information about administration officials can be released in the greater public interest. The Central government has proposed amending the Right to Information (RTI) Act to protect individual privacy by denying any personal information through an amendment in the proposed data protection law, the draft of which was released on Friday.

The draft of the Digital Data Protection Bill proposes to do away with 8.1 (j) section of the RTI Act, which allows information commissioner to determine if personal information about administration officials can be released in the greater public interest. This is for the first time the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has proposed changes in the RTI Act related to provisions regarding

sharing of information. The government in 2019 had amended the RTI Act provisions regarding appointment and salaries of the information commissioners by giving itself powers to fix term and salaries of commissioners.

Under RTI Act, information about an individual with the government, including its employees, can be shared following an RTI application provided there is enough ground that this will serve larger public interest.

The information can be shared with the application through a speaking order giving reasons why sharing the information will serve the large public interest. But, almost a third of the total rejections of RTI applications are by invoking section 8.1 (j) and the provision is said to be one of the most misused parts of the law, according to experts. The proposed Data Protection bill, whose draft was shared by the government with public in Friday, has proposed to drastically change section 8.1 (j). “The words “the

disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual unless the Central Public Information Officer or the State Public Information Officer or the appellate authority, as the case may be, is satisfied that the larger public interest justifies the disclosure of such information” shall be omitted,” the draft said.

With this, the amended section 8.1 (j) exemption would read “information which relates to personal information”. While the data law proposal states this is in order to bring in “consistency”, experts said this could give a cover to corrupt officials. RTI activist Shailesh Gandhi called the proposal an attempt of the NDA government to weaken the information law. “The present government amended the provisions relating to the status and

tenure of the Information Commissions but did not touch the exemptions,” Gandhi said, who described exemptions as “well crafted” to provide balanced information to people.

“If the section 8.1 (j) is deleted it would weaken the law and would aide those against whom there are allegations of corruption. If this amendment is made, all information that can be related to a person may be denied. Most information relates to a person and hence the law would become a Right to Deny for public information officers (PIO) who do not wish to give information,” he said. The proposed data protection law also provides for deletion of section 43A of the Information Technology Act dealing with compensation to protect data as this area would be covered under the new proposed law.

Source: Hindustan Times, November 21,2022

Only 17 percent opt for admissions under RTE quota

A total of 27,381 students registered themselves for Class I admission at private schools across the State this year. Of the 9,289 private schools in the State, as many as 92,373 seats should be allotted for children from economically weaker sections category, according to the AP Right to Education (RTE) Act.

However, of the total registered students, only 17.51 per cent opted for free admissions at private schools under the RTE quota. Reason: lack of awareness on the government scheme. The central government had enacted the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009, with the aim of providing free and compulsory education to children between 6 and 14 years from EWS sections. The act mandates that private schools reserve 25 per cent of their seats for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

According to the school education department, the candidates who opt for

free seats will be selected for admission through a lottery system, which will be held on Tuesday. Considering this provision, 5 per cent of the seats will be allocated to orphans, HIV and disabled children, 10 per cent to SCs, 4 per cent to STs and 6 per cent to the other weaker sections.

The government data revealed that 3,582 students registered themselves in Bapatla, followed by 3,285 in Annamaiah. However, 2,010 candidates opted for admissions at private schools in Bapatla, followed by 1,485 in Annamaiah, and 1,294 in Kurnool.

Parents rue lack of awareness on quota under RTE

Three districts saw least number of candidates opting for free admissions. Only three candidates opted for private schools in Alluri Sitarama Raju, 140 in Satya Sai and 195 in Nellore. Of the 85,813

free seats available under the RTE Act, 2,696 candidates were allotted seats last year. However, only 2,102 candidates joined against 2,602 seats available under the first phase and 55 against 94 available seats in the second phase.

Parents rue lack of awareness on such a provision. G Venkateshwarlu of Kadapa said, "Though I am a graduate and working as a representative at a clothing merchant, even I don't know about the 25 per cent reservation under the RTE Act to admit my son to a private school. The government must ensure such schemes reach grass-root level."

Speaking to TNIE, Commissioner of School Education, S Suresh Kumar,

expressed satisfaction over the response the scheme has received this year. "Nearly 30,000 candidates have registered and 17,000 have opted for admissions. There will be demand for the best and top schools in their respective areas. The national average of admissions to private schools under this quota is 30-35 per cent only," he said.

Meanwhile, noted lawyer Thandava Yogesh who fought for the implementation of RTE Section 12 (C) (1) by filing a plea and subsequent contempt case against the State government in the High Court also created awareness among the public through various platforms.

Source: The New Indian Express, April 18, 2023

Remove 'misleading' ads: Child rights body directs Bournvita amid 'high sugar' row

NCPCR wrote to Bournvita amid huge row over allegations of having high sugar content in the milk supplement.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has written to the manufacturer of health drink Bournvita, Mondelez India International, asking to conduct a review and withdraw 'misleading' advertisements and packaging labels. The notice came amid huge row over allegations of having high sugar content in the milk supplement.

"It has been brought to the notice of the Commission that your product contains high percentage of sugar and contents/substances/mixtures/formula which may cause harmful impact to the health of children," the notice said addressing to Deepak Iyer, president of Mondelez International, India.

The child rights body also urged the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the Central Consumer Protection Authority to take action against companies that fail to meet the guidelines on food safety or advertising.

The row erupted after a health influencer, in a video, criticised Bournvita alleging that the powder supplement contains high sugar, cocoa solids and cancer-causing colourant.

A Bournvita spokesperson earlier said that the formulation of its milk supplement has been 'scientifically crafted by a team of nutritionists and food scientists to offer the best of taste and health. All our claims are verified and transparent and all ingredients have regulatory approvals. All the necessary nutritional information is mentioned on the pack for consumers to make informed choices'.

However, NCPCR noted that Bournvita 'fails to display mandatory disclosures in line with the guidelines and regulations of FSSAI and under the Consumer Protection Act', and asked the company to respond within a week.

Source: Hindustan Times.com, April 27, 2023



CITIIS URBAN CLIMATE FILM FESTIVAL



Entries are invited from filmmakers around the world for the Urban Climate Film Festival, organised by the NIUA-CITIIS program. The films must showcase climate change and its impact on life in cities.

Festival locations:



Delhi



Mumbai



Bengaluru



Kolkata



Ahmedabad

All formats are welcome:

**Documentary, Non-Fiction,
Fiction, Animation, etc.**

Scan to submit



To know more about the festival and submit your films, go to

<https://niua.in/citiis/ucff>

In collaboration with



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