

MUMBAI MERI JAAN

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF AGNI



Editorial

Those above 80 can now vote from home

The Election Commission of India (ECI) said it has introduced the facility to Vote-from-Home (VFH) for people above 80 years of age and those with disabilities in the upcoming assembly elections in Karnataka.

"For the first time the ECI is going to provide the facility to those above 80 years of age. Our teams will go there with a form-12D to exercise their franchise," Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said.

The EC encourages those above 80 years to also come to the polling station, those who cannot can avail this facility, he said. Secrecy will be maintained and the entire process will be videographed, Kumar explained.

"All the political parties will be informed whenever there is a movement for voting from home," he said.

For people with disabilities, a mobile application called 'Saksham' has been introduced, which they can login to and choose the option to vote.

Another mobile application, 'Suvidha' has been developed, which is an online portal for candidates to file nominations and affidavits.

"Candidates can also use the Suvidha portal to seek permission for meetings and rallies," Kumar said.

The ECI has also launched a campaign called Know Your Candidate.

"Political parties have to inform voters on their portals and social media platform why they chose a candidate with criminal background and gave ticket to contest the election," Kumar said.

The commission has introduced e-VIGIL mobile application for anyone to lodge complaint relating to election code violations. The response time will be 100 minutes, the CEC said.

"This is a single app for recording, reporting and resolving violations. This app captures the GIS location and the response time to address the grievance is 100 minutes," Kumar said.

While all the above innovations are for Karnataka, it will be implemented in all future elections in the country. **MMJ**

Stories of Good Governance

Vibrant Gram Panchayats at Orkun Mittur and Dibburahalli

Shrikant Soman, MMJ Editorial Board Member

The story of Gram Panchayats at Orkun Mittur and Dibburahalli is a classic example of the hard work and planning at the grassroot level in villages. Here the panchayat office which is usually a dormant place is buzzing with activity. There is a monthly monitoring system to oversee the execution of the annual village development plan.

Mandated committees like Bal Vikas Samiti (children's development committee) and School-Monitoring Committee, which were near defunct, have been meeting diligently to monitor overall child development.

The villages covered by these two Gram Panchayats have functional street lights.

Ration shops display mandated information about the public distribution system (PDS). Panchayat Officials are available 24x7 to resolve citizens' complaints related to water. The Gram Panchayats in Karnataka have been delegated 29 functions which were

hitherto been carried out at the Government Level. And these two Gram Panchayats have very effectively utilised this additional vested power. The Oorkunte Mittur Gram panchayat constructed the highest number of toilets under the erstwhile Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, a national programme to build toilets.

The secret of this development is the innovative framework of Gram Panchayat Organisation Development (GPOD). It is the brainchild of NGO Arghyam subsequently transitioned to the non-profit Avantika Foundation. The GPOD framework is based on the assumption that gram panchayats inherently possess tremendous potential. They have the capacity to function as robust institutions. With the help of Avantika Foundation, the panchayat members in Oorkunte Mittur collectively articulated their vision as "overall sustainable development through transparent and good governance". Then they outlined **contd. on Page 2**

Waste management in K West

Zahida Banatwala, AGNI Trustee

In the month of December / January a big hue and cry was made relating to Swachata and Waste Management, and that only segregated waste would be collected. The reality is very different.

Residents are now at the mercy of MCGM. But for alert and vigilant citizens the whole



city would be a stinking mess. We at K West have been following up with and MCGM, regularly, if not able to sort out the issue at **contd. on page 2**

34 flooding spots to be rectified before onset of monsoon

After tackling issues at 306 flooding spots in the past few years, the BMC has now undertaken remedial work at 40 locations this year. Of these, work at 34 spots is expected to be completed before the onset of the monsoons, said a civic official.

The civic body has identified 386 spots infamous for flooding

across the city and various works have been completed to tackle issues at these locations. Additionally, 487 dewatering pumps have also been installed to tackle waterlogging during the last monsoon. Since there is no mechanism to understand the level of flooding in the city, the BMC also introduced flood gauges at **contd. on page 2**

When Power Corrupts

 **Maria Dsouza H West**

In the Development Plan with the H West Ward Office, the road connecting Mount Mary Road to Peter Dias Road was known to us as Tertullian Road. It was steep with a lot of vegetation and like everything that is not looked after, it fell to litter and decay. Drug addicts, pedlars and loiterers frequented it after sunset. Yet, many people used it, to cut short the distance. The then MLA, Mr Baba Siddiqui used his funds and constructed steps on one side, Called Tertullian . The two ALMs namely Mt Mary/Kane Rd and Peter Dias



R d c a m e together to decide on what they could do with the rest of the area which was very uneven. Suggestions that came up were, an urban forest, an environment friendly garden, compost pits that would take in the waste of the entire road. All seemed very inviting except for the exorbitant costs.



In 2017, an offer was made by the sitting Corporator, Mr Asif Zakaria to have that area developed, using his funds. Mr. Alan Abraham was brought in as the architect and designer. What developed was the 'state of the Art' Steps, now named St Stephen Steps. They were completed in 2018 and inaugurated on Republic Day. It did not however change the status of the Steps. It remained



a connecting road in the record books of the BMC.

Soon, the space was used for events organised by the architect and his team, Word went around that the space was freely available 24X7 to anyone with permission from the BMC. There were birthday parties, annual day of Schools, rehearsals of all kinds, sound checks, photography sessions, football and cricket tournaments, this increased the footfalls every weekend, increasing traffic, parking problems, noise decibels hit the roof, food stalls and more. The impression given was that with such high class events held, anti-social behaviour would stop, Sorry to say, they existed side by side. The question is, can events be held on a road? Can the pedestrians be stopped using the road during an event? Can the residents who live in close proximity be disturbed 24X7 by drums, loud music, clapping, shouting? Nowhere is this allowed.

Hence the residents made a collective complaint to the BMC, the Police and to Ashish Shellar, the MLA. A joint meeting was held in the office of the AC, Mr Vinayak Vispute and in the presence of the Maintenance and garden departmental heads. They were advised not to give permission in future to any event. They will have to give us their decision in writing. So far we are enjoying peace. May Peace reign.

MMJ

The Marshals



Waste Management in K/West

contd. from page 1 lower level we do not hesitate to send pictures and messages for redressal of problems. That there are close to 400 C C T V c a m e r a s installed by the MLA at various parts o f t h e constituency have proved very useful. At this juncture I would like to mention that the workshop conducted by Mario Fishery AGNI coordinator to educate AGNI Coordinators on how to use various MCGM APPs has also proved extremely



useful. I have used the app extensively to lodge complaints and get the problems solved. AGNI Coordinator Sandra Alex and other ALM Members got



together and resolved many solid waste management issues resolved

MMJ

34 flooding spots to be rectified

contd. from page 1 50 locations in the first phase of the works being carried out.

After switching to microplanning to tackle the issue in 2019, the civic body studied each chronic flooding spot separately and tried to identify the reasons why a specific area floods every monsoon. Accordingly, it came up with customised solutions for each location. Other than dealing with 40 chronic spots this year, the BMC has planned remedial work at another four locations.

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Vibrant Gram Panchayats

contd. from Page 1 corresponding mission statements. Functional portfolios were assigned to the individual members of the panchayats.



The portfolio of 'Production Head' is assigned the responsibility of managing all livelihood functions like agriculture, animal husbandry and job programmes. This arrangement resulted in distributed leadership as against a Sarpanch centric governing system. There was higher transparency in the governance system. This resulted in a substantial improvement in service delivery. This again had a positive impact of substantially higher collection of tariffs as well as in many other areas from the villagers.

The examples of the efficient functioning of Gram Panchayats at Orkun Mittur and Dibburahalli lead us to another point which we are more interested in. Does the good management of village level administrative institutions like Gram Panchayats depend on higher management education from a branded university? Or does good management and governance transcend the boundaries of education? India needs to follow the examples of these two and many other grass root level organisations with innovative framework of Gram Panchayat Organisation Development (GPOD) and some such other systems with the help of enlightened NGOs (like Avantika Foundation) and have vibrant and robust grass root level reforms where authority is delegated and the stakeholders are the participatory units of their own governing system. This is the key as well as answer to our mostly non-functional and corruption and red-tapism ridden governing system for a better tomorrow.

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Miyawaki- Urban Forestation of Bandra

 Vera Alvares

At present, Rao sahib Patwardhan Udyan in Bandra-Khar is in the news for the simple reason that an underground parking lot for vehicles will be constructed beneath it, possibly leading to the destruction of its green canopy. Of late, the dwindling green cover in Mumbai and the lack of open spaces available to children and seniors have become causes for much concern to the citizens. Against this background the active environmentalists who have been vociferously advocating urban forestation with the Miyawaki method are back in the limelight.

Dr. Akira Miyawaki of Japan was a botanist and ecologist who propagated a new approach to urban forestation through a four layered greening of degraded lands in urban areas. Only seeds from native trees are sown in a tight cluster in soil that is enriched with rice husk, coco-peat, new soil and manure. In their battle for sunlight and water, the saplings achieve rapid growth and maximum density.

There are thousands of Miyawaki micro forest trees in India from Delhi to Chennai, from Thiruvananthapuram to Hyderabad and more. Mumbai already sports a few of these thick

jungles that prove to be the lungs of the industrialized localities of the city.

A thick wall of greenery in the forty two acre Nisarg Udyan in Navi Mumbai is a fine example of how swiftly and densely the trees, bushes, creepers, saplings and grasses grow in the Miyawaki method! An erstwhile dumping ground in Navi Mumbai was painstakingly developed and today it is a forest teeming with all kinds of life, including human. More than sixty types of saplings were originally planted in four layers- tall trees, short trees, creepers and bushes with grass. The trees chosen were Kadamba, Peepal, Neem, Palas and Jamun that grow in clusters hugging each other, providing shade to the green layers of growth beneath.

The micro Miyawaki forests have also been successfully grown in Mulund, Kandivali, Wadala and Thane. Mumbaikars would surely support this venture of creating more green spaces to improve the air quality, decrease temperatures and induce rain in their city. Since urban forestation can be swiftly achieved through the Miyawaki method, the day may not be far when such a cool oasis of greenery will come into existence in Bandra too!

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Waste segregation in D Ward - Pilot Project

The BMC has resurrected its solid waste segregation campaign, with a South Mumbai ward initiating a pilot project at three locations involving over 200 societies. Back in 2017, after much discussion and deliberation, the BMC had made waste segregation compulsory for large societies (with more than 20,000 sq feet of area), bulk generators (more than 100 kg of waste per day) and new buildings built after 2007.

Following awareness campaigns, many complexes had even started waste segregation and built composting units on their

premises. In order to give a boost to the campaign, the BMC had even declared a tax rebate for these societies in 2019. But after the lockdown, almost every society stopped segregating waste.

In an attempt to revive the campaign, the D ward comprising Malabar Hill and Tardeo areas has been segregating 100 per cent waste at source in three localities—Napeansea Road, Bhulabhai Desai Road and BIT chawls. "There are around 200 buildings in these three areas and it generates 10 tonnes of waste

Fin literacy NGO focuses on public liability insurance

'In most developed countries, if you are injured in a public space such as a bank, cinema hall, mall or restaurant, the owner of the establishment has an insurance policy that covers it'

Moneylife Foundation's 'Report on Public Liability Insurance in India' was released by the chairman of General Insurance Corporation (GIC), Devesh Srivastava recently. The Foundation is engaged in spreading financial literacy, consumer awareness and advocacy, and works towards safe and fair market practices through research, workshops, meetings and petitions and counselling.

The report gives a 360-degree perspective on the rules and regulations governing liability insurance, its functioning and operability for massive public tragedies like the Bhopal gas leak on the intervening night of Dec 2 and 3, 1984, and the subsequent evolution of commercial liability products. Incidentally, the Public Liability Insurance Act was enacted post the Bhopal tragedy.

According to Sucheta Dalal of Moneylife Foundation, "In most developed countries, if you are injured in a public space such as a bank, cinema hall, mall or restaurant, the owner of the establishment has an insurance policy that covers it. In India, we are on our own. If you have a good enough personal accident policy and

health policy you may be covered. The public establishment has no responsibility to even call an ambulance to get you to a hospital."

Moneylife Foundation discovered this through the case of D S Ranga Rao, who was involved in an accident while trying to access his bank locker. Even though he was severely injured, none of the grievance redressal authorities got him justice. Only after Moneylife Foundation escalated it to the highest level of the Reserve Bank of India was Rao reimbursed for his surgery and hospitalisation.

Srivastava said, "In the US, nearly 40-45 % of insurance products are meant for liability insurance compared to just 1-1.5% in India. We need to change this and take public liability insurance products to the mass market. It will bring the required change in the mind-set of businesses as well as the public."

The report has made certain key recommendations to ensure the efficacy of liability insurance and the implementation of rules and regulations to protect the rights of victims.

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every day. The waste in these areas is now being segregated at the source," said an official from the BMC. Sangita Hasnale, deputy municipal commissioner of the area and former head of solid waste management initiated the campaign.

The societies in these areas have been instructed to classify wet waste, dry waste and household hazardous waste. A separate

arrangement of wet waste collection vehicles has been arranged. Awareness programmes like street plays, rallies have also been organised to get more public participation. "The buildings and societies that do not classify their waste, will be penalised according to the rules of the Municipal Corporation," said Sharad Ughade, assistant commissioner of D ward.

"The project is on a pilot basis and the campaign can be started in the entire D ward by making appropriate changes / improvements based on the results obtained from this experiment," said a BMC official.

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Tech is the way to go forward - Maha Govt

Our thoughts shape our vision. Our vision become our action and shapes our destiny. Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Eknath Shinde has a vision to enable every person of the state with the help of technology. Since the government has all the database, it should take a step forward and provide the benefits due to the citizen at their doorsteps, rather than he or she visiting the government offices multiple times to get their work done, said Anand Sharad Madia, Officer on Special Duty to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

Madia's expertise lies in the technology sector and he aims to use his knowledge acquired over two decades for betterment of the state. He was born and brought up in Mumbai and now returned back to the state to serve it as a payback.

In 2014, he was appointed by the Government of Sikkim as Ex Officio Secretary on e-governance projects in the state of Sikkim. In 2016, he was appointed as an advisor by the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh. His focus during the stint in Arunachal Pradesh was inward investments and use of technology for betterment of governance. He was also a part of the Arunachal Investment Council.

In July 2022, 49 year old Madia joined the Chief Minister's Office, Maharashtra, as Officer on Special Duty and given the rank equivalent to Secretary of State. He is once again using his vast knowledge of technology and public administration to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals outlined by NITI Aayog. His focus is on health, education, human development, startup ecosystem, industry and agriculture.

He strongly believes that Maharashtra has tremendous potential for growth and becoming a 1\$ trillion economy. He is focused on how disruptive tech can contribute to transforming the socio-economic landscape of the state.

He visited the Free Press Journal office on January 5 and met the top management. He spoke with Dominic Rebello and R N.

Bhaskar of FPJ on how technology can be an enabler and help farmers and citizens in far off areas to get their issues resolved. He also spoke about Samruddhi Mahamarg project which is completely IT driven and will lead to prosperity.

EXCERPTS

Why is Maharashtra now focusing so aggressively on the information technology (IT) sector or IT enabled services?

A one-line answer will be that we have no other option. Today, the phones and the iPad have become an extension to the human body itself. It has become the way we live. If you see in the last few years, banking is digitized, I have not gone to the banks in years, filing of income tax is digitized, ordering food is digitized, meeting friends is digitized and discovering people is digitized. Now, if government does not take full benefit of the digitisation for the benefit of society, then we are oblivious not doing something right.

Today, if it is possible for me to ensure that a person from Chandrapur does not need to come to Mumbai to meet the Honouabke Chief Minister (CM) or Deputy CM with a challenge, a good wishes or an invite, then I have achieved my job effectively. I still want that person to speak, meet and talk to the CM, but I don't want to get them to take the trouble to travel so long and spend money on it. Doing that is not feasible in today's age and time. This government is doing its best to ensure that all services are put in electronic format. We are certain that we want to take all citizen services to electronic format, a digital format, something that using an app cannot be assessed.

One of the biggest contributors, enablers, incentivisers of this digitization program is the Samruddhi Mahamarg project. What is your take on that?

The Samruddhi Mahamarg is not just a road for traveling from one place to another. It's - a road to prosperity. It passes through so many districts in the state - on both sides of the road - which will see so much development. A person passing through or a person living next to it will be able to utilize that development for growth financially, spiritually and knowledge wise.

Because we have spiritual centre's, a financial district, a knowledge city, a logistic hub coming there. It is so beautifully made that people are crossing speed limits. So, this Mahamarg is going to be completely IT driven. But by the time we are done with it, there is going to be so much infrastructure on the road itself. Because every life is precious, by using IT services on the road we want to ensure that there is no challenge to the speed limit. Just imagine that from one location, my children can study in that area because of the education hub. So, this Mahamarg will add a whole new vein in the state.

What are the investments that you are making in the IT sector and what kind of returns do you expect?

The government is currently investing close to a few thousand chores- from getting the records put straight and coming out with a citizen database to ensure that all the beneficiaries are mapped and can get due benefits made available to them is also a part of IT enabled services. This is where the government is insuring or investing money right now. To give you an example, a person in the family gets an old



a g e
pension.
But that
is as far
as one
person is
concerned.
Now,
as soon
as I have

that on boarded on my citizen's database that this person is getting this, lives in this area, is doing these things for the profession, I will be able to propagate the other benefits available to that person or that family as a proactive measure. The citizens should not come and tell me that I have become a senior citizen and I have not been able to avail the benefit the government has promised me. In fact, my system should be able to map the senior citizen and communicate directly with the person that this benefit is due to you. Unless and until I use IT to get my record right, how will I be able to do that?

So, the citizen record is one such initiative. There are various other schemes coming in place.

How will IT benefit agriculture, which accounts for 50% of the workforce in India and the population?

The government is very soon coming out with policies, tenders to ensure that all the land parcels are napped using satellites. Once this happens, using satellites, the government will be able to monitor the land parcel from the day sowing happens till cultivation takes place. Any challenges amidst those times can be monitored. Using Geographic Information System (GIS), identification of crops can also happen and will happen.

For example, if in a location there is a drought or flood, we will be able to know at what level was the crop damaged. Artificial Intelligence (AI) will give us a complete statement of that, which then just needs to be vetted once by the people on the ground and the compensation will go into the farmers' accounts. This is only possible using IT as a medium. This will eliminate the conventional route of people going to the spot and surveying the land.

For the last one year, this is already happening in Gujarat - every square inch of the land parcel is being mapped. For Kisan Bhima Yojna, this is the technology that is used to dispense the money from the insurance companies to the farmers. The land deeds have been digitised, what crop is growing has been digitised.

Haryana and Maharashtra are about to do it.

All this digitisation of the farm level with drones, with satellite mapping requires you to train an army of people who can read digitised maps. Are you creating that scale?

Yes. Under the skilling mission, the government of Maharashtra is not only setting up skilling colleges for agricultural enablement but are also for setting upskilling institutes for future technologies in every district.

Even in the case of agriculture, we spoke about sat satellites, but on the ground if my soil is compromised, it doesn't have enough nutrients, how will the crop grow? So, I will be using IoT-based devices for this. I can't say we will be doing the entire bulk of it, but there's going to be a lot of exercise that is going to happen to map and identify

the soil type.

Maharashtra's weather and soil conditions are so phenomenal that we can take over the entire floriculture of the Netherlands in one year. We put a Pointsman to do this as a mission director.

The only job that needs to be given to that person is to ensure this happens. That is the kind of fertile soil we have. And we still buy Dutch roses. But, it is nobody's fault - neither the government's nor the farmers'. It's just that now with IT and more knowledge transfer we have realised that these are the skills that we can go to. At the State level, now there is an organisation called MITRA, which is the state's NITI Aayog and its mandate is to find out what needs to be done.

The government is into governance, but the growth, the vision, the map, somebody will have to be a part of the government and guide them and act as facilitators.

Unless and until we take that next step forward, and change proactively the systems, the laws, the way things are operating, things will not go to the next level.

Since you are going to be using IT to look into every aspect of agriculture, one of the biggest variables would be Climate change. Climate change can impact agriculture in a way that we have not even imagined. The only solution to my mind is for the state and for the sector to promote hydroponics in a big way.

There is a gentleman, I can't officially name this person yet, who will very soon be becoming a part of MITRA. And, he has been chosen or been placed in the Centre by the Prime Minister because of his knowledge in hydroponics and progressive agriculture. I have been honored to meet him a couple of times to understand the amount of information or knowledge he has. He is from Maharashtra and every time he is back in the state, he ensures that he stays in his farm and does farming. He wears a suit when he comes for the official meetings, but his nails still have soil in them. He is not lost touch with the ground. These are the people who can make the change.

Between the private sector's contribution to build IT infrastructure that the state needs and the state's own IT Department. Where would the emphasis be?

On both. What we have done is that we have reached out to all the top head-honchos - the heads of large IT organisation's. For example, TCS.

The Honourable Chief Minister has asked them to come aboard and help us. They are doing this on a day to day basis. He has asked them to please come and help us on how we should structure the department, structure the policy, and take it to the next level. The Economic Committee that was recently announced has just three people from the government other than the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister, it has just three secretaries. The rest of the 10 to 12 members are all industrialists. To get input from them will benefit us. To become 1 trillion-dollar economy. I will need even the shoe polish guy on the station to also benefit because when he does, it adds to my state's financial value considerably. So, the state is proactively gunning, trying to become a 1 trillion with an all-inclusive approach.

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