

MUMBAI MERI JAAN

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF AGNI

Action for good
Governance &
Networking in
India
AGNI

Editorial

Poll panel to be appointed by an independent committee - SC

Just a week ago, ADR (Association for Democratic Reforms) had organised a webinar on "Should there be a collegium system for the appointment of Election Commissioners?" Now the Supreme Court bats for independent EC.

In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court ruled on March 2 that a committee comprising of the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of India will appoint the Chief Election Commissioner and Elections Commissioners until a law is put in place. This was in response to a batch of petitions (including ADR) seeking an independent mechanism for the selection of the Poll panel. Like in the present situation, if there is no Leader of the Opposition, the person heading the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha will be on the panel.

Till now appointment process under Article 324 was entrusted to the Executive with the responsibility as a "stop-gap arrangement". This process was to be replaced by a law made by parliament. But this was not done by any government even after seven decades. The court observed that a person who feels indebted to the one who appointed him cannot have an independent mind. As the court said, democracy can succeed only if all stakeholders work towards maintaining the purity of the election process so as to truly reflect the will of the people.

The main eye opener was the hasty and tearing hurry in the appointment of Mr. Arun Goel as Election Commissioner by the government with the file moving at lightning speed, the procedure taking less than 24 hours from start to finish on November 18 last year.

The Law Commission had made a similar proposal some years ago which the Supreme Court accepted and passed the order.



MMJ

An event was organised by "American School Bombay" on 4th February 2023

 Zahida Banatwala, AGNI Trustee

The topic chosen was Clean City by the Robotic Team. I was invited to be a guest speaker and be part of the jury. The event was planned to be centred around exploring innovative solutions to problems centred around waste management. The event was to introduce young minds to the world of Robotics and the world of Artificial Intelligence.



I, instantly accepted the invitation to participate in the event. Waste Management is a topic very close to my heart, and working with children is an exciting proposal.

The day of the event had a crowd of excited students bursting with ideas. The students participating in the event were **contd. on Page 4**

Stories of Good Governance

Super-Efficient Functioning Bureaucrat - Mr. Mahesh Zagade

 Shrikant Soman, MMJ Editorial Board Member & Ward Coordinator, R/North

The title of this article may have shocked you. We have been groomed to believe that our bureaucracy is corrupt and inefficient. It is dangerous to make such a sweeping general statement.

Let me narrate to you my own personal encounter with super-efficient functioning bureaucracy.

This was when I was CEO of a large premium hospital in South Mumbai. We had opened a Chemist Shop. We were offering 10% to 20 % discount to customers. This had upset many nearby chemist shops. One of them was a big bully leader of the Chemist Association. He tried to twist our arms by stopping the supply of medicines from wholesale agents. We then made a direct deal with the manufacturers. Even manufacturers were reluctant to go against the wishes of the Chemist Association for obvious reasons. But somehow we per-

sisted and got our supply.

Then we were called by

the Assistant FDA Commissioner. He fired us for selling medicines below the MRP. He said it is illegal to sell medicines below MRP. We did not budge. We decided to approach the FDA Commissioner.

The FDA Commissioner patiently listened to us. To be honest, we were not having much hope from him and were prepared to take our battle to a higher level. To our utter pleasant surprise, he called the Asst. FDA Commissioner and took him to task left and right in front of us. Even then we did not believe him. We thought that this was all a drama. But it seemed that he was hard bent on action. He asked us if we can give our complaint in writing duly

contd. on Page 4



Apada Mitra Training programme by BMC

Civic body gives life-saving tips to 361 people who volunteered for a 12 day disaster management course

The first batch of 361 volunteers are ready to help you if disasters like earthquake, flood or even terror attack strike. Trained under the BMC's 'Apada Mitra' initiative, these good Samaritans coming from NSS, NCC, Home Guard, Civil Protection Force of private hospitals have successfully completed a 12-day lifesaving course. These brave-hearts have already swung into action and started

saving people during fire and road mishaps.

Rashmi Lokhande, head of the emergency management department said, "In the first phase, we want to train 1,000 citizens, 500 from the city and 500 from suburbs. Organised at the civic body's disaster management office in Parel, the training programme – which started on February 9 – included lessons on giving first aid, CPR, search and rescue operation, **contd. on Page 4**

Remembering Gerson – A tribute

 Jennifer Shetty, AGNI's A Ward Coordinator

On 7th February 2023 a meeting was held at St. Aloysius School at Mount Carmel Church Bandra – Remembering Gerson on his first death Anniversary.

Everyone poured out their hearts in appreciation for Gerson as a human being and Gerson as a Leader, I thought it best to capture all of it and share the same.

Nutan - Remembers Gerson as the most receptive person, open to ideas, very encouraging and ever ready to give the GO AHEAD. Very cordial and helpful in assisting with the Mithi River Project.

Earnest - Although he did not know Gerson very well, he said he had a striking personality. Despite his age, he attended all meetings with sincerity. He believed that Talent must be used to enhance social change. The most impressive quality was, " he never criticised anyone "

Bulu - From the day I knew him, he was a pillar of strength and very encouraging. Lots of learning from the way he thought, worked and interacted. He never liked fights and arguments, it was something unique about him. He was quick to bring order into a meeting. Solutions were always available. He was one of a kind and can never be compared to anyone.

Pamela - Total admiration for who he was. Democratic approach, pillar of strength, worked tirelessly, very courteous, supportive in guiding to form ALM's

Sandra - Man who wore many hats and wore them beautifully, AGNI is above board NGO, reiterated the importance of being "A-POLITICAL". Gerson's spirit will be a guiding horse. We must uphold his values!

Lillian - Towering personality, strengthened ground level. Initiated many NGO's. Committed to self-Governance, partnering and networking experience capabilities were impressive

Zahida:- Shyama introduced me to Gerson. At first sight - I was completely bowled over by

his personality. He instilled faith and confidence in me from day one. Never took anyone for granted. He kept everyone united in spirit and wholeness. He trusted me to write minutes at

Trustee meetings. We will never find a man like Gerson.

Nikhil - Gerson's half page article on "Citizens involvement" in the leading newspaper Times of India really attracted my attention to him. Anand requested Gerson to include Nikhil in Team Agni. He was bold in his conviction to support out of the box ideas. On the discussion of write ups for MMJ, I suggested that every WARD had ample stories to tell and every month each WARD must dedicate their experience to MMJ. He had foresight and saw merit and encouraged everyone. His encouraging spirit was amazing!

Theo - I came in contact with Gerson through Church in the city. We talked on the telephone and he told me to join Agni assuring me that it's a secular forum. He also said, "you have the liberty to call me anytime" I have contacted him in challenging times and he's always been there for me guiding me in the right direction. He participated wholeheartedly in BMC Elections and had frequent interactions with everyone. The successful Mummy Daddy PLEASE VOTE FOR ME campaign is etched in my memory.

Reuben - I feel privileged to call him my "GODFATHER" met him for the first time when he came to give a talk in the Civic and Political cell of the church. I was impressed and contacted him to join Agni. Gerson wrote to Govt. Authorities introducing Agni Coordinators. I



formed six ALM'S with his guidance. He respected everyone and made me what I am today. He extended immense courtesy and invited me to stay back for drinks and dinner after meetings. He was the face, pillar and strength of Agni. Truly IRREPLACEABLE PERSONALITY

Jennifer - I was introduced to Gerson through Mrs. Kiran Madan. My first contact with him was on telephone. His rich, respectful, articulate voice impressed me. When I met him I was totally mesmerized. There was something about him that was so transforming. I joined Agni as a co-coordinator and worked along with Gul Asrani. Over passage of time I became coordinator. Gerson and I spoke a lot about social change and how we could enhance it. His impressive characteristics in short is, he was extremely respectful, inspiring, approachable, quick thinking although he grew older every day, expert in letter writing and whenever I was in a fix to communicate with authorities, Gerson always said, please come over, we can apply our minds together and resolve it. He never undermined anyone's capabilities, never discriminated. Even if he disagreed he never raised his voice. I've never seen him getting angry! He always complimented me for my work and overflowing ideas. He used to say with a hearty laughter, " Jenny I can't keep up to your ideas, I wish I was younger". His laughter rings in my ears, his personality shines so vividly, his meritorious work will be remembered eternally. I WILL ALWAYS MISS YOU DEAREST GERSON. Although gone from our midst, you are in our hearts forever.

Antony Dias - A man of few words, understood Community problems and offered to find solutions. Listened to Coordinators and discussed issues at monthly meetings and asked for solutions and way forward. Towering personality with field experience and solutions. Calm and quiet, never ignored your suggestions.

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Waste to Energy Plant at Pali Hill

 Lillian Pais, H/West Ward Coordinator

After a successful tour of Earth Corner at St Peter's Church the students of the Economics Department at R.D. & S.H. National College, Bandra West were absolutely enthused to know more about waste management.

The next tour, our team took them on was the Waste to Energy plant at Pali Hill. This plant is set up on 100 sqm of land at the Pali Hill Reservoir. It uses anaerobic digestion technology to treat approx. 800 kg of wet waste daily. This zero waste model was set up by the Pali Hill Residents Association in partnership with H/West Ward. Initially the wet waste collected from the 78 buildings, 23 bungalows and nearby restaurants was utilised by the plant but more recently the plant is running only on restaurant waste. The power generated is used to power 68 streetlights and eight bulbs on a 1-km stretch.

Very simply explained - The food waste is brought into the plant around 2 am every day and then the manual sorting begins at 8am. Eggshells, any trace of plastic etc is removed. The food waste is then pulverized and pumped into the plant where the actual process starts. The gasses are trapped in a balloon which



is deflated periodically into a generator which produces electricity. This process was interesting to watch.

The lessons learnt by the students were many. Firstly, the importance of source segregation of waste, that the toxic by-products of methane, carbon, nitrogen etc. was harnessed to produce electricity and the sludge generated is compost which is utilised in Municipal Gardens, the liquid produced from the process is recycled to dilute the pulverized food waste in step 1, so that it can easily be pumped into the plant.

The students also realised that though this initiative the waste reaching the landfill was reduced and there was annual saving of approximately 10 lakhs on transportation of waste the landfill and tipping fees.

Such projects don't just reduce ones carbon footprint but also showcases how citizens can make an impact when they collaborate with the authorities for positive change.

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Citizens Victory

 **Nutan Bhalla, AGNI L Ward Coordinator**

R Powai is a good sign, but unfortunately it is leading to innumerable road blocks and causing traffic blocks due to construction of roads at Chandivali farm road leading through Panch Shrushti complex.

Chandivali farm road is a major connect between Hiranandani and Chandivali, but it's been over 2 months and the road is not accessible to residents, except a portion for bikers to use. Citizens could earlier make an exit through the Sangharsh Nagar road to reach Sakinaka. However, some portions of the Sangharsh Nagar road were dug up again with the result, residents had no option but to go through DP road 9 (a two-way lane which is encroached on both sides) to reach Sakinaka / Andheri, JVLR and Hiranandani. Now thankfully the exit from Sangharsh Nagar is open so the route can be assessed. While Chandivali farm road work is still in progress, digging for storm water drains has started on the junction adjoining road DP No 9.

While there was no response from civic officials, excavator Sanghale said a cross culvert was being made to prevent flooding of the road from drain water coming in from Manubhai chawl. While applauding the initiative, by cordoning of a section of the road it would add to the traffic congestion. While construction of more housing complexes in the area by big builders like Godrej and Shapoorji Pallonji would give a wider choice to prospective buyers, it would definitely add to the woes of the commuters. Construction of buildings, resurfacing of roads, continuous digging for various amenities, noise and air pollution, seem to be a regular feature, not to forget the encroachments, illegal constructions, and hawkers are



the burning issues of the day.

Residents of the area are vigilant, active and are reaching out to Government officials, through online and offline methods but there is little success achieved. So, a peaceful protest was held on 12th February 2023 under the leadership of Chandivali Citizens Welfare Association, (founded by Mandeep Singh Makker in the year 2019) to highlight issues of the area.

More than 200 people participated in the protest on a Sunday morning bringing home the point of deliverance.

Action was swift and an on-site meeting with AMC L ward and Road officials took place. Earlier, they met up with Additional Municipal Commissioner projects Mr



V e l s r a u where encroachment free footpaths for Chandivali

Farm Road and DP Road 9 and other roads was also raised. Sources reveal that Velrasu has instructed his staff to start the tendering process for the 90 feet road work at the earliest.

Local MLA Shree Dilip Lande also launched an inaugural ceremony for commencement of concrete work on DP Road 9 on 17 February 2023.

This was a Victory of Citizens:

- 1 A great victory for the residents and an awakened hope of many more battles to be won.
- 2 Storm water drain work at Junction Chandivali Farm Road
3. Work in Progress on Shiv Bhaktani Road leading to Chandivali Farm Road.

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The Earth Corner Tour at St Peter Church

 **Lillian Pais, H/West Ward Coordinator**

Every academic year, the Economics Department at R.D. & S.H. National College, Bandra West organizes various educational and economic-related activities for their undergraduate students.

This year the Intra-Collegiate Fest organised "ECOVERSE" with Sustainable Development as the central theme with the goal of raising student awareness of social and environmental change.

The students from FYBA, SYBA and TYBA economics along with the team of ECOVERSE and faculty kicked off their pre-fest activities with a tour of Earth Corner at St Peter's Church for a tetra pack recycling program. The students brought with them tetrapaks and were informed of the importance of recycling in general and then shown the process for recycling and the final recycled product.

The three simple steps were explained:

1. RINSE your empty carton with water. If the pack comes with a straw, push the straw inside the carton.
2. If it comes with a cap, place it back on and close it tight.
3. LIFT THE FLAPS AND FLATTEN the carton to optimise storage space till collection.
4. STORE in a separate container or with Dry Waste to be collected by BMC or recycler.

They were then shown the other eco-friendly practices on the campus from being a



collection point for plastic waste and e-waste to promotion of shroud burial and the benefits of solar panels. At the composting unit they were given a hands-on feel of the earthy smelling compost and opportunity to take some. The importance of segregation and the necessity to reduce waste to landfills was discussed.

It was a real eye opener for them to know that a waste-to-energy plant existed at Pali Hill and that



BMC has a dry waste centre at Reclamation operated by AASRA who through recycling are able to empower the rag pickers employed. This made them understand that 'WASTE IS WEALTH' and today there are many career opportunities open for recyclers from thrift stores to manufacturing and selling recycled products.

We ended with a group picture against the painted wall at; Earth Corner. We hope that seeing a working model for segregation and composting will make life style changes in our youth for a greener tomorrow.

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An appeal for donations

A GNI is a movement managed and run by volunteers. Being a voluntary movement, AGNI needs the support and contribution of every citizen to continue its work. Citizens are invited to contribute their indispensable ideas, time, effort and financial support. Send Cheque / DD in favour of "AGNI" to any of our Ward Coordinators as listed on Page 4 or to AGNI Office: Chadha

Bldg, 1st Floor, Plot No. 95, Wadala (West), Mumbai 400 031
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Super-Efficient Functioning Bureaucrat - Mr. Mahesh Zagade

contd. from Page 1 signed. We readily complied. He was very happy to receive it as according to him many complainants do not give complaints in writing and do not wish to be named. The Asst. FDA Commissioner was given a warning letter and then transferred to some upcountry inconspicuous place. We were happy to have our problem solved. The FDA Commissioner also asked the Asst. FDA Commissioner to INSTRUCT all the wholesaling agents to immediately restore the supply to our Chemist Shop. If this was not done, then further disciplinary action would be initiated against him. All this action happened in a superfast way in a matter of 3 days. Our faith in functioning and efficient non-corrupt bureaucracy was restored.

The name of this FDA Commissioner was Mr Mahesh Zagade, IAS. He has been Principal Secretary to GOM, Transport Commissioner and many more. At every post he has held, he has left his shining mark.

This is not some hearsay story. It is my first-hand experience. We say that our bureaucracy is

bogged down by so many procedural and legal obstacles hampering the smooth functioning. But my experience is that on occasions it works even better than the private sector, though it is more an exception than a rule. But this example also proves the point that if the person at the helm is hard bent to carry out his job as it was originally meant to be carried out, then yes, it can be done against all the odds.

The example of Mr Mahesh Zagade is not in isolation. There are quite a few such honest AND efficient officers. Together we can build a better India. There is hope!

MMJ

Apada Mitra Training programme

contd. from Page 1 scaling high-rises to evacuate people in fire incidents, etc. The session was guided by experts of disaster management cell, medical officers of civic-run hospitals, National Disaster Response Force personnel, weathermen and cops. Also teachers have ensured that the volunteers should be well-versed with the disaster management laws and the city's existing system of averting mishaps.

The volunteers were awarded with a certificate and life-saving kit.

An event was organised by "American School Bombay"

contd. from Page 1 from American School of Bombay and other schools such as Hill Spring, and NGOs such as Akanksha, Aseema, Acorn, Kotak Education Foundation, girls from Nurul Islam School to name a few. It was an event managed by the older students Team Pangea. After the introduction of the flow of the programme, it was my turn to speak on waste management with the help of a presentation, it was a shock for all present to know that our waste management was very poor.

The competition was then thrown open to the various



participating teams to come up with solutions adopting robotics as one of the methods for waste disposal. They were provided with material to come up with models of their concepts. It was heartening watching their enthusiasm and sincere efforts to find solutions to manage waste. Judges walked around tables, inquiring about their ideas and the team took great pride and pain to help us understand the concept. They explained that with the use of Drones, Robots all underground drains etc. could be accessed where the human hand could not reach.

I must admit the challenge was now up to the jury, a tough decision to select the winning team as each one was a winner. There was a group of children from the slums of Dharavi, surprisingly these children



were so aware of why the nallahs were getting choked and the solution to the same. Finally, after much deliberation by the jury, 3 teams were selected winners to the astounding sound of cheering by the participants.

It was a very satisfying experience knowing that our future was in the hands and minds of these young students brimming with ideas to take the world forward, armed with technology at their fingertips they could bring about sustainable change. Perhaps it would be a good idea for the governing bodies to seek the ideas of the young minds and t w e a k t h e m t o b e professionally viable.

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