

Editorial

A virtual dream

The government of India has come up with National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) taking a holistic view of e-Governance initiative across the country integrating them into a collective vision and shared goal with the ultimate objective of bringing public services closer and in a more convenient manner to the public.

E-Governance in India has evolved over a period of time and various state governments and ministries of central government are at different stages of implementation. What began as computerization of government department subsequently led to streamlining of processes through computer networking. Of late the Government Process Re-engineering and Change Management have acquired Citizen Centricity and Service orientation. The previous e-Governance initiatives played a very important role in shaping the e-Governance strategy of India.

E-Governance helps in enhancing governmental relationships and facilitates fair and efficient delivery of service but it has to be based on open and democratizing principles. In the Indian context e-governance is being introduced to improve delivery systems and reduce bureaucratization. It has been effectively employed in service delivery apparatus in certain domains yet its contribution in many areas of public systems management is not significant and calls for a more interventionist approach. People are still not accepting it. Apart from the technical difficulties and the intricacies involved in implementing such mammoth venture, it needs to be mentioned that a more intensive and holistic effort needs to be made. The present situation in the state regarding the implementation of the novel initiative is far from satisfactory, and the public is still in the dark about the utilities and services it aims to provide them. Dissemination of information on the workings and functions of such initiatives to the general public is of paramount importance.

A lackadaisical and non-committal attitude adopted by those responsible for the implementation and maintenance that has crept in almost every public initiative is arguably the most prominent roadblock in ensuring the success of such ventures. Initiatives and policies can deliver results only when backed by sincere efforts and proper involvement of implementing agencies. Further, creating a conducive culture through attitudinal reorientation is also required or else the initiatives are not properly accepted as is the case in many states in India. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that comparatively backward states like Jharkhand are also effectively using e-governance initiatives to improve delivery systems in certain domains. It is keeping in view these aspects of e-governance that the Government of India has taken up the challenge of implementing e-governance in the most backward of the states.

Yet the success or otherwise of such efforts will largely depend on the human factor. Technology, in whatever form or manner, needs human intervention and monitoring. The Government should make earnest efforts to ensure that the people assigned to such vitally important public initiatives be made responsible for the outcome, along with the authority to implement them. Till then, such efforts to virtualise governance will remain a virtual dream.

Using RTI in journalism: a lesson in tenacity

In the last 10 years that I have been using RTI for journalistic work, I have dealt extensively with the whole gamut of government machinery from the president's secretariat, PMO, Cabcsec, chief ministers' offices of states, central and state ministries, public sector undertakings, investigation agencies, and police organizations, down to the district collectors and district superintendents of police of the remotest districts of each state trying to garner information from them on a wide range of issues of national importance. But despite the RTI Act, getting crucial information from the government is a tough, tedious, and often frustrating engagement where, it would appear, anti-transparency is a statement of belief and hiding the information and passing the buck the favorite diversionary activity. Having overcome their initial fear, several government departments try to make every effort to undermine the RTI Act, since the very beginning.

The fact is that whether the seeker of the information will get it or not and what will happen to the RTI application, it all depends on the mindset of the person sitting on the other side of the table, that is, the PIO. An application with queries can return with complete information from one office, and from another office a similar application with similar queries may come back with claims of exemptions for denial of information. It can be forwarded to hundreds of offices just to confuse the seeker and defeat the purpose of information. There are many such experiences while dealing with government offices and officials on RTI which are necessary to share in order to understand this observation. For instance, section 6(3) of the RTI

Book Extract: Journalism through RTI—Information Investigation Impact
By Shyamal Yadav, Senior Editor, The Indian Express, (Courtesy: The Hoot.org)

Act says:
Where an application is made to a public authority requesting for an information—which is held by another public authority; or the subject matter of which is more closely connected with the functions of another public authority—the public authority, to which such application is made, shall transfer the application or such part of it as may be appropriate to that other public authority and inform the applicant immediately about such transfer: Provided that the transfer of an application pursuant to this subsection shall be made as soon as practicable but in no case later than five days from the date of receipt of the application.

Further, section 7(9) says: "An information shall ordinarily be provided in the form in which it is sought unless it would disproportionately divert the resources of the public authority or would be detrimental to the safety or preservation of the record in question." There are many rulings of information commissions and one from Madras High Court that section 7(9) cannot be used for denial of any information.

But, both these sections have been variously misinterpreted and exploited by several public authorities. Section 6(3) has been most commonly misused for denying information and indulging in their favorite diversion tactics of passing the buck. On many applications, I have got disconcerting, and often alarming, responses from ministries and departments such as the CPWD, Department of Revenue, CBDT, MHA, Department of Posts, Ministry of Water Resources, ECI, and state DGPs, among others. These are

lessons for those who always criticize transparency law for so-called 'misuse' by users and claim that valuable time of public authorities is being wasted. There are examples that several of their colleagues are themselves misusing the law and wasting the time, energy, and resources by unmindful use of section 6(3), forwarding the application to hundreds of officers without making an effort to know who is the custodian of the requisite information.

ECI's 2000 Envelopes

The first such big shock I experienced, and definitely the most baffling, was while dealing with the ECI. On an application filed with the ECI, I must have received in total an overwhelming 2000 envelopes but hardly any information—all they said was either, "The requisite information may be treated as NIL!" or "Your application is being forwarded to" other CPIO. My applications were first forwarded by the ECI to CEOs of all states and then onwards to district election officers (DEOs), that is, district magistrates by CEOs. In most cases, even the DEOs managed to adroitly pass the buck by forwarding my queries to returning officers of every assembly constituency to respond directly.

In fact, during the ongoing controversy related to Bangladeshi migrants, requests were filed to the CEO of Delhi, MHA, the Delhi-based Foreigner Regional Registration Office (FRRO), and the ECI for information about Bangladeshi migrants. Applications were filed on May 21, 2008 to all these authorities with changed words. Interestingly, the application was also put to CEOs of some states, and they had forwarded the application to

DEO, and many DEOs forwarded it to the officials in charge of the electoral rolls revision. I was absolutely reconstituted. In every assembly constituency, I was unperturbed by the influx of envelopes on my table as I realized that every letter forwarded by one officer to another was being marked to me. At the end, there were thousands of envelopes but there was almost no information.

States and districts, supposedly harboring large numbers of suspected Bangladeshis, either did not respond or they forwarded the application to the sub-division level so the response was not consolidated. One day I visited the ECI office and met Deputy Election Commissioner R. Balakrishnan and told him about the bundles of worthless envelopes received. According to him, the problem of Bangladeshi migrants was mainly in Assam; to which I countered that I had not got responses from many districts and subdivisions of Assam. He was asked what he thought I should do. He immediately called up the CEO of Assam who informed him that in Assam there were around 150,000 names of "D Category" voters identified during the revision of electoral rolls. So, obviously the CEO of Assam had the information but his PIO had unnecessarily, or with the intention of stalling, forwarded the application to the ground level.

Much the same happened when another RTI application was filed to ECI on January 12, 2010 to get details of cash seized during General Elections 2009, and action taken in the matter. But the application was forwarded to CEOs of all states and they in turn forwarded it to the district level interpreting section 6(3) of the RTI Act. But later, the ECI improved the system as when similar query was asked for General Elections 2014, the ECI provided countrywide data from Delhi itself.

National News

BJP Leader Venkaiah Naidu files his nomination for Vice President

New Delhi, July 18: Senior BJP Leader, M Venkaiah Naidu today filed his nomination for the post of Vice President of India. Talking to media after filing his nomination, Mr Naidu expressed confidence that he will be able to do justice to the august post. He thanked all parties who supported his candidature and said India's strength lies in Parliamentary system.

He assured that he will uphold dignity and tradition of the office. Mr Naidu said he comes from a humble background and rose to this position because of the support of the people. He said he does not belong to BJP anymore as the post of Vice President is above the party. Mr Naidu also said that it is painful for him to leave the party.

Yesterday, BJP President Amit Shah in New Delhi announced Venkaiah Naidu's name for the NDA vice president candidate after the Party Parliamentary Board meeting. Mr Shah called him one of most recognisable faces in the party. After the announcement of the candidature of Mr Naidu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a series of tweet said that he is a fit candidate for the office. Mr Modi said, the years of Parliamentary experience Mr Naidu has, will help him discharge the important role of Rajya Sabha Chairperson.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu also hailed the choice while the ruling TRS in Telangana and in Tamil Nadu, the rebel AIADMK faction led by former chief Minister O Panneerselvam has extended their support to Mr Naidu's candidature. After his selection as NDA candidate, Mr Naidu resigned as Minister of Information and

Broadcasting and Housing and Urban Affairs. Naidu had started his political career as a worker of the ABVP, the students' wing of the RSS, and held positions in student unions. He was also the president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, the BJP's youth wing.

The four-time Rajya Sabha member was also a member of the Andhra assembly. He was the rural development minister in the first NDA government.

Mr Naidu, who is 68, served two-time as the party president is pitted against Gopalkrishna Gandhi. Mr Gandhi was chosen by an alliance of 18 opposition parties, including the Congress. Today is the last day for filing the nominations. The scrutiny will be held on tomorrow and the last date for withdrawal of nomination is 21st of this month.

The Vice-President is elected by an electoral college comprising members of both the Houses of Parliament including nominated members. The electoral college for the August 5 election consists of 790 MPs of the two chambers of Parliament. NDA's has numerical superiority in the electoral college over the opposition.

Opposition Vice Presidential candidate Gopal Krishna Gandhi has filed his nomination papers today. Talking to media after filing nomination, Mr Gandhi said he is representing the aspirations of common people of the country. He said unemployment is a huge issue which people face and country is being divided by few. He said he wants to unite people of the country.

On Shiv Sena's comments that he had been opposed to the death sentence of 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts convict Yakub Memon, Mr Gandhi said he has always been against death penalty.

Sports Corner - NE India

New Head Coach João Deus brings youthful infusion to NEUFC



By: Vikash Singh Guwahati, July 18: NorthEast United FC (NEUFC) has reached an agreement with João Carlos Pires de Deus who will take over as the Head Coach of the Highlanders. The young 40 year old Portuguese started his career as an Assistant Coach in Portugal, winning the Portuguese Cup and reaching the Super Cup final. He also won the Angola League and the Angola National Cup during his phase as an Assistant Coach. In 2009, he became the Head Coach of the Cape Verde National team and implemented his philosophy on the senior team and the country's grassroots structure, the benefits of which the country reaps even today. Cape Verde broke into FIFA's Top 50 by the end of his term and recently ranked number one in Africa in 2016.

After stints in Spain and Portugal where he took up various challenges which enhanced his reputation, he was appointed as the Head Coach of Sporting Clube de Portugal 'B' where he developed and honed several Portuguese stars like Gelson Martins (who now plays for the National Team) for three years. In his first year at Sporting CP 'B' he achieved a best ever standing in the League and also claimed the 'Best Coach of the Year' award. Speaking on the appointment, Club

Owner, John Abraham said, "The DNA of NEUFC has always been riddled with youth. I am delighted to welcome João on board who is a tactically astute young coach with the track record of honing young talent and playing exciting football. We hope that he will be able to channelize the strengths of this Club and help us achieve our objectives this season. I wish him the very best and would like to assure the fans that we will work hard in every department to fulfill our collective expectations."

João expressed his thoughts on taking up the mantle of Head Coach at NorthEast United FC. "I am a very positive man and I am very positive about the challenge that I have with NorthEast United FC. The Club is new with a vibrant fan base and owners who have the right vision to develop football in the region. I can assure the fans that we will play positive football and that all the players and the staff will work hard. We will leave no stone unturned so that we can achieve our objectives. I believe that young players are important in any campaign and will ensure that they fit seamlessly into our setup. This year, we will be focused on playing good football and winning as many games as we can...taking it one game at a time."

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