



भारतीय लोक प्रशासन संस्थान
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
Building Capacity for Good Governance

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Karnataka Regional Branch

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Virtual Newsletter

ವಾಸ್ತವ ಸುದ್ದಿಪತ್ರ

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Views expressed by the contributors are personal and do not represent the views or position of the Editorial Board or the Executive Committee of the Branch.

Chief Editor



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A Note from the Chief Editor



S. Ramanathan, IAS (Retd.)

Chairman

Indian Institute of Public Administration
Karnataka Regional Branch, Bengaluru

I am happy to place before our readers the **July 2021** issue of our *Virtual Newsletter*. This is our **12th issue**, since we began this initiative. The *Lead Article*, this time, is by **Dr. G. Gurucharan**, who writes that “*Civil Servants are not the Handmaidens of Politics*”, against the background of some very unpleasant developments in West Bengal.

In our section on *Policy Matters* in Karnataka, we bring the story of Karnataka selecting 11 Private Sector Executives for **Indian Administrative Fellowships**, which is being anchored by Bengaluru-headquartered non-profit **The/Nudge Foundation**.

In our section on *Gender Matters*, **Khushi Shetty** and **Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander** of Public Affairs Centre, write on *Realities of Women Leadership in Civil Society Organisations*.

In our report on the activities of our Branch, we carry reports of two events which were organized last month, namely, a **Panel Discussion** and a **Webinar**.

In the *Consumer Matters* section, **Mr. Y.G. Muralidharan** writes on *Consumer Protection in Times of Corona*.

For our *Documents* section, **Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar** highlights the *2021 World Press Freedom Index*.

And in our *Miscellany* section, we carry the heart-warming story of the **Chief Commissioner of BBMP, Mr. Gaurav Gupta**, IAS donating a laptop to a student-flower-seller.

I wish to add a disclaimer here that the views expressed by the contributors are personal and do not represent the views or position of the Editorial Board or the Executive Committee of the Branch.

Do write in, with your responses, views and ideas for improvement of the Newsletter.

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Lead Article

(Source: *Deccan Herald* dt. 6th June 2021)

Not the Handmaiden of Politics



Gurucharan Gollerkeri

Director, Public Affairs Centre, Bengaluru

The recent controversy on the posting of a civil servant, the Chief Secretary of a State, no less and the circumstances that surround it must invoke serious reflection. The eponymous ‘*Babus*’ that some berate with glee, or the anonymous civil servants and their tireless work that many never see, have as the result of the unseemly wrangle between the Centre and West Bengal State, been propelled to the limelight. It should in the years to come serve as a modern-day parable of how not to administer. But first, back to the future, if only to tell us of the prescience of the founding fathers on how independent India’s future polity might evolve.

The fact that the independence of the Indian Civil Service was enshrined in the Constitution rather than any statute was by intent and design, whatever the protestations of privilege that the detractors of the Civil Service advance. Its intent and purpose were clear – compromising the independence of the Civil Service was rendered more difficult. Perhaps more important, the debate in the Constituent Assembly on the Civil Service was accompanied by no small sense of trepidation about its future, an open acknowledgement of the distrust of future politics in the country.

Therefore, what has emerged from the recent action of the Government of India and the response of the state is not a mere quotidian issue; nor a silly, meaningless argument between a couple, in this instance, the central and the state governments. It should serve as the basis for a much-needed, meaningful, and non-partisan dialogue that can change the quality of everyday administration ridding it of politics, while at the same time strengthening cooperative federalism. Even more important, it should serve as an opportunity for the politician and the civil servant alike to revisit the imperatives of the purpose, integrity, and the standards of service of Public Administration that need to be upheld.

To revisit the need for and the importance of an independent, impartial Civil Service, we would do well to learn lessons from its history, context and the conditions that have circumscribed its development, or as some might say, its decline. Two exhortations by one of the great statesman-administrators of independent India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, best serve as the touchstone for the civil servant and the elected political representative alike, especially in the present day: his address to the first batch of the officer trainees of the Indian Administrative Service at Metcalf House in April 1946, a few months before independence;

and his speech in the Constituent Assembly on the need for the protection and independence of the Civil Service in independent India, delivered in October 1949.

Seen from the perspective of the Civil Service, there can be little doubt that the successes we have achieved and the progress we have made since independence is in considerable measure the result of the passion, competence and commitment of our civil servants. The Civil Service remains the favourite whipping boy, for some people that always remain cynical, but that does not detract from the fact that over the last seventy-four years, scores of civil servants have contributed their mite to the task of social and economic progress in the country. There are some guiding principles that form the bedrock of the higher civil services in the country and it is critical to ensure that these essential wellsprings are not allowed to dry up.

To paraphrase from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's 1946 address, above all, the Civil Service must maintain the utmost impartiality and incorruptibility of administration. A civil servant cannot afford to, and must not, take part in politics. Nor must he involve himself in communal wrangles. To depart from the path of rectitude in either of these respects is to debase public service and to lower its dignity. He urged the civil servant to render service without fear or favour and without any expectation of extraneous rewards. It would be fair to say, while there may be some black sheep, as in other walks of life; most civil servants strive to and have succeeded in meeting this standard.

If the civil servants are to continue to serve without fear or favour, what standard should the elected representatives uphold? Again, we must turn to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel exhorting the members of the Constituent Assembly and I quote:

'...If you want an efficient All-India Service, I advise you to allow the Services to open their mouths freely. If you are a Premier, it would be your duty to allow your Secretary, or Chief Secretary, or other Services working under you, to express their opinion without fear or favour. But I see a tendency today that in several provinces the services are set upon and told. "No, you are servicemen; you must carry out our orders." The Union will go - you will not have a united India, if you have not a good All-India Service which has the independence to speak out its mind, which has a sense of security that you will stand by your word...'

For some time now, the Indian Civil Service has faced the ominous prospect of its independence being subordinated to narrow political interests; civil servants are not the handmaidens of politics or politicians. It is time the political class heeds the sage advice of the Sardar: Do not quarrel with the instruments with which you want to work. It is a bad workman who quarrels with his instruments. Everyone thrives with encouragement. Nobody will want to work if criticised and ridiculed in public.

It is not without reason that the Indian Civil Service attracts the best and the brightest of India's youth. The result is that the higher civil service in India is peopled by as educated, committed and talented a group of people one might find that strives to administer this complex and diverse country. The intellectual integrity of the civil servants and their unequalled sharing of responsibility must be preserved sans politics for the greater cause of India's future.

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Policy Matters **Karnataka**

Karnataka picks 11 Private Sector Executives for Administration Fellowship

*Karnataka is the first state to accept the IAF, which is being anchored by Bengaluru-headquartered non-profit **The/Nudge Foundation**.*

*(Source: Bharath Joshi, **Deccan Herald**, June 28, 2021)*

A venture capitalist, a quizmaster and a neuroscientist are among the 11 private sector professionals who have been selected for the state government's **Indian Administrative Fellowship (IAF)** programme.

These 11 Fellows will spend 18 months rubbing shoulders with senior bureaucrats and policy makers to work on projects in the areas of Sustainable Development Goals, Agriculture, Rural Development, e-Governance and so on.

The Fellowships start on 1st July 2021. The 18-month Fellowship will offer a stipend of up to Rs.20 lakh per annum.

*“The Fellows have held leadership positions in some of the world’s most admired organizations, and have academic credentials from Stanford, Harvard, IIMs and Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and more,” Chief Minister **B.S. Yediyurappa** said in a note.*

There were more than 2000 applicants across India for the IAF and they were selected *“through a rigorous selection process”*, the government said in a statement.

The **Fellows** and their assignments are as follows:

1. Venture Capitalist **Ravi Trivedi** (Agriculture);
2. Consumer Neuro-Scientist **Dr. Gayathri Swahar** (Horticulture and Sericulture);
3. Quizmaster **Giri Balasubramaniam** (Education)
4. Fidelity Investments CFO **R. Balasubramanya** (Karnataka Administrative Reforms Committee-II);
5. Former Jubilant Motorworks CEO **Rohit Malhotra** (Rural Development);
6. Technologist **Vani Narayan** (e-Governance);
7. IT Evangelist **Sreenivasa Madenhally** (Planning, Programme Monitoring and Statistics);
8. Entrepreneur **Ramachandran Narayanaswamy** (Woman and Child Development);
9. Entrepreneur **Aruna Sampige** (Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood);
10. Bosch Finance Head **Sunil Kumar Vaya** (State Planning Committee); and
11. Environment Economist **Shobha Ananda Reddy** (Panchayat Raj).

Read more at: <https://www.deccanherald.com/state/top-karnataka-stories/karnataka-picks-11-private-sector-executives-for-administration-fellowship-1002409.html>

Gender Matters

Realities of Women Leadership in Civil Society Organisations



Khushi Shetty

*Intern @ Public Affairs Foundation
and*

Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander

Executive Director, Public Affairs Foundation

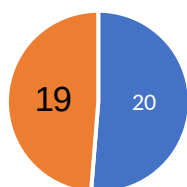
Women Leaders in Civil Society

The WHO defines civil society as a “*space for collective action around shared interests, purposes and values, generally distinct from government and commercial for-profit actors.*” These non-profit Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), or Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), work for the development and welfare of people at a local, national and international level.

This article provides an overview on women leaders in CSOs, their challenges, and the barriers they face.

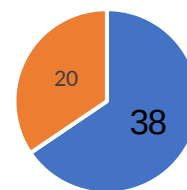
A cross-country survey conducted by *Dasra*, a philanthropy organisation, reveals that of 328 non-profits with a budget of less than INR 5 crore, the number of men in leadership positions clocks in at 20 per cent and the number of women in leadership positions comes in at 19 per cent, a similar percentage of positions being given to both. The gap comes in with an increase in budget, wherein 38 per cent of organisations are now led by men and only 20 per cent by women. This has been visualised below. Another disparity that cropped up from the survey was that 13 of the 74 organisations, which were led by men, did not have any women on their Board of Directors. That is over 17.5 per cent of men-led organisations *without any women* in such a prominent position (*Dasra*, 2016).

Leadership Positions: Budget < 5 Cr.



■ Men ■ Women

Leadership Positions: Budget > 5 Cr.



■ Men ■ Women

Response to the Gender Gap

The gaping disparity in leadership positions for women, has elicited multiple institutions to work towards providing opportunities for women. For example, Micro-Finance Institutions (MFIs) have schemes for women, aiding them through upskilling and by providing loans, which enables them to reach higher positions as their skill base increases. Pairing this with financial support, women gain access to greater independence, when working in CSOs, or gives them the ability to start a CSO of their own.

In addition, women leaders have begun to embrace other women leaders in their organisations. In the same survey conducted by *Dasra*, it was seen that for women-led organisations, it was more than 5 times likelier to have women representation in managerial positions, compared to men-led organisations. This doubles with Board positions, with women-led organisations more than 10 times likelier to have women representation, than men-led organisations (*Dasra*, 2016).

Reality of Women Leadership in CSOs

A quick check on the reality of women leaders in CSOs paints a picture of the influence of patriarchy which does not allow women to come to the forefront, unless the initiative is by a woman.

Even when having access to leadership positions, often women are placed as proxy leaders; a male figure is normally the one who is actually leading the organisation *incognito*. In other cases, women are placed in non-strategic positions where they wield no power. In both these scenarios, women are only placed in their positions for branding and to represent diversity.

Beyond the institutional gender bias, women leaders in CSOs, once appointed in leadership positions, face further issues just because of their gender. “*Indian Women Leaders in the NGO Sector*” by Abichandani and Babu (2018) identifies three main challenges faced by women leaders:

1. *Institutional factors* - this includes legislation, organisational structure and social standing which affect men and women leaders differently. Women-led NGOs are expected to have a non-hierarchical organisational structure, with a highly democratic work environment.
2. Women-led NGOs are also *expected to have high transparency* in their proceedings and *high accountability* in their organisation. As Abichandani and Babu comment, women are held up to “*society’s larger-than-life expectations of these leaders.*” Such expectations are put in place for these women leaders to ‘prove their worth’.
3. *The patriarchal structure* warrants high scrutiny and puts pressure on the personal decisions that these women make in their lives. This is seen with the idea that a woman’s wish to have a child and her attitude towards her job are seen on different sides of a scale, when judging her as a leader.

Women face the brunt of outdated traditions being placed on them. An aspect that a study by researchers Kundu and Ramnath highlighted was that women were not seen as equal to men as they had a dual work burden - of work and home. These assumptions that were made on women working in these organisations impeded the growth of their careers and lowered the extent to which these organisations hired women (Kundu & Ramnath, 2016). Women are also expected to be *nice* and *kind* people, expectations that are not levied on their male counterparts. This undermines their leadership as they are either labelled as *bossy* or *domineering* in exhibiting behaviour that is excused in men (Abichandani & Babu, 2018).

Way Forward

Based on the discussions mentioned above, the following activities can be undertaken to overcome some of the key challenges mentioned:

1. Intervene and address concerns at the community level (including culture);
2. Upgrade school curriculum to sensitise students on gender equality and educate on struggles faced by women;
3. Encourage community-based programmes geared towards sensitising men and women on gender inclusivity.

Conclusion

Gender discrimination is a multi-faceted problem; hence a single solution cannot bear the brunt of the weight. Steps have to be taken at each stage to make the long journey more approachable and ensure there is true empowerment. Stepping into the unknown future after a pandemic, we need the best leaders we can get, irrespective of gender. Our leaders of today shape the world of tomorrow. It is time we get equal and equitable in who gets to decide what is to come.

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Report of Branch Activities

1. Report of Panel Discussion

The **Karnataka Regional Branch** of the **Indian Institute of Public Administration**, in collaboration with Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CeRSSE), **JAIN (Deemed-to-be University)**, Bengaluru, organized an online **Panel Discussion** on the theme, **“Civil Society Response to the Pandemic: Lessons and Challenges”**, on 10th June 2021. Introductory remarks were made by **Mr. S. Ramanathan**, IAS (Retd.), Chairman of IIPA-KRB, and **Prof. Raj Singh**, Vice-Chancellor, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University). **Dr. Gurucharan Gollerkeri**, IAS (Retd.) Director of Public Affairs Centre, Bengaluru chaired the event. The Panelists were the following:

1. **Ms. Shukla Bose**, CEO, Parikrma Foundation, Bengaluru;
2. **Fr. Swebert D’Silva**, SJ, Rector, St. Joseph’s College (Autonomous), Bengaluru; and
3. **Mr. Jagdish Reddy** of *Varthur Rising*, Bengaluru.

Each of the Panelists above highlighted the work their respective institutions were doing to provide succour to those in need. The event effectively brought out the role of the voluntary

sector in bridging the gap between the government and the people, by identifying the needs of the community and providing support and services, especially in the most untouched and marginalized areas, where the government is not able to reach.

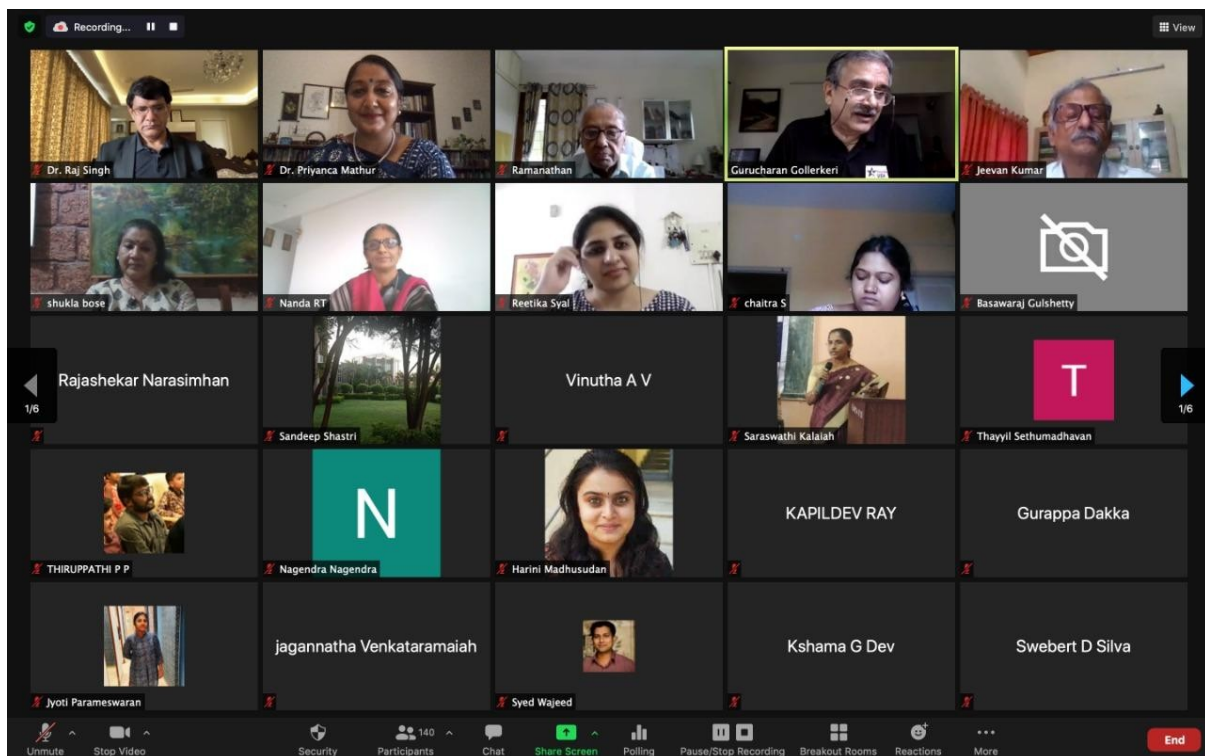
The three take-aways from the Panel Discussion were effectively summed up as follows, by the Chair, **Dr. Gurucharan**:

1. There exists a great need to decentralise, to enable decision-making to take place at a local level.
2. It is not just the NGOs and government who have to do their jobs; even people should practise health-seeking behavior.
3. The time has come for us to use science and technology and data analytics, to deliver services to those who need them the most.

Dr. Priyanca Mathur of JAIN (Deemed-to-be University) welcomed the Panelists and guests. **Dr. Dr. Reetika Syal**, on behalf of JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), and **Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar**, on behalf of the IIPA-KRB, proposed a vote of thanks.

Below:

A Screenshot of Dignitaries, Chair and Participants at the Panel Discussion



Report-2

Report of Webinar on “*Citizen-Centric Administration*”

The **Karnataka Regional Branch** of the IIPA, in association with **St. Joseph's College of Law**, Bengaluru, celebrated the **United Nations Public Service Day-2021** with a webinar on "**Citizen-Centric Administration**" on 23rd June 2021. **Fr. Jerald D'Souza**, Director of St. Joseph's College of Law, set the tone with his Introductory Remarks. The event was chaired by **Dr. Gurucharan Gollerkeri**, IAS (Retd.), Director, Public Affairs Centre, Bengaluru. The two panelists were **Dr. V. Anitha**, Faculty at St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Bengaluru and **Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar**, Hon. Professor at Karnataka State Rural Development and Panchayat Raj University, Gadag.

Dr. Gurucharan provided the conceptual framework for Citizen-Centric Administration by locating it in terms like Rule of Law, Social Accountability and Civil Participation. He raised two fundamental questions: One, how can the State, while performing its manifold duties, do the same from a citizen-centric perspective? And two, how can law be utilized to institutionalize citizen-centric administration?

Dr. V. Anitha referred to the many citizen-centric initiatives that have been taken in the country like adoption of ICT, enactment of the Right to Information Act, Citizen Charters, Social Audit, etc., but in the wake of the many shortcomings in them, there is a pressing need for a shift in the development paradigm itself. She spoke of the principles inherent in the *New Public Service* model, which could provide the answer.

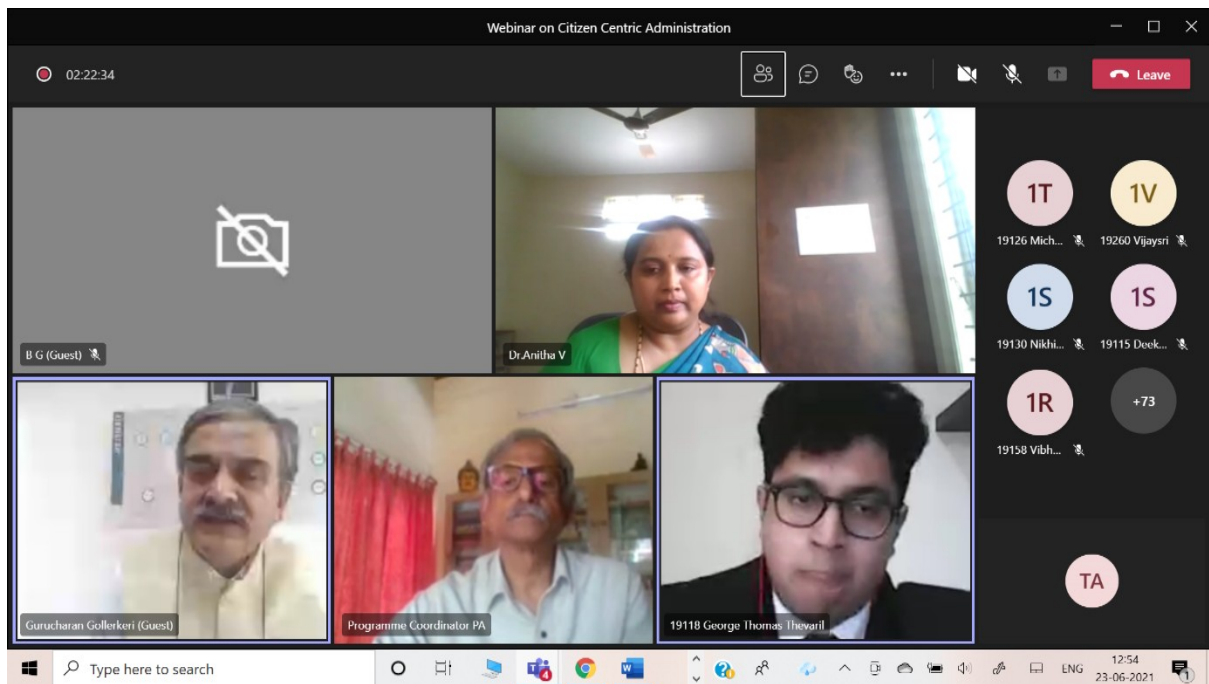
According to **Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar**, Citizen-Centric Administration requires the following: A theoretical and policy framework that moves citizens from the periphery to the centre of decision-making processes; a sound understanding of citizens' expectations; identification of techniques that can help governments deliver services in a responsive and equitable manner; building collaborative relationships with citizens, community and civil society; encouraging shared responsibilities in resolving public issues; and instilling values like empathy and respect for human dignity in civil servants.

The presentations were followed by an active engagement with the participants.

Mr. Thomas Alexandar, Faculty at St. Joseph's College of Law, and Convenor of the webinar, welcomed the dignitaries and participants. **Ms. Vijayshri** proposed a vote of thanks. The webinar was ably anchored by Mr. **George Thomas Thevaril**.

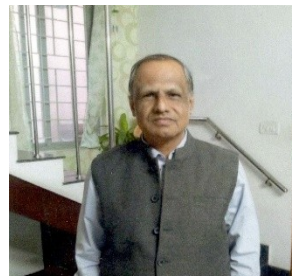
Below:

A Screenshot of the Chair, Panelists and Anchor at the Webinar



Consumer Matters

Consumer Protection in Times of Corona



Y.G. Muralidharan
Founder Trustee

Consumer Rights Education and Awareness Trust

The spread of the Corona virus has had a devastating effect on the lives of citizens across the globe. Thanks are due to the Central and State governments for their efforts in trying to limit the spread of the pandemic. But all the good work done by the police, health workers and dedicated public servants has been undone by some market operators and traders, and even some lower-level staff. This has also exposed the inefficient Consumer Grievance Redressal system across Karnataka. A quick survey done online in some of the districts shows that the benefits rolled out by the State during the lockdown are not reaching the intended beneficiaries.

Dissemination of information about the facilities and concessions extended by the State is crucial in times of crisis such as the present. A number of departments in Karnataka have announced several measures to ease citizens' difficulties. Unfortunately, none of the departments has taken steps to disseminate the information. Take for instance, food and medicines, which are of primary importance. The Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs

department has taken steps to distribute two month's quota of food grains in advance. The Government Order is nowhere to be seen. The department's website is silent on this issue.

Though ration card holders have been able to get their food grains, the quantity and other issues are not addressed. During the survey, it was observed that the Fair Price Shops are supplying lesser quantity than specified by the Department. The shop owners are compelling consumers to buy non-PDS items like soaps, detergents, oil, etc. This tied-sale appears to be widespread in areas like Chamarajanagar, Magadi, etc. Further, these items are sold over and above the Maximum Retail Price. Consumers who refuse to buy these items have to forego food grains. Some shop owners are threatening consumers that their BPL cards will be cancelled if they do not buy these products.

Face masks and sanitizers are in huge demand and this has led to overpricing. In districts like Kolar and Chikkaballapur, it is found that both these products are sold at double the rate printed on the cover/bottle. A Good Samaritan in Chintamani tried to use his skills but found how laws do not work. A complaint about over-pricing was filed with the Legal Metrology Department, only to be told that these two products come under the Drugs Control Department. The much-touted *Jan Oushadhi Kendras* [JOK] are also found to be playing mischief. In Kolar district, a few JOKs are selling branded medicines, if generic medicines are not available. Some are not issuing receipts. There are other complaints relating to non-refund of advance paid for booking marriage halls and hotels for receptions and other functions.

Three months ago, the Karnataka Government launched its *Mahithi Kanaja* web portal, with the intention of putting up all information of departments at one place. Rather, it appears that it is under lockdown. But the contents remain as they were on the day of launch. Departments like Food, Health, Labour, Women and Child Development, etc. should have uploaded all the circulars and notifications issued during lockdown.

The Corona crisis and lockdown has revealed that the State's Citizen Grievance Redressal system is defunct and there is no system in place. At least in times of crisis, there should be an efficient system. The Delhi and Rajasthan Government decisions have some lessons for other states. In these two states, one single nodal agency has been made to deal with complaints of all nature. The booth level officer is made responsible to take up the grievance and report back the action taken. The complaints are categorized as Red, Green etc. For instance, complaints relating to non-supply of food grains and medicines are put in *Red* and need to be resolved within a few hours. The small survey showed that a majority of the citizens in Karnataka are not aware of the help lines and call centres. A section of the citizens who used the help line have a different story to tell. For instance, the state has help lines like *Janahitha*, *E-Spandana* etc. Either these help lines are not functioning, or there is no response when one calls.

Karnataka is a model state as far as *Sakala* is concerned. This program has a well-built system for receiving complaints, and its call centre is functioning effectively. Karnataka would do well to use this portal for all grievances from across the state, and develop a system where the complaints are directed to the concerned departments for redressal and follow up.

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Documents

D. Jeevan Kumar

2021 World Press Freedom Index

Reporters without Borders
Paris, France
2021

Journalism, the Vaccine against Disinformation, is Blocked in More than 130 Countries



The **2021 World Press Freedom Index** compiled by *Reporters Without Borders* (RSF) shows that journalism, the main vaccine against disinformation, is completely or partly blocked in 73% of the 180 countries ranked by the organisation.

This year's [Index](#), which evaluates the Press Freedom situation in 180 countries and territories annually, shows that journalism, which is arguably the best vaccine against the virus of disinformation, is totally blocked or seriously impeded in 73 countries and constrained in 59 others, which together represent 73% of the countries evaluated. These countries are classified as having “very bad,” “bad” or “problematic” environments for Press Freedom, and are identified accordingly in black, red or orange on the World Press Freedom map.

The Index data reflect a dramatic deterioration in people's access to information and an increase in obstacles to news coverage. The coronavirus pandemic has been used as grounds to block journalists' access to information sources and reporting in the field. Will this access be restored when the pandemic is over? The data shows that journalists are finding it increasingly hard to investigate and report sensitive stories, especially in Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

The 2021 Edelman Trust barometer reveals a disturbing level of public mistrust of journalists, with 59 per cent of respondents in 28 countries saying that journalists deliberately try to mislead the public by reporting information they know to be false. In reality, journalistic pluralism and rigorous reporting serve to combat disinformation and “infodemics”, including false and misleading information.

“Journalism is the best vaccine against disinformation,” RSF Secretary-General Christophe Deloire said. ***“Unfortunately, its production and distribution are too often blocked by political, economic, technological and, sometimes, even cultural factors. In response to the virality of disinformation across borders, on digital platforms and via social media, journalism provides the most effective means of ensuring that public debate is based***

on a diverse range of established facts.”

Norway is ranked *first* in the Index for the fifth year running, even though its media have complained of a lack of access to state-held information about the pandemic. **Finland** maintained its position in *second* place while **Sweden** (up 1 at 3rd) recovered its *third* place ranking, which it had yielded to Denmark (down 1 at 4th) last year. The 2021 Index demonstrates the success of these Nordic nations’ approach towards upholding Press Freedom.

The World Press Freedom map has not had so few countries coloured white – indicating a country situation that is at least good if not optimal – since 2013, when the current evaluation method was adopted. This year, only 12 of the Index’s 180 countries (7 per cent) can claim to offer a favourable environment for journalism, as opposed to 13 countries (8 per cent) last year. The country to have been stripped of its “good” classification is Germany (down 2 at 13th). Dozens of its journalists were attacked by supporters of extremist and conspiracy theory believers during protests against pandemic restrictions.

The Press Freedom situation in **Germany** is nonetheless still classified as “fairly good,” as is the case in the **United States** (down 1 at 44th), despite the fact that Donald Trump’s final year in the White House was marked by a record number of assaults against journalists (around 400) and arrests of members of the media (130), according to the US Press Freedom Tracker, of which RSF is a partner. As a result of falling four places, **Brazil** joined the countries coloured red, indicating that the Press Freedom situation there is classified as “bad”. The vilification and orchestrated public humiliation of journalists have become trademarks of President Bolsonaro, along with his family and closest allies. *Brazil shares the “bad” classification with India (142nd), Mexico (143rd) and Russia (down 1 at 150th)*, which deployed its repressive apparatus to limit media coverage of protests in support of Kremlin opponent, Alexei Navalny.

China (177th), which continues to take Internet censorship, surveillance and propaganda to unprecedented levels, is still firmly anchored among the Index’s worst countries, which are indicated in black on the World Press Freedom map. Right below China is the same trio of totalitarian countries that have historically occupied the bottom three places. Two are Asian: **Turkmenistan** (up 1 at 178th) and **North Korea** (up 1 at 179th). The third is African: **Eritrea** (down 2 at 180th). Regardless of their continent, these countries maintain absolute control over all news and information, enabling the first two to claim they had no COVID-19 cases and the third to maintain complete silence about the fate of 11 journalists who were arrested 20 years ago, some of whom have allegedly been held in metal containers in the middle of a desert.

The country that fell the furthest in 2021 was **Malaysia** (down 18 at 119th), where the problems include a recent “anti-fake news” decree allowing the government to impose its own version of the truth. Big descents were also registered by **Comoros** (down 9 at 84th) and **El Salvador** (down 8 at 82nd), where journalists have struggled to obtain state-held information about the government’s handling of the pandemic. Most of the 2021 Index’s biggest gains are in Africa. **Burundi** (up 13 at 147th), **Sierra Leone** (up 10 at 75th) and **Mali** (up 9 at 99th) have all seen significant improvements.

Miscellany

Chief Commissioner of BBMP Donates Laptop to Student-Flower Seller

Source: *Times of India*, dt. June 30, 2021



A young girl peering into her mobile phone, while selling flowers near the BBMP headquarters, caught the attention of civic body's **Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta**, IAS. He offered to buy her a laptop to make it easy for her to attend online classes.

Banashankari H, who aspires to become a doctor, has been selling flowers at the Shakthi Devathe Temple at the office for the past five years. She sits from 8.00 am to 2.00 pm and attends online classes. After studying at home for an hour, she's back at the stall in the evening.

The 16-year-old student of Mitralaya Girls High School in Sampangiram Nagar, said, *"I don't know how I can study further but given a chance, I'd like to become a doctor."* Her mother Anitha said, *"My daughter is a hard worker, wants to study further and we also want her to be educated. But we cannot afford it. It was very kind of the BBMP Chief Commissioner to extend his help to my daughter."*

Gaurav Gupta said, *"I understand the importance of education and I noticed that Banashankari was attending online classes while selling flowers. It shows that despite hardships, she is working towards building a future. I offered to buy her a laptop because she was using a small phone and she said it had no clarity."*

He will be helping her with personal funds, not through any BBMP scheme. *"I'm sure Banashankari is not the only one and there are many more who are deserving too. But I happened to stumble on upon her and felt I should help her."*

Read more at:

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/83976755.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst



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