

Need to spread equitable distribution of vaccinations

WHO and partners have learnt from the mis-steps in response to the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic and established the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator to promote equitable access to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics. Most low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs) face difficulties in accessing and delivering vaccines and therapeutics for COVID-19 to their populations. Multinational agencies, financial institutions, and wealthier countries should consider measures that could provide relief to indebted LMICs.

The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and others need to lead an international initiative to mobilise support for LMICs in need. Many LMICs do not have an established platform for vaccinating their adult populations. Although it is feasible to deliver COVID-19 vaccines to health-care and other front-line essential workers, in some LMICs it will be difficult to effectively reach and vaccinate with two doses all elderly populations and individuals with co-morbidities, given insufficient mechanisms to identify such groups.

The ultracold chain requirements of mRNA

COVID-19 vaccines are likely to be an insurmountable hurdle. The infrastructure for vaccination in many LMICs is already inadequate, as shown by the 19-7 million under-vaccinated infants globally. Strengthening the capacity of LMICs to do clinical trials and promoting LMIC participation in research are crucial. Tracking the safety and effectiveness of different COVID-19 vaccines over time in various populations and settings will necessitate improvements in pharmacovigilance.

Regulatory authorities in many LMICs need to be strengthened and could benefit from a programme of national and international support, as well as regional cooperation and reliance mechanisms. As part of internationally coordinated actions, COVID-19 technologies should be transferred to LMIC-based manufacturers, accompanied by regulatory guidance. Efforts to boost local manufacturing capacity in LMICs will contribute to equity, global solidarity and global health security. India and South Africa have called for the suspension of intellectual property rights related to COVID-19 vaccines to improve access for LMICs, a move now supported by many other countries, but

opposed by the pharmaceutical industry, which cites the disincentive to innovation.

There are further challenges. Governments in LMICs with strong private health sectors, as those in high-income countries, will need to manage the inherent potential for inequity, whereby the rich could access COVID-19 vaccines before individuals with less access to private care who may be at increased risk of severe disease and death, such as older people and those with comorbidities. LMICs affected by war, civil conflict, economic crises, or natural disasters, or with large refugee populations or populations with special needs or vulnerabilities need additional support for vaccines and vaccination under extremely difficult operational conditions.

Re-examining global governance structures, including the UN and its Security Council, is much needed so that the voices and interests of billions of people in LMICs are better represented and recognised. Global support to multilateral institutions is essential to sustain their support to LMICs to facilitate vaccinations globally. The COVID-19 pandemic shows that no nation can stand alone. We are all part of a common humanity that requires us to respect our diverse experiences, cultures, and countries and forge partnerships that better serve the interests of all, as the health experts world over aver.

Upholding 'secrecy' in Lok Pal selection



Madabhushi Sridhar Acharyulu

THE RTI Act and general ethics of administration demands the transparency about any selection or recruitment for public office. The Department of Personnel and Training rules and Office Memoranda also guide the CPIOs to place entire record of recruitments and promotions and transfers in the public domain on their own.

Lok Pal is an anti-corruption institution which is supposed to decide the legal action on complaints of abuse of authority for gain in a transparent manner. Though law was passed in 2013, the NDA Government could not appoint the Lok Pal and Lok Ayuktas since 2014 till recently. The high-level committee headed by the Prime Minister will appoint Lok Pal and others, which is expected to maintain the minutes of meetings that has to be in public domain as per law and rules.

But, according to CIC order dated January 28, the CPIO of DoPT has denied the minutes of the selection process of Lok Pal. Though CPIO did not invoke any 'exception', but his denial was upheld by CIC as valid. The CIC wrongly quotes the two Supreme Court judgements and gives order exactly opposite to SC orders.

The CIC cited SC order 15th Feb 2019 in Anjali Bharadwaj v Union of India which directed disclosure of all details of appointment of Information Commissioners which was complied with by DoPT. But it denied sharing the minutes of Lok Pal appointment which was made by almost similar Selection Committee.

Another case cited is: Common Cause A Registered Society vs. Ajay Mittal (Contempt PET.(C) No. 714/2018 in W.P.(C) No. 245/2014) relating to the constitution of the Lok pal, wherein the SC said: "...So far as the prayer for putting the names recommended by the Search Committee in the public domain is concerned, we have considered the provisions of Section 4(4) of the Act and it is our considered view that no direction from the Court should be issued in this regard. Rather the matter should be left for a just determination by the Selection Committee as and when the meeting of the Committee is convened."

A simple reading of Section 8(I)(b) would have been sufficient to know that disclosure of minutes was not prohibited by SC. Section 8(I)(b) says: information which has been expressly forbidden to be published by any court of law or tribunal or the disclosure of which may constitute contempt of court". This decision shows that Selection Committee if believes in

transparency should decide to disclose. There is no prohibition imposed by SC.

Appellant Anjali said the contempt petition was filed when despite the court's 2017 ruling, the Centre failed to appoint a chairperson and members of the Lok Pal. She pointed out that Section 4(4) of the Lok Pal Act which states that the Selection Committee shall regulate its own procedure in a transparent manner for selecting the Chairperson and Members of the Lok Pal.

The Central Information Commission has affixed its seal to non-disclosure of minutes of the anti-corruption body allowing secrecy in appointment process much against the letter and spirit of Right to Information Act and good governance rules.

Thus, selection process of Lok Pal is the 'secret' according to latest order of the CIC, most unfortunate. Secrecy breeds corruption. There are two tragedies: Lok Pal, which is expected to introduce transparency in all governance wings fights against transparency, the DoPT and CIC Saroj Punhani supports the secrecy.

Nowhere the order of CIC does support its conclusion that information sought 'confidential' 'secret' and 'fiduciary' in nature. One can find collegium conclusions in Supreme Court but not details of appointment of Lok Pal either from Lok Pal or DoPT. The CIC has simply listed the CPIO's illegal and illogical contentions and approved at the end, without giving any justification.

Anjali Bharadwaj has filed RTI application in November 2018 with the Department of Personnel and Training, seeking records related to the process of selection of the chairperson and members of the Lok Pal.

Authorship: A new concept

The DoPT refused to provide a copy of the minutes of the meetings of the Selection Committee claiming the authorship of such documents which include 3-5 high level dignitaries does not vest in the Department of Personnel and Training and same have been shared as secret document. This raises fundamental question - who is the author of file of selection committee? It is neither poetry nor a story for someone to author it. Posts are advertised, applications are submitted, and selection committee conducts the process. None is author or owner of a file. Any file is built on application and ends with decision. Everyone who adds a comment is a contributor and each owns it. RTI recognizes holding the file not owning. And the DoPT which is nodal agency to implement RTI does not know it. Civil servants feel they are subordinate to DoPT and do not displease the boss.

The CIC has no jurisdiction or legal



When Cabinet decisions are disclosable along with entire material after decision was taken, how can any other body be considered as 'high level authority'? Is that committee higher in level than the Cabinet? How the 'level' of authority prevents the disclosability? The CIC should have answered these questions

provision to examine the authorship of 'file' and deny it without referring to any clause of exception. The CIC's judgment is a shock to RTI activists as it laid down a new precedent of rejecting the appeal though no exception is attracted.

Sealed cover: Sealing transparency

The CPIO thought that confidentiality of the said record can be gauged by the fact that the averted minutes of the Selection Committee were received in a sealed cover by the DoPT and that it had been presented before the Supreme Court too in a sealed cover. The CIC did not explain who and why the minutes was categorised as 'secret' and on what grounds? Is it CIC's new concept that sealing the cover itself is 'secrecy' and every post and courier that goes in sealed cover, should never be opened?

The Commissioner understood that the information belonged to Lok Pal and thus it was 'third' party information with DoPT, which was given in sealed cover. Perhaps CIC assumes that anything given in sealed cover is 'top secret'. It is a clear misuse of third-party provision as 'exception' though there are several judicial pronouncements that information could be denied only under Sections 8 and 9 of RTI Act.

It also exposed the CPIO's knowledge

of RTI, who thinks that consent of third party is needed. If that is so, why did he not consult Lok Pal, who might have consented for disclosure. It is pathetic that CPIO and first appellate authority of DoPT thinks that because third party is 'higher level' committee, the information should be totally 'secret'. The CIC did not bother to ask CPIO why he did not pursue the process of consulting third party. From CPIO of DoPT to CIC, an independent authority, they go by their own sense of transparency ignoring the RTI Act completely.

When cabinet decisions are disclosable along with entire material after decision was taken, how can any other body be considered as 'high level authority'? Is that committee higher in level than the cabinet? How the 'level' of authority prevents the disclosability? The CIC should have answered these questions.

Another wonderful idea of CPIO of DoPT floated was that minutes of a decision-making committee 'is holding it in fiduciary in nature' and hence should be denied. The CIC did not find it unreasonable and did not give any reasons.

The Government was never ready to constitute the Lok pal, though Act was passed in 2013. Even after the SC direction, the process did not begin. Only after contempt petition was pressed, the Selection Committee met. The Committee consists of the Prime Minister (Chairperson), Speaker of the House of the People, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, the Chief Justice of India, or a Judge of the Supreme Court nominated by CJI and an eminent jurist, as recommended by the Chairperson and other members. As none was recognised as the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha after the 2014 elections, Committee met without the LoP and selected the Chair and other members of Lok Pal in 2019. The CIC, sadly, agreed with DoPT and Lok Pal in denying the information without reasoned application of any exception.

(The writer is Professor of Law, Bennett University and former Central Information Commissioner)

Design education for new millennials

PROF A BALASUBRAMANIAM



"DESIGN education is changing," says the Design Guru Don Norman, Professor Emeritus, UC San Diego, and author of the famous book, 'Design of everyday things'. He further calls for a new paradigm in design education: "Design education has to move away from schools of art and architecture and move into the schools of science and engineering. We need new kinds of designers, people who can work across disciplines, who understand human beings, business, and technology and the appropriate means of validating claims."

The reason for this simple. Design itself is changing and evolving: from a predominantly form-giving activity to a strategic problem-solving one. Design thinking is the new mantra for innovation. Technology institutes and Management firms are seen to invest more and more in Design. Millennials are advised to understand the changing scenario of the profession, as they embark on the journey for a career in Design.

Design education is responsible

Students of Design must understand that the profession needs to be responsible. From a merely form giving activity that was creating aesthetically interesting products, the profession of Product Design is now contributing to sustainable living by innovating with materials, technology and processes. Products that end up in landfills are frowned upon. There is also this growing concern for planet-friendly products as opposed to user-friendly products that pollute the earth. Curriculums are therefore being transformed to include sustainable production processes, eco-friendly materials and design projects focus more on helping humankind than create wasteful products.

Design education gets generic

There was a time when specialisations were the norm. Industrial Designers went on to specialise in Product Design, which progressed into Interior Product Design, and further into Bathroom Designers! Such specialisations are not working any more. Customers are happy to deal with Interdisciplinary designers who are generalists who can tackle a plethora of problems straddling different specialisations. Progressive Universities like JKLU have included Interdisciplinary Design programmes to cater to this requirement.

Design education is getting digital

The pen has been sacrificed for the stylus. The paper for screens. Designers have gone completely digital. There is therefore, this need for an urgent revamping of the course contents to make digital learning, online classes and bite-sized inputs. Take for instance, a discipline like Communication Design. All new programmes have extensive emphasis on the digital way of learning.

Design education is about co-creation

Designers used to work in silos, developing new products and patenting their innovations. There is, however, a new breed of designers who are open and develop products that include all the stake holders of the project. Co-creation is gaining ground and copy-left is the new normal. Design schools are now getting the millennials to collaborate on digital platforms, working across time-zones and developing solutions collectively for the problems of the world.

Design education is multi-disciplinary

Designers who learn in special institutes dedicated to design, miss out a multi-disciplinary approach to problem solving. Inputs in sociology, psychology, finance and management make design professionals more ready for solving real-life problems. Critical thinking and systemic thinking processes are taught in new institutes of Design for making them develop into a well-rounded professional.

JKLU for future-ready education

The future of design is all pervading. It has to cater to all sectors of the economy. The divisions and specialisations are blurring. The world is shrinking and one can no more afford to work in silos.

Designers will be expected to take on leadership roles and have to become more disruptive and innovative, responsible and inclusive. They should learn to cultivate empathy to cater to the last individual. Sustainability will become the mantra for the future of design. Imagination will become paramount and creativity will be the key to solving world's problems.

The Institute of Design JKLU is ready for the challenge. New curriculums are embedded with Communication and Critical thinking classes. Interdisciplinary Design is an option for the generalist designer. Communication Design programme is predominantly digital. Co-creation is the norm, as students from Technology, Management and Design get together for classes and projects. We are poised to bring about a new paradigm in design education. One that is contemporary and relevant for the new millennials.

(The author is with JK Lakshmiptat University, Jaipur)

Drains in Indore being turned into playgrounds for residents

SUNDEEP POURANIK



THIS Madhya Pradesh city, which has been awarded the title of the country's cleanest city four times, is now converting open drains filled with garbage into playgrounds where cricket and football matches are being played.

The process from waste collection to its disposal has been given a new dimension in Indore by creating a new drainage model.

The form of the drains flowing in Indore is being transformed through the Sirpur Dhar Road to the Aam wali Pulia and the meeting of drains at Chandan Nagar.

Residents and large outfalls have been identified by the municipal corporation under the river-drain outfall tapping work and after trapping these by laying down a sewerage line, the sewerage falling into the primary sewerage line of the city was stopped, causing the sewage flowing in the drains to now be transferred directly to the Sewage Treatment Plant. The corporation is doing plantation work on a large scale to beautify and protect the environment on both sides of the drain as well as tapping it. Due to these efforts made by the Corporation for the Kanh-Saraswati river and purification of drains, the drain at Chandan Nagar has completely dried up.

A similar process has been followed from Shiv Nagar to Kailash Chaudhary Park Nagar, Virat Nagar, Udyog Nagar, Khatipura and Azad Nagar which meets the drain in the Kanh river. This drain has also dried up and at a particular place a football match was played after which a cricket match was also played there.

Municipal Commissioner Pratibha Pal said Indore is the first city where drain and sewerage water used to flow once, but now the entire drain has dried up as a result of sewer tapping done under the 'River-Drainage Sanitation Campaign'. Where it was not possible to stand near these drains due to the stench and filth, a 'Nullah cricket match' was organized in the past few days.

Superintendent Engineer Mahesh Sharma and Gopal Jagtap of Institution 'Basics' said 'Hamara Nullah, Hamara Abhiyan' was started under which the drains are drying up and the residents are playing football and cricket there. Residents of Chandan Nagar also took an oath of maintaining cleanliness as well as not throwing any garbage and litter into the drains.

LETTERS

Wanted a new law for exports



NEW agricultural-law for exports is required (not for corporates or brokers eating into farmers' profits). Everyone wants raise in salary / income. Why not farmers? Exports will avoid the main problem of accumulation of unsold / stationary stocks. This way it is possible for the government to buy food grains from farmers for maximum support price / reasonable price and export the accumulated stocks. Also with profits from exports at hand, it is easy for government and farmers TEAM (with sharing of investment burden) to set up long-term warehouses / godowns to store the harvest, buy the vehicles to speedily transport the harvest to godowns to save it from sudden rains, possible are: crop rotation, latest technology introduction etc.

Many suggest that private investment arrangement in production of crops will nullify loan taking by small farmers via mortgaging assets. In case of spoilt-crop, loss burden is reduced for farmer (as part of loss is shared by the private investor). Money-Amount burden for agricultural loans write off to farmers too gets reduced to government of India.

Madhav P, Secunderabad

Civilised behaviour missing

YOUR editorial 'Cuss words the new normal' (15th Feb) aptly sums up the decadent state of ever-falling standards of public decorum among large number of our politicians. Not only in politics, even in our ordinary lives, cuss words seem to have become quite common, as frequently evidenced in street brawls, road rage cases, informal meetings and discussions. There is a general tendency to browbeat a person with a differing viewpoint with loud-mouthed rhetoric, provocative gestures and even casting unwarranted aspersions.

Cutting across all sections of society, people generally have no qualms about calling each other names. Unfortunately, this malaise has even afflicted the average household, where arrogant behaviour seems to hold sway. It is high time that due primacy is accorded to polite and courteous behaviour in our day-to-day lives. These values need to be inculcated in children in right earnest in their infancy and both educational institutions and parents can play a highly pro-active role in this regard. In the state legislatures and Parliament, the speakers and leaders of different parties should keep a hawk's eye on the general behaviour of the elected representatives and take appropriate deterrent steps for curbing any deviant mannerism.

Amit Banerjee, New Delhi

India should maintain vigil in Ladakh

THE India-China agreement on disengagement at Pangong Tso in Ladakh is certainly a promising start towards peace. However, stabilising the borders could take a long time. The Indian and Chinese troops are expected

to stop their forward positions on either side of Pangong in a phased manner. The troops will have to return to the pre-April 2020 position.

However, the surprisingly hasty decision of China to withdraw its troops raises doubts about its intentions. What could have prompted China to take such a hasty decision? It is reasonable to assume that Beijing's strategic move is linked to the US factor of interfering in the Ladakh standoff. In spite of the attempts by both countries to end the row peacefully through dialogue, talks between the two sides remained in a state of complete deadlock.

The takeaways are clear here: China has been moving cautiously since the Biden administration took a decision on the China-centric Quad and Indo-Pacific strategy. In the recent telephonic conversation between US President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, both of them had reiterated their commitment to a strong India-US relationship. China's disengagement could be linked to deterring India from joining the US-led alliance. China wants to lessen the prospect of India partnering with the new administration to form an anti-China coalition.

It is a fact that earning US support is essential for India's standing up to China. China believes that if India-US relationship is further strengthened under Biden administration, it will reinforce the US-led alliance. Notwithstanding the fact that the disengagement is unquestionably positive, India must monitor the progress closely and press for the resolution of all remaining issues including the Depsang plateau.

Venu G S, Kollam

thehansreader@gmail.com