



## IT MATTERS

Education thrives on stability, not uncertainty

Page 3



Story of Forest Rest houses-Scog- Shimla water catchment sanctuary-Shimla-Himachal Pradesh-India

Visit our you-tube channel

Like-Subscribe-Share

## A LOOK

ASCI explores AI's role in Advertising



Page 04

# Systemic flaws in Healthcare

# HPPCL corruption: Who will answer?



Photo used for indicative purpose only. Photo source: Internet

### HIMACHALSCAPE DESK SHIMLA

The recent demise of HP Power Corporation's Chief Engineer Vimal Negi has raised several pressing questions regarding accountability and the investigative process.



It is being speculated that had the anonymous letters concerning alleged malpractices within the HP Power Corporation and the involvement of certain IAS officers been taken seriously by the present administration, Negi's life might have been saved. His disappearance and the subsequent discovery of his body near the Bhakra Dam at Shahtalai have only intensified suspicions, prompting concerns over whether those responsible for his death will ever face justice.

From the day Negi went missing, his family members and colleagues repeatedly claimed that he was under severe mental stress. The corporation's management has been accused of pressuring

him into unethical practices, forcing him to work beyond permissible hours, and denying him leave. The circumstances surrounding his death led to immediate demands from his family and corporation employees for action

against two officials, Harikesh Meena and Deshraj, calling for their suspension and the registration of criminal cases against them. While Deshraj was suspended, Meena was not, and the FIR only mentioned the position of the Managing Director without naming Meena specifically. When the issue was raised in the legislative assembly, Meena's name still did not appear in the FIR, and he was merely granted leave. The government, in response, assured that any names emerging from the investigation would be included in the FIR.

The government's handling of this case has led to widespread skepticism. If Deshraj's

bureaucratic hurdles. Patients often require multiple attendants to navigate the system, and unless these procedural obstacles are removed or simplified, these schemes will remain largely ineffective in practice.

Another crucial aspect is that while patients receive free medicines and medical supplies, the government

procures these from private suppliers. This procurement process has become a breeding ground for corruption. A recent case report highlighted the glaring price disparity between the hospital supply and market rates. A prescribed medicine, marked at INR 2163 in a government hospital, was found to

Continued on page 2

Continued on page 2

### HIMACHALSCAPE DESK SHIMLA

Healthcare is a fundamental necessity, yet systemic flaws continue to hinder its accessibility and efficiency. While government schemes such as Ayushman Bharat provide free treatment of up to five lakh rupees for senior citizens above 70 years of age, their implementation is marred by

# Systemic flaws in Healthcare

Continued from page 1

be available for just INR 400 at a private pharmacy. Additionally, another medicine provided by the hospital was declared counterfeit by a chemist. When confronted, a government hospital doctor acknowledged the malpractice, stating that despite bringing such issues to the government's attention multiple times, no corrective action had been taken. Procurement decisions are made at the administrative level, leaving doctors powerless in this regard.

The recent CBI raids on private hospitals in the state further exposed irregularities in the supply of medicines under government schemes. Himachal Pradesh's Baddi region, India's largest pharmaceutical manufacturing hub, has witnessed multiple instances of drug samples failing quality tests. However, government action has remained confined to issuing notices to the concerned companies,

with no records of criminal proceedings against offenders. When reports confirm the failure of drug samples, why is there no follow-up on punitive action? The logical conclusion is that substandard or counterfeit medicines continue to be supplied not only to government hospitals but also to private ones.

The treatment of patients in hospitals, particularly under government schemes, has also raised serious concerns. A shocking case from an Ahmedabad municipal hospital, discussed in the Rajya Sabha, illustrated the extent of negligence and exploitation. A doctor refused to extend Ayushman Bharat benefits to a patient unless he agreed to have his leg amputated. When the patient declined, he was asked to pay INR 35,000 in cash to receive treatment. Such instances of misconduct in hospitals are frequently reported, further highlighting the need for reform.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 vaccination drive, once hailed as a success, is now being scru-

tinized, with reports indicating that every third individual suffered side effects. Another alarming report suggests that nearly 45% of surgeries conducted in the country are unnecessary. The commercialization of healthcare has transformed it into a business where patients are treated as profit-generating entities rather than individuals in need of medical care.

Unchecked malpractices in procurement, medicine supply, and hospital administration pose a significant risk to public health. The increasing number of incidents involving corruption and unethical practices demands urgent intervention. The government must enforce strict regulations, conduct periodic audits, and implement a transparent procurement system to curb corruption and malpractice. A well-balanced approach, where accountability and oversight are prioritized, is essential to uphold the integrity of the healthcare system and ensure that citizens receive the care they deserve.

## Himachal cracks down on organised crime with MOCA-style law

HIMACHALSCAPE DESK  
SHIMLA

Taking a bold step against rising organised crime, the Himachal Pradesh government has introduced the Himachal Pradesh Organised Crimes (Prevention and Control) Bill, 2025 (HPOCA), mirroring the Maharashtra Organised Crime Act (MOCA). The legislation targets criminal syndicates involved in drug trafficking, cyber terrorism, human organ trade, and healthcare fraud, among other serious offences.

Presenting the bill in the Assembly on Wednesday, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu highlighted the growing threat organised crime poses to public order, economic stability, and societal security. He

stressed that a dedicated legal framework was essential to dismantle these networks operating in the state.

The new law casts a wide net, defining organised crime as any continuing unlawful activity committed by individuals or syndicates through violence, coercion, or intimidation for financial gain or to spread terror. It covers a broad range of crimes, including drug trafficking, environmental offences like illegal mining and wildlife smuggling, intellectual property violations such as piracy and counterfeiting, as well as cyber terrorism and healthcare fraud. Human organ trafficking, fake document rackets, food and drug adulteration, and sports corruption such as match-fixing have also been

brought under its ambit.

To ensure a strong deterrent, the legislation prescribes the death penalty or life imprisonment for crimes resulting in death. Other offences will attract severe punishments, including heavy fines and stringent prison terms. Repeat offenders will face even harsher penalties to curb persistent criminal behavior. The bill also includes provisions to seize properties linked to crime syndicates, striking at the financial backbone of organised crime. Officers investigating such cases will be granted greater authority and legal protection when acting in good faith.

Until now, Himachal Pradesh had no dedicated law against organised crime, as such offences were once rare in the state.

# HPPCL corruption: Who will answer?

Contd from page 1

name could be included in the FIR, it remains unclear why Meena's name was omitted, especially since Meena, as the head of the corporation, was considered more responsible by the victim's family and corporation employees. The administrative investigation into this matter has been entrusted to Additional Chief Secretary Omkar Sharma, running parallel to the police probe. However, doubts about the impartiality of the investigation have been further fueled by social media posts from Bhupendra Negi, which have raised serious concerns about the credibility of the authorities involved.

Distrust towards the HP Power Corporation's management and the government is not without precedent. Ever since the current administration assumed office, allegations of corruption in the corporation's projects have surfaced. Notably, a letter addressed to the Prime Minister had alleged massive financial irregularities involving the Managing Director of the Power Corporation and another IAS officer in relation to the Shongtong Hydropower Project. Instead of launching an inquiry into these claims, the Power Corporation's Managing Director filed an FIR, in which an investigation brought BJP legislator Janak Raj's name into controversy.

In March 2023, the Chief Minister directed the completion of the Shongtong Project by July 2025, setting a one-month deadline to resolve all pending issues. However, subsequent discussions indicated that the project's design had undergone a substantial 600% modification, and reports suggested that the corporation remained inactive on the matter for over 150 days. Additionally, allegations of corruption surfaced in 2024 regarding the Pakhubela Solar Power Project, where questions arose over the cost

disparity compared to similar projects in Gujarat. While a 35 MW solar project was reportedly built for INR 144 crore in Gujarat, the 32 MW project in Pakhubela was estimated at INR 220 crore, yet no satisfactory explanations have been provided.

Given the historical and ongoing controversies surrounding the Power Corporation's operations, it is evident that officers attempting to maintain integrity within the system may face undue stress and adverse working conditions. When allegations of corruption are dismissed or deflected rather than properly addressed, it sets a dangerous precedent, ultimately discouraging honest officials and eroding public confidence in governance. To restore faith in the system now only an independent and impartial probe can address the concerns raised and bring justice to Vimal Negi and his grieving family.

Send your blog for publication to us every week by Wednesday and win attractive gifts. Mail us at [himachalscape@gmail.com](mailto:himachalscape@gmail.com). Titled "Blog for the week"

# Urban dreams, Central control, Local realities

**TIKENDER SINGH PANWAR /  
HITESH VAIDYA**  
NEW DELHI

India is undergoing a major urban shift. In the coming decades, it is expected to have the largest urban population in the world. This transformation began after the 1990s when India embraced economic liberalization. Since then, the central government has played a key role in shaping urbanization through various policies and programs.

From the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) to schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and Swachh Bharat Mission, successive governments have influenced how cities grow and develop. In mobility, the central government has focused heavily on metro rail projects, consuming nearly 30% of the urban development budget. However, these initiatives have mostly followed a top-down approach, leaving limited room for states and cities to customize solutions based on local needs.

Why does the Centre control Urban Development?

Despite urban development being a state subject, the central government continues to have a strong influence. One reason is that cities are seen as "engines of growth," crucial for India's economic ambitions. To boost infrastructure and economic competitiveness, the Centre directs funds to urban projects through centrally sponsored schemes. However, this often leads to uniform planning that does not consider regional differences.

Finance commissions have also shaped urban growth by attaching conditions to funds allocated to cities. For instance, the 15th Finance Commission required city governments to increase

In a vast and diverse country like India, decision-making should be closer to the people. When city governments have more control, they can better connect with citizens, improve service delivery, and ensure fair taxation

property taxes in proportion to state GDP growth. Instead of allowing city governments to decide their priorities, funds are often tagged with specific spending requirements, reducing flexibility.

A more effective approach

Urbanization is not uniform across India. Different states and regions have unique patterns of growth. Southern states experience high migration from the north, while the Himalayan region sees administrative and political factors influencing urbanization. In Kerala, cities and villages blend seamlessly, while in Gujarat, industrial growth has driven urban expansion. In many cities, the wealthy live in the center, pushing the poor to the outskirts, while in others, the rich prefer suburban areas, similar to urban trends in the US during the 1970s and 1980s.

The needs of cities also vary. Some cities already have sufficient housing, making large-scale PMAY projects unnecessary, while others still face severe housing shortages. Water and sanitation services are better managed in some cities than in others. A one-size-fits-all approach to urban planning does not work.

Decentralizing urban development funds

A better approach would

be to decentralize financial devolution. Instead of rigid national schemes, funds should be directly transferred to states and city governments, allowing them to prioritize spending based on local needs. The total urban budget, about ₹96,000 crore, should be split so that 70% goes directly to states and cities, while 30% remains with the Centre for national priorities like climate-resilient infrastructure.

Cities should have the autonomy to decide how to allocate funds across critical sectors like transportation, sanitation, housing, water, and waste management. With support from state governments and expert agencies, they can develop city-specific plans. The current approach has often resulted in underutilized funds or rushed spending on irrelevant projects just to meet bureaucratic requirements.

Why this matters

National governments should focus on broader issues like economic growth, national security, and international relations, leaving local governance to city administrations. In a vast and diverse country like India, decision-making should be closer to the people. When city governments have more control, they can better connect with citizens, improve service delivery, and ensure fair taxation.

A fundamental shift in urban policy is needed. Urban should be shaped by local governments, not just distant bureaucracies. A more flexible and locally driven approach will ensure sustainable urbanization and better quality of life for India's growing city population.

*Tikender is the former deputy mayor of Shimla, and Hitesh is the former director of NIUA. Both are currently members of the Kerala Urban Commission. The views expressed are personal.*

# Education thrives on stability, not uncertainty

**HPU without regular VC  
since 3 yrs**

**M L VERMA**  
SHIMLA

A stable leadership structure is the foundation of any thriving education system. Himachal Pradesh's higher education sector, however, is grappling with significant administrative challenges, with leadership vacancies affecting key institutions. The situation at Himachal Pradesh University (HPU) is particularly concerning, as the university has been without a permanent Vice Chancellor (VC) for three years. More recently, the absence of a Registrar for over a month has further strained academic and administrative operations, creating uncertainty for students and faculty alike.

The issues at HPU are part of a broader administrative bottleneck in higher education across the state. A recent Himachal Pradesh High Court ruling on the Vice Chancellor selection process at the Agricultural University in Palampur has brought attention to procedural lapses in academic appointments. The court's decision reaffirmed the necessity of adhering strictly to prescribed procedures under the Himachal Pradesh Agricultural, Horticultural and Forestry University Act, 1986. The ruling underscores the importance of transparent and legally sound appointment processes to ensure stability and continuity in universities.

Leadership gaps have far-reaching consequences. Delays in appointments, whether due to administrative hurdles or coordination challenges between the government and the Governor's office, have led to disruptions in research, faculty recruitment,

and institutional development. Institutions such as the Central University Dharamshala, the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University Mandi are also grappling with similar concerns. These vacancies have had a ripple effect, affecting academic calendars, research output, and even institutional accreditation prospects.

The government has previously emphasized the need for merit-based appointments in higher education. Addressing the current situation requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including the government, Raj Bhavan, and academic bodies, to ensure timely and lawful appointments. Clear communication and adherence to statutory provisions can help resolve procedural hurdles while maintaining the autonomy and credibility of educational institutions. Stability in leadership will restore confidence and ensure universities remain centers of excellence.

Students and faculty are at the core of any university's success, and their academic progress should remain a priority. Expediting pending appointments, streamlining recruitment procedures, and ensuring adherence to legal frameworks will help strengthen the higher education system. Himachal Pradesh has a rich academic legacy, and with proactive governance, its universities can continue to serve as centers of learning and innovation. The current challenges present an opportunity for systemic improvements that can reinforce the stability and credibility of academic institutions for the long term.

# The crucial role of Media in Disaster reduction

**RAJAN KUMAR SHARMA**  
HAMIRPUR

The field of communication and journalism has seen remarkable progress since ancient times. One of the earliest figures associated with the dissemination of information is Maharishi Narad Ji, who is revered for his ability to transmit knowledge across vast distances. Today, the role of media in disaster management is more critical than ever, as it serves as a bridge between the public and emergency organizations. Through timely reporting and mass communication, the media plays a pivotal role in mitigating disasters before, during, and after their occurrence.

Media channels are instrumental in disaster management through various functions, including educating the public on potential hazards and preparedness measures, providing early warnings about impending disasters, giving people time to evacuate or take necessary precautions, disseminating real-time updates about affected areas, casualty figures, and resource needs, alerting government agencies and relief organizations

about specific emergency requirements, and facilitating public discussions on disaster response strategies for continuous improvement. For the media to effectively fulfill these roles, it is essential to establish direct and ongoing collaboration with disaster management organizations. Experience has shown that consistent interaction between media and disaster response teams enhances the flow of critical information, ensuring a more effective response when disasters strike.

In disaster situations, the demand for accurate and timely information is paramount. The public relies on media for early warnings, updates on rescue and relief operations, and guidance on accessing aid. Many past disasters have demonstrated the life-saving power of well-disseminated warnings. For instance, in November 1970, a tropical cyclone and storm surge struck southeastern Bangladesh, resulting in over 300,000 deaths and leaving 1.3 million people homeless. However, when a similar cyclone hit the same region in May 1985, the loss of life was significantly reduced

to 10,000, primarily due to improved early warning systems and better preparedness. By May 1994, another severe cyclone in Bangladesh led to fewer than 1,000 fatalities—a testament to the effectiveness of media-driven awareness campaigns. A similar trend was observed in India. The 1977 cyclone in Andhra Pradesh claimed 10,000 lives, but 13 years later, an equally powerful storm in the same region resulted in just 910 deaths. This drastic reduction was largely due to the implementation of an early warning system linked to radio broadcasts, which effectively alerted residents in low-lying areas.

Media can be broadly categorized into electronic and print media. Electronic media includes radio, both wireless and satellite, television through cable and DTH, and digital platforms, which provide real-time updates and visual reports. Print media comprises newspapers, magazines, and journals, which offer in-depth analysis and documentation of disasters and response strategies. Both forms of media contribute significantly to disaster preparedness, re-

sponse, and recovery. Broadcast media, in particular, can play an essential role in rapidly informing the public, collecting real-time data, and facilitating discussions on disaster resilience.

Countries with advanced disaster warning systems, such as Japan, have demonstrated the potential of media in mitigating losses. Despite having one of the most sophisticated tsunami warning systems, Japan still suffered a heavy toll in the March 2011 tsunami, which claimed nearly 20,000 lives. This highlights the need for continuous improvement in communication strategies, ensuring that warnings are not just issued but also effectively acted upon. The establishment of State Emergency Operations Centers and Decision Support Systems further strengthens the role of media as a vital response partner. News agencies provide valuable communication channels that help authorities assess the disaster's impact and allocate relief resources efficiently.

While media plays a crucial role in disaster mitigation, the accuracy and credibility of information must

be upheld. Misinformation or unverified reports can lead to panic, confusion, and misallocation of resources. To prevent this, journalists must adhere to strict fact-checking protocols, relying on verified sources before broadcasting disaster-related news.

Although media organizations and disaster response agencies have distinct objectives, their collaboration is essential in reducing disaster risks and protecting lives. By working together, they can ensure that accurate and timely information reaches communities in need, ultimately strengthening disaster resilience worldwide. In conclusion, the media's role in disaster reduction is indispensable. By leveraging modern communication technologies and fostering partnerships with disaster management organizations, the media can help create a safer and more prepared global community. Through education, early warnings, and real-time reporting, the media remains a lifeline during times of crisis, proving that knowledge and awareness are powerful tools in saving lives.

## ASCI's 'AdNext: Explores AI's role in Indian advertising'



**HIMACHALSCAPE DESK**  
SHIMLA

The Academy of Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) unveiled its latest report, 'AdNext: The AI Edition,' at the 'Global Adda' event during the ICAS Global Dialogues Summit. The report provides an

in-depth analysis of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its transformative impact on the Indian advertising industry.

The report highlights four major aspects shaping AI adoption in advertising. It notes that AI is seen as a tool to enhance human creativity rather than replace it, with experts acknowledging its potential to boost efficiency and personalization. Digital-native industries are integrating AI seamlessly, while traditional sectors are exploring its creative applications to enhance customer engagement. Indian

consumers show a unique acceptance of AI-powered advertising technologies, positioning the country as a potential testbed for global AI solutions. The report also stresses the need for governance frameworks to ensure responsible AI adoption, focusing on transparency and ethical deployment.

Conducted by design tech firm Parallel HQ, the research was produced in collaboration with Google and Games 24X7 and supported by industry leaders such as Diageo, Hindustan Unilever, Mondelez, Nestle, Cipla Health, Coca-Cola, Colgate, Pepsico, P&G, Kenvue, Bajaj Auto, and Dream Sports. It compiles insights from 27 leading professionals, legal experts, regulators, and technology innovators, offer-

ing a holistic view of AI's opportunities and challenges in advertising.

Manisha Kapur, CEO and Secretary General of ASCI, emphasized the importance of responsible AI adoption, stating, "The advent of AI presents an unprecedented opportunity for the Indian advertising industry to innovate and connect with consumers. However, this power must be used responsibly to build long-term trust." Robin Dhanwani, Founder and CEO of Parallel, added, "AI is reshaping industries at an extraordinary pace. This report is a significant step towards understanding its adoption, impact, and regulatory landscape."

At the Global Adda event, Parallel HQ presented the re-

port's findings, followed by a panel discussion featuring industry experts. The discussion explored AI's impact on creativity, responsible advertising, and the role of self-regulation in shaping AI-driven practices. In an exclusive Fireside Chat moderated by CNBC TV18's Shibani Gharat, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Abhishek Singh, highlighted AI's evolving role in Indian advertising, discussing its impact on personalized content, targeted marketing, and audience engagement.

The report calls for continued research and collaboration among stakeholders to refine AI frameworks and ensure its responsible implementation in the advertising landscape.