



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Nikhil De, an activist with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan that provided vital inputs

Under the Scanner

In a welcome development, the Bill will make state government officials accountable for giving services to citizens and promises fast redressal of their grievances

By Prakash Bhandari in Jaipur

THE Congress government in Rajasthan is all set to introduce a unique bill—the Rajasthan Public Accountability Bill—that will make the state government officials accountable for providing service to citizens. It will bring government officials in 28 departments providing 225 services under the scanner.

These services are water supply, irrigation, civil supplies, law, *panchayati raj*, local self-government, public works department, transport, agriculture, agriculture marketing, all municipal bodies, social welfare, health, rural development, state roadways and all services under the district collector's office.

The Bill is being brought in to ensure transparency through the free flow of information using modern, electronic and information technology tools, as well as offline modes of dissemination

through an effective Janata Information System.

The Bill will lay out a comprehensive citizens' charter by each department, enumerating rights and entitlements, including public goods and services, to be provided to the people and detailed job charts of public functionaries to identify their specific responsibilities in ensuring efficient delivery of people's rights and entitlements. It will seek accountability of public functionaries for timely delivery of services.

The Bill also provides for a decentralised grievance redressal mechanism with a facility for filing and tracking

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grievances and independent appellate structures to ensure fairness and credibility. It will also initiate monitoring of programmes and policies through social audit facilitation units. This will help in the conduct of community score cards, citizens' report card, expenditure tracking and statutory social audit covering all social sector programmes.

The Bill provides for the right to be informed of the obligations and duties of public functionaries, the right to examine records pertaining to the functioning of public authority, including its powers, duties, and norms applicable to monitoring, financial planning, budgeting, allocation and expenditure through open information dissemination. It also provides for the right to file a complaint specifying a grievance, and obtain a dated acknowledgement receipt, prompt redressal of the grievance and the right to participate in a public hearing within 14 days of filing the complaint.

The Gehlot government involved the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) to provide inputs for drafting the Bill.

The MKSS under Aruna Roy has worked intensely in the areas of Right To Information, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Lokpal Bill, Right to Food and human rights issues. The MKSS was largely entrusted the job of providing inputs for the Jan Sochna portal.

The state government formed a committee to advise it on the Bill. It included former bureaucrat Ram Lubhaya as its chairman, Nikhil De, an activist with MKSS, and Prof Dev Kothari, a population expert. De had submitted the draft Bill which was accepted as the ideal Bill.

"The Bill envisions making grassroots democracy a reality," said De. After the approval of the cabinet, the Bill will be enacted by the Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha. ■