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## Governance in the Times of Corona: Is Technology the Gamechanger?

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### SPEAKERS

#### AJAY CHAGTI, IAS

Special Secretary

Department of Information Technology, Government of NCT of Delhi

#### GEORGE KURUVILLA

Chairman and Managing Director,

Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL)

#### VINEETA HARIHARAN

Senior Public Policy Expert



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# GOVERNANCE IN THE TIMES OF CORONA: IS TECHNOLOGY THE GAMECHANGER?

The Coronavirus pandemic has posed as a major threat to humanity worldwide and world leaders in various domains like governance, education, economics, medicine and more are coming together to brainstorm solutions to contain the viral pandemic and save lives primarily. Looking at the COVID-19 scenario in the Indian perspective, the present situation is challenging for the Centre and the State governments to carry effective governance, especially due to the lockdowns implemented across the nation. Discussing the challenges for effective governance in times of COVID-19 outbreak, an eminent speaker panel joined in a webinar hosted by **Souvik Goswami** from **Elets Technomedia**. The panel included - **Ajay Chagti**, IAS, Special Secretary, Department of Information Technology, Government of NCT of Delhi; **George Kuruvilla**, Chairman and Managing Director, Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL); and **Vineeta Hariharan**, Senior Public Policy Expert.

## MODERATOR

**SOUVIK GOSWAMI**

from Elets Technomedia

## HERE IS THE GIST OF THE PANEL DISCUSSION:

**AJAY CHAGTI, IAS**

Special Secretary

Department of Information Technology, Government of NCT of Delhi

Chagti, addressing the webinar on COVID-19 issue said, true that the pandemic has posed as a major challenge in governance but it has also been the reason for proactiveness in the approaches of the Centre and State authorities across the country. "We have learned from other countries and we took actions early", he added.

Elaborating on the government's efforts, he mentioned how slowly and gradually lockdowns were implemented, how gatherings were banned starting from 150 people, reducing it to 50 people, further shrinking it to 25 people, then 10, then 4 and finally taking it to the individual level. Moreover, medical



personnel have been taken care of. PPEs are provided to the doctors, nurses and to the sanitation staff as well, Chagti added.

Talking on how technology has been a great enabler for the authorities to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, Chagti said, "Technology is the force multiplier during the lockdown, we can see, there are so many of the practical examples. When the lockdowns were implemented the people were asked to apply for passes through WhatsApp or through the website so that the

contactless technologies can be applied." Moreover, many people didn't have ration cards and as many as 10 lakh people have applied for the ration cards online, he added.

Similarly, a lot many initiatives were taken using technology as the enabler including tracking of people under quarantine, drones are being used to monitor the lockdown situation, for sanitization and more, Chagti said. "Carrying sanitization using drones is about 50 times better than regular sanitization carried by humans. Moreover, it is fast and

consistent as well", he added.

Turning his words to cloud technology, Chagti said, the cloud has certain aspects like video conferencing, online lectures, live classes and more. However, video conferencing has seen the biggest expansion recently. Further, on video conferencing and e-education he added that students have easy access to virtual classrooms which has abled the education system to keep running without compromising on the learning aspects of the students during the lockdowns.

## GEORGE KURUVILLA

Chairman and Managing Director  
Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL)

Addressing the significance of government's role, Kuruvilla said, "It was extraordinary. A prompt and coordinated response by the government, from PM to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) to the States and the local government has been commendable. Also, "Miniter of Information and Broadcasting immediately took to the radio bridge informing all his officers about the situation and told them to be calm. So, he set the tone for the officers to respond to the situation amidst the lockdowns", he added.

Further, Kuruvilla talking on the significance of social media during the crisis said, "Social media has played an important role in providing a platform

for various government departments to spread awareness."

Talking on the technology being a gamechanger in the times of crisis, Kuruvilla said, "One of the biggest challenges faced in government offices is that we know the technology is available but how to go with it, how to place the order and avail the services is not that easy. And, here we have been proactive. For instance, we have been using drones for monitoring the movement of people in congested areas, and remote areas." Answering the question on technology in demand by the various departments, Kuruvilla said, thermal cameras, vestibules through which people can



pass through and get sanitized, geofencing technology for hotspots, tracking people under quarantine by using GPS, and more such technologies are being requested by the government departments.

Acknowledging the united efforts of multiple government departments, organisations, private companies, NGOs, research labs, various institutions, start-ups, Kuruvilla

said, all came together to deliver the customized solutions for combating the pandemic situation, which was a dire need for the country initially. And moving ahead the authorities look forward to better technologies and solutions for containing the pandemic and saving lives, he added.

Adding on, he said, the Ministry of Information and

Broadcasting holds a press briefing on a daily basis wherein a joint secretary-level officer from both the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) is present, also an officer from Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) is present. "The briefing includes the status of the pandemic situation in the country, what are steps are

being taken by the authorities, what steps BECIL and other concerned organisations are is taking, what guidelines is Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) releasing, and more", he added. This shows the seriousness of the situation and how concerned are the authorities for controlling the pandemic and bringing the nation back on track.



## VINEETA HARIHARAN

Senior Public Policy Expert

Vineeta Hariharan, addressing the topic of governance considering the COVID-19 situation, said that India has been proactive in adapting to changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic and levelling up our effective governance in a speedy manner.

Vineeta said, "We were not taken by surprise to see that we are prepared well in advance." Hitting on to the effective policy implementation amidst the crisis, she said, nationwide lockdown is a bold decision that the Government of India

has taken. Also, the way such a densely populated country has responded to the crisis, it is an exemplary display of effective policy implementation along with apt use of technological measures

Moreover, "I think if digital platforms are mandated in the most possible areas of work that will be a great takeaway from this pandemic for us", said Vineeta.

However, there were a few issues like the movement of migrant labours and inappropriate arrangements to cater to the massive worker population was a sphere where things could have been better, added Vineeta. But, in every crisis, we cannot expect seamless execution of public policies. Considering the fact, in this COVID-19 situation,

the public policy has been implemented in an appreciable manner and definitely, India is ahead of its times in terms of fighting the pandemic compared to the rest of the world, she said.

Resting her words, Vineeta concluded that through the crisis there has been learning that how efficiently the data collected about the area wise availability of the health infrastructure per capita can be utilised. Also, it can be equally distributed to health facilities across the country like the Kerala model where every ward and every dispensary has a health care facility.

I think there will be lots of IT specialists are required in the government sector in this situation where everything is in the virtual space.