

Citizens Inspect Government Work in New Delhi

This story was provided in an email received by CHRI from Parivartan on 25 March 2004

For the first time in the country, the citizens of Delhi officially inspected a government work on Thursday. They inspected a road repaired by PWD after monsoons last year.

It often happens that an inspector comes to your house or business from some government department and says that he has come to inspect such and such thing. Has it ever happened that a common man goes to a government department and says that he wants to inspect government works? Now this can happen through the Delhi Right to Information Act. This Act gives a right to every citizen to inspect any government work and take sample of material of that work.

A road was repaired by the Public Works Department of Delhi Government in September 2003. Richa, a Parivartan worker, applied under the Delhi Right to Information Act that she would like to inspect the road after the repair was completed and she would also like to take a sample of material. However, she was asked irrelevant questions. She was asked to prove her nationality, to produce certificate of her educational qualification, her experience in road works, where was she employed etc. It is only after the Chairman of Public Grievance Commission and the Secretary (Administrative Reforms) of the Delhi Government intervened that the PWD agreed to allow inspection.

On Thursday, 25th March, the records related to the repair of this road were to be inspected and the entries made in these records were to be compared with the field reality. The measurements entered in the measurement book were to be compared with the actual field conditions whether they match. A sample of material was also to be collected by the officers of PWD in the presence of the applicant and handed over to the applicant.

However, it came out that the entire road had been relaid by the PWD since the last repairs. Thus the patches put by them during repairs got covered and could not be verified. Though the inspection turned out to be a formality, however, it was important as it established the right of the citizens to inspect the government works and also laid out the process how to do that.

This is happening for the first time in the country that some citizen has officially inspected a government work. It has significant implications and can actually mean a severe blow to corruption. All the corruption takes place in records. For instance, the unscrupulous officials fill up in records that 200 meters of road was made whereas actually only 100 meters is made and the payment is made for 200 meters. If a citizen files an application before the start of any work that he would like to come and inspect the work after it has been completed, the authorities would be scared to fill up wrong measurements as they know that someone is going to come and inspect their records and the work. They would not fill up wrong entries. Imagine if every citizen starts filing such applications for any government work that they see happening in their own areas, this would mean a deadly blow to corruption.

All this while we kept cursing bureaucrats and politicians for corruption. Now the ball is in our court. Whenever we see any government construction taking place anywhere in Delhi, just file an application to the concerned Department that you would like to inspect that work after it has been completed.

Parivartan will be inspecting five more roads in April and May. If you wish to join us during these inspections to understand the process, do write back to us. We will inform you whenever the dates for these inspections are finalized.

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