

Rejoinder regarding Cartoon Published in The Times of India, New Delhi Edition Dated 14th May 2025

Gram Panchayats are Vibrant Institutions of Local Self Governance; Not Failed InstaGram Panchayats

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The New Delhi edition of **The Times of India** dated **14 May 2025** has published, under the TIMES TECHIES section (page 24), a cartoon originally carried by The Times of India on **14 April 2016** with the caption: “*Gram Panchayats failed. We have InstaGram Panchayats.*”

In this context, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj states that the phrase “Gram Panchayats failed. We have InstaGram Panchayats” does not reflect the ground realities or the considerable advancements made so far in strengthening the Panchayati Raj system over the years. The Ministry is of the view that while satire holds its place in media, **broad generalisations like these, about the performance of democratic institutions, can lead to misperceptions about the transformative work being done at the grassroots level in India.** The exemplary work of more than 32 lakh elected representatives of Panchayats, including over 14 lakh women members to build a robust PRI system in India often tends to be undermined or misrepresented with over simplistic depictions.

To illustrate, amongst the various achievements in the recent past, **the Meri Panchayat mobile application (recognised with the Gems of Digital India Award 2024) of MoPR, empowers citizens to access Panchayat-level information in real-time, promoting greater public engagement.** This not just strengthens community participation but also thrives democratic values that India stands for, at the grassroots level. **Integration with platforms like Gram Manchitra, Bhashini, and the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has enhanced Gram Panchayat capabilities manifold in planning, multilingual access, and hyperlocal weather forecasting for better disaster preparedness and livelihood resilience.** Under the Flagship Scheme of ‘Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)’ introduced in 2018-19 and subsequently revamped from 2022-23, training and capacity building of over 3.65 crore Panchayat representatives and functionaries (cumulative) of more than 2.50 lakh Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at all levels has been completed, thus enabling strong leadership at the grassroots level that is transforming the face of rural India.

With over 2.5 lakh Panchayats operating through eGramSwaraj, real-time payments via PFMS, asset management through the National Asset Directory (NAD), citizen-centric services delivered through ServicePlus, adoption of Citizen Charters, expansion of online service delivery mechanisms, availability of Gram Panchayat-level weather forecasting, construction of state-of-the-art Panchayat Bhawans, and increasing own-source revenue mobilisation, the Gram Panchayats today are moving decisively and successfully towards the vision of “Viksit Bharat 2047”. The PRI system in India immensely contributes towards inclusive growth marked by technological integration, environmental sustainability, linguistic inclusivity, and community participation.

Today, Gram Panchayats in India are striving towards becoming Digital, Smart, and Atmanirbhar. Public response to a recent three part digital series ‘Phulera Ka Panchayati Raj’ by MoPR clearly indicates growing public interest, awareness, and confidence in Panchayat-led governance system in the country. The view that Gram Panchayats have failed is erroneous, rather they are vibrant institutions of local self-governance essential for achieving the goals of sustainable development and participatory democracy.

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