



PRAJATANTRA 2021

A National Virtual College Festival



Prajatantra is Praja Foundation's flagship initiative to reach young Indians, especially college students. 'Prajatantra 2021' was organised as a national virtual festival of democracy that aimed to educate youth on various topics related to urban governance and citizen participation. While Prajatantra was celebrated throughout August, the main event days were August 25 to 28 when competitive events took place. Various knowledge sessions, where students got a chance to learn from various experts, were also conducted throughout the month.

Maturing from the last two seasons of Prajatantra, where colleges based in Mumbai participated, this year's event truly represented the entire country's youth. 67 colleges based in 21 Indian states and 3 Union Territories registered. Students from 30 different cities including metropolises as well as emerging towns were part of the event.

The theme for this year was 'Model City Government'. City governance acts as a base of the three-tier system of governance and influences the quality of life of citizens. However, urban dwellers are often unaware to the structure and functions of civic bodies and thus fail to participate actively in the governance process. This, along with lack of accountability leads to various issues at the grassroots level. Prajatantra hopes to change this reality by building capacity of urban youth to actively participate in governance as well as help develop their skills so that they can hold the local governments accountable.

Prajatantra is a platform for the future leaders to enhance their understanding of responsibilities, obligations and even limitations of their local governments. Apart from this objective, we also hope to connect them with like-minded peer groups from across the country.



KNOWLEDGE SESSION SUMMARY

In Prajatantra 2021, knowledge sessions were held in six-parts. This segment's objective was twofold - enhancing students' understanding of the key themes under urban governance as well as being their point of assistance as they prepared for the upcoming competitions. Knowledge Sessions focused on **Public Health, Mobility, Solid Waste Management, Municipal Finance, Introduction to Urban Governance and Municipal Corporation Procedure**. A panel of eminent guest speakers from academia, sector knowledge experts, public service and civil society had joined to share their practical experiences from the field. They also familiarised participants with the stages of development, planning and execution of a policy.

The series opened with the **Public Health knowledge session which was held on 11 August 2021**. Dr. Mangesh Pednekar, Director of Healis - Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health moderated the session while Prof. Dileep Mavalankar, Director of Indian Institute of Public Health (IIPH) and Rakesh Jani, Consultant on Disaster Management Information System, discussed various sub-topics on this essential civic issue.

This was followed by the **Mobility session on 14th August 2021**. The expert panel involved Dhawal Ashar, Senior Manager at World Resources Institute (WRI), Prof. Shivanand Swamy, Director Emeritus, CoE-UT, CEPT University and Sujit Patwardhan, Founder Trustee- Parisar while Tanushree Venkat Raman, Communications Manager of World Resources Institute (WRI) was the moderator.

Next in line was a knowledge session on **Solid Waste Management** which took place on 17th August 2021. Asad Warsi, Founder & Director of Eco Pro Environmental Services, Pramod Dabrase, Consultant on the subject and Prof. Srinivas Chary, Director of Centre for Energy, Environment, Urban Governance and Infrastructure Development at Administrative Staff College of India along with the moderator, Neville Mehta, CEO of Mumbai First joined us for the session.



“My major takeaway was how interactive tools can be used in the context of a government trying to interact with its citizens.”
 Vatsalya Amit, S. K. Somaiya College of Arts, Science and Commerce (Maharashtra)

In the **Municipal Finance session (held on 20 August 2021)**, moderator Prof. VN Alok, Associate Professor of Public Finance at the Indian Institute of Public Administration and the panellists, Debarpita Roy, Fellow at ICRIER and Ravikant Joshi, Former Chief Accountant of Vadodara Municipal Corporation discussed the sources of funds and various expenses at the administrative stage.

The knowledge session on the **Introduction to Urban Governance inaugurated the first day (25th August)** of Prajatantra 2021 competitions. Moderator Prof. Gayatri Doctor, Program Chair & Associate Professor at CEPT University and the panel of Prof. Debolina Kundu, Associate Professor at the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) and Dr. Partha Mukhopadhyay, Senior Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), explained the power and functions under the purview of city governments.

The final Knowledge Session in the series focused on **Municipal Corporation Procedures and was conducted on 27th August 2021**. P.D. Hari Prasad, Deputy Controller of Accounts, East Delhi Municipal Corporation moderated the session. The panel of Srinivas Alavilli, Head of Civic Participation at Janaagraha, and Tikender Singh Panwar, former Deputy Mayor of Shimla Municipal Corporation discussed the division of work among civic committees and departments.

PRAJATANTRA EVENTS SUMMARY

Prajatantra events were structured to give participants an immersive experience of urban governance. We included the roles of the Mayor, to provide an overall vision to the city governance (Mayor Speech); Municipal Committee Chairpersons, to study and prepare holistic policies on their respective subjects and Elected Representatives, to examine proposed policies critically (debate over proposed policies). Focus was also given on the role of citizens to increase awareness of governance structures (quiz) and give voice to subjects that concern them (Op-Ed Writing) as well as of media to creatively feature and highlight local affairs (Engaging Citizens through Social Media and Five Stars of My City: A Video Competition)

The mayor Speech was one of the highlights of the event. Participants showed their in-depth understanding of civic bodies and proposed policies centered around the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, data-driven programmes and opening up opportunities for women and youth. **In the Grand Finale, we were joined by three sitting mayors from three municipal corporations; Vikrant Gojamgunde, Mayor of Latur Municipal Corporation, Junaid Mattu, Mayor of Sringer Municipal Corporation and Mukesh Suryan, Mayor of South Delhi Municipal Corporation.** They shared their experiences as well as interacted with students through a series of Q & A.

The Policy Presentation event featured four functions handled by the city governments; public health, solid waste management, mobility and municipal finance. COVID-19 pandemic had a significant influence on policies regardless of the themes. Students focused on sustainability, accessibility, inclusion and bridging disparities.

The collage features a grid of six mayors: Junaid Mattu, Mukesh Suryan, Hir Datta, Migaank, Vikrant Gojamgunde, and Yogesh Mishra. Below them is a diagram titled 'Inclusive and Responsible POLICIES' with a central 'FRAMEWORK' box. The framework includes: SAFE HEALTH FOR ALL, GREEN TRANSPORT, FINANCIAL SUSTENANCE, POWER DEVOLUTION TO ULB, and SOUND MENTAL HEALTH. To the right is an infographic titled 'Municipal solid waste management plan' with sections for 'MAX 15% FOR 3 SPECIFIED TASKS' and 'Mumbai dumping'.

“Heartiest congratulations to the Prajatantra team for such an initiative! We see Mock Parliament Sessions and Model United Nations but what really matters is the city's governance; and the objective of Praja Foundation in organising Prajatantra, delights me because democracy is about local governments.”
 Jayprakash Narayan, General Secretary of Foundation for Democratic Reforms and Former Member of Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly

"Prajatantra 2021 by Praja foundation was truly an outstanding initiative. It was a great pleasure to listen to the participants from all corners of the country and understand the new generation's aspirations. A big thank you to Praja and its incredible team. All the best for future initiatives!"

Tanmay Kantikar, Founder Trustee, Parivartan; Judge for Mayor Speech Competition.

The Debate competition was structured around two themes. One of the themes was on Strategy for Waste Management where students debated over: A. Reduce, reuse, recycle and recover at ward level (decentralisation) or B. Use of scientific Landfills.

Another topic for debate was on Public Municipal Finances and where it should be spent wherein students debated over: A. Building primary health infrastructure or B. Building secondary or tertiary health infrastructure. Both sides came up with their unique arguments to present their side. Question & Answer round saw the debate heating up, where the opposition challenged proposed policies. In the end, a poll took place to understand the audience's view on the subject.

The quiz tapped participants' knowledge of matters concerning urban governance. Quiz topics included the Indian Constitution, municipal structures, government programmes and functions of urban governance. In their feedback, many participants expressed that they found questions to be more challenging than they expected. But they also acknowledged that their curiosity to learn more on the topics have significantly increased.

Social Media strategy concentrated on the creative use of the new age tools to strengthen the interaction between citizens and the government. Most strategies focused on Facebook and Instagram, reflecting the most popular social media platforms among Indian youth. Visuals-based content was, particularly under spotlight highlight. Suggestions also emphasised the use of online competitions like meme competitions and quizzes to keep the social media feed interactive and lively.

Video Competition and Op-Ed writing were two submissions-only competitions. Both aimed at testing participants' research skills and ability to express a subject creatively. Out of two Op-Ed themes, 'Importance of Pedestrianisation in Mobility Planning and Ideal Structure and Features of a City Complaint Redressal Mechanism' emerged to be quite popular. Five Stars of My City event featured videos of local strategies (swift vaccination drives, contact tracing mechanism) to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in particular.



"I am grateful to entire Prajatantra team for creating such an innovative platform. Students who role played mayor have definitely well understood local civic bodies. I admire all of them."

Vikrant Gojamgunde,
Mayor, Latur Municipal Corporation

Prajatantra Festival saw participants from 30 cities from various corners of India



FELICITATION CEREMONY SUMMARY

The felicitation ceremony celebrated the best of Prajatantra. **Jayaprakash Narayan, General Secretary of Foundation for Democratic Reforms and former Member of Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly and Vandana Chavan, Member of Rajya Sabha and former Mayor of Pune Municipal Corporation** along with **Nitai Mehta, Founder and Managing Trustee of Praja Foundation** joined us as the guests of honour. **Milind Mhaske, Director of Praja Foundation**, hosted an insightful fireside chat with them.

During the conversation, Vandana Chavan highlighted the need to 'think globally and act locally' in the planning of modern governance. The guests went on to discuss how the politics understood by citizens is unlike the reality, conveying the challenges a person-in-authority faces. She also explained the layers of legislative procedures.

Jayaprakash Narayan drew attention to the fact that political reforms must not start at parliamentary levels but at the grassroots level. In his words, when people see the change, their vote brings in locally, they vote against all pressures. The discussion continued to on the challenges of governance faced and potential solutions for the future. Nitai Mehta took us through the journey of Praja Foundation and what factors motivated him to work towards strengthening the city governance.

This chat gave way to the concluding note of the ceremony where winners of the individual event and best performing colleges were announced. This segment filled the Zoom room with joy and ecstasy. Guests too shared applauding remarks. They also appealed to students to become active agents of change in the coming years.

"I would like to thank the Praja Team for making the last two weeks memorable. Decision to be part of Prajatantra was big leap as we do not hold a background in politics or law. We are happy and proud that we gave our best."

Ameena Sherin, All India Institute of Hearing and Speech (Karnataka)



"I would like to thank Praja for having got so many bright youngsters on one platform and making them understand democracy, local governments and issues that really bane us."

Vandana Chavan, Member of Rajya Sabha and Former Mayor of Pune Municipal Corporation

Expert Speakers and Guests for Prajatantra 2021



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