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LET'S MAKE IT WORK

FOR THE PEOPLE

As Pranab Mukherjee leaves his mark on Rashtrapati Bhavan by opening it up to the public, and equally by speaking up about tolerance, Governance Now assesses his term as president

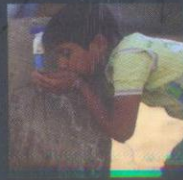


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The CVC has no teeth, but it has dentures, writes ex-CVC N Vittal

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In photos: A UP village where fluorosis has left scores crippled

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How to make the economic survey and the budget more meaningful

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kept specially for guests like me, so that, if we chose, we could stay there and follow the discussions. We had lunch with the president and his other guests. And I might add, I played with the peacocks here – even the peacocks here are people-friendly.” Akash Manoj’s device uses a small silicon patch, attached to the wrist or fitted behind the ear, to detect a protein released during heart attacks and hence warn a person that he needs to get medical attention at once. He was also in awe of the library at Rashtrapati Bhavan, where he got to look through books more than 200 years old.

Gujarati writer Ashok Chavda (also known by his pen name ‘Bedil’) was so impressed with the stress laid on time management at Rashtrapati Bhavan that he says that in his 15 days’ stay there, he planned out his work for the next 15 years.

Rahul Shailendra Kokate, a painter from Mumbai, says, “I was astounded by the architecture of the building, and I hope some of that influence will seep into my work. It’s also a matter of pride for me that some of my paintings will be put up at the museum there.”



Gujarati writer Ashok Chavda

Innovator Ajay Sharma, from Chandauli, near Varanasi, who invented a biogas bottling plant, says he used to think the president has nothing to do, but only after living at Rashtrapati Bhavan did he realise how much in fact the president has to do. For some, like Mansukh Prajapati, inventor of an earthenware fridge, the stay at Rashtrapati Bhavan was nice vacation:

Mukherjee could have limited his task to delivering fine speeches and giving some suggestions to change the system during his visits to the universities but he chose to do much more. In fact, he intervened to improve standards at the IITs, the IISc and the IISER. He revived the tradition of holding meetings of central universities, as also of higher and technical institutions, at Rashtrapati Bhavan. He also organised a visitors’ conference, where industrialists could put forth their demands for innovative solutions before the scientific community. This has resulted in 100 research agreements being signed between universities and industries in two years. He also invited experts to tell the central universities how to improve the international ranking of their institutions.

Mansukh Prajapati, inventor of a mud refrigerator, who is originally from a village near Morbi in Gujarat, was among those invited to stay at Rashtrapati Bhavan for 10 days. He says his time there was “unforgettable”. “My

“For the first time, I didn’t have to keep running about, attending to what needs doing. Here, I woke up to the sounds of birds.” However, he also says that though they were officially free to do anything, there was a whole schedule set out for them: there were meetings with ministers, visits to various departments, interactions among the guests, an interaction with the president, and so forth.

He also found the visit to the five villages in Haryana that have been adopted by the president, interesting. The president’s secretariat supervises development services such as e-tech, biogas, organic agriculture, women’s empowerment and so on in these villages. He says the president’s secretary, Omida Paul, asked them for suggestions on what more could be done to improve the socioeconomic condition of people in those villages. He is also happy that his earthenware products are being used in the villages adopted by the president.

On the last day of their stay there, the guests were asked to invite their families to Rashtrapati Bhavan. This made it all the more memorable, they say. ■

Sons. Coming soon after union minister for science and technology Harsh Vardhan’s complaint that industry was not helping innovators, Tata’s words of assurance were a soothing balm. Anil Gupta, of the National Innovation Foundation, says it was a good sign that Tata came and spoke to grassroots innovators at the president’s initiative. “I am hopeful more industrialists will help and support innovators.”

Mukherjee has also been instrumental in connecting innovators to central universities and other institutions. He set up innovation clubs in each university and trained a team of inspired teachers. He believed in allowing thousands of ideas to grow and turn into innovations at college and school level. The festival of innovators was a culmination of his efforts to put innovators face-to-face with researchers and academia. As president, he adopted five villages in Haryana with the purpose of nurturing talent and promoting innovations.

innovations – a mud fridge, a mud hot-plate and a mud cooker – are on display in five Haryana villages that the president has adopted,” he says proudly. Ajay Kumar Sharma of Varanasi is the inventor of a device that can help fill cooking gas cylinders with biogas. As a presidential guest, his work too will be on display at the villages adopted by the president. Similarly, Paresch Panchal’s cowdung flowerpots and an agarbatti-making machine got him invited to the Rashtrapati Bhavan. “My stay there was like a beautiful accident; it changed my life and my business too,” he says.

As Mukherjee gets ready to bid adieu to Rashtrapati Bhavan, he would have the satisfaction of accomplishing a mission. He certainly did not want to spend five years just signing on the dotted line, making ceremonial speeches and formal appearances. He seems to have found a way out – and in the process, has left a mark. ■

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