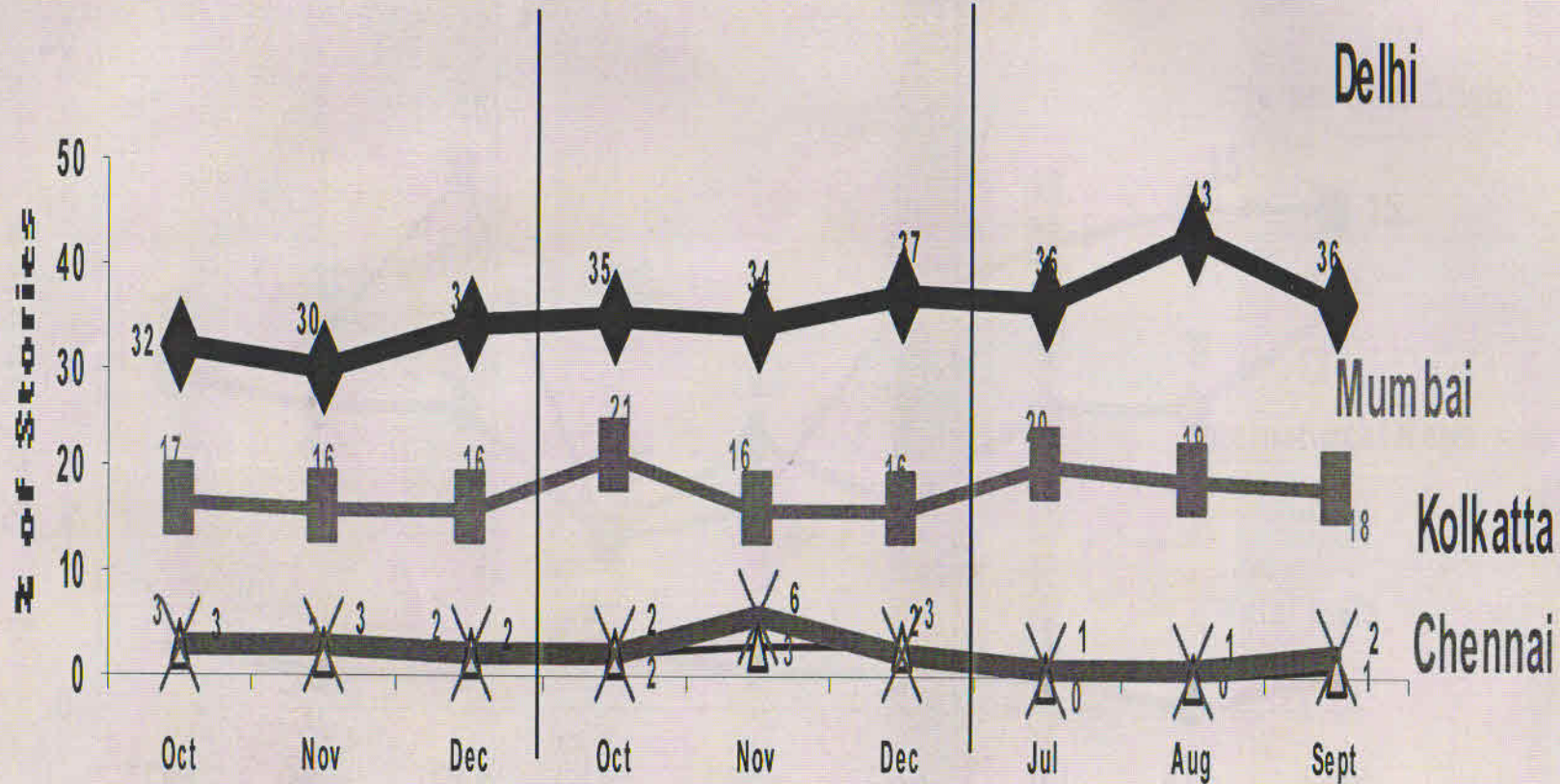


FIXATION WITH DELHI-MUMBAI : ORIGIN OF NEWS ITEMS

2003

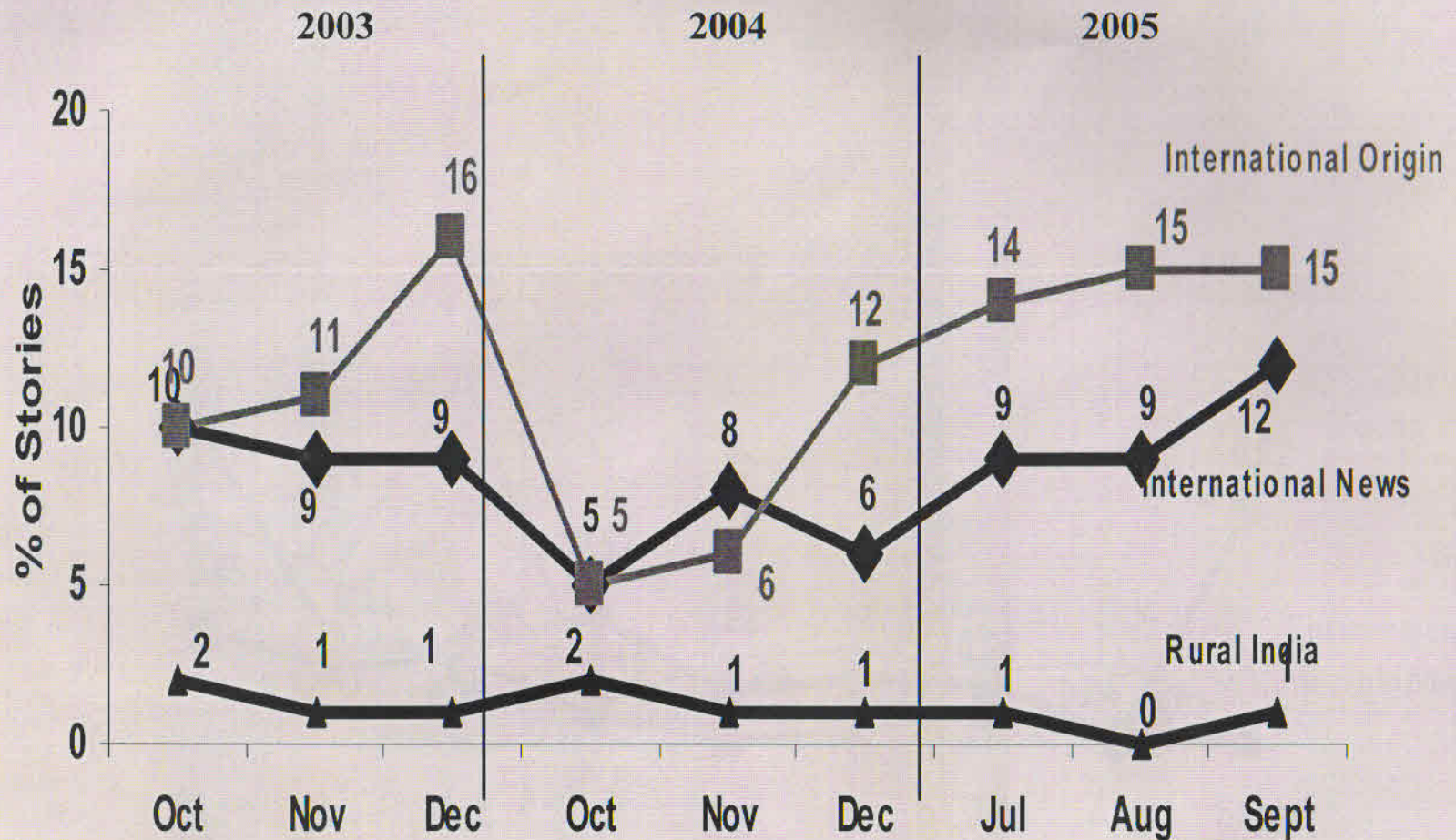
2004

2005



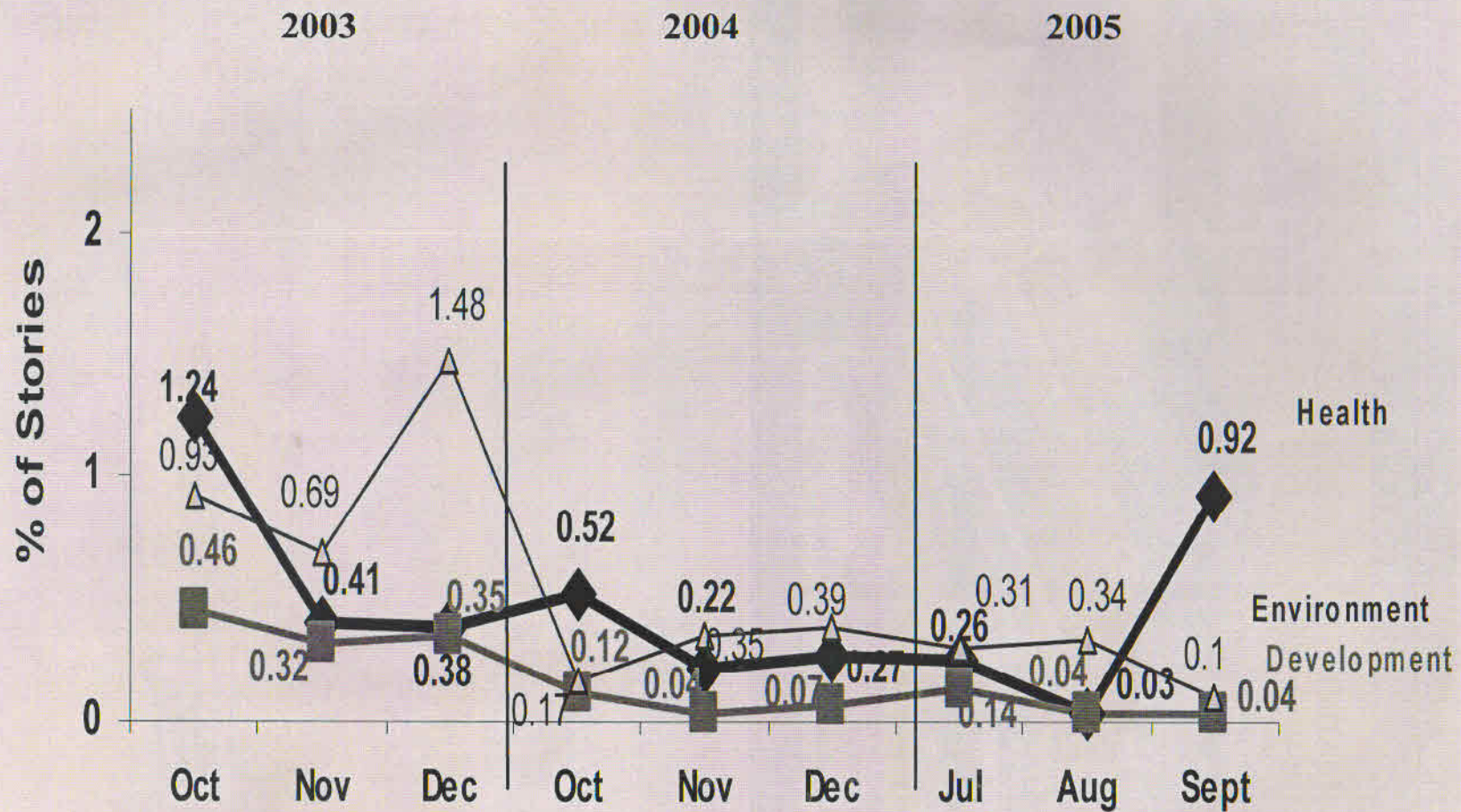
Source : CMS Media Lab

INTERNATIONAL & RURAL COVERAGE: TV NEWS



Source : CMS Media Lab

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT : NOT A CONCERN?



PERSPECTIVES

Perception is everything

The latest Centre for Media Studies survey on corruption across the country throws up some interesting results. Not surprisingly, in most sectors, the proportion of households that thinks there is corruption has gone up. What's interesting,

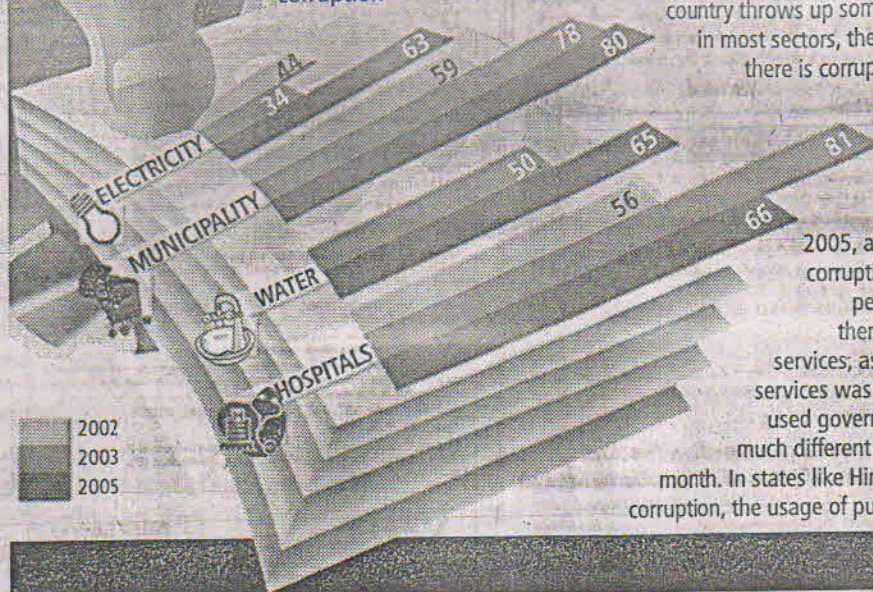
however, is that the number of households that have actually paid bribes is lower — in the case of electricity, for instance, just 21 per cent of households paid bribes in

2005, against 63 per cent who felt there was corruption. Even more interesting, just 10-35 per cent of households were aware that there was a redressal mechanism in these

services; as a result of which the usage of public services was poor — just 53 per cent of all people used government hospitals and the figure wasn't

much different for those earning below Rs 2,000 per month. In states like Himachal Pradesh, where there was less corruption, the usage of public services was higher. **SUNIL JAIN**

Percent households who feel there is corruption



Source: Centre for Media Studies

The finance minister has rightly increased the outlays for key social sectors in the recent Budget. Before we start cheering, let us analyse whether these increased outlays will result in better services for the citizens. There is a concern among economists and experts that increased outlays may not result in better services given the present state of public services.

A recent Centre for Media Studies (CMS) study shows that a majority of citizens are not satisfied with the delivery of public services. In seven out of the 11 departments covered in the study, less than one-third of the citizens are satisfied with the services delivered. In fact, in most need-based services such as the police, judiciary and municipalities, (which enjoy a greater discretion and power), not even 20 per cent of the households are satisfied with their services. Even in essential services such as the PDS, hospitals, and electricity and water supplies, a mere 30-40 per cent of the households are happy with the services.

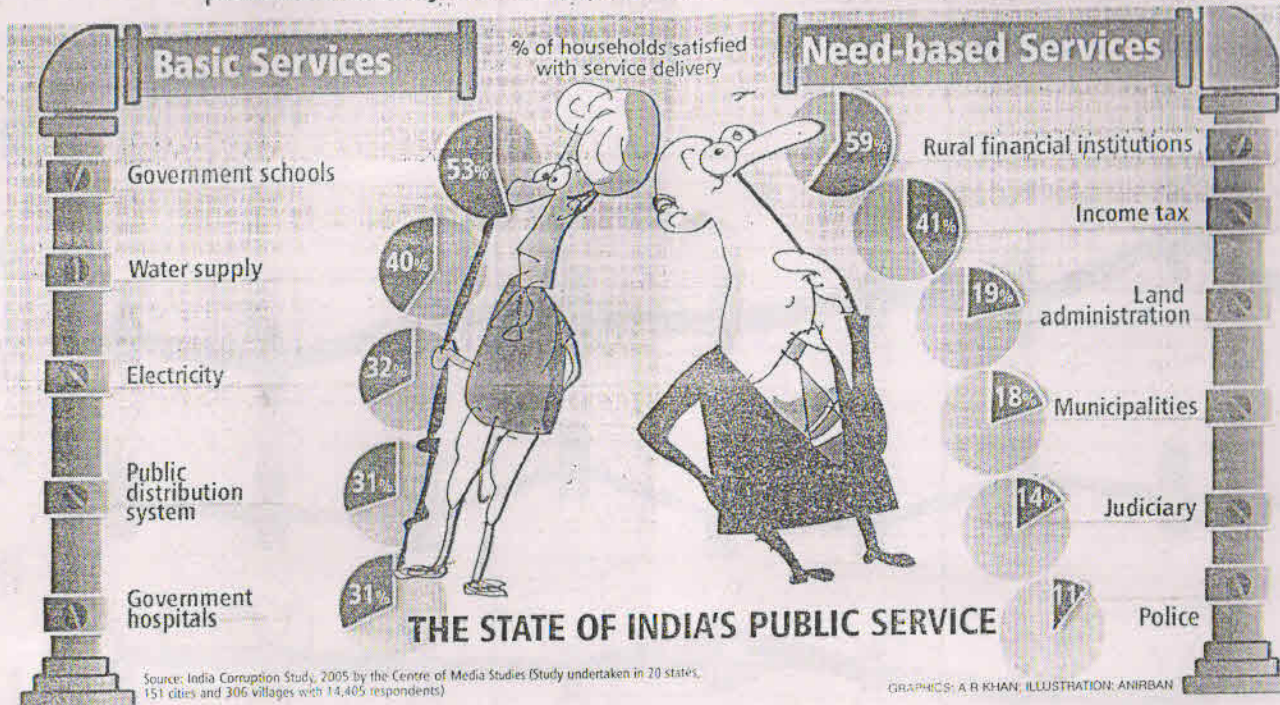
The CMS study also shows that the poor are more dependent on public services than others. Unfortunately, the pitiable quality of service offered by public departments often forces them to go to private providers. In fact, there is enough evidence to show how these extra costs (especially in case of health services) often push the poor to below poverty line.

So what are the reasons for the poor quality of public services? The CMS study brings out that the low quality of service is not necessarily due to a resource crunch but more due to poor and outdated systems. Procedures and systems in public service departments are not just very complex, they are at times outdated. The study shows that even educated people in urban areas have difficulty filling up regular forms (like the application for an electricity connection). As a result, most citizens have to seek help from middlemen or pay bribes, just to complete procedures. A lot of this can be simplified easily.

There is still very little transparency in procedures. While successful experiments

What's ailing public services?

Mere increase in outlays is unlikely to do the trick, the flaw lies primarily in the poor and outdated procedures and systems, say Manu Vatsal Sharma and Naveen Surapaneni



such as the computerisation of the railway reservation system show the way ahead, examples such as this are few and far in between.

The study brings out that there are hardly any effective complaint redressal sys-

tems in place in most departments. In most cases, citizens are not even aware that such systems exist and departments make no effort to educate them. Even those who are aware have little confidence in them. Not surprisingly, the result is a sense of

helplessness.

The behaviour of cutting-edge level employees is another area of concern. Most employees of the public services are not tuned into the changing expectations of the citizens.

Hope, however, is not lost. In recent times, there have been examples where public services have been improved substantially in a short time.

There are a number of possible initiatives at the department level, such as

strategic outsourcing of services, use of technology (like e-seva in Andhra Pradesh), better commercial practices, performance-linked incentive to staff, periodic tracking of user satisfaction and involving resident welfare associations. These initiatives can go a long way in improving the quality of public services.

Also, the public service provider needs to be made more accountable to the citizens through user committees. This experiment has been demonstrated to hold potential in the case of Rogi Kalyan Samitis in Madhya Pradesh.

The cutting-edge level employees are the most crucial link between the departments and citizens. There is a need to orient staff at the cutting-edge level to the increasingly higher expectations of citizens.

Also, it is high time that we directly linked outlays to outcomes. We can draw valuable lessons from the British experiment of having public service agreements (PSAs) with local governments under which objective and measurable targets for various services are fixed together

Initiatives like e-seva in Andhra Pradesh or Rogi Kalyan Samitis in Madhya Pradesh offer valuable insights in improving delivery

with an evaluation mechanism. The funds are allocated to local governments on the basis of their achievement on PSAs.

We hope that the increased outlays will also bring about better delivery of services to citizens. Only this will enable India to realise the vast opportunities that the emerging knowledge economy present before us.

The authors work with Centre for Media Studies (CMS)



PEOPLE LIKE THEM Geetanjali Krishna

Temporary shelters... forever?

The sea laps peacefully at the shores of the fishing hamlet Tarangambadi in the Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu. Translated from Tamil, the name means "the place of the singing

shell-shocked survivors, he moved in with the hope that over time, they would be given better homes to live in. But nothing of the sort happened. "I received Rs 4,000 from the Tamil Nadu government

funds from a local ship-building company to rebuild their homes since most are too poor to build them without financial help. "I can't bring myself to go to sea when it's rough," says Rathinavel, "so I don't have a regular income any more."



PEOPLE LIKE US Kishore Singh

The ever-willing bartender

Hoping to teach my son the co-relation between labour and wealth, I had trained him to serve drinks every time we had guests. For each drink he'd make, he'd get a token sum which, totalled up every month, would add a tidy sum to his

you add a little more whisky to this?" they'd summon the ever-willing bartender. Or, "Hey, you skipped the vodka in the screwdriver pal, how about fetching us some?"

Later, when my friends learned that he was being paid per drink made, they remarked that I was exploiting the poor

would snap at her husband, "do you have to match your host drink for drink?" Checking the ledger carefully, I discovered that not only had my son started billing me for the drinks he made for everyone twice over, he had begun to include drinks he was mixing for me - also twice over. Ar... in an