

Dear Mr Ribeiro,

I came across your interesting article in the Indian Express this morning titled "The Fake News is Correct" (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-fake-news-is-correct-5617651/>) and am taking the liberty of writing to you. Let me state at the outset that I have been an admirer of yours for decades and have followed your storied career with great interest.

I am the Secretary, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation - the Union Ministry in-charge of coordinating the implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) across the country through the respective State governments. In this capacity, I have been working for the last three years and have seen rural areas of India make remarkable progress in the domain of sanitation in general, and toilet ownership and usage in particular.

You may be aware that since the inception of the SBM, there has been a change in the sanitation behaviour of hundreds of millions of people with respect to toilet access and usage. There were an estimated 550 million people defecating in the open in rural India since the SBM began: that number has now come down to less than 50 million today. Over 9 crore toilets have been built across rural India under the Mission. Over 5.5 lakh villages and 615 districts have been declared ODF (Open Defecation Free), along with 30 ODF States and Union Territories. A recent large scale independent third-party survey, under the World Bank support project, conducted in rural India has found that 96.5% of the people who had access to toilets used them. ([Link](#))

I am writing to you, particularly, to address the point you made in your piece regarding low usage of toilets due to water shortage. In this respect, I wanted to draw your attention to two particular points:

1. In rural India, the toilet technology we promote comprises what is called a "steep slope rural pan". This is a specially designed commode that has, as the name suggests, a steeper slope than urban toilets, which reduces the amount of water needed to flush it. On an average, a rural toilet only needs a litre or a litre and a half of water to flush it completely.
2. The Ministry has also issued a directive to States urging them to prioritize ODF villages for provision of water supply and good progress is being made in this direction as well.

I agree with the broader point made in your piece regarding the necessity of water for toilet usage but we have seen many examples of water-scarce villages where toilets have been made a priority by the local community and community-owned water supply structures are being used to ensure a steady supply of water for basic needs.

I felt I should write to you to highlight the above points with respect to the limited point on toilet usage made in your piece. I hope this helps and would very much like to call on you when I am in Mumbai next.

I received your email address from Mr Dattareya Padsalgikar, the recently retired DGP of Maharashtra, a very old and close friend.

Warm regards,  
Param Iyer