

Town planners 'blind' to the challenged

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BMC Holds Workshop To Sensitize Architects

Debabrata Mohapatra | TNN

Bhubaneswar: The state government last April had committed to introduce sound warning systems at traffic posts for the convenience of the visually impaired.

* The railways had promised to construct small barriers at the end of platforms for the benefit of the visually challenged.

* Some banks had pledged to make ATMs user friendly for the challenged.

Almost all government and private offices here and other parts of the state are virtually out of bounds for the visually challenged.

They are being forced to confine themselves to their homes as attempts to travel, enter buildings, parks and shops can be unsafe or humiliating. Inaccessibility by the challenged is one of the most neglected areas of town planning.

Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation on Tuesday organized a two-day workshop to sensitize engineers, town planners and architects to create facilities for the disabled.

"Our objective was to equip technical persons with necessary knowledge and skills and train them to strengthen their capacity to identify loopholes in accessibility, identify barriers and implement changes in a methodical manner," said BMC commissioner Vishal Kumar Dev.

"The crux of the workshop was not only to train people theoretically but also to audit existing public buildings and come up with recommendations and suggestions for making them compliant with the PWD Act 1995," said BMC official Dillip Routray.

"We have been facing difficulties at traffic posts, on footpaths, platforms, banks and gov-



ernment offices. Engineers and town planners have completely ignored us while carrying out development activities," said Sanyas Kumar Behera, a member of the Orissa Association for the Blind.

He blamed the state information and technology department for not developing a software to help them read newspapers. "The software is available in other states. But our government has not been active in this area," said Behera, national trust coordinator of Open Learning Systems, a voluntary organization.