

## We talk a good game!

by

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Can you think of one common answer for the following three questions? (a) do you want the closest thing to Ripley's Believe It or Not? (b) do you want to counter any negative remarks about the wisdom of our lawmakers? (c) do you want to have a good cry?

Answer: Take a look at *The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995*.

Here is an assorted bag of of statements from this document, each of which can simultaneously (a) make you wonder what country is being spoken about, (b) want to shake the hand of the person who had the foresight to formulate the Act, and (c) want to bawl your guts out in despair.

In this document, referred to as the PWD Act, there is a section called 'Non-Discrimination' where you will find the following classic statements:

*Establishments in the transport sector shall, within the limits of their economic capacity and development for the benefit of persons with disabilities, take special measures to:*

- 1. adapt rail compartments, buses, vessels and aircrafts in such a way as to permit easy access to such persons;*
- 2. adapt toilets in rail compartments, vessels, aircrafts and waiting rooms in such a way as to permit the wheel chair users to use them conveniently.*

*The appropriate Governments and the local authorities shall, within the limits of their economic capacity and development, provide for:*

- 1. installation of auditory signals at red lights in the public roads for the benefit of persons with visual handicap;*
- 2. causing curb cuts and slopes to be made in pavements for the easy access of wheel chair users;*
- 3. engraving on the surface of the zebra crossing for the blind or for persons with low vision;*

4. *engraving on the edges of railway platforms for the blind or for persons with low vision;*
5. *devising appropriate symbols of disability;*
6. *warning signals at appropriate places.*

*The appropriate Governments and the local authorities shall, within the limits of their economic capacity and development, provide for:*

1. *ramps in public building;*
2. *adaptation of toilets for wheel chair users;*
3. *braille symbols and auditory signals in elevators or lifts;*
4. *ramps in hospitals, primary health centres and other medical care and rehabilitation institutions.'*

Maybe the wisdom of the lawmaker is in the judicious insertion of the catch-all phrase *within the limits of their economic capacity and development* in each of the above paragraphs thereby leaving a loophole for the non-enforcers of this 16 year-old legal document.

If you want more instances, you may also care to look at the so-called *National Policy for Persons with Disabilities*, where it is further stated (under the title 'Responsibility for Implementation') that:

*The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment will be the nodal Ministry to coordinate all matters relating to the implementation of the Policy.*

Is there any accountability for non-implementation by the body that has clearly been identified as being responsible for that implementation which did not take place? In this same document, you will also see the following bold (rash?) assertion:

*It will be ensured that every child with disability has access to appropriate pre-school, primary and secondary level education by 2020.*

It says further down that document that The Ministry of Human Resource Development will be the nodal Ministry to coordinate all matters relating to the education of persons with disabilities.

As the title of Richard Feynman's non-technical book says:

**Surely you're joking Mr. ...**