



Centre for Peace and  
Development Initiatives

April 2017

## CPDI Right to Information Watch

### Editorial:

#### Will new Sindh RTI law be a harbinger of transparency?

Greetings from the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives, (CPDI).

As we know, sands were shifting in Sindh for quite some time now with regard to legislation on right to information. Sindh government has finally repealed Sindh Freedom of Information Act 2006 and has enacted an effective Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016. Will this law empower citizens in holding elected representatives and public officials accountable? A combination of political will and an independent and autonomous information commission is a prerequisite for the implementation of an RTI law. We can see from the back view mirror that political support to Punjab Information Commission was missing. Tenure of first three information commissioners has come to an end and throughout their tenure they were not provided 43 members staff as Punjab government did not approve service rules. Governments continue kicking can down the road on RTI legislation and even when governments are compelled to legislate on RTI, politicians drop the ball in the implementation phase as transparency itself is quite an inconvenience when they are in power. Politicians find excellent allies in bureaucrats to slow down or completely thwart implementation of RTI laws.

Information commissions have been driving the train on transparency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. The good news is that Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 envisages establishment of an independent and autonomous information commission. Will Sindh government provide administrative and budgetary autonomy to Sindh Information Commission and appoint well reputed persons information commissioners? Will Public Information Officers (PIOs) be designated in Sindh public bodies? These and other questions will determine whether or not or to what extent Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 be a harbinger of transparency in Sindh.

### RTI Legislative Landscape

#### Federal RTI Law and Protection of Whistle Blowers:

It was reported in the media that Senate committee unanimously decided to drop whistle blower

protection clause from right to information law. Other than this, there has been no development on right to information legislation at federal level.

CPDI has always maintained that whistle blowing is too serious and complex a business to be left alone to one or two clauses in an RTI law. There is need for full fledged law on the protection of whistle blowers. So, it is a good development that this clause has been dropped from right to information law under consideration. CPDI has highlighted, through an Op-Ed in Dawn, this [Needless Delay](#) by federal government in enacting RTI law and urged it to table the bill in the parliament without further delay.

#### **Sindh enacts RTI law:**

Finally Sindh joined Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab by repealing Sindh Freedom of Information Act 2006 and by [enacting Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016](#). CPDI contributed Op-Ed piece '[Right to Know](#)' in Dawn chalking out the future course of action for Sindh government, civil society groups, journalists how to operationalise Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 and the likely pitfalls that may occur on the way.

#### **Appointment of Information Commissioners in Punjab Information Commission:**

Tenure of Chief Information Commissioner, Mr. Mazhar Hussain Minhas and Information Commissioner Mr. Ahmed Raza Tahir ended in March while tenure of Mr. Mukhtar Ahmed Ali will be ending on April 30, 2017. CPDI has urged Punjab government to appoint well reputed information commissioners in Punjab Information Commission in line with the criterion set under the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013 in the story titled [Punjab govt urged to appoint information commissioners](#)

## **RTI in Action**

#### **RTI for investigative reporting:**

Journalists have continued using RTI laws for investigative reporting during the month of March. An interesting story was filed by 'The News' reporter Mr. Sher Ali headlined [Bulletproof vehicles only for vulnerable officials'](#).

#### **Landmark decision of Punjab Information Commission:**

Punjab Information Commission gave a landmark judgment in the month of March when it asked Public Information Officer to not only provide information to the applicant about [salary, perks and privileges of the Chief Justice but also make it available on Lahore High Court web site as well](#). Thanks to this judgment, now citizens know about the salary, perks and privileges of CJ, LHC as reported in a story titled [Hefty pay cheque: Punjab's top judge gets Rs1.05m per month](#).

Furthermore, Punjab Information Commission also [imposed](#) a fine totaling 2 months salary of irrigation department's Faisalabad EXEN (Excavator Division) Abid Rashid for not providing requested information to an applicant despite notices by the commission.

#### **Diplomat tasked to use RTI Law:**

Have you ever heard a diplomat using an RTI law? Well, Ikram Junaidi reported on March 16 that

government has tasked a senior Pakistani diplomat to use US FOI law to seek information from Face Book in a story titled [Interpol help sought to curb blasphemy online](#).

**Transparency and Right to Information Program**

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Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives, Pakistan (CPDI-Pakistan)

Tel: +92 (0) 51-8312794, 8312795

URL: [www.cpd-pakistan.org](http://www.cpd-pakistan.org)