



Centre for Peace and
Development Initiatives

June 2017

CPDI Right to Information Watch

Editorial:

Wither Democratic Norms?

The undue haste with which Senate Committee on Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage approved the Right of Access to Information Bill 2017 leaves much to be desired the way democracy is functioning in the country. On May 15, 2017, federal Information Minister Mariam Aurangzeb moved this bill in the Senate. CPDI analysed this bill on the yardstick of standards of effective right to information legislation and found it wanting in many respects. CPDI shared its recommendations to improve this law with the committee on May 17, 2017 and requested Chairperson to seek input from civil society groups and journalists before finalising this bill but to no avail.

Much has been said and written about this bill but suffice is to say that in its current form this bill will not facilitate citizens in having access to information about matters of public importance. Civil society groups and journalists should make concerted efforts to get this bill improved in the light of CPDI recommendations once it is moved in the lower house of the Parliament.

RTI Legislative Landscape

RTI bill sees light of the day:

As we shared in the last edition that we have witnessed a surge in public pronouncements by the federal Information Minister and it seems that government is going to table right to information bill in the parliament soon. We also shared that over all political climate dictated that government should score some points on transparency. Well, federal government finally [moved RTI bill in Senate on May 15](#), 2017 and its Standing Committee on Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage approved it, without listening to civil society groups and citizens, on [May 30](#), 2017.

It should be noted that CPDI, Coalition on Right to Information and journalists shared their concerns through print and electronic media about this bill. CRTI even held a protest rally on May 19, 2017 against this bill and through press conference, Coalition on Right to Information termed this bill [restrictive and ineffective](#). Umar Cheema, a leading investigative journalist who has been using RTI laws for investigative reporting contributed a story headlined [A law that will ensure secrecy instead of transparency](#).

Nation wrote Editorial titled '[Transparency Foul](#)' and CPDI contributed Op-Ed to Dawn titled '[Legalising Secrecy](#)' but even then Senate Standing Committee on Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage approved this law on May 30, 2017.

Lack of political will in implementing the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013:

Implementation of the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013 seems to be the least of the priorities of Punjab government. With the tenure of members of the Punjab Information Commission over, there is no Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners appointed at Punjab Information Commission. Coalition on Right to Information presented [Charter of Demands](#) to Punjab government to ensure implementation of this law. Civil society groups will have to launch a sustained and concerted campaign to exert pressure on Punjab government to take steps to protect and promote citizens' right to information through proper implementation of the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013. One such step has already been taken as a lawyer has filed a petition in Lahore High Court on the issue of the [delay in the appointment of information commissioners](#).

Sindh has finally an RTI law:

Sindh Assembly approved Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 on March 13, 2017. It took Governor Sindh a month to sign the bill into a law when he finally put his signatures on Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 on April 12, 2017. Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 became law of the land finally when it was published in the official gazette on June 02, 2017.

If experience of Punjab is any guide, civil society groups will have to be vigilant to ensure implementation of Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016.

RTI in Action

Transparency and Judiciary

Superior courts are entrusted to interpret rights of the citizens and at the same time these courts are bound to implement laws of the land within their own sphere of activities. We earlier reported that Lahore High Court shared on the instructions of Punjab Information Commission information about salary, perks and privileges of the judges.

CPDI sought similar information from Peshawar High Court under Section 2 (I) (VIII) which says that any entity that performs public functions is a public body. Peshawar High Court provided this information Peshawar High Court which does not come within the purview of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Act 2013. However, CPDI sought It is heartening to RTI and PTI.

As we have been sharing, PTI has set a trend of filing information requests. We have also maintained that some may question the motives but the fact is that these information requests bring into sharp focus greater level of transparency in the functioning of public bodies and promote the cause of public accountability. This time around, PTI has submitted a request for information to get certified information about the [use of PM office by Mariam Nawaz](#).

Transparency and Right to Information Program

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