



Centre for Peace and
Development Initiatives

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CPDI Right to Information Watch

Editorial:

Beaten Pathways of Accountability and Transparency:

What institutions are reflecting more and more these days is the importance of transparency, [accountability](#) and zero tolerance for corruption. It is evident right from the historical verdict of Supreme Court of Pakistan against the Prime Minister on Panama issue to the argumentation on the Accountability Bill 2017 in Sindh Assembly nowadays. The National Assembly of Pakistan also passed the crucial proposed law '[The Public Interest Disclosure Bill 2017](#)' in August which calls for the protection of persons making public interest disclosures especially in corruption cases alias whistleblowers. The debatable efforts of government to promote transparency and accountability does not end here, the senate of Pakistan on August 22, 2017 passed the much anticipated [Right of Access to Information Bill 2017](#). Right of Access to Information Bill 2017, though celebrated by the government as a great leap towards transparency and two way flow of information between the government and common masses is wistfully still not in harmony with the global RTI practices, which was highlighted by CPDI i.e [RAI Bill 2017 does not provide possible access to Public Records](#). Now the National Assembly might work with Wisdom to reconsider the bill and then make it a government bill.

RTI Legislative Landscape

Seats of Punjab Information Commissioners vacant since April:

The provincial government of most populous province of Pakistan i.e Punjab had enacted Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act in 2013. Despite multifold challenges, with the backing of vigilant Civil Society Organizations, the performance of Punjab Information commission and implementation of RTI law has been laudable. However [Chief Information Commissioner](#) and additional Information Commissioners got retired in March and April this year respectively. Since then, PIC seats of Chief Information Commissioner and two Additional Information Commissioners have been vacant. It shows the lack of commitment of Provincial government that even after 3 months the Information Commissioners are not appointed which in turn is not only delaying the pending adjudication of complaints in the commission but also the flow of information.

Sindh Transparency and Right to Information law up in the air and not implemented:

The provincial government of Sindh had successfully enacted the Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 but [Sindh govt fails to establish information commission within prescribed time](#). The provincial government was supposed to establish commission within 100 days but outstandingly it has been more than 5 months that the government has not taken any measures to implement the law. Chief Minister of Sindh claims its commitment to exercise the law but still not certain that when the law will see light of implementation.

Government celebrating the weak Right of Access to Information Bill as a victory:

The Senate of Pakistan passed the Right of Access to Information Bill 2017 on August 22, 2017 which will repeal the Freedom of Information Ordinance 2002 if and when, approved by the National Assembly of Pakistan. RAI Bill does not lie with the global RTI practices and CPDI has raised concerns, via newspaper articles, protests and letters to legislators that highlighted the flaws in the Bill. But the Information Ministry and Senate turned the Blind eye and passed the Bill without taking input from CSOs, journalists and RTI experts. RAI Bill 2017 is to some extent better and citizen friendly as compare to the prohibitive and weak Freedom of Information Ordinance 2002 but weaker as compare to the RTI laws applicable in Punjab and KP.

RTI in Action

The right of access to information for the public good is massively common in India that more than [60 lac information requests](#) are filed in a year but with the ruling of Supreme Court of India on right to privacy being a fundamental right could leave RTI facing new challenges in India. Whereas current PML-N government of Pakistan that claims zero tolerance for corruption and promotes transparency is still on the alleyway of fundamental right of access to information with the weak FOI 2002. Last month, the Supreme Court of Pakistan removed the PM from office over panama papers case giving the message of accountability of every individual and Institution in power. Since the Right of Access to Information bill is passed in the Senate of Pakistan there is a lot of buzz in the town against the limitations in possible access to information in the bill, Dawn wrote an editorial [RAI Bill: A way out of Darkness. The RAI Bill is weak](#) as compare to provincial RTI laws but effective to some extent as compare to FOI 2002. PTI has a trend of filing information requests and getting information under RTI laws. Now the PAT along with the families of victims of [Model Town Incident](#) have sought inquiry report of the incident from Lahore High Court under RTI law, they claimed that if the information held by the public body is for good then the general public should have access to the report. Lahore High court has sought reply from the provincial departments on question of enquiry report being public.

Transparency and Right to Information Program

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