



Centre for Peace and  
Development Initiatives

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## CPDI Right to Information Watch

### Editorial:

[International Right to Know Day](#) was celebrated on Sep 28 in all over the world. The day is celebrated to promote citizen's fundamental right to know, good governance and transparency and government matters. Interestingly, there was a buzz in the town over international right to know day, many [CSO](#) organized relevant events and many [columnists](#) wrote about the issue in various newspapers. What needs our attention is that Pakistan was the first country in South Asia to legislate Right to information law and is now at the last to implement it according to Global RTI practices. Not many people know about their right, and very few people file information requests. The awareness about RTI in public domain in Pakistan is disappointingly low as compare to India, more than 9 lac information requests are filed in a year and India has now brought the Defence institutions in the purview of RTI. Where countries like Nigeria are taking [Open Government Partnership](#), government of Pakistan needs to rethink its commitment to openness and flow of information. The Punjab Information Commission is under function with the vacant seats at the top, without the information commissioners. KP RTI act is implemented without established rules of business and enactment of Sindh transparency and Right to Information Act seems a sour dream. The right to access to information bill at federal and Balochistan incline us to question ourselves that are we living in a democracy? The RAI Bill under discussion is nothing but a law that [does not provide fullest possible access to information](#).

### RTI Legislative Landscape

#### Appointment of Information Commissioners- Forgotten by Authorities

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, seats of Chief Information Commissioner and two Additional Information Commissioners are vacant. It shows the lack of commitment of Provincial government that even after 4 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.

CPDI recently wrote letter to CM Punjab urging him to appoint Information Commissioners on priority basis.

### **Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 may die in the womb without implementation**

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 6 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 in a Rush to pass RAI Bill 2017**

With elections running close, the federal government is in a rush to pass all the pending bills in the pipeline without the farsightedness and consequences. Right of Access to Information Bill 2017, passed by Senate on August 22, was presented 5 times in the National Assembly of Pakistan but [due to lack of quorum](#), the bill was neither discussed clause by clause nor rejected. However opposition side raised its concerns over the vague language and indemnity clause in the bill. Civil society has repeatedly raised voice against the weak RAI Bill and highlighted the issues i.e 3 different lists of exempted information and the power granted to Minister in charge rather than information Commission. Federal Minister for information, Ms. Marriyum Aurangzeb has said several times that the bill will soon be passed by National Assembly. RAI Bill 2017 is not much different from FOI 2002-not ensuring free flow of information. The National Assembly should revisit the Bill to make it better as Provincial RTI laws or global RTI practices, before making it a law.

## **RTI in Action**

### **Punjab Government not protecting citizen's Right of Access to Baqir Najafi Report: Model Town Incident**

Last month, Pakistani Awami Tehreek (PAT) along with the families of victims of Model Town Incident had sought inquiry report of the Model Town incident from Lahore High Court under RTI law i.e Article 19(A), the Full bench Lahore high court ordered and declared Baqir Najafi report as a public. However Punjab government resorted to [challenge verdict over Najafi report](#) and has taken stay order to disclose the report. Ironically, the tribunal bench that made the baqir najafi report was established by the same Punjab government. The Punjab government says that report has [no legal value](#) and making it public can fan the [sectarian violence](#). These are the pretext used by the Punjab government for not providing access to the report. Paradoxically, the PML-N is in power at federal level that apparently shows commitment to pass 'Right of Access to Information Bill 2017' but not willing to disclose the Baqir Najafi report at provincial level. The day to day hearings will start from the coming month. The opposition parties like [PTI is sure](#) that the provincial government of Punjab will soon be caught over Model Town incident. On the other hand, National Accountability Bureau (NAB) is active over the

reference filed against the ruling party officials and has issued arrest warrants of deposed PM and finance minister. Where the opposition parties claim that NAB is serving the rulers only, NAB chairman says that [NAB is committed to corruption-free Pakistan: chairman](#).

**Transparency and Right to Information Program**

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