



Centre for Peace and
Development Initiatives

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CPDI Right to Information Watch

Editorial:

The PTI led government has gathered all praise for establishing Pakistan Commission on Access to Information. Former governments made several efforts but the final stage is achieved by PTI. Former government had missed the legal six-month deadline to form the commission whereas it was legally bound to establish the commission, which is an appellate forum, within six months of the enactment of law so that citizens could effectively utilise it. However, the government could not fulfil its legal obligation until April 16, 2018. According to the section 18, the prime minister is responsible to establish information commission within six months. Information commissions are oversight bodies responsible for deciding complaints filed by citizens over non-provision of information by the public bodies and spreading awareness about RTI. Not only this, the commission can even penalise a public official for not disclosing the information related to public matters. The subjects of federal government are somehow different than provincial.

The future will disclose whether accountability, openness and transparency will prevail at federal level or not. On the other hand, media houses and proponents of the freedom of expression are claiming that [freedom of press is at the decline in Pakistan](#). Many media houses are at the verge of shutdown and [journalists are losing their jobs at a surprising pace](#).

RTI Legislative Landscape

Call for Amendments in Punjab RTI Law

Fayyaz Ul Hassan Chohan, Provincial Minister for Information and culture had indicated few months back that Punjab government has made a call to bring amendment in Punjab RTI Law. Finally, [Punjab Cabinet has approved the amendment in Punjab Right to Information Act 2018](#). The draft is yet not made public and it is still a question that whether the amendments will empower public or not.

Based on the results derived from [CPDI's report on status of online proactive disclosure in provincial departments](#), CPDI has made a call for improvement in online proactive disclosure and many departmental websites have taken steps to make their web presence more meaningful, by disclosing more information.

Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act, 2016

Provincial government of Sindh had notified Sindh Information Commission in May 2018. The commission is now in place and dealing complaints on daily basis. The commissioners are selected as per criteria mentioned in Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act, 2016. Government has approved budget and the commissioners are working from Sindh Information and Archives Department. However, rules of services and schedule of costs etc are yet to be made.

Implementation of Right of Access to Information Commission

The federal government has established Federal Information Commission, a well celebrated RTI activist sit as a commissioner along with two other commissioners. Quota of three commissioners is completed whereas the government has not passed budget. It is a welcome move by the federal government; however it will be an interesting sight to observe openness and transparency by the federal departments like defence and foreign affairs etc.

CPDI conducted a comprehensive study to gauge status of online proactive disclosure of information by federal ministries and institutions. Along with that, we are also working for the designation of PIOs by writing advocacy letters to federal public authorities

RTI in Action

Currently the federal government and provincial governments of KP, Punjab and Sindh are taking operative measures for the implementation of RTI in Pakistan. We are a strong proponent of proactive disclosure of information and in this substance, 4 reports on the status of online proactive disclosure by public authorities were conducted by CPDI. In the month of November CPDI gauged the online proactive disclosure of information in the federal ministries and institutions. According to the results, the Minister of Finance scored highest 61% and Ministry of Communication scored lowest with only 3%.

A number of CSOs are working for RTI but the shrinking spaces for freedom of expression, media and civil society is nothing but a pockmark on democracy and right to information in Pakistan.

Transparency and Right to Information Program

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