

Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Minister of State for Personnel, Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. The Central Information Commission has given me the duty to propose 'vote of thanks' to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. It is my privilege to do so.

3. Hon'ble Prime Minister, Sir, I must heartily thank you on behalf of the Central Information Commission as also on my own behalf, to have spared some time for us this morning, from your extremely busy schedule. You have always been a source of strength and inspiration for the Central Information Commission and, for that matter, for the State Information Commissions also, ever since the Commissions were constituted consequent upon the operation of RTI Act, 2005. This is reflected in the fact that we had the benefit of your guidance in the 1st and the 3rd Annual Conventions held in 2006 and 2008 respectively. Your presence amidst us today further proves this point.

4. The Right to Information is a cherished right. The Supreme Court of India in one of its latest judgments has said that Right to Information is intended to be a formidable tool in the hands of responsible citizens to fight corruption and to bring in transparency and accountability in the functioning of public authorities. However, this law also provides for preservation of confidentiality of sensitive information. It is the paramount task of the Central Information Commission and the State Information Commissions to strike a balance between the need to disclose information, and at the same time, to disallow information which may adversely affect the national security or the efficiency of administrative machinery. This is what the Commissions endeavour to do.

5. Sir, the RTI Act is a revolutionary law for the empowerment of people for which your Government, in general, and, you, in particular, can take legitimate credit and pride. It is said that in modern society, information is power. The general impression is that this law has largely succeeded in empowering the people of India. However, firm empirical evidence on this point is yet to be collected. It, however, needs to be kept in mind that it cannot be converted into a tool of oppression or intimidation of honest officials striving to do their duty. The Commission have to always keep this in mind.

6. This law has placed a heavy burden on the enforcement agencies, including the Commissions. The figures are mind boggling. It has adversely affected the quality of Information supplied and also resulted in delays in disposals. This is not a happy situation and calls for remedial measures. The solution lies in the law itself, in the form of voluntary disclosures. More the voluntary disclosures, the lesser the demand for information and, therefore, lesser the burden on the CPIOs and the Appellate Authorities. Progress in this area, however, is not encouraging. What is called for is preparation of detailed Templates for different classes of public authorities. The Administrative Ministry has to take a lead in the matter, rather than leaving the entire matter to the whims and fancies of the public authorities.

7. I also thank the Hon'ble Minister of State for Personnel for being with us this morning. He has always been a source of support and strength for us.

8. The Secretary, Deptt. of Personnel and Training, also deserves propose thanks for her presence and being always helpful to the Commission.

9. Most of all, I would like to thank you all, Ladies & Gentlemen, who have travelled from different parts of the country to participate in the deliberations that follow for more efficacious servicing of the RTI Act and for fine-tuning the functioning of the Commissions.

10. I also thank the RTI practitioners present here. I am sure, their field experience will enrich the proceedings of the Technical Sessions.

Thank you all once again.