

Press Release

12.10.09

The first day of fourth Annual convention of the Central Information Commission commenced with the inaugural by hounourable President of India. Sri Prthviraj Chavan, Honourable Minister of State for personnel, public grievances and pension, Sri Wajahat Habibullah, Chief Information Commissioner, Sri Satyanand Mishra, Information Commissioner and Sri Shantanu Consul, Secretary Personnel were present on the dais.

Sri Wajahat Habibullah while welcoming the guests stated that it is great pleasure for the commission to have with it honourable president for the inaugural session. The commission takes pride in sharing with the gathering its efforts in implementing the RTI Act as the adjudicator for four years. The convention like this provides for an opportunity to discuss the matters of concern with all the stakeholders.

Sri Prthviraj Chavan, Honourable Minister congratulated the Commission in creating such a platform whereby all the stakeholders discuss the areas of the concern in the implementation of the RTI Act. He further informed the gathering at the DRDO bhawan that the government is keen to strengthen the Right to Information.

Smt Pratibha Devisingh Patil, Honourable President in her speech observed that the Right to Information Act has the potential to make Government and the people work together for the benefit of both. The occasionally noticed tendency to view public authorities as adversaries should go. There is a fine balance

which needs to be maintained between applications under the Right to Information to public authorities and also ensuring that public authorities are not flooded with applications some of them of frivolous nature, which could overwhelm their ability to respond in time. Therefore, there is a need for a sense of responsibility for more openness on the part of public authorities as also within civil society to ensure that applications which reach authorities are those that genuinely need immediate attention. It is here that the role of the Central Information Commission, as a regulator, balancer and educator, is critical. She concluded with good wishes for the Convention.

Vote of thanks was delivered by Sri Satyanand Mishra, Information Commissioner at the end.

The keynote address was delivered by Lord Meghnad Desai. Lord Desai made opening remarks with congratulating the government to have enacted such legislation in which a citizen can question the agencies of the government. He further stated that the right to information strengthens the roots of democracy in India.

The first technical session of the day was chaired by Prof M M Ansari, Central Information Commissioner along with three speakers- Sri CD Arha, state chief information commissioner, Andhra Pradesh, Sri S K Sarkar, Joint Secretary, DoPT and Sri Shekhar Singh, NCPRI. The session focused on the outcomes of the study reports conducted by three various groups. Sri Sarkar and Sri Singh presented their study reports and concluded that there is not much contradictions in the findings of both the

studies even though there were different sample sizes. Sri Singh's report recommended for greater awareness towards the RTI Act.

The second technical session of the day was chaired by Ms Medha Patkar. The other speakers of the session were Prof M M Ansari, Central Information Commissioner, Sri Shailesh Gandhi, Central Information Commissioner, Sri Jairaj Phatak, Municipal Commissioner, MCGM, Mumbai, Sri Niten Chandra (representing Smt Rita Sharma, Secretary, MoRD) and Sri Pankaj K P Shreyaskar, Deputy Secretary, CIC.

Ms Medha Patkar while making opening remarks stated that proactive disclosures by the Public Authorities are the pre cursor to good governance. It is indeed a matter of great concern that the important and meaningful information be placed in public domain by all the P A s making use of all the mediums and merely through the website.

Prof Ansari and Sri Shreyaskar presented a study on the transparency, accountability and least corruption index of the central Public Authorities. Sri Gandhi presented a kind of status report on the compliance of section 4 by the Delhi Government. Sri Phatak gave a crisp presentation on how the MCGM maintains their proactive disclosures. Sri Chandra gave the perspectives on the efforts of the Ministry of Rural Development in regard to their schemes.