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Vice President inaugurates 12th Annual Convention of Central Information Commission

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For the first time all vacancies of Information Commissioners filled by the Government: MoS Dr Jitendra Singh

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu inaugurated the 12th Annual Convention of Central Information Commission (CIC), here today.

While delivering the inaugural address, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that the information has to be given in a language which is understandable to everyone, especially the one who applies for it. He said that the Right to Information has seen a massive increase in acceptance across the globe in the past twenty years. He further said that Right to Information enables greater Government accountability, facilitates the citizens' participation and lends transparency to Government functioning. It leads to a fundamental change in relations between the citizens and the Government, he added.

The Vice President said that sharing of information and creation of a transparent governance structure accountable to the people of our country are key pillars of democracy. He further said that transparency and accountability are the two key elements for the success of democracy. We need to convert Swarajya in to Surajya and the fruits of the development should reach everyone, he added.

Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu said that enhanced access to credible information makes our democracy more progressive, participatory and meaningful. According to Kautilya, good governance is aimed at fulfilling the welfare of the people; 'In the happiness of the king's subjects lies his happiness, in their welfare, his welfare', he added.

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Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu said that early disposal by the Information Commissions will help citizens get their grievances redressed quickly and encouraged all the Commissions to make a concerted, sincere effort towards speeding up disposal of cases registered with them. The Central and State Information Commissions are a bridge between Public Authorities and the citizens, he added.

Addressing at the inaugural session, the Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Development of North-Eastern Region (DoNER), MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh said that the focus of the Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has been on 'minimum government, maximum governance'. He emphasized upon the transparency, accountability, in-time delivery in the Government. He said that the Government has adopted two-pronged strategy including zero-tolerance towards corruption and providing adequate protection to those who are performing their task with integrity and high degree of excellence.

Dr Jitendra Singh said that for the first time, all vacancies of Information Commissioners have been filled by the Government. He also ensured all support to the functioning of the Commission. He said that now RTI online portal has been launched and RTI can be filed from anywhere in the world. He said that number of RTI requests online has increased from about 87,830 in the year 2014 to 2,68,920 in the year 2016-17. Dr Jitendra Singh said that the number of grievances lodged by people has increased 5 fold in the recent years, from 1.5-2 lakh grievances in the year 2014 to 11 lakh grievances now. He said that this increase is due to the quick response given by the Government to the grievances. He said that Government has been more responsive, more prompt and citizen-centric. He also said that the pendency of the cases has also been reduced by the Commission in the recent years.

The Minister said that a mechanism should be devised to reduce the pendency. Most of the information is now available in the public domain, he added. He said that the Government has also changed the whole focus of 'Civil Services Day' being observed every year. He said that now the District Collectors are being involved in the 'Civil Services Day' and this year 599 districts participated in it. He said that the Government is open to strengthen the legislations. He further said that the focus of the Government is on: Zero tolerance to corruption and non-performance, maximum transparency, citizen-centricity and benefitting the last man in the queue.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Information Commissioner, Shri R. K. Mathur said that the annual convention is an occasion to do a stocktaking of what we have done in the previous year and what needs to be done. He said that the Commission had about 26,000 cases pending as on 31.03.2017 as compared to about 35,000 pending cases as on April 01, 2016. He said that the Commission has converted to a paperless system. He also spoke on other initiatives of the CIC i.e. video-conferencing and facilitation desk among others. He said that more than 3,500 queries have been answered by CIC through facilitation desk. In the year 2016-17, the CIC conducted about 15,000 video conferences, he added. He informed that this convention followed two seminars held in May and July this year, to discuss 'Implementation of the Right to Information Act 2005' and 'Land Records and RTI Act' respectively.

During the convention, three subjects namely 'Suo-motu disclosures', 'Record keeping' and 'Emerging issues in implementation of RTI Act' were also discussed.

The first Session on **Suo-motu disclosures** was chaired by Shri Bimal Julka, Central Information Commissioner. The first speaker, Shri Devesh Chaturvedi, Joint Secretary, Department of Personnel and Training set the parameters for the discussion on suo-motu disclosures. Shri Lal Duhthlana Ralte, State Chief Information Commissioner, Mizoram gave a presentation on suo-motu disclosures in Mizoram under the RTI Act. Shri Nikhil Dey centered his deliberation on proactive disclosures- 'Towards Janta Information Systems'. Shri K. Govindarajulu, Joint Secretary, Institute of Secretariat Training and Management brought out observations of the Institute during their study of Public Authorities, Suo-motu disclosures and obligations of Public Authorities under Section 4 of the RTI Act. Shri Venkatesh Nayak talked about proactive Information Disclosure and gave instances of good practices and incentivizing compliance. Shri R.K Jain focused on options for enforcement of Section 4 of the RTI Act. Ms Amrita Johri highlighted the significance of proactive disclosures in improving social welfare programmes, elaborating on a study of Fair Price Shops disclosures.

The next session on **Record Keeping** was chaired by Shri Sudhir Bhargava, Central Information Commissioner. This session started with a presentation by Ms Smita Kumar, Joint Secretary, Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances highlighting Record Retention Schedule- Right to Information and obligations of Public Authorities. Shri B. Banerjee, Chief Information Commissioner, West Bengal presented an overview of Record Keeping rules and practices as well as areas that need to be addressed. Shri Syed Farid Ahmad, Assistant Director, National Archives of India talked about Public Records Act, 1993 and the RTI Act, 2005. Dr. Surinder Kumar, Senior Technical Director, NIC highlighted the aspect of digital preservation of electronic records. Shri Shishir Chand presented a case study on Record Keeping and Right to Information Act, 2005. Dr Kalyan Bhattacharjee focused on Record Keeping at IIT, Delhi- a case study. Shri Amresh Jha and Shri Aman Vats talked about using Open Government Data for Integrated Environment Notification System: Meta-Analysis of Initiatives in India.

The last session on **Emerging issues in the implementation of the RTI Act** was chaired by Shri Amitava Bhattacharya, Central Information Commissioner. Shri V.S Gadhavi, State Chief Information Commissioner, Gujarat gave his views on the requirements under the RTI Act and implementation issues. Shri Vinson M Paul, Kerala State Chief Information Commissioner talked about the experience of Kerala in implementation of the RTI Act. Shri Khurshid Ahmad Ganai, J&K State Chief Information Commissioner spoke on emerging issues in the implementation of RTI Act in the State. Shri Suresh Chowdhary, Rajasthan State Chief Information Commissioner highlighted the issues in implementation of RTI Act- Rajasthan experience. Shri Shyam Lal Yadav, Senior editor, The Indian Express presented a perspective on investigative reporting through RTI. Shri Ram Nath Jha, Executive Director, Transparency International India discussed the emerging issues in the implementation of the RTI Act- A structural Review. Shri Sanjeev Narula, Advocate, Delhi High Court focused on the issues arising in execution of orders passed by the Commission: A big challenge facing the Right to Information Act,

2005. Shri Shiv Om Prakash presented a case study of Website Management & Non-Compliance of CIC decisions in respect of Public Authority. Shri Kush Kalra, Advocate, High Court and Ms Sunaina Mishra, Assistant Professor of Law discussed about issues in the implementation of RTI Act.

The Secretary, DoPT Shri Ajay Mittal was also present during the Inaugural Session.

The Information Commissioners, former Chief Information Commissioners, former Information Commissioners, State Information Commissioners, representatives from various Ministries and stakeholders of RTI also attended the convention.

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