

Third Annual Convention on 3rd & 4th Nov.

(The PM exhorts for better ‘information house-keeping’ and voluntary disclosure enhancement)

Third Annual Convention of the Central Information Commission was inaugurated by Dr. Manmohan Singh Hon’ble Prime Minister of India. Amongst others present were Shri Prithvi Raj Chavan, Minister of State, Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions. Shri Wajahat Habibullah, Chief Information Commissioner, Shri A. N. Tiwari, Central Information Commissioner, Shri Rahul Sarin, Secretary, Department of Personnel Training, Govt. of India.

Fourteen State Chief Information Commissioners, 54 State Information Commissioners and five Secretaries of SICs also attended the Convention. The representatives of the Civil Society, Media and five Delegates of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangla Desh and Nepal were present from SAARC Countries.

While welcoming the distinguished guests Mr. Wajaht Habibullah, stated that the opportunity of the annual convention will be utilized in assessing how far we have gone in the implementation of this revolutionary Act which was aimed to empower the common man. He further informed the gathering that a national sub-committee of Central Information Commission on implementation of Right to Information Act was setup during the convention of 2007. The said sub-committee submitted its report on 30th July 2008. The sub Committee has made some very important recommendations like identifying the major obstacles in flow of information and outlining ways and measures for removing them for facility of the public. Documentation and dissemination of best practices in India and abroad and creation of e-enable common portal for Information Commissions were other recommendations. The Committee hopes that there is a concerted attempts made by the Central Government and the State Governments to implement the Right to Information Act, 2005 in true letter and spirit.

While inaugurating the Convention, Hon’ble Prime Minister Dr. Singh complimented the Central Information Commission for bringing all the Information Commissions along with South Asian Countries together. He added further that regional cooperation in South Asia can acquire a new

meaning if we agree to share our experiences in processes of governance and learn from each other. He hoped that this Convention will promote greater mutual understanding of processors of governance in our region. The Prime Minister noted that this transition from a tradition of secrecy in official matters has of course not been easy. It has involved not only the setting up of an appropriate institutional mechanism but also a change in the mind set of public servants.

The PM observed further that he have been told that, in comparison to the first year, in the second year, the number of requests that were rejected has come down by more than 4%. The measure of success in empowering citizens with information, however, should not be limited to the reduction in the number of rejection of requests by public authorities. There must be enhancement in the quality of voluntary disclosure so that information seekers are not required to join long queues. Public authorities in our country have still to go a long distance in proactive disclosures. They must endeavour to voluntarily put out in the public domain information of use to our citizens. This will be a major challenge for public authorities in the arena of information house-keeping. By improvement in data management practices and by computerization of records and work flows the time may not be far off when citizens may locate on their own the status of their requests in the workflow artery of public authorities. The PM further observed that this has been integrated into government plan of e-governance calling for computerization of all Central Government organizations.

The PM also cautioned that we need to strike a balance between the need for disclosure of information and the limited time and resources available with the public authorities. Also, vexatious demands should not be allowed to deprive genuine information seekers of their legitimate claims on limited public resources.

First technical session on RTI and transparent Governance started at 11:30 A.M. This session was chaired by Shri A. N. Tiwari, Central Information Commissioner. The other speakers of the session were Prof. Madhu Kishwar, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Mr. Parth Shah, President, Centre for Civil Society, Mr. D. K. Daschaudhuri, SIC, State Information Commission, Tripura, Dr. P. K. Mohanty, JS, Ministry of Urban Development.

The speakers of this session emphasized on the importance and sweep of the pro-active disclosures as mandated under section 4 of Right to Information Act. They also elaborated on the use of RTI and its influence on the service delivery mechanism. Dr. Mohanty impressed upon that the Right to Information Act is one of the constituents of the good governance. While concluding the session Shri A. N. Tiwari, quoted Prof. Amartya Sen and illustrated as to how the freedom of the information is complementary to the political and social freedom. He finally concluded by stating that the Central Information Commission and the State Information Commissions can make the delivery mechanism far more workable by enforcing of section 19(8)(a).

The President of India sent greetings and facilitations to all those associated with the Commission and wished the Convention every success.