

National Convention on Right to Information

October 13 to 15, 2006

The Central Information Commission organized the National Convention on Right to Information on completion of one year of its enforcement at Vighyan Bhavan, New Delhi. His Excellency The President of India, Dr.A.P.J. Abdul Kalam inaugurated the Convention. The President stated in the inaugural address:

"Good governance is being recognized as an important goal by many countries across the world. They have taken up specific initiatives for open government. Freedom of information is being redefined and supported by detailed guidelines. The Internet revolution has proved to be a powerful tool for good governance initiatives and the world is moving towards Internet governance...Can we provide good governance to our one billion people? Can the governance speed up the delivery system? Can this be done by e-governance at a cost affordable by our nation? E-governance system is a means to an end. We need enlightened citizens to realize the full benefits of the e-governance systems...I inaugurate the National Convention on Right to Information and my best wishes to all the participants for success in the mission of promoting India as the most informed and participative society in the World."

On the second day participants broke into groups to discuss panel issues in three halls of Vighyan Bhavan.

Panel presentations were followed by 'Citizen Speak', where many of the participants were allowed to express their views.

Activists from all over the nation discussed various problems in implementation of the Act and passed the following Resolutions at the National Convention :

1. The Governments must provide required resources, facilities, funding and personnel to the Information Commissions to be able to implement the Right To Information Act.
2. All Public Authorities must fulfill the requirements of Section 4, and a compliance report should be submitted to the appropriate Information Commissions before 1 January, 2007.
3. The Government must give an undertaking publicly that no changes will be made in the RTI Act until October, 2008.

4. Commissions must give an opportunity for a personal hearing to appellants and complainants.
5. Commissions should go by the letter and spirit of the law, ensuring that all denials of information are only as per the exemptions listed in the Act.
6. The Governments must ensure a common name in whose favour the application fees can be made by demand drafts or postal orders, and increase the modes of payment of these fees.

Finally the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in his Valedictory Address at the National Convention on 15 October, 2006 stated:

"...[I]t has become clear that the citizens of our country have owned this Act with their arms wide open. This has become, if anything, a "Peoples' Law." The implementation of RTI Act is, therefore, an important milestone in our quest for building an enlightened and at the same time, a prosperous society. We must guard against the growth of professional middlemen in the use of this Act as seen in some other countries.... right to information is not a substitute for good governance. It has to support and aid the process of good governance. The Act has been a matter of pride for the UPA Government. It was a commitment we made to our people. Therefore, we are - as, if not more, interested in its abiding success."

-Srinivas Madhav
Consultant
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