



# Information has to be given in a language which is understandable to everyone: Vice President Inaugurates 12th Annual Convention of Central Information Commission

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The Vice President of India, 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 was addressing the gathering after inaugurating the 12th Annual Convention of Central Information Commission, here today. The Minister of State for Development of North Eastern Region (I/C), Prime Minister's Office, Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr. Jitendra Singh, the Chief Information Commissioner, Shri Radha Krishna Mathur and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

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.

The Vice President 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.

The Vice President 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 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.

In a lighter note, the Vice President said that the country and all the political parties should think over the need to have simultaneous elections so that the attention can be focussed on the development of the nation.

Following is the text of Vice President's address :

"I am happy to be here today with all of you on the occasion of the 12th Annual Convention of the Central Information Commission marking the 12th Anniversary of the enactment of the Right to Information Act.

The country and all the political parties should think over the need to have simultaneous elections so that the attention can be focussed on the development of the nation.

Sharing of information and creation of a transparent governance structure accountable to the people of our country are key pillars of democracy. 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. Information can be empowering if it is authentic. If it comes from a non-credible source it can have negative consequences. Lack of information can lead to rumour mongering or disinformation campaigns. The enactment of the Right to Information Act in the year 2005 and even before that, passing of the Freedom of Information Act in the year 2002, was a watershed in the democratic march of our country. Indeed, the adoption of the citizens' Right to Information has enabled each citizen to be better informed and more actively participate in the governance of the country. This enhanced access to credible information makes our democracy more progressive, participatory and meaningful. Citizens now have confirmation that the information is authentic. This can be potential 'ammunition' to fight injustice and cleanse the polity.

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'. From this thought springs the idea that people are necessary participants in creation of systems for governance. Kautilya's Arthashastra talks of a free flow of communication between the King and his subjects. One of the nine types of Royal Edicts is 'Response' – a reply prepared after the king has read and discussed a communication received.

However, a law giving individuals the right to access information held by public bodies did not come in a formal shape till 1766 when Sweden became the first country in the world to adopt such a law. This was followed after nearly two centuries by Finland which adopted such a law in 1951.

By 1995, there were only 19 countries with an RTI law. However, the increased acceptance of democratic processes the world over has led to a much faster rate of adoption of Right to Information. It is significant to note that even those countries which are not formally democratic in structure have come up with some form of Right to Information. For a nation which has adopted democracy as a political system the Right to Information is even more of an imperative.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises Right to Information as a human right. The Right to Information is now guaranteed as a Fundamental Right by the Constitution of about 60 countries. The idea behind RTI is that Governments hold information not for themselves but on behalf of wider public.

The Right to Information has seen a massive increase in acceptance across the globe in the past twenty years. The number of countries which have adopted such a law has increased to nearly a hundred.

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. In India, a sea change can be seen in the systems of governance and the attitude of Government agencies since adoption of the Right to Information Act. Also a clear attitudinal change is visible in Public Authorities dealing with matters concerning public services and citizens' expectations.

It is also seen that citizens' expectations have changed in the past decade and more. From a once in a five years exercise of electoral choice, the citizen now expects to be regularly consulted in matters directly concerning him. The RTI Act adopted by India in 2005 fully recognises this by making it mandatory for the Central and State Governments to not only make available certain specified information suo motu to the public but also to publish all relevant facts while formulating important policies or announcing decisions which affect public. Administrative Authorities are also required to provide reasons for administrative or quasi judicial decisions to affected persons.

When the Chief Information Commissioner Shri Radha Krishna Mathur came to invite me to inaugurate this Convention, he informed me that such Conventions have been held right from 2006. The Conventions have attracted enthusiastic participation from the State Information Commissioners, Public Authorities, students, researchers, civil society representatives and the media. Today, I see an impressive gathering of persons interested in taking this movement forward.

Shri Mathur has further informed me that the Central Information Commission has been holding its Annual Conventions with different themes to discuss issues that arise in implementation of the RTI Act. From the inception, the Commission has discussed diverse topics such as the need for maximum suo-motu disclosures, promotion of Open Government, enforcement of the orders of the Commissions and penal clauses in case of non- compliance of orders, need for a strategy specific to rural areas, role of media and civil society in promoting RTI, role of political leadership, RTI and Public Private Partnership Projects etc. The Conventions have also concentrated on taking stock of implementation of the RTI Act across the country.

I see that after the last convention held in November 2016, the CIC has increased the frequency of interactions with all stakeholders on subjects of interest. This has taken the form of seminars held from time to time on the implementation of the Right to Information in general and in particular in certain important sectors. An example is the seminar on Land Records. This is a crucial sector, where the condition of records and their accessibility is critical to elimination of corruption at the cutting edge. This sector also contributes to a major portion of civil and criminal litigation in the country. I am sure that recommendations that had been made in this seminar shall help in addressing critical issues facing this sector. Information has to be given in a language which is understandable to everyone.

I am also happy to hear from the CIC that the Commission is working towards bringing down the pendency of cases filed before it to within 6 months of registration. An early disposal by the Information Commissions will help citizens get their grievances redressed quickly. I would encourage all the Commissions to make a concerted, sincere effort towards speeding up disposal of cases registered with them. They must ensure timely and correct information for the citizens.

The Central and State Information Commissions are a bridge between Public Authorities and the citizens. I would like them to participate in the public discourse on transparency and RTI related issues. More importantly, they should give advice to Public Authorities to improve their processes and procedures for decision making. This would lead to systemic improvements, leading to lesser number of RTI requests being generated. I would suggest that the Commissions and Public Authorities should take up such an exercise regularly.

It is in this context that I am especially pleased to note that today also the subjects for the Convention have been chosen carefully for discussions on 'Suo Motu Disclosures', 'Record Keeping' and 'Emerging Issues in Implementation of the Right to Information'. I hope that all the participants will find these discussions most productive and contribute to evolution of better transparency and accountability levels.

I have great pleasure in inaugurating the Convention and wish all participants success in the deliberations. Media has an important role to play in the success of parliamentary democracy. Parliament has a role, politicians have a role, political parties have a role and media has also an important role. People should get information. The success of parliamentary democracy lies in information flow. I hope the discussions will come up with substantive recommendations which will help further advance the cause of Right to Information in our country.

**Jai Hind!"**

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KSD/BK

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