

Press Release



Federal Government Officers Trained on the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017

Islamabad, March 04, 2024: The Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) and the Pakistan Information Commission conducted a one-day training session for the Public Information Officers (PIOs) to fully equip them with their roles and responsibilities under the RAI Act, 2017. The act ensures every citizen's right to access information held by government departments, with officials serving as its custodians.

Mr. Shoab Ahmad Siddiqui, Chief Information Commissioner of the Pakistan Information Commission, inaugurated the session with a strong commitment to upholding the Federal RTI law. He emphasized the crucial role of designated officials as the primary source of information for citizens, underscoring the necessity of enhancing their capacity. Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, Executive Director of CPDI and former Information Commissioner at Punjab Information Commission emphasized the pivotal role of RTI as the touchstone of other fundamental human rights. He traced its historical significance and international recognition, citing Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Open Government Partnership, article 16.10 of Sustainable Development Goals and Article 19-A of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Emphasizing Pakistan's legislative landscape, he noted the absence of effective RTI laws in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan, while highlighting the salient features of the Federal RTI Act. In addition, significance of information for the resolution of service delivery issues was also discussed in detail.

Mr. Muhammad Azam, Former Chief Information Commissioner of the Pakistan Information Commission, led a comprehensive session on the significance of proactive disclosure under the act. Section 5 of the act was thoroughly defined, urging PIOs to proactively disclose information via websites to streamline processes, reduce workload, and better serve the public. He shared that out of 40 ministries and departments, only 15% have uploaded 50% of the required information on their

websites. Meanwhile, Mr. Zahid Abdullah, former Information Commissioner, and rights activist, emphasized the crucial aspect of information accessibility and highlighted the challenges faced by the blind individuals in exercising their right of access to information. He also raised demand that the websites of the government departments should be accessible for the person with disabilities.

Representatives from 32 Federal Government departments and Ministries were enthusiastically engaged in the training, committing to facilitate the information disclosures in their capacities through the implementation of RAI Act, 2017. Expert sessions, led by former and current information commissioners, covered the powers and functions of the commission, filing procedures for information requests, and common pitfalls that may hinder timely responses to the citizens. Participants at the end believed that transitioning from the culture of secrecy to transparency is imperative for better governance and transparency leading to a vibrant and democratic Pakistan.

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