

COMMENT

R i g h t T o (D i s) I n f o r m a t i o n

People in this country simply do not know how to get information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. They face difficulty in filing RTI applications at block and district levels. Even though three years have passed since the enactment of the RTI Act, the authorities in almost all states look passive to execute the Act. The State Information Commissions (SICs) are said to be the main bottleneck in the implementation of the Act. A study conducted by the Society of Participatory Research in Asia across 10 states in early 2008 suggests that SICs in Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala have very poor disposal rates of appeals and complaints. Also things are equally dismal in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal.

Not happy with the working of various information commissions in the country three years after the promulgation of the Right to Information act, RTI activists throughout the country have now decided to launch a 'Save RTI' campaign.

"There are increasing pendency of cases in the Information Commissions. The condition has become so bad that if one files an RTI today chances are that it will come to hearing two years later. ...the information which is not provided on time has no meaning."

Leading RTI activist Arvind Kejriwal recently alleged at a press meet that the attitude of the people, who are supposed to solve the problems, is not encouraging for the RTI Act. A meeting of leading RTI activists was held in New Delhi recently where more than 150 activists from 21 states participated. They are planning to take their 'Save RTI' campaign to the public directly. Because that is the only way to get things done.

The activists feel that despite the clause of penalty in the Act, most commissions refrain from giving penalties to the faulty Public Information Officers (PIOs) which encourages them to hold back relevant information from the public.

"Central Information Commission (CC) has passed an order barring the employees from filing RTI application in their own department whereas Kerala Information Commission has passed an order saying the ministries do not come under the purview of the act. All these judgements are anti-RTI," according to Mr Kejriwal.

Laws are fine so long as they remain on paper. They are paper tigers. Laws are made not for implementation. The persons in authority do not want to see people get right information as it would affect their vested interests. If RTI Act remains in the main an area of public litigation crusaders they have nothing to lose because only mass awareness will create trouble for them. □□□