

Seminar on “Right to Information Act” on 17.11.2006 at Haryana New Secretariat, Chandigarh.

Haryana Institute of Public Administration (HIPA) in association with IC Centre for Governance organized a Seminar on Right to Information on 17.11.2006 in the Conference Hall of New Secretariat at Chandigarh. The seminar was attended by a large number of officers from various departments, representatives from NGOs and academia. The objective of the seminar was not only to create awareness about right to Information (RTI) Act but to deliberate a number of issues relating to the implementation of the Act.

The Seminar was addressed by a galaxy of eminent persons, which included Mr.G.Madhavan, Chief Information Commissioner, Haryana, Mrs.Meenaxi Anand Chaudhry, State Information Commissioner, Mr.Prabhat Kumar, Former Cabinet Secretary, Government of India, Mr.C.L.Kaw, Former Chairman, Railway Board, Mr.Shanti Narain, Former Member (Traffic) Railway Board and Mr.Mahesh Kapoor, Former Adviser, Planning Commission and Ms.Suchi Pandey from Parivartan.

Dr.Prasanna Kumar, Director General, HIPA welcomed the gathering and emphasized that the RTI Act is an important instrument and it needs to effectively implemented. Dr.Suresh Misra, Professor and Head, Public Administration, HIPA made a presentation on Capacity Building in RTI and the role of HIPA.

Mrs.Meenaxi Anand Chaudhry, State Information Commissioner gave a brief account of the significance of the Act in good governance and the need to ensure that the benefit of RTI Act, reaches the citizens. She laid particular stress on management of records by public authorities and the need to ensure that the Govt. instructions of various departments on the subject of weeding out of records are in conformity with the provisions of the RTI Act. She expressed the hope that as has been done by the Education Department of Haryana other departments will also prepare programmes and take advantage of the Govt. of India scheme which provides assistance for updating records. She pointed out that in spite of the completion of one year of the enactment most of the departments and public authorities are yet to publish manuals by way of proactive disclosure under Section-4 of the Act. She hoped that the Govt. will attach due importance to this subject and the departments will comply with its provisions within a couple of months so that all basic information is made available to the citizens.

Sh.G.Madhavan, Chief Information Commissioner, Haryana gave an account of the level of awareness of the RTI Act and the nature of complaints/appeals received by the Commission. He drew attention to the fact that majority of the

complaints/appeals are originating from the urban areas and are also confined to a few departments/ public authorities. There was an urgent need to create greater awareness especially in rural areas and he called upon the NGOs to arrange interactive seminars at the local level. He emphasized that creating awareness can not be the sole responsibility of the State Govt. and all the stakeholders including the State Information Commission, NGOs and as well as civil right groups should come together for this purpose. He informed those present that the State Information Commission Haryana has been holding public hearings in every case and does not close a case formally unless information to the satisfaction of the complainant/appellant is provided by the Public Authority. He further pointed out that even though no time limit has been prescribed under the Act for disposal of complaints/appeals by the State Information Commission, every effort is being made to dispose off these cases within a maximum period of 3 months. He further informed that the commission has launched its own exclusive website www.cicharyana.gov.in which has become functional and will provide all relevant information including the status of cases fixed for hearing before the Commission, cause list, interim as well as final orders passed by the Commission as well as various circulars, instructions issued from time to time on the implementation of the RTI Act, 2005. He hoped that the website will prove useful to the citizens in providing information on the activities of the Commission and other matters connected to the RTI Act, 2005.

Mr.Prabhat Kumar, Former Cabinet Secretary, GOI emphasized the need to promote transparency in Governance. Effective implementation of the Act will enhance the credibility and image of the civil services. According to him records management and information management are the two important areas that need to be taken care of. He concluded by saying that RTI is a Common Cause and a shared responsibility between the Government and the Citizen.

During the interaction session a large number of NGOs from various districts of Haryana gave an account of their activities relating to RTI. The seminar provided a platform for these organizations to interact with various departments and also the Haryana State Information Commission. The Seminar concluded with a message that it is a time to move from a culture of secrecy to a culture of transparency and promote awareness about the Act, particularly in the rural areas.