

Right to Information Act in India

Right to Information (RTI) is an Act of the Parliament of India to provide for setting out the practical regime of the right to information for citizens and replaces the erstwhile Freedom of information Act, 2002. Under the provisions of the Act, any citizen of India may request information from a "public authority" (a body of Government or "instrumentality of State") which is required to reply expeditiously or within thirty days. The Act also requires every public authority to computerize their records for wide dissemination and to proactively certain categories of information so that the citizens need minimum recourse to request for information formally. Information disclosure in India is restricted by the Official Secrets Act 1923 and various other special laws, which the new RTI Act relaxes. Right to Information codifies a fundamental right of the citizens of India.

Early Days of RTI:

Right to Information Act was passed by Parliament on 15 June 2005 and came fully into force on 12 October 2005. The first RTI application was filed at a police station in Pune by Shahid Raza Burney. The first RTI application in Delhi was filed to the office of President about article 370 in Jammu & Kashmir. Every day, over 4800 RTI applications are filed. In the first ten years of the commencement of the act over 17,500,000 applications have been filed.

Governance and Process

The Right to information in India is governed by two major bodies:

- Central Information Commission (CIC) – Chief Information commissioner who heads all the central departments and ministries- with their own public Information officers (PIO)s. CICs are directly under the President of India.
- State Information Commissions-State Public Information Officers or SPIOs – Heading over all the state department and ministries the SPIO office is directly under the State Governor.

State and Central Information Commissions are independent bodies and Central Information Commission has no jurisdiction over the State Information Commission.

Departments are exempted from the Act:

Twenty-odd organisations are exempted from RTI. But all these entities are related to the country's defense and intelligence, such as RAW, BSF, CRPF, CISF, Intelligence Bureau, National Security Guard etc.

Fees:

For central government departments one needs to pay Rs. 10 with every RTI application. Mode of payment may vary from government to government. While submitting application in person, some organisations accept cash while some do not. Some ask for Court Fee Stamp, some ask for Indian postal order (IPO). When sending an RTI application by post, we can use IPO/ court fee stamp of Rs. 10.

Those below poverty line (BPL) do not have to pay Rs. 10 as fee for filing an RTI.

RTI for Personal Issues:

Be it never-ending delay in dispatch of passport or police dilly-dallying in giving you a **copy of FIR** you might have filed, submit an RTI application asking pointed questions.

- Pending Income Tax return
- Delayed PF withdrawal
- Delayed PF Transfer
- Delayed Passport
- Delayed Aadhar card
- Delayed IRCTC Refund
- Copies of answer sheets
- Property Documents like Occupancy Certificate/Completion Certificate
- Status of FIR
- Status of a complaint
- Status of EPF
- Delay in Scholarship

Social Problems can be solved using RTI

- Fix roads with pot holes
- Conduct social audit of government projects
- Know how your MP/MLA spent the fund allocated to him
- Know how a particular government project or scheme was implemented