

**Draft Speech
For MOS (PP) for the
CIC Convention on 12th October 2009**

Her Excellency, the President of India;

Mr. Wajahat Habibullah, Chief Information Commissioner, Central Information Commission;

Chief Information Commissioners and Information Commissioner of the State Information Commission;

Secretary (Personnel);

Members of the Civil Society and Media;

Other officials of the Government;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would first of all like to congratulate the Central Information Commission for organising this convention. CICs endeavour this year to explore issues which would lead the regime into a new phase are of great relevance to the thought processes going on in the government to strengthen the RTI regime.

The commencement of the fifth year of the RTI regime marks the dawn of a new era. In the first four years of this regime the Government has been ably supported by different stakeholders like the Information Seekers, Civil Society, Media, the Information Commissioners and the Information Providers in carrying it forward. This has helped achieve the aim of the government to inculcate a culture of transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority and to secure access to information to all its citizens.

The strategy of the Government has till date been of proactively extending support removing difficulties in the implementation of the Act without touching the legislative aspects of it. Being a new Act, which affects the life of every citizen in the country, massive training and sensitization programmes have been organised by the government by itself and in collaboration with the civil society since the very beginning. These have also been supplemented at the Central and State Government by the awareness generation programme.

Mindful of the fact that the central government may not be fully cognisant of the full gamut of issues in RTI implementation, the Government initiated an independent study to understand the key issues and constraints in this regard. The report of the study has been received in June this year. The study has thrown up various issues on both the demand and supply side, which I believe will be presented before this fora during the course of the convention. I am very happy to know that the Civil Society has conducted a similar study on RTI implementation and the Sub Committee of the Information Commissioners has supplemented these efforts with its own report. These input from the studies will help us formulate the new schedule for action.

Last year, the government launched a centrally sponsored Plan scheme. It aims to strengthen the working of the State Information Commissions, build capacity of various stakeholders, propagate RTI, make interventions in educational medium and set up a National Resource Centre for RTI. The Planning Commission has further given 'in-principle' approval for extending the scheme to cover IT

interventions/ E-governance for RTI which would address the issues on both the demand and supply side through the use of technology and help us extend the reach of the regime to the remotest corners of the country. I hope all these efforts will strengthen the implementation of RTI in India.

The Government is now attempting to strengthen the RTI Act by initiating some amendments. A consultation with the Chief Information Commissioners and Information Commissioners from the Centre and State Governments is scheduled on 14th October. We will also put a consultation note in public domain for obtaining wider views and suggestions on the subject. I am sure that such consultation will prove to be very fruitful. It has always been the endeavour of the Government to strengthen the RTI Act for enhanced transparency, openness and accountability.

My personal experience with RTI has been that people use it not just to access information, but to address their grievances which as we all know, are at present not within the purview of this Act. I would request all of you to explore this aspect and deliberate what could be the best way to merge the two or otherwise.

I would again like to congratulate the CIC for the successful organisation of this convention.

Jai Hind