

Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) calls for more awareness among the general public for effective implementation of the J&K Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009.

The CIC Sh. Khurshid Ahmed Ganai has called for more awareness among the general public for effective implementation of the J&K RTI Act, 2009. He was addressing the Roundtable of First Appellate Authorities (FAAs), Public Information Officers (PIOs) of District Anantnag at Anantnag on 08th of June, 2017. Deputy Commissioner, Anantnag Dr. Syed Abid Rasheed Shah, IAS was also present. The Roundtable was attended by Superintendent of Police, Anantnag Sh. Zubair Ahmad Khan, KPS, Dr. Raja Muzaffar Bhat and his colleagues from JK RTI Foundation and other prominent RTI Activists from district Anantnag viz Prof. Mir, Mr. Zafar Salati, Mr. Mushtaq, Mr. Tasaduq Rashid etc.

The CIC stated that as per the figures available for the year 2014-15, 27,000 RTI applications have been received by the PIOs in the State while over 30,000 RTI applications were received in the year 2013-14. This works out to an average of 1200 to 1300 applications per district per year which is quite low. He said if higher number of applications from the districts of Srinagar and Jammu are accounted for, then it would appear that the number of applications from other districts is even less than 1,000 per year or may be even lesser. This he said is the result of lack of awareness about the RTI law among the general public. He stated that section 23 of the J&K RTI Act, 2009 enjoins upon the State Government to formulate programmes for creation of awareness among the general public and for training of officials like the PIOs and FAAs in the implementation of

the Act. He stated that while training was being imparted by Jammu and Kashmir Institute of Management, Public Administration & Rural Development (JKIMPARD), creation of awareness among the general public was lagging behind. He said that he is soon going to take up the matter with the State Government for allocation of separate budget which could be provided to all the Deputy Commissioners in the State to conduct awareness generation programmes about the RTI to meet the requirements of Section 23. He said that exercise of the right under the RTI Act can be extremely useful in improving the delivery of the developmental programmes being undertaken as part of the District as well as State Plans and under various other State and Centrally sponsored schemes and projects. He also said that greater exercise of RTI will help to improve the performance of the local self government institutions like Municipalities and Panchayats and also of recruitment agencies.

The CIC called upon the PIOs and FAAs present in the Roundtable to go through the J&K RTI Act, 2009 and Rules carefully to ensure that they perform their duties in conformity with the provisions of the Act. The Act and the Rules can be downloaded from their websites if need be. He said there were specific provisions in the RTI Act related to providing of assistance to the RTI applicants by the PIOs. He said that slackness in the implementation of Section 4 of the Act pertaining to mandatory and suo motu disclosure of information through websites etc. was a big handicap which needs to be addressed by all the Public Authorities, both within and outside the Government.

The RTI activists highlighted the problems which the RTI applicants are facing and sought directions from the CIC and the Deputy Commissioner to all the PIOs so that the information sought for by the applicants is provided within the stipulated time frame and no information is hidden unless covered by the exemptions under sections 8 and 9 of the Act or cannot be provided in terms of section 11 etc. The RTI Activists called for more cooperative attitude on the part of the PIOs in the district and elsewhere in the Government in the interest of transparency, accountability and corruption free governance which is at the core of the RTI law.

The DC Anantnag Sh. Syed Abid Rasheed Shah assured the CIC that this Roundtable at Anantnag will prove to be a watershed and that the PIOs and FAAs of district Anantnag will certainly perform better in view of the guidelines and advice given by the CIC. He also assured that the suggestions of the RTI Activists will be considered on merits and necessary follow up action taken.

The CIC thanked the DC Anantnag Sh. Syed Abid Rasheed Shah, SP Anantnag Sh. Zubair Ahmad Khan, all other officers and the prominent RTI activists for a healthy discussion and exchange of ideas which he felt will go a long way in improving the implementation of the RTI Act in District Anantnag. He particularly congratulated DC Anantnag and the officers of the DC office for making excellent arrangements for the Roundtable.