

Amid growing backlog, 1,500 cases pending with information commission

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PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief information commissioner Farah Hamid Khan on Wednesday said currently, around 1,500 cases against government departments over information delay or denial were pending with the KP Information Commission and the number was growing.

Ms Khan told a ceremony held here to launch a study on “Comparative Analysis of Right to Information Laws in Pakistan” that the KPIC had requested the provincial government to make key amendments to the KPRTI Act, 2013, but the relevant file had been found missing from records, according to an official statement.

She said the proposed law changes were related to the quorum issue as the commission couldn't issue orders on cases if the hearings weren't attended by at least two of its three members, including CIC and two information commissioners.

The CIC said currently, the positions of both information commissioners were vacant. She demanded the immediate filling of those vacancies.

KPIC chief says file of proposed RTI law changes has 'gone missing'

Former CIC Sahibzada Khalid Khan, who was also in attendance, said the “movement of RTI” had somehow fizzled out as the last PTI government was not very serious about the implementation of the law.

He also said any attempt to remove parliament from the ambit of the Pakistan Right of Access to Information Act, 2017, should be thwarted.

“All public sector bodies run on taxpayers' money, including superior judiciary, should be covered by the RTI law,” he said.

Another former head of the KPIC Azmat Hanif Orakzai said though the commission was not completely dysfunctional, bureaucratic hurdles were created to the appointment of the chief information commissioner.

Former information commissioner Kalimullah Khan said it was very disheartening to see how authorities had rendered the KPIC useless by not appointing information commissioners.

In a presentation on the study, Mohammad Anwar, executive director at the Centre for Governance and Public Accountability, called for the legislation on RTI in Azad Jammu and Kashmir as well as Gilgit-Baltistan.

He said India-held Kashmir had a robust RTI law but the AJK respondents continued to be without their fundamental right of access to information.

Mr Anwar also stressed the need for the establishment of the Balochistan Information Commission under a law passed by the province in 2021.

He said Balochistan's law on RTI was the weakest in the country as under it, people had to specify reasons for accessing information of public bodies, while the implementation mechanism was also weak.

The CGPA chief said Sindh's RTI legislation required compulsory review before citizens could file complaints with the Sindh Information Commission.

He also said Punjab's law on RTI was the only law under which the tenure of the information commissioners could be extended after the first term.

Mr Anwar proposed amendments to the KPRTI Act to do away with the quorum of information commissioners for meetings deciding appeals, to cover superior judiciary under the definition of public bodies, and appeal court against the decisions of the information commission as the Peshawar High Court.

The study also said the governments should assist public bodies in digitising records for proactive disclosure.

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