

Transparency and accountability in an increasingly polarised world

The Commonwealth Human Rights
Initiative (CHRI) Quarterly Newsletter

VOL 25, NO. 1 | APRIL, 2019



CHRI

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
working for the practical realisation of human rights in
the countries of the Commonwealth

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan, international non-governmental organisation working in the area of human rights. In 1987, several Commonwealth professional associations founded CHRI, since there was little focus on human rights within the association of 53 nations although the Commonwealth provided member countries the basis of shared common legal system.

Through its reports, research and advocacy, CHRI draws attention to the progress and setbacks to human rights in Commonwealth countries. In advocating for approaches and measures to prevent human rights abuses, CHRI addresses the Commonwealth Secretariat, the United Nations Human Rights Council members, civil society and the media on criminal justice concerns. It works on and collaborates around public education programmes, policy dialogues, comparative research, media dissemination advocacy and networking on the issues of Access to Information and Access to Justice.

CHRI promotes adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Commonwealth Harare Principles and other internationally recognised human rights instruments, including domestic legislation supporting human rights in Commonwealth countries.

CHRI is headquartered in New Delhi, India, with offices in London, UK and Accra, Ghana.

International Advisory Commission: Sam Okudzeto, Interim Chairperson. Members: Alison Duxbury, Wajahat Habibullah, Vivek Maru, Edward Mortimer, and Sanjoy Hazarika

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FROM THE INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR

Greetings from CHRI!

We bring to you another edition of our quarterly newsletter. We are aware of the delay but we'll try to do better with deadlines!

Our work over the past year has both been a continuation of CHRI's mandate as well as an expansion of its scope. In 2018, we researched newer subjects, undertook more research, launched several reports and met with human rights stakeholders from across fields and geographies. We also began a new initiative – the South Asia Media Defenders Network (SAMDEN), which, as its name suggests, is working to tackle issues of press freedom in the subcontinent. Our team too grew and evolved with us; while some moved on to other projects, we also welcomed new members into our fold.

All four programmes of our work -- Prison Reforms, Police Reforms, Access to Information, and the International Advocacy Programme – continued to be active and grow. In London, the programme on SDG 8.7 (modern day/contemporary slavery) has gathered momentum, visibility and strength while our Africa office in Accra, Ghana, the Secretariat of the Right to Information campaign in the country has been at the heart of a significant victory with the passage of Ghana's long awaited RTI Act (after a delay of well over a decade); We salute their steadfastness and the solidarity of all groups as well as lawmakers who enabled the bill to succeed.

In terms of geographies, our focus at head office continued to be on South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bangladesh) and East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania), for in-country engagement, and a wider reach through research and training at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. There has been an increasing engagement with Small States at the HRC, especially Small Island Development States (SIDS). We are glad that there is more robust engagement between the three offices.

During the last year, I travelled to Geneva, New York, Nairobi and Accra. Among other things, I spoke at a Roundtable Discussion on Human Rights in the Maldives; and had the opportunity to chair multiple discussions at the side-lines of the 39th session of the UNHRC, which CHRI organised along with the Commonwealth Secretariat, and in partnership with the governments of Australia, The Bahamas and Fiji. I attended the bail petition hearing of renowned photographer Shahidul Alam who was arrested in August 2018 and charged under Section 57 of Bangladesh's Information Communications Technology Act. This was in pursuance of SAMDEN's mission to review, assist (when necessary) and highlight issues relating to impunity and arbitrariness with regard to State action against media workers.

There's much more – and this newsletter will place a large set of material at your disposal for reading and review. We look forward to your thoughts and comment.

With warm wishes,

Sanjoy Hazarika,
International Director, CHRI

New Delhi, April 2019

CHRI UPDATES FROM THE PAST YEAR

Looking back at the year that was | [Click on the headlines to know more](#)

INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY EFFORTS

['UN monitoring on Sri Lanka must continue', civil society calls on Human Rights Council](#)

[Statement at the UN Human Rights Council by Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu for CHRI](#)

[The global human rights implementation agenda: The role of national Parliaments](#)

[Role of Parliament of Sri Lanka in protecting democracy, human rights and the Rule of Law](#)

[Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative: The Big Picture on Small States, Chatham House, London](#)

[Joint letter to Michele Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, on deteriorating human rights situation in Bangladesh](#)

[Four Commonwealth countries elected to HRC: CHRI expresses concern over lack of accountability, 'Clean Slate Syndrome'](#)

[Civil Society takes a stand on Cameroon – calls on Patricia Scotland and CMAG Foreign Ministers to defend Commonwealth values](#)

[Cameroon: UN review should condemn crackdown on rights](#)

[CHRI: Protect journalists, minority rights, end impunity, high praise for handling of Rohingya crisis](#)

[Maldives result affirmation of ordinary people's belief in democratic processes: CHRI](#)

[CHRI urges for a human rights-based prisons policy in Tanzania](#)

[CHRI delivers oral statement at the Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\) adoption of Bahamas at the Human Rights Council](#)

[Joint Statement on Ghana's Right to Information Bill, 2018](#)

[CHRI Oral statement to High Commissioner for Human Rights at the HRC](#)

[CHRI condemns recent killings in Bangladesh, demands timely investigation](#)

[CHRI: Tuvalu should adopt recommendations in UN Review](#)

[CHRI among over 50 human rights groups calling for immediate release of female Saudi rights defenders](#)

[CHRI lauds Bangladesh for sheltering Rohingyas](#)

[CHRI among groups making submission to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group \(CMAG\)](#)

[CHRI's Oral Statement at the UPR outcome of Cameroon at the UN Human Rights Council \(HRC\)](#)

[CHRI's Oral Statement at the UPR outcome of Bangladesh at the UN Human Rights Council \(HRC\)](#)

[CHRI statement at the UN Human Rights Council 39th Session: Human Rights situation that require the Council's attention, 17 September, 2018](#)

[CHRI and partner organisations urge UN member states to refrain from voting for candidates that are unfit for membership](#)

[CHRI among 95 civil society organizations calling on the UN HRC to urgently launch a 'Commission of Inquiry' to investigate violence against protesters in Palestine](#)

[Experts Call for Accountability in UN Human Rights Council: CHRI report on Pakistan, Kenya, Australia, UK, Rwanda, South Africa and Nigeria released](#)

CONFERENCES CONDUCTED OR ATTENDED

'Strengthening Legal Protection Against Torture' in India

Tbilisi: CHRI's prison reforms coordinator at the 3rd International Conference on Legal Aid

SAMDEN's second convening on journalism and "The Perils of the Internet" in New Delhi

6th National Conference with Heads of Prisons of all Indian states and UTs

Two-day consultation on creating a 'model policy for women in police in India'

CHRI's 85th Meeting of Executive Committee and 25th Annual General Meeting

Conference on Defending the Defenders

Public meeting on Citizens' Right to Information, Issues and Perspectives

One-day consultation with stakeholders on Indian prisoners abroad

CHRI second Annual Lecture on Human Rights: Vrinda Grover, Supreme Court Advocate and Human Rights Advocate delivered the lecture on March 29, 2019, on "From Impunity to Accountability: Unraveling the Labyrinth of the Hashimpura killings (1987-2018)"

Press briefing on Status Update: Shabbirpur Caste Violence, Lucknow, 19 May 2018

Karnataka Conclave's 'Conversations of the Constitution'

Launch of 'Strangers to Justice' and roundtable consultation with stakeholders

Validation workshop on a draft report on "Turn-around Time in Criminal Justice Administration in Ghana"

Ghana: Focus group discussion on the Right to Information (RTI) bill

First (International) Convening of the South Asia Media Defenders Network (SAMDEN), 22-24 June 2018

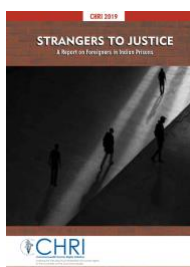
Turn-around Time in Criminal Justice Administration in Ghana

REPORT LAUNCHES



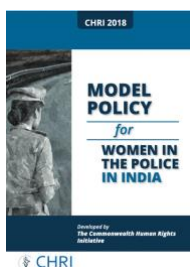
Hope Behind Bars? Status Report on Legal Aid for Persons in Custody:

This report is prompted by the right of every person to have effective legal representation of his or her choice. It looks at the delivery of legal aid to accused persons in police stations, courts and prisons in India, and seeks to identify good practices of legal aid delivery from different states and districts. The scope of this report is limited to access to legal aid in criminal cases.

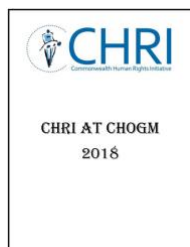


'Strangers to Justice': CHRI's report on foreign nationals imprisoned in India:

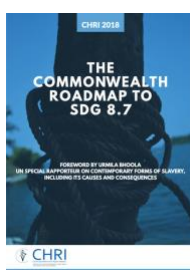
This report documents and examines the challenges faced by foreign national prisoners (FNPs) in India. The analysis is anchored by the data collected from 22 states and four Union Territories through Right to Information requests filed by CHRI to heads of all 36 state prison departments across the country.



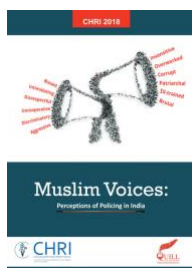
Model policy for women in police: This Model Policy was based on state-wise research on the status of women police, gaps in organisational policies, practices and processes, as well as on best practices and international models. It has been created with the hope that its adoption can ensure increased and meaningful participation of women in policing, and in this way, strengthen policing overall.



CHRI at CHOGM 2018: The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) has long been a major target of CHRI's advocacy work for the upholding of States' human rights commitments. Set against the backdrop of the curtailment of civil society space taking place in many countries, CHRI's CHOGM report focuses on the relationship between civil society and the Commonwealth Secretariat.



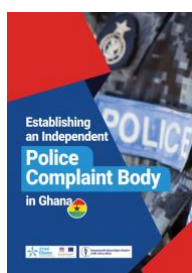
The Commonwealth Roadmap to SDG 8.7: The overarching aim of this report is to build a picture that showcases not only what action governments are taking to meet SDG 8.7 but to provide an indication of whether government response is in fact contributing to reducing the prevalence of contemporary forms of slavery. This indicator framework builds on the one developed by the WalkFree Foundation in the 2018 Global Slavery Index



Muslim Voices: Perceptions of Policing in India: This report documents the perceptions and experiences of policing in India of Muslim citizens. It is a result of a study conducted by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and Quill Foundation. The study, spread across eight cities and several geographies¹, focuses on issues related to everyday policing - access, engagement, and discrimination - as perceived by common Muslim citizens, along with a special focus on the experience of Muslim police officers themselves.



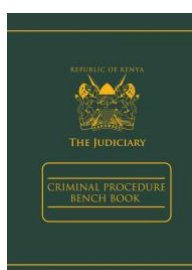
Key to Transparency: Your guide to using The Right To Information Act 2005 to collect data about Indian Prisons: CHRI prepared this handbook to facilitate access to information on prisons by using the Right to Information Act 2005 to assist researchers, academicians, civil society organisations and other interested members of the society. This handbook provides basic information on filing RTI requests, as well as step-by-step guides on the process and procedures that one must be aware of while filing such requests to receive information related to prisons. It also includes a database on relevant public information officers (PIOs), sample applications and a basic guide on what kind of information can be sought from relevant authorities.



Establishing an Independent Police Complaint Body In Ghana: This Report is the outcome of CHRI Africa's research conducted to aid the process of establishing an independent police oversight mechanism. The Report synthesises best practices from selected countries and recommends a good mix of factors to be taken into account when fashioning a mechanism for Ghana.



Ten Things About Legal Aid: This handbook was prepared with the goal of enhancing awareness about legal aid in Indian jails. Access to justice is the most basic human right and CHRI's Prison Reforms team has been active in pushing for making competent legal aid lawyers to effective legal representation to all.



Criminal Procedure Bench Book for Kenya: This publication came out of an early draft for Katiba Institute, which also made a significant contribution to it. While it has been designed by and for judges and magistrates, it is hoped that other players in the criminal justice system such as prosecutors, defence counsel, probation officers, children officers, police officers, accused persons and academics will find it useful.



Easier Said Than Done: Pledges and Performance, Holding Commonwealth members to account at HRC’ (a report for the 37th Session of the UN HRC): Since the inception of the Human Rights Council (HRC), CHRI’s Easier Said Than Done (ESTD) series has reviewed Commonwealth member states’ performance at the forum. This edition of the ESTD report presents an analysis of the performance of seven Commonwealth member states during the 37th regular session of the HRC: Australia, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, South Africa and the United Kingdom.



Easier Said Than Done: Pledges and Performance, Holding Commonwealth members to account at HRC’ (a report for the 38th Session of the UN HRC): This edition of the ESTD report presents an analysis of the performance of seven Commonwealth member states during the 38th regular session of the HRC and addresses institutional and human rights concerns in the HRC and explains discrepancies in the behaviour of these countries.



Recommendations on Legal Aid at Police Stations: In this document, CHRI puts forth its recommendatory model for ensuring prompt and effective access to legal aid at police stations. This model is based on consultations held with various stakeholders including state legal services authorities, academicians and experts in this field.



Legal aid at Police stations (Pamphlet): This guidebook suggests possible models of legal aid delivery at police station, as well as some important guidance on their setup.

Joint recommendations for a police complaints authority for Delhi: CHRI held a round-table consultation on the reconstitution of the Delhi Police Complaints Authority on 19 June 2018, which saw the participation of civil society organisations, individual experts, representatives of the Delhi Government and the Delhi Police. This document is a summary of the key points discussed and collective recommendations that came through at the consultation.



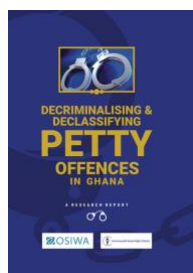
Report on a panel discussion on ‘Reducing Pre-Trial Detention In The Commonwealth’: Almost 15% of the world’s prison population is in the Commonwealth countries. A large number of these 1.4 million prisoners await trial, and the average period of detention is increasing each day. This report is an outcome of a panel discussion on why and how, and with what effect, have Commonwealth countries undertaken reforms to reduce prison populations and improve prison systems.



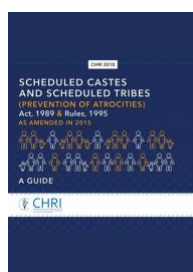
Bringing them home: Repatriation of Indian Nationals from Foreign Prisons, a barrier analysis: This report was prepared by CHRI's Prison Reforms Programme in 2017. "Bringing Them Home" identifies the policy and practical factors hindering efficiencies in the transfer process at more than 30 checkpoints encompassing the stages of application screening, verification of nationality, sentence adaptability, issuing of travel documents, and various permissions and clearances to be obtained for the final movement of the prisoner. It also presents the bottlenecks experienced by key stakeholders like the Indian Missions, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Law, the State Home Departments and Police and Prison Departments in executing their duties.



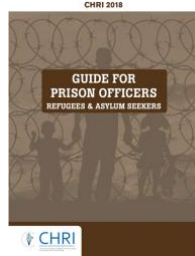
SDG16 India: Mapping the Datascape: This report, which CHRI launched on 4 July 2018, examines India's status and progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 which calls upon governments to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." Based on the global indicators framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the report establishes baseline data, identifies blind spots and maps the landscape for measuring progress on Goal 16 targets.



Decriminalising and declassifying petty offences in Ghana: CHRI, with support from the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), published on this research project to provide preliminary evidence to contribute to ongoing reform efforts in the criminal justice system. This would enhance and encourage the use of a more informed and holistic approach to reforming the system, rather than a skewed approach focusing largely on trial and post-trial processes and outcomes.



Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention Of Atrocities) Act, 1989 & Rules, 1995 as Amended in 2015: A guide: This booklet serves as a comprehensive guide to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, along with the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995, as amended in 2015. It explains the purpose of this special law, offences defined as atrocities, their punishments, procedure for registration, investigation and trial of cases, special safeguards, rights of victims and witnesses, roles of different state officials, and details of relief and rehabilitation measures, and emphasises the role of the police as the first point of contact within the criminal justice system. It is, however, limited to explaining the bare Act and the Rules. It does not include court orders and judgments with regards to the POA Act.



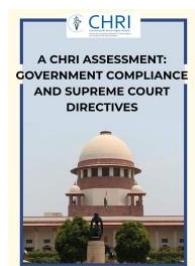
A Guide for Prison Officers, Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Asylum Seekers and refugees often get detained for lack of proper knowledge and the ambiguity of existing law with regard to their protection in India. This guidebook provides pertinent information for prison officers on laws and provisions governing their stay, detention and determination of status in India.



A basic guide: Defending Asylum Seekers In Detention (Bengali): This pamphlet is a basic guide on defending asylum seekers in detention. It addresses the issue lawyers may face in demarcating between Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Economic Migrants. It further describes the legal framework available in India.



Monitoring the Monitors: A micro-study on monitoring committees in West Bengal: As oversight bodies, 'Monitoring Committees' are mandated to oversee legal aid delivery and review the working of legal aid lawyers in legal service institutions across India. This study is based on surveys conducted in a number of legal services authorities in West Bengal and puts forth recommendations to bring about higher levels of efficiency and efficacy, communication and uniformity in the working of the Monitoring Committees.



Government compliance and Supreme Court directives on police reform: This report provides a quantitative assessment of the status of compliance by States and Union Territories with the Supreme Court directives on police reforms as directed in *Prakash Singh and Ors. vs.*

ADVOCACY EFFORTS

'Death by stoning' penalty draws CHRI demand to revoke Brunei membership from the Commonwealth

Bihar custodial deaths: 8 ex-DGPs come together in strong condemnation

New Zealand attack: CHRI writes to PM Jacinda Ardern, expresses solidarity

CHRI: UK decision to revoke citizenship of 'ISIS bride' violates national law, international obligations

Pulwama: CHRI calls for swift action against perpetrators, urges international bodies to hold agencies responsible

CHRI calls for peaceful, free and fair elections in Nigeria

Another RTI activist death brings up Maharashtra's toll to 16; India urgently needs to step up and protect its citizens from reprisals, says CHRI

CHRI commends National Human Rights Commission's move towards greater accessibility

Probe allegations of rigging, intimidation: CHRI urges Bangladesh

CHRI letter urging human rights bodies to intervene in case of missing transgender political candidate in Telengana

SC verdict is 'call for action' to Commonwealth Nations bound to colonial laws: CHRI

CHRI calls recent Pune Police raids and arrests excessive, calls for transparency on charges

CHRI condemns the alleged torture of Talib Hussain, urges immediate release from custody

NRC outcomes: 'Uphold constitutional obligations, ensure firmness and dignity,' says CHRI

CHRI demands NHRC investigation, end to police excesses in Tuticorin

India: Reject death penalty for child rape cases, focus on ending impunity for sexual violence

CHRI seeks changes in SPCA for better efficiency

SAMDEN ADVOCACY

The South Asia Media Defenders Network (SAMDEN) is a network of media professionals, anchored in CHRI and working on issues of shrinking journalistic space, and offering capacity-building resources to counter intimidation and build awareness.

[SAMDEN expresses solidarity with the Shillong Times](#)

[As Tanzanian paper resumes publishing, CHRI places weight behind The Citizen](#)

[End persecution of journalists critical of the govt, SAMDEN urges the Philippines](#)

[Pak govt must heed stakeholders' concerns before establishing new media regulatory: SAMDEN](#)

[SAMDEN calls upon Manipur CM to release journalist and withdraw defamation suit](#)

[Advocacy for the release of Shahidul Alam](#)

[Advocacy for the release of Cameroon TV host Mimi Mefo](#)

[Justice for Khashoggi, Sohail Khan, repeal Bangladesh's draconian Digital Security Act: SAMDEN](#)

[South Asia Media Defenders Network concerned about attack on Ghanaian journalist](#)

MEDIA ARTICLES BY CHRI STAFF

[Modi's 5 years: a report card](#) | Deccan Herald

[Prison Reforms and Democracy](#) | Journal Periferias

[Killings return in Assam, so does AFSPA tussle](#) | Tribune India

[Book review, 'India after Naxalbari': D'Mello combines the honesty of his feelings with compelling stories of the fighters](#) | The Indian Express

[NHRC: A Toothless Tiger?](#) | India Legal

[Assam's NRC process mired in *ad hoc-ism* and prejudice](#) | DownToEarth

[Will Truth Triumph in Rafale Review Case? The Faceoff Between RTI Act and Official Secrets Act](#) | News18

[A model policy for women in the police](#) | The Hindu

[RBI Tried To Bury Details Of Demonetisation Advice That Modi Ignored](#) | Huffpost

[The national security lie](#) | Deccan Herald

[Behind bars and forgotten: Pakistani prisoners in India](#) | The Telegraph

[The challenge of manufactured consent](#) | DownToEarth

[Detention Centres in Assam Are Synonymous With Endless Captivity](#) | The Wire

[In the Northeast, a David versus Goliath battle](#) | The Hindu

[Reach out to those opposing citizenship Bill](#) | The Tribune

[Govt should read warning signs and put passage of Citizenship Amendment Bill on hold](#) | The Economic Times

[Is Technology A Saviour for our Criminal Justice System?](#) | Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD)

[Policeman, train thyself](#) | The Indian Express

[How my RTI application made the CIC to direct Defence Ministry to disclose joint operational doctrines](#) | The Leaflet

[K.S. Dhillon, the Top Cop Who Believed Not Just in Enforcing the Law, but Also Upholding Rights](#) | The Wire

[NRC: Governments must show wisdom and statesmanship](#) | The Economic Times

[Untangling the knot of citizenship](#) | The Tribune

[Transparency and accountability: cheating on the deal](#) | Deccan Herald

[Assam on the Edge Again: Defining Citizenship](#) | Economic & Political Weekly

[Coming home to jail: on the Repatriation of Prisoners Act, 2003](#) | The Hindu

[Manjula Shetye's Death in Byculla Jail: A Year on, Little has Changed](#) | The Wire

[Fair and Unbiased Policing Still a Far Cry in India](#) | The Wire

[Time to Raise the bar](#) | mydigitalfc.com

[Reality of impunity, rhetoric of human rights](#) | The Hindu

RTI REVEALS

RBI compelled to disclose demonetisation meeting minutes after CIC's penalty show cause notice under RTI Act

The Comptroller and Auditor General's performance audit report of capital acquisitions -- including the Rafale fighter aircraft purchase

Social Justice & Empowerment Ministry claims: Cabinet Note and materials regarding 10% quota law cannot be disclosed under RTI

Computers intercepted, Transparency interrupted: MHA's CPIO refuses information about December 2018 authorisation order under the IT Act

Latest appointments to the Central Information Commission: a critical assessment of the processes involved based on DoPT's documents

More than 10 Indian workers died every day in Gulf countries in the last six years; 117 deaths for every US\$ 117 remitted + Central Government's flip-flop in the Lok Sabha over death statistics of Indians in Gulf countries: An analysis

Read reports on the 26/11 Mumbai attacks accessed from the Maharashtra Legislature under the RTI Act, while the Union Home Ministry denies access

CIC directs the disclosure of two Joint Operational Doctrines used by the Defence Forces, in a 7-year old RTI case

Charging GST on fees payable under India's RTI Act is blatantly illegal

SBI admits, CPIO goofed up with Electoral Bond sale data, refuses to divulge details of donors and recipient political parties under RTI

RTI reveals Advisory Board under J&K Public Safety Act spent 75% of its budget upholding detention orders which J&K High Court quashed later on

RTI Amendment, Bill 2018: Contradicts GOI's 2017 Policy for other Tribunals, Law Commission's Views and Article 14 of the Constitution

Transparent political party funding through Electoral Bonds: Government of India proposes, State Bank of India disposes- an RTI tale

Sterlite/Vedanta, Coal India and POSCO are among 17 Indian companies blacklisted by Norway from investment of its pension funds

Denial of sanction to prosecute defence personnel under J&KAFSPA: Defence Ministry and Indian Army deny they hold case-related records and procedural information

In the time of crisis, Public Sector banks reject more RTIs than ever before: An analysis of statistics from the CIC's latest annual report

RTI WORKSHOPS

Training workshop with senior, mid-level govt officers in Shillong

Workshops on the Implementation of Access to Information Act, 2016, in Kenya

Workshop on using RTI as a journalism tool in Kolkata

Workshops on using RTI information to further journalism, governance in Bangladesh

Workshop on RTI for civil society representatives in Bangladesh

Workshop on the use of RTI in Journalism in Bangladesh

Celebrating 14 years of RTI in J&K

STAFF ACHIEVEMENTS

RAJA BAGGA (PRISON REFORMS TEAM, 2013-18) has received the prestigious Chevening Scholarship to study Criminal Justice Policy (MSc) at the London School of Economics. "The course fits perfectly with my five years of prison reform work at CHRI. I intend to hone the legal research skills I developed at CHRI, during the course," says Raja, whose presence has added heft, depth and good cheer to his team, especially with his magnum opus on Legal Aid across India that should be released in the next months. Chevening is the UK government's global scholarship programme that offers future leaders the unique opportunity to study in the UK. These scholarships are awarded to outstanding professionals to pursue a one-year master's degree in any subject at any UK university.

NIRIKSHA SANGHVI (POLICE REFORMS TEAM, 2017-18) has been selected for the prestigious J N Tata Scholarship, 2018-19 which is given by the J N Tata Endowment for higher education of Indians. Niriksha says, "I have received this scholarship for pursuing a one-year Advanced LLM in Public International Law, from Leiden Law School, Netherlands. I am going to focus my LLM on international criminal law, human rights and conflict-related laws". Established in 1892, the J. N. Endowment is a prestigious institution and over the years J N Tata Scholars have distinguished themselves and have had outstanding achievements to their credit.

SHIKHA CHHIBBAR (PROGRAM OFFICER, ACCESS TO INFORMATION PROGRAMME) was nominated from India and participated successfully in the international seminar on "Foundations of Open Societies: Individual self-determination and tolerance" from 14-26 October 2018, at the International Academy for Leadership (IAF) in Gummersbach, Germany. This seminar was organised by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) and covered the concept of "open society" and its relevance for liberal thought and policy. It emphasized on Liberal Democracy as an essential component of open society and the respective roles of rights and rule of law therein. "This seminar was a great learning experience for me and intense knowledge-sharing discussions have contributed to my growth both at professional and personal level. I am grateful to FNF and IAF for giving me this wonderful opportunity to participate in such an interesting seminar," says Shikha.

ANKUR OTTO (PROJECT OFFICER, POLICE REFORMS PROGRAMME) was nominated by CHRI for a workshop on "Moderation: Facilitation and Program Design" which was undertaken by Friedrich Naumann Foundation at their International Academy of Leadership in Gummerbasch, Germany. Participants for the workshop came from almost 26 countries. "All the sessions were very interactive, interesting and knowledgeable. We were exposed to various tools and methodologies that I can make use of in my work. I plan to utilise my learning of facilitating sessions creatively with different groups, as well as designing and scripting such sessions, in my work in CHRI," says Ankur.

PUSHING FOR POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY IN GHANA AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT POLICE COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

By Gideon Nii Kotey Neequaye
Programme Officer, Access to Justice, CHRI Ghana

CHRI's Accra office has been working towards the establishment of an Independent Police Complaints Commission/Authority (IPCC/A) since 2005. Part of its current advocacy, which has been ongoing since 2014, is centred around re-activating and sustaining the debate on the need for an IPCC in Ghana, and as increasing citizen awareness and participation in its discourse.

To this end, since February 2018, the team has undertaken several activities; this piece details some of our most prominent efforts below:

1. **Conducting research on IPCC models around the world:** To bolster our advocacy efforts towards the establishment of an IPCC in Ghana with evidence-based information, we conducted research in collaboration with a consultant. The report included best practices from selected countries and makes recommendations for the introduction of the IPCC mechanism in Ghana. It was launched on 31 October 2018 by Justice Emile Short, an Executive Committee member of CHRI Africa Office and a former Commissioner of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ).
2. **Engaging CSOs and stakeholders:** CHRI has also been serving as the lead of a network of CSOs advocating for the establishment of an IPCC. In this capacity, between July and November 2018, our team organised four meetings where it engaged with stakeholders, analysed progress and planned the way forward. On 5 December 2018, we also held a consultative round-table meeting in East Legon. The objective of this meeting was to bring together all stakeholders to discuss an appropriate IPCC model for Ghana. The discussion was attended by representatives from Parliament of Ghana, the Judicial Service, Legal Aid Scheme, the office of the Attorney General, the Commission on Human Rights, Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the Ghana Police Service and the National Commission on Civic Education.
3. **Development of a Legal Framework:** CHRI, with the assistance of a consultant, developed a legal framework proposing the modalities for the setting up of an IPCC for Ghana. This framework was presented to stakeholders at the round-table for their inputs, and will be presented to the government for consideration.
4. **Meeting with official stakeholders:** As a follow up to our work on this project in 2014, we felt the need to (re)engage the new Minister of Interior and the Police Council as

well as Parliament to brief them on the project and solicit buy-in and support, since a lot of the leadership has since changed. A brief summary of these meetings follow:

- We met with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Defense and Interior at the Parliament House on 30 July 2018. The Committee assured us of its support towards the advocacy.
- We met with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General at the Attorney General's Department on 31 July 2018. The Minister commended the team for its efforts and made suggestions to take the work forward.
- We met with the Chief Justice at the Head Office of Judicial Service on 3 August 2018. The Chief Justice, while supportive of the initiative, suggested that our efforts could benefit from further research.
- The team on 6 August 2018 met with the Director of the Legal Aid Scheme; he suggested that the Coalition must intensify its advocacy and discuss with the public the idea of having an IPCC.
- On 8 August 2018, the team met with the National Executive of the National Association of Retired Police Officers (NARPO), where members commended the work being done by our office and pledged their support.
- On 23 August 2018, the team met with the CHRAJ Commissioner and the Director of Investigations at the Commission's Office in Accra to introduce the project and discuss recent instances of police brutality. The Commission also reiterated its commitment to the cause.
- We met with members of the Police Council on 26 November 2018 to brief them about the project. The Chairman of the Council, H.E. Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia thanked the members of the Coalition and assured that the Council would deliberate on the matter and intensify advocacy through media.

5. Conducting community forums and radio discussions

The CHRI team, with support from partners in the region, also organised three public forums, one each in the Ajumako, Tano South and Wa West districts in the three regions (Central, Brong Ahafo and Wa, respectively). The meeting in Ajumako was held in June 2018 and the other two in September 2018. Our goal was to increase awareness and promote participation of local communities on the need for an independent police complaints body in the country.

As a follow up, the office also collaborated with community radio stations and conducted radio discussions on the subject. These discussions were aimed at educating listeners, and were attended by CHRAJ representatives and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), who also spoke on issues relating to police accountability.

On 15 November, 2018, we organised another public forum in Accra, which was chaired by COP Dr. Perter Wiredu, a former Director -General of the Ghana Immigration Service and a retired Police Commissioner.

CHRI'S CITY CORE GROUP INITIATIVE: DEMANDING AND WORKING TOWARDS BETTER ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN AT POLICE STATIONS IN MUMBAI

By Donita Quadros, Project Associate, Mumbai, CHRI with
Dolphy D'souza, Project Lead, Mumbai, CHRI

CHRI seeks to work towards greater accountability in policing, more transparency, an end to torture and other illegal practices. To this end, it focuses, among other things, on the value of community policing and the need for greater diversity. CHRI's aims to act as a catalyst to enable these practices, and in the Indian subcontinent, our teams have worked to bridge the gap between the public and police.

In Mumbai, over the past year, CHRI has helped several groups working with women who have faced difficulties in accessing justice at police stations, by coming together to form a city-wide core group. This City Core Group [CCG] is a unique blend of leaders from various organisations, lawyers and activists working towards police accountability, especially in cases of violence against women. CHRI anchors these meetings with resource persons every month, and in between the meetings, continues working to assist members and victims by providing vital information, and referrals, and bringing them in contact with the police and other authorities as needed.

The CCG started nine months ago with 10 organisations, and has now grown to include 24 groups. During these months, CCG representatives underwent extensive capacity-building sessions on issues such as child abuse and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, the Domestic Violence Act, police reforms, police procedures, the functioning of the police complaints authority, and sexual harassment at the workplace Act, among other things. Each meeting of the Group consists of such training sessions, in addition to sharing cases worked upon, a discussion of issues faced, and the way forward for the collective. We feel strongly that this ongoing process of capacity building has strengthened the group and forged trust between its members.

The CCG has worked to offer practical assistance to those in need across the city. To date, it has handled over 20 cases. It also works as a base for knowledge building, and offering solidarity in cases of violence against women.

The group is connected online via a WhatsApp group that is moderated and facilitated by CHRI; this works both for networking, and knowledge building and sharing, and is used by members to post ideas, research, as well as seek practical or legal help. CHRI members in the CCG team are Dolphy D'souza and Donita Quadros (the authors of this piece, and Project Lead and Project Associate, Mumbai team, respectively), and Anju Anna John, Project Officer, Police Reforms, under the supervision of Maja Daruwala, Senior Advisor.

For more information about the CCG Initiative, please email dolphy@humanrightsinitiative.org



Chhelbhai Dave 1889 -1956

Chhelbhai Dave Police Reform Project

70 years after his retirement, Chhelbhai Dave is celebrated throughout Gujarat as a model of effective, humane, fearless and incorruptible police leadership. He consistently demonstrated equal concern for the welfare of the lower ranks of the police and for the public they served. He served as the head of police forces successively in Jamnagar, Junagadh and Bhavnagar states before Indian independence, and in Baroda at the time of independence. His reputation lives on in popular culture and folklore as the “Lion of Saurashtra”.

The Chhelbhai Dave Police Reform Project seeks to continue his legacy and to promote more effective policing in the interests of India’s citizens and the welfare of the lower ranks of police. Among the Project’s efforts is the City Core Group in Mumbai, organised by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative.

WORKING TOWARDS A JUST AND EQUITABLE COMMONWEALTH: A REPORT FROM CHRI LONDON

By Ellen Shustik,
SDG 8.7 Programme Lead, CHRI London

In the past year, the London Office of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) has been busy advancing its SDG Target 8.7 programme. Following the release of its [report](#) at the April 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, CHRI developed a comprehensive Indicator Framework with 53 indicators to complement and supplement the [Global Slavery Index \(GSI\)](#), which has 104 indicators.

This work culminated in the launch of a [report](#) that puts forward a comprehensive roadmap to accelerate the process of meeting the SDG 8.7 on 10 December 2018.

The Commonwealth Roadmap to SDG 8.7 was launched by Baroness Young of Hornsey at the House of Lords, and was followed by a roundtable discussion on the challenges in dealing with contemporary forms of slavery and how tracking progress around SDG 8.7 can be an effective measure to address them.

The report provides a roadmap for effective action towards eradicating all forms of contemporary slavery in Commonwealth countries and proposes an Indicator Framework to measure progress. It also identifies four areas of action that could potentially meet the Commonwealth's goal of eradicating modern slavery by 2025: social norms, attitudes and behaviours; law and policy frameworks; social and economic assets and safety nets, and robust data collection.

CHRI London has recently been collaborating with the [Walk Free Foundation](#) to update the Global Slavery Index (GSI) for 2018-2019 for all 53 Commonwealth countries. Proposed next steps will be the release of a joint report at the UN's High-Level Political Forum in July, and the launch of a Commonwealth Portal of Indicators in partnership with the Walk Free Foundation. We also hope to release a joint report based on that research at the CHOGM in Rwanda in June 2020.

A new and unique component of CHRI's work on SDG 8.7 is the proposed establishment of a network of local, grassroots civil society organisations working on 8.7 issues from across the Commonwealth in London. This is to follow a large mapping exercise of relevant NGOs in all 53 countries, along with the development of membership documents.

This network could serve as a knowledge-sharing platform for country-specific and thematic information and best practices across the Commonwealth. A pre-CHOGM meeting may hopefully be held around the end of this year to refine an advocacy strategy for Rwanda;

regional representatives from the network could attend this meeting to pursue advocacy on SDG 8.7 at highest levels of government.

(N.B CHRI is open to receiving expressions of interest and/or recommendations from relevant civil society members across the Commonwealth who would like to join this grassroots network and movement for change towards achieving SDG 8.7.)

The office also continues to build and strengthen relationships with relevant organisations, High Commissions, and UK government departments and agencies in London. For our work on SDG 8.7, we have connected to Geneva with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

In March, CHRI was represented at The Commonwealth Equality Network's first global meeting in Mauritius with LGBTQ+ activists from across all geographies. The focus of this event was the decriminalisation of homosexuality, and CHRI promoted its research project on LGBT prison populations. At the invitation of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Joanna Ewart-James (Chair, CHRI London Office) also attended and presented at the Commonwealth seminar in Geneva, on the side-lines of the UN HRC, on the modalities for the establishment of a femicide watch/gender-related killings watch as a prevention mechanism'.

THE PLIGHT OF FOREIGN NATIONAL PRISONERS IN INDIA IS POOR, BUT IT NEEDN'T BE SO

By Palak Chaudhari,

Project Officer, Prison Reforms, Access to Justice Programme, CHRI

Hassan Rohullah* (name changed) finished serving his prison sentence in June 2013, after which he was sent to the Alwar Detention Centre in Rajasthan to await repatriation to his home country of Iran. When our team met him five years later, in May 2018, he was far from being repatriated. In fact, he was still waiting for a preliminary step to be completed: his nationality verification.

When we shared the news of his continued detention with the Iranian Embassy in New Delhi, it expressed, after some initial skepticism, alarm at the lack of communication regarding Mr. Hassan's fate.

In our work with Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs) lodged in prisons across India over the last decade, this is, sadly, not an isolated case. FNPs frequently find themselves unable to communicate with anyone on the outside due to linguistic and cultural barriers -- a situation made worse if they are vulnerable or poor. Without consular access or any communication with their friends and family, it is not only their liberty but also their mental health that takes a toll.

An Embassy is supposed to be the equivalent of one's kin in a foreign country. But if it does not even know about a prisoner's whereabouts and are thus unable to inform the family, who will look out for them?

The stakeholders in the process of repatriating an FNP usually are many and complex: the police department, prisons department, the state Home Department, the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO), the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of External Affairs and the concerned embassy or High Commission. As expected, a delay at any point can cause a bottleneck for the entire process. Thus, after being discovered at the Alwar detention centre, Mr. Hassan's long struggle for nationality verification began. But this was not straightforward. Some documents that needed to be dug out were five years old. At one point, papers expected within three weeks took more than two months to arrive.

Eight months after we shared his details with the embassy, in January 2019, we found that the final document for his repatriation had been cleared. While it was happy news, it came five years too late for him, and for his family who thought he had disappeared and would never return.

As noted before, this is not an isolated narrative. However, despite institutional delays and the confusion we have noted among stakeholders regarding procedures concerning FNPs,

we know that there is a solution. Earlier this year, the Prison Reforms team came out with a national study on FNPs titled, “Strangers to Justice: A report on foreign nationals in Indian prisons.”

The report reviewed issues FNPs face while dealing with the criminal justice system in India, including lack of access to consular representatives, severance of contact with families, and unnecessary delays in repatriation of prisoners after the completion of their sentences, among other things. It also placed data on FNPs in the public domain; this was obtained through responses received in response to our Right to Information (RTI) requests to the heads of prison departments of all 36 states and Union Territories in January 2018. It should be noted here that we only received information from 26 states and Union Territories.

The findings only underscored what we had already found in our field work. For instance, of the 3,908 foreign nationals from 58 countries that are housed in prisons in these areas, only 222 persons (5.7%) have ever received consular access.

While finalising the study, we also worked to build a network with stakeholders to address some of the more pressing concerns, and shared our data with embassies to enable them to work towards dealing with the issues that were coming to light. The report, which was launched in January 2019, detailed our findings and offered recommendations for improvements. A round-table consultation that accompanied the report launch was attended by officials from the Government of India as well as from various embassies and High Commissions, and served as a platform for all participants to voice their concerns.

You can [read the report in full](#) here, and find out more about the [round-table consultation here](#).

* At the time of writing, Hassan Rohullah continues to remain in detention despite efforts. His documents have been processed and the only barrier to his repatriation is the expense of his travel ticket that he and his family cannot afford. If you are or know someone who might be interesting in contributing to his ticket, or initiating a crowdfunding campaign, please feel free to write [to palak@humanrightsinitiative.org](mailto:palak@humanrightsinitiative.org).

MOVING TOWARDS TRUE GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN THE POLICE IN INDIA

By Nikita Bhukar

Research Officer, Police Reforms Programme, CHRI

Gender-based discrimination and inequality pervade policing. This is borne out by CHRI's 2015 reports on Women in Police in South-Asia¹. This is underpinned by "gendered" perceptions of services like policing, both of police officers themselves and larger society, shared by men and women. Perceptions still instinctively veer towards seeing attributes like force and brute strength as necessary for "effective" policing, and thereby, cast policing as a man's job. In this way, patriarchy and gender stereotypes prevail, diminishing the space for honest discussions around women's equal and meaningful participation in policing. While there are policy benchmarks in place to increase women's representation in the police, the numbers of women remain abysmally low. This not only impacts equality of opportunity for women in the police, it also cuts short efforts to improve policing.

Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution of India mandate equality before the law, prohibition of discrimination and equal opportunity in matters of public employment. India is also obligated by its international commitments to strive for and achieve gender equality.

As a public service, the police is mandated to enforce and uphold the law, especially fundamental rights. This makes it even more important that the police lead the way towards equality. That is why it must be truly representative of society.

As an institution in India, the police has not broken out of colonial shackles. Implicit in this is its very structure and makeup, which is geared towards patriarchy. This needs wholesale change. The first crucial step to achieve this is to get more women representation.

DEFINING THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Nine Indian states adopted the 33% reservation benchmark after the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued an advisory to this effect in 2009. Five states set it at 30% and another five at less than 30%. The Central government also issued advisories to mandate the role of women in various police tasks to encourage higher recruitment and increase the demand for women personnel in state police departments.

Despite setting benchmarks and targets, women still make up only 7.28% of the total police strength in India (as on January 2017). A few states fare marginally better, with women comprising more than 10% of their force, while most fall far short of the target. A further

¹ CHRI (2015), *Rough roads to equality: Women police in South Asia*

breakdown of data reveals even fewer women at important operational positions, and shows that they remain mostly concentrated at lower ranks.

Further, women in police face several other barriers, ranging from hurdles in recruitment; promotions; postings; an endemic lack of basic facilities like separate toilets, and to sexual harassment at the workplace. Across states, police departments tend to limit women to desk jobs and shy away from giving them active policing roles. Getting more women into leadership positions can only be done by first getting more of them into all levels of the police.

THE WAY AHEAD

While this is vital, an increase in the numbers of women alone will not automatically result in equal opportunities or needed mainstreaming. Police departments must be proactive to welcome women into all areas of police work, not simply those considered “best suited” for women. There needs to be simultaneous emphasis on identifying and removing systemic gaps in facilities, structures, processes and practices that currently disadvantage women. The view must always be to create a supportive and welcoming environment.

CHRI [drafted a model policy for women in police](#), in line with similar existing international models. The model policy presents a holistic approach to work towards ensuring equality for women within police organisations, which was launched on 28 March 2019 by Mr. Amitabh Kant, CEO, Niti Aayog, Government of India. Mr. Wajahat Habibullah, former Chief Information Commissioner and chair of CHRI’s India Executive Committee and senior police officers from 13 states including Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra, and Telangana attended the event.

We seek to address policy gaps while recognising that policing is a state subject in India. The model policy also lays down time-bound actionable measures to achieve substantive gender equality in police, with the aim of achieving equitable representation at all ranks, providing equal opportunities to women in all aspects of policing, advocating for a safe work atmosphere for women, and making the police force more representative of society.

A FEW BROAD SUGGESTIONS MADE IN THE POLICY:

- The police force must take effective measures to ensure equality. The policy suggests broader systemic reforms in police departments, starting from amending the guiding framework -- in this case, the state Police Acts -- to include the mandate of equality. They should incorporate diversity, inclusiveness, accountable and quality as their core values. Gender stereotyping must be eradicated through new and improved training. Training and orientation of all personnel should be geared towards principles of equality and professionalism through gender-awareness and rooting out prejudices.
- The force must remove barriers to the incorporation of more women in the profession. Increasing female representation can only be possible through

systematic, time-bound recruitment measures and proactive steps to attract more women. The police departments also need to address the (several existing) barriers deterring their entry. Decisions around transfers and postings, for instance, must be taken keeping in mind the pressures on all working women of attending to family and childcare responsibilities also.

- Police departments should no longer “silo” women into certain positions deemed “fit” for them. In attempts to increase gender diversity, police departments are taking the “shortcut” of relegating women to all-women units or policing only to do with crimes against women and children. Policewomen must get equal opportunities to experience and take part in all kinds of police work. This “gendered” isolation, which does nothing to improve policemen’s response to crimes against women, must be extinguished.
- Police departments must ensure safety and proper facilities in the workplace. The lack of basic facilities such as separate toilets and changing rooms for women affects their performance on a daily level. This requires urgent attention. All state police departments must also set up accessible Internal Complaints Committees as mandated by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and fully operationalise them.

Any efforts to enhance diversity in the police in India will not work without a holistic approach from the state police departments to approach this holistically. Everything else, including the MHA advisories, will remain (as they have to this day) piecemeal efforts that add little to change the scenario on the ground for policewomen. CHRI commits itself, through the model policy, to take forward the conversation around gender inclusivity, equity and equality.

THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION IS AN INVIOLEABLE PART OF A HEALTHY DEMOCRACY – AND MUST BE SEEN AS SO

By Tahmina Laskar,
Senior Programme Officer, Access to Information programme, CHRI

CHRI's Access to Information (ATI) programme works to promote the institutionalisation of a regime of transparency at all levels of government in Commonwealth countries, with a current geographical focus on South Asia and the Commonwealth African countries.

The team's work involves lending technical inputs on issues of access to information, filing Right to Information (RTI) requests in India on matters of public interest and putting this information and our analyses in the public domain, conducting trainings for both the supply and demand side, and performing legislative advocacy for transparency and accountability.

Over the past year, the ATI team has worked to publish comprehensive guide on RTI implementation in Sri Lanka, and prepared a preliminary note on comparative best practices for implementing the provisions of the ATI Act in Kenya.

[CHRI visited Kenya](#) in November 2018 and conducted a national level workshop in Nairobi with government representatives and other stakeholders on challenges to the implementation of the ATI Act in Kenya. We also provided technical inputs on the new version of the Ghana RTI Bill that had been put together by the government and the Parliamentary committee, with inputs from civil society. The Ghana Parliament recently finally passed the RTI bill after 17 years of advocacy and efforts by activists from the country and across the Commonwealth.

In addition to this, throughout 2018, the ATI team also conducted RTI training workshops in [India](#), [Sri Lanka](#), and Bangladesh (please see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)) for media persons and civil society representatives. The workshops were designed to train participants in drafting effective RTI applications, to seek accountability from their governments and authorities.

In December, our team conducted [a RTI Training of Trainers \(ToT\) Workshop](#) for senior- and mid-level government officers in Shillong, Meghalaya, North-east India. The workshop, which was held at the Meghalaya Administrative Training Institute in Shillong, witnessed the participation of more than 50 officers from several official departments from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

Apart from these efforts, the ATI team has also been an active advocate for the effective functioning of the RTI mechanism in India, as well as encouraging government bodies to disclose information concerning decisions that affect its citizens.

For instance, when the Central government decided to amend the RTI Act to empower itself to determine the salary levels of Information Commissioners across the country, our team joined the RTI fraternity across the country to oppose it. The findings and arguments against the proposed amendments were not only highlighted by the media but also endorsed by members of the Central Information Commission (CIC) and supported by several other serving and retired State Information Commissioners. The Government finally bowed to civil society, media and political pressure and did not table the Bill in Parliament. Now, with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha, it is likely to lapse.

Another interesting development arose from the RTIs filed by our team head, Mr. Venkatesh Nayak, on the issue of demonetisation, where he had sought the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Reserve bank of India responding to the Central government decision to demonetise currency notes of Rs. 500 and 1000 denomination. We obtained this after a long wait of two and a half years after the Central Information Commission (CIC) directed their disclosure. Thereafter, we placed these minutes in the public domain, spurring another surge of media and public discourse around the efficacy of the controversial economic exercise.

The ATI team's RTI-based interventions last year also worked to expose the numbers of Indian workers who have died in Gulf countries in the last six years. This had a huge media impact, and also propelled two Members of Parliament, Mr. Malyadri Sriram (of the Telugu Desam Party, Bapatla, Andhra Pradesh) and Dr. Dharam Vira Gandhi, (Independent, Patiala, Punjab) to ask the Government about the deaths and the steps being taken for their safety. In response to this, the Government denied ever having collected separate data on the deaths. Our team then sent evidence to an MP about the past Parliament Q&As where this information was tabled by the same Minister and his predecessor. We also drafted a breach of privilege notice which the MP then sent to the Speaker, but was persuaded to withdraw. The ATI team will continue to highlight the issue of deaths of Indian workers in Gulf countries through statistical research.

The team is currently analysing data supplied by three Indian Embassies in the region to identify the patterns of death, based on age and cause of death of Indian workers in Gulf countries, and aims to release these findings later this year to build public opinion in favour of making the Government take the issue seriously.

Our interventions also resulted in a Q&A session tabled in Parliament based on the CIC's directive to the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) regarding compliance with its orders. The matter related to the proactive disclosure of information regarding organisations and other entities that obtain tax-exempt status. The ATI team had written to the CIC about persistent non-compliance of the CBDT with such orders, following which the CIC pointing these out to the CBDT. The CBDT then issued an Office Memorandum to all authorities under its jurisdiction to strictly comply with CIC's orders unless they had been challenged in Court. We are cognisant of the need for such active efforts to encourage transparency and accountability and plan to continue our work in this field.



CHRI

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