

# **Right to Information Bill**

## ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

### *Section*

#### *Access to official information*

1. Right to access to official information
2. Responsibility of Government to provide information on governance

#### *Compilation and publication of manual on information of an agency*

3. Responsibility of Minister in respect of access
4. Provision of guidelines for manual

#### *Exempt information*

5. Information from the Office of the President and of the Vice-President
6. Information relating to the Cabinet
7. Information relating to law enforcement, public safety and national security
8. Information affecting international relations
9. Information that affects the defence of the country
10. Economic and any other interests
11. Economic information of third parties
12. Information relating to tax
13. Internal working information of agencies
14. Parliamentary privilege, fair trial, contempt of court
15. Legal profession and any other privilege under law
16. Medical professional privilege
17. Disclosure of personal matters
18. Disclosure for the protection of the public interest

#### *Procedure for access*

19. Application for access to information
20. Person to deal with application
21. Transfer of application
22. Deferred access
23. Decision on application
24. Information that cannot be found or not in existence
25. Payment of advance deposit
26. Extension of time to deal with an application

## **Right to Information Bill**

27. Refusal to process for failure to pay deposit
28. Refusal of access
29. Manner of access

### *Amendment of personal records in custody of an agency*

30. Amendment of personal records
31. Application for amendment of information
32. Dealing with an application to amend records
33. Incomplete applications
34. Action on application to amend record
35. Refusal to amend records
36. Notice of decision
37. Notations to be added to records

### *Internal reviews and appeals*

38. Internal review by the Minister
39. Action by the Minister
40. Decision of the Minister on review
41. Delegation of power by the Minister
42. Application to the Supreme Court for judicial review
43. Powers of the Supreme Court
44. Ruling of the Supreme Court
45. Right to a lawyer or any other expert

### *General and miscellaneous provisions*

46. Burden of proof
47. Appointment of information officers
48. Protection in respect of actions for defamation or breach of confidence
49. Protection in respect of certain criminal actions
50. Fees and charges of agency
51. Waiver of fee on basis of financial hardship
52. Fees and charges not part of the Consolidated Fund
53. Responsibility of the Minister
54. Attorney-General as a party to proceedings

## **Right to Information Bill**

55. Annual reports by agencies
56. Report by the Minister to Parliament
57. Limitation of period for exempt information
58. Information held by the national archives, museums and libraries
59. Application of Act to existing and future information
60. Offence of disclosure of exempt information
61. Other offences
62. Extension of time
63. Application to the private sector
64. Regulations
65. Interpretation
66. Modification to existing enactments

*Right to Information Bill*

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**BILL**

ENTITLED

**RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT, 2013**

AN ACT to provide for the implementation of the constitutional right to information held by a government agency, subject to the exemptions that are necessary and consistent with the protection of the public interest in a democratic society, to foster a culture of transparency and accountability in public affairs and to provide for related matters.

PASSED by Parliament and assented to by the President:

*Access to official information*

**Right of access to official information**

1. (1) In accordance with paragraph (f) of clause (1) of article 21 of the Constitution, a person has a right of access to information or part of an information in the custody or under the control of a government agency.

(2) The exercise of the right under subsection (1) is subject to the exemptions specified in sections 5 to 18.

(3) The right may be exercised through an application made in accordance with section 19.

(4) A person does not have to give a reason for the application except where that person requests that the application be treated as urgent.

## *Right to Information Bill*

(5) Where an agency receives an application for access, part of which is exempt, the information officer shall disclose to the applicant as much of the information as can reasonably be separated without disclosing the exempt part.

### **Responsibility of Government to provide information on governance**

2. In addition to the requirements of article 67 of the Constitution, and subject to this Act, the Government shall make available to the people, general information on their governance without application from a specific person.

#### *Compilation and publication of manual on information of an agency*

### **Responsibility of Minister in respect of access**

3. (1) The Minister responsible for a government agency shall, within twelve months from the date of the coming into force of this Act, and every twelve months after that date, compile and publish, after consultation with the Public Services Commission and the Head of the Civil Service and in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Public Services Commission under section 4, an up-to-date official information compilation in the form of a manual, listing the government agencies that are under that Ministry.

(2) The manual shall contain

- (a) a description of the organisational structure and functions of each agency including details of the responsibility of each division or branch of each agency,
- (b) a list of the various classes of information which are prepared by or are in the custody or under the control of each agency,
- (c) a list of the types of information that may be purchased or inspected free of charge or subject to a fee, and the deposit required or the fee or charge payable in respect of an access to information as specified by the Minister responsible for Justice under section 50,
- (d) the name, telephone number, fax, e-mail and postal address of the information officer of the agency or a designated officer of the agency to whom a request for access may be made,
- (e) the place in the agency where information which is accessible under this Act or any other enactment, can be found or made available,

*Right to Information Bill*

- (f) the arrangements made or procedures established by the agency that will enable members of the public to participate in the formulation of the policies of the agency, and
- (g) the arrangements made or procedures established by the agency to enable a member of the public to seek amendment of that member's personal official records with the agency.

**Provision of guidelines for manual**

4. The Public Services Commission in consultation with the Attorney-General shall provide guidelines

- (a) for the preparation under section 3, of the manual by the Minister responsible for a government agency; and
- (b) for the preparation and publication of the constitutional instrument or the statutory instrument required under paragraph (c) of article 296 of the Constitution.

*Exempt information*

**Information from the Office of the President and of the Vice President**

5. (1) Information is exempt from disclosure

- (a) if it is for submission or has been submitted to the Office of the President or of the Vice-President, or
- (b) if it contains matters the disclosure of which would reveal information concerning opinion, advice, deliberation, recommendations, minutes or consultations made or given to the President or the Vice-President.

(2) A certificate signed personally by the Secretary to the President or the Secretary to the Vice-President that information is exempt information is conclusive evidence that the information is exempt subject to the operation of article 135 of the Constitution.

(3) Information which contains factual or statistical data and does not disclose information concerning a deliberation or decision of the Office of the President or of the Vice President is not exempt information.

**Information relating to Cabinet**

6. (1) Information is exempt from disclosure

- (a) if it is prepared for submission to the Cabinet or submitted to the Cabinet for consideration,

*Right to Information Bill*

- (b) if it is an official information from the Cabinet, not published or released to the public, or
- (c) if it contains matters which if disclosed would reveal information on a decision, deliberation or discussion of the Cabinet.

(2) Information which contains factual or statistical data and which does not disclose information concerning a decision, deliberation or discussion of the Cabinet is not exempt information.

(3) A certificate signed personally by the Secretary to the Cabinet or the Head of National Security that the information is exempt information is conclusive evidence that the information is exempt subject to the operation of article 135 of the Constitution.

(4) This section does not prevent the Cabinet from publishing or granting access to information that is otherwise exempt.

(5) For the purposes of this section, a reference to the Cabinet includes a reference to a committee or sub-committee of the Cabinet.

**Information relating to law enforcement, public safety and national security**

7. (1) Information is exempt from disclosure if it contains matters which if disclosed can reasonably be expected

- (a) to interfere with the prevention, detection or curtailment of a contravention or possible contravention of a law,
- (b) to prejudice the investigation of a contravention or possible contravention of a law,
- (c) to reveal investigation techniques and procedures in use or likely to be used in law enforcement,
- (d) to disclose the identity of a confidential source of information, matter or the information given by a confidential source in respect of law enforcement,
- (e) to impede the prosecution of an offence,
- (f) to endanger the life or physical safety of a person,
- (g) to prejudice the fair trial of a person or the impartial adjudication of a case,
- (h) to reveal a record of information that has been confiscated from a person by a police officer or a person authorised to effect the confiscation in accordance with an enactment,

### *Right to Information Bill*

- (i) to interfere with the maintenance or enforcement of a lawful method or procedure for protecting the safety of the public,
  - (j) to endanger the security of a building, structure or means of transport or a system including computer and communication systems for which security is reasonably required,
  - (k) to prejudice the security of a prison or place for lawful detention,
  - (l) to facilitate the escape of a person from lawful custody, or
  - (m) to prejudice a system or procedure for witness protection or any other procedure for the protection of persons or property where the protection is required.
- (2) Information is not exempt from disclosure
- (a) if it consists merely of a report on the success of a programme adopted by an agency to deal with a contravention or possible contravention of the law,
  - (b) if it contains a general outline of the structures of a programme adopted by an agency to deal with a contravention or possible contravention of an enactment, or
  - (c) if it consists merely of a report on a law enforcement investigation that has already been disclosed to the person who is the subject of the investigation.
- (3) Information created by or in the custody of the Armed Forces or the security and intelligence agencies established under the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act, 1996 (Act 526) which relates to the security of the State is an exempt information.

#### **Information affecting international relations**

- 8.** (1) Information is exempt information if its disclosure can reasonably be expected
- (a) to damage or prejudice the relations between the Government and the government of any other country,
  - (b) to reveal information communicated in confidence to a government agency by or on behalf of another government, or



## *Right to Information Bill*

(c) to reveal information communicated in confidence to an agency by an international organisation of states or a body of that organisation.

(2) Despite subsection (1), the exempt information may be disclosed if the President gives prior approval for the disclosure.

### **Information that affects the defence of the country**

**9.** Information is exempt information if its disclosure can reasonably be expected

- (a) to damage or prejudice the defence of the Republic or a foreign state allied to or friendly with the Republic, or
- (b) to be prejudicial to the detection, prevention or suppression of terrorism, sabotage or espionage.

### **Economic and any other interests**

**10.** Information is exempt from disclosure prior to official publication

- (a) if it contains trade secrets or financial, commercial, scientific or technical information that belongs to the Government and the information has monetary or a potential monetary value,
- (b) if the disclosure of the information can reasonably be expected to damage the financial interests of the Government or the ability of the Government to manage the national economy,
- (c) if the disclosure of the information can reasonably be expected to create undue disturbance in the ordinary course of business or trade in the country,
- (d) if the disclosure of the information can unduly benefit or be injurious to a person because it provides advance information about future economic or financial measures to be introduced by the Government,
- (e) if it contains criteria, procedures, positions or instructions that relate to negotiations carried on or to be carried on by or on behalf of the Government, or
- (f) if it contains questions to be used in an examination or test for educational purposes.

## *Right to Information Bill*

### **Economic information of third parties**

**11.** (1) Information which would reveal a trade secret, research, scientific, technical, commercial, financial or labour related information supplied in confidence whether expressly or impliedly is exempt information if the disclosure can reasonably be expected

(a) to prejudice the competitive position or interfere with the contractual or any other negotiations of a person, a group of persons or an organisation,

(b) to result in undue loss or gain to a person, a group, a financial institution or any other body, or

(c) to result in similar information which is not being supplied to the agency, where it is in the public interest that similar information continue to be supplied.

(2) Information which has already been made available to the public by the appropriate person, authority or body is not exempt information under subsection (1).

### **Information relating to tax**

**12.** (1) Information obtained from a tax return or gathered for the purposes of determining tax liability is exempt information.

(2) Exempt information under subsection (1), may be disclosed if the person to whom the information relates agrees to the disclosure.

### **Internal working information of agencies**

**13.** (1) Information which if disclosed would reveal

(a) an opinion, an advice, a report or a recommendation contained, prepared or recorded, or

(b) a consultation or a deliberation held

in the course of or for the purpose of making a decision in the public service or an agency of the Government and which can reasonably be expected to frustrate or inhibit the candid deliberative process of an agency or between agencies is exempt information.

(2) Information is not exempt from disclosure under sub-section (1)

(a) if it merely contains material that has been publicly mentioned as forming the basis of a public policy or for formulating public policy, or

(b) if it contains only factual or statistical data.

## *Right to Information Bill*

### **Parliamentary privilege, fair trial, contempt of court**

**14.** Information is exempt information if its disclosure can reasonably be expected

- (a) to infringe or contravene a parliamentary privilege,
- (b) to prejudice the fair trial of a person or the impartial adjudication of a case before a Court or a quasi-judicial body, or
- (c) to constitute contempt of court or of a quasi-judicial body.

### **Legal profession and any other privilege under law**

**15.** (1) Information is exempt information where it is privileged from disclosure on grounds of

- (a) lawyer and client professional relationship,
- (b) communication between
  - (i) spouses whether married under an enactment or under the common law as defined in clause (2) of article 11 of the Constitution,
  - (ii) a man and a woman who hold themselves up as husband and wife, or
- (c) the Evidence Act, 1975 (N.R.C.D. 323).

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply where the person entitled to the privilege knowingly waives the privilege.

### **Medical professional privilege**

**16.** Information the disclosure of which reveals confidential communication between a doctor and a patient or any other medical professional expert, in connection with the patient's medical diagnosis or treatment is exempt information.

### **Disclosure of personal matters**

**17.** (1) Information the disclosure of which involves the unreasonable disclosure of information concerning the personal affairs of an individual whether living or deceased is exempt information.

(2) Disclosure is unreasonable if it reveals or is likely to reveal information about the individual's

- (a) physical or mental health,
- (b) marriage or employment record,
- (c) business or trade secrets of commercial value to the individual, or
- (d) professional, commercial or financial affairs.

*Right to Information Bill*

- (3) Disclosure is reasonable if
- (a) the individual to whom the information relates gives prior consent,
  - (b) the disclosure is required to promote public health or public safety,
  - (c) the disclosure is necessary in order to subject government activities to public scrutiny,
  - (d) the disclosure does not unjustifiably damage the reputation of any other person referred to in the information,
  - (e) the disclosure is made to the individual to whom the information relates,
  - (f) the disclosure does not contravene a provision on exempt information specified in this Act,
  - (g) the disclosure would not have an adverse effect on the affairs of the individual or prejudice the future supply of the information,
  - (h) the information has already been made available to the public by the appropriate person, authority or body,
  - (i) the individual to whom the information relates was informed or made aware prior to supplying the information that the information belongs to a class of information that will or might be made available to the public, or
  - (j) in the case of a deceased person, the applicant is the next of kin or represents the next of kin or is the personal representative of the deceased.

**Disclosure for the protection of public interest**

**18.** Despite a provision of this Act on exempt information, information is not exempt if the disclosure of the information reveals evidence of

- (a) a contravention of, or a failure to comply with, a law, or
- (b) an imminent and serious risk to public safety, public health or the environment,
- (c) miscarriage of justice,
- (d) abuse of authority or a neglect in the performance of an official function,

and the benefits of disclosure clearly outweigh the harm or danger that could occur in the event of a disclosure.

## *Right to Information Bill*

### *Procedure for access*

#### **Application for access to information**

**19.** (1) An application for access to information held by an agency shall

- (a) be made in writing to the agency,
- (b) contain sufficient description or particulars to enable the information to be identified,
- (c) indicate the type of access required,
- (d) state the capacity of the applicant to the satisfaction of the officer to whom the application is made, if the application is made on behalf of another person,
- (e) state an address in the country to which a communication or notice can be sent, and
- (f) be accompanied with the relevant fee.

(2) Where an applicant is unable to make the application in writing due to illiteracy or a disability, the applicant shall make the request orally.

(3) Where a request is made orally under subsection (2), the request shall be reduced into writing by the officer to whom the application is made, who shall give a copy of the written request as recorded and as duly authenticated to the applicant.

(4) Where an application does not sufficiently describe the information required, the agency to which the application is made shall so inform the applicant and offer the applicant the necessary assistance to identify the document.

#### **Person to deal with application**

**20.** (1) An application for access to information shall be dealt with by the information officer of the agency or an officer designated for that purpose by the Minister in the manual referred to in section 3.

(2) The information officer of the agency or the designated officer may delegate the function under subsection (1).

(3) The delegation

- (a) shall be in writing, and
- (b) does not prevent the person who made the delegation from performing the function as provided under subsection (1).

## *Right to Information Bill*

### **Transfer of application**

**21.** (1) Where an agency is unable to deal with an application because the information requested

- (a) is not in the custody or control of the agency, but to the knowledge of the agency, it is held by another agency, or
- (b) is in the custody of the agency but it is more closely related to the functions of another agency,

the information officer to whom the application is made shall, within ten working days of the receipt of the application, transfer the application to the other agency and give written notice of the transfer to the applicant.

(2) Where an application for access is made and the agency to which the application is made does not have the information in its custody, the information officer

- (a) shall make the necessary enquiry to establish whether any other agency has the information, and
- (b) shall transfer the application to that other agency if that agency has the information, and
- (c) shall notify the applicant accordingly.

(3) A notice of transfer shall state,

- (a) the date of the transfer,
- (b) the agency to which the transfer is made, and
- (c) the reason for the transfer.

(4) An application transferred from one agency to another is a request for access to information made to the agency to which the application is transferred on the date the transfer is received.

### **Deferred access**

**22.** An agency may defer access to information if it is information

- (a) which requires publication under an enactment but the information is yet to be published,
- (b) which is required to be published within ninety days from the receipt of the application or the transfer of the application, or
- (c) which has been prepared for submission to any person or body and is yet to be submitted.

### **Decision on application**

**23.** (1) Where an application for access is received by an agency, the information officer shall take a decision on the application and send a written notice to the applicant within twenty one working days from the date of receipt of the application.

*Right to Information Bill*

- (2) The notice shall state
  - (a) whether or not access to the information will be given,
  - (b) whether access to only a part of the information can be given and the reason for giving only a part,
  - (c) whether or not there has been a transfer under section 21, and
  - (d) whether or not there is deferred access under section 22.
- (3) Where the information officer decides to give access, the notice shall state
  - (a) the period, which shall not be more than fourteen days, within which the access can be given,
  - (b) the form or manner in which the access will be given,
  - (c) whether access is to only a part of the information because the other part is exempt information,
  - (d) the day on which the agency expects the information to be published or submitted, in the case of a deferred access under section 22, and
  - (e) the fee to be paid by the applicant.
- (4) Where the agency decides to refuse access, the notice shall state,
  - (a) the reason for the refusal,
  - (b) the right of the applicant to seek redress in accordance with the provisions on internal reviews and appeals under sections 38 to 45,
  - (c) the name and rank of the officer who dealt with the application, and
  - (d) the fees payable for dealing with the application.
- (5) Where an agency fails to determine an application within twenty-one working days after the application is received by the agency, the agency shall give reasons for the failure, and the applicant has the right to seek redress under sections 38 to 45.
- (6) Subsection (5) does not apply to an application which has been transferred to another agency or which the agency has refused to continue to process for failure to pay the required deposit or fee.

## *Right to Information Bill*

### **Information that cannot be found or not in existence**

**24.** (1) Where reasonable and practical steps have been taken to find the information requested and there are reasonable grounds to believe that the information

- (a) is in the possession of the agency but cannot be found, or
- (b) does not exist,

the information officer or the designated officer shall by a statutory declaration notify the applicant that it is not possible to give access for the stated reason.

(2) The notice shall state the steps taken to find the document or to determine its existence.

(3) A notice under this section is a refusal to give access to the information and the applicant may take the steps that are open to the applicant under sections 38 to 45.

(4) Where the information is found after the notice, the information officer shall so notify the applicant and give access, unless the information is exempt or is inaccessible under a provision of this Act.

### **Payment of advance deposit**

**25.** (1) Where the costs to the agency for dealing with an application are likely to exceed the amount of the application fee, the agency may request the applicant to pay a reasonable advance deposit determined by the agency.

(2) A deposit requested by an agency under subsection (1) is not part of the application fee, and accordingly a further advance deposit paid in respect of the application which is in excess of the amount which is necessary to cover the costs of dealing with the application shall be refunded to the applicant.

(3) A request for an advance deposit shall be accompanied with a notice that sets out the basis on which the amount of the deposit has been calculated.

(4) The amount of advance deposit requested by an agency in respect of an application shall be paid to the agency within the period of time specified by the agency in the request.

(5) An agency may refuse to give access to information if a fee or advance deposit payable is not paid within the period notified to the applicant.

(6) An agency shall refund an excess payment of a fee or deposit to the applicant.



*Right to Information Bill*

**Extension of time to deal with an application**

**26.** (1) An information officer may extend the time provided for dealing with the application for a further period if

- (a) the application is for a large quantity of information or necessitates a search through a large number of documents and compliance with the original time limit would unreasonably interfere with the operations of the agency,
- (b) the information requested has to be gathered from more than one source,
- (c) consultations with a person outside the agency are required and cannot reasonably be complied with within the time limit, or
- (d) the applicant agrees to the extension of time.

(2) The period of extension shall not exceed twenty-one working days from the date when a decision on the application should have been made, but the Minister responsible for a government agency may, on an application in writing, grant further periods of extension not exceeding a total of three months.

(3) Where an extension of time is granted under this section, an information officer shall, within thirty days of the receipt of the application, notify the applicant in writing stating,

- (a) the period of the extension,
- (b) the reason for the extension, and
- (c) the right of the applicant to lodge an application for a review under sections 38 to 45 within the prescribed period.

**Refusal to process for failure to pay deposit**

**27.** (1) An agency may refuse to continue to process an application where the agency has by notice demanded payment of an advance deposit in relation to the application, and the applicant has not paid the deposit within the period of time specified in the notice.

(2) Where an agency refuses to continue to process an application when the applicant has paid part of the advance deposit, the agency shall refund to the applicant the part of the advance deposit paid which exceeds the costs incurred by the agency in processing the application.

(3) An agency which refuses to continue to process an application shall immediately notify the applicant in writing of the refusal.

(4) A refusal to continue to process an application under this section is subject to review and appeal under sections 38 to 45.

*Right to Information Bill*

**Refusal of access**

28. (1) An agency may refuse access to information if
- (a) the application is manifestly frivolous or vexatious,
  - (b) the information is an exempt information,
  - (c) the work involved in processing the application will, if carried out, substantially and unreasonably divert resources away from their use by the agency in the performance of the agency's functions,
  - (d) the information is contained in a document which is available for inspection at that or any other agency, whether as part of a public register or otherwise, or whether or not inspection of the document is subject to a fee or charge,
  - (e) the information is contained in a document which is available from, or available for inspection at, that agency, free of charge, in accordance with that agency's policies and practices,
  - (f) the information is usually available for purchase, or
  - (g) the information forms part of library material.
- (2) An agency shall not refuse to give access by virtue of paragraph (c) of subsection (1) without first assisting the applicant to amend the application so that the work involved in processing it will not, if carried out, substantially and unreasonably divert the agency's resources away from their use by the agency.

**Manner of access**

29. (1) Access to information may be given to an applicant
- (a) by giving the applicant
    - (i) a reasonable opportunity to inspect the document containing the information, and
    - (ii) a copy of the document containing the information,
  - (b) by making arrangements for the applicant to hear the sounds or view the visual images, in the case of information contained in a document from which sounds or visual images are capable of being reproduced, whether or not with the aid of another device,
  - (c) by giving the applicant a written transcript of the words recorded in the document, in the case of information contained in a document in which words are recorded in a manner in which they are capable of being reproduced in the form of sound,

*Right to Information Bill*

- (d) by giving the applicant a written transcript of the words contained in the document, in the case of information contained in a document in which words are contained in the form of shorthand writing or in coded form,
  - (e) by giving the applicant the written form, in the case of information contained in a document in which words are recorded in a manner in which they are capable of being reproduced in a written form, or
  - (f) in any other form, electronic or otherwise, including computer printouts, diskette, compact disk rom and downloading.
- (2) Where an applicant has requested that access be given in a particular form, access to the information shall be given in that form.
- (3) Subsection (2) does not apply where giving access in the form requested,
- (a) will unreasonably divert the agency's resources away from their use by the agency in the performance of its functions,
  - (b) will be detrimental to the preservation of the information or having regard to the nature of the document containing the information, will otherwise not be appropriate, or
  - (c) will involve an infringement of a copyright subsisting in a matter contained in the information.
- (4) Where access cannot be given in the form specified by the applicant but can be given in some other form, access shall be given in that other form.
- (5) Where an applicant requests that access be given in a particular form, the information officer may refuse access in that form and give access in another form.
- (6) For the purposes of subsection (5), the applicant shall not pay a charge which is greater than the charge that the applicant would have paid had access been given in the form requested.
- (7) This section does not prevent an agency from giving access to information in a form agreed on between the agency and the person who requested the access.

*Amendment of personal records in custody of an agency*

**Amendment of personal records**

**30.** A person given access to information contained in an agency's

## *Right to Information Bill*

records may apply for an amendment of the information if

- (a) the information represents the personal records of that person, and
- (b) in that person's opinion, the information is incorrect, misleading, incomplete or out of date.

### **Application for amendment of information**

**31.** (1) An application for the amendment of information contained in an agency's records

- (a) shall be in writing,
- (b) shall specify that it is made under this Act,
- (c) shall contain particulars which will enable the agency's records, to which the applicant has been given access, to be identified, and
- (d) shall specify the area in which the applicant claims the information contained in the records is incorrect, misleading, incomplete or out of date.

(2) Where the applicant claims that the information contained in the records is incomplete or out of date, the application shall be accompanied with the relevant information which the applicant considers necessary to complete the agency's records or bring them up to date.

(3) An application shall indicate an address in the country to which a notice under this Act should be sent and the application shall be submitted at the office of the agency.

### **Dealing with an application to amend records**

**32.** The provisions of sections 20 and 23 which deal with applications and the twenty one working days period for dealing with an application shall apply to section 30 with the necessary modifications.

### **Incomplete applications**

**33.** An agency shall not refuse to accept an application to amend a personal record on the ground that the application does not contain sufficient particulars to enable the agency's records which contain the information to which the applicant has been given access to be identified, without first taking steps that are reasonably practicable to assist the applicant to provide the relevant particulars.

### **Action on application to amend record**

**34.** (1) An agency shall, in respect of an application to amend a personal record,

- (a) amend its records in accordance with the application, or
- (b) refuse to amend its records.

## *Right to Information Bill*

(2) Where an agency fails to take a decision on an application within twenty-one working days after the application is received by the agency to amend its records in accordance with the application, the agency shall give reasons for the failure and the applicant has the right to seek redress under sections 38 to 45.

### **Refusal to amend records**

**35.** An agency may refuse to amend its records in accordance with an application if it is satisfied that

- (a) its records are complete, correct, up to date or not misleading in a material particular, or
- (b) the application contains matter that is incorrect or misleading in a material particular.

### **Notice of decision**

**36.** Section 23 (which requires notice of a decision to be given by the information officer of an agency to an applicant within twenty one working days) applies to the application for amendment of a personal record with the necessary modifications.

### **Notations to be added to records**

**37.** (1) Where an agency refuses to amend its records, the applicant may, by notice in writing lodged at an office of the agency, require the agency to add to those records a notation

- (a) specifying the particulars in respect of which the applicant claims the records are incomplete, incorrect, out of date or misleading, and
- (b) setting out the information the applicant claims is necessary to complete the records or to bring them up to date if the applicant claims the records are incomplete or out of date.

(2) The agency shall comply with the requirements of the notice lodged under subsection (1) and shall give a written notice of the notation to the applicant.

(3) Where an agency discloses to another person an information contained in the part of its records to which a notice relates, the agency

- (a) shall give to that person, when the information is disclosed,
  - (i) a statement that the person to whom the records relate, claims that the information in the record is incomplete, incorrect, out of date or misleading, and

*Right to Information Bill*

- (ii) a statement setting out particulars of the notation added to its records, and
- (b) shall in the statement, give the reason for the agency's refusal to amend its records in accordance with the notation.

*Internal reviews and appeals*

**Internal review by the Minister**

**38.** (1) Except as otherwise provided in this Act, a person aggrieved by a decision of the information officer of an agency may submit an application for review of that decision to the Minister responsible for the agency.

- (2) An application for review
  - (a) shall be in writing,
  - (b) shall be accompanied with the prescribed fee,
  - (c) shall be addressed to the Minister, and
  - (d) shall be submitted within twenty-one working days after the receipt of the notification of the decision sought to be reviewed.

**Action by the Minister**

**39.** (1) On the receipt of an application for review, the Minister responsible for the government agency shall

- (a) inform the information officer who dealt with the original application and any other person affected by the review, and
- (b) call for and examine any other document of relevance to the review.

(2) The Minister may by notice in writing require the applicant and any other person affected by the review to make a submission in person or in writing to the Minister in furtherance of the review.

(3) The Minister shall conduct the review *in camera*.

(4) The Minister shall not, in the course of reviewing the decision of an agency, disclose to the applicant or a person other than the information officer, an information that is exempt under this Act.

**Decision of Minister on review**

**40.** (1) The Minister responsible for the government agency shall notify the applicant of the Minister's decision on the application within twenty-one working days of receipt of the application for a review, if there is no delay or other default on the part of the applicant.

## *Right to Information Bill*

- (2) The notice shall state
- (a) the reason for the decision and the provision of this Act relied on, and
  - (b) where the review is dismissed, that the applicant may file an application for a judicial review of the decision of the Minister by the Supreme Court .

(3) Where the Minister fails to notify the applicant of a decision on the review within the twenty one working days, the Minister shall give reasons for the failure, and the applicant may seek redress in the Supreme Court.

(4) Where the Minister decides a review in favour of the applicant for access to information, the information officer shall within forty-eight hours after the Minister's decision has been communicated to the applicant, give access to the relevant information.

### **Delegation of power by Minister**

**41.** The Minister responsible for a government agency may in writing delegate the power conferred under sections 38 to 40 to an officer of a rank higher than that of the information officer.

### **Application to Supreme Court for judicial review**

**42.** (1) Where an applicant is refused access to information by an agency

- (a) because the disclosure
  - (i) will be prejudicial to the security of the State, or
  - (ii) will be injurious to the public interest, or
- (b) for any other reason,

the applicant may apply to the Supreme Court for a judicial review of the decision.

(2) The application for judicial review shall be lodged within twenty one working days of receipt of the notification of the decision.

### **Powers of the Supreme Court**

**43.** (1) In addition to its powers under the Constitution, the Supreme Court may, in respect of an application for judicial review under section 40 or section 42,

- (a) require the relevant information under the control of the agency to be produced before it for examination and scrutiny,
- (b) enter and inspect premises occupied by the agency concerned in the appeal,

## *Right to Information Bill*

(c) require to see original documents, and

(d) summon and examine on oath a person who the Supreme Court considers may have information relevant to the appeal.

(2) The proceedings of the Supreme Court shall be held *in camera* and the Supreme Court may prohibit the publication of information relating to the proceedings.

(3) The Supreme Court shall not, in the course of a review, disclose to a party other than the representative of the agency and the Attorney-General information which is exempt from disclosure under this Act.

### **Ruling of the Supreme Court**

44. (1) The Supreme Court after hearing the application and presentations made before it, may make an appropriate order.

(2) Where the Supreme Court orders that access should be given to an information, the Court shall specify the period within which access should be given.

### **Right to a lawyer or other expert**

45. A person who applies for access to information, the information officer of the agency concerned and a person affected by any proceedings under this Act whether before a Minister or a Court is entitled to be represented by a lawyer or an expert.

## *General and miscellaneous provisions*

### **Burden of proof**

46. In proceedings for the review of a decision of a person who has authority to grant or refuse access to information under this Act, the burden of proof that the decision is justified lies on that person.

### **Appointment of information officers**

47. For the purposes of this Act, an agency shall designate an officer known as an information officer to perform the functions assigned to an information officer under this Act.

### **Protection in respect of actions for defamation or breach of confidence**

48. (1) Where access to information is given under this Act, and the person by whom the decision to give access believes in good faith, when making the decision, that this Act permits or requires the decision to be



## *Right to Information Bill*

made, an action for defamation or breach of confidence does not lie against the Republic, an agency, an information officer, the Minister responsible for a government agency or a member of staff of an agency in respect of the making of the decision or the giving of access.

(2) The giving of access to information under this Act or the making of a decision to give access does not constitute, for the purposes of the law relating to defamation or breach of confidence, an authorisation or approval of the publication of the information by the person to whom access is given.

### **Protection in respect of certain criminal actions**

**49.** Where access to information is given in good faith under this Act, the person by whom the decision is made or a person concerned in giving access to the information has not committed an offence in respect of the decision to give access.

### **Fees and charges of agency**

**50.** (1) An applicant seeking an access to information under this Act shall pay the fee or charge determined by the Minister responsible for Justice.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) the Minister shall, by legislative instrument, issue the relevant guidelines to the agencies.

(3) The guidelines shall specify the amount payable for

(a) a search for every hour or fraction of an hour of manual search required in excess of two hours to locate the information,

(b) computer access and any other costs incurred in locating, retrieving, processing and photocopying the information,

(c) the cost of preparing the information for disclosure, and

(d) the postage costs.

### **Waiver of fee on basis of financial hardship**

**51.** An information officer of an agency may, on the authority of the Minister responsible for the government agency, waive a fee or charge for giving access to information where the information officer considers that the applicant will suffer financial hardship if required to pay the fee or charge.

### **Fees and charges not part of the Consolidated Fund**

**52.** Fees and charges received by an agency under this Act do not form a part of the Consolidated Fund and shall be kept by the agency in an

## *Right to Information Bill*

identified account to be used to defray the expenses incurred by the agency in the performance of its functions under this Act.

### **Responsibility of the Minister**

**53.** (1) The Minister responsible for Justice has ministerial responsibility for the effective implementation of this Act, and may for that purpose issue written guidelines to agencies and ministries.

(2) Subsection (1) is in addition to paragraph (c) of article 296 of the Constitution.

(3) The Minister may

- (a) conduct public education programmes and provide information for the implementation of this Act,
- (b) initiate research to be conducted into matters affecting the purposes of this Act, and
- (c) receive representations from the public in respect of the operation of this Act.

### **Attorney-General as a party to proceedings**

**54.** The Attorney-General shall, under this Act, be a party to proceedings before the Supreme Court for the review of a decision of an agency.

### **Annual reports by agencies**

**55.** (1) An agency shall, within three months after the 31st of December each year, submit a written report on the activities of the agency under this Act during the preceding year to the Minister responsible for Justice.

(2) The report shall include

- (a) the number of applications for access during the reporting period;
- (b) the number of applications approved and the number rejected together with the reasons for the rejection;
- (c) the number of reviews requested, the number granted and the number dismissed together with reasons; and
- (d) the number of applications to the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court for judicial review and the results of the reviews.

(3) The Minister may in writing request for any other information which the Minister considers necessary for the purposes of submitting a comprehensive report to Parliament under section 56.

## *Right to Information Bill*

### **Report by the Minister to Parliament**

**56.** (1) The Minister responsible for Justice shall by the 30th of June of each year lay before Parliament an annual report on the activities of the agencies in respect of the preceding year based on the annual reports of the agencies referred to in section 55.

(2) The report of the Minister may contain comments that the Minister considers necessary including an assessment of the extent to which agencies are complying with this Act.

### **Limitation of period for exempt information**

**57.** (1) Information classified as exempt information under sections 5 to 18 ceases to be exempt information on the expiry of twenty-five years calculated from the end of the calendar year in which the information came into existence.

(2) On the expiry of the period specified in subsection (1), a person may seek access to the information and the agency which has custody of the information shall give access in accordance with the procedure for access under this Act.

### **Information held by the national archives, museums and libraries**

**58.** This Act does not apply to information held by the national archives, libraries and museums to which the public have access.

### **Application of Act to existing and future information**

**59.** (1) This Act applies to information which came into existence before, or comes into existence after, the commencement of this Act.

(2) This Act applies to information held by an independent contractor engaged by an agency as a contractor and that information, for the purposes of this Act, is information held by the agency.

### **Offence of disclosure of exempt information**

**60.** A person who wilfully discloses information which is exempt from disclosure under this Act commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of not less than two hundred and fifty penalty units or to a term of imprisonment of not less than twelve months or to both the fine and the imprisonment or to a non-custodial sentence as determined by the Court.

### **Other offences**

**61.** (1) A failure or neglect by an information officer or other public officer to perform a function authorised by this Act where the occasion arises to perform that function constitutes a gross misconduct.

## *Right to Information Bill*

- (2) A person who
  - (a) seeks or gains access to the personal record of another person under false pretences,
  - (b) wilfully makes a false statement
    - (i) to mislead any other person in order to gain access, or
    - (ii) to gain access to information, or
  - (c) with intent to deny right of access to information,
    - (i) destroys, damages, alters or conceals a document, or
    - (ii) makes a false entry in a document,

commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of not less than two hundred and fifty penalty units or to a term of imprisonment of not less than twelve months or to both the fine and the imprisonment or to a non-custodial sentence as determined by the Court.

### **Extension of time**

**62.** Unless extension of time is provided for, where in this Act provision is made for taking a step, for the doing of an act or making a decision within a specified time, the time may be extended for a further period not exceeding fourteen working days if

- (a) the extension is needed to locate and retrieve the requested information, or
- (b) the extension is necessary to enable consultation to be held with another person on the requested information.

### **Application to the private sector**

**63.** (1) The Minister responsible for Justice may, by legislative instrument, extend the application of this Act to the private sector.

(2) The legislative instrument made under subsection (1) shall specify

- (a) the provisions of the Act which shall apply to the private sector,
- (b) the type of information to which access should be given,
- (c) the exemptions which shall apply to the private sector as they apply in the public sector, and
- (d) the court procedures that may be enforced to make available the requisite information.

### **Regulations**

**64.** The Minister responsible for Justice may, by legislative instrument,

## *Right to Information Bill*

make Regulations

- (a) making it obligatory for government agencies and private organisations to maintain their records in good and accessible condition in order to facilitate access to information;
- (b) for further procedures for access to information under this Act,
- (c) for the amounts of the fees and charges to be paid to an agency in respect of access to information,
- (d) making it obligatory for the institutions of chieftaincy to maintain their records in good and accessible conditions, within the limits imposed by article 270 of the Constitution, in order to facilitate access to information, and
- (e) to provide for matters that are necessary to give full effect to this Act.

### **Interpretation**

**65.** In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,

“access” means right of access to information;

“agency” means a government agency;

“Court” means a court of competent jurisdiction;

“designated officer” means an officer so designated for the purposes of this Act;

“exempt information” means information which falls within any of the exemptions specified in sections 5 to 18;

“function” includes powers and duties;

“government agency” includes a Ministry, a government department, District Assembly or a local authority, a statutory or any other body corporate or unincorporated, or a public office, funded in whole or in part from public funds or in which the Government has an interest, or holds shares;

“information” includes recorded matter or material,

(a) regardless of form or medium,

(b) in the possession or under the control or custody of an agency, and

(c) whether or not it was created or made by an agency;

## *Right to Information Bill*

“information officer” includes the information officer of the agency to whom an application is made and a designated officer;

“international organisation” includes an organisation of States or Government of States or an organ of that organisation;

“right of access” means the right of access to information;

“state secret” includes information considered confidential by the Government which if disclosed would be prejudicial to the security of the State or injurious to the public interest;

“trade secret” means a secret formula or technique, process, programme, device or product known and used to the advantage of only one manufacturer and the disclosure of which would cause significant economic loss to the owner or manufacturer.

### **Modification to existing enactments**

**66.** Where an enactment in existence immediately before the coming into force of this Act, provides for the disclosure of information by a person or an authority, the disclosure of the information is subject to this Act.

Date of *Gazette* notification: 31st July, 2013.

## **Right to Information Bill**

### MEMORANDUM

The right to information is a fundamental human right guaranteed by the Constitution and is recognised as a right by international conventions on human rights.

Article 21 (1) (f) of the Constitution provides that

“All persons have the right to

(f) information subject to such qualifications and laws as are necessary in a democratic society;”

and the purpose of the Bill is to give substance to that constitutional provision by providing for

(a) access to official information held by government agencies, and

(b) the qualifications and conditions under which the access should be obtained.

Our choice of democratic governance entails an active participation by all in the governance of the country. In this participatory democracy, the right to information is particularly relevant. It is essential to ensure good governance. It is only when those who are to participate in governance are well informed that they can contribute meaningfully to governance. This can only be achieved if they have access to the relevant information. Thus access to information requires that there is in existence the requisite data or information. It also ensures

(a) that there is available to the individual the requisite data or information,

(b) that there is more truthfulness and transparency in government,

(c) that corruption is reduced to a minimum because the actions of various persons in authority are made subject to public scrutiny.

This realisation of the importance of the right to information and the desire to ensure that there is transparency in governance, constitute the foundation for empowering the citizenry to contribute to the good governance and rapid development and progress of this country. The right to information, however, needs to be qualified in accordance with the Constitution.

For our purposes, the Constitution in article 12 (2) subjects the enjoyment of the human rights provisions in Chapter Five to the rights

## Right to Information Bill

and freedoms of others and the public interest. In addition, article 21 (1) (f) specifically subjects the right to information “to such qualifications and laws as are necessary in a democratic society”. Conventions on human rights, such as the African Charter on Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provide guidelines as to the import of the right to information.

The underlying factor in the qualifications to the right to information, is the need to protect the safety and integrity of the State and the privacy of individuals. This need is summed up in the general term of “subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others” and “for the public interest”. In the language of article 12 (2) of the Constitution,

“Every person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual contained in this Chapter, but subject to respect for the rights and freedom of others and for the public interest”.

The required qualification to the right to information finds expression in the Bill through the exemptions and protection from disclosure of various kinds of information.

In the provision for the exemptions and protection, however, care has been taken to make them relate to specific circumstances and situations and to make them address specific pressing social needs so as to ensure that loopholes are not available which will be taken advantage of to whittle away the right of access in the implementation of the law.

The Bill deals with two broad subject areas, the first area dealing with information held by government agencies, and the second area with general and miscellaneous matters.

*Clause 1* provides for access to official information held by a government agency. Except for information specified as exempt information, a person has a right of access to information held by government agencies and does not need to give a reason for the request for access, unless that person requests that the application be treated with urgency.

Where a request for access to information that is partly exempt is made, the agency to which the request is made is required to honour the request in respect of that part of the information which is not exempt.



## **Right to Information Bill**

Thus the fact that information is partly exempt is not a valid ground for refusal of access.

Maximum disclosure in relation to governance is provided for in *clause 2* which requires the Government to make non-exempt information on governance available to the public without the need of an application. This provision is meant to ensure transparency in Government and to equip the public with the necessary knowledge and information to contribute meaningfully to national development. This provision and indeed any other mandatory provisions may, like any of the provisions of the Constitution on fundamental human rights, be enforced through an action at the High Court as specified in article 33 of the Constitution.

The compilation and publication of an up-to-date manual on official information, at the instance of every Minister in consultation with the Public Services Commission and the Head of Civil Service is covered by *clause 3*. The manual shall, among other things,

- (a) list the agencies that are under the Ministry,
- (b) describe the structure and functions of each agency and the various classes of information prepared by, kept by, or under the control of an agency;
- (c) list the types of information that may be purchased or accessed free of charge or at a fee;
- (d) provide the name, telephone number, e-mail and postal address of the person to whom a request for access should be made and state the procedures by which access may be obtained.

*Clause 4* requires the Public Services Commission in consultation with the Minister responsible for the implementation of the Act to provide guidelines for the preparation of the manual under *clause 2* of the Bill. The Attorney-General will be responsible for the implementation of the Act and any other enactment that relates to access to official information in the custody of an agency.

Exemptions are provided for in *clauses 5* and *6*,

- (a) from disclosure of information submitted or meant for submission to the President, the Vice-President as well as information that relates to opinion, advice and recom-

## Right to Information Bill

mentation, among others, given to the President or the Vice-President. A certificate signed by the Secretary to the President or the Vice-President establishes whether or not information that relates to the office of the President or the Vice-President is exempt, and is only subject to article 135 of the Constitution;

- (b) from disclosure of information submitted or meant for submission to the Cabinet and official information of the Cabinet which has not been published or released to the public, as well as decisions, deliberations and discussions of the Cabinet. Subject to article 135 of the Constitution a certificate signed by the Secretary to the Cabinet establishes whether information that relates to the Cabinet is exempt or not. In spite of the exemption from disclosure of information relating to the Cabinet, the Cabinet has the power to grant access to an information relating to its work. This is another provision intended to enhance transparency in governance.

*Clause 7* exempts information that relates to law enforcement, public safety and national security from disclosure. This provision is necessary for the protection of national security, public order and public health. Even then, where the information pertains to measures adopted to counteract a contravention or a possible contravention of the law and to the outcome of those measures, and disclosure of the information is in the public interest, the information ceases to be exempt.

*Clauses 8, 9 and 10* provide, among others, for the exemption from disclosure of information that is likely to damage or prejudice

- (a) the relationship between this country and any other countries or an international organization,
- (b) the defence of this country or of a friendly foreign country, and
- (c) the economic or financial interests of the country.

They are aimed at safeguarding the national interest or national security.

*Clause 11* exempts from disclosure confidential information which would reveal a trade secret or which relates to research, scientific, technical or commercial subjects or to labour where the disclosure of the information would prejudice the economic or financial interests of a person or group of persons. In *clause 12* provision is made for the exemption from

## Right to Information Bill

disclosure of information obtained on a tax return or for the purpose of determining tax liability. *Clauses 11 and 12* together protect the rights of third parties in respect of information held by government agencies, which affects the interests of the third parties. This is in consonance with the Constitution.

Information contained in internal working documents of an agency which relates to an opinion or advice given or a report or recommendation made or consultation or deliberation held in the course of making a decision in the agency is exempt from disclosure in so far as the disclosure will frustrate the decision making process of the agency. This information is, however, not exempt from disclosure if it forms the basis of a public policy or for formulating a public policy and has already been publicly mentioned.

*Clauses 14, 15, and 16*, respectively, exempt from disclosure privileged information the disclosure of which would

- (a) infringe or contravene a parliamentary privilege or constitute a contempt of court or of a quasi-judicial body;
- (b) infringe on lawyer and client professional relationship or communication between spouses whether married under an enactment or under the common law as defined in *clause (2)* of article 11 of the Constitution, or is privileged from disclosure under the Evidence Act, 1975 (NRC 323); or
- (c) reveal confidential communication between a doctor or any other medical expert and a patient in connection with the patient's medical diagnosis or treatment.

*Clause 17* exempts from disclosure information that relates to unreasonable disclosure of the personal affairs of an individual, whether dead or alive and defines what constitutes unreasonable disclosure. *Clauses 15, 16 and 17* taken together protect the individual's right to privacy.

The exemptions from disclosure are subject to the public interest and can be lifted where disclosure would help reveal a contravention or a failure to comply with a law or non-disclosure could result in an imminent and serious risk to public safety, health or the environment: *clause 18*.

*Clause 19* provides for the procedures for access. It requires among other things that an application for access to information shall,

- (a) be in writing, adequately describe the information for which access is sought;

## Right to Information Bill

- (b) disclose the nature of the access required;
- (c) provide an address in the country to which a response should be sent, and
- (d) be accompanied with the relevant fee.

In order to make access as universal as possible, the *clause* further provides, where the applicant cannot write, for oral applications which would be reduced into writing by the receiving officer. *Clause 20* specifies the officers who should deal with an application for access. They are the information officer of an agency or a person designated by the Minister in the manual for the purpose and any other officer to whom these officers may delegate their power in writing.

Provision is made under *clause 21* for the transfer of an application to the relevant agency where an agency to which the application was initially made is unable to deal with the application. Under *clause 22*, access to information may be deferred where the information is required by law to be published and it has not yet been published or where it is to be published within 90 days, or where it is meant to be submitted to a person and it has not yet been submitted to that person.

*Clause 23* makes the information officer of an agency responsible for determining an application and requires the information officer to give notice to the applicant within 21 working days from the date of receipt of the application stating whether or not access will be granted. Where access will be granted the notice will have to state the mode for the access. Where access is refused, the notice will have to state the reasons for the refusal.

In *clause 24* provision is made for the information officer of an agency to give notice to the applicant by a statutory declaration, where the information requested for cannot be found or does not exist. The declaration should state that it is not possible to give access for the reasons stated in the declaration and should further state the steps taken to find the information or to determine its existence. The notice is considered to be a refusal. *Clause 25* gives an agency powers to demand the payment of an advance deposit, where in the opinion of the agency the cost of processing exceeds the application fee. The agency has a discretion to specify the period of time within which an advance deposit should be paid and to refuse to process an application where any fee or advance

## Right to Information Bill

deposit required to be paid has not been paid, and is obliged to refund an advance deposit that is in excess of the cost of processing.

The information officer of an agency has the power under *clause 26* to extend the period for the processing of an application for a further period not exceeding 21 working days,

- (a) where the volume of work required in the processing is so huge that it would unreasonably interfere with the operations of the agency, or
- (b) where the processing requires consultation with a person outside the agency or the applicant agrees to the extension.

The information officer is required to give notice in writing of an extension to the applicant, state the reason for the extension in the notice and inform the applicant of the applicant's right to request for a review of the decision. Under *clause 27* an agency may refuse to continue the processing of an application where the applicant fails to pay a required deposit. In that event the agency must refund to the applicant a part of the advance payments made by the applicant that exceeds the cost of the processing up to the time of the refusal.

*Clause 28* provides the conditions under which an application for access may be refused. Under this *clause* the information officer of an agency is empowered to reject an application for access to information where

- (a) the application is frivolous or vexatious, or
- (b) the processing of the application would require an unreasonable diversion of the agency's resources and the applicant has not paid in advance the cost of the processing as determined by the agency.

This *clause* is virtually a summary of other provisions in the Bill. It, however, provides a useful reference on the subject of refusal of access. An applicant

- (a) may be allowed, under *clause 29* which provides for the manner of access, to inspect a document that contains the information,
- (b) may be given a copy of a document containing the information, and

may hear or view the information, among others, and be given access in the form requested by the applicant or in the form agreed on between the applicant and the agency.

## Right to Information Bill

*Clause 31* provides for the amendment of the personal records of a person who has been given access to information in the custody of an agency and which that person considers to be incorrect, misleading, incomplete or out-of-date. The application for amendment under *clause 30*, should be in writing and should specify that it is made under the law, give sufficient particulars to enable the records to be identified, specify the error, or omission in the records, provide the information necessary to correct the error or to fill in the omission and provide an address to which notices should be sent, *clause 32*. *Clause 34* applies with modifications as are necessary, the provisions in *clause 20* on the person to deal with an application and the 21 working days period for dealing with application as provided under *clauses 23* and *31* to correction of records.

*Clauses 33, 34, 36, and 37*

- (a) provide that an application to amend personal records should not be refused on the grounds that it does not contain sufficient information, without reasonable steps first being taken to assist the applicant to provide the required information;
- (b) provide for the determination of an application and the period for the determination which is 21 working days;
- (c) provide for the conditions under which an application for amendment of records may be rejected; and the application of *clause 21* with modifications to the section; and
- (d) provide that an applicant whose application to amend personal records is rejected may issue a notice in writing to the relevant agency requiring the agency to add a notation to the records specifying the applicant's objections to the records and recording the information the applicant claims is necessary to make the records acceptable.

The agency is bound to comply with a notice and cause a notice of the notation to be given to the applicant and to any other person who is given access to that record.

*Clause 38* on internal review and appeals, permits a person aggrieved by a decision of an information officer of an agency to apply in writing to the Minister for a review of the decision within 21 working days of receiving notice of the decision. The application has to be accompanied with the specified fee.

## **Right to Information Bill**

The procedure for review by the Minister is outlined in *clause 40*. The Minister has a discretion to require, through a notice, the person affected by the review to make a submission either in writing or in person in respect of the review. The Minister must hold the review in private and not disclose exempt information to either the applicant or to any person other than the information officer of the agency. Under *clause 40*, the Minister is obliged within 21 working days of receiving an application for a review to give notice to the applicant of the decision on the application unless the applicant causes a delay in the determination of the application. The notice should state the reason for the decision, the provision of the Act relied on and the right of the applicant to apply to an Appeals Commissioner for review, where the Minister dismisses the application.

Where a Minister, in a review, determines that access should be given to the applicant, the access must be given promptly within 48 hours after the Minister's decision has been communicated to the applicant: *clause 40(4)*.

Provision is made for a review by the Supreme Court of the decision of an agency which relates to disclosures that will be prejudicial to the security of the State or will be injurious to the public interest in accordance with article 135 of the Constitution. *Clause 43* details the powers of the Supreme Court in relation to a review. These include the power to request for and inspect documents as well as the power to summon and examine witnesses.

The Supreme Court does not have the power to disclose exempt information to any person other than a representative of the agency whose decision is under review and the Attorney-General. The Supreme Court, under *clause 44*, has the right in an application for review, to make an order that the Court considers just and is obliged, where it orders access, to specify the period within which access should be given.

Under *clause 45* a person affected by proceedings is entitled to a lawyer or any other expert.

*Clause 46* places the burden of proof on the person who decides to refuse a request for access to information, with respect to justification of the decision in review proceedings. *Clause 47* requires government agencies and private bodies to appoint information officers or any other officers

## **Right to Information Bill**

for the purposes of the law. *Clauses 48 and 49* respectively indemnifies a person who in good faith, grants access to information, from actions for defamation, breach of confidence or criminal liability.

*Clause 50* gives the Minister responsible for Justice the discretion to specify fees and charges by guidelines and imposes an obligation on a person who requests for access to information to pay the relevant fee or charge. Under *clause 51*, however, the information officer of an agency may waive a fee or a charge if it will impose financial hardship on the person making the request. This *clause* will ensure that a person is not denied access to information merely because of that person's inability to pay the access fee or charge. Fees and charges paid to agencies are not part of the Consolidated Fund and are to be kept by the agencies to cover costs relating to the grant of access: *clause 52*.

*Clause 53* places on the Minister responsible for Justice responsibility for the implementation of the Act and empowers the Minister to give guidelines for that purpose. Under *clause 54* the Attorney-General is made a party to proceedings for the review of the decision of an agency before a Court.

*Clauses 55 and 56* respectively provide for the submission of written annual reports by agencies within 3 months after the end of each year to the Minister responsible for Justice, and the submission of a report by the Minister to Parliament within 6 months after the end of the year.

*Clauses 57, 58 and 59* respectively provide for the limitation period of exempt information, which is twenty-five years from the date of creation of the information; make the law inapplicable to information held by the national archives, libraries and museums and apply the law to information created before or after the coming into force of the Act as well as to information held by an independent contractor engaged by an agency.

Wilful disclosure of exempt information, unlawful access to the personal record of another person and destruction, damage, alteration and concealment of a document and the making of a false entry in a document aimed at denying access to information are all made offences under *clauses 60 and 61*.



## **Right to Information Bill**

*Clause 62* provides for the extension of time for an action to be taken under the law by 14 days where a provision is not made for an extension; whilst *clause 64* empowers the Minister responsible for Justice to make Regulations by legislative instrument for the effective implementation of the law.

Since the aim of the Bill is part of the move to stamp out corruption, *clause 63* empowers the Minister responsible for Justice to extend the application of the law to the private sector.

*Clause 65* is on interpretation and *clause 66* makes disclosure of information under any other enactment in existence before the coming into force of the Act, subject to the Act.

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Date: