

Assertive citizenship taking root

September 28 is being observed as the Right to Know day by the Freedom of Information Advocates Network, a global group of NGOs working for better transparency in governments. An **India Together** report on the recent strides citizen activity has made in India on the right to information.



September 28, 2004 - Recent developments in Delhi, Maharashtra and Karnataka indicate that both awareness and usage of right to information (RTI) laws are gaining ground and examples of tenacious use are springing up. The promise of greater and sustained transparency gains is becoming brighter.

Delhi

Regular India Together readers will be aware of the Delhi based NGO Parivartan's pioneering efforts in promoting the proper implementation of the state's RTI law. Until recently Parivartan had been concentrating on exposing corruption in the Public Distribution System and the state of civil works in Delhi.

Beginning 15 August 2004, Parivartan has joined hands with Indian Express (IE) in its campaign to promote proper use and implementation of Delhi's RTI Act. For several days in row, the IE carried one story every day related to the use of RTI and on September 5, the partners organized a camp for citizens in Vasant Kunj. Citizens enthusiastically participated in the camps bringing in specific complaints and learning how to use the RTI application process to file requests. Parivartan staff helped them frame questions.

Encouraged by the overwhelming response, IE is keen on taking the initiative to other cities as well. The partnership in Delhi is expected to continue for a few more months. In addition, IE journalists have themselves have been using the RTI for their stories and features. Parivartan is currently working on a users guide on RTI and is looking for a partnership with a Hindi newspaper in order to reach an audience different from the one they are reaching through IE.

Earlier this month, reacting to the IE-Parivartan campaign, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)

Commissioner Rakesh Mehta issued orders to ensure proper implementation of the access to information law within the MCD (IE Report). All junior, assistant and executive engineers, deputy health officials, sanitation officials and other field level officials have been asked to furnish information on time. Mehta also plans to 'institutionalise the system of disseminating information'. Plans are also underway to make available the use of RTI online and to allow the 134 new citizen service bureaus to accept RTI applications. The bureaus are scheduled to begin functioning on October 2.

This September 28 is a special one for many states in India. Across the nation, in Delhi, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka, citizen pressure for open governments is growing stronger.

- [This journalist demands his rights](#)
- [Another step towards Parivartan](#)

Round up

For the last two years, September 28 has been observed as the Right to Know Day in many nations after the Freedom of Information Advocates Network decided this at the global network's formation in Sofia, Bulgaria (2002). But this September 28 is a special one for many states in India. With Delhi and Rajasthan taking the lead in the north, Karnataka in the south and Maharashtra in centre-west, citizen pressure for open governments is growing stronger.

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