



**REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON**  
**RIGHT TO INFORMATION**  
**IN SOUTH ASIA**

UNDERSTANDING  
THE SILENT REVOLUTION

**#KNOWYOURGOV**

**MARCH 16-17, 2016,**  
**ISLAMABAD**

**CONFERENCE PROGRAMME**



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## .....**Introduction**

**P**akistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency-PILDAT is pleased to host a two-day Regional Conference on **the Right to Information in South Asia**, which is being hosted in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information (RTI) Commission and the Punjab Information Commission in **Islamabad** on **Wednesday, March 16 and Thursday, March 17, 2016**.

The Conference is the first-ever event in South Asia that has been organised to generate informed discourse on RTI between relevant stakeholders in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Through the Conference, government officials, media persons, trainers, academics and civil society activists will be provided a platform to share their experiences in supporting RTI within their home countries and enhance regional cooperation for the strengthening of such local efforts. Participants will also discuss solutions to the challenges faced by stakeholders of the RTI movement in Pakistan by taking stock of the approaches other South Asian countries have taken to address these challenges. This year's Regional Conference on the Right to Information in South Asia, called **Understanding the Silent Revolution**, includes a series of Panel Discussions in which nationally and internationally renowned speakers and panelists will discuss Regional Conference themes, both among themselves and with the wider public.

The Regional Conference is being organised by PILDAT under the *More Effective Right-To-Information at Federal and Provincial (Sindh and Punjab) levels* project, for which it has received financial support from the Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) under the *Enhanced Democratic Accountability and Civic Engagement* project.

### **The Right to Information: Regional and International Landscape**

#### **International Landscape**

The Right to Information is an internationally protected human right which grants citizens the right to access prescribed forms of information held by governments and imposes a concomitant responsibility on states to ensure timeliness, ease, inclusiveness and affordability of information provision to citizens. RTI has rapidly achieved near-global recognition in the past two decades and, in the process, has transformed how citizens hold state institutions accountable and how governments manage and disseminate public information to the people.

Broadly speaking, RTI legislation has been adopted by countries in two main phases. Only 13 countries, predominantly developed democracies, guaranteed the right to information for their citizens before 1995. Since 1995, however, over 90 countries have enacted RTI laws, with the majority of these being developing democracies within Asia, the Middle East and South America.

Recognizing the rapid spread of RTI around the world, numerous intergovernmental agencies and international organisations have called on governments around the world to ensure the provision of this all important right to their citizens.

#### **The United Nations**

RTI has been enshrined in two seminal pieces of international law, the United Nations' (UN's) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1968, of which 76 countries are signatories, including Pakistan. RTI was also included in the UN's declaration on Sustainable Development Goals as Goal 16.10 in July 2015.

#### **The Commonwealth**

The Final Document of the Expert Group Meeting held by the Commonwealth in March 1999 has emphasized that RTI is a legally enforceable right that enables citizens to hold their state institutions and other publically funded organisations accountable. The Law Ministers Meeting in May 1999 and the Heads of Government Meeting later endorsed these views in November of the same year.

#### **The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**

In a 2008 SAARC Ministerial Meeting, delegates endorsed legislation that confers the right to information for citizens to eliminate corruption and improve governance at all levels of public administration.

#### **Regional Landscape**

After adopting RTI relatively later than other regions, South Asia has made important strides in ensuring the provision of this all-important right to its people. Between 2002 and 2009, governments in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan enacted RTI legislation and/or constitutional guarantees. More recently, RTI laws were also passed in Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives. Additionally, a historic RTI Bill is being considered within the Sri Lankan Parliament for approval.

However, despite these achievements, South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Nepal face unique challenges regarding the improvement of RTI legislation and/or implementation. These challenges include the continued existence of secrecy-promoting colonial laws, such as the Official Secrets Act in Pakistan and India, the lack of public awareness on RTI legislation, bureaucratic resistance towards consistent implementation of RTI law provisions and lack of technological resources.

**Pakistan** became the first South Asian country to adopt RTI legislation in 2002, with the passage of the Freedom of Information Ordinance (FOIO) by the military-backed regime of President General Pervez Musharraf, after numerous efforts to enact the same had been derailed in the early and late 1990's. At the provincial level, Balochistan and Sindh adopted similar laws in 2005 and 2006, respectively. The FOIO has been ranked 84<sup>th</sup> in the world on the Global RTI Ratings, published annually by Canada-based Centre for Law and Democracy.

Encouragingly, however, modern RTI laws are being considered by the Federal and Sindh governments. The Government of Pakistan's RTI Bill, 2014, has received international acclaim, but is now being revised in light of the “changing security situation”, according to government sources. The Government of Sindh's RTI Bill, 2015 has been vetted by the Law Department and is currently being revised according to the recommendations of various civil society organisations.

The cause of RTI was given a significant boost in Pakistan with the passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendment in April 2010, after which the provincial governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab passed RTI laws in 2013. These laws took into account international best practices on the subject and include a number of progressive provisions, especially the ones for the establishment and funding of dedicated agencies to hear RTI-related complaints and coordinate implementation of the law within government departments.

**India** became the second South Asian country to adopt RTI legislation in 2005, with the passage of the Right to Information Act, currently rated as the third-best law in the world on the Global RTI Ratings series. The RTI regime in India is also supported by a robust implementation mechanism headed by the Central Information Commission of India, which hears between 2-4 million RTI complaints every year.

Passage of India's RTI Act was expedited through the pressure generated by popular grassroots movements, such as the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan in Rajasthan, and, at the national level, by the National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information, formed in 1996.

Despite these successes, the RTI regime in India has room for further improvements in the following areas: compliance of government departments with proactive disclosure requirements, and whistleblower protection. The Whistleblower Protection Bill of India, finalized in 2011, is still awaiting the approval of the central legislature.

**Nepal** became the third South Asian country to enact RTI legislation with the passage of the Right to Information Act in 2007, which is currently ranked as the 23<sup>rd</sup> best law in the world. The RTI movement in Nepal was spearhead by a popular people's movement, called Jan Andolan, which forced the monarchy to concede the absolute powers it had enjoyed for nearly two centuries.

The Constitution of 1990 recognized many of these demands by enshrining RTI as a fundamental right under Article 16. However, subsequent efforts to ensure RTI in statutory form could not be consummated. The first RTI Bill tabled in the Nepali Parliament was resoundingly rejected by civil society and the media for allegedly intending to bolster the prevalent culture of secrecy. The passage of another Bill was derailed in 2002 after the dissolution of Parliament. However, the country is now on track to ensure RTI for its citizens after the passage of an RTI law in 2007, the establishment of a National Information Commission in 2008, and the promulgation of Rules in 2009.

**Bangladesh** enacted an RTI law in 2009 after the disruption of numerous efforts to pass such a law previously. Bangladesh's RTI law is currently ranked as the 20<sup>th</sup> best law in the world according to the Global RTI Ratings series.

Demand for RTI initially emerged in the country within the 1980's, but remained sidelined well into the early stages of the 1990's by a succession of military-backed governments. These demands were renewed after the restoration of democracy in the country in 1991. Subsequent efforts to enact RTI in the early 2000's were also derailed due to further political turmoil.

In 2007 a military-backed caretaker government committed to the passage of RTI legislation at around the same time a citizens movements was building pressure around the issue. As a result, an Ordinance on RTI was approved by the President in 2008 and passed by the Parliament in 2009. A landmark whistleblowers protection law was also enacted in 2011.

**Sri Lanka** is set to become the most recent adopter of RTI legislation in South Asia. A historic guarantee on RTI was enacted by the government as part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment upon coming into power in 2015 after the long-awaited restoration of democracy in the country. President Sirisena's government also pledged for the passage of RTI legislation in the announcement of its 100-day work program upon coming into office. This Bill was due to be tabled in

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the Sri Lankan Parliament on March 08, 2016, after receiving approval of the Sri Lankan Cabinet in December 2015, but could not be laid in front of legislators owing to a lack of approval from the National Provincial Council. The Deputy Minister on Mass Media and Parliamentary Reforms, while announcing presentation of the Bill in Parliament on March 08, said that the Bill could be challenged in the Supreme Court by any concerned party after it is presented for a first reading.

## Detailed Programme

**Day One**  
**Wednesday, March 16, 2016**

**Arrival & Registration** 09:30 am – 10:30 am

### Inaugural Plenary Session

**Overview of Right to Information in South Asia** 10:30 am – 01:00 pm

This session will serve as an introduction to the Conference and include an overview of the state of Right to Information Legislation and implementation as well as the progress achieved by RTI movements from within the participating countries of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

**'RTI in Pakistan: A Slow but Steady Start'** 10:30 am – 10:50 am  
*Mr. Ahmed Bilal Mehboob*  
President, PILDAT  
**Panel Chair**

**'The Evolution of RTI Movements in the World'** 10:50 am – 11:10 am  
*Mr. Michael Karanicolas*  
Senior Legal Officer, Centre for Law and Democracy, Canada

**'Sri Lanka's Path towards RTI'** 11:10 am – 11:30 am  
*Mr. Luwie N. Ganeshathasan*  
Researcher, Centre for Policy Alternatives, Sri Lanka

**'Bangladesh's experience with RTI'** 11:30 am – 11:50 am  
*Ms. Tahmina Rahman,*  
Regional Director, Article 19, South Asia

**'The Movement for RTI in Nepal'** 11:50 am – 12:10 pm  
*Mr. Tanka Aryal*  
Executive Director, Citizen's Campaign for RTI, Nepal

**'RTI in India: the Second Independence'** 12:10 pm – 12:20 pm  
*Prof. Dr. Jagdeep S. Chhokar*  
Founder, Association for Democratic Reforms, India

Q/A 12:20 pm – 01:00 pm

Lunch Break 01:00 pm – 02:00 pm

### Panel Discussion I

**Protecting and Disclosing Sensitive Information under RTI** 02:00 pm – 04:00 pm

The Session will outline the need for balancing concerns for protecting national security and foreign affairs concerns with the internationally accepted principles of RTI. The Session will also include views on how these concerns have been balanced with the principles of RTI in various countries whilst also making a case for the principle of opening up sensitive information to public disclosure.

**'Does the Need for Protecting Sensitive Information Negate RTI?'** 02:00 pm – 02:15 pm  
*Honourable Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed*  
Chairperson, Senate Standing Committee on Defence  
**Panel Chair**

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**'Balancing National Security & Foreign Affairs'** 02:15 pm – 02:30 pm  
*Honourable Dr. Jayampathy Wickramaratne*  
Chairman, RTI Bill Drafting Committee,  
Parliament of Sri Lanka

**'Establishing Criteria for Protection and Disclosure of Sensitive Information'**

*Mr. Aamir Latif* 02:30 pm – 02:40 pm  
Bureau Chief, Online News Network

*Mr. Tasneem M. Noorani* 02:40 pm – 02:50 pm  
Former Interior Secretary, Government of Pakistan

Discussion & Q/A 02:50 pm – 03:45 pm

Tea Break 03:45 pm – 04:00 pm

### Panel Discussion II

**Civil Society and Media in the RTI Movement** 04:00 pm – 06:00 pm

The Session will outline the importance of civil society and media involvement for furthering the RTI reforms agenda in South Asia. The Session will include presentations on how RTI movements around the world, and within South Asia in particular, have benefitted from partnerships with civil society and media. Presentations will also chart the way forward for such partnerships in the future to ensure effective implementation and usage of RTI.

**'Giving the Movement a Face: Involving Civil Society in RTI'** 04:00 pm – 04:10 pm  
*Mr. Nikhil Dey*, Founder, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan  
**Panel Chair**

**'Forging Partnerships for More Effective RTI'** 04:10 pm – 04:20 pm  
*Mr. Taranath Dahal*  
Chairman, Freedom Forum, Nepal

**'Landing the story: RTI and Investigative Reporting'** 04:20 pm – 04:30 pm  
*Mr. Saleem Safi*  
Television Anchor and Columnist, Geo TV

**'Media & Civil Society Support for RTI in Pakistan'** 04:30 pm – 04:40 pm  
*Mr. Mazhar Hussain Minhas*  
Chief Information Commissioner, Punjab Information Commission

*Maj. (Retd.) Sahibzada Muhammad Khalid* 04:40 pm – 04:50 pm  
Chief Information Commissioner, KP Right to Information Commission

Panel Comments 04:50 pm – 05:20 pm

*Dr. Amna Mahmood*, Convener, Academic Network on Right to Information  
*Dr. Jagdeep S. Chhokar*, Founder, Association for Democratic Reforms  
*Mr. Hafiz Tahir Khalil*, Islamabad Bureau Chief, Daily Jang  
*Mr. Aamir Wasim*, Islamabad Chief Reporter, Daily Dawn

Discussion & Q/A 05:20 pm – 06:20 pm

**Day Two**  
**Thursday, March 17, 2016**

**Panel Discussion III**

**Promoting Government Openness through RTI**

09:30 am – 12:00 pm

The Session will outline the necessity of an open information regime and regular citizen-state interfaces for a modern system of governance. The Session will include presentations on the impact of RTI on the functioning of government, the challenges for the effective implementation of RTI within government, and regional best practices in relation to training government officials on RTI.

**'RTI: A Prerequisite for Modern Governance'**

09:30 am – 09:45 am

*Mr. Krishna Hari Baskota*

Chief Information Commissioner, Nepal

**Panel Chair**

**'Challenges of RTI Implementation:  
Lessons from India'**

09:45 am – 10:00 am

*Mr. Wajahat Habibullah*

Former Chief Information Commissioner, Central Information Commission of India

**'Janta Information Systems: Implementing Proactive Disclosure'**

10:00 am – 10:15 am

*Mr. Nikhil Dey*

Founder, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghathan

**'Impact of RTI on Governance in Bangladesh'**

10:15 am – 10:30 am

*Ms. Ruhi Naz*

Project Coordinator, Research Initiatives, Bangladesh

**Panel Comments**

10:30 am – 11:00 am

*Mr. Nasir Jamal*, Director General Internal Publicity, Federal Ministry of Information Broadcasting & National Heritage

*Mr. Amjad Mehmood*, Director General, National Institute of Management, Islamabad

*Mr. Abid Majeed*, Secretary Information, Provincial Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

*Ms. Memon Roshan Tabassum* Director, Sindh Information & Archives Department

*Mr. Dinesh Sagar Bhusal*, Under Secretary, National Information Commission Nepal

Discussion & Q/A

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

*Experience Sharing by Public Information Officers in Punjab*

**Panel Discussion IV**

**Opening Parliaments to Citizens through RTI**

12:30 pm – 01:40 pm

The Session will cover the importance of making legislatures more open and accountable for a modern, representative democracy. The Session includes views on how RTI can be used by civil society to make objective, fact-based assessments of proceedings in the legislature, and the impact this increased public scrutiny has had on legislative performance and the interface between the public and its elected representatives.

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<b>'Why Open Parliament to the Public?'</b> <i>Ms. Aruna Roy</i> Founder, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghathan <b>Panel Chair</b>	12:00 pm – 12:15 pm
<b>'The Punjab Assembly: Leading the way for Open Legislatures in Pakistan'</b> Mr. Inayatullah Lak, Secretariat of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab	12:15 pm – 12:30 pm
<b>'Parliamentary Openness in the Internet Age'</b> <i>Ms. Rabea Anwar</i> Joint Secretary Legislation, Secretariat of the Senate of Pakistan	12:30 pm - 12:45 pm
Discussion & Q/A	12:45 pm – 01:40 pm
<b>Closing Ceremony</b>	
<i>Mr. Nazeer Mahar</i> <b>Team Leader, DAIEDACE</b>	01:45 pm – 01:55 pm
<i>Mr. Mazhar Hussain Minhas</i> Chief Information Commissioner, Punjab Information Commission	01:55 pm – 02:05 pm
<i>Maj. (Retd.) Sahibzada Muhammad Khalid</i> Chief Information Commissioner, KP Right to Information Commission	02:05 pm – 02:15 pm
<b>Mr. Ahmed Bilal Mehboob</b> <b>President, PILDAT</b>	02:15 pm -02:25 pm
Lunch	02:25 pm – 03:25 pm

## Profiles of Regional Participants



**Ms. Aruna Roy**

*Founder*

*Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, India*

**Aruna Roy** is a social and political activist. She was born in Chennai in 1946, and worked in the Indian Administrative Service from 1968 to 1975. She resigned in order to devote her time to social work and social reform. She joined the Social Work and Research Center in Tilonia, Rajasthan, which had been set up by her husband Sanjit 'Bunker' Roy where she worked until 1983. She then moved to Devdungri, Rajsamand District, Rajasthan in 1987, and along with Shanker Singh, Nikhil Dey and many others helped to form the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS). Aruna Roy is a prominent member of many campaigns. She is one of the founders of the movement for Right to Information in India. The movement has been credited for getting Right to Information laws passed in several States, including the Rajasthan Right to Information Act passed in the year 2000. The RTI movement and campaign also played a crucial role in the passage of strong national legislation for the Right to information in the year 2005. Her contribution to the cause has been widely appreciated.

In 2000, she was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership. Aruna Roy requested that the award be given to the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, but was informed that it was only given to individuals. She put the award money into a trust to support the process of democratic struggles. She was a member of the Central governments National Advisory Council from 2004-2006, where she played a key role in incorporating strong citizens entitlements in the recently enacted Right to Information and National Rural Employment Guarantee Acts. She was also a member of the subsequently reconstituted National Advisory Council -2 and was the convener of the Working Groups of Transparency, Accountability and Governance and review of the Government's flagship programmes. The President of India has also conferred upon her the prestigious Lal Bahadur Shastri National Award for Excellence in Public Administration, Academia and Management in 2010. The MKSS Collective and her have also been awarded the Rule of Law Award in the World Justice Forum held in Barcelona, Spain in June 2011, along with being listed as one of the 100 most influential people in the world by the TIME Magazine for 2011.



**Professor Jagdeep S. Chhokar**

*Founder*

*Association for Democratic Reform, India*

**Jagdeep S. Chhokar** is a **citizen-activist** for **improving democracy and governance** in the country; a bird watcher and conservationist; and a trained lawyer. He has remained a **Professor** (teacher, trainer, researcher, and advisor) of **Management and Organisational Behaviour** at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, from 1985 till November 2006. Before becoming a professor he was an engineer-manager with the Indian Railways, and worked as an

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international marketing manager for four years.

He is one of the founding members of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). He has taught in several countries including Australia, France, Japan, and the US. His professional interests cover all aspects of organisational functioning, cross-cultural management; international marketing; international management; international business; human resource management; business strategy and policy; management in government, and in public systems/sector; and industrial and occupational safety. His broader interests include electoral and political reforms, informed choice (freedom of information), world affairs, and ornithology (bird watching).

His educational qualifications are LL.B. (2005); Ph.D. (1983), MBA (1977), Grad. Mech. Engg. (1967); Grad. Prod. Engg. (1967). His research has appeared in several international journals. He has also contributed chapters to edited books and has written several teaching cases. His writing has also appeared in the business and popular press. He is the lead editor of a volume titled *Culture and leadership across the world: The GLOBE Book of in-depth studies of 25 societies*, brought out by the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Programme, and published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, N.J. (now Routledge/Psychology Press), in 2007.



**Dr. Jayampathe Wickramarathne**  
*President's Council, Member of Parliament  
Parliament of Sri Lanka*

Dr. Jayampathy Wickramaratne counts 38 years as a practicing lawyer in Sri Lanka and is a President's Counsel, equivalent to Queen's Counsel in England. He specializes in constitutional law, human rights, administrative law and criminal law. He holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka and was awarded the Ph. D. degree by the University of Peradeniya for his thesis titled "Fundamental Rights in Sri Lanka".

Dr. Wickramaratne has served as Senior Advisor to the President of Sri Lanka on Constitutional Affairs, Senior Advisor in the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs and member of the Government's Constitution Drafting Team. He played a key role in the drafting of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution passed in 2015 after the change of Government. He is a Member of Parliament since August 2015 and chairs the Committee set up in the Prime Minister's Office to assist and advise the Government on framing a new Constitution. He chaired the drafting committee of the Right to Information Bill that will be presented to Parliament in March. He has written extensively on constitutional issues and presented numerous papers at international events.



**Mr. Krishna Hari Baskota**  
*Chief Information Commissioner,  
National Information Commission, Nepal*

Mr. Krishna Hari Baskota is currently serving as the Chief Information Commissioner at the National Information

Commission in Nepal. Before this he has served in senior positions in the Nepalese bureaucracy including Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, and Coordinator, High Level Administrative Reform Commission, Government of Nepal. In his tenure as Chief Information Commissioner, he has mobilized interaction, orientation and training programs to government Public Bodies, Public Information Officers in addition to getting Civil Society Organizations and Media on board to raise awareness to effectively implement RTI. The National Information Commission monitors the implementation of RTI on a central as well as district level and has introduced a new initiative under which public bodies undergo a 'RTI audit' that evaluates the status of RTI implementation at the level of the Central Ministry. Mr. Baskota publishes regularly on RTI in daily, weekly, monthly and periodical journal to share experience and learning and best practices. He also appears in interviews to Radio, TV and conferences arranged by civil society organizations.



**Mr. Luwie Ganeshthasan**  
*Researcher*  
*Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA)*

Mr. Luwie Ganeshthasan is a graduate of the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, and an Attorney at Law of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka and is currently working as a Researcher for the Research and Advocacy theme of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA). Since January 2012, he has been involved in supporting public interest litigation cases filed and handled by CPA, and in co-authoring several policy briefs and advocacy documents. He has appeared as a Junior Counsel in several cases including The Centre for Policy Alternatives Vs. D.M Jayaratne and others (The Case challenging the legality of the impeachment of the 43rd Chief Justice of Sri Lanka), In re the 21st Amendment (The case challenging attempts to repeal constitutional provisions relating to devolution of power to provincial councils). He actively participates in CPA's effort to raise awareness on issues relating to constitutional reform, transitional justice legal reform by authoring brief guides for non-lawyers and by participating in public discussions. He has also contributed to policy briefs and advocacy documents on issues related to legal and constitutional reform and human rights and reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka. He has engaged in field research on issues such as devolution of power (specifically relating to the Northern Province), the challenges in achieving durable solutions for Internally Displaced Persons, post-war land issues in the Northern province and post-war accountability mechanisms.



**Mr. Michael Karanicolas**  
*Senior Legal Officer,*  
*Centre for Law and Democracy Canada*

**Michael Karanicolas** is the Senior Legal Officer for the Centre for Law and Democracy. An internationally published writer and photographer, Michael takes a personal interest in issues of free speech and journalists' rights. In his time with CLD, Michael has taken a leading role in developing and applying CLD's flagship Right to Information Rating Methodology, and has worked on major advocacy projects around the world, including Afghanistan, Canada, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, the Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar and Yemen. Michael has also been central to the development of CLD's digital rights programme, and has authored over a dozen publications on freedom of expression and the right to

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information. Michael has a BAH (Dean's List) from Queen's University, and an LLB (Dean's List) from the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University.



**Mr. Nikhil Dey**

*Founder,*

*Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan*

Mr. Nikhil Dey was born in Bangalore in 1963. He was educated in India and the USA (12th Standard from Thomas Jefferson High School, Fairfax County Virginia USA), Bachelors Degree from the Osmania University, India, and got his degree in law from the University of Delhi. After working briefly with the Kheduth Mazdoor Chetna Sangathana in Madhya Pradesh, he joined Ms. Aruna Roy and Mr. Shankar Singh in 1987 to go to Devdungri, in Rajsamand District in Rajasthan where along with many others they helped found the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS). Since 1990, he has been a full time worker of the MKSS, and has been involved in struggles of the poor for justice, including grass root struggles for land and the payment of minimum wages. He has also been a part of peoples' organisations taking responsibility for putting together "peoples' drafts" of the Right to Information and Employment Guarantee Bills. Mr. Dey is also part of the effort by people's movements to build institutions of participatory democracy, where for instance, introducing statutory requirements of social audits and public hearings is now institutionalising people's platforms for public audits. He is currently a member of the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) and of the State Employment Guarantee Council of Rajasthan. He is also a Co-convenor of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI). Mr. Dey would like to dedicate this Brief to the many media stalwarts who have contributed in seminal ways to India's Right to Information movement. These include Mr. Nikhil Chakravarty, Mr. Ajit Bhattacharjea, Mr. Prabhash Joshi, Mr. Kuldeep Nayar, and Mr. Prakash Kardaley.



**Ms. Ruhi Naz**

*Project Coordinator*

*Research Initiatives, Bangladesh*

Ms. Ruhi Naz, a graduate in law is an advocate of Supreme Court of Bangladesh and a RTI activist who associates herself with Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB) an action research based organization having enormous contribution in taking RTI to the doorstep of community people. It is by the support of RIB's field facilitator that a large section of disadvantaged and marginalized group has been hugely benefitted by using RTI to get safety-net benefit from Government which earlier they were denied off. As a RTI activist Ms. Ruhi is actively involved and closely work with people at different strata of society with a view to sensitize them for promotion and effective implementation of RTI law in Bangladesh. She has also worked with the supply side of RTI, that is government officials, which helped her in developing a better understanding of reasons for success and areas that needs improvement for effective implementation of RTI law. She, together with the Chairman of RIB, Dr. Shamsul Bari regularly pen a column monthly in a national daily on scope and development of RTI law in Bangladesh.



**Ms. Tahmina Rehman**  
*Regional Director*  
*Article 19, Bangladesh*

Tahmina Rahman has been working as the regional director of Article 19, an international NGO based in London, for several years. She has extensive experience in leading human rights initiatives including the promotion of access to information and the right to know of poorer communities. The Ministry of Information used ARTICLE 19's video song Tathya Adhikarer Gaan (Song on RTI) for the promotion of RTI through its national outfit Bangladesh Betar reaching millions in remotest parts of the country. Ms. Rahman also led a series of training of over 350 designated officials under the RTI law both at the national and district level in partnership with the newly constituted Information Commission. She has spoken at various international seminars on the status of implementation of RTI law in Bangladesh and the region including on invitations from UNESCO, World Bank, the government of Germany and South Africa.

Ms. Rahman has a Master in Laws from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies. She was a McArthur fellow at Harvard University, USA. Ms. Rahman was nominated as "Women of Expression 2012", an online publication on women who have excelled in human rights activism. Previously she was the Deputy Director of the International Mobilisation Programme at the Secretariat of Amnesty International. She has held management and policy positions in Oxfam (GB), Water Aid and HAP International. She has worked in several countries in Asia and Africa including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana and South Africa.



**Mr. Tanka Raj Aryal**  
*Executive Director*  
*Citizen's Campaign for Right to Information, Nepal*

Mr. Tanka Aryal is a known transparency and accountability expert in Nepal. He has been working with Citizens' Campaign for Right to Information (CCRI) as an Executive Director since 2011. Mr. Aryal has served as a Country Representative to Nepal for ARTICLE 19 in the past. At present, Mr. Aryal is also providing his service as the Open Government Data National Consultant for UNDESA/DPADM. He is a practicing lawyer at Supreme Court of Nepal. He has remained involved in the promotion and protection of Right to Information, Right to Privacy, Freedom of Expression and Internet Freedom nationally for last decade. Mr. Aryal holds LLM in International Human Rights Law from Central European University and LLM in Human Rights and Gender Justice from Kathmandu School of Law Nepal. Mr. Aryal has published various articles on Right to Information and accountability. He is Author of three books, co-author of four books and lead researcher of two research projects on Right to Information in Nepal.

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**Mr. Taranath Dahal**

Taranath Dahal has been a professional journalist and Right to Information (RTI) activist for the past 23 years. As General Secretary of Federation of Nepali Journalist (FNJ) has remained at the frontline of RTI movement in Nepal. Similarly, he was the member of RTI draft committee formed for the first time and served as the government taskforce of RTI Bill in Nepal for two times. He has authored several books, research papers and working paper, compiled and edited journals on RTI, press freedom and freedom of expression. Besides this, he has delivered various training and lectures as keynote speakers on RTI in and outside the country.

Currently Dahal is the chairperson of Freedom Forum, a leading civil society organization working for the cause of promoting RTI and freedom of expression in Nepal. The Freedom Forum has a substantial body of work on RTI whether that be in creating pressure for the enforcement of RTI Act, or be in spreading public awareness or in rendering analysis and recommendations, in bringing it into practice and in promoting information culture in Nepal. The major accomplishment of Freedom Forum in this area is its initiative for drawing up an Agenda for Change on Freedom of Expression and Right to information in Nepal, which includes comprehensive plan for strengthening these themes in Nepal. This was accomplished through a collaboration with ARTICLE 19 and Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), where Dahal played a leading role to chart out the long-term strategy and plan in connection with establishing these themes in Nepal. In addition, Mr. Dahal is the chairperson of Citizens' Campaign for Right to Information (CCRI), a network of prominent civil society organizations and individuals working for the cause of RTI in Nepal. It has been functional in policy reform, public awareness building and academic works on RTI.



**Mr. Wajahat HabibUllah**

*Former Chief Information Commissioner  
Central Information Commission of India*

Wajahat Habibullah, a former civil servant from the Indian Administrative Service, began his career as a Lecturer in History in St Stephens' College Delhi and spent much of his career in the service in Jammu and Kashmir, most of it in the Kashmir Valley. He has also served on the staff of two Indian prime ministers—Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi as Director and Joint Secretary respectively — and was administrator of the union territory of Lakshadweep, and has held the posts of minister in the Embassy of India, Washington DC, and Director, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration. Subsequently, he was secretary in the department of consumer affairs, the ministries of textiles and Panchayati Raj.

After retiring from the service Habibullah served as India's first chief information commissioner- and chairman, national commission for minorities. A former Randolph Jennings fellow at the United States Institute of Peace (2003-04), Wajahat has been awarded the Rajiv Gandhi Award for Excellence in Secularism. He is the author of 'My Kashmir: The Dying of the Light' published in Pakistan as 'My Kashmir: Conflict and the Prospect of Enduring Peace'.



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