

Regional Conference on 'Investigative Journalism and Citizens' Right to Information'



3rd May, 2014

Islamabad Hotel, Islamabad

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Scope and Rational of the Conference:

The fourth estate model dictates the press to make government accountable by publishing information about matters of public interest even if such information reveals abuses or crimes perpetrated by those in authority. From this perspective, investigative reporting is one of the most important contributions that the press makes to democracy and, resultantly, to the citizens. Investigative journalism also contributes to democracy by nurturing an informed citizenry. Information is a vital resource to empower public that ultimately holds government accountable through voting and participation. Furthermore, investigative journalism helps media to monitor the performance of public institutions and share the findings with the citizens. When we take into the consideration the fact that most people do not exercise their right to information in a direct and personal way, the significance of investigative reporting becomes all the more important. People rely heavily on mass media – newspapers, radio, television and, increasingly, the Internet-in order to have access to information. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the journalists to empower the citizens by exercising the right to information on their behalf, in matters pertaining to public interest, through investigative reporting. That is why journalists are not only supposed to use access to information laws, firstly, to inform themselves, but also, to better inform the public.



Right to information legislative landscape in Pakistan has changed for the better with the enactment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Act 2013 and Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013. As the implementation phase of these laws has just begun, it is important to learn from the region how citizens and journalist have used right to information legislation for public accountability and for public good. How effectively right to information laws are being used by journalists in the region for investigative reporting? It is in this context that Press Council of Pakistan (PCP) in collaboration with Coalition on Right to Information, (CRTI), will be holding one day regional conference on ‘Investigative Reporting and Citizens’ Right to Information’ on May 03, 2014 at Islamabad Hotel, Islamabad.

Conference Goal:

To Promote investigative reporting through the use of RTI Legislation:

Specific Objective:

Lessons learnt pertaining to investigative reporting through the use of RTI Legislation in South Asia shared with journalists in Pakistan.

Intended Outcome:

Improved investigative reporting through the use of RTI Legislation

Welcome Note:

Mr. Zahid Abdullah welcomed the participants and shared with the participants that delegates from Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan were invited in this regional conference organized by Coalition on Right to Information in collaboration with Press Council of Pakistan. He shared with the participants that information commissioner from Bangladesh Ms. Saddiqa Haleem was invited and was looking forward to participating in this conference but at the eleventh hour she could not come as Prime Minister did not allow her to travel to Pakistan. He gave a brief overview of the three sessions: ethical



journalism and citizen's right to information, right to information legislative landscape and implementation challenges and how RTI can be useful for investigative journalism. He shared with the participants that this conference was being held to celebrate international world press freedom day. He was of the view that it was important for us to reflect during the course of conference proceedings as to what

extent citizens right to information was being prioritized by media and to what extent it was compromised by other interests. He also remarked that as we celebrate World Press Freedom Day, we need to remember those journalists killed in the line of duty to protect citizens right to information. He impressed upon the government to ensure safety of the journalists as citizens right to information was dependant on safety of journalists.

1st Session

“Ethical Journalism and Citizens Right to Information”

Chair of the Session

Shahid Khaqqan Abbasi, Federal Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources

Speakers of the Session

Senator Farhat Ullah Babar

Mujeeb Ur Rehman Shami, President CPNE

Raja Muhammad Shafqat Khan Abbasi, Chairman, Press Council of Pakistan

Shahid Khaqqan Abbasi, Federal Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources

Mr. Zafar Ullah Khan, Executive Director Centre for Civic Education, as a moderator of first session, acknowledged the Press Council of Pakistan (PCP) and Coalition for Right to information (CRTI) for holding the conference on an important topic according to the significance of the day as the entire world was celebrating World Press Freedom day and hoped for thought provoking and productive discussion. He invited Mr. Senator Farhat Ullah Babar who had championed many causes and significantly contributed to the Right to Information legislation in Pakistan.

Senator Farhat Ullah Babar

Mr. Babar said today on 3rd May, Press Freedom Day he would like to pay tribute to those journalist who had raised their voices for freedom of journalism, right to information and against the culture of impunity and violence against journalist and journalist who had been killed in this freedom fight. He said the freedom of press we have in Pakistan was not because of Government but because of journalists who had struggled for it very long time and faced lot of challenges during this struggle. He said that culture of impunity and violence against journalists should be condemned. He was of the view that it was shocking that other than two cases, all cases of attacks against journalists remain unresolved. Sharing his opinion on RTI he said as



far as Right to information was concerned, after 18th constitutional amendment, three basic rights had been given constitutional protection and these were: the Right to Education Article 25 of the constitution, Right to fair trial Article 10 and Right to information Article 19-A. He shared with the participants that during last 25 years, initiatives had been taken for legislation on right to information

but this was a fact that there was no purposeful law pertaining to right to information. KPK is the first province to have legislated and enacted RTI law although its rules and regulations are yet to be framed. However, significant step has been taken by the KP government and it needs to be congratulated. At the Federal level, there is an ordinance known as Freedom of Information ordinance 2002 which was promulgated by the then government. The purpose of this ordinance was not to provide legislation to access information held by public bodies but to fulfill the requirement for loan from Asian Development Bank (ADB). He said that this ordinance was not about providing access to information but to deny access to information. Sharing his views about the future of federal RTI law, he said that the present senate committee on information had taken up this matter and a sub-committee was tasked to draft right to information law. There are three important foundations for any Right to Information law, maximum disclosure to provide maximum information to citizen, minimum exemptions to restrict the exempted information and right to appeal for those who are unable to get the required information and there should be a penalty if any public body deliberately destroys or hides the record from public. He shared that a draft bill was prepared and endorsed by the members of information committee of senate and send to senate where 105 members of the senate unanimously endorsed the draft bill. Now it is the constitutional responsibility of the government to present the RTI law as a bill but unfortunately it has not happened. He said the struggle for making a law is not an easy struggle as there are so many steps that have to be taken. So, we will watch with concern and trepidation. Civil society groups should continue building pressure on the government so that a right to information law is enacted in line with the spirit of Article 19-A of the constitution. He shared with the participants that right to information law could not be enacted in the country owing to the prevailing culture of secrecy. When we sent draft right to information bill to Ministry of Defense for comments, we were sent a reply asking us, the Senators, not to proceed on this issue till NOC was issued by the ministry. We disregarded the letter but this shows culture of secrecy that prevails in the country. Therefore, it is very important that educated people continue their struggle for right to information in the country. The biggest challenge in right to information is that classified documents which affect national security will be exempted and withheld. So, there is a need to address this matter and identify that what exactly national security is and it must be made binding on the officer to provide reason in writing as to how disclosure of a particular piece of information will be detrimental to national security. On the current conflict between state institution and media he said that patriotism was not the monopoly of any state institution and national security was not the concern of only one institution. All Pakistanis and all state institutions are equal stakeholders in issues related to patriotism and national security. The time has come that there must be an informed and knowledgeable debate on issues like as to what is national security, patriotism and who is going to be the torchbearer of national security and patriotism to the exclusion of all state institutions. I would urge that media should not be strangulated in the name of national security and patriotism and all media houses should show unity and not allow the claim of national security and patriotism by any state institution to strangle a section of the press. At the same time, it was time for introspection for media as rights come with responsibilities.

Mujeeb Ur Rehman Shami, President Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE)

Mr. Mujeeb Ur Rehman said that Right to information and investigative journalism were affiliated with democracy because it was only the democracy that gave the right to public to made decision for themselves. So when media persons demand these rights, it is not the question for their personal demands or personal concerns. Right to know is the right of people to empower them so that they can know what is happening around them and to know whether or not elected representatives are functioning according to the law and constitution. Journalist also demand these rights to aware the masses about the functioning of government. Journalists gather secret information through investigative journalism and share with public so that they could make their elected representatives accountable. According constitutional protection to basic rights is one thing but what matters most is how these rights are going to be enforced. The institutions like Supreme Court have to take initiatives to establish and enforce right to information. If a government believes in transparency and has nothing to hide, then it should provide maximum access to information. The government of KPK has established the information commission and has designated Public Information Officers to provide the information to citizens. If someone tries to hide information, that official can be punished under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa right to information law. Why cannot other provinces and federal government introduce such right to information laws? On one hand we have constitution and an independent state, and, on the other, we have to struggle for our basic and constitutional rights. He was of the view that Right to know at right time was very essential for safety and development. As a nation, we need to stand united and media, national security sector and all of us have to play our roles for development of the country.



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Raja Muhammad Shafqat Khan Abbasi, Chairman Press Council of Pakistan

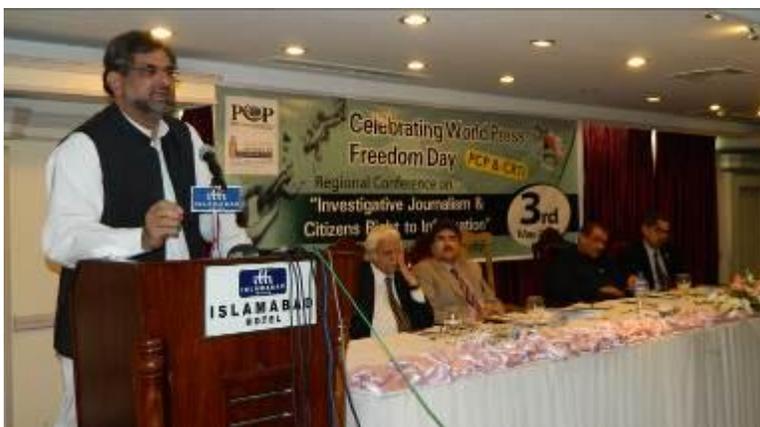
Mr. Shafqat Abbasi said that where whole world under the flag of United Nations was celebrating freedom of press day, he would like to express solidarity with journalists and salute the courageous journalist and all those people who had struggled for the freedom of expression and for the freedom of press. PCP expresses solidarity and will continue its efforts to raise the voice for finding the truth and for press freedom. He said he was pleased to share that on very first meeting of press council on 1st November 2007, apart from the other



issues that were discussed, the first resolution which was passed by the PCP pertained to the implementation of RTI laws in Pakistan. We urged governments of KP and Punjab to legislate on right to information and now there are right to information laws in both the provinces which can be compared with such laws legislated in developing countries. We are hopeful that Federal law which is under the consideration of cabinet will be enacted soon as the constitutional right to information of citizen of Pakistan has already been accepted in the constitution of Pakistan. The article 19-A of the constitution of Pakistan gives constitutional right to every citizen of Pakistan to know and make public bodies accountable. He shared that public participation is essential for transparency and accountability and good governance in the country. Furthermore, public participation also strengthens democracy. Now is the time to get rid of culture of secrecy in Pakistan and accept people's right to know. Denial of information is the denial of basic democratic right of the people. In India which is the biggest democracy in the world, right to information is not included in the constitution. However, our constitution accords this right to every citizen, therefore, it is not right of journalists alone. Today on press freedom day I think the role of press in past 40 years for freedom of press, democratic system, rule of law and for independent judiciary has been incomparable. Owing to this role, media is known as fourth pillar of the state and playing the role of watchdog. There is no doubt that it has been a long struggle for this freedom and independence of press. Now the challenge for the press in Pakistan is to demonstrate responsibility. Issues of media should be resolved by media itself by applying principles of self accountability. PFUJ, CPNE, APNS and other journalistic bodies should come forward and initiate a dialogue to ensure ethical practice in media. Journalist are the best judge to resolve the issues related to the regulation and other issues pertaining to media and press should follow the code of conduct. The constitution gives the freedom of the expression subject to the reasonable restriction imposed by law. The press should decide what are the grey areas and it is hoped that press will enjoy freedom with responsibility. He also said that there should be maximum disclosure and limited exemptions. The public bodies should not hide information from public.

Shahid Khaqqan Abbasi, Federal Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources

Mr. Khaqqan said that the subject of today is extremely important and has lot of significance in the context of Pakistan. The press in Pakistan has faced hardships from both from dictatorial regimes and democratic dispensations but has managed to preserve its freedom by offering sacrifices. There are always some black sheep in every organization but the majority of journalist have always believe and in democracy, freedom of press and independence. In our country, we have extensive access to information but the formal access to information is lacking. I am big supporter of RTI and in India it has been used very effectively to control corruption. However, it should be kept in mind



that there are responsibilities also linked with right to information. At times, information is time sensitive, there is commercial and contractual sensitivities and at times there are security implication. Journalists should try to strike balance when deciding what is and is not newsworthy. It is often seen that inappropriate things are said against people in TV programs. There is generally no agenda and guests are allowed to express their views which is not a good practice. Balance is also important and journalists should be mindful of the implications of what they report. With right there comes the responsibility so journalists have to act accordingly and play their role for balance and ethical conduct.

2nd Session

“Right to information legislative landscape and implementation challenges: regional Perspectives”

Chair of the Session

Dr. Nazir Saeed, Secretary Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage

Speakers of the Session

Mukhtar Ahmed Ali, Information Commissioner Punjab

Tanka Raj Aryal, RTI Expert from Nepal

Mario Gomez, Executive Director International Centre for Ethical Studies, Sri Lanka

Habbibullah Muqbil, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

Sahibzada Muhammad Khalid, Chief Information Commissioner Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission

Dr. Nazir Saeed, Secretary Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage

Muhammad Anwar, Executive Director Centre for Governance and Public Accountability moderated this session and made critical interventions throughout the session to ensure proper discussion.

Mukhtar Ahmed Ali, Information Commissioner, Punjab Information Commission

Mr. Mukhtar said that now there were right to information laws in all the provinces. Pakistan was the first country in South Asia to have right to information law in the shape of Freedom of Information Ordinance 2002 which was replicated by Sindh and Balochistan. However, these laws were not implementable as these laws had many flaws. There were too many exemptions in these laws. The provisions pertaining to proactive disclosure of information were not effective. Furthermore, appellate



bodies were largely toothless and ineffective. CPDI used these laws in order to collect empirical data to demonstrate that these laws were not effective. Over the years, more and more voices started demanding enactment of effective laws and to protect citizens right to information. As a result of civil society efforts, right to information was given

constitutional protection through 18th Amendment. Prior to this, High Court interpreted Article 19 in a manner that freedom of expression could not be complete without right to information but this was only a court decision and not constitutional protection to right to information which was provided

through the insertion of Article 19-A through 18th Amendment. However as it happens, judicial interpretations are always used to reform laws and in this sense it was a landmark decision. Insertion of Article 19-A was a substantial advancement. After elections, KP government took the lead and enacted their RTI act which is certainly one of the best laws in the world. Punjab followed the suit and enacted a good right to information law. These two new laws have certain weaknesses but fundamentally they are based on internationally accepted principals which includes maximum disclosure, minimal exemption, low cost, proactive disclosure and, whistle blower protection and the concept of open government etc. As these laws are based on internationally accepted principles of right to information legislation, therefore, these laws can be turned as very good laws. However this is only a first step and there is a long way to go. What is needed is a paradigmatic shift. The existing paradigm of governance is based in secrecy which has been considered of value for centuries in running the affairs of government. That is why all information is declared secret or classified unless declared otherwise. It is in this context that right to information laws aim to turn this paradigm upside down. As our aim is that all information should be open to public access unless declared otherwise which cannot happen just by introducing a new law. In legal terms, we have now a constitutional amendment and we have new laws in two provinces. We are making a small beginning in these two provinces and hopefully other provinces and federal government including FATA and PATA will soon catch up. Much depends on how effectively these laws are enforced and the responsibility lies with the provincial governments and information commission which have been setup. We now need to not only work in terms of creating public awareness but also need to train government officials and amend many rules and procedures and by-laws to make them consistent with the provisions of Right to Information laws. At present, right to information laws are operational in an environment where there are plethoras of laws which deny access to information. In such a scenario, public officials are likely to be confused. In this context, information commissions and governments in the provinces have a big task ahead to make their instructions, laws and procedures consistent with right to information laws. That is why it is important that people start using these laws for their rights and entitlements. Overall I think we can be optimistic we have already made some progress but there is a long way to go and I am sure that together we can make progress. There is lot which we can learn from the region and from our neighboring countries. We are privileged to have delegates from neighbouring countries as we can learn from their experiences.

Tanka Raj Aryal, RTI Expert from Nepal

He congratulated all the participants of the conference on press freedom day and thanked the organizers for inviting him from Nepal to share his RTI experience. He said that before RTI evolved as an integral part of the freedom of expression, it also had dimension as a tool for anti corruption, transparency and accountability. On press freedom day, we are talking about the Right to Information which contributes significantly in promoting transparency and accountability. Since 1990, an upsurge has been witnessed in the world with regard to the enactment of right to information laws. Sweden was the first country to have introduced right to information law in 1966. Presently, there are more than 100 countries which have adopted right to information laws under their national legal regime and there are more than 60 countries which have accorded right to information the status of fundamental right. Nepal is the one of the countries which has protected right to information under the fundamental right of the

constitution. We have passed RTI law as a fundamental right under 1990 constitution. However, it could not be implemented due to lack of implementing legislation. In 2006, after political change in the country, we adopted new constitution and passed the specific separate Right to Information Act 2007 in Nepal. There is National Information Commission since 2008. In the context of Nepal, we are equipped with law and with constitution and have the institutional framework to implement right to information. Nepalese right to information law stands at 18th position in international ranking of national RTI laws. However, implementation of the law leaves much to be desired. Nepal passed the law and formed the national information commission but the present commission is without commissioner even after one year. Public officials do not provide information out of fear. It is important to strengthen

supply side like appointing the information commissioner, public information officers and by ensuring proactive disclosure of information has prescribed by the law. In India, the right was demanded from the grassroots and pressure was built on the government. In the case of Nepal, it was lobbied by the journalist community and some rights activists. As a result, common people are not



aware about right to information law which is not only the case in Nepal but in most of the South Asian countries. We are empowering people and telling them that this is your right and you can ask information. There should be motivation, orientation and training for both demand and supply side and we have to change the mindset of the public officers also. Another experience in Nepal is that we do not have proper record keeping mechanism. Until and unless there is digitalization of information, right to information will not be implemented as public officials cannot provide information if it is not properly kept. Lastly, role of media is extremely portent for realization of right to information. Journalists can use right to information legislation for investigative reporting and help people exercise their right to information.

Mario Gomez, Executive Director International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka

Mr. Mario congratulated the government of Punjab and KPK on the adoption of the provincial RTI laws. In Sri Lanka, we recently got newly elected council to the north east province and civil society is suggesting to adopt the provincial RTI laws for the province of the northern council. We can get inspiration from examples in Pakistan in trying to adopt RTI legislation in Sri Lanka. Mario shared the global prospective regarding the growth of RTI laws in the world and referred to UN convention against corruption and European court and their contribution to the growth and international legal reorganization of RTI as an international right. RTI has been used in a variety of way in South Asian and Sri Lanka is willing to adopt a comprehensive RTI legal regime. He said that although Sri Lanka does not have RTI law but RTI has been on the agenda of the media and of civil society since 2001. In 2001 the law commission presented a very basic law on right to information. This law was taken up by media

organizations and civil society and this law was improved upon and presented before cabinet and the government approved the draft law. However, unfortunately before parliament could pass the draft law, the parliament was dissolved and the law was never enacted. Afterwards, the law was revised by the law commission and taken up again by opposition and presented as a private members bill about three years ago before the parliament. However, this law has not been passed yet and Sri Lanka still



languishes without the Right to Information law. We have very uneasy peace in Sri Lanka. Media in Sri Lanka tends to be dominated by the state and many media organization engage in self censorship. During the war, 16 media persons were killed in the line of duty. During the course of last five years, our system of government has

become centralized and parliament has become almost a rubber stamp. Under these circumstances, there is greater need for right to information law. He said freedom of information legislation should be extended to cover regulators, courts and legislators. RTI law has not only been used by the rich but has also been used by the rural poor in India. So it is important to build the culture of information and openness so that the poor could use right to information for their rights and entitlements.

Habibullah Muqbil, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

Mr. Habibullah

He shared with the participants that Afghanistan has suffered a lot from conflicts for last 40 year and conflict is one of the biggest problems we have faced and are still facing. We are not post conflicts but in conflict country and beside conflict we have problems of drugs, terrorism and corruption. According to transparency International, Afghanistan is ranked as the most corrupt country in the world. So right to information law can be used as a tool in fighting corruption and bringing about transparency, accountability and public transformation. He said the struggle



for right to information started around 2007 when Afghanistan became a member of SAARC. However, it is very unfortunate that we still do not have RTI law in Afghanistan.

Sahibzada Muhammad Khalid, Chief Information Commissioner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission

Mr. Khalid said the Right to Information Act is a paradigm shift from the culture of secrecy we have grown up with. There was a time when information was beyond the reach of common man but now it is accessible to all owing to developments in the field of information technology. We have an excellent law



and we need to ensure its proper implementation. It is very important that Public Information Officers are able to respond to the public demands and queries. For me, RTI is like switching a bulb in an absolutely dark room and that is how we should treat RTI law. Educating the public is foreseeable problem and in this regard he was very much impressed

by the work of Indian information commission. He was of the view that there should be greater focus on the supply side of information. Politicians have done their job and now it was our responsibility to deliver. National security is indeed an issue but there is information commission that will decide the issues related to it. Civil society groups and social workers who are struggling hard for right to information and other constitutional rights of people must keep up pressure for realization of the rights of people.

Dr. Nazir Saeed, Secretary, Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage

Dr. Nazir, while thanking the organizers for conducting the event, said that we required valuable input for enacting RTI act at the federal level. The provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have taken lead in enacting good right to information laws. At federal level, the process of drafting right to

information law has been going on since 2008. We sought input from civil society groups and incorporated its suggestions in the draft law. The Senate Committee on Information and Broadcasting has unanimously approved draft right to information law. The Cabinet has said that this law should be moved by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. We are still working with government and opposition members to make it more effective and excellent piece of legislation and we are incorporating best practices pertaining to right to information legislation.



3rd Session

“Role of RTI in Investigative Reporting”

Chair of the Session

M. Ziauddin, Executive Editor the Express Tribune

Speakers of the Session

Umar Cheema, Investigative Reporter, the News

Azaz Syed, Senior Correspondent Geo TV

Anurag Acharya, Media Expert from Nepal

Matih Ullah Jan, Anchor Waqt TV

Nadeem Iqbal, Executive Coordinator, Network for Consumer Protection

Zahid Abdullah, Program Manager, CPDI

Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, Director UNESCO

M. Ziauddin, Executive Editor the Express Tribune

This session was moderated by Aftab Alam, Executive Director, IRADA and he made substantive contribution to the flow of debate during the session.

Umar Cheema, Investigative Reporter, the News

Mr. Cheema presented a comprehensive analysis of world best practices of investigative journalism and gave example how investigative reporting on tax issue resulted in Pakistan becoming only the 4th country in the world to publish tax directory. He said that Right to information laws are of no value if these laws are not used. Right to information laws are not only for journalist but for common public as well. Right to information laws democratizes the process of access to information. He said that federal right to information law was a weak one and needed to be repealed as its appellate body is largely ineffective. He gave example as to how President became judge of his own cause under Freedom of Information Ordinance 2002 when a citizen asked information about expenses incurred when the President performed Haj. He said that Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have come



up with good right to information laws and it is hoped that federal government will also enact an effective right to information law.

Azaz Syed, Senior Correspondent Geo TV

Mr. Azaz shared his views with the participants about the scope of investigative journalism. He said that there is a difference in journalism of print and electronic media. The print media has come up with excellent investigative stories. He appreciated the role of CPDI and PCP for furthering the cause of right to information in the country. He was of the view that though there were laws in place for access to information, however, it was not easy for common people to exercise this right. It was up to the journalists to investigate stories and search the truth. Pakistan has been declared as most dangerous country for journalists after Mexico. Despite challenges, we have right to information and can seek information as a right from public bodies. Right to information is not a right for journalists and bureaucrats alone, it is right of all citizens of Pakistan. Therefore, citizens should be encouraged to exercise this right for attainment of their fundamental rights.



Anurag Acharya, Media Expert from Nepal

Mr. Acharya was of the view that right to information was not that of journalists alone; it was right of all citizens. In Nepal, citizens are being sensitized to exercise this right. Exercising right to information is often a frustrating and long drawn battle. He congratulated Pakistan for putting in place effective right



to information laws at the provincial level and for embarking on the journey of providing citizens their right to access information. He was of the view that certain mind-set results in the denial of access to information. In Nepal, corruption is a major issue. Along with corruption, there is issue of impunity and both corruption and impunity go hand in hand. In Nepal,

investigative stories have been carried out by journalists by going across the border. Recently, it was exposed through an investigative story how 130 million were embezzled from adult literacy program. He shared that journalists have to face threats as well for their investigative stories. The journalist who exposed this corruption faced threats to his person and had to remain in hiding for weeks to save his life. While sharing the facts about the problems being faced by journalists in Nepal, he said in a survey

done by an organization showed that as many as 50 per cent of the journalist did not publish name with the story out of fear, 48 per cent torn down the story due to fear, 24 per cent share the idea with editor and 67 per cent share it to colleagues but not with the editor. The survey also showed that local politics and politicians, local corruption and crime issues and stories on arm groups were most dangerous subject for investigative reporting. Nepal has one of the finest RTI act but the question is whether the journalist are willing to use this law. Journalists can get information through our right to information law for investigative stories but they will have to combine journalistic passion with utmost integrity and ethical standards. The information is linked with power and those who deny access to information do not want citizens to share power.

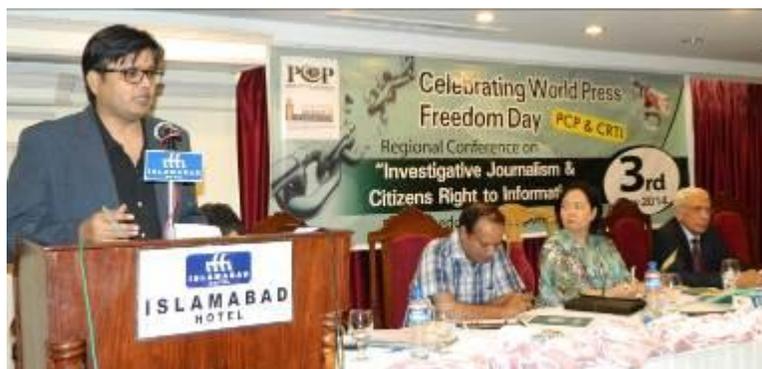
Matih Ullah Jan, Anchor Waqt TV

Mr. Jana urged students of journalism to take journalism not as just another job but as a passion. Investigative journalism and promoting access to information should be with some purpose. For any journalist, the biggest purpose and objective should be the public interest, rule of law and strengthening of the democratic principles. When we talk about investigative journalism, it means we are talking about an unarmed journalist trying to collect information from dangerous and no-go areas for public good. Journalism is a dangerous job in Pakistan and no matter how powerful investigative journalist you are, you cannot enter into cantonments to investigate ordinary crimes that take place on daily basis. He said that as a journalist, he never used right to information laws to access information held by public bodies and have always sought information from his sources. The benchmark for any

civil society to prove their performance in ensuring access to information for common citizens is as to how many common people were able to access information. It is very important that citizens are able to exercise their right to information and civil society groups should focus on creating awareness as to how citizens can use this law for their rights. In countries where there is there is civil military imbalance, often journalists are fed with stories to discredit democratic system.

Nadeem Iqbal, Executive Coordinator, Network for Consumer Protection

Mr. Nadeem as a consumer right activist shared with the participants that rights of citizens were not being protected in certain areas. Media is dependent on advertisement revenue for its survival. The share of



government in the advertisement revenue in 2002 was 4 billion rupees and now private sector is contributing 40 billion in advertisement revenue for media. He said media is not reporting the reality of corporate sector which is violating the consumer rights because of business interest and revenue it is getting from it.

Zahid Abdullah, Program Manager, CPDI

Mr. Zahid Abdullah while sharing his experience about investigative journalism and citizen's right to information in Pakistan, was of the view that national security sector has been very intrusive when we exercise our right to information about matters pertaining to national security sector. There has been unfortunate incidents and some of them have been documented even by Supreme Court. He said that



the problem of exercising right to information in matters pertaining to security sector was not restricted to Pakistan alone but it was a problem faced by rights activists in many countries. That is why international standards pertaining to exercise of right to information in issues linked with national sector have evolved which need to be incorporated in right to information legislation. He

was of the view that Pakistan was a country of 180 million but media largely focused on high politics and civil military relationships often at the expense of issues of common people. It was unfortunate that media did not find attractive to talk about the issue of non-availability of clean drinking water. It is true that we are facing grave challenges involving security sector but there are other pressing issues being faced by 180 million people which are not being given as much attention by media as these issues deserve. He shared that CPDI unearthed the existence of secret funds in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and shared documentary evidence with media. He said RTI legislation has immense potential to be used for investigative reporting. RTI legislation has immense potential to be used for investigative reporting provided that journalists show patience and develop certain skills. He was also of the view that civil society groups in the country have championed the cause of right to information legislation and media did not take up this issue as a cause.

Dr. Kozue Kay Nagata, Director UNESCO

Dr. Nagata said that it was a great pleasure to be here to celebrate the world press freedom day 2014. This year the theme is media freedom for better future. As we are in the process of shaping the post 2015 MDG Development agenda, the emphasis is on economic development, free flow of information and free media.

Talking about the role and importance of right to information in economic development, Dr. Nagata said that economic development was very important for any country and social development was

incomplete without economic development. Right to information is of fundamental importance for economic development and the government of Pakistan is interested in economic development. Therefore, free flow of information is crucial.

Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries for journalist where seven journalists get killed every year. Pakistan is one of the four most dangerous countries along with Iraq, Syria and Brazil. Except only two murder cases, no other cases have been resolved since 2000 which shows that criminal justice system is weak in the country. If there is lack of safety for journalists, it does not augur well for the economic development as investors are not interested in investing when there are negative perceptions about law and order. Furthermore, this negative perception also impacts tourism industry which has immense potential.



Concluding her discussion she said that she was happy to see the democratic Pakistan but it was important that there is greater level of literacy so that people could protect their interests and in this context media has great role to play in educating people about their rights.

M. Ziauddin, Executive Editor the Express Tribune

Mr. Ziauddin said that we the journalist have faced and stood against oppression, highly restrictive laws and censorship during past fifty years. So I have reservations on the assertion that RTI was never demanded by journalist. It is very important for journalists to establish their integrity and this takes time. He was of the view that journalists do not make news, their job is to cover the news. He shared



with the participants that market economy and democracy were a deadly combination and corruption could not be ruled out but it could be reduced through social control. He was of the view that regulatory bodies for media in Pakistan like PEMRA and PCP were not regulatory bodies but these were government bodies. He suggested that the Board of Governors of regulatory bodies

should be chosen by intraparty parliamentary group and board of director should be accountable to intraparty committee. He said that it was not the media but the bureaucracy that was delaying the enactment of right to information law.

Note of Thanks

At the end of the conference, Raja Shafqat Khan Abbasi thanked all the participants for showing active participation and patience throughout the day. He also thanked worthy speakers of all three sessions for sharing their experiences. At the end of the session, shields and mementos were distributed among the speakers and group pictures with the speakers and participants were taken.
