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தகவலறியும் உரிமைக்கான ஆணைக்குழு

RIGHT TO INFORMATION COMMISSION (CONSTITUTED UNDER RTI ACT, No 12 OF 2016)

ලිපිනය: කාමර අංක 2- 203-204, බණ්ඩාරනායක ජාත්යන්තර සම්මන්ත්රණ ශාලා පරිශ්‍රය, බෞද්ධාලෝක මාවත, කොළඹ 07/விலாசம்: அறை இல 2- 203-204, பிளம்ஐசிஎச் இபெளக்தாலோக்க மாவத்தை இ கொழுப்பு 07/Address : Room No 2- 203-204, BMICH, Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07

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THE RTI COMMISSION OF SRI LANKA CONCLUDES SEVERAL APPEAL HEARINGS, MORE ON THE WAY

30 May 2017. Colombo, MEDIA STATEMENT: Marking little more than three months since Sri Lanka's Right to Information Act, No 12 of 2016 was operationalised on 03rd February 2017, the RTI Commission notes its appreciation of the significant numbers of Public Authorities and citizens who have reached out to the Commission during the intervening period. This indicates the support and interest evidenced by the public who are, in growing numbers using their 'Right to Information' guaranteed to them under the Act. It is very encouraging to see that some Public Authorities are in fact, voluntarily complying with the pro-active disclosure requirements of the Act.

As the statutorily independent appellate body established under the Act, the Commission is pleased to announce that it has recently concluded the hearing of two Appeals, during which process, both Appellants received the information that had been requested under the Act from Public Authorities noticed to appear before the Commission, to the satisfaction of the parties concerned. Currently, several more Appeals are pending hearing.

The Commission has been receiving many requests for guidance from Public Authorities in respect of procedural and substantive aspects of the RTI Act along with letters from Citizens (including public officers themselves) on injustices caused to them by the denial of information. Close to three hundred such letters have been received during the past months. The Commission is heartened by the use of RTI as evinced thereto. Responses to the letters have been on an individual basis, strictly in chronological order of the date of receipt. As the Commission is still operating with a skeletal staff from temporary premises, it is responding as speedily as possible to the same.

Particularly in regard to advice being requested by information officers of Public Authorities, the Commission notes that it will respond in terms of Section 5(5) of the Act where advice is being sought regarding a procedural matter 'connected with the grant of access to any information.' However it is regretfully unable to advise on a substantial matter relating to the application of the Act given that this may prejudice the hearing of that same matter, in the event that it comes up formally in appeal. In this regard, the Commission wishes to emphasize the primary aim of the RTI Act is the maximum disclosure of information subject to narrowly drawn exemptions that again must yield to the overriding principle of the public interest.

The Commission calls upon Public Authorities who have not yet complied, to abide by the mandatory statutory duty to name and publicise the appointment of Information Officers and Designated Officers as required by the Act.

It is also with great pleasure that the Commission announces the forthcoming launch of the Commission's RTI logo as well as its website which will be in a basic form and further updated progressively. The website will have links to the Commission's Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) for the years 2017-2019, concluded appeals, and relevant documents relating to RTI. Importantly it will also feature drafts of Rules on Inquiries and Report Formats (under Section 10) as per Section 42 of the Act, as well as Guidelines relating to the proactive disclosure of Public Authorities under Sections 8 and 9 of the Act. These draft Rules and Guidances are being put into the public domain for feedback prior to finalisation and gazetting.

Public responses are being invited in regard to the same in view of the Commission's firm belief that public participation in the yet evolving RTI process is indispensable to bringing about a culture of accountability and openness in Sri Lanka. The Commission hopes to soon embark on the facilitation of training activities for public officials as required under the Act.

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