Threat to RTI

Why in news?

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- The legislative agenda of the upcoming monsoon session of Parliament hints at amending the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005.
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- Government is considering amending the Act for Introduction, Consideration, and Passing.
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Why is it a threat?

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- **Citizen** - RTI Act has transformed the citizen-government relationship and invalidated illegitimate concentrations of power.
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- It has legitimised people's demands, and changed the feudal and colonial relationships.
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- This progress would be threatened with any dilution of the spirit of the RTI Act.
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- **Governance** - Under RTI, a public authority is to provide as much information suomotu to the public at regular intervals.
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- The spirit of the RTI law thus lies in not just filing and getting an answer.
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- It actually mandates the replacement of the prevailing culture of secrecy with a culture of transparency.
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- **Ideals** - Government has shown unwillingness to operationalise Lok Pal, Whistleblowers Act and the Grievance Redress law.

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- This already has a negative impact on the ideals of transparency and accountability, which would worsen with dilution of RTI.
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What are the concerns with the proposal?

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- **Consultation** - Earlier attempts to amend the Act have had strong popular resistance.
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- The government now seems to be avoiding transparency and consultation in trying to impose the changes.
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- As in the “pre legislative consultation policy”, any amendment to the law should be discussed before it goes to the cabinet.
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- But applications for information about amendments to be made under the RTI Act have been denied.
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- **Process** - In recent times, key legislations are passed without being sent to multi-party standing committees.
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- Some are being passed under the tag of Money Bill, to avoid facing the Opposition.
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- Significantly, this is also the case with legislations having a bearing on transparency.
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- Clearly, these are practices without due consideration of the parliamentary processes.
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Why is Lokpal significant too?

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- The RTI Act just allows to uncover fraud through a demand for information.
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- It is the Lokpal law which helps to use the information to hold a bureaucrat or elected representative accountable.

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- Accountability should also have been institutionalised through a strong social accountability and Grievance Redress Act.
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- But Public servants, troubled by accountability, are seeing these provisions as interference.
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- Given these existing shortfalls, any amendment to the successfully and extensively used RTI Act needs a legitimate assessment.
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Source: The Hindu

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