Threat to RTI - II

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What is the issue?

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The proposal to amend the RTI Act, 2005 has raised dissent at many levels with call for a roll back of amendments.

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What are the concerns?

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- The changes would erode the independence of the Information Commissions at the national and state levels.
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- The Central government seeks control over the tenure, salary and allowances of the functionaries.
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- These include Chief and other Information Commissioners at Centre, and State Chief Information Commissioners.
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- It would eliminate the parity they currently have with the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.
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- Thus, the equivalence with a Supreme Court judge in matters of pay, allowances and conditions of service would also be disturbed.
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- Also, the Supreme Court has held right to information as being integral to the right to free expression under Article 19.
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- Thus, weakening the transparency law would go against this guarantee.
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What are the existing shortcomings?

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- 1) The information commissions get little official support to fill the vacancies.
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- Evidently, Central Information Commission has over 23,500 pending appeals and complaints.
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- 2) The law envisaged that voluntary disclosure would reduce the need to file an application.
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- But many State departments are ignoring the requirement to publish information suo motu.
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- 3) Fines are rarely imposed for any shortfall in compliance.
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- So officers are giving incomplete, vague or unconnected information to applicants with impunity.
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- 4) Easier payment of application fee and a reliable online system to apply for information are missing.
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What could be done?

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- RTI Act has fared well in empowering the citizen, by weakening the colonial legacy of secretive government.
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- Filling up the vacancies and bringing in efficiency is the need of the hour.
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- Better compliance by government departments and agencies should be ensured.
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- Also, the scope of RTI could also be extended to more institutions influencing official policy.
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Source: The Hindu

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