



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INFORMATION COMMISSIONS IN INDIA

Minutes of 12th Annual General Body Meeting held on September 9th, 2023 at Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh

Participants:

Board of Governors:

- Shri Y.K. Sinha, President, NFICI & Chief Information Commissioner, CIC New Delhi
- Shri Jalada Kumar Tripathy, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Odisha
- Shri Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Assam
- Shri Md. Shakeel Akhter, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Tamil Nadu
- Shri Oinam Sunil Singh, Information Commissioner (I/c), SIC Manipur
- Shri Sunil Porwal, Information Commissioner (I/c), SIC Maharashtra
- Shri Vivek Sharma, Information Commissioner, SIC Uttarakhand

Members Present:

- Shri R. Mahaboob Basha, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Andhra Pradesh.
- Shri Amrutbhai Patel, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Gujarat.
- Shri Vishwas R. Satarkar, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Goa.
- Shri R.D. Dhiman, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Himachal Pradesh.
- Dr. Vishwas Mehta, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Kerala.
- Shri N.C. Srinivasa, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Karnataka.
- Shri I. Meyionen Jamir, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Nagaland.
- Shri Devendra Bhushan Gupta, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Rajasthan.
- Shri Y.P. Gurung, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Sikkim.
- Shri Virendra, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC West Bengal.
- Ms. Sonam Yudron, Information Commissioner, SIC Arunachal Pradesh.
- Shri Gumjum Haider, Information Commissioner, SIC Arunachal Pradesh.
- Shri Manoj Kumar Trivedi, Information Commissioner, SIC Chhattisgarh.
- Shri A. Abdul Hakkim, Information Commissioner, SIC Kerala.
- Dr. K.M. Dileep, Information Commissioner, SIC Kerala.
- Shri Anumit Singh Sodhi, Information Commissioner, SIC Punjab.

Special Invitee:

- Shri Suresh Chandra, Information Commissioner, CIC, New Delhi

Also Present:

- Shri P. Samuel Jonathan, Information Commissioner, SIC Andhra Pradesh.
- Shri Rakhhal Chandra Besra, Secretary, SIC Jharkhand

NFICI's officers:

- Dr. Sidh Kumar, Honorary Secretary, NFICI, New Delhi
- Shri Sarvottam Kumar Rana, Executive Secretary, NFICI, New Delhi.

Shri R. Mahaboob Basha, Chief Information Commissioner, Andhra Pradesh commenced the proceedings with a warm welcome and thanked the Chief Guest, His Excellency Shri S. Abdul Nazeer, Governor of Andhra Pradesh for sparing his valuable time to inaugurate the 12th Annual General Body meeting of NFICI. He also welcomed and thanked all the guests. Shri Basha expressed his gratitude to the Hon'ble President, NFICI, Shri YK Sinha and NFICI members for giving Andhra Pradesh State Information Commission an opportunity to organise such an important meeting of NFICI in his State. Shri Basha then requested Shri Y.K. Sinha, Chief Information Commissioner, CIC, New Delhi and President NFICI to deliver the welcome address.

On behalf of the member of NFICI, Shri Y.K. Sinha, Hon'ble Chief Information Commissioner, Central Information Commission and the President, NFICI, thanked the Chief Guest, His Excellency Shri S. Abdul Nazeer, Governor of Andhra Pradesh for sparing his valuable time to inaugurate the session. He welcomed all the dignitaries and the members of the Federation to the 12th AGB meeting of NFICI. He also conveyed his thanks and appreciation to Shri Shri R. Mahaboob Basha, Chief Information Commissioner, Andhra Pradesh and his team in the Andhra Pradesh State Information Commission for organising the meetings meticulously. Shri Sinha, affirmed that the meetings of NFICI provide a platform to discuss and inculcate the best practices being followed by various Information Commissions. He underlined that these meetings helped in facilitating exchange of views and opinions as well as coordination relating a more effective implementation of this sunshine legislation.



His Excellency Shri S. Abdul Nazeer, Governor of Andhra Pradesh, addressed the gathering. He extended warm greetings to the participants of the 28th Board of Governors and 12th Annual General Body meetings of National Federation of Information Commissions in India (NFICI).

His Excellency, Governor stated that he is happy to learn that the National Federation of Information Commissions in India has been set up to strengthen the Right to Information Act, 2005, which came into effect on 12th October, 2005. The Act seeks to establish the principle **“transparency is the norm and secrecy is an exception”** in the working of every public authority. The RTI Act aims to ensure maximum openness and transparency in the machinery and functioning of Government at all levels. The Right to Information Act is a powerful tool that allows Indian citizens to access information held by public authorities at all levels of the government. It has significantly contributed to promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in the country’s governance and system and enables the citizens to exercise their right to know and hold public authorities accountable for their actions and decisions.

The RTI Act played a crucial role in strengthening democracy in the country and promoted transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. It facilitated informed decision-making and enabled citizens to actively engage in the democratic process. The RTI Act became a significant tool in curbing corruption and promoting good governance. By providing access to information, the Act increased transparency in government operations and exposed instances of corruption and misuse of administrative powers. It empowered the citizens to demand accountability and seek redress for any wrongdoing.

A key strength of the Act pertains to statutory status and administrative autonomy provided to the Information Commissions. The Central and State Commissions have identical powers and responsibilities, and exercise exactly the same authority, in respect of institutions within their respective jurisdictions. The Act clearly defines the roles, responsibilities and jurisdiction of the national and sub-national bodies, the Central Information Commission and the State Information Commissions and each of them is independent of the other.

The esteemed chief guest expressed happiness that the National Federation of Information Commissions in India, which has enrolled the State Information Commissions of several States and Union Territories, as its members, seeks to facilitate coordination and mutual consultation among the Central Information Commission and the State Information Commissions, constituted under the Right to Information Act 2005, and to strengthen the administration of the Act, through education, research and dissemination of knowledge etc. among various other aims and objectives.

He congratulated the National Federation of Information Commissions in India, for choosing Visakhapatnam, well-known as the 'City of Destiny', to organise their 28th Board of Governors & 12th Annual General Body Meeting, and wished the proceedings all success.

At the end of the inaugural ceremony, Dr. Vishwas Mehta, Hon'ble Chief Information Commissioner, Kerala delivered the vote of thanks.

The members re-assembled for the next session after the tea break.

State Chief Information Commissioner of Andhra Pradesh Shri R. Mahaboob Basha read out the message received from the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Shri Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, which is as follows:





CHIEF MINISTER
ANDHRA PRADESH

MESSAGE

I extend a warm welcome to each of you on behalf of the Government of Andhra Pradesh. It's heartening to see delegates from across the nation gather here in Visakhapatnam, a city of destiny, for the 12th Annual General Body Meeting of the National Federation of Information Commissions in India (NFICI).

For the last two decades, the Right to Information Act, 2005, the transformative legislation, has provided citizens unprecedented access to Government activities and benefited many. The Act's role in promoting transparency, participation of public and accountability is crucial for the sustenance of our democracy.

At this juncture I would like to briefly mention one of the historical initiative of my Government i.e., "Navaratnalu". Under this flagship programme, the Government have embraced innovative approaches starting from selection of beneficiaries, placing the beneficiary list for social audit and adopting **Direct Benefit Transfer** ensuring payments reach eligible beneficiaries without intermediary involvement with utmost transparency. This path breaking initiative has yielded a considerable deposit of Rs. 2.31 lakh crore in to the beneficiaries' bank accounts over the past 50 months.

My aspiration is for a conducive environment that allows the Right to Information Act, 2005 to thrive at all tiers of governance, ultimately benefiting the public. I congratulate all dignitaries and anticipate fruitful discussions and outcomes during the NFICI meetings.

Y.S.


(Y.S. JAGAN MOHAN REDDY)

Shri Y.K. Sinha, President NFICI presided over the proceedings of the 12th Annual General Body Meeting with the following agenda points.

Welcome all the new Chief Information Commissioners. Shri Sinha congratulated and welcomed the following Chief Information Commissioners on their appointment and their participation in the AGB meeting for the first time:

- Shri R.D. Dhiman, Hon'ble CIC Himachal Pradesh;
- Shri Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta, Hon'ble CIC Assam;
- Shri Y.P. Gurung, Hon'ble CIC Sikkim;
- Shri Md. Shakeel Akhter, Hon'ble CIC Tamil Nadu.

The following agenda points were discussed:

1. Confirmation of Minutes of last Meeting: The 11th Annual General Body Meeting was held on 03.02.2023 at Kevadia Colony, Gujarat. All the members of NFICI confirmed the minutes of the meeting.

2. Election of members for Board of Governors in place of SIC Tamil Nadu: It was informed that the two year tenure of State Information Commission, Tamil Nadu as Member of Board of Governors got over on 02.09.2023.

Andhra Pradesh State Information Commission was unanimously elected as a member of the Board of Governors from zone 1 on rotational basis in place of State Information Commission, Tamil Nadu for a two years term beginning from 09.09.2023.

The President felicitated Shri R Mahaboob Basha, Chief Information Commissioner, Andhra Pradesh on joining the Board of Governors. He also expressed his gratitude to the Tamil Nadu State Information Commission.

2. Status of the Audited Annual Accounts for the FY 2022-23: Members were apprised that the NFICI's audited Annual Accounts for the financial year 2022-23 have been prepared by M/s Batra Deepak & Associates, Chartered Accountant. The audited

Annual Accounts comprising the Income & Expenditure Statement, Receipts & Payments Statement, and the Balance Sheet were presented before the members attending meeting. The brief summary of NFICI's audited accounts for the financial year 2022-23 as given below was put up to the members of the Federation attending the meeting:


- Opening balance, as on 01.04.2022 : Rs. 35,33,193/-
- Receipts : Rs. 71,75,262/-
- Expenditures : Rs. 89,25,385/-
- Closing balance, as on 01.04.2023 : Rs. 17,83,070/-

All the members after perusing the statements and audited accounts for financial year 2022-23 approved the account unanimously.

3. Status of NFICI's Current Accounts and FDs: The members of the Federation were apprised of the status of NFICI's current account and fixed deposits being maintained by State Bank of India, Bhikaji Cama Place, New Delhi. As on 05.09.2023 a sum of Rs. 1,55,875/- was held as balance in the current account and there were 14 Fixed Deposits amounting to Rs. 1,89,78,277/- (principal amount). Members expressed their happiness on maintenance of account in a systematic manner.

5. Status of Annual Membership Fee from the member Information Commissions: The members of the Federation were apprised about the status of NFICI's annual membership up to financial years 2022-23. It was noted that the State Information Commissions, Kerala and Telangana had not yet deposited membership fee for the financial year 2022-23. Both the member Commissions were requested to arrange to make payment of outstanding annual membership fee for the year 2022-23 at earliest.

The President also requested all the members of the Federation to deposit the annual membership fee for financial year 2023-24 at the earliest.

**6. Status of release of 3rd Grant of Rs. 4.00 Lakhs to member information Commissions:** It was intimated that, during Special General Body meeting held on 10.06.2022 at New Delhi, it was decided to release the 3rd grant of NFICI to those members of the Federation who had submitted utilization certificates and vouchers for the 1st and 2nd grants. Members were apprised of the status of release of 3rd grant @ Rs. 4.00 lakhs to following member Commissions:-

S.No.	State Information Commission	Favoring	Amt. Released (in Lakhs)	Cheque No. & Date
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	Secretary, Arunachal Pradesh State Information Commission	4.00	507220 08.09.2022
2.	Assam	Secretary, Assam State Information Commission	4.00	507221 08.09.2022
3.	Chhattisgarh	Secretary, Chhattisgarh State Information Commission	4.00	507222 08.09.2022
4.	Manipur	Secretary, Manipur State Information Commission	4.00	507223 08.09.2022
5.	Meghalaya	Secretary, Meghalaya State Information Commission	4.00	507224 08.09.2022
6.	Mizoram	Secretary, Mizoram State Information Commission	4.00	507225 08.09.2022
7.	Nagaland	Secretary, Nagaland State Information Commission	4.00	507226 08.09.2022
8.	Punjab	Secretary, Punjab State Information Commission	4.00	507227 08.09.2022
9.	Tamil Nadu	Secretary, Tamil Nadu State Information Commission	4.00	507228 08.09.2022
10.	Karnataka	Secretary, Karnataka State Information Commission	4.00	507240 09.12.2022
11.	Uttarakhand	Secretary, Uttarakhand State Information Commission	4.00	507239 09.12.2022
12.	Odisha	Secretary, Odisha State Information Commission	4.00	038059 14.03.2023
13.	Kerala	Secretary, Kerala State Information Commission	4.00	038055 20.02.2023
14.	Gujarat	Secretary, Gujarat State Information Commission	4.00	038056 20.02.2023
15.	Rajasthan	Secretary, Rajasthan State Information Commission	4.00	038063 20.02.2023

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16.	Himachal Pradesh	Secretary, State Information Commission, Himachal Pradesh	4.00	038074 24.07.2023
17.	Goa	Goa State Information Commission	4.00	038075 24.07.2023

7. Outstanding UC and vouchers from members Information Commissions: The status of outstanding utilization certificates and supporting vouchers against the 1st, 2nd & 3rd grants was conveyed to all the members of the Federation. The respective member Information Commissions were requested to submit their outstanding Utilization Certificates and Supporting Vouchers in respect of the grants released by NFICI at the earliest.

8. Important & landmark decisions selected by the Editorial Board: The members of the Federation were informed that an Editorial Board meeting was held on 28th July, 2023 at CIC Bhawan, New Delhi. Office of the NFICI had received a total of 122 decisions from the following member Information Commissions:

Sl. No.	Information Commissions	No. of decisions received
1	CIC Delhi	47
2	Arunachal Pradesh	04
3	Gujarat	07
4	Goa	10
5	Himachal Pradesh	15
6	Kerala	05
7	Karnataka	01
8	Manipur	11
9	Odisha	03
10	Rajasthan	01
11	Sikkim	10
12	Uttarakhand	04
13	West Bengal	04
	Total	122

The Editorial Board had a detailed discussion and out of the 122 decisions, a total of 35 decisions have been selected as important & landmark decisions. The President proposed that apart from uploading the selected decisions on NFICI website, an annual journal should be published by the NFICI and all the selected decisions by the Editorial Board be published in this journal. Sufficient copies of the journal should be dispatched to the members for reference and academic research of the Commissions. It would help in inculcating best practices. A sample copy of the journal was also presented before the members. The members appreciated the initiative and approved the same unanimously.

9. Ekta Committee report for recommendations to Central Government: Shri Suresh Chandra, Information Commissioner, CIC, Convener of the Committee briefed the NFICI members about the recommendations of the Committee and requested that the same may be sent to the concerned authority on behalf of the NFICI.

10. Agenda points received from SIC Sikkim. Sikkim State Information Commission had submitted the following two agenda points for discussion and consideration by the members:

Point 1 (Verbatim) - That in section 8 of sub-section (j) it has been reflected that "information which relates to personal information, the disclosure of which has no relationship to any Public Authority or interest, or which would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual unless the Central Public Information officer or State Public Information officer or the Appellate Authority, as the case may be is satisfied that the larger Public Interest justifies the disclosure of such information."

a) *Provided that the information which cannot be denied to the parliament or state legislature shall not be denied to any person.*

Suggestions: In the RTI Act/ rules, the definition of larger Public Interest, Personal document and Public document are not defined, it would be appropriate if, the definitions are incorporated in the rule for easy disposal of such cases.

Discussion – The point was discussed by the members and decided that since section 8 (1) (j) of the RTI Act has been amended vide section 44 (3) of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, no further intervention is warranted.

Point 2 (Verbatim) - Payment of Annual Membership Fee of NFICI and release of grants: *The state Information Commission of Sikkim was not able to pay the annual membership bill for the financial year 19-20, 20-21 and 21-22 because of non-availability of resources during the COVID period. After the COVID period, the Commission paid the membership bill for the financial year 2022-23 at the amount of Rs 1,00,000, with a request to deposit this amount against the dues of the Financial Year 2022-23, but the same has been adjusted against the outstanding payment for the financial year 2019-20. The bill for the outstanding membership fee of Rs. 3.00 lakhs (from 2020-2023) is under process and will be deposited to the Central Information Commissions NFICI by the 1st week of September 2023. Utilization certificates for the previous grants have already been submitted through mail and Registered post (if it is not received, we can submit a Xerox copy of the same now).*

Suggestions: *In this regard it is to submit that the 3rd grant under "improving transparency and accountability in Government through effective implementation of RTI Act" may kindly be released to all the member states under NFICI without waiting for their annual membership contribution for timely implementation of this scheme please.*

Discussion – The matter was discussed and the Executive Secretary apprised the members that the outstanding annual membership fee in respect of State Information Commission, Sikkim has been received till 2023-24. Hence, SIC, Sikkim has now become eligible for the 3rd grant. Members agreed to release 3rd grant to State Information Commission, Sikkim at the earliest.

11. Any other item with the permission of the Chair.

Points raised by Chief Information Commissioner, Andhra Pradesh.

(1) Shri R. Mahaboob Basha, Chief Information Commissioner, SIC Andhra Pradesh raised a point stating that he got generous support from State Govt. Andhra Pradesh to organise the meetings at Visakhapatnam. Shri Basha requested that the amount of Rs. 8.00 lakh released to SIC Andhra Pradesh for the meetings of NFICI be allowed to be utilized for purchase of infrastructure for smooth conduct of hearings in the State Information Commission, for which he assured that he would produce the invoices, utilisation certificates and vouchers, as per guidelines issued by NFICI for utilisation of grants.

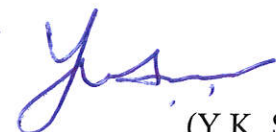
The members deliberated it length on the request made by CIC Andhra Pradesh and finally decided that he be allowed to utilise this grant for infrastructure in the best interest of the Commission and as per the revised guidelines. This would ultimately benefit the Appellants and Respondents as well.

(2) The official website of A.P. Information Commission is not effective and it requires major revamping to cater the needs of people. It is also learnt that other State Information Commissions are also facing similar problems. In the wake of the growing expansion of the online information sector, it is necessary to take measures to establish a comprehensive online connectivity system in all the Information Commissions. In this context, it was requested to work towards setting up a comprehensive online system in all the State Information Commissions through the NIC in a cost effective manner.

Shri Sidh Kumar, Hony Secretary NFICI and JS, CIC gave a briefing on AppCoMS software developed by the empanelled vendor of NICSI. After the briefing, members requested for a training workshop for the officers of member State Information Commissions on the functions of AppCoMS software at Central Information Commission, New Delhi. The President, NFICI directed the Hony Secretary to organise a training workshop as soon as possible.

At the end there was also a discussion about the venue for holding the next BOG & AGB meetings. Shri Virendra, Chief Information Commissioner, West Bengal volunteered to host the next meeting in the State of West Bengal. He stated that the tentative date and venue of the meeting would be decided and intimated in due course of time. This was agreed to by all the members of the Federation.

There being no other point to discuss, the meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the chair.



(Y.K. Sinha)

President, NFICI