

Importance of Using Electronic Means to obtain Information under RTI Act – Special Reference to COVID 19 Pandemic

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The Right to Information Act No. 12 of 2016 is one of the greatest democratic initiatives of Sri Lankan legal system. 19th amendment to the constitution recognized the Right to Information as a substantive fundamental right while RTI Act No. 12 of 2016 provided for the procedural mechanism of it. The RTI Act provides provisions for requesting information by utilizing electronic means while employing traditional means.

Though RTI Act and regulations provide provisions to obtain information through electronic means, it is regrettable to observe that the responsiveness to such information requests from public authorities are lies on unsatisfactory level. It is visible that many public authorities have not paid satisfactory attention to the requests made through electronic means/email and citizens have never received any response at all from public authorities in the most of the time. This implies the bureaucratic attitude of public officials while discouraging citizens' democratic participation.

It is crucial that the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic situation makes a huge impact on every levels of citizen's lives and not limited to the day to day activities of the citizens and making a high level impact on functions of the government as well. Due to this COVID 19 situation, most of citizens are unable to get the public services and enjoy their rights through traditional means. Thus, it is important to find out alternative ways to enjoy RTI with COVID 19 Situation.

In this context this paper attempts to assess the current status of responses to email communications from public authorities with regard to RTI applications and highlights the importance of encouraging use of electronic means to achieve the objectives of RTI Act during the COVID 19 pandemic.

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