Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

You are a Public Information Officer (PIO) in a government department. You are aware that the RTI Act 2005 envisages transparency and accountability in administration. The act has functioned as a check on the supposedly arbitrarily administrative behaviour and actions. However, as a PIO you have observed that there are citizens who filed RTI applications not for themselves but on behalf of such stakeholders who purportedly want to have access to information to further their own interests. At the same time there are these RTI activists who routinely file RTI applications and attempt to extort money from the decision makers. This type of RTI activism has affected the functioning of the administration adversely and also possibly jeopardises the genuineness of the applications which are essentially aimed at getting justice.

What measures would you suggest to separate genuine and non-genuine applications? Give merits and demerits of your suggestions.

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EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2017	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

Right to Information; transparency; accountability; misuse and extortion; citizens' rights; objective scrutiny; privacy protection; timely disclosure; safeguards against harassment; administrative efficiency

Model Answer

Introduction

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 empowers citizens to scrutinise public authorities. However, alleged extortion and frivolous applications may burden administration. Safeguards must address misuse without restricting legitimate access to information.

Suggested Measures

1. Improve Proactive Disclosure

Departments should publish budgets, contracts, decisions and service-delivery information under Section 4.

Merit: Reduces repetitive applications and improves transparency.

Demerit: Requires regular updating and adequate resources.

2. Digitise RTI Processing

Online filing, tracking and searchable disclosure databases can identify duplicate requests and improve response times.

Merit: Enhances efficiency and creates auditable records.

Demerit: Digital exclusion may disadvantage some applicants.

3. Enforce Existing Legal Safeguards

Provide information within statutory timelines, apply lawful exemptions consistently and report credible extortion attempts to appropriate authorities.

Merit: Protects genuine applicants and deters coercion.

Demerit: Requires reliable evidence and due process to prevent false accusations.

4. Train PIOs and Strengthen Oversight

Standardised procedures, periodic audits and independent review can ensure consistent decisions.

Merit: Reduces arbitrary rejection and improves accountability.

Demerit: Training and oversight require time and funding.

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Ethical Safeguard

Applications should not be rejected merely because an applicant files frequently, acts through another person or appears motivated by personal interest. The Act does not generally require applicants to justify their reasons for seeking information.

Conclusion

The appropriate distinction must be based on lawful criteria, not subjective judgments about an applicant's motives. Proactive disclosure, efficient processing and action against proven extortion can protect both transparency and administrative functioning.

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