

**Topics discussed at the Meetings of the Union Cabinet obtained under
India's RTI Act- accessible on CHRI's website
July 19, 2010**

Dear all,

CHRI's Access to Information team (ATI team) is testing India's *Right to Information Act, 2005* (RTI Act) to obtain information that is not easily available in the public domain. Widening the boundaries of the RTI Act for engendering greater transparency in government is another purpose of this endeavour. We hope to expand this exercise to other Commonwealth countries that have similar access legislation in future.

Topics Discussed in Cabinet Meetings in the Government of India:

The Council of Ministers is the highest decision making body in the Government of India. The Union Cabinet which comprises of all the Ministers of Cabinet rank and other special invitees meets every Thursday, ordinarily. Extraordinary meetings may also be scheduled as and when required. The agenda of the meetings of the Union Cabinet is rarely publicised in advance. Information about what was discussed in the Cabinet is also not fully disclosed after every meeting. The Government of India selectively circulates information about the decisions taken at Cabinet meetings through the Press Information Bureau.

Although Cabinet papers are treated as secret documents prior to Cabinet meetings [also covered by the exemption granted under Section 8(1)(i) of the RTI Act], Cabinet decisions along with reasons and the material basis of such decisions must be made public after the decision has been taken and the matter is complete or over. However, in actual practice, not much information about Cabinet meetings is available to people.

The ATI team has used the RTI Act to obtain list of topics discussed by the Union Cabinet in its meetings held during the course of the first year of the United Progressive Alliance Government (between June 2009 and May 2010). Month-wise listing of these topics is available on our website at:
http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&catid=93%3Aarti-applications&id=759%3Acabinet-meetings&Itemid=567 Readers are advised to approach the concerned ministry / department for obtaining copies of the Cabinet papers and the detailed agenda put up to the Union Cabinet during these meetings.

This is the first in the series of documents that are being uploaded on our website under the link: 'Information Obtained under RTI'. You will find this link on the left hand-side menu under 'Resources' located on all our webpages. A significant part of the information uploaded in this section was provided by Cabinet Secretariat free of cost on its own. On one occasion the information was provided free of cost as the deadline of 30-days had lapsed. The application fee and in a few instances the additional charges were paid by the members of the ATI team from their pockets.

Disclaimer: CHRI has uploaded on its website information and scanned copies of documents as provided by public authorities under India's RTI Act. CHRI makes no claim as to the authenticity or accuracy of the information displayed under the links given below. In case of doubt readers are requested to contact the respective public authorities for obtaining authentic information. The governments / public authorities may have a copyright on any or all of the information uploaded under the links given below. Readers are requested to contact the respective public authorities to clarify copyright-related issues. These documents are being placed in the public domain for non-commercial use only. Readers are advised not to use these documents for commercial purposes.

We urge RTI users to obtain similar information about the topics discussed in Cabinet Meetings in State Governments and place them in the public domain in similar fashion. Please fee free to circulate this email to your contacts.

In order to access our previous email alerts please click on: <http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/india/national.htm> You will find the links at the top of this web page. If you do not wish to receive email alerts please send an email to this address indicating your refusal to receive email alerts.

Thanks,

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