Jan Soochna Portal

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The State Government of Rajasthan has recently launched the first-ever **public information portal** named **"Jan Soochna Portal-2019".**

- The portal aims to **provide information** to the public about government authorities and departments empowering them with access to useful information.
- The portal was developed by the government officials in close collaboration with the IT professionals and civil society groups.
- It initially gives information of about **13 government departments** on a **single platform.**
- Information related to the availability of food grains & ration shops, **implementation of schemes** and their beneficiaries, land records and social security pensions, inter alia, will be available on a **real-time basis** on this platform.
- **Information kiosks** in *village panchayats* and **self-service e-Mitra centres** in the towns will be established to enable the people to access the information.
- The Department of Information Technology will serve as the **nodal department** for the development, operationalization, and maintenance of the JSP.
    - The norms and standards are laid down through the digital dialogue by the **advisory group**. And, to ensure that the responsibilities are carried out smoothly, the advisory group will be the **monitoring agency.**
    - **Grievance redressal** officers will be appointed so that citizens can keep a check upon the accountability aspect of the State government.
- The launch of this portal is in accordance with the true spirit of the **Right to Information (RTI) Act** and ensures compliance with **Section 4(2) of the RTI Act** that mandates the public authorities to **proactively disclose information** in the public domain.

Right to Information (RTI) Act

- RTI Act was enacted in **2005** with the aim to secure the citizens' access to information which is under the control of public authorities.

- The primary purpose behind this enactment was to promote **transparency** and **accountability** in the working of every public authority.
- **Section 4** of the RTI Act requires **suo-moto disclosure of information** by each public authority.
- In 2018, an amendment was proposed to the RTI Act that aimed at giving the Central government the power to fix the tenure and salaries of state and central information commissioners, which are statutorily protected under the RTI Act.
    - The proposed move may dilute the autonomy and independence of Information Commissioners.

Benefits

- Jan Soochna Portal (JSP) is a **remarkable achievement** in advancing the Right to Information (RTI).
    - Now, the people would not need to file applications separately under the law to obtain information. They could **freely** access the information publicly
- JSP is unique for it ensures both- transparency accompanied by accountability.

Challenges

- The **digital divide** is a serious problem in India. To bridge this gap, utmost care must be taken to ensure that access points are open and free for all.
- There are huge challenges with regard to the **maintenance** issues and ensuring that there is **no abatement in the availability** of information.

Way Forward

- The need is to host the JSP in **decentralized locations,** right down to the municipal ward and panchayat levels. This will ensure that people have access to welfare schemes, revenue activities such as mining, and other service delivery issues such as health and education.
- The portal would eventually turn out to be an effective medium for the digital dialogue with the people as well as a strong instrument for ensuring transparency in governance.
- The need of the hour is that other State governments must follow the Rajasthan government's pioneering initiative and make people, including the marginalized sections, a part of the governance process.

Source: TH