

# IN THE PAKISTAN INFORMATION COMMISSION ISLAMABAD

Appeal No. 1993-06/2022

Farooq Dawood

Vs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Fawad Malik: Information Commissioner

## A. APPEAL

1. Mr. Farooq Dawood, Trustee, THE HELPLINE TRUST filed an application under the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017 read with Article 19A of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973. Through his application dated April 27, 2022 he has sought the following information pertaining to Prime Minister's visit to Saudi Arabia held on 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, April 2022:

- i. *“As a citizen of a poor country I am simply appalled at the Prime Minister of Pakistan carrying a non-value adding entourage of six dozen individuals on his official visit to Saudi Arabia at a time when the government is begging for loans in Washington DC.*
- ii. *Under the Right to Information laws mentioned above kindly provide the following information relating to Prime Minister's 28 – 30 April 2022 visits to Saudi Arabia.*
  - a. *Please provide a complete list of individuals who shall be accompanying the Prime Minister as a part of his entourage and a complete list of those sent as advance party to cover / facilitate the 28 – 30 April 2022 visit. Kindly, ensure the lists include ALL individuals i.e. politicians, staff, family, friends, relatives, media, security, valets, drivers etc, and also those who shall arrive from various locations such as Doha and London.*
  - b. *Kindly mention against the name of each of the above individuals if the ticket and hotel expenses were paid by the government of Pakistan, or by the individual him/her-self.”*

2. Feeling aggrieved for the non-provision of information within the stipulated timeframe provided under the Act, he has filed appeal before the Pakistan Commission on access to information, Islamabad.

## **B. PROCEEDINGS**

3. The Spokesperson, Ministry of Foreign Affairs vide letter dated 22-06-2022, was directed to provide reasons in writing within seven working days as to why the requested information has not been provided to the applicant as under section 14 of the Right of Access to Information Act 2017, each public body is bound to respond to a request as early as possible and in any case not later than ten working days of the receipt of the request.
4. The reply was not submitted therefore the appeal was fixed for hearing before the Commission on 27.07.2022 but neither was the reply submitted nor any one appeared to represent the respondent public body.

## **C. COMMISSION'S VIEW**

5. The appellant being a citizen of Pakistan is asking for the information and record pertaining to the visit of the Prime Minister along with the delegation to Saudi Arabia held on 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. He has requested for the provision of the complete list of individuals who accompanied the Prime Minister as a part of his entourage and a complete list of those sent as advance party to cover / facilitate the visit including the individuals i.e. politicians, staff, family, friends, relatives, media, security, valets, drivers etc, and also those who joined from various locations such as Doha and London. The appellant is further desirous to know whether the tickets and hotel expenses were paid by the government of Pakistan, or by the individuals themselves.
6. This Commission has already dealt with the appeal no. 1915-06-2022 titled "*Abdullah Malik versus Ministry of Foreign Affairs*" with identical matter. The view of the Commission recorded in the said appeal may be considered as integral part of this appeal. The same is reproduced hereunder:
7. "*While dealing with the matters related to information and record sought by the citizens under the Act 2017, the public bodies are under obligation to respond the applications as mandated in the Act. In the case*

*in hand the respondent public body has not acknowledged the application, information is not provided to the applicant in the stipulated time frame and the notices of the Commission are ignored and the reply is not submitted despite the assurance. It is presumed that the respondent public body is willfully avoiding the proceedings before the Commission and that the facts and figures are being concealed from the citizens. In such like circumstances the Commission is left with no option but to decide the appeal ex parte after going through the file in the light of the Act and article 19A of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973.*

*8. Government spending is made from government revenues and taxes paid by the citizens therefore every citizen has the right to know how his/her taxes are spent, mandatory spending, discretionary spending or in the delivery of public infrastructure and services. Open access to information and record held by the public bodies and governance must be entrenched in democracy and its institutions. The article 19A of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973 provide the citizen right of access to information and record held by the government institutions as a fundamental right that cannot be denied nor delayed at the whims of the beurocratic whims and hurdles as it would amount to infringements of the fundamental right.*

*9. The citizens consider it matter of public importance as they have the right to know in the public interest whether the visit of the delegation was in the national interest or merely for the purpose of performing Umra at the cost and expense of the tax money triggering misuse of authority and power.*

*10. The detailed budget of the public bodies, including proposed and actual expenditures, original or revised revenue targets, actual revenue receipts, revisions in the approved budget and the supplementary budget are the category of information and record that ought to have been published proactively including uploading over the internet in a manner that best ensures its access to the citizen and the taxpayers as mandated in section 5 of the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017, promulgated by the Parliament. The annual budget of the country is aired to the public therefore the public has the right to know the spending of the government of their tax money for comparison, whether it is justified under the rules and regulations and whether it is properly utilized in the best interest of the country.*

*11. Transparency in the working of the government departments is the essence for the enactment of the Act 2017. Its spirit is to ensure that the people of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan have access to the records held by the federal public bodies for making the government accountable to the people. This practise would improve the participation of the people in the public affairs aimed at reducing corruption, nepotism, discrimination, misuse of power and authority and inefficiency in the governance.”*

**D. ORDER**

12. The appeal is allowed. The Secretary/Public Information Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad is directed to furnish the appellant all the requested information detailed in para 1 supra of this order, forthwith, but in any case not later than seven days of the receipt of this order.

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Mohammad Azam  
Chief Information Commissioner

Fawad Malik  
Information Commissioner

Zahid Abdullah  
Information Commissioner  
Announced on 16.08.2022

Certified that this order consists of 04 pages, each page has been read and signed.