

Lahore High Court: Meeting Minutes Become Disclosable After Final Decision

In 2026 LHC 5409, the Lahore High Court held that meeting minutes lose their section 7(b) exclusion after the public body takes a final decision.

Judgment analysis | Published 1 September 2026 | Shahbaz Shah, Advocate High Court

Case: Lahore Electric Supply Company v. Federation of Pakistan and others

Reference: Writ Petition No. 33829 of 2026 | 2026 LHC 5409

Court and judge: Lahore High Court | Justice Raheel Kamran

Decision: Petition dismissed on 1 September 2026 | No order as to costs

What the Lahore High Court decided

The Lahore High Court has held that minutes of a public body's meeting do not remain permanently excluded from disclosure under the federal Right of Access to Information Act, 2017. The exclusion in section 7(b) lasts only until the public body takes its final decision on the matter discussed.

In Lahore Electric Supply Company v. Federation of Pakistan and others, Writ Petition No. 33829 of 2026, reported as 2026 LHC 5409, Justice Raheel Kamran dismissed LESCO's challenge to an order of the Pakistan Information Commission. The Commission had directed LESCO to provide certified copies of two sets of meeting minutes concerning an officer's promotion.

The Court did not hold that every word in every set of minutes must always be disclosed. It drew a more precise line. Once the final decision has been made, section 7(b) can no longer be used to withhold the minutes as a complete record. If a particular passage is genuinely protected by privacy or another exemption, that passage may be severed under section 16 while the remaining record is supplied.

How the dispute arose

Ateeq Ahmad Khan requested certified copies of the minutes of LESCO's 144th Human Resources meeting held on 27 February 2023 and its 261st Board of Directors meeting held on 4 May 2025. The requested material concerned the promotion of Muhammad Ramzan Butt, then an officer of LESCO.

LESCO did not provide the record. The applicant appealed to the Pakistan Information Commission under section 17 of the 2017 Act. LESCO argued that the minutes were excluded under section 7 and were also protected by the privacy and deliberative-process exemptions in section 16.

On 4 May 2026, the Chief Information Commissioner allowed Appeal No. 5240-12/25. The Commission found that the promotion decision had already been finalized and directed LESCO to provide the information to the applicant and the Commission within ten days.

LESCO then invoked the Lahore High Court's constitutional jurisdiction under Article 199. It maintained that only the final order was public, while the minutes, service-record material, ACRs, observations and recommendations leading to that decision remained confidential.

Article 19A and the disclosure-first approach

The Court began with Article 19A of the Constitution, which guarantees every citizen access to information in matters of public importance, subject to regulation and reasonable restrictions imposed by law.

The constitutional right is implemented at the federal level through the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017. Section 3 states the general rule that an applicant shall not be denied access to information or a record held by a public body, subject to the Act. It also directs that the statute be interpreted to advance transparency, accountability and prompt disclosure.

This interpretive direction matters. Exclusions and exemptions are not free-standing powers to preserve official secrecy. They must be applied according to their exact language, purpose and statutory limits. A public body cannot enlarge an exception beyond what Parliament enacted.

Why section 7(b) is only a temporary exclusion

Section 6 declares specified categories of official material to be public record, including final orders and decisions. Section 7 then excludes certain records from section 6.

Section 7(b) deals with minutes of meetings, but its wording makes the exclusion subject to a final decision by the public body. The same qualification appears in section 7(a) for file notings and section 7(c) for intermediary opinions or recommendations.

The Court held that these words must be given practical meaning. If meeting minutes remained excluded forever, even after the relevant decision had been made, the statutory qualification would become redundant.

The promotion decision in this case had already been finalized and acted upon. The event controlling the duration of the exclusion had therefore occurred. LESCO could no longer rely on section 7(b) to withhold the complete minutes simply because they recorded deliberations that came before the final decision.

Section 16 requires a separate and proven exemption

The end of the section 7(b) exclusion does not erase section 16. A public body may still establish that particular information falls within a separate statutory exemption. But it must prove the elements of the specific exemption relied upon.

LESCO invoked the deliberative-process exemption in section 16(1)(i)(iii). That provision applies where disclosure is likely to undermine a public body's deliberative process by inhibiting the free and frank provision of advice or exchange of views.

The Court held that the exemption is not triggered merely because a document contains deliberations. The public body must demonstrate the likelihood of the prejudice identified by the statute. In this case, LESCO did not show how disclosure after the promotion decision had been finalized and implemented would undermine any continuing deliberative process.

A general fear that future officials may speak less freely was not enough. The judgment therefore requires a record-based explanation of the statutory harm, not a formulaic reference to confidentiality.

Privacy does not justify withholding the whole record

LESCO also relied on section 7(g), concerning personal privacy, and section 16(1)(c), which protects information whose disclosure would invade the privacy of an identifiable individual.

The Court rejected the proposition that an entire official record becomes private merely because it names an employee or concerns promotion. The requested minutes documented decision-making by a public body about appointment to public office. Section 16(1)(c) itself recognizes that the privacy exception does not apply where the person is or was an official of a public body and the information relates to that person's functions as a public official.

At the same time, the judgment protects genuinely private information. Section 16(1)(a)(i) requires severability: if only part of a record falls within an exemption, that part is removed and the residual record is disclosed.

This is the practical middle course. A public body should identify the exact protected passage, explain the legal exemption and redact only what the statute permits. It cannot use the presence of some personal material as a reason to suppress the entire set of minutes.

An RTI applicant does not have to explain why information is wanted

LESCO argued that the applicant had not demonstrated a public interest or given reasons for seeking the minutes. The Court found this objection contrary to section 11(5), which states that an applicant shall not be required to provide reasons for a request.

The right therefore does not depend on proving a personal stake, exposing a suspected wrong or satisfying the public body that the request has a worthy purpose. The applicant must identify the information with sufficient detail, but does not have to justify the intended use of it.

This point is important for both applicants and designated officials. A demand for motive can become an informal barrier that the statute deliberately removed.

The Information Commission can order disclosure and ensure compliance

LESCO also challenged the Commission's decision to direct production within a specified period and to keep the matter for implementation.

The Court held that enforcement is part of the statutory scheme. Section 19(2)(e) assigns the Commission responsibility for ensuring implementation of the Act and disclosure of records that must be made public. Section 20(1)(e) authorizes it to order a public body to disclose information and to take reasonable measures to remedy a failure to implement the Act.

The ten-day disclosure direction was therefore consequential to the allowed appeal and within the Commission's powers. An information right without an effective power to secure compliance would be largely theoretical.

The burden rests on the public body in an appeal

Section 17(4) places the burden on the public body to prove in an appeal that it acted in accordance with the Act. The judgment applied that rule directly.

LESCO had raised several possible grounds of exclusion and exemption, but it did not establish that section 7 continued to protect the minutes after the final decision or that section 16 justified withholding them in full.

This allocation of burden changes how an RTI appeal should be prepared. The authority refusing access must identify the exact provision, connect it to the actual contents of the record and prove the statutory basis for non-disclosure. A broad claim of privacy, confidentiality or administrative sensitivity is insufficient.

Earlier judgments did not control the precise issue

LESCO relied on *Pakistan Telecommunication Authority v. Pakistan Information Commission*, reported as 2024 YLR 929 Islamabad, as well as decisions concerning personal information and service records.

The Lahore High Court distinguished those authorities. It found that the Islamabad case did not decide the precise question raised here: whether the conditional exclusion of meeting minutes continues after the public body has taken the final decision to which section 7(b) refers.

The Indian decisions cited by LESCO and the Pakistani privacy cases mainly concerned personal information, ACRs and service records. They did not determine the duration of section 7(b)'s conditional exclusion under the federal 2017 Act.

The ruling should therefore be read as a focused interpretation of the words used by Parliament, not as a rejection of privacy protection or of every deliberative-process claim.

Practical effect for public bodies

After a final decision, a federal public body dealing with a request for meeting minutes should:

- confirm whether the decision connected with the meeting has been finalized;
- stop relying on section 7(b) once that event has occurred;
- inspect the record passage by passage for any genuine section 16 exemption;
- record the exact statutory harm supporting each proposed redaction;
- sever protected material and disclose the remaining record;
- avoid demanding the applicant's motive or proof of personal interest; and
- comply with lawful implementation directions issued by the Information Commission.

The judgment does not prevent protection of ACR details, private addresses, medical information or other genuinely exempt material where the statutory test is met. It prevents that material from being used as a blanket justification for withholding the complete decision-making record.

Practical effect for applicants and counsel

An applicant seeking concluded meeting records can now rely on a clear Lahore High Court authority that section 7(b) is tied to the timing of the final decision.

In an appeal or constitutional case, counsel should establish the date and nature of the final decision, identify the requested minutes, challenge any blanket refusal and insist on severability. If the public body relies on the deliberative-process exemption, it should be asked to identify the continuing process and the specific prejudice that disclosure is likely to cause.

The applicant should also distinguish official functions from personal information. The stronger argument is not that privacy disappears, but that official decision-making must be disclosed after lawful redaction of genuinely protected parts.

Limits of the ruling

The judgment does not make all records of every meeting automatically public. It interprets the federal Right of Access to Information Act, 2017 and the particular conditional wording of section 7(b).

It does not prevent a public body from relying on a properly established section 16 exemption. It requires that the exemption be proved and applied narrowly.

It does not decide that complete ACRs or every item in a service file must be disclosed. It holds that possible private content does not justify withholding an entire set of minutes where exempt parts can be severed.

It also does not remove the need to examine the applicable law. Provincial RTI statutes may use different text and should be interpreted on their own wording.

Final result

The Lahore High Court found no illegality, jurisdictional defect or misreading of the 2017 Act in the Information Commission's order dated 4 May 2026. The writ petition was dismissed with no order as to costs.

The judgment was announced in open court on 1 September 2026 and approved for reporting. The Lahore High Court's approved-judgments index identifies it as 2026 LHC 5409.

Judgment record and downloads

The supplied 13-page judgment is available on this page for viewing and download. Its case title, petition number, parties, judge, hearing date, announcement date, statutory provisions, reasoning and final order were checked against the document and the Lahore High Court's approved-judgments index.

This commentary is independent legal analysis for research and general information. Counsel should verify the official judgment, current statutory text, any later reported citation and subsequent judicial treatment before relying on it in proceedings.

Primary sources

Lahore High Court, Lahore Electric Supply Company v. Federation of Pakistan and others, Writ Petition No. 33829 of 2026, 2026 LHC 5409, announced 1 September 2026 and approved for reporting. The supplied judgment is available on the corresponding article page.

Right of Access to Information Act, 2017, Pakistan Code, Ministry of Law and Justice; Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, National Assembly official text.

General legal information only. Verify the official judgment, current statutory text and later judicial treatment before formal reliance.