

30th June 2009

Commissioner warns staff to act on RTI applications

The Times of India

LUDHIANA: In order to streamline the system of providing information under the Right To Information (RTI) Act, the municipal corporation (MC) commissioner had asked all public Information officers (PIOs) of the department to disburse relevant information sought under the Act within a weekâ€™s time. He also asked the officers of the building branch to deal strictly with illegal buildings.

Addressing a meeting of PIOs, commissioner GS Ghuman said that he had been getting complaints regarding poor performance of the RTI department due to which he has initiated the move. He Ghuman said if he got any further complaints regarding denial of information or supply of irrelevant information then he would take stern action against officers responsible for it. He also asked PIOs that he would take review meetings on the second and last Tuesday of every month.

Presiding over the meeting of the building branch, Ghuman clearly said that construction of illegal buildings was in the knowledge of the state government as the issue had been highlighted enough by media, therefore they should put in extra efforts to deal with the problem. He said due to construction of illegal buildings, the state exchequer and the MC was suffering huge losses, which would not be tolerated. Ghuman said in the coming days the state government would start a drive against all illegal buildings and the principal secretary, director, chief vigilance officer and the chief town planner of the local bodies department at any stage could hold random checking of illegal buildings in the city.

Giving strict warning to all officers of the branch, Ghuman said though the main responsibility would be of the commissioner and senior town planner, lower officers would not be able to escape their responsibility. He once again directed all the officers of the building branch to check all the buildings of the city and issue challans and notices to owners of illegal buildings. He even clearly said that if any corrupt nexus of the building branch officers with the contractors or politicians come in their knowledge, strict action would be initiated against the officers involved in it.

22nd June 2009

## RTI enthusiasts set up interactive web portal

The Hindu

Chandigarh (IANS): If you want information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, just visit a new web portal to find out how. The site has been set up - not by the government - but by people and groups in Chandigarh who want to spread awareness about this right.

The interactive online web portal - [www.rightto.info](http://www.rightto.info) - has come up thanks to the RTI Users Association which aims to form a strong network of RTI users across the country.

"We have constituted this forum so that RTI users from all over the country can exchange their knowledge and findings and interact among each other. This organisation will provide them an easy platform to run and support various activities that are of larger public interest," Hemant Goswamy, coordinator of the association, told IANS.

He said the organisation, which is an initiative of likeminded people, is still in the nascent stage and will take some time to have a proper organisational structure in all the States. "However, we have initiated our activities from Punjab and Haryana," he said.

Mr. Goswamy said any individual who is using the RTI could join them and upload his information on their website, which anyone can access. It also has a special section for youth to solve their queries and apprehensions regarding the RTI Act.

"We will also organise various activities, seminars, debates and discussions touching upon the burning topics that immediately concern our society at regular intervals," Mr. Goswamy said.

"Anybody, whether he is using the RTI to highlight a corrupt and unlawful activity or for the betterment of society, can join us. We would work in the most transparent and responsible manner," he added.

Kamal Anand, another member of the association, said: "The RTI Act is a valuable tool in the hands of the common man to make our government and bureaucracy more accountable towards their work and decisions."

"Since its enactment, hundreds of scams and anomalies have been unearthed by the use of RTI. In the last four years, all the RTI users of the region had felt a need for greater interaction and further dissemination of knowledge about this act among the public," he said.

The youth of the region are also very enthusiastic about the concept of this association.

"I have seen many things going wrong right under the nose of top officials of our administration, but we cannot do anything. Sometimes I wanted to seek information through RTI but dropped the idea as I was not aware of its procedure," Radhika Rai, a journalism student here, told IANS.

"There are many friends of mine who were not using RTI because of similar reasons but now I guess we all have an easy solution for our problem," she added.

Mayank Sharma, a young entrepreneur based here, said: "This association of RTI users is a unique thing in Chandigarh and I will certainly join it. I think the mere presence of such a group involving well-aware people will automatically make things better."

The Hindu

*21<sup>st</sup> June , 2009*

*Info chief writes to PM on RTI changes*

DNA

Mumbai: After the president's speech that hinted at amendments in the Right to Information (RTI) Act, central information commissioner Shailesh Gandhi has written a letter to the PM pointing out certain sections he feels should not be changed if at all the amendments are made.

The sections pertain to the definition of what is record, information, the right to information, and what defines a public authority.

Talking to DNA from Delhi, Gandhi said, "Personally, I am against any amendments to the Act. There are many PIOs and citizens who do not understand the Act in totality. They are getting familiar with it and any changes made right now will only confuse them."

He added, "I hope they do not make any more exclusions as that would cause only more harm than improvement."

21st June 2009

Court vacation is no excuse to delay RTI query

Abhinav Garg , TNN, 02:14am IST

The Times of India |

NEW DELHI: Every June, litigants might well be resigned to their cases invariably getting delayed due to a month-long vacation in the Delhi High Court, but India's top information watchdog has taken a dim view of this colonial tradition.

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has said there is no law that allows courts to give up their obligation under the Right to Information Act even if on vacation. CIC's disapproval came on HC's failure to furnish an RTI response to an applicant on the ground that staff is lean owing to vacations.

"The Commission finds it difficult to accept that any public authority can claim vacation from RTI for one month which is not provided for in law," information commissioner Shailesh Gandhi noted in a recent decision.

CIC was hearing an RTI appeal filed by Rakesh Agarwal, whose application before HC in January this year had sought a copy of 'Delhi Petty Offences Rules' and bio-data coupled with other details of special metropolitan magistrates posted by HC to main traffic courts in the capital.

While a copy of the rules was supplied by P S Chaggar, HC's public information officer, he refused to disclose information on the second part concerning magistrates. Invoking rule 5 (B) of Delhi High Court (RTI) Rules, the PIO maintained this would cause "unwarranted invasion of privacy of the magistrates." This made Agarwal move CIC in appeal because the first appellate authority within HC didn't respond to his first appeal.

In CIC, Chaggar also relied upon the confidentiality clause of the parent RTI Act 2005 to argue that information like residential addresses of the magistrates couldn't be disclosed as it is personal information.

Agarwal then agreed before CIC to scale down his demand and limit it to file notings and correspondence based on which appointment of magistrates was done by HC. The commission then asked Chaggar to prepare its reply and furnish it to Agarwal, only to be told by the PIO that since court is on vacation during June, there is skeletal staff present in concerned branches from where information has to be collated.

Though CIC made its unhappiness known, it relented by extending the deadline for supplying information to Agarwal till July 15.

20th June 2009

CIC moves PM against plan to amend RTI

The Times of India|

NEW DELHI: Information commissioner Shailesh Gandhi has written to PM Manmohan Singh in protest against the government's intention to amend the Right to Information (RTI) Act, saying any changes may amount to "avoidable confusion" and cause more harm than good.

He added that if the government felt it was absolutely necessary to introduce amendments in the law, then there should be no tinkering with existing definitions of what constituted "information" or a public authority.

The letter comes at a time when the department of personnel and training (DoPT) has mooted amendments to the RTI Act that include exclusion of file notings (other than those related to social and developmental subjects) from disclosure, increase of fees, anonymity for officials amongst other far-reaching changes.

Gandhi, an RTI activist-turned-information commissioner, has sought a clarification from the PM on what these amendments are and the government's reasons for proposing them. He pointed out that the government had declared its intention to amend the legislation through the President's speech in Parliament earlier this month. "It would be in the fitness of things if the government declared the amendments they are proposing to the Act, and gave the reasons for the amendments publicly. I request you to clarify these matters soon so that citizens feel reassured," he said.

Gandhi added, "It would be useful to remember that the RTI Act was

the result of an extensive consultative process in which citizens and the government engaged in intensive discussions for a long time. It would therefore be appropriate if the government transparently accepts certain boundaries in the exercise of improving transparency."

18th June 2009

Parents use RTI to challenge schools selling stationery on campus

The Times of India |

VADODARA: You will have to buy books and notebooks only from school' this is one rule that has peeved most parents who don't understand the rationale behind such decrees their children have to keep up with. Moreover, when they confront school management over such issues, their pleas go unheard on most occasions. But now parents can hope for some relief. A parent had filed an right to information (RTI) application to Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) authorities seeking information whether schools can sell books and uniforms from school premises.

The reply furnished by CBSE states that the board has neither such information nor is there a provision in affiliation bye-laws of the board. This indicates that there are no such rules by CBSE but it's the school management that decides such issues.

"The school where my ward studies has clear cut rules whereby they have to buy books and uniform from the shop in the school premise. We asked the school management to explain the rules under which such provisions are made. But we did not get any answer," said RTI applicant and parent Keyur Gandhi.

After series of refusals from school authorities, Gandhi filed an RTI to CBSE last month. "There would always be a tussle between parents and school management over purchase of books and uniform. We wanted to buy these school items from outside but were forced to buy them from the school's shop," added Gandhi.

And it's not just CBSE schools that have such provisions, even several Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board (GSHSEB) schools in the city impose their own set of rules when it comes to school stationery. "We bought school notebooks outside but school teachers are asking my child to buy stationery from the school. When we argued with school management they said that if we don't follow

rules then our ward's notebooks will remain unchecked," said a parent whose child is in a state board school.

18th Jun 2009

BJP launches protest over Ram Pradhan panel report

The Times of India

MUMBAI: The BJP plans to make the Ram Pradhan committee report a major plank for the forthcoming assembly elections in Maharashtra.

Thousands of BJP workers on Wednesday took to the streets and agitated against the government's decision of not tabling the report in the state assembly. The activists burnt effigies of ministers and also several copies of the Action To be Taken Report (ATTR). The activists shouted slogans and took out rallies in Mumbai, Thane, Kalyan, Bhiwandi, Nashik, Wardha, Sindhudurg among other places.

State BJP president Nitin Gadkari `alleged' that the government was trying to "cover-up" what actually happened behind the scenes on 26/11. "The common man needs to know about the findings of the committee and who is responsible for the deaths of several police officers and citizens. If there is any incriminating information on the role of ministers and bureaucrats, it should be made public," Gadkari said, while condemning the suspension of three MLCs who had raised their voice against the government's decision in the house.

BJP state general secretary Vinod Tavde, who was among those suspended, said, "When a member of the legislative council finds it so difficult to get to the bottom of the truth, imagine the plight of the common man. The state promises transparency in administration under the Right to Information Act, but when it comes to tabling a crucial report, the government suppresses the information," he pointed out. Tavde added that the issue will now be put before the public and the party would expose the "undemocratic" role of the government.

On Wednesday, senior BJP activists including Ram Naik, Kirit Somaiya, Sardar Tara Singh, Mangal Prabhat Lodha, Atul Shah, Arun Deo and city president Gopal Shetty protested in front of the LIC building.

17th June 2009

Secrecy over lapses

The Hindu

MUMBAI: There seems to be a reversal of roles in Maharashtra. In 1998, it was the members of the Congress who tore up the Action Taken Report (ATR) of the Srikrishna Commission on the Mumbai riots of 1992-93. The ruling saffron alliance reluctantly tabled the report in the assembly in August 1998, six months after it was submitted by Justice B.N. Srikrishna. The assembly rejected the report as it was "one-sided."

The report clearly indicted the ruling Shiv Sena for the bloodiest riots the city had witnessed.

It is now the turn of the Opposition to bay for the blood of the ruling Congress alliance. The report of the two-member committee, which probed the lapses by the police during the November 26 terror attacks, was not tabled in the assembly session. Instead, the government tabled an ATR of the report and it claims it has not "entirely accepted" the report. Did the Mumbai police and government perform its role during the Mumbai terror attacks of November 26? The Opposition Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) certainly did not think so. In the winter session of the State Assembly in December 2008, in Nagpur, Sena's Ramdas Kadam and BJP's Gopinath Munde caused a commotion making allegations that the police were inept and sleeping on the job.

The new Chief Minister, Ashok Chavan, then hastily assured them that a high-powered committee would be set up to probe the role of the people Mr. Kadam and Mr. Munde said should be sacked. They were the then Director-General of Police, Maharashtra, A.N. Roy, Mumbai Police Commissioner Hasan Gafoor and the then Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Chitkala Zutshi. While initially Mr. Chavan said that the committee would probe the roles of these three officials, the committee's terms of reference were considerably broader as R.D. Pradhan who headed it, told the media in May.

The two members — Mr. Pradhan, former Union Home Secretary and V. Balachandran, former Special Secretary with Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) — examined the roles of the police and also the intelligence lapses and made recommendations. At the press conference held last month, Mr. Pradhan said the Mumbai police did its best in a "war-like" situation. He dodged all questions related to lapses in the performance of the police or the government. On the contrary, he praised the police and put the blame on the lack of direct intelligence information. However, the report clearly did not give the police a clean chit as it was made out to be.

A few days before the ATR was tabled in the Assembly, Mr. Gafoor was shunted off to the Maharashtra Police Housing Department and ironically the head of State Intelligence D. Shivanandan, was appointed to head the city police.

Surprise choice

Since intelligence or lack of it was one of the main reasons the attacks took everyone by surprise, it is curious that Mr. Shivanandan should be chosen to head the city police force. Mr Gafoor clearly is the fall guy for this government, which was first pushed into ordering an inquiry into official lapses and then clearly not too keen on making it public citing lame excuses.

The report praises Mr Rakesh Maria, joint commissioner of police (Crime) who was manning the control room, for his exemplary work. Mr Roy no longer heads the state police and Ms Zutshi, who was trapped in the Taj Mahal hotel, has retired.

Some questions remain. What about the roles of Mr. Roy and other senior police officials? What is the kind of leadership they have inspired to be spared by the committee? What about the lapses at the Cama hospital encounter where three senior policemen were killed by the two terrorists? The government has resorted to its favourite mechanism of appointing a committee but of what use is such a committee when the contents are not made public.

One person who is fighting to learn the truth is Ms Vinita Kamte, the wife of the late additional commissioner of police (east) Mr Ashok Kamte who was killed in the attack. Ms Kamte has filed an application under the Right to Information (RTI) Act demanding the call records of her husband to the police control room. She has information that the control room did not respond to calls for additional reinforcements and that is one of the reasons her husband and other officers lost their lives that night. Ms Kamtes request has been rejected once and she has gone into appeal. She claims there are missing portions in the log sheets. The Pradhan committee only examined officials, and did not interview anyone else, due to reasons of time. Some of the recommendations of the committee are in place already and it is difficult to understand why this hastily done job was necessary in the first place.

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17 June 2009

PCMC does not have latest figures of mobile towers

The Times of India

|  
PUNE: While the Pimpri-Chinchwad New Township Development Authority (PCNTDA) last week initiated action against illegal mobile towers put up within its limits, the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) does not even have the latest figures on the number of mobile towers within its municipal limits.

In reply to an application filed by corporator and standing committee member Ramdas Kumbhar in June 2008 under the Right to Information Act, the PCMC's building permission department had said that there were 343 mobile towers in the municipal limits, out of which 326 were illegal!

During the standing committee meeting on Monday, Kumbhar, while referring to the action taken by PCNTDA, asked the civic administration how many mobile towers had been put up in the municipal limits till June 2009. The civic administration said that the latest figures were not available and that they would be provided at the next meeting.

Speaking to TOI on Tuesday, Vasant Kachi, deputy city engineer and chief of the building permission department, said that he had recommended to the municipal commissioner that a meeting of civic officials and representatives of telecom companies be held in the next few days to solve the problem of unauthorised mobile towers.

"I don't have the latest figure of the total number of mobile towers and the number of unauthorised and authorised mobile towers," he said.

Explaining the rules for allowing mobile towers to be built, Kachi said, "A person has to furnish a building completion certificate and structural stability certificate. Our department gives permission if it is satisfied with these documents and levies development charges on them."

When asked what the PCMC was planning to do to curtail the mushrooming of illegal towers, Kachi said, "From now on we will not give a building completion certificate to a person if there is an unauthorised mobile tower in the building". However, he hastened to add, "In most cases, people do not put up a mobile tower before getting a building completion certificate".

Explaining why a large number of unauthorised towers had come up, Kachi said, "People send applications to the PCMC to get permission to put up the mobile towers on their properties, but they do not wait for the permission before putting up the towers."

Shahaji Pawar, assistant commissioner and chief of the property tax department said, "The property tax department charges tax on the mobile towers in municipal limits. Property holders who have put up mobile towers have to pay the property tax, else the PCMC will dismantle the towers."

He said that the property tax department does not keep separate records of the property tax collected from mobile towers.

Explaining the method by which property tax is calculated for a mobile tower, Pawar said, "The department calculates the tax based on the annual rent that the property owner receives for the tower."

17th June , 2009

Sonia Gandhi's case transferred to division bench of CIC

The Indian Express

Agencies Posted online: Wednesday, at 1749 hrs

**New Delhi :** The case pertaining to disclosure of documents relating to Indian citizenship of Sonia Gandhi under the RTI Act will now be decided in a Division Bench of the Central Information Commission.

The move follows a decision of the Chief Information Commissioner to withdraw himself from the case because of his proximity to Gandhi.

Chief Information Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah who was hearing the case decided to transfer it to a Division Bench because of his association with Sonia Gandhi -- he worked as secretary of Rajiv Gandhi Foundation under her Chairmanship.

"The case is therefore transferred to a Division Bench comprising Information Commissioner S N Mishra and M L Sharma for hearing and disposal," Habibullah said.

Exercising his Right to Information, an applicant Milap Choraria sought copy of all documents and file noting from the respective files relating to the application for Indian citizenship submitted by Sonia Gandhi and the approval by Government of India, from Home Ministry.

His application was turned down by the ministry citing a clause of RTI Act, prohibiting disclosure of personal information of a third party which serves no public interest.

But the Ministry provided sketchy information to him saying that Gandhi had applied for citizenship on April 2, 1983 for Indian citizenship and was granted the same on April 30, 1983.

Unsatisfied with the response, Choraria appealed before the CIC to facilitate him in getting the information.

17th June , 2009

Turning over the keys to citizens

The Indian Express

martin demello Posted online: Wednesday, Jun 17, 2009 at 0144 hrs

The 2005 Right to Information Act was a significant milestone for India, a firm commitment to openness and transparency. The UPA's promises of a public data project has only strengthened that commitment, promising to sweep away the nation's dusty piles of secrecy and bureaucracy. But with increasing computerisation comes a related, but often overlooked imperative — that all government software be open source.

If you have been keeping up, however peripherally, with developments in computing and information technology, chances are that you have encountered the term “open source” before. At its heart, the concept is quite simple. A computer wants instructions in its “native language”, machine code. Here is a small sample of machine code:

```
wO<98>\oCa^Fd^^3^Tx<99>z,|9dY $*Uxi8D^@sdu^_^e+@/
```

Programmers, however, work with a more human-readable language, which is then translated to machine code. This “source code” looks something like this:

```
if weather = “rainy” then display image of(rain) else display image of(sunshine)
```

Now, if you sell commercial software, you need not give anyone your source code. The translated machine code is all that your users need to run your applications. Indeed, most companies see the source as something to be protected; customers are delivered opaque machine code that they can use without being able to see how it works. The user gets his program, which is what he cares about, the company gets to protect its business secrets, and all is well. Right?

“Wrong”, say a growing number of people. Enter the free, libre and open source software movement, which believes users should have access to the source code of any program they purchase, and the freedom to modify it, as fundamental rights. This is naturally enough, a controversial topic in the business world — few companies want to give away the secrets behind their software, or the right to control its use. The debate takes a more serious turn though, when what is involved is not commerce but government, and what is being hidden are not business secrets but the implementation of policy and law-enforcement. The salient issue here is not “freedom”, but transparency.

In the US, where ubiquitous computerisation has long since become a fact of life, two applications have thrown the problems of closed-source into sharp relief. The first is the Diebold electronic voting machine. The principle is straightforward — it displays the available options to the voter, records the votes and sends them to a central counting-house to be tabulated. In practice, the Diebold is an overcomplex, labyrinthine machine, the correctness and integrity of which have been called into question by several watchdog bodies.

Now that should be easy to resolve — simply appoint a taskforce to audit the machine for correctness and security, ensuring that it does what it is supposed to do, and nothing it is not supposed to. Well, it would be simple — except for the fact that the Diebold is closed-source. There is no transparency in how it works — the disturbing, terrifying fact is that a private company can, through malice or incompetence, invisibly influence an election in one of the world's most powerful countries.

Exhibit number two is the breathalyser, a device which estimates the amount of alcohol in a person's bloodstream. It is commonly used as a "field sobriety test", and its results are admissible in court. Since a person can be convicted on the basis of a breathalyser test, it is imperative that it be above reproach. In practice, however, how the sensors are read, and how their readings depends on software that is, again, proprietary and closed-source. Several breathalyser manufacturers have indeed been taken to court and asked to turn over their code — which has been found to be buggy and error-prone. Others have resisted on the grounds that revealing their source would "compromise trade secrets", something that, sadly, seems to outweigh human rights in much of the world.

These problems may seem comfortably far away, with computers only beginning to work their way into our daily lives. However, the central issues are both relevant and urgent. A government, after all, runs primarily on information, and it is crucially important both that that information not be compromised, and that it can be shown not to be compromised. And the more we allow computers — increasingly a critical link in the chain — to become impenetrable black boxes, the less we can trust that entire chain. Freedom of information is a vital, transformative principle; let us not render it pointless by neglecting trustworthiness of information.

16<sup>th</sup> June , 2009

Govt tells CIC not to have benches

Press Trust of India / New Delhi , 17:00 IST  
Business Standard

The government has held that the Central Information Commission or the State Information Commissions cannot constitute benches for hearing matters, a point

CIC does not agree with.

In a recent communication to the CIC, the Ministry of Personnel and Training has said that Right to Information Act does not empower the Chief Information Commissioner to constitute benches.

The ministry said that the matter of Central Information Commission and State Information Commissions taking decisions on complaints and appeals by constituting benches has been examined in consultation with department of legal affairs.

The legal affairs department, the personnel ministry said, has pointed out that the Central Information Commission or the State Commissions could function through benches only if there was a specific provision in the RTI Act for that.

The legal affairs department has further opined that provision of section 12 (4) of the RTI Act does not empower the Chief Information Commissioner to constitute benches.

"In view of this legal provision, it is advised that decisions on the complaints and appeals should be taken by the Central Information Commission as defined in section 2(b) of the RTI Act, 2005 and not by the benches of the Commission," the communication said.

15th June 2009

HC takes state to task over human rights PIL

The Times of India |

MUMBAI: The Bombay high court has directed the state government to file a reply within three weeks in response to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) `alleging' a shockingly low finding of human rights violations by the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (SHRC), systemic irregularities and `alleged' improprieties by senior members of the commission. Relying on information received under the Right to Information Act (RTI), the PIL states that of the 28,083 cases filed before it till June 2008, the commission had directed action against erring public servants in only 39 cases.

The cases of human rights violations filed by citizens that come up before the commission are against the state, its various organs and public servants. The commission disposed of 24,071 cases and 4,012 were pending as of June 2008. The PIL said it would be absurd to suggest that as many as 24,032 complaints were frivolous and devoid of any merit. "It would mean that in only 0.16% cases was the `allegation' of human rights violations proved."

When the PIL filed by a businessman-turned-activist Pushkar Damle came up

before the bench of Chief Justice Swatanter Kumar and Justice S C Dharmadhikari on Thursday, they lost no time in calling for a detailed reply from the state. Government counsel G W Mattos too sought time on the grounds that the `allegations' against the commission and its members were "exhaustive."

The petitioner sought to make it clear that though he had had a case dismissed by the commission a few years ago despite a positive finding into an `allegation' against a HC public prosecutor for having threatened him, he was "not trying to settle scores." He said thanks to the "indignities he suffered, it broadened his outlook and he dug deep to find that the problems of the commission were systemic in nature requiring intervention from the HC."

To begin with, the PIL stated that the state government has chosen not to implement or bring into effect a 2006 amendment to the Protection of Human Rights Act of 1993. By the amendment, the constitution of the commission had changed from chairperson (a retired Chief Justice of any high court) and four members, to a chairperson and two members. The PIL `alleged' that in 2006 for six months, the commission functioned with only a chairperson C L Thool heading it. Thool has since finished his term.

However, within seven days of the amendment being gazetted on September 14, 2006, and before its actual implementation date of November 23, 2006, a committee headed by the Maharashtra chief minister selected three persons who were appointed by the governor as commission members on October 10, 2006, the PIL `alleged.'

The members who continue till date are T Singaravel (a former police commissioner of Nagpur), Subhash Lalla (a former personal secretary of the Maharashtra CM) and Vijay Munshi (a former high court judge).

The PIL says that the HR Act, despite being amended, has not yet been implemented in Maharashtra and the home department in reply to queries has only said that the amendment file has been moving from desk to desk since December 2007 with no rational explanation for its status since December 2006 when it had been received. The law requires the state to implement a central Act from the date of its notification, the PIL pointed out and is questioning "the Maharashtra government's attempt to frustrate the spirit of the modification in law by refusing to implement it."

Relying on RTI replies, the PIL stated that one of the members proceeded on medical leave for a cancer surgery a day after his appointment. The state picked up the tab of Rs 6.25 lakh for extensive medical treatment. Yet another member, the PIL `alleged,' travelled with his wife for official visits several times flouting mandatory guidelines. In one instance, a member produced and was sanctioned a taxi-travel reimbursement of Rs 3,422 from his Marine Lines residence to the Santa Cruz airport, a distance of about 30-35 km. "This fare is by no stretch of

the imagination logical and shows that the scrutiny for TA bills is a farce," said the PIL.

In an instance of systemic lethargy, the petitioner's advocate Amit Karkhanis stated that though the sessions courts have been designated as human rights courts, special public prosecutors have not been appointed by the state for the past eight years. As a result, both the victim and the state exchequer is burdened as every complaint has to be filed before the SHRC.

15 Jun 2009

4 years of 'your right to know', but a long way to go –

The Times of India

NEW DELHI: Is it possible for an ordinary man to take on the judiciary or the administration? People like Subhash Chandra Agarwal, Commodore (retired) Lokesh Batra and journalist Anuj Dhar have proved that it can be done. As the Right to Information Act completes four years, it is these unlikely heroes who have brought meaning to the legislation by constantly pushing the envelope.

While the Congress-led UPA can take credit for bringing a forward looking legislation in the form of RTI Act, the true measure of its success lies in the change in the quality of life for ordinary people. Despite constant jibes that the law is only being used by disgruntled bureaucrats to get information on transfers and postings, no one can deny that there is finally an alternative if your ration card or passport is stuck somewhere in red-tape.

Textile businessman Subhash Chandra Agarwal's RTI applications have forced the government to cough up details on ministers' assets while his applications on declaration of wealth by judges' and Padma awards have often grabbed headlines. Agarwal said the Act should be applicable to the private sector as well. "Increasingly, services like telecom, power and water are being given to private firms but the public is not privy to this information. Private companies should also be brought under the ambit of the Act," he added.

If people were shocked at the morbidity of the Nithari killings, Batra's RTI replies revealed that the government was not one of them. Even as hapless parents ran from pillar to post to get the administration, including the National Commission for Women (NCW), to react, Batra's RTI plea yielded shocking replies. The NCW member deputed to investigate the gruesome crime took her own sweet time, visiting the spot only after two weeks. Her report after that meeting was an eye-opener on the callous attitude of the powers-that-be.

Batra has also been lobbying for uniformity of rules so that NRIs and people of Indian origin can seek information under RTI. "There should be a uniform mode of payment across the country. I have also been stressing that section 4 of the Act -- that talks of voluntary disclosure -- should be implemented by all agencies," Batra said.

Journalist Anuj Dhar has rallied to get disclosures on the mysterious death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, a plea that left many red faced in the government as one ham-handed reply followed another.

While there are several lacunas in the implementation of the Act, activists say that the law must not be tinkered with. Rising fears of file notings being exempted from disclosure have left many to distrust the government that has, in many ways, created impediments rather than remove them. Activists have so far been able to ward off the government's attempts to dilute the Act. It remains to be seen how long they will have the upper hand.

15<sup>th</sup> June 2009

Activists against proposed amendments to RTI Act -

The Hindu

JAIPUR: The campaigners for transparency and right to information are worried about the proposed amendment to the country's path breaking law, the Right to Information Act 2005, diluting its effectiveness. If the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government goes ahead with the changes, as announced by President Pratibha Patil in her address to Parliament on June 4, nothing good is to come out of it, they insist.

After the Magsaysay award winner Aruna Roy last week expressing serious doubts about the intention behind the move to amend the existing Act, it was the turn of Shailesh Gandhi, Commissioner with the Central Information Commission, to give out similar sentiments here on Saturday. "We have to fight this move as it is not an attempt to improve upon the existing law," said Mr. Gandhi, speaking as the chief guest at the launch of an orientation workshop on the second phase of the RTI project being implemented by the Jaipur-based NGO, CUTS Centre for Action, Research and Training(CUTS CART).

"My fear is that with the amendment the present provision in the law to provide copies of file noting would go. In the next 100 days this can happen and the people have to remain vigilant against any such move," said Mr. Gandhi, a businessman turned RTI activist. "People are only familiarizing themselves with the existing law and changes in them would only complicate the situation and obstruct the implementation of the law," he warned. "The Governments in general are no great advocates of right to information," he pointed out.

As such education of the masses was taking considerable time in making the law more effective, Mr. Gandhi, who created a record of sorts in clearing the pending applications with the Central Information Commission, said. "What I have come across while dealing

with the applications is that many of the applicants do not know how to seek information. Perhaps people should be taught to be more focused in their queries,” he felt.

“In three years the Act has made a big impact. However it should be pointed out that initially only 15 per cent in Rajasthan knew how to file an application under the law to get information. With advocacy their number has gone up to 35 per cent in the past three years,” observed George Cheriyan, director CUTS CART.

The collective concern of the civil society organizations (CSOs) was about the dilution of the provisions of the Act to suit the powers that be, he said.

Harinsh Pandya of JANPAT, a network of civil society organizations in Gujarat, said RTI had rekindled a new hope in the minds of the public on the effectiveness of the system. The law had not only opened up immense possibilities for the ordinary citizen but also was helping the bureaucracy in withstanding undue pressure from the politicians, he pointed out.

The gathering , which included grass root level of RTI activists and CSOs from Rajasthan unanimously resolved to raise their collective concern to the Government of India over the announced ‘suitable amendments’ to the RTI.

It also asked the Rajasthan Government to take necessary steps for the effective implementation of the RTI act by appointing required number of Information Commissioners and by providing required infrastructure.

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15th June , 2009

Lawyer seeks list of babus’ assets, govt says sorry

The Indian Express

RAGHAV OHRI Posted online: Monday , at 2249 hrs

Chandigarh : The Personnel department of the Punjab government has refused to share details of the assets owned by IAS and IPS officers in the state. The information was sought under the Right to Information (RTI) Act by advocate H C Arora.

In the application filed with the Personnel department (IAS Branch), Arora had stated: “Whether there is any requirement under relevant rules for the IAS and IPS officers to submit their statement of assets periodically to the State Government/ Central Government with a copy to the State Government? If yes, how many IAS/ IPS officers have submitted their statements/ returns of assets?”

“Please supply me the copies of their latest returns, and the return statement submitted initially at the time of joining of service,” Arora had said in the application.

In response, the Assistant Public Information Officer (ASPIO) said in an official communication: “The IAS officers are required to submit under Rule 16 (2) of the All

India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968, every year, a statement of their assets, which is kept on record.”

But the details Arora sought were denied: “As regards the request for supplying copies of the property returns, submitted by IAS Officers, it is stated that this information being a third party information, cannot be supplied.”

Now, Arora has filed an appeal with the first Appellate Authority of the Personnel department, which has sent a letter to the Secretary, Department of Information & Technology, seeking advice on the appeal. Arora has received a copy of the letter.

The letter reads: “You are requested to advise the Personnel department as to whether information relating to assets of the officers, as sought by the applicant, is to be provided or not under Section 8(j) of RTI Act, 2005. The above advice may be given at the earliest so that the appeal may be disposed.”

Arora is yet to be communicated about the final decision on his appeal.

Advocates, meanwhile, say the information should not be denied. Senior advocate

R S Cheema said such information cannot be denied since these officers are public servants, and according to law, they are under obligation to provide details of their assets.

Advocate Amar Vivek was of the same opinion. “Under no legal provision, IAS and IPS officers can withhold details of their assets. It is not personal information by any means. They are government servants and not private people.”

Earlier, Arora had sought similar information from the public information officer (PIO) of the DGP, but it was denied.

14th June 2009

National RTI awards instituted

The Times of India

TNN, 03:51am IST

|

PUNE: Public Cause Research Foundation (PCRF) has invited nominations for its National Right to Information (RTI) Awards, 2009. Instituted this year, the awards will be presented in November every year to those who have displayed exemplary commitment to RTI.

Speaking at a press conference on Friday, RTI activist Vijay Kumbhar said there were five awards in three different categories. One award would be given to an outstanding information commissioner, who enables access to correct and complete information to a maximum number of appellants.

Two awards would be given to public information officers who provide comprehensive and accurate information to a maximum number of applicants within the prescribed time limit. The other two awards would be given to citizens who create a maximum impact by using the RTI Act, Kumbhar added.

PCRf intends to honour and recognise the contribution of the bureaucratic community as a whole to gather relevant data, which could go a long way in identifying the shortcomings in the current system of the RTI as well as suggesting possible reforms.

Each award carries a citation, a plaque and a prize money of Rs 2 lakh. Apart from the awards, at least a dozen citations would be given away to information commissioners, public information officers and citizens.

All information commissioners in the country are automatic nominees, Kumbhar said. However, nominations are being invited from public information officers and citizens. They can either nominate themselves or can be nominated by someone else. Nominations can be sent online at [www.rtiawards.org](http://www.rtiawards.org) or through forms obtained from National RTI Awards Secretariat, A-119, Kaushambi, Ghaziabad-201010, Uttar Pradesh, and forwarded by post. The last date for filing nominations is June 30.

15th June 2009

Delay in info: Babus must pay Rs 250 a day -

Indian Express

**BANGALORE:** Officials who attempt to hide or distort information sought under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, would be fined Rs 250 per day until the information is provided, said J S Virupakshaiah, Commissioner, Karnataka Information Commission, on Sunday. The daily fine could amount to a maximum of Rs 25,000, added Virupakshaiah. Speaking at an RTI awareness convention at the Trade Union Coordination Center(TUCC), Virupakshaiah explained the procedure of filing and the follow-up of an RTI application.

"The appellant should keep a copy of the receipt after seeking information under RTI," he said.

Appellants, who fall below the poverty line, should attach a copy of the BPL certificate provided from the tahasildar's office while filing an RTI query, he added.

The information sought under RTI should be precise and to the point, he said. A query under one application should be regarding only one piece of information and, in case of multiple queries, separate applications should be filed.

"If an officer does not respond with the sought information, in less than 30 days, the appellant has the right to go to the higher official or the appellate authority," he said.

"For a delay of every day, the officer will be penalized Rs 250 per day and the fine can go up to Rs 25,000," said Virupakshaiah.

Virupakshaiah elucidated upon the powers of the RTI commission and its right to initiate disciplinary action against officers who provide wrong or incomplete information.

14 Jun 2009

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12th June 2009

File notings under RTI: DoPT seeks law ministry's opinion –

The Times of India 12th June 2009

NEW DELHI: With ideological differences at the highest levels in government on the issue of allowing access to file notings, the department of personnel and training (DoPT) has sought advice from the law ministry on the issue.

File notings have been disclosed by information commissions but government departments have often refused information. The DoPT, on its part, has done nothing to dispel the confusion mentioning the term "file notings" in its website's frequently asked questions.

In fact, there has been a tussle between the Central Information Commission (CIC) and the ministry. Sources in the ministry, however, said allowing disclosure of file notings was not a question between warring individuals. "It is not that DoPT has dug in its heels and does not want to give out file notings. There is a serious ideological difference between the government. We are trying to resolve this in an amicable manner. We appreciate the CIC's attempt to ensure transparency and we are not against it. We want to make the law more user friendly but that can only happen once these differences are sorted out," a source said.

Since the Right to Information Act (RTI) was made operational in October 2005, the government has been reluctant to part with file notings. While in some cases people were able to access this part of the information -- which includes notes and opinions made by government officials on a particular issue -- there were many others who were denied the information. In fact, DoPT on its website clearly points out that "file notings" were exempted under the Act leaving public information officers confused on its implementation.

In July 2006, the Union Cabinet decided to amend the RTI Act so that only file notings related to social and developmental projects could be made accessible to the public. The government's step was based on the logic that issues related to the people would be made public but decisions regarding sensitive subjects could be hampered if information was made public.

The amendment was to be cleared by Parliament in its monsoon session but vociferous complaints by activists and public furore prevented the government from doing so.

On its part, the CIC has been issuing orders over a period of time asking DoPT to correct its website. It sent DoPT the first reference in February 2006 and recently sent a showcase notice on why ministry officials should not be imprisoned for repeatedly ignoring the CIC's directions.

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With ideological differences at the highest levels in government on the issue of allowing access to file notings, the department of personnel and training (DoPT) has sought advice from the law ministry on the issue.

12th June 2009

Dialling 100 to complain? Your call details may be shared –

The Indian Express

Krishnadas Rajagopal Posted online: Friday , Jun 12, 2009 at 0133 hrs  
New Delhi : Dialling 100 may not be as confidential as you think.

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has categorised telephone calls to the police control room (PCR) as a “public activity”. All call details can now be accessed through the Right to Information (RTI) Act even if it is at the cost of someone’s privacy.

This recent judgment comes after an appeal by an RTI applicant, who had requested information from the Delhi Police about a particular call to the PCR, wherein a woman had accused him of assault.

Chief Information Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah recently ruled: “A telephone call to the Police Control Room is clearly a public activity.”

The Bench observed that under Section 8 (1) (j) of the RTI Act, information could be exempted from disclosure provided it does not have any relationship with a public activity.

Wajahat Habibullah told Newsline on Thursday: “A call to the PCR is a formal complaint made to a public institution, the police. There is no reason for the police to keep it confidential unless the caller specifically requests his or her identity to be kept a secret for fear of compromising his or her security.”

However, the police’s Public Relations Officer and Assistant Commissioner Rajan Bhagat begs to differ. He said: “If divulging details of the PCR call impedes the process of investigation in a case, the details are kept confidential. If the suspect in the case himself asks for call details, it surely will not be disclosed. In such a case, the information is exempted of disclosure under the RTI Act.”

In this particular case, one Surindra Bhayana of Rohini had on September 20, 2007 asked the Deputy Commissioner of Police (PCR) for information about a call made by a woman of the same locality, named Santosh.

He wanted the ‘daily diary’ register details about the call made at 4 pm by Santosh. She had alleged Bhayana attempted to “offend her and hit her with a knife”.

The police replied stating the alleged victim had objected to the call details from being shared.

Deputy Commissioner of Police and PIO (PCR), V K Mishra, also told the CIC that Santosh had specifically said the copy of her complaint should not be provided to Surindra Bhayana.

12 th Jun 2009

Civil aviation be brought under the ambit of RTI' –

The Times of India

LUCKNOW: The UP Congress on Thursday demanded that civil aviation department should also be brought under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Party spokesman, Subodh Srivastava said that civil aviation is not related to intelligence or national security, hence common man has all the right to know about the utilisation of funds allocated to the department. He charged Mayawati government with trying to shield cabinet secretary, Shashank Shekhar Singh, who earlier served in the department as principal secretary and is now associated with it as an advisor. There are number of complaints of anomalies in the utilisation of funds allocated to the civil aviation department and by putting it under classified list, government is trying to protect Singh, he claimed.

Srivastava said that state government had earlier kept several items under classified category. But after the Congress lodged a complaint with the governor and made it a political issue, the state government was forced to amend its order. However, he added, later it was learnt that government has secretly included civil aviation in the classified list. Now, he said, UP Congress under the leadership of its president, Rita Bahuguna Joshi has decided to launch an agitation against the government move. He also raised fingers at the appointment of information commissioners.

9<sup>th</sup> June 2009

Padamsinh and family have 11 licensed weapons

The Times of India

MUMBAI: A day after controversial NCP Lok Sabha MP Padamsinh Patil was remanded to CBI custody for his alleged involvement in the murder of his cousin Pawan Raje Nimbalkar, it was found that Padamsinh and his family members have 11 licensed weapons.

Lokbharti Party leader Kapil Patil obtained the information on the weapons owned by Padamsinh and his family members by invoking the provisions of the Right to Information Act. "We have been officially informed by the Osmanabad district administration that Padamsinh and his family have 11 weapons," Kapil said. Kapil on Monday asked chief minister Ashok Chavan and home minister Jayant Patil to cancel the licences and also seize all the weapons in the possession of the Padamsinh Patil family. "He (Padamsinh) has full police protection. Under such circumstances, why does he need weapons. It should also be investigated how the Osmanabad district collector and superintendent of police granted such a large number of licences to a

single family. Whether the weapons for self-protection or for other reasons needs to be known," Kapil said.

Information garnered by Kapil Patil reveals that, while there are four weapons-one revolver, one pistol and two rifles-in the name of Padamsinh Patil, the remaining weapons are in the names of his son Rana (who is presently a minister of state for information and public relations), his brother, brother's wife, nephew and his nephew's wife.

Of the 20 licences issued by the Osmanabad district administration recently, 11 have been issued in the name of Padamsinh and his family members. "I have submitted all the information to legislative council chairman Shivajirao Deshmukh," said Kapil Patil.

Meanwhile, there is a demand for a probe into lands purchased by Padamsinh and co-accused Satish Mandade and Mohan Shukla. "Our information is that the trio purchased nearly 3,000 acres of land near Alibaug. It should be investigated at a higher level," said a senior officia

7th June 2009

Enemy Property: HC tells authorities to take action-

The Times of India

KANPUR: Disposing of a public interest litigation (PIL) regarding the sale of enemy property, which is deemed to be under custody of Ministry of home affairs, the Allahabad high court recently directed the concerned authorities to take appropriate action in accordance with the law.

The two-judge bench, comprising chief justice CK Prasad and justice Dilip Gupta, also advised the petitioner to approach the appropriate authority of the government for removal of encroachment and for preventing the encroachment over property.

The bench further cleared that it had not expressed any opinion regarding the claims made by the petitioner and that shall be considered by the appropriate authority.

The petitioner, Ashraf Mahmood, had claimed that one S Humayun Nazar was a citizen of Pakistan and despite that was selling property in India, specially in Kanpur. Since the property in question was under the custody of Ministry of home affairs, Humayun Nazar had no right to sell that property. The possession was an encroachment. Therefore, the court should declare the sale deeds of property in question executed by Humayun Nazar be declared as null and void and also pass an order that no other person should take possession of that property.

The counsel for the petitioner had pleaded that the petitioner had brought the matter before the government machinery and the latter had not taken immediate steps to prevent the sale of property or declaring the registered sale deeds as null and void.

Petitioner Ashraf Mahmood claimed that S Humayun Nazar had some ancestral property in Jajmau. Humayun Nazar and his father Nazar Mohammad had shifted to Pakistan in

1980s and had acquired the citizenship of Pakistan. Since both father and son had citizenship of Pakistan, they had lost the right to property in India and that property was deemed to be under the custody of ministry of home affairs as custodian of enemy property.

He further claimed that S Humayun Nazar had also obtained British citizenship fraudulently. Humayun Nazar had visited Kanpur in 2008 and during his stay in Kanpur, sold the ancestral property which was under the custody of the Indian Government to 12 persons by registered sale deeds at sub-registrar zone number one Kanpur Nagar between May to August 2008.

The petitioner attributed that he had brought the matter before the SSP and the district magistrate Kanpur Nagar in the month of September 2008, but they had not acted so far. He had made representation before the ministry of home affair and the ministry had asked the district magistrate Kanpur Nagar on December 19, 2008 to inquire into the alleged matter and seek information on five points, including the sale of property.

In the month of March 2009, Ashraf Mehmood's efforts paid some dividends and Kotwali police registered a case against Humayun Nazar under Enemy Property Act and FERA. Since then, no action had been taken so far. The department informed him that the inquiry had been going on when he had sought information under the Right to Information Act. Just to stimulate the concerned departments, he had filed a PIL before the high court.

7th June 2009

Fire service declares Delhi's new airport terminal 'unsafe'

The Times of India |

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Fire Service has declared the brand new departure terminal 1 D at the capital's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGI) unsafe.

According to the information accessed by IANS under the Right to Information Act (RTI), Delhi Fire Service chief R C Sharma has refused to provide a no-objection certificate (NOC) for terminal 1 D, citing many shortcomings during the two inspections conducted by his team in the past few months.

In his last report on May 13, Sharma cited six shortcomings. He said the ventilation system in the VIP lounge, baggage area and the office area was yet to be completed. Further, he stated, the exit route in the retail area should have a separate staircase or passage.

"In some places sprinklers are hidden in the false ceiling, which should be brought down. Some of the restaurants are under construction and are using wooden material. The wood works need to be painted with fire retardant chemicals. Necessary fire alarms or sprinkler system should be extended to these areas," Sharma noted in his report.

He further said systems at the new departure terminal could not be checked due to passenger movement and asked for arrangements to test the systems whenever

possible.

But so far the Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL), a joint venture between the state-run Airports Authority of India and a consortium led by infrastructure major GMR, has not made any arrangements for the inspection of the systems.

In his report Sharma concluded that "terminal 1 D cannot be considered safe from the safety point of view till safety arrangements are fully completed."

Terminal 1 D, which is spread over 33,000 sq m, has replaced 1 B, the old terminal. It was opened for operations April 19. Kingfisher, Kingfisher Red and IndiGo, Jet Airways, JetLite and Spice Jet are operating from the new terminal, while GoAir, Air India and others are operating from terminal 1 A.

According to the airport officials, around 200 flights operate daily from the new departure terminal, which has been built at a cost of Rs.500 crore (\$100 million). The terminal is able to handle 10 million passengers annually and is equipped with 72 check-in counters. It was inaugurated by Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel.

The airport authorities had first invited the Delhi Fire Service officials April 8. At that time, the fire service wrote in its report that fire pumps and the fire control room were yet to be fully operational and that the sprinkler line was not charged with water at many places.

DIAL sent a report to the fire department May 4 stating that measures suggested had been complied with. The fire department again conducted an inspection and highlighted fresh shortcomings.

When asked why necessary clearance was not sought before the new terminal came into operation, DIAL spokesman Arun Arora said the terminal was absolutely safe for operations and for passengers.

"DIAL is very much alive to the required fire safety norms. We have been following all fire safety norms (domestic as well as international) for all equipment and procedures," Arora told IANS.

"All necessary documents have been submitted to the fire department and inspections have been carried out by the Delhi Fire Service officers. All observations and suggestions made by them were carried out by DIAL. The suggestions made by them during their subsequent visit to terminal 1 D are also being carried out," he added.

Arora said to ensure fail-proof fire safety DIAL has taken many initiatives.

"We have deputed 18 well trained firemen who keep patrolling all areas of the terminals - like the check-in area, airline ticketing areas and security holds. More than 50 fire hydrant outlets have been deployed inside and outside the terminal for greater safety," Arora said.

Though DIAL has been running the new terminal without fire safety clearances, the Delhi Fire Service was silent on why no action was being taken against the airport authorities. As per the powers conferred upon the fire department, it can cut electricity and water supplies to a building or even shut it down if the fire safety norms are not met.

4th June 2009

CIC declares Jawaharlal Memorial Fund as Public Authority

The Indian Express

Agencies Posted online: Thursday , Jun 04, 2009 at 1323 hrs

New Delhi : The CIC has declared Jawaharlal Memorial Fund (JNMF), a trust established in the memory of India's first prime minister, as a public authority liable to provide information under the RTI Act.

"...keeping in view the facts and circumstances of the instant case and in the interest of justice, transparency and accountability, the Commission declares the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund a Public Authority under the Right to Information Act 2005," observed a bench of Information Commissioners Annapurna Dixit, M M Ansari and Satyananda Mishra.

The observation by the three-member bench of the Central Information Commission, constituted after the instructions of Delhi High Court, is in contrary to the earlier decision of CIC where it had held that the RTI Act is not applicable to the Fund.

The Commission has found that the JNMF was getting substantial financial aids from different ministries and is running from a rent-free accommodation in a building owned by the Government thus making it "answerable and accountable" to the public.

"...the property tax for the accommodation is being paid by CPWD for the premises given to the Respondent (JNMF), being thousand square yard of Government land, further emphasise the fact that the respondent is to be classified as a Public Authority," it said.

2nd June 2009

Steep increase in RTI applications

The Hindu

Special Correspondent HYDERABAD: The number of applications received under the 'Right To Information (RTI) Act' in the State increased by 573 per cent in the last three years, indicating a growing public awareness about the Act. The synopsis of State Information Commission Annual Report for 2008 was released to the media persons here on Monday.

Giving the details, Chief Information Commissioner C.D Arha said that of 59,664 applications received in the State, 54,022 had been disposed of. Thirty-nine per cent of appeals had come from the rural areas. "The RTI does not remain an urban phenomenon any more," Mr. Arha added.

## Recommendations

While Hyderabad district topped in the number of complaints filed under RTI, most of the complaints in the State pertained to Revenue department, followed by Municipal Administration and Urban Development. Accordingly, some of the recommendations by the Commission included computerisation of land records, updating of government department websites. While a total of 99,202 applications were received in the last three years, 92 per cent were provided with information sought and 7,121 applications were returned or rejected.

Earlier in the day, the Commission submitted the comprehensive Annual Report to the Chief Minister Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy and it would be tabled before the State Legislature soon.

Mr. Arha said barring six departments related to security and intelligence, any other information could be sought under the RTI. He also said that though disposal of cases in the State was highest in the country, pendency was due to increasing work load.

The Commission in association with **Centre for Good Governance** introduced innovative measures like 'Online File Tracking System' and 'SMS facility' to know the status of the application. Appreciating the SMS facility, Centre directed for its implementation through out the country.