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Central Info panel clueless on RTI pleas

CIC Admits It Keeps No Records Of Cases Or Orders

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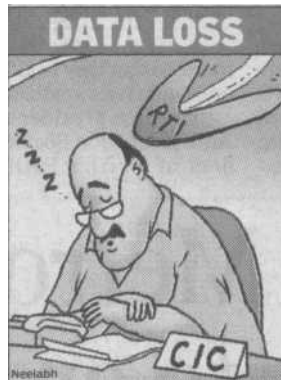
New Delhi: Transparency, like charity begins at home. India's topmost body created to enforce your right to know has just learnt this the hard way.

The Central Information Commission (CIC) has been caught on the wrong foot with an RTI activist exposing how it has been unable to furnish to the public information as basic as the number and status of cases and appeals pending with it. Reason: It maintains no such record. Surprising indeed, coming as it does from a commission known for ticking off public authorities who fail to ensure transparency in maintaining records.

Faced with the irrefutable proof that a citizen cannot know the status and pendency of cases with the commission apparently because no one keeps track, a stunned chief information commissioner Wajahat Habibullah has cracked the whip and ordered an in-house upgrade of records. Habibullah's orders to remedy the "grievous defect" came recently after his public information officer admitted that the CIC kept no record of judgments and orders passed or pending on cases heard.

"The CIC's registry will take immediate steps to computerize and maintain a record of appeals/complaints admitted, the date of hearing of each appeal, the decision in each case with the state of announcement," the chief information commissioner decreed while deciding an RTI plea filed by Shrutti Singh Chauhan.

"Such information should be updated regularly and supplied to every information commissioner at the end of each month. This should also be made available in public domain through the commission's website. This exercise will be completed within one month," he added.



• Last year, RTI activist Shrutti Singh Chauhan had sought details of cases heard by the CIC but whose verdicts were still to be announced

• She was told that the commission did not maintain records of cases with it

• Matter finally reached CIC chief Habibullah. Shocked, he ordered upgrade of the panel's records in 30 days

In her plea filed almost a year ago, Chauhan had sought to know from the CIC's public information officer Pankaj K P Shreyaskar details of the cases in which hearing had taken place but judgment/order was still to be passed. She had requested that the information be given along with the name of the information commissioner hearing it, name and address of the appellant, the date of hearing and "the reason for keeping the judgment in abeyance".

A day later, Chauhan was told that the CIC had no such information available with it. She then filed an appeal with the first appellate authority within the CIC. A month later, her appeal was rejected, with the appellate authority blaming her for seeking information which she knew wasn't available with the CIC.