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# RTI applicants to get travel costs

Viju B | TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Mumbai:** It's an order that will bring cheer to lakhs of RTI applicants across the country, especially those who run up huge travel and accommodation bills while appearing for hearings at the Central Information Commission (CIC) in New Delhi. The CIC has directed the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to compensate a Mumbai-based Right To Information applicant, Yogesh Mehta, who was forced to travel to Delhi and appear for five hearings of the commission in the past year.

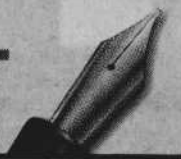
The CIC, while ordering a compensation of Rs 10,000 to the RTI applicant, said he had been compelled to attend the hearings on several dates at his own cost to press for his complaints against SEBI. He had suffered avoidable expenditure in doing so, it ruled.

Ironically, Mehta's two-year-old struggle with SEBI to gather infor-

mation about a case of missing shares from the custody of the Bombay stock exchange defaulter committee through two RTI queries met with little success as SEBI officials replied that the matter was sub judice.

Though he decided to withdraw the CIC appeals, he urged the CIC to con-

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sider his complaints against SEBI, as the incomplete information provided by SEBI's public information officer reached him only after 58 days. The RTI act says that a penalty can be imposed on the PIO if there is a delay of more than 30 days in providing information which comes under the ambit of the act.

During the final hearing, SEBI on its part said the delay was not intentional as the required information was not readily available with the agency and had to be obtained from the BSE. It also said that the information pertained to several transactions which had to be collected and collated and thus the delay. The CIC, after perusing the records and hearing the submission, decided that no penalty needed to be imposed for the delay.

However, information commissioner A N Tiwari, who passed the order, said that he could not be oblivious to the fact that the delay in this matter had resulted in detriment to the complainant and had affected his rightful claim to timely information under the RTI act. The order therefore held that Mehta was entitled to suitable compensation under section 19(8)(b) of the act.

► RTI activists welcome order, P 10

## RTI activists welcome CIC's landmark order

Viju B | TNN

**Mumbai:** RTI activists have welcomed the Central Information Commission's landmark order compensating an RTI applicant for his travel and accommodation and said the penalty would prove to be a deterrent to various central government agencies who refuse to provide information citing frivolous excuses. If an RTI applicant wants to appear before the CIC he will have to spent at least Rs 10,000 for travel and accommodation for hearing. He may appear once before the commission, but if there are further hearings, he may not appear as he may not be able to afford it, former IPS officer-turned-activist Y P Singh said.

He said the CIC should also take up written arguments instead of insisting that an applicant be present for the hearing.

Section 19(8)(b) of the RTI act states that the commission has powers to order a public authority to compensate the complainant for any loss or other detriment suffered. The CIC incidentally deals with RTI appeals against central government institutions like income tax, customs, excise, CBI, SEBI and various other public sector undertakings.

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