Filing an RTI query? Be prepared to wait

Viju B I TNN

Mumbai: The UPA govern-
ment last week proposed an
initiative to convert a phone
call into an RTI application
in order to spread the move-
ment across the country Iron-
ically, the state where the RTI
movement has been a run-
away success may soon be
rendered ineffective as the
number of pending appeals
has reached an all-time high.
The six information com-
missions across Maharashtra
have a whopping 16,866 ap-
peals pending till June this
year. While the information
commissions had received a
total 26,870 appeals, the com-
missions had disposed of 9,914
appeals till June this year.
An applicant is often
forced to file a second appeal
with the State Information
Commission (SIC) after both
the RTI query and the first
appeal fail to provide the ex-
act information the applicant
had sought. Last year, over 3
lakh RTI queries were filed
across the state, but the num-
ber of appeals mounted as
months progressed. Mumbai
alone has 4,818 appeals pend-
ing till June this year.
RTI activists said all six
information commissioners
should dispose of appeals at
a faster pace if the Act has to
survive in the long run. "Ap-
peals that have been filed one-
and-a-half-years ago are still

TOTAL APPEALS RECEIVED

by SIC upto
June 2008
Mumbai-4818
Konkan-3039
Pune-5364
Nashik-5248

Disposal upto
June 2008
1494
1056
1527
2192

Aurangabad-3585 1152
Amaravati-2542

Nagpur-2274
Tota-26870

1385
1108
9914

Total appeals pending
with 6 information
commission 16866

pending with the commission.
At this rate, by the end of 2009,
the pendency will be over
three years old," said RTI ac-
tivist Shailesh Gandhi.
In 2007, the commission-
ers had disposed of 3,600 ap-
peals and complaints and, on
an average, disposed of about

Activists said all 6

info commissioners

should dispose of
appeals at a faster
pace if the Act has
to survive in the

long run

900 appeals per commission-
er per year. "The pendency
can be reduced effectively by
reducing the inflow of sec-
ond appeals and complaints,
and secondly by increasing

the rate disposals," Gandhi
said.
A comparison with the
disposal of cases with the
Bombay high court judges
and the information com-
missioners show that while
each high court judge dis-
posed of on an average 2,530
cases annually, the infor-
mation commissioner on an
average disposed of 899 ap-
peals last year.
Activists said the com-
missions could reduce the
number of appeals consid-
erably if they were more se-
vere on penalties. "The pub-
lic information office (PIO)
and appellate authority to-
day do not care to provide in-
formation as they know that
they will not be pulled up,"
said Bhaskar Prabhu of Ma-
haadikar.
Meanwhile, officials at the
SIC said they are heavily un-
derstaffed and till date, their
pleas to appoint a law officer
and registrar have not been
considered. "Many appeals
could have been cleared at
the level of the appellate au-
thority , but they refuse to
provide information on friv-
olous grounds," the SIC of-
ficial said.
On Friday, a group of RTI
activists are planning to sub-
mit a memorandum to the
SIC and request the com-
mission to reduce the pen-
dency of cases to 90 days.
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