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Filing an RTI query? Be prepared to wait

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Mumbai: The UPA government last week proposed an initiative to convert a phone call into an RTI application in order to spread the movement across the country. Ironically, the state where the RTI movement has been a runaway success may soon be rendered ineffective as the number of pending appeals has reached an all-time high.

The six information commissions across Maharashtra have a whopping 16,866 appeals pending till June this year. While the information commissions had received a total 26,870 appeals, the commissions 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 exact information the applicant had sought. Last year, over 3 lakh RTI queries were filed across the state, but the number of appeals mounted as months progressed. Mumbai alone has 4,818 appeals pending 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. "Appeals that have been filed one-and-a-half-years ago are still

TOTAL APPEALS RECEIVED

by SIC upto June 2008	Disposal upto June 2008
Mumbai-4818	1494
Konkan-3039	1056
Pune-5364	1527
Nashik-5248	2192
Aurangabad-3585	1152
Amaravati-2542	1385
Nagpur-2274	1108
Tota-26870	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 activist Shailesh Gandhi.

In 2007, the commissioners had disposed of 3,600 appeals and complaints and, on an average, disposed of about

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900 appeals per commissioner per year. "The pendency can be reduced effectively by reducing the inflow of second 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 commissioners show that while each high court judge disposed of on an average 2,530 cases annually, the information commissioner on an average disposed of 899 appeals last year.

Activists said the commissions could reduce the number of appeals considerably if they were more severe on penalties. "The public information office (PIO) and appellate authority today do not care to provide information as they know that they will not be pulled up," said Bhaskar Prabhu of Maahadikar.

Meanwhile, officials at the SIC said they are heavily understaffed 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 authority, but they refuse to provide information on frivolous grounds," the SIC official said.

On Friday, a group of RTI activists are planning to submit a memorandum to the SIC and request the commission to reduce the pendency of cases to 90 days.

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