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CIC to act against babus refusing reply to RTI pleas

CRACKING THE WHIP Transparency watchdog to consider demand to penalise civil servants who avoid such applications

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NEW DELHI: Chief information commissioner (CIC) Radha Kumar Mathur on Tuesday promised to favourably consider demands that the transparency watchdog imposes penalties on civil servants who avoid responding to right to information (RTI) requests.

Mathur's promise came at a meeting with RTI activists convened by the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) where poor implementation of proactive disclosures was being discussed.

A study released last week pointed out that information commissions had become impediments to implementation of the law. The report said that most decisions taken by them were without justification and often public information officers were let off the hook without penalties in 99% of the cases.

Mathur heard the grievances of members of the forum some of who said that the penalties levied by the CIC had not been implemented. He then said that he was willing to resolve to impose penalties wherever required. The CIC also agreed to come up with a format for the orders which ensures they are complete.

A STUDY RELEASED LAST WEEK POINTED OUT THAT INFORMATION COMMISSIONS HAD BECOME IMPEDIMENTS TO IMPLEMENTING LAW

The study had estimated that 60% of orders issued by the commissions were incomplete and did not record basic information.

The study - that analysed the time taken by commissions to decide an information appeal and the quality of the orders - said information commissions were increasingly failing to deliver on their mandate.

And this inability to perform started from the time a citizen filed an appeal against denial of information, the report added.

Penalties were imposed in only 1.3% of the cases where delays in information occurred, according to Anjali Bharadwaj of Sartak Nagrik Sangathan (SNS) said.

Financially, this means that the reluctance of the commissions nationwide cost the exchequer ₹290 crore.

"But even more important than the revenue lost is the loss of deterrence value that the threat of penalty was supposed to have provided," Bharadwaj said.

1,000 Mayors to brainstorm on pollution, traffic congestion

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AHMEDABAD: About 1,000 mayors and municipal councillors from across the country have congregated in Gandhinagar to brainstorm over rising air pollution and traffic congestion in urban areas.

Making roads pedestrian-friendly and finding smart parking solutions are also on the agenda, and Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are the focus states.

These issues will be deliberated at the four-day Urban Mobility India Conference and Expo inaugurated on Tuesday by Union urban development minister M Venkaiah Naidu.

The meet aims at enhancing knowledge on various aspects of low carbon climate-friendly urban transport.

Improving city bus services, financing metro systems, multimodal, intelligent transport systems (ITS) for smart mobility, road safety, ensuring access for common man to urban transport will also be discussed.

Some 2,500 delegates from India and 25 other countries will deliberate on various aspects at the conference, being held outside Delhi for the first time since its inception in 2008.

During the programme, Naidu announced that the Centre has given ₹290 crore to Gujarat for the urban development programme. He praised Gujarat for making 160 cities and towns open-defecation free, and felicitated representatives from several municipalities.

After clean chit in graft case, there's a spring in BSY's step

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BENGALURU: Karnataka BJP president BS Yeddyurappa is a happy man these days. Ever since a special CBI court in the city acquitted him of graft charges involving the grant of mining leases during his tenure as chief minister, the septuagenarian politician seems to have got a fresh lease of life.

His acquittal last month is significant as it was the most serious of all charges that the former chief minister faced. He was forced to step down as CM in 2011 and subsequently spent two months in jail.

The alleged mining lease scam together with a host of other allegations had cast a shadow on the fate of the seasoned politician, best known as the Bharatiya Janata Party's first chief minister in the whole of south India.

Political circles in the state are abuzz that Yeddyurappa is on a comeback trail. Fifteen other graft cases registered against him have already been quashed, though the Congress government intends to challenge them in the Supreme Court.

HOW YEDDY'S FORTUNES CHANGED

■ Yeddyurappa was accused of corruption while granting mining leases during his tenure as chief minister

■ Was forced to step down as CM in 2011 and subsequently spent two months in jail

■ 15 other graft cases against

him have already been quashed

■ BJP's national leadership, president Amit Shah in particular, has thrown its weight behind him

■ He is an influential leader of the Lingayat community, which comprise about 10% of the electorate and is now closely aligned with the BJP



"The taint is gone. Yeddyurappa is poised to take over from where he left off," one of his aides said.

Yeddyurappa is critical for the BJP as its most prominent face in the state. And his clout stems from being an influential leader of the Lingayat community, which comprise about 10% of the state's electorate.

"There is no doubt that Yeddyurappa is the symbol of the Lingayat community, which is closely aligned now with the BJP. This is the biggest factor in his favour," said social activist Alphonse Kennedy.

It will not be a cakewalk though for Yeddyurappa in leading the BJP back to power.

At 73, he is not getting any younger. There are leaders within the BJP who are opposed to him.

Political observers say Yeddyurappa's biggest challenge will be to quell dissent within his own party. The party's leadership, president Amit Shah in particular, has reportedly thrown its weight behind him.

The BJP is hoping Yeddyurappa will retain his electoral magic. In 2008, he had led the party to power for the first time in the state.

BULDHANA RAPE CASE

Girls refuse to go back to boarding school

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NAGPUR: Fear has gripped tribal girl students and their parents in Buldhana district after the alleged rape of two fellow minor students of the Nimbaji Kokre Ashramshala (tribal boarding school) in Hiwarkheda.

Over 50 girl students, who live in Halkheda village in Jalgaon district, have refused to return to the boarding school after the alleged rapes, and have conveyed their feelings to the state tribal welfare department.

Some students have even reportedly threatened to kill themselves if their parents forced them to go back to the school.

Parents of the students said the girls have refused to rejoin the tribal boarding school out of fear over lack of safety and security. Officials of the state tribal welfare department are now visiting the houses of the affected students and asking them if they want to seek admission in other boarding schools nearby.

Ashramshalas of the region would reopen on November 15 after the Diwali vacation.

Nimbaji Kokre Ashramshala at Hiwarkheda was in the news recently after 15 persons, including teachers, were arrested for allegedly raping two minor tribal girl students. The accused include the president, secretary and joint secretary of the school.

LURED WITH FOOD

Chairperson of the Maharashtra State Commission for Women (MSCW), who visited the tribal boarding school in Buldhana said the institution did not have the proper infrastructure.

Asha Mirge, a former member of MSCW, said one of the girls told her about the way the accused operated.

"One of the girls, who taken in the police custody for questioning, told me that the main accused (sweeper) used to lure students with good food. He used to tell them that they will be given good food if he was allowed to do whatever he wanted," she said.

Bhopal prison cells can't be unlocked from inside: Ex-inmate

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KHANDWA: A former inmate of the Bhopal jail from where eight SIMI activists reportedly escaped hours before being gunned down in an encounter late last month has contested police claims that the prisoners had unlocked the cell from inside with makeshift keys.

Mohammed Khalil, 40, is the nephew of Mohammed Aqeel Khilji, one of the eight SIMI activists killed on October 31. Khalil said he was imprisoned in the same barracks for five months between October 2013 and March 2014.

I was in B block, A sector - where the SIMI activists were lodged before they reportedly escaped," he told HT.

"The cells have nearly two feet thick walls and the lock holder is further one foot inside the wall in a socket. So the gates are installed in such a fashion that the lock and the holder are 2.5 feet away. So even if anyone is given the key, he will not be able to open the gate as his hand will not reach the lock," Khalil said.

He insisted he was speaking

the truth and his claim was verifiable. "You can visit the jail and check it yourself," he said.

Sanjay Choudhary, the director-general of jails, refused to react to Khalil's claim. "I cannot say anything on this because a judicial inquiry has already been instituted, and any comment from my side may create confusion in the inquiry process," he said.

OFFICER SUSPENDED

The Madhya Pradesh government on Tuesday suspended Deputy Inspector General (Jails) Mansharam Patel for alleged negligence in connection with the jailbreak, according to police officials.

The state government has mandated retired High Court judge S K Pandey to probe the incident.



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