

Minutes of CIC meeting held on 7th April, 2020 at 1100 hrs.

Present

Shri Bimal Julka, Chief Information Commissioner
Shri D.P. Sinha, Information Commissioner
Shri Yashvardhan Sinha, Information Commissioner
Smt. Vanaja N Sarna, Information Commissioner
Shri Neeraj Kumar Gupta, Information Commissioner
Shri Suresh Chandra, Information Commissioner
Dr. Amita Pandove, Information Commissioner
Secretary to the Commission, assisted by other officers

A meeting of Commission was held on 07.04.2020 at 1100 AM through video conferencing to resolve urgent issues arising due to the lockdown. Civil Society Organization Representatives were also invited to provide suggestions.

The following matters were discussed:

1. Issue of notices and listing of cases for disposal of RTI second appeals:

Maximum possible efforts will be made with the help of technology for early conduct of hearings under the prevailing circumstances arising due to lockdown. Notices may be issued by e posts, if required.

It was reiterated that the Registrar will continue to train all the DRs periodically to provide support and ensure that the scheduled hearings commence through audio / digital mode by 15th April, 2020, if not earlier in larger public interest.

Action: Registrar / DRs

2. Arrangements for cleaning and sanitation in the CIC building:

The Commission was apprised of the steps taken on cleaning and sanitisation of CIC building. Periodicity in accordance with the protocols on sanitisation will be maintained for sanitisation of CIC building.

Action: JS (P&B)

3. Arrangement of passes for the staff for movement, whenever necessary:

Request has been made to the Delhi Police to issue passes to the essential staff of CIC. Till the passes are issued by Delhi Police, authorisation from CIC may be used for commuting from home to office. Suitable vehicle arrangements should also be made for staff necessary to attend office during lockdown period.

Action: JS (P&B)

4. Operation of e - office:

E-office platform has been extended to the home computers of the CIC officers in the hierarchy of the channel of submission of files.

Action: JS (MR)

5. Settlement of pending claims:

The Commission was apprised of status of claims. The claims should be settled expeditiously in view of availability of e-office at home computers of CIC officers.

Action: JS (A)

6. Office Memorandum on tendering of resignation by Sh. Bimal Julka from post of the Information Commissioner:

The Office Memorandum on tendering of resignation by Sh. Bimal Julka from post of the Information Commissioner was placed before the Commission.

Action: JS (A)

7. Interaction with Civil Society Representatives:

Commission held an interaction with CSO representatives to apprise them of the preparedness of the Commission in resuming hearings after the lockdown period. Specific suggestions were sought in this regard. The CSOs emphasised the need for proactive disclosures under section 4 of the RTI Act by various Government Departments especially concerning issues relating to health, sanitation & water supply, public distribution system, pay and pensions, relief package by the Finance Ministry and clarity in its implementation guidelines for resuming construction activities & measures to deal with the unorganized sector/life and liberty issues/measures to attain higher levels of transparency in these challenging times. It was suggested that the new technological tools be utilised appropriately for the ease and convenience of all concerned. Extensive publicity may be carried out through various media platforms for the benefit of public at large by the concerned Departments. Details of the interaction are annexed.

8. Any other matter:

- (i) Steps may be initiated for waiver of lockdown period from the stipulated timelines for CPIO, FAA and second appeal under the RTI Act.
- (ii) Commission may issue advisory to all Ministries / Departments for proactive *suo motu* disclosures under section 4 of the RTI Act during the lockdown period to remove all ambiguities in the access to essential services (food, shelter, water, medical, sanitation, etc.) to the citizens.
- (iii) Next meeting of the Commission may be held at 11 AM on 10.04.2020.

Action: JS (Law)



(Rahul Rastogi)
Joint Secretary (Admn.)
07.04.2020

To

1. PPS to Chief Information Commissioner (BJ)
2. PPS to Information Commissioner (DP)
3. PPS to Information Commissioner (YS)
4. PPS to Information Commissioner (VN)
5. PPS to Information Commissioner (NG)
6. PPS to Information Commissioner (SC)
7. PPS to Information Commissioner (AP)
8. PPS to Secretary/PS to Additional Secretary

Copy also to:

1. JS (P&B)/ JS (MR) / JS (Law)/Registrar (Consultant)
2. Shri Sushil Kumar, DS (Admn)
3. Shri S.K. Rabbani, DS (Gen. Admn)
4. Shri K.A. Talwar, DS (CR-I)
5. Shri U.C. Joshi, DS (Law)
6. Shri R.S. Murthy, Consultant
7. Shri S.C. Sharma, Consultant
8. Shri R.P. Grover, Consultant
9. Shri Baljit Singh Kasana, Consultant
10. Shri H.P. Sen, Consultant
11. Shri K.L. Das, Consultant
12. Shri A.K. Assija, Consultant



(Rahul Rastogi)
Joint Secretary (Admn.)
07.04.2020

Annexure

Record of discussions with Civil Society Organizations during the video conference meeting with the CIC on 07.04.2020 at 1100 hrs.

Participants from the Civil Society Organizations

- 1 Ms Anjali Bhardwaj
- 2 Mr Venkatesh Nayak
- 3 Mr Subhash Chandra Agrawal
- 4 Commodore Lokesh Batra (Retd.)

Summary of the suggestions/observations of Representatives of Civil Society Organizations are as follows:

Ms Anjali Bhardwaj

1. She suggested that during this time of crisis, information is the need of the hour. *Suo moto* disclosure of information (under Section 4 of RTI Act 2005) especially with respect to the essential services like food, water, health sanitation though has been available on website, may be given a wider publicity through display on walls, radio etc. so as to reach the common man.
2. Prioritization of hearing of appeals and providing of information by the Public Authorities be taken up, especially of essential services.

Mr Venkatesh Nayak

1. He congratulated CIC for having invited him to discuss and offer suggestions to strengthen the Commission's efforts on RTI implementation during the lockdown period.
2. Proactive disclosure would be the most important tool to be adopted by the Ministries.
3. By giving an example of the Finance Ministry's Jan Dhan Yojana scheme which is available on the website, he suggested that the Ministries should share the information in the local language and through means that the information can reach the local people, i.e. radio, TV, print media, advertisement, etc. CIC may consider issuing advisory to various Ministries.
4. ICMR was providing information on website on issues related to COVID19. However, they have now been asked to submit information to public only through Health Ministry. There is a possibility of spread of fake news for which Government has issued advisory. Some countries have suspended providing information, so CIC should try and see that this does not happen in India, since the transparency element is important during these times to keep up the people's confidence.

Mr Subhash Chandra Agrawal

1. He suggested that provisions under section 4 of RTI need to be largely followed to help unorganized sector to get information of the benefits being provided by Government to them.
2. All have to comply with the various directions issued during lockdown, but this period can be used to work in a disciplined way to try and dispose of the cases within one year since justice delayed amounts to justice denied.
3. He felt that disposing of cases through access of link may not be possible in all cases since the petitioners do not upload all information, and the CPIO do not have access to the files linked to the information being given during this period of lockdown.

Commodore Lokesh Batra (Retd.)

1. All relevant information related to health facilities, hospitals, etc. is available on the ICMR website.
2. Cases pertaining to life and liberty should be disposed of on priority.
3. E-post can be made use of, since the normal delivery of dak is not taking place, due to unavailability of transport connectivity during the lockdown.
4. To enable hearings, the written submissions should be made available to the petitioners. Commission should hold meetings wherever feasible by audio/video with the consent of the parties. CPIOs need their supporting staff to assist in/ providing information. Every document should be available to all.
5. All notices may be sent either by mail or SMSs. The applicants should be asked to make their e-mails and mobile numbers available for this purpose.