

RTI applicants needn't provide address: Centre

NEW DELHI: Government departments should not insist on seeking address of an RTI applicant if a post box number is being provided to them for communication, the Centre has said.

The Ministry of Personnel has written to all Central government ministries or departments which act as public authorities mandated with providing information on RTI applications made to them, citing a judgement by Calcutta High Court in this regard.

"When the legislature thought it fit, the applicant need not disclose any personal detail, the authority should not insist upon his detailed whereabouts particularly when post box number is provided for establishing contact between him and the authority.

"In case the authority would find any difficulty with the post box number, they may insist upon personal details.

However, in such case, it would be the solemn duty of the authority to hide such information and particularly from their website so that people at large would not know of the details," the High Court judgement said.

The order had come following a writ petition by Avishek Goenka who sought court's direction that authority should not insist upon the detailed address of the applicant as and when any application is made under the Right to Information Act.

The interested parties could cause a threat to the activist and there have been past incidents of unnatural deaths of activists in the field, presumably by persons having vested interest to conceal the information that is asked for by the activist, the petitioner had said.

Disposing of the petition on November 20, last year, the court had directed Secretary, Ministry of Personnel, to circulate a copy of its order to all concerned so that the authority can take appropriate measures to hide information with regard to personal details of the activists to avoid any harassment by the persons having vested interest.

The Personnel Ministry, nodal department for implementation of the RTI Act, had on Wednesday sent a copy of the court's order to all ministries and chief secretaries of state governments for "appropriate action".

"It is a step in the right direction towards protecting the lives of whistleblowers," said Commodore Lokesh K. Batra (Retd), who had in October 2013 brought to the notice of the ministry that public information officers were sharing personal data of RTI applicants with private bodies, thus endangering the lives of information seekers. — PTI

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