

Submitting information under RTI

Adhering to fixed timeline under the provisions of the RTI Act is the crux of the rationale and the purpose of the transparency law and if any deviation, mostly wilful, takes place, that is not only defeating the very purpose and the objective of an applicant seeking such information but sending messages that there was abject deficiency of transparency and systematic functioning in the concerned Government department. After all, it is not some favour being done to the applicant by furnishing the requisite information nor any of his or her grievances or reason of any aggrieving as such getting addressed and resolved but the information, ipso-facto, essentially is required to be furnished as any Indian citizen stands duly empowered in this direction. However, there have been several instances in the past where such submission has taken an inordinate delay or having been not submitted at all or even an inability expressed perhaps as an alibi in having any clue to such information. That has resulted in serious views taken by the CIC even to the levels of serving show cause notices on such authorities who were required to dispense with such information. That should have resulted in proper message reaching to all departments and offices in Jammu and Kashmir to be more particular and conscious about responding to the application by a desirous person. However, recently, non adherence of the guidelines and allowing the time limit exceed substantially has resulted in serving show cause notices on more than one authority in the UT like an Assistant Commissioner (General), a Tehsildar and a Medical Superintendent. Such notices have provisions about initiating penal action against them all.

It is, however, not only these officers having to face the music for violating provisions of the RTI Act but it results in causing embarrassment to the UT Government itself as repeated violations of an Act of Parliament by the authorities being directly dealt with by the CIC. It is to be noted that in the instant case, the RTI applications having been filed in 2018 and 2019 which remain pending and have therefore been viewed seriously. For three to four years after filing of the application, the three applicants having not received the desired information cannot be justified in any case whatsoever. The information is to be submitted within the statutory period of 30 days from the date of the receipt of the application being the elementary ingredient of the RTI Act must, by now, be fairly known to all the employees in the UT departments as also the increasing consciousness among the general public about the element of being empowered to seek whatever information needed under the said Act in time bound manner. Therefore, it entails that enough care needs to be taken in not disregarding the time-frame factor so that any apprehensions about the most important two factors of transparency and accountability in the working of the Government departments and as such the Government do not take place. That is mandatory for democracy to triumph and work in the real sense for the general public. Public Information Officer (PIO) of a public authority is the bridge between the information seeker and his right of getting the desired information.

In the cases under reference, not only inordinate delay in furnishing information was intentionally caused but even instructions of the State Information Commission were not complied with thus the entire matter falling under the purview of the section 20 of the RTI Act which has the provision of imposing penalties. As such all the three officers in the UT Administration have been asked to submit explanation about the reasons as to why penal action should not be taken against them. Caution is needed to be taken that just to get an exemption from penal action, an engineered or created information cannot be submitted but only that one which is already existing and is held by the public authority which can be in the form of a document, a statement, an opinion, an order or whatever. It is, therefore, important that the General Administrative Department makes it amply clear to all the departments and offices about the sensibilities and importance attached with the RTI Act and how information is without fail to be submitted within the timeframe and in case some penal action was initiated by the CIC for violation of guidelines, the same could be treated as gross misconduct under service Rules unless there were unavoidable reasons and justified too but made known before the statutory period of 30 days.

Status of PM's Saffron Mission

Prime Minister's "Saffron Mission" which was launched in the concerned states in the year 2014 and thus in Jammu and Kashmir as a major saffron producing (state) of the country has, as of now, its status wrapped in utter suspense. In other words, to promote its cultivation, quality maintenance, standardisation, marketing, providing the requisite infrastructural support and other associated factors budgetary allocations are also made. Where does the progress of the scheme stand and how the said Mission has transformed in pushing up the production and resultant increase in money incomes of the agriculturists engaged in its cultivation must be known supported by the year wise data. It is, however, intriguing that the UT Government through its Directorate of Agriculture should be found reluctant in furnishing such information and that too when sought under the statutory provisions of the RTI Act by an applicant citizen. Further, the extent of recklessness shown in it can be gauged by the fact that such an application was filed way back in 2017.

The applicant, therefore, had to seek the intervention of the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) in the matter where after analysing all facts and material provided with reference to seeking the information observed that not only was the information not passed during the mandatory fixed period but while hearing, none appeared before the CIC on behalf of the respondent (Deptt. of Agriculture) to provide the updated information before it which projected how total disregard was shown to the entire issue under the RTI provisions. The things have reached to such a pass that section 20 of the RTI Act is sought to be invoked against the erring authority in the matter which is initiating of penal action. It is, however, unfortunate that such an attitude of poor response should be manifest in the working of the UT Administration, that also in respect of a scheme like the one under reference, and an immunity having been developed in this respect to treat the Transparency Law so casually. That again shows how repeated and prolonged violations are otherwise not viewed seriously by the higher authorities in the UT Government. There are other similar instances of treating furnishing of information under the said Act quite casually and the matter reaching the extent of the extreme - that of facing penal action is projecting the functioning of the Government departments in a limitless recklessness which needs to be checked forthwith.

Unifying Indian languages through a common script!

Prof. Rasal Singh

Time and again, Hindi has been projected as a symbol of imposition and a threat to the pluralistic identities of India. Recently, an online spat between two Indian actors from competing film industries has reignited the debate on Hindi as India's national language. At the success event of KGF: Chapter 2, the Kannada actor Kichcha Sudeep referred to the recent pan-India success of films from the southern region and said Hindi was no longer "a national language". In response to his comments, veteran Hindi film actor Ajay Devgn through his Twitter handle asserted that Hindi is our national language and will remain so. He further asked his south India film colleague why regional films are dubbed in Hindi if it doesn't have pan india presence. This twitter spat has off late snowballed into a major controversy with fellow actors, and politicians from south India jumping into the band wagon. They accused the Central Government of indulging in language politics. This is not the first time that a celebrity from the South has spoken about language war, especially Hindi imposition. While the misunderstandings between the duo (actors) got sorted but the banter has made one question reverberate in the entire country once again- Isn't Hindi our national language? Earlier presiding over the 37th meeting of the Official Language Committee of Parliament, Union Home Minister Amit Shah also called for the adoption of Hindi as an alternative to English language. He further pointed out that nine tribal communities of the Northeast have adopted Devanagari as script of their dialects. Apart from this, all the eight states of the Northeast have agreed to make Hindi compulsory in schools up to Class X. The minister also said that the development and expansion of Hindi should not be at the cost of other Indian languages, but as an alternative to English. Meanwhile, Amit Shah's pitch for the Hindi language provoked trenchant criticism from a wide spectrum of opposition leaders and artists. These include Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, Kerala Chief Minister P Vijayan, AR Rahman, and Prakash Raj, to name a few. Opposition to Hindi is in the DNA of these people and their politics. It is a carefully cultivated political weapon stemming from hollow language chauvinism. It is unfortunate that the victims of colonial hangover are all for English, a foreign language; on the other hand, Hindi, an Indian language is considered as a symbol of imposition and a threat to pluralistic identity of India. The statements of AR Rahman and Prakash Raj are glaring examples of hypocrisy and demonstrates their lost connection with the soul of India.

NEP 2020's strong focus on the mother tongue ensures that a child's energies are spent on learning critical concepts rather than learning a new language. It also protects hitherto discriminated languages by inculcating them in the school curriculum. However, its implementation on ground seems to be a herculean task in the present socio-cultural scenario; wherein the Indian languages are suppressed, and vulnerable to the colonial language, English, which is slowly engulfing all the Indian languages except Hindi. The prominence of the 21 other Indian languages included in the

Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution is gradually diminishing in the intellectual world, while the dominance of the English language is gradually expanding. Apart from its prominence in socio-cultural life, governance-administration, trade-market, English has also made significant inroads as a medium of education. This undoubtedly poses the biggest existential threat for all Indian languages. But, with the efforts of the current Central dispensation, the situation has been somewhat circumvented by promoting, and giving adequate support, respect, and acceptance to Hindi and other Indian languages like Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Assamese, Dogri, Kashmiri and Punjabi; yet a lot of work needs to be done in this direction. Teaching in mother tongue is imper-



ative as it not only results in maximum development of intellectual abilities of the learner, but at the same time leads to propagation of Indian languages. This is the foundation of the ambitious project to make India a knowledge super power. Indian languages are a sine qua non for educational and cultural development since they strengthen equity in education. Thus, interaction, dialogue, and organisation of Indian languages is the tip of the iceberg to understand and inculcate pride in India's rich culture and knowledge traditions.

In the present context, there is a dire need for the Indian languages to come closer to each other to deal with English supremacism. Efforts should be made to strive towards eradicating their mutual unfamiliarity and separation. Devanagari script can play a decisive role in the development, propagation, and interaction of Indian languages. For this, the best literature of all Indian languages must be transliterated into Devanagari script so that it can be accessible to the vast majority and wider Hindi society.

Many great men like Raja Rammohun Roy, Lokmanya Tilak, Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Krishnaswamy Iyengar, Muhammad Karim Chagla and Bineshwar Brahm have advocated the adoption of Devanagari script for all Indian languages as the national or common script. A common script would enable the spoken language to flourish, while easing the burden on educational and administrative systems. Devanagari script is the best suited for

this purpose as it fulfils the two most important criteria - unlike the Latin script Devanagari is phonetically sound, and among the current Indian scripts it's the most widely used. Though the need for a common script has been iterated by many, nobody intended to tread on the political landmine of regional politics for years. It's time to rise above narrow politics and regionalist identities and move forward towards realization of this dream. The 'Navdevata of Devanagari' Bineshwar Brahm had even sacrificed his life for this cause.

Having a single script for different Indian languages is of far-reaching significance as it will remove the unfamiliarity, mistrust, and distance between them. Thus, bringing them closer to each other. The process can be initiated with the adop-



tion of the Devanagari script as the common script for Indian languages that originated from Sanskrit and for script-less languages and dialects. Today there are many such languages and dialects of Jammu and Kashmir, North-East, Andaman-Nicobar, and Goa etc., which are facing existential crisis due to lack of script. However, these gradually disappearing/endangered languages have a very rich tradition of oral literature, which not only needs to be protected rather it also needs to be taken to the wider society hitherto unknown. Similar is the case with the literature of Nayanar-Alvar saints, Gitagovindam of Jayadeva, Guruvani of Nanakdev, verses of Shankardev, Bakh of Lalleshwari, Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas, and Gitanjali of Gurudev. These should be read by every literate Indian. Standardising the script not only provides the best balance of diversity and functional literacy, it further increases social closeness and cultural affinity.

Certain Indian languages have their own separate scripts like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam etc.; excessive linguistic diversity is not always the best for knowledge creation and propagation. The adoption of Devanagari script as their co-script would not only enable the spoken language to flourish at the same time it resolves the age-old menace of socio-cultural narrow-mindedness existing in the society. Linguistic diversity of India has been the centre of discussion and contemplation for a long time. India is a multilingual, multiscrypt country. But despite this plurality, the

undercurrent of Indianness is its biggest feature. Like the national language Hindi, the Devanagari script can play a big role in further strengthening this undercurrent of Indianness. Leaving all opposition and petty politics behind, today Hindi has organically become the contact language of the country. It is a language which can emotionally unite Indians and result in a tangible true national integration. Hindi needs to be given its due place and recognition in India. We must love, own, promote and communicate in Hindi in the truest spirits of the pride of our national language. Efforts should be made to make Devanagari script the common thread that links all of India. The Devanagari script may also be partially modified/enhanced to accommodate the specific sounds of a particular language thereby establishing its natural proximity and affinity with more and more Indian languages.

The complex process of language learning can be made very simple and accessible by adopting a common script for all Indian languages. By doing this, new languages can be learned easily. The origin, cultural context and vocabulary of Indian languages from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kutch to Kamrup are very similar. This holds the key to making Indians multilingual. An educated Indian will be able to read and write several languages easily and will be able to get acquainted with the rich literature, and cultural traditions embedded in them. It is also noteworthy that the Indian languages are not mutually competitive, but complementary. This mutuality and complementarity will further increase with the adoption of the Devanagari script.

The script of most languages of the Arab world is Arabic and the script of many languages of Europe-America is Roman. Therefore, not only do they have better socio-cultural dialogue, but trade and tourism are also flourishing. Today the market and language have an interdependent relationship. The market expands through language and language flourishes through the market. That's why Hindi is developing and expanding so much. Other Indian languages would not only be culturally enriched by being associated with their elder sister Hindi through Devanagari script; rather they will also be able to find their feet in the employment, business, and tourism sectors. Being the language of a large market increases the recognition and demand of the language internationally, whereby it can decisively intervene in foreign policymaking, and influence international diplomacy. Indian languages can form a united front based on shared cultural background, common vocabularies, and common script to combat English linguistic hegemony. The original script of the Dogri language was Takri and that of Kashmiri was Sharda. Over a period Dogri adopted Devanagari and Kashmiri adopted Nastalik as their script respectively. Today Dogri is read and understood by the Hindi society while the Kashmiri language is gradually shrinking. Further, the Kashmiri language can also revive itself by adopting the Devanagari script and connecting with Hindi and other Indian languages.

(The author is Dean, Students' Welfare, Central University of Jammu.)

Looking through gifted eyes

Dr. Shashi Sharma, Dr Satish K Gupta

"I summon the people of my nation, to give a thought to eye donation

Think when you leave your journey last, your possessions, your breath deserting you fast.

So before you cross the seven skies, pledge that you will donate your eyes."

These are the words of Mr Harbaksh Singh, a blind who knows what vision is! Like Harbaksh Singh there are 68 lakh people who are waiting for their turn to get eyes. Out of this, 10 lakh people are blind by both eyes. The cornea is the front transparent window of eyeball, just like a watch glass. The eyes cannot see, if this cornea is opaque even though rest of the eyeball inside is normal. The window of the eye is shut and it cannot see. Corneal injuries, infections, corneal dystrophy and degeneration and post-surgical bullous keratopathy are the main causes of corneal blindness. The vision or sight of such person can be restored by replacing diseased cornea by a healthy one. The National Blindness and Visual Impairment Survey 2019, reported that the corneal blindness was the leading cause of blindness in persons aged less than 50 years of age, accounting for 37.5% of total cases and was the second leading cause of blindness among the persons above 50 years of age.

Where from to get healthy cornea? This is obtained from dead person within six hours after death and is grafted to a blind person to restore

his/her vision. There is no dearth of infrastructure or manpower in the country, but only problem is procurement of the eyes. At present there are, 435 functional Eye Banks (EBs) and Eye Donation Centers (EDCs) in the country involved in collection and distribution of donated eyes as per the National Programme for Control of Blindness (NPCB). Roughly, about 1 crore deaths occur in

There are numerous reasons as to why people do not donate their eyes. Lack of awareness among the general public, absence of motivation, insufficient facilities in hospitals and institutes, social and religious myths are a major barriers towards eye donation. There are certain facts regarding eye donation. Anyone irrespective of his/her gender, age, blood group or religion can donate his/her eyes. People who use lenses or spectacles, or those who have been operated upon can still donate their eyes. All that is needed to have clear cornea. People suffering from diabetes, hypertension or asthma can also donate their eyes. People suffering from AIDS, Hepatitis B/C, Sepsis, Rabies, certain malignancies of head and neck, leukemia, meningitis and encephalitis cannot donate their eyes.

It is a matter of great pride for the people of Jammu region that Government Medical College, Jammu, now has its own Eye Bank, which is now

registered with the Directorate General of Health Sciences, MOHFW, New Delhi as Eye bank, Corneal Donation and Retrieval Centre, by the efforts of Hospital administration, SOTTO J&K, Central and State Government. All the facilities for corneal retrieval and donation are now available in Government Medical College, Jammu.

Only problem lies in procurement of the eyes. Since eyes need to be removed within 6 hours after the death of the person for their further use, so Eye Bank, Government Medical College, Jammu (Phone number : 0191-2584294) must be informed immediately after the death. Eye Bank will itself rush a team of doctors to the donor's home. Eye donation is not a monetary exercise, and it is a complete act of charity. Eye removal takes only 10-15 minutes and leaves no scar or disfigurement of face. In most cases, the donation of eyes from one person cures blindness in two people. The identities of both the donor and recipient remain confidential and are not disclosed. Let all of us pledge to donate our eyes and also motivate our family, friends and relatives to do the same, so that when we close our eyes in final rest, two blinds will see this beautiful world once again, through each of us. Pledge forms for eye donation can be obtained either online or from Eye Bank, Government Medical College, Jammu. Eyes are the only gift which you can give after death.

(The authors are GMC-J Principal & HOD Ophthalmology GMC-J)

My experiences with the politicians

Narinder Singh

Right from my student days in college and Jammu University, I used to interact with the politicians on many occasions as a students Leader. During 1960s some anti national elements in Jammu city, raised slogans of Pakistan Zindabad and in response to that we the students of MAM and Science Colleges Jammu took out a procession raising slogans against the anti national elements in Jammu city and the then DIG Police Jammu Vishwa Mitter lathicharged and arrested some students leaders including myself which were later on released on the persuasion of the then IGPL D Thakkar. I along with Harbans Singh, Manhor Singh and Onkar Seth and many others met the then Chief Minister GM Sadiq and apprised him about the high handedness of the then DIG who lathicharged pro Indian students and urged upon him to take action against him but he didn't assure about any action, then I and other leaders met the then Cabinet Minister D P Dhar who assured us that after his coming back from Srinagar he would take action and we opened the colleges in view of the ensuing examination. His assurances and that day never came as he used to be known as Terkalogist (the person who always believes in dilly delaying policy). We were preparing for examinations and opened the colleges. Again during 1966, three students were killed in an agitation demanding opening of Agriculture College at R S Pura. During that period an Action committee was formed and Harbans Singh was nominated as its Chairman and myself as PRO of the said

Committee. During seventies Hashim Qureshi from Srinagar high jacked Indian plane to Pakistan in winter and I along with Sohan Lal Raina ret. Additional Deputy Commissioner, Daljit Singh Tiger Tehsildar and PL Manchanda Law student observed hunger strike at Shaheehi Chowk Jammu raising slogan "Pakistan Hai Hai, return our plane," and on the assurances of the then Vice Chancellor Jammu Dr J N Bhan that matter would be taken up by the Government of India with the Pakistan we ended the hunger strike.

In 1972, after joining the State Information Department as a gazetted officer I used to remain in touch with the chief ministers/ministers and politicians of the J&K state and found them always interested in their personal publicity. I remember during 1970's a minister visited my office at Old Secretariat and told that he visited Social Welfare's Department Office. On this my Asstt Information Officer enquired whether he has taken any action against any of the employees. He replied that it was good that everything was going on well and he started drafting the press release but after some time the same minister came and told that he has placed one chowkidar under suspension to make the news catchy, then I told the officer to mention one official instead of a chowkidar. Such was the attitude of the politicians.

During those days everyone of them was concerned about their personal publicity, generally they used to listen 7-45 pm radio Kashmir Urdu bulletin that used to be the main attraction. If their activities were not covered they used to feel

disturbed. I remember once a minister visited some villages on foot during 1970s and the visit was not covered by Radio Kashmir in its 7-45 pm news bulletin, he was very much upset and remarked "what was fun of walking on foot" and used to consider Information Department as ineffective, therefore, officers of the department used to send news to the print/visual media in advance.

Once a minister visited far flung areas of a district and I sent to media news in advance. That minister reached back to Jammu, I was accompanied him. On the way he listened the news, he was very happy but at the same time he was disturbed, if any mishap has occurred on the way nobody would come to his residence to enquire about his health that was the fate of officers of the Information Department. The ministers whose news were covered used to compliment me by saying that you were "just in news". It has rightly been said that "Fortune favours few and I among those as whatever I wanted in my life, I got that"

During our student days we were three friends Daljit Singh Tiger, Harbans Singh and me. I was fan of Dev Anand, Daljit Singh of Dalip Kumar and Harbans Singh and myself of Raj Kapoor. During sixty's Daljit and Harbans Singh left for Bombay to meet their heroes, they persuaded me but I did not agree, they could not reach because of shortage of money. As fortune favours few and I am among those. In 1983 I was posted as Public Relations Officer Bombay and remained there for seven years in two terms and met Dev Sahib

and his two brothers Chetan Anand and Vijay Anand and many others such as Dharmendra, Poonam Dhillon, Dimple Kapadia and prominent filmmaker such as B R Chopra and Ramanand Sagar. So to say I became so popular among the film industry that I was nominated as Delegate to the feature films festival in 1984 and Documentary films festival in 1992.

Again I was transferred back to J&K and posted as Special Assistant to Director General of Police and handled Hazrat Bal and Charar-e-Shrief crisis.

Once I interviewed a militant who was well qualified and obtained PHD Degree in Political Science and enquired that being a highly qualified why he opted to join militancy, his reply was "that he was told that Islam in Kashmir was in danger and as per Islam wherever Islam is in danger we have to fight war which is called a jihad. When I questioned did you find Islam is in danger, he said no it's only Pakistan agency ISI who misguided rather Muslims in Kashmir are more happy and prosperous than in Pak occupied Kashmir.

There is a prolonged Governor Rule in J&K which is against the norms of Democracy, he is like a monarch, common man can't approach him easily. Therefore, Assembly's elections must be held at the earliest to restore democratic set up into the state of J&K. Whatsoever demerits maybe but elected members are always voice of the people who can solve day today problems of the people being their representatives.

(The author is former Director Information)