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Shortage of 10 court fee stamps affects RTI pleas

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PUNE: The shortage of court fee stamps, particularly of Rs 10 denomination, has put citizens and RTI activists in a spot. They are finding it difficult to submit RTI applications to the state government departments which do not accept Indian Postal Orders (IPOs) in place of the court fee stamps.

The state government in 2009 had asked the departments to accept IPOs, but many insist on the court fee stamps.

Sanjay Kolte, joint Inspector General of Registrations, and Superintendent of Stamps said, since March 14, there has been a shortage of court fee stamps of Rs 10 denomination because there is less supply from the Indian Security Press from Nashik and Hyderabad.

"There is shortage of security papers at the printing press. We are constantly following up the issue. The government departments should follow the procedure prescribed under RTI," he added.

An RTI applicant, on condition of anonymity, said, "I had submitted an application under RTI, along with an IPO of Rs 10, to the Pimpri-Chinchwad New Township Development Authority in the second week of May. A week later, I received a call from the department that the IPO cannot be accepted as per state government rules. When I argued that IPOs should be accepted, the person replied that there is no mention in the RTI rules in the state about acceptance of IPOs."

RTI activists said most state departments are probably unaware that in September 2009, the state government had issued a government resolution (GR) stating that as per central government directives, IPOs, demand drafts, bank cheques issued in the name of accounts officers of public authorities can be accepted.

"All departments should ensure that these directives (about accepting IPOs, demand drafts, and bank cheques), should be brought to the notice of the public information officers and appellant officers. The state government will subsequently make a provision for accepting IPOs," the GR issued on September 14, 2009 stated.

Vijay Kumbhar, RTI activist, said most government departments are not accepting IPOs despite the GR being issued five years ago. The departments insist on court fee stamps, he said.

Qaneez Sukhrani, convenor of the Vimanagar Citizens' Forum and an RTI activist, said, "The shortage of court fee stamp of Rs 10 denomination is an obstacle for RTI applicants. Every department accepts IPOs. In Maharashtra, despite the state GR, the directives are not being followed. The government should issue fresh directives for accepting IPOs," she said.

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