

CIC directs IMD to make district wise rainfall data public**IMD Director General directed to review the information policy**

The Central Information Commission has directed the Director General of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) to review IMD policy and make a written submission within one month "about the arrangements that will be made for free access and dissemination of" district wise rainfall data for at least the last five years. The IMD was refusing to make this basic information public on the plea that they earn revenue by selling a lot of such information.

The CIC order dated January 16, 2009 (the order is available on SANDRP website at: www.sandrp.in/news), which became available to SANDRP today, was following a hearing at the CIC on January 6, 2009, where Himanshu Thakkar from SANDRP represented the case on behalf of Bipin Chandra. Shri A K Bhatnagar (ADGM & Appellate Authority, Ph: 24697473, 24618241) and Shri T A Khan (DDGM & CPIO, Ph: 24615371)) represented the case on behalf of IMD.

Facts of the case On March 27, 2008, Bipin Chandra from SANDRP had filed an application before the IMD for the monthly rainfall data for the last five years for some six districts of Madhya Pradesh and some other related information. Shri TA Khan, CPIO of IMD said in his reply that "supply of Meteorological Data does not fall in the ambit of RTI Act, 2005". We were shocked to get this reply, but an appeal to the Appellate Authority at IMD proved futile. So after due process an appeal was filed before the CIC against this decision of the IMD on July 9, 2008.

At the hearing on January 6, 2009, before the Information Commissioner Shri A N Tiwari, Thakkar argued that the IMD must make the annual and monthly rainfall data for all the districts of India public on its own regularly and people should not be asked to file applications and pay charges for such primary data. This data is of crucial importance to a lot of different people. IMD has not been making this primary data public at any stage, whereas several state governments have been making even daily, taluka wise data public for several years on their website. The India Meteorological Department has been created such huge public expenses is refusing to make this primary data public and is asking people to file application and after IMD decides what charges to pay for each such applications individually, the applicants has to pay the charges. This is not an acceptable situation.

CIC agrees to the merit of the case In its directions dated January 16, 2009, the CIC said, "Commission noted that there was merit in the latter submission of the appellant... There is undoubtedly a public interest implication about dissemination of this data – brining it out into the public domain – as a routine process. One would have accepted the public authority to exhibit this data on its website and widely publicise its availability so that those wishing to access it could reach out to it. Unfortunately, this has not been done and when this matter is raised, it is complicated by several complex technological/ tactical responses."

SANDRP is grateful that IMD agreed at the hearing to provide the information requested in the first place to be made available free of charge *within three weeks*, without prejudice to the respondent's rights. SANDRP is happy that CIC has made this direction and asked IMD's Director General to review its information policy and file a submission within a month in this regard. Let us hope that IMD will use this opportunity to make public *suo moto*, all minimally required information in public interest.

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