CIC Reserves Order on Disclosing Minister's I-T Returns

by Yatish Yadav

New Delhi: The Central Information Commission (CIC) on Thursday reserved its judgment on an appeal filed by the Association for Democratic Returns (ADR) on making public the I-T returns of MPs. After a hearing, the CIC stated that it will go through the arguments before deciding the next step.

The hearing was on disclosing the I-T returns of MoS (Independent) Corporate affairs Sachin Pilot, Union Minister for Social Justice & Empowerment Selja Kumari and Union Minister for Civil Aviation Ajit Singh under RTI application filed by the ADR in February, 2010 to various I-T authorities regarding I-T returns of 22 MPs and 20 MLAs. The RTI was later forwarded to the appellate authorities concerned, all of whom had held the opinion that the information lacks public interest under relevant sections of the RTI Act under which personal information cannot be divulged unless larger public interest was proved.

The ADR in its statement said that notices from the CPIO were sent to Selja and Ajit regarding the disclosure of their I-T returns, under Section 11 of the RTI Act. No such notice was sent to Sachin regarding disclosure of his I-T returns.

"The third parties stated that the information sought under the said RTI related to personal information, disclosure of which had no relationship to any public activity or interest and would cause unwarranted invasion of privacy," the ADR statement said I-T officials of the circle concerned attended the hearing and said the ADR had not proved the larger public interest.

The ADR national coordinator Anil Bairwal and former chief commissioner Asbok Aneja argued before the CIC saying that appeal has larger public interest. It also referred to the Election Commission order dated February 25, 2011 which has added a new section in the affidavit for contesting candidates which makes it mandatory for them to disclose various information about the last I-T returns filed by them along with their dependent and spouse.

"The ADR in its argument said that the EC order asks MPs and MLAs to disclose the total income that they reported in the last I-T returns and thus the information that the ADR was asking through RTI is already in public domain."