

# Now, settle your RTI case long distance

## Delhi to Bihar: Information body disposes of case via video-conferencing

**Chetan Chauhan**

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THE JUDGE and the defendants were in two separate locations in Delhi; the petitioner was in Begusarai in Bihar, more than 1,100 km away.

The court dismissed the application after hearing all the parties in person and seeing all relevant documents almost in real time.

This unusual case under the Right to Information (RTI) Act — conducted via video-conferencing — was disposed of by Central Information Commissioner (CIC) Wajahat Habibullah on Monday.

This was the first instance of a court (the Central Information Commission, the country's transparency watchdog, is a quasi-judicial body) anywhere in the world hearing a case and delivering a verdict via video-conferencing.

Speaking to *HT*, Habibullah called it the best example of paperless legal proceedings.

"Any documents required by me or by the respondent (the Prime Minister's Office, or PMO) were immediately



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scanned and e-mailed; they were on my computer within seconds. After hearing the case, I issued my oral order from my office," he said.

The judge and the officials of the PMO, against whom the application had been filed, did not

have to move out of their offices. All Gupta had to do was go to the Begusarai district collector's office, a few km from his house.

"I saved a minimum of Rs 2,000 (on travel to Delhi and other expenses)," Gupta told *HT*.

For the record, Gupta had sought to know the status of his application for relief from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund under the RTI Act.

The entire proceedings took place via a video-conferencing network set up by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) that now connects 450 of India's 600 districts. NIC provides central and state governments their IT network backbone.

"No other country in the world has used this facility as we did," Habibullah said. "In a few months, citizens in 450 districts will have access to NIC studios for such hearings."