

Disclose audit reports of cooperative banks: CIC to RBI

The Central Information Commission has directed the Reserve Bank to make public audit reports of co-operative banks, rejecting the arguments of the Bank that such disclosure could "lead to loss of faith in some banks" and adversely affect economic interests of the state.

The Reserve Bank had sought exemption on two grounds -- it could affect economic interests of the state (Section 8(1) (a) of the RTI Act) and information is held in fiduciary capacity (Section 8(1)(e)).

The RBI also relied on a previous decision of the full bench of the Commission which had left it on the banking regulator to decide whether such a disclosure could affect the economic interests of the state.

Hearing the plea of Jayantilal N Mistry of Gujarat who sought the copies of audit reports of co operative banks, Information Commissioner Shailesh Gandhi said even if the information comes under the exempted category cited by the RBI, there was a larger public interest in its disclosure.

"The best check on arbitrariness, mistakes and corruption is transparency, which allows thousands of citizens to act as monitors of public interest. There must be transparency as regards such organizations so that citizens can make an informed choice about them," Gandhi said.

He said the full bench had also concluded that there was a public interest in disclosure and directed the disclosure before November 30.

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