

The Times of India, Ahmedabad

VADODARA

-18/04/06

At VMC, Right to Information implies vague info

The civic body does not even have a single-window system for getting the details

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TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Vadodara: You may think that the government has armed you with a weapon by introducing the Right to Information (RTI) Act last year. But you may find the weapon without an edge if you try using it at Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC). Even if you manage to extract the information after running from pillar to post, chances are that it would be incomplete.

For instance, getting information regarding the development on a road project in Tandajia proved to be a daunting task for M

I Sheikh. "I asked for some information regarding encroachments from the co-ordination department. Initially they refused to accept any money from me. When I insisted, they refused to accept any cash and asked me to attach a non-judicial stamp," said Sheikh, a resident of Tandajia. "However, they did not issue a receipt."

Sheikh had demanded information regarding the work progress on model road near Tandajia, why the work was delayed and a copy of the work order issued for starting the work. "I was told that the electricity poles erected on the side of the roads were to be removed and that VMC had written

to the GEB to remove them. However, they refused to furnish the copy of the correspondence to the Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd. Also, the information given was very vague in nature," Sheikh added.

But VMC officials claim otherwise. "We accept cash and sometimes even cheques. I have even accepted applications from those who did not pay the fee," said one of the information officers. "Actually people don't know about right procedures and how to pay fee," he added.

Another applicant Vipul Patel of Aastha Charitable Trust too went through the same ordeal. Pa-

tel had demanded information regarding water tanks in the city when they are cleaned, who cleans them and the cost of maintenance. "I was made to run from pillar to post just for finding the person responsible for dispensing the information. They did not even have the required format for demanding information," Patel said.

"They initially refused to accept the fee in cash so I attached a non-judicial stamp. Though they provided the details within 15 days, they were very vague. I got clear details after I made another application," Patel added.

"We cannot accept money as our department has only been

asked to provide the information," said city engineer V N Taylor. When asked where to pay the money, Taylor said it can be paid to the concerned department.

"The civic body has till date received 32 applications under RTI Act and all have been disposed except one," said information officer Rahul Bhatt.

Interestingly, the civic body does not even have a single-window system for getting the information. Eight officers have been appointed as information officers for various departments and the onus to track down the right officer lies on the applicant, sources said.