

## **RN Das to be next Chief Information Commissioner**

*By Rajiv Shah/TNN  
ToI, 09.06.2006*

Gandhinagar: A high-level committee headed by chief minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, decided to appoint Rabi Narayan Das, a Gujarat cadre IAS officer of the 1971 batch, as the next chief information commissioner (CIC).

The final appellate authority in the state under the Right to Information Act (RTI), Dr P K Das retires as CIC eight months after he was appointed, on Friday. Rabi Narayan Das is at present working as secretary, food and public distribution, Government of India. Confirmed Opposition leader Arjun Modhvadia, a member of the committee to finalise the name of the new CIC, "Das' name was suggested. He is known to be an objective IAS officer. I decided to support it immediately."

A batchmate of state chief secretary Sudhir Mankad, Das, who will be 60 in December 2006 when he retires from the IAS, will have to take premature retirement from the Central government to join as Gujarat's new CIC, officials said.

Officials said, among pending issues, the new CIC would have to confront a Gujarat government circular dated November 14, 2005, which disallows, under RTI, state officials to part with file notings made in the process of decision-making. The circular also disallows officials to part with information under the RTI on an official against whom an inquiry is pending.

It specifically says, "Only after the chargesheet is issued should the information be officially given under the RTI." The circular also bars information on preliminary explanation sought against any official to be given to a person other than the one against whom the inquiry is on. It says, "Only when the chargesheet is issued and preliminary inquiry is over, that others too can avail of the information." Then, the circular says, the information cannot be parted with in case the accused has filed for a re-appeal, nor can it be parted with when a senior official gives his or her remark on the person whose case is under review.

Insiders said, the CIC has enough powers not to comply by the November 14 circular disallowing file notings or proceedings against a state official to be handed over under the RTI. Outgoing CIC P K Das told TOI, "The commission can apply on these issues when there is a complaint. So far, no such issue of not being allowed a file noting to be seen has come to me." In just one case, ex-IAS official P V Bhatt has made his first appeal to a lower level appellate authority on file notings.