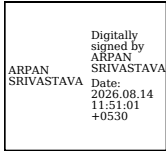




CGHC010267772023



2026:CGHC:34304



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HIGH COURT OF CHHATTISGARH AT BILASPUR

WPC No. 3707 of 2023

1 - Public Information Office Through Chitra Tripathi, W/o Shubhankar Pandey, Aged About 29 Years, Deputy Divisional Manager, Public Information Officer, Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, R/o Sector 2, Devendra Nagar, District Raipur (C.G.).

2 - Divisional Manager Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, Raipur (C.G.)

--- **Petitioner(s)**

versus

1 - Chhattisgarh State Information Commission Through Commissioner, C.G. State Information Commission, New Raipur, Atal Nagar, Raipur (C.G.).

2 - Ashwani Soni R/o B.R. Yadav, Ward No. 1, Shankar Nagar, Bowli, Thana Mahasamund, District Mahasamund (C.G.).

3 - Director C.G. Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Naya Raipur, Atal Nagar, District Raipur (C.G.) (Wrongly Mentioned As First Appellate Authority)

--- **Respondent(s)**

WPC No. 3749 of 2023

1 - Public Information Office Through Chitra Tripathi, W/o Shubhankar Pandey, Aged About 29 Years, Deputy Divisional Manager, Public Information Officer, Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, R/o Sector 2, Devendra Nagar, Distt. Raipur, (C.G.).

2 - Divisional Manager Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, Raipur (C.G.)

---Petitioner(s)

Versus

1 - C.G. State Information Commission Through Commissioner, C.G. State Information Commission, New Raipur, Atal Nagar, Raipur (C.G.).

2 - Ashwani Soni R/o B.R. Yadav, Ward No. 01, Shankar Nagar, Bowli, Thana Mahasamund, Distt. Mahasamund (C.G.).

3 - Director C.G. Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Naya Raipur, Atal Nagar, Distt. Raipur (C.G.) (Wrongly Mentioned As First Appellate Authority).

--- Respondent(s)

WPC No. 3708 of 2023

1 - Public Information Office Through Chitra Tripathi, W/o Shubhankar Pandey, Aged About 29 Years, Deputy Divisional Manager, Public Information Officer, Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, R/o Sector 2, Devendra Nagar, District Raipur (C.G.).

---Petitioner(s)

Versus

1 - Chhattisgarh State Information Commission Through Commissioner, C.G. State Information Commission, New Raipur, Atal Nagar, Raipur (C.G.).

2 - Ashwani Soni R/o B.R. Yadav, Ward No. 1, Shankar Nagar, Bowli, Thana Mahasamund, District Mahasamund (C.G.).

3 - Director C.G. Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Naya Raipur, Atal Nagar, District Raipur (C.G.) (Wrongly Mentioned As First Appellate Authority).

--- **Respondent(s)**

WPC No. 3725 of 2023

1 - Public Information Office Through Chitra Tripathi, W/o Shubhankar Pandey, Aged About 29 Years, Deputy Divisional Manager, Public Information Officer, Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, R/o Sector, 2, Devendra Nagar, District- Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

2 - Divisional Manager Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

---**Petitioner(s)**

Versus

1 - Chhattisgarh State Information Commission Through Commissioner, C.G. State Information Commission, New Raipur, Atal Nagar, Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

2 - Ashwani Soni B.R. Yadav, Ward No. 01, Shankar Nagar, Bowli, Thana Mahasamund, District- Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh.

3 - Director C.G. Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Naya Raipur, Atal Nagar, District- Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

--- **Respondent(s)**

WPC No. 3699 of 2023

1 - Public Information Office Through Chitra Tripathi, W/o Shubhankar Pandey, Aged About 29 Years, Deputy Divisional Manager, Public Information Officer, Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, R/o Sector 2, Devendra Nagar, District : Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

2 - Divisional Manager Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, Raipur (C.G.).

---**Petitioner(s)**

Versus

1 - Chhattisgarh State Information Commission Through Commissioner, C.G. State Information Commissioner, New Raipur, Atal Nagar, Raipur (C.G.).

2 - Ashwani Soni R/o B.R. Yadav, Ward No.1, Shankar Nagar, Bowli, Thana Mahasamund, District : Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh.

3 - Director C.G. Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Naya Raipur, Atal Nagar, District Raipur (C.G.)

--- **Respondent(s)**

WPC No. 3724 of 2023

1 - Public Information Office Through Chitra Tripathi W/o Shubhankar Pandey, Aged About 29 Years, Deputy Divisional Manager, Public Information Officer, Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, R/o Sector-2, Devendra Nagar, District : Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

2 - Divisional Manager Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, Raipur (C.G.).

---**Petitioner(s)**

Versus

1 - C.G. State Information Commission Through Commissioner, C.G. State Information Commission, New Raipur, Atal Nagar, Raipur (C.G.).

2 - Ashwani Soni R/o B.R. Yadav, Ward No.1, Shankar Nagar, Bowli, Thana Mahasamund, District : Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh.

3 - Director C.G. Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Naya Raipur, Atal Nagar, District Raipur (C.G.) (Wrongly Mentioned As First Appellate Authority)

--- Respondents

For Petitioners	:	Mr. Abhishek Khandelwal, Advocate appears on behalf of Mr. Awadh Tripathi, Advocate.
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For Respondent No.1	:	Mr. Shyam Sundar Lal Tekchandani, Advocate
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For Respondent No.3	:	Mr. Suyash Gupta, Advocate appears on behalf of Mr. Kashif Shakeel, Advocate
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Hon'ble Mr. Justice Amitendra Kishore Prasad

Order on Board

05/08/2026

1. By way of this petition, the petitioner has prayed for following reliefs:-

i. That, the Hon'ble Court may kindly allow the petition and quash the order dated 08.05.2023 (Annexure P/1) in the interest of justice and restore the order passed by the Public Information Officer and First Appellate Authority.

ii. Any other relief which deemed fit and proper may also be issued looking to the facts and circumstances of the case and looking to the interest of the petitioner.

2. The facts of the case, in brief, are that the petitioner, a citizen of India, was posted as the Public Information Officer and respondent No.2 submitted an application dated 07.12.2021 seeking information under Section 6(3) of the Right to Information Act, 2005, relating to muster rolls and certificates of coupe cutting pertaining to all beats of Sirpur Range for the period from January, 2021 to November, 2021, which application was addressed to the Divisional Manager, C.G. Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, Barnawapara Project Division, Raipur. The petitioner, vide order dated 07.01.2022, rejected the said application by referring to Section 8 of the Act, observing that the muster rolls contained details of labourers, including their bank account numbers. Thereafter, respondent No.2 preferred a first appeal dated 15.01.2022, though the same was again addressed to the Executive Director instead of the Divisional Manager. The First Appellate Authority, i.e. the Divisional Manager, Rajya Van Vikas Nigam, dismissed the appeal vide order dated 07.03.2022. Subsequently,

respondent No.2 preferred a second appeal before respondent No.1 on 09.03.2022. Upon receipt of notice, the petitioner appeared before respondent No.1 and filed his reply on 28.10.2022. Thereafter, respondent No.1, vide impugned order dated 08.05.2023, directed that the account details and IFSC code of the labourers be concealed from the muster rolls and that the remaining information contained therein be furnished to respondent No.2; the said order was served upon the petitioner on 14.07.2023.

3. Learned counsel for the petitioners, in all these connected matters, submits that the impugned orders are contrary to the provisions of the Right to Information Act, 2005 and the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Central Public Information Officer, Supreme Court of India v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal, reported in 2020 (5) SCC 481. It is contended that the information sought by the respective respondent No.2 in the connected matters pertains to personal information, which is exempt from disclosure under Section 8 of the RTI Act, particularly when such disclosure has no nexus with any public activity or public interest and may result in unwarranted invasion of privacy. It is further

submitted that the respective respondent No.1 could not have directed disclosure of such information merely by masking the account details and IFSC Code, as the information sought in its entirety is protected from disclosure under the statutory exemption.

4. Learned counsel appearing for respondent No.1 submits that the impugned order dated 08.05.2023 has been passed in accordance with law. It is submitted that, insofar as the information falling within the ambit of Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act is concerned, the same has rightly been directed to be screened/withheld as it relates to personal and confidential information. However, with regard to the remaining information sought by respondent No.2, which does not fall within the statutory exemption, respondent No.1 has merely directed the Public Information Officer to furnish such information after concealing the personal and confidential particulars. It is, therefore, submitted that the impugned order does not suffer from any illegality or infirmity warranting interference by this Court in exercise of its writ jurisdiction.

5. Learned counsel appearing for respondent No.2 supports the impugned order and submits that the information sought relates to official records and the work executed by the labourers and, therefore, the same cannot be denied in its entirety by taking recourse to Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act. It is submitted that respondent No.1 has already protected the privacy of the concerned labourers by directing that their account numbers and IFSC Code be concealed and has rightly directed disclosure of the remaining information.
6. Heard learned counsel for the parties and perused the material available on record.
7. From the record, it appears that respondent No.2, being dissatisfied with the response furnished by the Public Information Officer, preferred a first appeal. The First Appellate Authority dismissed the said appeal vide order dated 07.03.2022. Thereafter, respondent No.2 preferred a second appeal before respondent No.1, which came to be decided by the impugned order dated 08.05.2023. Thus, the controversy in the present writ petitions is confined to the legality of the direction issued by respondent No.1 for

disclosure of the information after masking the account details and IFSC Code of the labourers.

8. A perusal of the impugned order dated 08.05.2023 shows that the information sought by respondent No.2 includes particulars relating to the labourers who had worked under the muster rolls, including their names, amounts paid and bank account details. The Public Information Officer had specifically declined to furnish such particulars by taking recourse to the statutory exemption contained in Section 8(1) (j) of the RTI Act.
9. The question which arises for consideration is whether the information relating to the personal and financial particulars of the labourers, who are third parties, can be directed to be furnished merely by concealing their bank account numbers and IFSC Code.
10. In this regard, reliance placed by the petitioner on the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Central Public Information Officer, Supreme Court of India v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal, reported in (2020) 5 SCC 481, is apposite. The Hon'ble Supreme Court, while considering the scope of

the expression “personal information” and the protection afforded to such information under the RTI Act, has held in paragraph 70 of the said judgment that personal records, including names, addresses, physical, mental and psychological status, marks obtained, grades and answer sheets, fall within the ambit of personal information. The Hon’ble Supreme Court has further emphasized that personal information is entitled to protection against unwarranted invasion of privacy and that disclosure can be justified where the statutory requirement of larger public interest is satisfied.

11. The relevant observations of the Hon’ble Supreme Court in Central Public Information Officer, Supreme Court of India v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal, reported in (2020) 5 SCC 481, in paragraph 70 of the aforesaid judgment are reproduced hereinbelow:

“70. Reading of the aforesaid judicial precedents, in our opinion, would indicate that personal records, including name, address, physical, mental and psychological status, marks obtained, grades and answer sheets, are all treated as personal information. Similarly, professional records, including qualification, performance, evaluation reports, ACRs, disciplinary proceedings, etc. are all personal information. Medical records,

treatment, choice of medicine, list of hospitals and doctors visited, findings recorded, including that of the family members, information relating to assets, liabilities, income tax returns, details of investments, lending and borrowing, etc. are personal information. Such personal information is entitled to protection from unwarranted invasion of privacy and conditional access is available when stipulation of larger public interest is satisfied. This list is indicative and not exhaustive."

12. In the present case, the information sought relates to personal and financial particulars of labourers, who are third parties. The particulars concerning the amounts paid to individual labourers, coupled with their personal and banking details, cannot be treated in the same manner as information relating merely to an official activity or expenditure in the abstract. Such particulars have a direct bearing upon the privacy and financial affairs of the concerned individuals.
13. It is also significant that respondent No.2 has not been able to demonstrate before this Court that disclosure of the aforesaid personal information is warranted in any larger public interest. The mere fact that the information forms part of official records does not, by itself, obliterate the statutory

protection available to personal information of third parties under Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act.

14. In the facts of the present case, the information sought concerns individual labourers and includes their personal and financial particulars. The said information relates to third parties and there is no material on record to demonstrate that the respondent-information seeker has established any larger public interest warranting disclosure of such information. Consequently, the statutory exemption under Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act cannot be defeated merely by directing the Public Information Officer to mask certain particulars and disclose the remaining information.

15. Another circumstance which cannot be lost sight of is that respondent No.2 had submitted multiple applications before the Public Information Officer seeking information concerning the same subject matter. Though the filing of multiple applications, by itself, may not be determinative of the right to information, the nature and extent of the information sought are relevant while examining whether the disclosure of personal information of third parties is justified

in the facts of the case. In the present matter, no specific larger public interest has been demonstrated which would outweigh the right to privacy of the concerned labourers.

16. This Court is, therefore, of the considered opinion that respondent No.1, while deciding the second appeal, failed to properly appreciate the protection available to personal information under Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act and the principles laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Central Public Information Officer, Supreme Court of India v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal* (supra). The direction to furnish the remaining particulars after merely masking the account numbers and IFSC Code, in the facts of the present case, cannot be sustained.

17. Accordingly, the impugned order dated 08.05.2023 passed by respondent No.1, insofar as it directs the petitioner/Public Information Officer to furnish the information relating to the personal and financial particulars of the concerned labourers after masking their account numbers and IFSC Code, is hereby quashed.

18. It is, however, made clear that this order shall not preclude the concerned authority from furnishing such information, if any, which is otherwise disclosable under the RTI Act and does not fall within any of the exemptions prescribed under the Act, provided that such disclosure does not result in the revelation of personal information of third parties protected under the statutory provisions.

19. In view of the foregoing discussion, all the connected writ petitions are **allowed** and **disposed of** in the aforesaid terms.

There shall be no order as to costs.

Sd/-
(Amitendra Kishore Prasad)
Judge

Arpan