RTI and Defence ministry

Why in news?

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- Defence ministry at various instances failed to address the requests made under RTI act.
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- Recently the Central Information Commission (CIC) advised the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to ensure correctness and accountability in defence procurements.
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What is the role of RTI in requesting an information?

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- RTI specifies information is required to be published within 120 days of the notification of the Act in respect of the items listed therein.
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- Listed items are like the particulars of the organisation, its function and duties, norms set for discharge of functions, etc.
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- The information can be in any form, including records, documents, opinions, press releases, circulars, contracts, etc. or can be data material held in any electronic form.
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- RTI Act prescribes a maximum of 30 days for disposal of applications.
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- It specifies for one CPIO (Central Public Information officer) for each department, who could forward the RTI applications to the right persons within the department.
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What are the issues in acquiring defence information?

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- There are plenty of RTI requests which were not addressed effectively by the defence ministry.
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- RTI portals of defence ministry does not provide any meaningful information required to be made public every year.
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- CPIOs to turn down the request on the grounds that the information sought by the applicant does not qualify as ‘information’.
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- The information required by the contractors and vendors itself is not delivered successfully by the department.
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- The process is uncommunicative and unresponsive in regard to matters relating to defence acquisitions.
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- There are chronic delays at every stage in the procurement process, which distressing aspect of the entire system.
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What method is used by CPIO for denial of information?

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- Section 8 of the RTI Act,exempts ‘information, disclosure of which would prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, relation with foreign State or lead to incitement of an offence’.
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- The irony here is, the denied information is found splashed all over the media or is available in the Standing Committee Reports.
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How this issue can be addressed?

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- Proactive disclosures and Quick response to the stake-holders - queries should be taken care.

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- Engaging some experienced consultants as transparency Officers to sift through the applications received under the RTI Act will help.
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- Identifying all areas of general interest for making proactive disclosures, related to those areas in a standardised format needs to be done.
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- At regular intervals data need to be released through various means of communications,it will reduce the use of the RTI.
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- Setting up Research institutions to carry out research based on information released by concern ministries will promote participatory governance.
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Source: IDSA

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