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Grievance officers get pat

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Patna, Jan. 28: The move of Bihar Prashashnik Sudhar Mission (BPSM) to equip the key government departments with officials for looking into public grievances exclusively and to alert the departments concerned for their redressal has proved to be effective in reducing the number of pending complaints.

A joint venture of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the government of Bihar, BPSM is responsible for implementing the Bihar governance and administrative reforms programme (BGARP). DFID is financing the BPSM. It would provide up to £18 million over a period of six years (2008-2014). Of it, £5 million would come in the form of technical co-operation. The rest will come as financial aid.

The BPSM roped in the services of public grievance officers in February last year and deputed them in the key government departments where the number of pending cases was very high. To ensure the grievance officers did not face much problem while carrying out their work, retired state government officials were appointed on contract assuming that they would be well-versed with the functioning of the government machinery.

The officers were provided with an executive assistant and a computer with Internet connection so that they could carry out their work efficiently and facilitate quick disposal of complaints received at the government departments.

The official figures collected from the key government departments revealed that out of 53,042 complaints received in these departments till October 2010, over 34,963 complaints had been disposed of. The percentage of redressal stood at 65.91 (**see graphics**).

"We hold a weekly meeting of the public grievance officers to assess the problems coming in the way of public grievance redressal. It helps us in providing the feedback to the government so that necessary corrective measures could be taken by the department concerned for quick disposal of complaints received," a source in the BPSM told **The Telegraph**.

He said the feedback received from the public grievance officers suggest a few field officers of some departments were not showing much interest in disposal of grievances, leading to low percentage of disposal of complaints.

The key government departments apart, BPSM has also deputed public grievance officers in districts and in the offices of all the superintendents of police.

There is a public grievance officer for every six blocks in a district.

"We have not yet received the data to substantiate the effectiveness of the public grievance officers deputed in districts. The feedback provided by the grievance redressal cell in the state headquarters, which monitors the progress made in addressing grievances in districts, suggests that the deputation of public grievance officers has helped the districts in reducing the number of pending complaints," said the BPSM official.

The claims of the BPSM official appear correct as a district magistrate (DM) of a north Bihar district said the presence of public grievance officers was proving effective as they keep the administration updated about the pending complaints and point out the officials responsible for the backlog. "Given our workload, such pin-pointed information help in taking corrective steps," added the DM.