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40 LAKH USED THEIR RIGHT TO INFORMATION IN 2011-12

[Anahita Mukherji](#), TNN Oct 12, 2013, 04.26AM IST

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(The dampener, though, is...)

MUMBAI: On the eighth anniversary of India's landmark transparency legislation today, data mined on the Right to Information (RTI) Act shows it is, indeed, India's sunshine law, with an estimated 40 lakh people using the Act during 2011-12, the latest year for which all-India data is available.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), an independent organisation closely associated with the RTI legislation, data-mined annual reports filed by the Central Information Commission (CIC) and 10 State Information Commissions that had

released their annual reports on their website -- [Andhra Pradesh](#), [Bihar](#), [Chhattisgarh](#), Karnataka, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, [Nagaland](#) and Rajasthan, as well as [Jammu and Kashmir](#), which is governed by its own RTI Act.

While 20.39 lakh applications were submitted to public authorities under the Central government and the 10 states studied, CHRI used this data to calculate the presumed number of applicants in the remaining 18 states, arriving at a conservative estimate of 40 lakh.

While there has been much cynicism over information denied by public authorities under RTI, the data tells a different story. Less than 10% of all RTI queries recorded have faced rejection.

The highest number of rejections was by public bodies under the Central government and those in Maharashtra, both of which received around 6.5 lakh queries each.

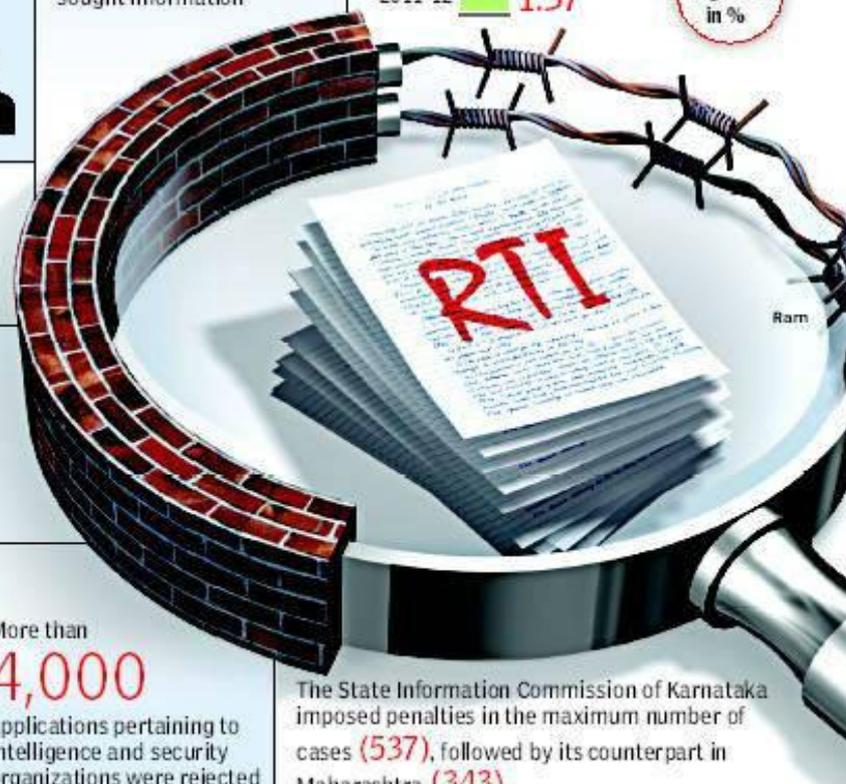
States with less population, such as Meghalaya and Mizoram, had a rejection rate of less than 1%. Other large states like Karnataka, with 2.93 lakh RTI requests, rejected only 0.3% of these. Despite a phenomenal increase in RTI applications in J&K, the rejection rate declined from 9% in 2009-10 to 4% in 2010-11. It now stands at 1.37% in 2011-12. The University of Kashmir received the highest number of RTI applications compared to any other public body in the state in the period 2009-12.

The dampener, though, is that high-profile authorities such as the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and Directorate General of Safeguards rejected virtually all applications they received.

And while the absolute number of RTI applicants may seem very high, they form a mere 0.3% of the population and 0.5% of the electorate. But Venkatesh Nayak, programmes officer at CHRI and author of the report on RTI, feels 40 lakh applications in a country with limited internet penetration is an achievement. "No country besides the US would have such a large number of people using one transparency law. While research shows the US Freedom of Information Act is used largely by individuals to procure information that personally benefits them, in India, many people file RTIs that are in the public interest," adds Nayak. He feels the high number of applications despite the murder of nearly 25 RTI activists over eight years is a promising trend.

For CHRI director Maja Daruwala, RTI has helped bring about a shift in the mindset of public officials. "While officials earlier believed they could get away withholding information, there is now a fear of the risks involved in denying information under the RTI Act," says Daruwala, pointing to the increasing, though partial compliance among public authorities with the Act.

RTI NUMBERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

<p>40 lakh RTI applications were filed across India in 2011-12</p>	<p>The rejection rate at the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and Directorate General of Safeguards was</p>	<p>Penalties imposed on info officers by CIC and State Info Commissions of AP, Karnataka and Maharashtra were highest, crossing ₹ 35 lakh each</p> 
<p>The number of RTI applications rejected are less than 10% for all information commissions studied (CIC and 10 state commissions)</p> 	<p>100%</p>  <p>In Chhattisgarh 2,351 women (4.81% of total number of RTI applicants) sought information</p>	<p>While the number of RTI applications received by authorities in J&K grew phenomenally, the rejection rate dropped</p> <p>2009-10 9 2010-11 4 2011-12 1.37</p> <p>All Figures in %</p>
<p>In states with smaller populations like Meghalaya and Mizoram, less than 1% of RTI applications were rejected</p> 		
<p>In Karnataka, which received nearly 2.93 lakh requests, the proportion of rejections was 0.30%</p>		
<p>The highest proportion of rejections was by public authorities under the Central government (8.14%) and those under the government of Maharashtra (7.2%)</p>		
<p>Number of cases in which the Maharashtra State Information Commission recommended disciplinary action against a public information officer is 443. The CIC recommended such action only in 24 cases</p>		