



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper - II

- Poll bond sale can go ahead: SC
- No 'iron curtains' around electoral bonds, says SC
- 40% of RTI rejections did not cite a valid reason, says analysis
- 'Move health to Concurrent list'



Poll bond sale can go ahead: SC

The Supreme Court refused to stay the sale of electoral bonds prior to the Assembly elections in crucial states such as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Highlights:

The judgment came on an urgent application moved by an NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, to stay the sale of the bonds scheduled between April 1 and 10.

Bond matters Some charges against electoral bonds and the SC's response

Anonymity of buyers	The scheme provides anonymity, but ensures that everything happens only through banking channels
Corporate houses can finance political parties	Anyone buying bonds will have to fulfil KYC norms. The money spent will reflect in the expense sheets of a company
Foreign corporate houses can buy bonds and influence electoral politics	Bonds can be purchased only by a person who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India
Bonds bought with white money can be re-purchased with black money	Bonds are not tradeable



‘Serious apprehension’

1. The NGO voiced serious apprehension that the sale of bonds before the elections would “further increase illegal and illicit funding of political parties through shell companies”.
2. The court agreed that the scheme protects the identity of purchasers of electoral bonds in a cloak of anonymity, but highlighted that such purchases happened only through regular banking channels. The State Bank of India would eventually know the identity of the buyer.
3. While the identity of the purchaser of the bond is withheld, it is ensured that unidentified/unidentifiable persons cannot purchase the bonds and give them to the political parties.
4. Under Clause 7 of the scheme, buyers have to apply in the prescribed form, either physically or online, disclosing their particulars.
5. The court rubbished the charge of electoral bonds facilitating anonymous and hefty donations from corporate houses to political parties. Anyone buying bonds would have to fulfil KYC (Know Your Customer) norms, the court said.



6. The court debunked fears that electoral bonds would help foreign corporate houses influence domestic electoral politics. It said the bonds could be purchased only by a person who was a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India.

No 'iron curtains' around electoral bonds, says SC

A "little effort" will go a long way in piercing the veil of secrecy about electoral bonds, the Supreme Court said in an order on Friday.

Iron Curtain

"All that is required is a little more effort to cull out such information from both sides (purchaser of bond and political party) and do some 'match the following'. Therefore, it is not as though the operations under the scheme are behind iron curtains incapable of being pierced," the court said.

Apprehensions allayed

1. The court dealt with apprehensions that corporate houses, domestic and foreign, could anonymously contribute hefty amounts to parties and have a stranglehold over electoral politics.
2. The court said money spent by companies could be easily traced online on the website of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. They can also be obtained in physical form from the Registrar of Companies upon payment of a prescribed fee.
3. Since the scheme mandates political parties to file an audited statement of accounts and also since the Companies Act requires financial statements of registered companies to be filed with the Registrar of Companies, the purchase as well as encashment of the bonds, happening only through banking channels, is always reflected in documents that eventually come to the public domain.

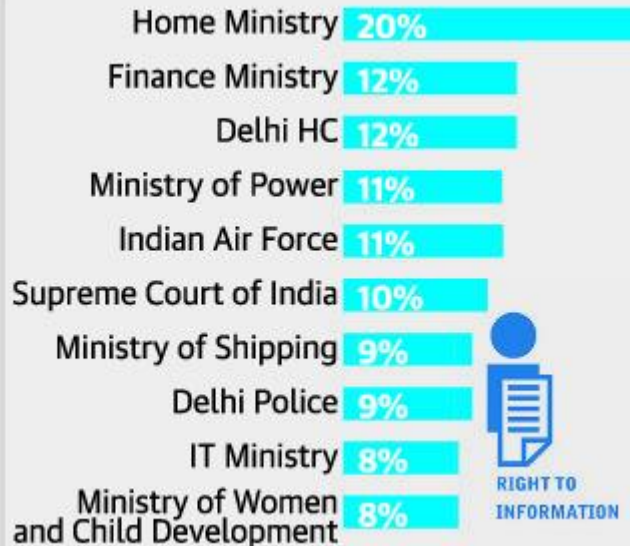


40% of RTI rejections did not cite a valid reason, says analysis

The Centre has only rejected 4.3% of all Right to Information (RTI) requests in 2019-20, the lowest ever rate, according to the Central Information Commission's annual report. However, almost 40% of these

Request denied

One out of every five RTI requests sent to the Home Ministry was rejected, the highest rejection rate among all ministries and public authorities



rejections did not include any valid reason, as they did not invoke one of the permissible exemption clauses in the RTI Act, according to an analysis of report data. This includes 90% of rejections by the Prime Minister's Office.

Highlights:

1. Public authorities under the Central government received 13.7 lakh RTI requests in 2019-20, out of which 58,634 were rejected for various reasons. Rejection rates have fallen since the 13.9% rate in 2005-06, and have been steadily trending downwards since the 8.4% spike in 2014-15. In 2019-20, they hit their lowest level so far.
2. The RTI Act allows public authorities to reject RTI requests on a number of grounds, ranging from information that would endanger life and safety to that which involves irrelevant personal information, Cabinet papers, foreign governments, copyrights, or sovereignty, security and intelligence matters. Public authorities are expected to cite the relevant clause of the Act to invoke the exemption.
3. In 38.7% of rejections in 2019-20, however, public authorities failed to cite these permissible exemption clauses and were classified under the 'Others' category in the CIC data. This is an increase from the 33% seen the previous year.



‘Move health to Concurrent list’

Health should be shifted to the Concurrent list under the Constitution, and a developmental finance institution (DFI) dedicated to healthcare investments set up, Fifteenth Finance Commission (FFC) Chairman N.K. Singh said.

Highlights:

1. Making a case for enhancing government spending on health to 2.5% of GDP by 2025, the FFC chairman said primary healthcare should be a fundamental commitment of all States in particular and should be allocated at least two-thirds of such spending.
2. Bringing health into the Concurrent list would give the Centre greater flexibility to enact regulatory changes and reinforce the obligation of all stakeholders towards providing better healthcare.
3. The health sector is in dire need of a DFI similar to the one being set up to stimulate infrastructure investments. Such a DFI would increase healthcare access in tier-2 and tier-3 cities and also come in with technical assistance that ensures proper usage of funds.

Missing Middle in Insurance

1. He also emphasised the importance of universalising healthcare insurance as a large section of the society still remained uncovered. While the PMJAY covers the bottom two income quintiles, commercial insurance largely covers the top-income quintile, thereby creating a ‘missing middle’ class in between.
2. This refers to people in the middle two income quintiles, where the population is not rich enough to afford commercial insurance and not poor enough to be covered under government-sponsored health insurance schemes.