

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (22.07.2022)

1. Plan for faster trains is moving slowly ([livemint.com](https://www.livemint.com)) Updated: 22 Jul 2022

NEW DELHI: A plan by Indian Railways to speed up passenger and goods trains by this year has got delayed, and the national transporter is yet to firm up a fresh deadline.

Two people privy to the development said that doubling the average speed of goods trains and raising passenger train speeds by 50% may now be completed only by 2024. They said covid disruptions and recessionary pressures on industrial suppliers have delayed specific projects intended to quicken the railway system.

Under the 'Mission Raftaar' launched in 2016-17 following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to increase the average running speed of freight and passenger trains, the Railways set a deadline to increase the average speed of goods trains from 25 kmph to 50 kmph and that of mail and express trains from 50 kmph to 75 kmph by 2021-22.

However, the deadline has passed, and there is only a tiny increase in train speeds. The people quoted above said that with projects under the Dedicated Freight Corridor getting completed, more space would become available in the railway system to accommodate faster trains and reduce travel time.

"Mission Raftaar is on course despite a few bumps on its path due to covid disruptions. Various works programme going on in country including track renewal and improved signalling and the development of Dedicated Freight Corridor project would certainly help to speed up railways systems quickly," said one of the persons cited above.

Questions sent to the ministry of railways remained unanswered till the time of going to press.

The need for speed for Railways has also come in for a review by the official auditor, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). In its report tabled in Parliament in April, the auditor rapped the Railways for failing to improve on mobility outcomes despite investing ₹2.5 trillion on track infrastructure during 2008-19.

The CAG said the average observed speed of mail/express and freight trains until 2019-20 was still around 50.6 kmph and 23.6 kmph, respectively. Out of 478 superfast (SF) trains, the scheduled speed of 123 SF trains (26%) was less than the specified speed of 55 kmph.

Another important observation of CAG is that though Railways has missed targets for increasing speed of its trains regularly, it has adopted rolling stock with a rated capacity of 100-160 kmph and tracks capable of handling trains with speeds of 100-130 kmph.

Even then, the auditor analysed that 97.9% of 2,951 mail and express trains were running below 75 kmph while the flagship high speed trains Rajdhani and Shatabdi were running at the same maximum speed of 130 kmph for years.

Globally, there are more than two dozen countries where passenger trains run at 200 kmph speed or more. Trains have been running at these speeds in some countries for

decades. <https://www.livemint.com/industry/infrastructure/plan-for-faster-trains-is-moving-slowly-11658429573403.html>

2. खरीद ऑर्डर में देरी के लिए कैग ने आर्मी ऑर्डिनेंस कॉर्प पर उठाये सवाल (hindusthansamachar.in) 21 July, 2022

नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) ने खरीद ऑर्डर में देरी और अनधिकृत व्यय के लिए सेना की कार्यप्रणाली पर सवाल उठाये हैं। कैग ने खरीद आदेश के कुछ मामलों में 301 सप्ताह तक की देरी के लिए आर्मी ऑर्डिनेंस कॉर्प (एओसी) को निशाने पर लिया है। संसद के मॉनसून सत्र में पेश रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि वैधता अवधि के भीतर निविदा स्वीकार न करने की वजह से 6.75 करोड़ रुपये अतिरिक्त खर्च का नुकसान उठाना पड़ा।

भारतीय सेना को शांति और संघर्ष दोनों समय में रसद आपूर्ति की जिम्मेदारी आर्मी ऑर्डिनेंस कॉर्प के पास है। एओसी के इन्वेंट्री प्रबंधन में रिसेप्शन, भंडारण, संरक्षण, लेखांकन, स्टॉक टेकिंग और आयुध आपूर्ति जारी करना है। कैग ने लोकसभा में पेश की गई रिपोर्ट में समय सीमा के भीतर निविदा स्वीकार न करने पर आवश्यकता से अधिक खरीद लागत के कारण 'अतिरिक्त खर्च' के कई मामले उठाये हैं। एक उदाहरण में सीएजी ने कहा कि वैधता अवधि के भीतर निविदा स्वीकार न करने की वजह से दोबारा पूरी प्रक्रिया करनी पड़ी जिससे 6.75 करोड़ रुपये का अतिरिक्त खर्च उठाना पड़ा।

रिपोर्ट में कहा गया कि ऐसे मौके आए हैं जब केंद्रीय डिपो में केंद्रीय खरीद की दरें पिछले एक से छह महीनों में की गई स्थानीय खरीद दरों से अधिक रही हैं। इस वजह से 4.36 करोड़ रुपये का अतिरिक्त खर्च हुआ। कैग के अनुसार खरीद एजेंसियां रिपीट ऑर्डर/ऑप्शन क्लॉज का उपयोग करने में विफल रहीं और इसके बजाय नए आपूर्ति ऑर्डर को पहले की तुलना में अधिक कीमतों पर रखा, जिस पर 3.89 करोड़ रुपये की अतिरिक्त लागत आई।

रिपोर्ट में कहा गया कि प्रमुख उपकरणों के एक मामले में आदेश देने और आपूर्ति में देरी से सेना की परिचालन तत्परता को नुकसान पहुंचा है। कुछ आपूर्ति आदेशों में रक्षा खरीद नियमावली की 23 सप्ताह की समय सीमा के विपरीत 301 सप्ताह की देरी देखी गई। सीएजी ने कहा कि निविदा प्रक्रिया समय सीमा के भीतर पूरा करना और आवश्यकता की स्वीकृति हासिल करना दो प्राथमिक क्षेत्र थे, जहां देरी हुई है। <https://www.hindusthansamachar.in/Encyc/2022/7/21/CAG-criticises-Army-Ordnance-Corps-delays-placing-orders.php>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

3. Varanasi अनुबंध की शर्तें बदल बीएचयू को दिया 2.44 करोड़ का झटका (samacharnama.com) 22 Jul 2022

बीएचयू के सर सुंदरलाल अस्पताल में 24 घंटे की दवा दुकान से संबंधित ठेके की शर्तों में बदलाव कर विश्वविद्यालय को 2.44 करोड़ रुपये के नुकसान का मामला सामने आया है. भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (CAG) के ऑडिट में पकड़ी गई इस अनियमितता पर शिक्षा मंत्रालय ने BHU को जांच के आदेश दिए थे. जुलाई-

2021 में गठित बीएचयू की जांच कमेटी अभी तक रिपोर्ट नहीं दे पाई है। संयुक्त रजिस्ट्रार द्वारा समिति को दी गई 8 जुलाई की अंतिम अवधि भी बीत चुकी है।

इससे पहले फरवरी-

2019 में सीएजी की रिपोर्ट पर बीएचयू ने शिक्षा मंत्रालय के सामने अपना स्पष्टीकरण पेश किया था। बताया कि कानूनी प्रकोष्ठ के समन्वयक द्वारा इस अनुबंध की जांच की गई और तत्कालीन कुलपति ने इसे मंजूरी दी. उस स्पष्टीकरण को खारिज करते हुए मंत्रालय ने बीएचयू को तीन महीने के भीतर दोषी कर्मचारियों (वर्तमान और सेवानिवृत्त) से वसूली सहित मामले में एक जांच समिति गठित करने का आदेश दिया था। जुलाई-2011 में गठित कमेटी को तीन महीने में अपनी रिपोर्ट देनी थी, लेकिन यह अभी भी लंबित है।

8 जून को संयुक्त रजिस्ट्रार एसपी माथुर, समिति के अध्यक्ष प्रो. ने आशाराम त्रिपाठी को पत्र लिखा. इसमें मंत्रालय के निर्देश का हवाला देते हुए 8 जुलाई तक रिपोर्ट दाखिल करने को कहा गया है. <https://samacharnama.com/city/varanasi/Varanasi-contract-terms-changed-BHU-got-a-shock-of-244/cid8084023.htm>

4. वाराणसी BHU में ₹ 2.44 करोड़ का घोटाला, उमंग फार्मसी को मिला था दवा बिक्री का टेंडर (thenetizennews.com) 21 July, 2022

वाराणसी के बीएचयू में 2 करोड़ 44 लाख का घोटाला सामने आया है। यह घोटाला CAG यानी कंट्रोलर एंड ऑडिटर जनरल ऑफ इंडिया की टीम ने पकड़ा है। बीएचयू में इलाज के लिए आने वाले मरीजों को दवा बिक्री के लिए उमंग फार्मसी को टेंडर मिला था। शर्त रखी गई थी कि हर दवा पर 4% वैरिएबल लाइसेंस फीस देनी होगी। फार्मसी ने दवाएं बेची, मगर बिल खरीदार को नहीं दिया। इसी सप्ताह CAG की रिपोर्ट आ सकती है।

2013 में मिला था दवा बिक्री का टेंडर

IMS-

BHU में सर सुंदरलाल अस्पताल में उमंग फार्मसी चल रही है। यह 24*7 खुली रहती है। साल 2013 में उमंग को BHU में फार्मसी खोलने का टेंडर मिला था। तब फार्मसी और BHU के बीच एक समझौता हुआ था। शर्त के अनुसार हर दवा पर 4% वैरिएबल लाइसेंस फीस BHU को देनी थी। आरोप है कि फार्मसी ने बिना किसी आदेश के इस एग्रीमेंट के शर्तों के खिलाफ जाकर काम किया। वैरिएबल फीस लाइसेंस को दवा के दाम से हटाकर दवा बिक्री की रसीद पर कर दिया गया।

2019 में शिकायत पर CAG ने जांच कीघपले की शिकायत होने पर 2019 में जब CAG ने इसकी जांच की। पता चला कि इस गड़बड़ी से संस्थान को 2.44 करोड़ का घाटा हुआ है। इसके बाद जांच कमेटी जुलाई, 2021 में बनी। तीन महीने में रिपोर्ट सबमिट करनी थी, मगर 12 महीने निकल गए। अब रजिस्ट्रार प्रो. अरूण सिंह ने कहा, "एक सप्ताह के अंदर कमेटी से रिपोर्ट सबमिट करने के लिए कहा गया है।" फार्मैसी का संचालन अभी भी BHU में किया जा रहा है।

इंडिया में नहीं थे कमेटी के एक मेंबरजांच कमेटी के अध्यक्ष प्रो. आशाराम त्रिपाठी ने बताया कि कमेटी के एक मेंबर इंडिया में नहीं थे। इसलिए देरी हुई। हम अपना काम कर रहे हैं। बहुत जल्दी नतीजे पर पहुंच कर रिपोर्ट प्रशासन को सबमिट करेंगे। <https://www.thenetizennews.com/2022/07/21/umang-pharmacy-found-2-44-crore-scam-in-varanasi-bhu/>

5. आजम के जौहर प्रशिक्षण संस्थान का कैग से कराया जाएगा ऑडिट, एस आईटी ने की थी ऑडिट कराने संस्तुति (amarujala.com) 21 July, 2022

मौलाना मोहम्मद अली जौहर प्रशिक्षण एवं शोध संस्थान रामपुर के निर्माण एवं उपयोगिता का ऑडिट नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) से कराया जाएगा। यहां अनियमितताओं की जांच के लिए बनाई गई एस आईटी ने इसकी संस्तुति की थी जिस पर अब अल्पसंख्यक कल्याण मंत्री ने इस पर काम कराने के निर्देश दिए हैं। यह संस्थान इस समय सपा नेता आजम खां के ट्रस्ट के स्वामित्व में है।

रामपुर के इस संस्थान की लीज 33 साल के लिए सपा नेता आजम खां ने कैबिनेट से अपने ट्रस्ट के नाम करा ली थी। मात्र सौ रुपये सालाना की दर से यह लीज कराई गई। जनवरी 2020 में इस बाबत जांच के बाद एसआईटी ने अपनी रिपोर्ट सौपी थी। जिसने कई अहम बिंदुओं पर जांच कराने की संस्तुति की थी। इसी आधार पर अब संस्थान का कैग से ऑडिट कराया जाएगा। 15 हजार वर्ग मीटर में बने इस संस्थान में वर्ष 2005 से 2008 के मध्य निर्माण कराया गया था। 9.97 करोड़ रुपये की लागत से बने इस भवन की उपयोगिता पर भी सवाल खड़े हुए और उसका भी ऑडिट कराने को कहा गया है। चूंकि आजम खां के ट्रस्ट ने इस भवन में रामपुर पब्लिक स्कूल खोल लिया गया तो उस पर प्रश्न चिह्न लगे हैं।

पट्टा भी निरस्त होगा

एसआईटी ने संस्तुति की थी कि इस संस्थान का पट्टा निरस्त कर इसे वापस लिया जाए। साथ ही साथ ही तत्कालीन मंडलीय अल्पसंख्यक कल्याण अधिकारी आरपी सिंह (वर्तमान में संयुक्त निदेशक) के खिलाफ भी कार्रवाई को कहा गया था। आरोप है कि उन्होंने अपने कर्तव्यों में उदासीनता बरती।

कर्मचारियों की संपत्ति की जांच होगी

चूंकि यह समिति इससे जुड़े अन्य प्रकरणों की भी जांच कर रही थी तो उसने अपनी रिपोर्ट में कहा गया था कि दो लेखपालों की संपत्ति की जांच कराना जरूरी है। भ्रष्टाचार निवारण संगठन से यह जांच कराने की संस्तुति की गई थी। समिति ने कहा कि प्रकरण में ग्राम अलीगंज बेनजीर मार्ग के किनारे बनाई गई है जिससे इन गांव के लोगों को आवागमन में परेशानी हो रही है। इस पर भी निर्णय लेने के निर्देश दिए गए थे। इन सभी जांचों पर अब कार्रवाई होगी।

मौलाना मोहम्मद अली जौहर प्रशिक्षण एवं शोध संस्थान का पट्टा निरस्त कर जमीन वापस लेने, कैग से इसकी जांच कराने तथा एसआईटी की अन्य संस्तुतियों पर कार्रवाई के लिए कहा गया है। इसके अलावा वहां

के अन्य प्रकरणों पर भी कार्रवाई कराएंगे। रामपुर के कुछ लोगों ने आकर अन्य प्रकरणों से भी अवगत कराया है।' - धर्मपाल सिंह, अल्पसंख्यक कल्याण मंत्री <https://www.amarujala.com/lucknow/up-news-audit-of-azam-s-jauhar-training-institute-will-be-done-by-cag-sit-had-recommended-audit>

6. केरल के वित्त मंत्री ने आर्थिक नीतियों को लेकर केंद्र सरकार पर निशाना साधा (hindi.theprint.in) 21 July, 2022

केरल के वित्त मंत्री के. एन. बालगोपाल ने बृहस्पतिवार को केंद्र की भारतीय जनता पार्टी (भाजपा) नीत सरकार की आर्थिक नीतियों को लेकर उस पर निशाना साधा और आरोप लगाया कि केंद्र की नीतियों से केरल को आर्थिक रूप से पंगु बनाया जा रहा है और संविधान में निहित संघवाद को खत्म किया जा रहा है।

राज्य विधानसभा में नियम 300 के तहत बयान देते हुए बालगोपाल ने कहा कि पिछले कुछ वर्षों के दौरान केंद्र सरकार देश के संविधान में निहित संघीय आर्थिक व्यवस्था को कमतर करने का लगातार प्रयास कर रही है। उन्होंने कहा कि केरल के हितों की रक्षा करना जरूरी है।

उन्होंने कहा कि राष्ट्रीय जनतांत्रिक गठबंधन (राजग) सरकार द्वारा संवैधानिक प्रावधानों की गलत व्याख्या की जा रही है ताकि राज्यों के हितों पर प्रतिकूल प्रभाव डाला जा सके और वित्त आयोग के जरिये केंद्र से मिलने वाली निधि को कम कर दिया गया है।

उन्होंने यह भी आरोप लगाया कि राज्यों को केंद्र सरकार के नियंत्रण में लाने के लिए भारत के नियंत्रक और महालेखापरीक्षक (कैग), आयकर विभाग और प्रवर्तन निदेशालय (ईडी) जैसी एजेंसियों का दुरुपयोग किया जा रहा है।

उन्होंने कहा कि इन प्रयासों ने केरल की प्रगति को रोकने का काम किया जा रहा है और केंद्र की उपेक्षा के कारण राज्य को "बेहद गंभीर वित्तीय स्थिति" का सामना करना पड़ रहा है। उन्होंने कहा कि केंद्र की ओर से लगभग सात हजार करोड़ रुपये के राजस्व घाटे अनुदान में कमी के कारण केरल की वित्तीय स्थिति गंभीर रूप से प्रभावित हुई है।

उन्होंने कहा कि केंद्र ने राज्य को 12 हजार करोड़ रुपये से अधिक जीएसटी मुआवजा भी देने से इनकार कर दिया है। <https://hindi.theprint.in/india/kerala-finance-minister-targeted-the-central-government-for-economic-policies/360802/>

7. Kerala FM attacks Centre on economic policies (theprint.in) 21 July, 2022

Thiruvananthapuram, Jul 21 (PTI) Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal on Thursday lashed out at the BJP-led government at the Centre over its economic policies, which he alleged were financially crippling the southern state and destroying the federal structure envisaged in the Constitution.

While making a statement under Rule 300 in the state Assembly, he said the Centre, over the past few years, has been making relentless efforts to 'undermine' the federal economic system envisioned by the Constitution of the country and stressed the need to protect the interest of Kerala.

The senior Marxist leader listed out various alleged means employed by the union government to subjugate the states financially.

According to him, the Constitutional provisions are being misinterpreted by the NDA government to adversely impact the interests of the states and central fund transfers have been slashed through the Finance Commission and other means.

He also alleged that various central agencies especially the regulatory agencies like the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), the Income Tax Department and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) are being misused to bring the states under the control of the central government.

Charging that many such attempts amounted to scuttling the progress of Kerala, he said the state is facing an “extremely stressful financial situation” due to the continued neglect of the Centre.

The “financial health” of Kerala has been seriously impacted by the reduction of approximately Rs 7,000 crore in the revenue deficit grant by the Centre and its refusal to give the GST compensation of over Rs 12,000 crore to the state.

Besides this, the borrowing limit of the states has been reduced to 3.5 per cent, he claimed.

To make things worse, the guarantee given to special purpose vehicles like Kerala Infrastructure Investment Board (KIIFB) and the Kerala State Social Security Pension Limited (KSSPL) have been defined as the state government’s debt, he added.

“Over Rs 14,000 crore is now accounted as the government’s debt this way. As a result, there has been a reduction of Rs 3,578 crore in Kerala’s borrowing capacity,” the minister added.

The Centre’s policies are adversely affecting the state’s development plans and the spending capacity in the health and education sectors and for welfare projects, he said adding that as a finance minister, he would soon send a letter to his central counterpart pointing out such gross violations of federal financial structure enshrined in the Constitution.

He also appealed to the legislators of the House to be vigilant about the present situation in which the basic tenets of the Constitution are under serious attack.

The Centre’s attempt was to undermine the federal system without respecting the essence of the Constitution and to sabotage the financial powers of the states by misusing various agencies under them, Balagopal further alleged. <https://theprint.in/india/kerala-fm-attacks-centre-on-economic-policies/1049204/>

8. Central policies will deprive State of ₹23,000 cr.:
Balagopal (thehindu.com) 21 July, 2022

Harmful Central financial policies will deprive the State of about ₹23,000 crore in the current fiscal compared to 2020-21, a situation which could seriously hobble the State's ability to fund welfare and development schemes, Finance Minister K. N. Balagopal informed the Assembly on Thursday.

Presenting a statement in the House which sought to raise "certain crucial issues for protecting Constitutional values and federal structure," Mr. Balagopal blamed the Narendra Modi government of using Central agencies such as the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), Enforcement Directorate (ED), and Income Tax department to further its own interests and curtail the fiscal powers of the State.

Mr. Balagopal's statement came on the heels of the latest Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on the State finances criticising the government for its 'off-budget borrowings' through the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) and Kerala Social Security Pension Ltd. (KSSPL), and the ED issuing a summons to former Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac regarding KIIFB's open market borrowings.

Mr. Balagopal said the State's financial health had been gravely affected by the Central decision to reduce ₹7,000 crore fiscal deficit grant and discontinue the Goods and Services Tax (GST) compensation of about ₹12,000 crore.

Further, the State will suffer a reduction of ₹3,578 crore in its borrowing capability this year due to the decision to consider the guarantee provided to KIIFB and the KSSPL as State debt. This will see ₹14,000 crore accounted as State debt, Mr. Balagopal said.

In addition to this, the borrowing limit of the State had been brought down to 3.5%. All these were bound to affect the State's spending on welfare schemes and sectors such as housing, education and health as envisioned in the State Budget, he said.

Mr. Balagopal accused the Centre of attempting to weaken welfare and development activities in the State by targeting KIIFB and the KSSPL. It should be suspected that the CAG's report for the year ended March 2020 (tabled in the Assembly in November 2021), which contained several "irrational observations," was meant to undermine the fund mobilisation capabilities and branding of KIIFB, he alleged.

Although the Assembly decided to reject the unconstitutional and technically flawed observations in the report, the Union Finance Ministry had used it as a reason to obstruct the functioning of KIIFB and the KSSPL. In the future, such policies could affect welfare activities, including the LIFE Mission housing programme, he said.

Mr. Balagopal alleged political motives of the Centre behind the summons issued by the ED to KIIFB officials and, more recently, Dr. Isaac. "It is a matter of concern that the information regarding the summons was leaked to the media even before KIIFB received them," he noted.

He indicated that he was planning to write a "detailed letter" to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighting the issues affecting the federal financial structure.

Mr. Balagopal's statement was made in accordance with Rule 300 of the Assembly Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business which permits a Minister to make a statement on a matter of public importance with the consent of the Speaker. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/central-policies-will-deprive-state-of-23000-cr-balagopal/article65666142.ece>

9. Centre stifling Kerala finances: Finance minister KN Balagopal (timesofindia.indiatimes.com) 22 July 2022

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The Centre has been using agencies such as the comptroller and auditor general (CAG), the IT department and the enforcement directorate (ED) to promote its political interests and subvert the federal financial structure enshrined in the Constitution, finance minister K N Balagopal said in the assembly on Thursday.

The minister said while some of these efforts are directed against states in general, many of them are specifically focussed on subverting Kerala's progress. The refusal to compensate the revenue deficit grant of nearly Rs 7,000 crore and GST compensation of nearly Rs 12,000 crore due to the state has created a severe stress on the health of its finances, he said.

Besides bringing down the state's borrowing limit to 3.5%, the Centre also defined the sovereign guarantee given by the state for the functioning of KIIFB and the Kerala state social security pension limited (KSSPL) as the direct liability on the state exchequer.

As a result, approximately Rs 14,000 has been defined as the state's direct liability, because of which the state's borrowing limit was curtailed by Rs 3,578 crore this year. In effect, when compared to 2021-22, the state is running short of approximately Rs 23,000 crore because of the Centre's stand.

Referring to an order issued on August 28, 2017, by the finance ministry, the minister said it overlooked 70 years of the federal fiscal structure and practices and decided to include the balances in the public account of the state while reckoning the net borrowing ceiling of the state governments. The public account of a state is a creation of the constitution under Article 266.

Also, Article 283 confers on the states the powers of regulating its public account under law made by the state legislature. The public account of the state reflects its internal financial transactions where constitutionally the state plays the role of a banker to itself. The Centre has unilaterally bypassed these constitutional provisions and have curtailed the powers of the state governments, he said.

The CAG report on the state finances was placed before the assembly which resolved not to accept the portions that were legally and constitutionally incorrect and technically false. The report was approved with changes. However, notwithstanding the resolution of the assembly, the erroneous and baseless comments of the report were used by the Centre to form the basis of its directions to disallow borrowings of state government agencies.

Referring to the probe by the ED into KIIFB, the minister said there was no clarity regarding the purpose of questioning or the subject matter that was being probed. He also said that he has written a letter to the union finance minister pointing out the gross violations of federal state financial structure by the Centre. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/centre-stifling-state-finances-min/articleshow/93039037.cms>

10. It's up to Kerala University to rectify shortcomings, says Higher Education Minister R. Bindu (thehindu.com) UPDATED: JULY 21, 2022

CAG performance audit flags varsity flaws

Higher Education Minister R. Bindu has said Kerala University is bound by its responsibility to rectify the shortcomings flagged by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in its performance audit that covered the period 2016-21.

“It is up to the university to provide substantial clarification on the deficiencies that have been highlighted. Such flaws are bound to crop up during close scrutiny by an audit agency such as the CAG into the functioning of any institution,” she said, while addressing a press conference here on Thursday.

Referring to the CAG finding that the university violated University Grants Commission (UGC) norms by appointing more than 10% of the teaching faculty on contract basis, the Minister said the practice is prevalent in universities and colleges across the country.

She also rubbished allegations that such shortcomings were concealed during the inspection by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) that fetched the university an unprecedented A++ grade.

Responding to questions in the Assembly earlier, Dr. Bindu said the department has been spearheading a comprehensive overhaul of the sector. The recommendation of the three commissions formed to recommend reforms is bound to considerably improve the quality of education.

She also informed the House that the government has initiated steps to appoint principals in colleges that have been helmed by teachers on a temporary basis for so long. Lists prepared by the Vice Chancellors of prospective principals have been published by the universities. Anomalies that have cropped up will be resolved at the earliest.

Her assurance was in reply to a question by Leader of Opposition V.D. Satheesan who claimed that a majority of government colleges did not have permanent principals. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/its-up-to-kerala-university-to-rectify-shortcomings-says-higher-education-minister-r-bindu/article65667335.ece>

11. State continues to face tough financial situation ([thehindu.com](https://www.thehindu.com)) UPDATED: 21 JUL 2022

RBI bulletin says TS among States with inflation in excess of 8 per cent

Telangana: The State continues to face a tough situation in terms of finances as it could not achieve the targets set for raising revenues on expected lines.

As a result, the State is forced to avail various facilities of financial accommodation provided by the Reserve Bank of India for meeting its immediate requirements pertaining to a host of welfare and developmental programmes initiated for different sections. The tight financial situation can be gauged from the fact that the State opted for special drawing facility provided by the RBI on all days of May totalling ₹711.65 crore.

Going by the data given in the RBI's bulletin released recently, the State had availed of ways and means advances amounting to ₹ 1,295.52 crore on all the 31 days in May. In addition to special drawing facility and ways and means advances, the State went for overdraft of ₹912.98 crore for 18 days during May, according to the RBI bulletin.

The dependence on these instruments reflects the pressure on the Finance department for raising resources required for implementing flagship programmes like Rythu Bandhu and Dalit Bandhu as well as the commitments that should be fulfilled in the form of debt servicing. Expenditure on interest payment was to the tune of ₹1,631.62 crore in April and ₹ 3,162.25 crore in May, according to the provisional data submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

Revenue receipts were not up to the expected levels during the first two months with the State registering ₹19,956.2 crore, a little over 10 per cent of the ₹1.93 lakh crore projected for the financial year in the budget estimates. Of this, the tax revenue was ₹18,751.39 crore, 14.81 per cent of the ₹1.26 lakh crore projected for the fiscal.

Coupled with this, the RBI bulletin said in terms of spatial distribution, Telangana along with Haryana, Sikkim and Andhra Pradesh experienced high inflation in excess of 8 per cent whereas Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh recorded inflation in the range of 4 to 6 per cent. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tehangana/state-continues-to-face-tough-financial-situation/article65666166.ece>

12. Debts are well within the limits and well managed: Andhra Pradesh government (timesofindia.indiatimes.com) UPDATED: 21 JUL 2022

AMARAVATI: Strongly refuting the Centre's charge about growing debts, the state government termed the attempts to compare the fiscal health of the states with the fiscal state of a country (Sri Lanka) is a mischievous.

The state government explained that borrowings by the state government are well within the limits and also well managed. The state government had also said that their performance on the fiscal front is better than the NDA government at Centre.

“Country's debts to GDP ratio jumped from 51 percent to 61 following the outbreak of covid-19. No government in the world survived without borrowing monies during the Covid19. YS Jaganmohan Reddy led government did a tremendous job during the Covid-19 as it could contain the fiscal deficit to just around 5.44 percent,” said Duvvuri Krishna, special secretary to the chief minister (finance) on Thursday.

He said that they have brought down the fiscal deficit to the lowest level 2.1 percent by 2021-22 by following stringent fiscal discipline.

Quoting the CAG provisional report, state government said that the fiscal deficit at the end of 2021-22 financial year is Rs.25,194.62 crore which is just around 2.1 percent of the total GSDP of Rs 12,01,735.52 crore. “Fiscal deficit was never within the permissible limits during the previous TDP regime.

The gross mismanagement of TDP government had in fact inflicted irrecoverable injuries to the state's fiscal health,” said the state government advisor (public affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy. He explained that the fiscal deficit during the TDP regime was 3.95 (2014-15), 3.65 (15-16), 4.52(16- 17), 4.12 (17-18), 4.06 (18-19).

He said that it further went up to 4.11 during 2019-20 due to the overlapping impact of TDP regime. In fact, the permissible limit during the TDP regime is just 3 percent while it never

maintained. “Although, the fiscal deficit touched 5.44 % during 2020-21 due to the covid-19, we could manage to bring it down to 2.1 percent by 2021-22,” said Sajjala.

He said that through a misinformation campaign, attempts are being made to create wide spread concern amongst the RBI, Centre, banks and financial institutions just because their darling Naidu is out of power. He said that the opposition is spearheading the campaign to tarnish the image of the State and thereby cripple the State financially to reap political gains.

The debts of the State which were Rs. 97,123 crore in 2014, jumped to Rs. 2,68,225 crore when Naidu demitted office in 2019. In addition to the above, owing to TDP’s misgovernance during 2014-19 the State had to endure the burden of many more additional liabilities such as the outstanding payables to the tune of Rs. 39,000 crore, said Krishna.

“The borrowings of the PSUs with the state government guarantees were skyrocketed to Rs.59,257 crore from just Rs.14,028.23 crore at the time of bifurcation. The debt in the books of the power sector corporations has increased from Rs. 29,703 crore to Rs. 68,596 crore during Naidu’s regime,” said Krishna.

Similarly, dues by the discoms to the power generators have increased from Rs. 2,893.23 crore to Rs. 21,540.96 crore. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amaravati/debts-are-well-within-the-limits-and-well-managed-andhra-pradesh-government/articleshow/93032627.cms>

13. Andhra Pradesh government spending meaningfully with focus on welfare: Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy (newindianexpress.com) UPDATED: 21 JUL 2022

VIJAYAWADA: Taking a dig at the opposition TDP for making a hue and cry on the State debts, Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said unable to digest the continuation of welfare schemes by the YSRC government, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu and his party men resorted to launch a false propaganda that AP has collapsed financially.

Speaking to mediapersons at the Secretariat on Thursday, Sajjala while admitting that there is an increase in borrowings following the revenue shortfall because of the COVID-19 pandemic, said the Centre is also no exception in this regard.

He asserted that the State government is making a meaningful expenditure in implementing several welfare schemes for the poor people.

Stating that the YSRC government has been implementing all the schemes despite the COVID-19 pandemic toppling the financial system for two-and-a-half-years, he said people’s respect for Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has increased and they are giving unprecedented victories to YSRC in every election.

"People's welfare and development of the poor are our political agenda. Our government is working in the direction of taking forward both welfare and development. Right from Amma Vodi, English medium in government schools, Videshi Vidya and other schemes are being implemented as part of that agenda. In case of any shortcomings, we are ready to correct them," Sajjala said.

He remarked that the TDP virtually got a slap when the Union MoS Finance, in reply to a question raised by a TDP MP in Parliament, said there are no accounts for Rs 1.62 lakh crore between 2014-19 (TDP regime) and the TDP government had submitted accounts for only Rs 51,000 crore after being asked by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

Describing the TDP chief and Co as anti-poor and anti-welfare, Sajjala said as the present government is implementing welfare schemes, they are making every effort to obstruct it and are resorting to a false propaganda on a daily-basis.

He appealed to people not to believe the words of Naidu and his group as it will cause harm to the State and injustice to the poor. "We urge the people to observe the facts," he said. Special Secretary to CM (Finance and Economic Affairs) Duvvuri Krishna said the Central government debt to GDP ratio, which stood at 50.47 per cent in 2013-14, rose to 61 per cent in 2020-21.

"The debt situation of Andhra Pradesh in FY 22 is quite encouraging. The provisional figures released by CAG convey that for the financial year 2021-22, the State government managed its finances in the most fiscally prudent fashion with the revenue deficit being limited to Rs 8,370.51 crore and fiscal deficit to Rs 25,194.62 crore. This translates to a fiscal deficit to GSDP ratio of less than 2.10 per cent," he explained.

Recalling that the deficit to GSDP ratio exceeded the then prevailing limit of 3 per cent during the previous TDP regime, he said its misgovernance and expenditure profligacy had resulted in undue swelling of the liabilities of Andhra Pradesh.

At the time of bifurcation, the debt of combined State assigned to the government of successor State of Andhra Pradesh was Rs 97,123 crore and when public account share was also added to the same, it was Rs 1,20,556 crore, the same had, over the five years increased to Rs 2,68,225 crore, Duvvuri elaborated

In addition to the above, owing to TDP's misgovernance during 2014-19, the State had to endure the burden of many more additional liabilities such as outstanding payables to the tune of Rs 39,000 crore as of May 2019, borrowings of PSUs with the State government guarantees to the tune of Rs 59,257.31 crore as of May 2019 (Rs 14,028.23 crore at the time of bifurcation), increase of debt in the books of the power sector corporations from Rs 29,703 crore to Rs 68,596 crore over the five year period 2014-19.

Further, dues to power generators by DISCOMs had increased from Rs 2,893.23 crore to Rs 21,540.96 crore during the five year period of 2014- 19. While the compounded annual growth rate during the five year period of TDP government stood at 19.46 per cent, it is 15.77 per cent during the YSRC regime, Duvvuri analysed. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/andhra-pradesh/2022/jul/22/andhra-pradesh-government-spending-meaningfully-with-focus-on-welfare-sajjala-ramakrishna-reddy-2479365.html>

14. Committee Formed To Look Into Issues of DTC (outlookindia.com, economictimes.indiatimes.com) UPDATED: 21 JUL 2022

The Delhi government has constituted a committee to look into the issues facing the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and to make recommendations for operational uniformity with partly private cluster model of buses.

The committee, constituted by Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot, will be headed by Delhi Transport Commissioner Ashish Kundra and will also have the DTC MD as its member.

According to officials, the mandate of the committee is to make recommendations so as to bring uniformity in the functioning of DTC and DIMTS (Delhi Integrated Multi-Modal Transit System) with regard to the buses operating under the cluster model as well as suggest measures to improve safety and comfort level of the commuters.

The committee has also been directed to examine ways and means to make the operations of DTC technologically advanced so as to reduce human intervention wherever needed.

The other responsibilities of the committee would entail suggesting measures for recruitment of officials at different levels who may be in a position to take the DTC to new heights, according to officials.

The minister has stressed that the induction of electric buses on a large scale would require adoption of tech savvy operations, they said.

Of the 7,200 buses currently plying on the city roads, DTC runs 3,900 buses and the cluster runs 3,300. There are 150 electric buses of DTC that will be added by next month to its fleet. At the same time, 2,600 buses are going to be retired in the next two years.

According to a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report tabled in the Assembly on Tuesday, the DTC has negative net worth and contributed 99.74 per cent of the loss incurred by state public sector enterprises in the national capital during 2019-20.

The Delhi Cabinet last month had given a nod to procuring 1,950 buses and issuing fresh tenders for 4,880 more, taking the fleet to about 12,000 on city roads by December 2024. Of the 1,950 buses to be procured, 450 will be low-floor AC CNG buses fully BS VI compliant. As many as 113 of them will arrive between August 2022 and January 2023 and 337 will arrive between February 2023 and March 2023, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had said.

The 450 CNG buses are in lieu of the cluster buses which will retire by October 10 this year, the officials said. <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/committee-formed-to-look-into-issues-of-dtc-news-210997>

15. Committee set up to look into issues facing DTC employees (dailypioneer.com) 22 July 2022

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SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

16. Privatisation of all public sector banks isn't a good idea (thehindubusinessline.com) Updated: Jul 21, 2022

Bank failures, which were rampant before nationalisation in 1969, could rise again. And, at present, there are hardly any entities that have the money to buy out the government's stake

A policy paper by Poonam Gupta, NCAER Director-General and member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (PMEAC), and Arvind Panagariya, former NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman and Columbia University professor, has recommended privatisation of all public sector banks except State Bank of India.

The influential economists have recommended that all public sector banks should be privatised and only the State Bank of India, due to its better performance, may remain under government ownership.

They have opined as follows: "In principle, the case for privatisation we have made applies to all PSBs including SBI. But we recognise that within the Indian economic framework and political ethos, no government will want to be without a single PSB in its portfolio. Keeping

this in view, the goal, whether stated explicitly or left implicit, should be to privatise all PSBs other than SBI...”

“Of course, if some years later, the circumstances turn yet more favourable to privatisation, the goalpost may be moved to include SBI in the privatisation list,” the authors argued.

They said that with the bulk of banking moving into the private sector, the RBI will also feel the pressure to streamline its processes, rules, and regulations to deliver superior outcomes since the fact of three-fifths of the banking sector being outside its regulatory reach would no longer serve as an explanation for its lapses.

In another development, it is also reported that the government plans to initiate the next round of public sector bank mergers after analysing a detailed study that has been commissioned on the outcome of amalgamation in public sector banks.

Back in time

Persons who are recommending total privatisation of all banks fail to see the banking history in this country. There was a sea change in the penetration of banks after the government took over 14 banks in 1969. Inclusive banking and mass banking were possible only through government banks. Only government banks were in the forefront to execute government schemes to help agriculture and small scale industries. Forty-two crore ordinary people have opened bank accounts as a result of the immense contribution of state-owned banks in opening the Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojana account, a recent government initiative.

The switch from class banking to mass banking was possible only due to government banks and any attempt to privatise all banks will be disastrous, as the common man will be driven out from the banking scene by private entities whose aim will only be to make profits for their shareholders at the cost of other stakeholders.

After the formation of Reserve Bank of India in 1935 and up to the period of our getting Independence (1947), there were 900 bank failures in our country. From 1947 to 1969, 665 banks failed. The depositors of all these banks have lost their deposited money.

Since the nationalisation of banks in 1969, 36 banks failed but these were rescued by merging them with other government banks. This included even a big bank like Global Trust Bank Ltd. Recently, the RBI had to come to the rescue of Lakshmi Vilas Bank Ltd and YES Bank Ltd, through the pumping in of capital by other entities. There were also many cooperative banks closure and the strength of 1,926 town cooperative banks which were in 2004 have shrunk to 1,551 in 2018.

Bank failures

How are the advocates of privatisation of banks going to explain the failure of private banks for the past 90 years in the country? Do they want a repeat of such bank failures?

The banking industry is different in the sense that banks are run with huge public deposits with miniscule shareholders' funds, and failure of any bank will have a disproportionate contagion effect.

Government ownership gives tremendous faith to depositors who opt for bank deposits even though the rate of interest is often below the inflation rate. Disturbing this structure will make the banking structure collapse.

The market value of government holding in banks is around ₹4,80,207 crore . To privatise these banks there should be buyers who can pump in this much of money. As industrial houses cannot have controlling interest in banks as per RBI licensing norms and as the present banks and NBFCs do not have adequate financial surplus, there are no eligible buyers for these banks. Hence recommending privatisation of all banks is utopian. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/privatisation-of-all-public-sector-banks-isnt-a-good-idea/article65667735.ece>

17. Bad loans are down, but due to accounting (*livemint.com*) JULY 22, 2022

Here's the good news first. As of March, bad loans of commercial banks fell to ₹7.42 trillion, from a peak of ₹10.36 trillion as of March 2018. Bad loans are loans that have not been repaid for 90 days or more. This has happened primarily because of an accounting eventuality. Basically, loans which have been bad loans for four years can be dropped from the balance sheet of banks by way of a write-off. In that sense, a write-off is an accounting eventuality.

During the four years, a bank ends up adequately provisioning or setting aside enough money against the bad loan to be able to write it off. Also, this does not mean that a bank has to wait for four years before it can write off a loan. If it feels that a particular loan is unrecoverable, it can be written off before four years, as long as it has been adequately provisioned for.

Downward trajectory

In FY22, the total amount of loans written off was ₹1.75 trillion. In fact, between March 2018 and March 2022, the amount of loans written off was ₹8.53 trillion. Nonetheless, total bad loans of commercial banks have fallen only to ₹7.42 trillion from ₹10.36 trillion.

Of course, overall bank lending has also grown during the same period and that needs to be considered as well. The bad loans rate or bad loans as a proportion of overall lending carried out by banks was 11.2% in March 2018. By March 2022, this fell to 5.9%. Even so, this fall could have been faster if it wasn't for the accumulation of fresh bad loans by commercial banks.

In fact, in FY21 and FY22, banks ended up accumulating fresh bad loans worth ₹2.56 trillion and ₹2.86 trillion, respectively. In FY19 and FY20, fresh bad loans were ₹1.35 trillion and ₹2.22 trillion, respectively. Prima facie, the spread of the covid pandemic seems to have led to a slight increase in loan defaults. This is a reason for worry.

Furthermore, over the years, banks have had to set aside adequate amounts of money to be able to write-off the bad loans. A bulk of these bad loans had been accumulated mainly by government-owned banks. Before October 2017, the government would set aside money in the annual budget to recapitalize these banks. Since then, things have changed and the government issues recapitalization bonds.

The government issued bonds, which were bought by the public sector banks. The government then used this money to recapitalize these banks. In short, this is how the government borrowed the deposits of banks and invested it back into the banks. This helped the government control its fiscal deficit.

This way of recapitalizing public sector banks is what economists called budget neutral. To that extent, the government wasn't spending money earned from taxes or borrowing money to recapitalize these banks.

According to the Union budget, as of March, the government has issued recapitalization bonds worth ₹2.79 trillion in total. These bonds pay an interest of 6-8% per year. The interest that the government pays is paid out of the annual budget. Nonetheless, the first of these bonds matures only in 2028 and continues until 2036.

When the bonds mature, they will have to be repaid and for that, the government will have to make annual allocations in the budgets of those years. Hence, the idea of recapitalization bonds in a way kicked the bad loans problem down the road. Instead of allocating money to recapitalize banks every year, the government decided to sell bonds, which they would have to repay in the years to come. <https://www.livemint.com/mutual-fund/bad-loans-are-down-but-due-to-accounting-11658422193447.html>

18. At Rs 2.4 Lakh Crore, Willful Loan Defaults in India Are Higher than 87 Countries' GDP, Says Report ([indiatimes.com](https://www.indiatimes.com)) Updated: JULY 21, 2022

The amount owed by wilful defaulters to Indian banks has risen more than ten-fold over the past decade, from Rs 23,000 crore on March 31, 2012, to Rs 2.4 lakh crore on May 31, 2022.

For the uninitiated, the RBI defines willful defaulters as people who had the capacity to repay their loans but chose not to. Companies that use funds for purposes other than what the loans were originally granted for are willful defaulters as well.

Data from credit bureau TransUnion Cibil shows that the defaults had surged to nearly Rs 2.6 lakh crore in March 2021, but have come down a bit since then. The data pertains only to those accounts in which suits have been filed against willful defaulters with outstanding amounts of Rs 25 lakh or more. As of May 31st 2022, there were more than 12,000 such defaults in India, as per TOI.

This massive amount of Rs 2.4 lakh crore is 2.7 times the allocation of Rs 86,200 crore to the health ministry and nearly twice as much as the Rs 1.4 lakh crore allocated to the rural development ministry that funds the rural jobs scheme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The report mentioned that this Rs 2.4 lakh crore translates into \$29.7 billion, which is higher than the GDP of 87 countries.

Vijay Mallya & Nirav Modi Not the Top Defaulters

According to the report, Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi did not make it to the list of the top wilful defaulters in India. These include many tax haven countries which typically have small GDPs.

As per the RBI data mentioning the consolidated amounts owed by people or companies who had at least one account in which they defaulted for Rs 100 crore or more, the ABG Group promoted by Rishi Agarwal and others tops the list. The company's seven loan accounts in different banks add up to Rs 6,382 crore of willful defaults.

Amtex Auto and its subsidiaries, promoted by Arvind Dham, are second with willful defaults of Rs 5,885 crore. Brothers Nitin and Chetan Sandesara, who have been on the run for a few years now, are third on the list with the consolidated default of their company, Sterling Global Oil Resources and its subsidiaries amounting to Rs 3,757 crore.

The companies of Kapil and Dheeraj Wadhawan Dewan Housing Finance (DHFL) and its subsidiaries- have willfully defaulted on Rs 2,780 crore. Next on the list are yet another set of brothers - Sanjay and Sandeep Jhunjhunwala, whose company Rei Agro has defaulted on Rs 2,602 crore of bank loans.

Other companies that defaulted on more than Rs 2,000 crore of bank loans are Mehul Choksi's Gitanjali Gems, Sanjay Kumar Sureka's Concast Steel and Power, Atul Punj's Punj Lloyd and Jatin Mehta's Winsome Diamonds and subsidiaries. Choksi and Mehta have fled to the Caribbean islands. Overall, nine companies have defaulted on more than Rs 2,000 crore of loans. Defaults are between Rs 1,500 crore and Rs 2,000 crore for the next seven in the list, as per TOI. The famous among those are Shakti Bhog Foods, Sintex Industries, Rotomac Global, Deccan Chronicle Holdings and S Kumars Nationwide.

SBI & Maharashtra Top The List

95% of the defaults were reportedly recorded in the books of public sector banks (PSBs). And out of this, the State Bank of India (SBI) and its associates account for over 30% of such loans.

After SBI, its Punjab National Bank (PNB), Union Bank of India (UBI) and Bank of Baroda (BoB), each of which reportedly have over 10% share in the outstanding amount.

In terms of states, the state which has the highest gross state domestic product (GSDP), Maharashtra, accounted for 34% of all the loan defaults in the country. Delhi recorded the second highest loan defaults, accounting for 17.5% of the total. West Bengal stood at the third spot, with 8.8 per cent of the total wilful defaults. <https://www.indiatimes.com/worth/news/indian-wilful-loan-defaults-rise-ten-fold-in-a-decade-575338.html>

19. Army Buys 20 Swedish Advanced Avalanche Rescue Systems to Detect Trapped Soldiers with Precision ([news18.com](https://www.news18.com)) Updated: JULY 22, 2022

The Army has got deliveries of 20 avalanche rescue systems from a Swedish firm this month, nearly two years after it placed an order for the equipment as an emergency procurement, News18 has learnt.

Defence sources told News18 that each of the rescue systems will be sent to different sector stores of the northern command.

So far, only the Gulmarg-based High Altitude Warfare School (HAWs)—which runs specialised training programmes for mountain and winter warfare—had a limited number of rescue systems that were procured last year after successful trials.

This is the first time that the Army has procured an advanced avalanche rescue system, a requirement that was long pending in the backdrop of a large number of soldiers getting killed in avalanches and landslides that have taken place in the last few years in the Siachen glacier and other high-altitude areas of Kashmir and the Northeast.

The Army has deployed basic avalanche victim detectors with ground-penetrating radars, but the advanced systems have the added advantage of transponders that makes detection faster, the sources said.

The 20 avalanche rescue systems were an emergency procurement in 2020 and sources say that the avalanche which killed two Army personnel in Sikkim in May 2020 prompted the move.

HOW WILL THE NEW SYSTEMS WORK?

Defence sources told News18 that the rescue systems provided by the Swedish firm Recco will have 150 transponders each.

As per the company's website, the detector of the rescue system emits a radar signal that on hitting the reflector is echoed back to the detector, thus pointing the rescuer in the direction of the victim.

The reflectors, the website states, are lightweight and passive transponders, comprising a diode and antennae, which do not require power or activation to work.

It further states that as a detector gets closer to a reflector, the radar signals turn stronger, giving out the accurate location of the victim to the rescuer.

Sources say more such systems are already in use with civil organisations and the military is likely to procure more of them that could be used in a range of rescue operations aside from avalanches, to rescue victims trapped in landslides or building collapses.

A defence source told News18 that each system will cater to 50 Army personnel at a time, with three reflectors attached to a soldier when he is out on patrol or other operations in an avalanche-prone area.

“When a person is trapped in snow, it is the first 25 minutes that are the most critical. His chances of survival go down after that. And when that happens, one does not know his position. Hence three transponders will be attached to a soldier,” the source said, adding that the new systems will aid in the effective detection of a soldier in such an eventuality.

PAST INSTANCES

Despite high precautions taken by the Army in deploying troops to high-altitude avalanche-prone areas, a large number of soldiers are killed in snowslides.

About 35,000 troops are deployed in high-altitude areas across the Army's eastern and northern commands and there are over 2,000 troops posted in Siachen and nearby areas.

Sixty-one people were killed this month in a landslide that hit Tupul in the Noney district of Manipur, of which half were Territorial Army soldiers.

In February, an avalanche in Arunachal Pradesh killed seven Army personnel.

Data shared by the government in Parliament in February 2020 showed that the Army had lost six personnel to avalanches in the Siachen Glacier in 2019, and 11 others in other parts of the country.

In December 2019, the government told Parliament that 74 Army personnel had died in avalanches alone in the previous three years.

One of the reasons for such high casualties is the limited number of people available for recovery operations. The strength can be increased by getting additional troops from other posts using helicopters, but such operations are dependent on the prevailing weather conditions.

The rescue teams carry avalanche victim detectors and coloured avalanche chords for easy detection of victims trapped in the snow. They also carry other equipment such as ice axes, shovels, ropes, and hypothermia blankets.

Troops inducted in high-altitude regions are provided adequate training in mountain craft and ice craft so that they can survive in glaciated terrain in mountains and cope with any eventuality, the government had told Parliament, adding that helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles, snow scooters, avalanche detectors, and mountain clothing are among the equipment used by troops in such areas. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/army-buys-20-swedish-advanced-avalanche-rescue-systems-to-detect-trapped-soldiers-with-precision-5601703.html>

20. 67% of 335 smart city projects worth Rs 13,496 crore completed in Gujarat ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) Updated: July 22, 2022

As many as 335 smart city projects worth Rs 13,496 crore are under various stages of implementation in Gujarat, of which 67 per cent have been completed, states data tabled in the Lok Sabha Thursday.

The maximum completed projects are in Surat, a hub of diamond polishing and textiles, while the least number of projects executed so far are in the state capital Gandhinagar, states the data accompanying a written reply made by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to a question asked by BJP MPs C R Paatil and Rajesh Chudasama in the Lok Sabha.

Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Rajkot, Surat, Vadodara and Dahod were among the 100 cities selected between January 2016 to June 2018 to be developed as smart cities.

Of the total 335 smart city projects in Gujarat, Surat with 82 projects worth Rs 3,106 crore, has the maximum projects, followed by Rajkot (72 projects worth Rs 3,248 crore) and Ahmedabad (with 68 projects worth Rs 3,268 crore). The least number of projects (37) are in Dahod worth Rs 1,004 crore.

A total of 226 smart city projects worth Rs 6,297 crore have already been completed. The maximum projects completed are in Surat where 70 projects worth Rs 2,054 crore have been completed, followed by Ahmedabad, where 57 projects worth Rs 2056 crore have been completed.

The least number of projects executed are in the state capital Gandhinagar, where only 11 projects worth Rs 237 crore has been finished. This is even lesser than the predominantly tribal city of Dahod where 22 projects worth Rs 435 crore have been completed.

In these six cities there are 104 works worth Rs 6,032 crore that are on “work order stage,” and the maximum number of such projects are in Rajkot (45 projects worth Rs 1,748 crore). There are five more projects worth Rs 1,167 crore that are at a stage of tenders.

The Government of India began releasing funds to Gujarat under the Smart Cities Mission since 2015-16. Till the current financial year, 2022-23, the Centre has released Rs 2,139 crore for Gujarat and the maximum Rs 498 crore has gone to Surat, followed by Ahmedabad (Rs 416 crore) and Gandhinagar (Rs 343 crore). Each of the other three cities have received Rs 294 crore of Central funds.

The Government of India has also stated that it has not received any proposal the Gujarat government for inclusion of more city corporations under Smart Cities Mission. Gujarat currently has eight corporations and those in Bhavnagar, Jamnagar and Junagadh do not figure in Smart cities. <https://www.indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/67-pc-of-smart-city-projects-worth-rs-13496-cr-completed-in-gujarat-8044536/lite/>