

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (24.05.2022)

1. Supreme audit institutions are building rich IT audit professionals, says CAG Murmu ([thehindubusinessline.com](https://www.thehindubusinessline.com)) May 23, 2022

“The three Ps — Privacy, Performance and Participation — are the touchstone of e-government systems”

Auditors have an important role in strengthening e-government systems by providing inputs to the government in how it manages the three Ps - Privacy, Performance, and Participation.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) Girish Chandra Murmu, while inaugurating a virtual seminar as the chair of International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) Working Group on IT Audit (WGITA) here on Monday, said the three Ps are the touchstone of e-government systems.

If the principal beneficiary of e-governance is the people of the country, then the gains of advancement in technology are shared equitably. “In India, we have consistently followed the principle of Antyodaya, which means no one is left behind,” the CAG said.

Digitalisation in the 21st century

The unprecedented digitalisation in governance in the 21st century has transformed the way governments work. More importantly, it has re-defined people’s participation by means of e-governance.

“While e-government systems improve the ease of life, they also raise concerns of data privacy, national information security and associated risks of providing information technology services; creating new challenges and opportunities for Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs),” Murmu said.

These advancements have provided opportunities to audit as well. SAI India has embarked on its enterprise-wide audit process automation and knowledge management system. An ambitious project is the One IAAD One System Project implemented in SAI India.

Embedding data analytics

In addition, Murmu said that his organisation is increasingly embedding data analysis using advanced tools and techniques into its audit domain. It is supported by institutional arrangements within the organisation.

The Centre for Data Management and Analytics of SAI India plays an advisory and facilitating role to CAG field audit offices in the use of Data Analytics and audit of IT systems and fostering a data-driven culture in the institution.

The International Centre for Information Systems and Audit, the premier training centre of CAG of India, promotes capacity building on technology-related areas within SAI as well as internationally. The Centre of Excellence in Digital Audit of Revenue is the National Centre of Excellence of SAI India, which is designed to facilitate data analytics and digital audit of revenue.

Working Group on Information Technology Audit

Murmu lauded the achievements of the Working Group on Information Technology Audit (WGITA). This included development of a Global Curriculum for IT Audit.

Set up in 1989, the INTOSAI WGITA has membership of about 63 SAIs worldwide. It is mandated to support SAIs in developing their knowledge and skills in the use of information technology-related audits by setting standards and guidance and facilitating exchange of experiences, sharing best practices, and encouraging bilateral and regional cooperation among its members.

The WGITA of INTOSAI is building a rich body of IT audit professionals to ensure effectiveness, accountability and transparency. The Working Group reviewed the progress of ongoing projects on various IT-related topics, namely, Cyber Security and Data Protection Challenges, IT governance, Performance Evaluation of IT Systems. It also reviewed existing products it has developed besides webinars, creation and maintenance of a Global IT Audit Database and Global Curriculum for IT Audits.

“As technology makes deep inroads into public administration, creating its own complexities, it calls for continuous upgradation of not only infrastructure but also the skill and knowledge among auditors. WGITA gains increasing relevance and importance in this context, to help understand and master the challenges through exchange of innovations across SAIs,” Murmu said.

WGITA, under the leadership of the CAG, has been instrumental in placing a high-level guidance document on Information Systems Audits in the INTOSAI Framework for Professional Pronouncements. Apart from this, in recent years WGITA has also brought out many other guidance materials on topics such as Data Analytics Guideline and on capacity building requirements for IT Audits. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/supreme-audit-institutions-are-building-rich-it-audit-professionals-says-cag-murmu/article65453674.ece>

2. Public auditors should provide inputs to govt to help improve 3Ps of e-governance: CAG (economictimes.indiatimes.com) May 24, 2022

Public auditors need to provide inputs to the government to help them improve the e-governance system which primarily includes privacy, performance and participation (3Ps), said CAG Girish Chandra Murmu on Monday. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) was speaking after inaugurating a virtual seminar as the chair of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) Working Group on IT Audit (WGITA).

Auditors have an important role in strengthening e-government systems by providing inputs to the government on how it is managing the three Ps, which are the touchstones of e-government systems - Privacy, Performance, and Participation, he said.

If the principal beneficiary of e-governance is the people of the country, then the gains of advancement in technology are shared equitably, he said.

"In India, we have consistently followed the principle of Antyodaya which means no one is left behind," Murmu said.

Set up in 1989, the INTOSAI Working Group on IT Audit, has a membership of about 63 Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) worldwide.

It is mandated to support SAIs in developing their knowledge and skills in the use of information technology-related audits by setting standards and guidance and facilitating the exchange of experiences, sharing best practices, and encouraging bilateral and regional cooperation among its members.

The CAG further said the unprecedented digitalisation in governance in the 21st century has transformed the way governments work. More importantly, it has redefined people's participation by means of e-governance:

Murmu stated that while e-government systems improve the ease of life, they also raise concerns about data privacy, national information security and associated risks of providing information technology services; creating new challenges and opportunities for Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs). These advancements, he said, have provided opportunities to audit as well.

SAI India has embarked on its enterprise-wide audit process automation and knowledge management system. An ambitious project is the One IAAD One System (OIOS) Project implemented in SAI India.

Murmu also shared with the public auditors gathered at the Seminar, that his organisation is increasingly embedding data analysis using advanced tools and techniques into its audit domain. It is supported by institutional arrangements within the organisation.

Murmu also appreciated the achievements of the Working Group on Information Technology Audit.

The Working Group reviewed the progress of the ongoing projects on various IT related topics, including, cyber security and data protection challenges, IT governance, and performance evaluation of IT Systems.

It also reviewed existing products it has developed besides webinars, creation and maintenance of a Global IT Audit Database and Global Curriculum for IT Audits. <https://government.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/governance/public-auditors-should-provide-inputs-to-govt-to-help-improve-3ps-of-e-governance-cag/91760460>

3. Auditors play vital role in shaping e-governance, says CAG (dailypioneer.com) May 24, 2022

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Girish Chandra Murmu on Monday said that auditors have an important role in strengthening e-government systems by providing inputs to the Government in how it is managing the three Ps, which are the touchstone of e-government systems - Privacy, Performance, and Participation. He was inaugurating a virtual seminar as the chair of International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) Working Group on IT Audit (WGITA).

Murmu said that the principal beneficiary of e-Governance is the people of the country and have to consistently follow the principle of Antyodaya which means no one is left behind.

“While e-Governance systems improve the ease of life, they also raise concerns of data privacy, national information security and associated risks of providing information technology services; creating new challenges and opportunities for Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs)”. These advancements have provided opportunities to audit as well. SAI India has embarked on its enterprise-wide audit process automation and knowledge management system. An ambitious project is the One IAAD One System (OIOS) Project implemented in SAI India,” said the CAG of India.

He also said that India’s apex audit body is increasingly embedding data analysis using advanced tools and techniques into its audit domain. It is supported by institutional arrangements within the organization. Its Centre for Data Management and Analytics (CDMA) of SAI India plays an advisory and facilitating role to our field audit offices in the use of Data Analytics and audit of IT systems and fostering a data-driven culture in our institution. The International Centre for Information Systems and Audit (iCISA), the premier training centre of CAG of India, promotes capacity building on technology related areas within our SAI as well as internationally. <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2022/india/auditors-play-vital-role-in-shaping-e-governance--says-cag.html>

4. Auditors can strengthen e-govt systems: CAG ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) May 24, 2022

If the principal beneficiary of e-governance is the people of the country, then the gains of advancement in technology are shared equitably.

Auditors have an important role in strengthening e-government systems by providing inputs to the government on how it is managing the three Ps-Privacy, Performance, and Participation, which are the touchstone of e-government systems, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, GC Murmu said inaugurating a virtual seminar as the chair of International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) Working Group on IT Audit (WGITA) in Delhi on Monday.

If the principal beneficiary of e-governance is the people of the country, then the gains of advancement in technology are shared equitably. “In India, we have consistently followed the principle of Antyodaya which means no one is left behind,” the CAG said. <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/auditors-can-strengthen-e-govt-systems-cag/2535365/>

5. Public auditors need to provide inputs Govt to help improve e-governance: CAG ([dailyexcelsior.com](https://www.dailyexcelsior.com)) 24 May 2022

Public auditors need to provide inputs to the government to help them improve the e-government system which primarily includes, privacy, performance and participation (3Ps), said CAG Girish Chandra Murmu on Monday.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) was speaking after inaugurating a virtual seminar as the chair of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) Working Group on IT Audit (WGITA).

Auditors have an important role in strengthening e-government systems by providing inputs to the Government on how it is managing the three Ps, which are the touchstone of e-government systems – Privacy, Performance, and Participation, he said as per an official release.

If the principal beneficiary of e-governance is the people of the country, then the gains of advancement in technology are shared equitably, he said.

“In India, we have consistently followed the principle of Antyodaya which means no one is left behind,” Murmu said.

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It is mandated to support SAIs in developing their knowledge and skills in the use of information technology-related audits by setting standards and guidance and facilitating the exchange of experiences, sharing best practices, and encouraging bilateral and regional cooperation among its members.

The CAG further said the unprecedented digitalisation in governance in the 21st century has transformed the way Governments work. More importantly, it has re-defined people’s participation by means of e-governance.

Murmu stated that while e-government systems improve the ease of life, they also raise concerns about data privacy, national information security and associated risks of providing information technology services; creating new challenges and opportunities for Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs).

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Murmu also shared with the public auditors gathered at the Seminar, that his organisation is increasingly embedding data analysis using advanced tools and techniques into its audit domain. It is supported by institutional arrangements within the organisation.

Murmu also appreciated the achievements of the Working Group on Information Technology Audit.

The Working Group reviewed the progress of the ongoing projects on various IT related topics, including, cyber security and data protection challenges, IT governance, and performance evaluation of IT Systems.

It also reviewed existing products it has developed besides webinars, creation and maintenance of a Global IT Audit Database and Global Curriculum for IT

Audits. <https://www.dailyexcelsior.com/public-auditors-need-to-provide-inputs-govt-to-help-improve-e-governance-cag/>

6. Government auditors should provide necessary information to improve e-governance system: CAG ([newsdayexpress.com](https://www.newsdayexpress.com)) 23 May 2022

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Girish Chandra Murmu said on Monday that auditors should provide information to help the government in reforming the e-government system. This primarily includes privacy, performance and participation (3P).

Murmu said this after inaugurating a digitally organized seminar as Chairman of the Working Group on IT (Information Technology) Audits (WGITA) of International Organization of Apex Audit Institutions (INTOSAI).

According to an official release, he said that the auditors have an important role in the e-governance system. They can play this role by giving necessary information to the government about the management of the three 'P's' i.e. privacy, performance and participation. All these three are important from the point of view of e-operational system.

The CAG said that if the main beneficiaries of the e-governance system are the common people of the country, then the benefits of advancement in technology should be shared equally.

In India, we follow the principle of Antyodaya. It means no one is left behind.

The Working Group on IT Audit of INTOSAI, formed in 1989, has about 63 Leading Audit Institutions (SAIs) members across the world.

Murmu said that in the 21st century there has been a remarkable digitization in the governance system. This has led to significant changes in the functioning of the government. Most importantly, it has increased people's participation.

He said that while e-government systems make life easier, they also raise concerns about data privacy, national information security and the associated risks of providing information technology services. In such a situation, new challenges and opportunities have arisen for the Apex Accounting Institutions (SAI).

Murmu also appreciated the achievements of the Working Group on Information Technology Audit.

The Working Group has reviewed the progress of ongoing projects on various IT related topics. This includes cyber security and data protection challenges etc.

Source: [navbharattimes.indiatimes.com](https://www.navbharattimes.indiatimes.com). <https://www.newsdayexpress.com/business/government-auditors-should-provide-necessary-information-to-improve-e-governance-system-cag/>

7. Government auditors must provide information to help improve e-government ([bollyinside.com](https://www.bollyinside.com)) 23 May 2022

CAG Girish Chandra Murmu stated on Monday that public auditors must provide feedback to the government to help them improve the e-government system, which essentially involves privacy, performance, and participation (3Ps).

As chair of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) Working Group on IT Audit, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) spoke after launching a virtual seminar (WGITA). Auditors play a vital role in enhancing e-government systems by offering input to the government on how it manages the three Ps, which are the touchstone of e-government systems: Privacy, Performance, and Participation.

If the principal beneficiary of e-governance is the people of the country, then the gains of advancement in technology are shared equitably, he said. "In India, we have consistently followed the principle of Antyodaya which means no one is left behind," Murmu said.

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8. सरकारी लेखा परीक्षकों को ई-

संचालन व्यवस्था में सुधार के लिये जरूरी जानकारी उपलब्ध करानी चाहिए: कैग

(navbharattimes.indiatimes.com, hindi-theprint-in) 23 May 2022

नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) गिरीश चंद्र मुर्मू ने सोमवार को कहा कि लेखा परीक्षकों को ई-सरकारी व्यवस्था में सुधार को लेकर सरकार की मदद के लिये जानकारी उपलब्ध करानी चाहिए। इसमें मुख्य रूप से निजता, प्रदर्शन और भागीदारी (3पी) शामिल हैं।

मुर्मू ने सर्वोच्च ऑडिट संस्थानों के अंतरराष्ट्रीय संगठन (आईएनटीओएसएआई) के आईटी (सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी) ऑडिट पर कार्यसमूह (डब्ल्यूजीआईटीए) के अध्यक्ष के रूप में डिजिटल रूप से आयोजित सेमिनार का उद्घाटन करने के बाद यह बात कही।

एक आधिकारिक विज्ञप्ति के अनुसार, उन्होंने कहा कि लेखा परीक्षकों की ई-संचालन व्यवस्था में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका है। वे सरकार को निजता, प्रदर्शन और भागीदारी यानी तीन 'पी' के प्रबंधन के बारे में जरूरी जानकारी देकर यह भूमिका निभा सकते हैं। यह तीनों ई-संचालन व्यवस्था के लिहाज से महत्वपूर्ण हैं।

कैग ने कहा कि अगर ई-संचालन व्यवस्था के मुख्य लाभार्थी देश के आम लोग हैं, तब प्रौद्योगिकी में उन्नति के लाभों को समान रूप से साझा किया जाना चाहिए।

उन्होंने कहा,

“भारत में हम अंत्योदय के सिद्धांत का अनुकरण करते हैं। इसका मतलब है कि कोई भी पीछे नहीं रहे।”

वर्ष 1989 में गठित आईएनटीओएसएआई के आईटी ऑडिट पर कार्यसमूह के दुनियाभर में लगभग 63 प्रमुख ऑडिट संस्थान (एसएआई) सदस्य हैं।

मुर्मू ने कहा कि 21वीं सदी में संचालन व्यवस्था में उल्लेखनीय डिजिटलीकरण हुआ है। इससे सरकार के स्तर पर कामकाज में महत्वपूर्ण बदलाव हुए हैं। सबसे महत्वपूर्ण, इससे लोगों की भागीदारी बढ़ी है।

उन्होंने कहा कि जहां ई-

सरकारी प्रणालियां जीवन को सुगम बनाती हैं, वहीं आंकड़ों की गोपनीयता, राष्ट्रीय सूचना सुरक्षा और सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी सेवाएं प्रदान करने के संबंधित जोखिम को लेकर चिंताएं भी पैदा करती हैं। ऐसे में सर्वोच्च लेखा संस्थानों (साई) के लिए नई चुनौतियां और अवसर पैदा हुए हैं।

मुर्मू ने सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी ऑडिट पर कार्यसमूह की उपलब्धियों की सराहना भी की।

कार्यसमूह ने विभिन्न आईटी संबंधित विषयों पर चल रही परियोजनाओं की प्रगति की समीक्षा की है। इसमें साइबर सुरक्षा और आंकड़ा संरक्षण चुनौतियां आदि शामिल हैं। <https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/business/business-news/cag-should-provide-necessary-information-to-government-auditors-to-improve-e-operation-system/articleshow/91749318.cms>

9. 1.82 lakh trains fail on punctuality index: CAG (timesofindia.indiatimes.com) Updated: May 24, 2022

LUCKNOW: While countries such as Japan, the Netherlands, Germany and Russia have a train punctuality yardstick of a few seconds to the maximum of five minutes, the Indian railways has stretched it to 15 minutes.

What is more disturbing is the fact that despite setting a low benchmark, the punctuality index of the mail and express trains in the country has declined from 79% in 2012-13 to 69.23% in 2018-19 and that too at terminating stations only, said a CAG report.

While in 2015-16, out of 5.86 lakh trains, 1.27 lakh express trains reached the destination with delay, during 2018-19 the number of delayed trains increased by 43%. Unfortunately, out of 6.22 lakh trains, 1.82 lakh trains did not meet the punctuality yardstick of 15 minutes. Three zonal railways (all having jurisdiction in Uttar Pradesh) NCR, ECR and NR have contributed 69% and 67% in total delay of Indian railways during 2015-16 and 2018-19.

Review of the complaint management system by CAG audit revealed that there was a sharp increase in the number of complaints lodged for inordinate delays. During 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 a total of 9,112, 20,025 and 35,793 complaints were lodged in the system for late running of trains. The complaints increased to 40,077 (an increase of 340% over 2015-16) in 2018-19.

In a response to the CAG report the ministry of railways stated in November 2021 that while Indian railways measures punctuality on a terminating basis, the monitoring is done on a continuous and real-time basis. To put punctuality performance in perspective it is to be noted that between 2012-2013 and 2018-2019 the train services have increased by 20%.

The railway ministry also stated that train services increased by over 1.5 times over 10 years. The average speed of mail and express trains during 2006-07 was 48.5 kmph, while during 2018-19 it went up to 50.2 kmph. The travelling time of more than 900 trains was reduced by more than an hour, while for 1,600 trains the travelling time was reduced by over 30 minutes.

However, unsatisfied with the railway's response, the CAG report said, "Punctuality measured on terminating basis does not conform to global best practices." It further stated that "the increase of only 3.5% of average speed in over 10 years is not a perceptible achievement despite upgradation of track infrastructure, rolling stock and signalling system."

The report stated that NEEExpress (12505) and Kaifiyat Express (12226) had 0% punctuality in 2018-19. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/1-82-lakh-trains-fail-on-punctuality-index-cag/articleshow/91753471.cms>

10. Will a cut in Centre's excise duty on petrol reduce States' sales tax revenue? (thehindu.com) MAY 24, 2022

Data show that a drop in the Centre's excise duty, regardless of the component deducted, reduces the States' VAT collections

A war of words has broken out between the Centre and the States regarding the Centre's excise duty cut and its impact on the tax revenue of the States. On May 21, the Centre announced a reduction of ₹8/litre in the excise duty charged on petrol. A day later, Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Dr. P. Thiaga Rajan tweeted that Tamil Nadu loses revenue when the Centre cuts tax as the State's taxes are advalorem. Ad-valorem basis means that a State's sales tax is based on the sum of the Centre's excise duty, the base price of petrol and the dealer's commission. The same day, Ms. Sitharaman explained in a series of tweets that the "entire burden of these two duty cuts is borne by the Centre" and the basic excise duty which is shareable with the States "has not been touched." Data show that a drop in the Centre's excise duty, regardless of the component deducted, reduces the States' VAT collections.

Change in excise duty

The table lists the components of the Centre's excise duty on petrol before and after the cut announced last Saturday. The reduction of ₹8/litre on petrol announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was deducted entirely from the Road and Infrastructure Cess component which is not shareable with the States. Only the basic excise duty worth ₹1.4/litre is shareable with the States; the additional duty and cesses are not shareable.

Impact on State's tax collections

The table lists the petrol price build up in Delhi before and after the central excise duty cut on Saturday. As Delhi's sales tax rate of 19.4% is charged on the sum of the base price, the Centre's excise duty and the dealer's commission, a reduction in excise duty will also bring down Delhi's sales tax charged on a litre of petrol. In this case, due to the Centre's cut, Delhi's sales tax reduced by ₹0.83/litre of petrol.

VAT across States

The table lists the VAT/sales tax levied by select States. Similar to Delhi, all the States charge VAT as a % on the sum of the base price, the Centre's excise duty and dealer's commission. In addition to that, some States also charge an additional amount as a flat rate on every litre of petrol or as cess. So, while the Centre's excise duty component remains fixed, the States' VAT rate is based on the other three components. And a reduction in excise duty will impact States' revenues to varying degrees based on the % of VAT levied.

Misused funds

Moreover, the Centre is expected to transfer the "unshareable" cess to the designated reserve funds so that it can be utilised for the earmarked purposes. However, in 2020, the CAG observed that the Centre retained 40% of all cess collections in FY19. Not a rupee of the ₹1.2 lakh crore of cess collected on crude oil was transferred to an oil industry development body it was meant to finance (FY10-FY19).

Source: PPAC, CAG, IOCL

<https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-will-a-cut-in-centres-excise-duty-on-petrol-reduce-states-sales-tax-revenue/article65455980.ece?homepage=true>

11. Chhattisgarh govt mulls probe into Augusta Westland helicopter purchase in 2007 (timesofindia.indiatimes.com) May 23, 2022

RAIPUR: Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Monday hinted at the possibility of the state government ordering a probe into the purchase of Augusta Westland109 helicopter purchase during the previous BJP regime.

This indication comes 10 days after the state-owned Augusta Westland-109 chopper crashed at the Swami Vivekananda Airport, killing two experienced pilots on May 12.

“If there is a demand for a probe, the government might consider it”, he told reporters at the helipad before leaving for Dantewada in the tribal Bastar region for his ongoing outreach campaign.

A day before, two RTI activists had demanded a probe into the purchase of Augusta Westland Chopper by the state government, alleging that there was a scam in its purchase.

Indications are that they could submit a letter to the state government soon demanding a detailed probe into all aspects of the purchase, including the tendering process, to find out the background of the company, individual or any agent. There is also a demand to examine whether there was any role of then chief minister Raman Singh’s office in the process of purchase of the chopper.

Augusta Westland-109 helicopter, which crashed at the Swami Vivekananda Airport in Raipur on May 12 night two pilots on board, was embroiled in a controversy over alleged kickbacks after the Chhattisgarh government brought it in 2007.

Senior Congress leader T S Singhdeo, who is now health minister in Chhattisgarh, and Nitin Sinha had filed a petition in the Supreme Court in 2016-17 over alleged irregularities in chopper purchase, violation of tender rules and other issues after the then BJP government purchased this chopper in 2007. Besides, two other petitions were also filed by Swaraj Abhiyan and another one by activist Rakesh Choubey over the same issue.

The petitioners had alleged that a huge commission was paid to the middleman in the deal and one of the beneficiaries might be the then Chief Minister’s son. It was also alleged that the price paid for the chopper was in excess of the prevailing market price at that time and about 30 per cent of the cost of the chopper was paid as a commission by the Raman Singh government.

The Supreme Court had, however, dismissed these petitions in February 2018 pointing out that there was no material prima facie to prove the allegations.

The petitioners had pointed out that the then Chhattisgarh government had brought the chopper from Sharp Ocean Investment private Limited (SOIL), a Hong Kong-based company who are registered dealer of Augusta Westland, Italy at a price of Rs 65.70 lakh dollars which amounted to Rs 26.58 crore in INR. Initially, it was claimed that Augusta had quoted 63.15 lakh dollars by offering a rebate of two lakh dollars for direct purchase from the company. Three state government officers had then visited Hong Kong-based SOIL for negotiations for this purchase.

As the process got delayed, the offer to buy the chopper at a price of Rs 61.15 lakh dollars was cancelled, officials claimed. After the state government chopper, Maina crashed, the state revived the process further and issued a global tender for the purchase of a new helicopter. Besides, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in its report pointed out that the state had to pay Rs 65 lakh more due to the purchase of the chopper through tender instead of direct purchase. The CAG calculated the loss on the basis of the extra cost paid by the state government due to the avoidable delay in taking a decision on signing the contract by the due

date for the purchase of the new helicopter. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/chhattisgarh-govt-mulls-probe-into-augusta-westland-helicopter-purchase-in-2007/articleshow/91750555.cms>

12. NPP questions govt on PDS irregularities (*nagalandpost.com*) 24 May 2022

National People's Party (NPP) State unit has questioned the State government on irregularities in public distribution system (PDS).

Noting how several studies and reports had highlighted the irregularities, the party in a press release said the average leakage from off-taken food grains of PDS in the country was 46.7% in 2011-2012 as per an estimate. In the State-wise leakage estimation, Nagaland was found to have 94.7% leakage of PDS off-taken food grains in the same period. The report of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India during the period 2005 to 2011 had also unearthed serious irregularities in the State's PDS structure, it added.

Moreover, the CAG report revealed that the Department of Food & Civil Supplies had issued ration cards randomly. Some other anomalies reported were large scale diversion of food grains to open market, allocation of food grains to non-existent institutions, hostels and Village Grain Banks, short allocation, short lifting and delayed distribution of food grains, charging higher rates and inadequate infrastructure, etc. The CAG had concluded in its report that all these anomalies and corrupt practices had seriously affected implementation of PDS in Nagaland, the release added.

NPP said it was also unfortunate that there were no adequate storage depots and warehouses in any district, with even Food Corporation of India (FCI) facilities, including the one at Dimapur, lacking in proper infrastructure and monitoring by the State agencies, due to which a huge quantity of rice and other commodities ended up at private godowns of unscrupulous businessmen.

Noting that the State government had extended the number of state stockists handling tide over rice in 2022-2023 as per an official notification, dated February 18, 2022, the party said it was aware that the tide over allocation of rice under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), which had been released from May 2022 to March 2023, amounted to 3,873 MT per month to all districts, but no proper records of the distribution had been found till date.

According to the above allocation, the party said Mokokchung should receive 400 MT, Wokha 380 MT, Phek 300 MT, Peren 200 MT, Tseminyu 100 MT, Kohima 400 MT, Longleng 200 MT, Dimapur 448 MT, Kiphire 220 MT, Shamatore 100 MT, Mon 400 MT, Niuland 100 MT, Chumukedima 100 MT, Noklak 100 MT, Tuensang 125 MT and Zunheboto 300 MT tide over rice through their respective stockists.

In 2018 and in 2019, NPP recalled that Nagaland Public Rights Awareness and Action Forum (NPRAAF) had raised serious concerns over the selection of State stockists and allocation without properly identifying the targeted beneficiaries. It had also discovered that targeted PDS (TPDS) was non-existent and there were no proper records despite the State receiving more than surplus items each month from the Centre.

The party claimed that Nagaland received 16,625 MT of rice annually with a monthly allocation of 1,385 MT of rice and 76,331 MT under Priority Households (PHH) with a monthly allocation of 6,360 MT. According to this supply and distribution, every individual in Nagaland should have received 4 kg rice per month on an average.

NPP questioned the State government where all these huge quantities of rice had disappeared and who had been the indirect beneficiaries of PDS for so many years. It demanded that the people responsible for all these corrupt practices should be exposed in public and appropriate action taken against them.

Further, the party said the rural farmers would benefit if they were provided with more incentives for local produce instead of solely relying on PDS. It suggested that the State government could mull over a programme whereby the funds allocated for PDS could be utilised for subsidies, agricultural loans and for procuring better seeds, modern equipment and organic manures for the local farmers to help create a better local economy. It appealed to all civil society groups, NGOs and citizens concerned to always question the State government on issues related to development of Nagaland and also rise and claim what was legally and rightfully theirs.

NPP said it was greatly dissatisfied and miffed at the manner in which the State government had been trying its best to elude questions posed to it by various civil societies and NGOs on issues and matter related to the well-being and development of the State, including the PDS. Since the enactment of National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, the scope of PDS had been widened with the increase of level of subsidies and expansion of coverage up to 75% of the rural population and up to 50% of urban population under TPDS, the release added. <https://www.nagalandpost.com/index.php/npp-questions-govt-on-pds-irregularities/>

13. Scrap voter list, cards – Aadhaar Hai Na! (thehansindia.com) 24 May 2022

Bihar Panchayat Raj Minister Samrat Chaudhary has come up with a unique idea of having dedicated websites for each and every gram Panchayat in the State. It is not a fancy idea to make the panchayat's presence felt on the Internet. It is aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability of 8,300-plus panchayats which will get Rs 8,500 crore budget for health and development works.

Each rupee that is spent will be accounted for. It is a great idea that every State must adopt and ensure that power flows down to the village level from the top. This will ensure decentralisation in its true sense.

This use of technology can be extended for conducting the elections and the forthcoming local self-government polls in States such as Maharashtra can be a good start for the much-needed reforms on this front. I am not talking any rocket science. The Aadhaar card has now come to be recognised as the single most important instrument of personal identity. I have seen the effective, flawless use of Aadhaar as an identity even in the serpentine queues at Tirupati.

Aadhaar is now accepted across financial accounts and transactions as part of the KYC. So, why don't we accept voter identification and scrap the outdated, outmoded, much-criticised system of voter registration and issuing of voter identity?

Imagine this. Huge rush at polling stations, people holding their ration cards or voter cards literally fall head-over-heels to find their name in the voter list. After managing to save their shirts in the melee, they collect their numbers. The check does not stop even after they reach the booths.

The number, name and identity are doubly checked. Then the voter is allowed to enter the voting machine area to press the button. Can all this not be done away with by using just one biometric identification just as they do in Tirupati Balaji queues? I have written to the Election Commission. Let us see.

The existing voter list system is full of flaws. Let me give you my personal example. Of all the four names that we registered, only my name figured in the list but with a wrong address. I got it corrected online, while my other family members still await their voter cards. On the contrary, all of us have our own Aadhaar cards. One of the flaws that I have observed is the scant respect with which the voter registration staff deals with the application forms, particularly during special camps.

They just throw them down into plastic trays on the ground. They do not bother to check if the forms land in the trays or fly away. This demonstrates their frustration. Don't we keep hearing the cases of disappearance of voters' names from the register en bloc, followed by accusations and counter accusations by politicians.

All this can be relegated to history by adopting the Aadhaar system. This is one sure shot way of ensuring inclusive democracy that everyone talks about these days. This is bound to prompt a few more voters to walk up to their neighbourhood polling booth without bothering about the elusive voter card and 'sacrifice' half an hour from their election day holiday.

The Aadhaar card can also be used for a host of other purposes such as land records, driving licence and even education record by incorporating a chip. Driving license anyway comes with a chip. It is a matter of extension of this technology to Aadhaar.

While we discuss the village panchayats, let us remember the man who dreamt of ensuring true self-governance – former PM Rajiv Gandhi whose death anniversary was observed last Saturday. Rajiv, through his Panchayat Raj plan and the 73rd Constitutional amendment, wanted the Gram Sabha as the foundation of the system.

Even the Congress party's greatest critic Prime Minister Narendra Modi said recently that "Panchayati Raj system is very important to fulfil the dream of Gram Swaraj." Modi went on to say "Today, as we are marking 'Amrit Mahotsav', we must fulfil Bapu's dream of Grameen Vikas." Good to hear these words which are almost music to one's ears as they remind us of what Mahatma Gandhi used to say – India lives in its villages.

Let's keep reminding the ruling dispensation at the Centre of Sab Ka Saath, Sab Ka Vikas and take it forward beyond slogans and election campaign banners. The inclusive growth should be transparent and must encompass all villages in all the States and Union territories, and not just the double engine-enabled ones. To begin with, the PM can empower all MPs to spend the funds allocated to them in rural areas as well, apart from asking them to ensure that the various government schemes are effectively implemented far and wide with far reaching effects. My heart bleeds when I read about funds allocated to various schemes just get lapsed for lack of

implementation. If the MPs, MLAs and down to gram panchayat level members take up the task of implementing these schemes, most of the problems will be solved.

Take the case of Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) under which each MP has the choice to suggest to the District Collector for works to the tune of Rs.5 Crores per annum to be taken up in his/her constituency.

For the uninitiated, the Rajya Sabha Members of Parliament can recommend works in one or more districts in the State from where he/she has been elected. The Nominated Members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select any one or more districts from any one State in the country for implementation of their choice of work under the scheme.

The rules of the game are clear. Under this scheme, the government directly transfers funds to the local authorities of respective constituencies. MPs do not receive any money but can recommend works following the guidelines in their constituency.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India recorded poor utilisation of funds, poor monitoring by the ministry, poor quality and, at times, inadmissible work, and suspected fraud and corruption. All these can be resolved with the Bihar model of transparency at the Panchayat level by uploading all accounts. Checks and counter checks become easy if the records are in the public domain.

Like many of those who travel on the roads, Mohan Guruswamy, former adviser to the finance ministry in the Vajpayee government, observed that the signs of development disappear the moment one travels 5 km on the highways. He had once made a presentation to a CMs' meet on decentralising powers. Responding, then Gujarat CM Keshubhai Patel asked him 'who will come to us if we do all these'. Guruswamy himself described this recently at Hyderabad.

As we look at a New India during the ongoing 75th year of Independence, it is time to shed this kind of feudal attitude and think like and for GenX, Y and Z. <https://www.thehansindia.com/business/scrap-voter-list-cards-aadhaar-hai-na-744527?infinite-scroll=1>

14. उत्तराखंड में बिना जल के चलती हर घर जल योजना (indiaspendhindi.com) 23 May, 2022

राज्य में जल जीवन मिशन के तहत 9,34,259 घरों में नल लग चुके हैं जो राज्य के कुल ग्रामीण परिवारों का 61.54% है। लेकिन क्या इन 61.54% ग्रामीण परिवारों को पानी मिल पा रहा है, ये एक बड़ा सवाल है।

देहरादून: उत्तराखंड देश की बड़ी नदियों और जल स्रोतों के लिए जाना जाता है लेकिन विडम्बना यह है कि हर साल गर्मी के दिनों में प्रदेश के लोग, खासकर पहाड़ी इलाकों में रहने वाले, पानी की समस्या से जूझने को मजबूर होते हैं।

पानी की समस्या प्रदेश में व्याप्त पलायन के मुख्य कारणों में से एक है लेकिन फिर भी उत्तराखंड के पहाड़ों में रहने वाले लोगों की प्यास बुझाने के लिए आधे-

अधूरे प्रयास ही दिखाई देते हैं। जल शक्ति मंत्रालय के द्वारा चलाये जाने वाले जल जीवन मिशन के अंतर्गत आने वाली हर घर जल योजना भी कुछ इस स्थिति में ही है।

हर घर जल परियोजना जिसकी घोषणा 15 अगस्त 2019 को प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के द्वारा लालकिले की प्राचीर से की गयी सभी घरों तक पानी की पहुंच इस योजना का मुख्य उद्देश्य है। अगर उत्तराखंड राज्य की बात करें तो जल जीवन मिशन की वेबसाइट पर उपलब्ध जानकारी के अनुसार राज्य के ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में कुल 15,18,115 परिवार हैं जिनमें से 15 अगस्त 2019 तक मात्र 1,30,325 घरों में पानी की सुविधा थी लेकिन वर्तमान में जल जीवन मिशन के तहत 9,34,259 घरों में नल लग चुके हैं जो राज्य के कुल ग्रामीण परिवारों का 61.54% है।

जल जीवन मिशन के तहत सबसे ज्यादा देहरादून जिले में 94.89% घरों में नल लग चुके हैं और हरिद्वार जिले में सबसे कम 39.06%; लेकिन यहां पर सवाल है कि क्या ये 61.54% ग्रामीण परिवार हर घर जल योजना का लाभ उठा रहे हैं?

केदार घाटी में मंदाकिनी नदी के किनारे पर बसा मैखंडा गाँव रुद्रप्रयाग जिले के ऊखीमठ ब्लॉक में आता है। मैखंडा में लगभग 250 परिवार रहते हैं, जिनके लिये गांव में केवल एक ही नल है। पानी से सम्बंधित अपनी सभी प्रकार की जरूरतों के लिये गांव के लोग इसी नल पर निर्भर रहते हैं। मैखंडा में दो साल पहले घरों में हर घर जल योजना के तहत नल लगे थे लेकिन इन नलों में अभी तक पानी नहीं आया है।

जल जीवन मिशन के डैशबोर्ड के अनुसार मैखंडा गाँव में 238 परिवार रहते हैं जिनमें से 192 यानिकि 80 % से ज्यादा घरों में नल से जल प्रदाय होता है। लेकिन, वास्तविकता में पूरे गाँव की पानी की जरूरतों को सिर्फ एक ही नल पूरा करता है।

मैखंडा आर्थिक और सामाजिक रूप से पिछड़ा है और इस गांव के अधिकांश लोग पिछड़ी और अनुसूचित जाती से आते हैं। प्रकृति की गोद में बसे इस गांव की अर्थव्यस्था मुख्य रूप से दिहाड़ी मजदूरी और खेती किसानों पर ही निर्भर करती है। नेशनल हाईवे 107 पर बसे होने के कारण इस गांव में कुछ सुविधाएँ जैसे स्कूल, प्राथमिक स्वास्थ्य केंद्र और किराना दुकानें तो आसानी से मिल जाती हैं लेकिन आज भी इस गांव के लोग पीने के पानी की समस्या से जूझ रहे हैं।

देश के दुसरे इलाकों की तरह ही मैखंडा में भी पानी लाने की जिम्मेदारी मुख्य रूप से घर की महिलाओं और लड़कियों की ही होती है।

बारहवीं कक्षा में पढ़ने वाली मुस्कान बताती हैं कि हर रोज सुबह के समय घर के कामों के लिए पानी उन्ही को लाना होता है क्योंकि घर के पुरुष सुबह ही काम की तलाश में घर से निकल जाते हैं और माँ को घर के और भी काम करने होते हैं।

"हमारे गांव में केवल एक ही नल है जिसके कारण हमेशा ही नल पर पानी लेने वालों की भीड़ लगी होती है जिसके चलते पानी लाने में समय भी बहुत लगता है इस वजह से मुझे कई बार स्कूल के लिए भी देरी हो जाती है जिसका असर मेरी पढ़ाई पर भी पड़ता है। गर्मी और बरसात के समय में पानी की समस्या और भी बढ़ जाती है क्योंकि गर्मियों में बहुत थोड़ा-थोड़ा पानी आता है और बरसात के समय पाइप लाइन टूट जाती जिसको सही करने में हफ्तों लग जाते हैं, " मुस्कान बताती हैं।

लग गए हैं नल, जल स्रोत का कोई नहीं ठिकाना

समस्या का कारण जानने के लिये रुद्रप्रयाग जिले के हर घर जल योजना के नोडल अधिकारी नवल कुमार सिंह से पूछा गया तो उन्होंने बताया,

"हर घर जल परियोजना के तहत पहले से उपलब्ध जल स्रोत से जल को हर घर तक पहुँचाना था लेकिन मैखंडा ग्राम सभा के जल स्रोत में पर्याप्त पानी नहीं होने के कारण नलों को मुख्य लाइन से अभी नहीं जोड़ा गया है। हमारे द्वारा दूसरे जल स्रोत को खोजा जा रहा है।"

मैखंडा की ही तरह प्रदेश के अन्य इलाकों में भी पीने के पानी के लिए लोगों को रोज संघर्ष करना पड़ता है।

टिहरी जिले के नरेंद्र नगर ब्लॉक के गांव रोंदेली में भी पानी की भारी किल्लत है। "हमारे गांव में हर घर जल योजना के तहत नल भी लगाए गए हैं लेकिन उनको अभी तक पानी के स्रोत से नहीं जोड़ा गया है। कारण पूछने पर अधिकारी बताते हैं कि हमारे गांव के लिये अभी कोई जल स्रोत निर्धारित नहीं किया गया है," गांव के प्रधान दिनेश सिंह बताते हैं।

उनका कहना है कि उनके गांव के आसपास जल के अच्छे स्रोत हैं लेकिन उनका इस्तेमाल ठीक से नहीं किया जा रहा है।

"हमारे गांव के ऊपर पानी का एक प्राचीन स्रोत है जिसमें बांज की जड़ों से निकलने वाला साफ पानी आता है; वहीं दूसरी ओर गांव के नीचे हेबल नदी में भी पर्याप्त मात्रा में पानी है लेकिन इसके बावजूद भी हमारे गांव में पानी की भारी किल्लत है," दिनेश कहते हैं।

हर घर जल योजना के अनुसार 55 लीटर पानी प्रति व्यक्ति प्रति दिन उपलब्ध कराया जाना है और यदि किसी जल स्रोत से ये आपूर्ति नहीं होती है तो गांव की पानी की लाइन को दूसरे किसी पानी के स्रोत से जोड़ा जायेगा। उत्तराखंड के पर्वतीय क्षेत्रों के बारे में यह जानना भी जरूरी है कि गर्मी बढ़ने के साथ जल स्रोतों में पानी की मात्रा बड़ी तेजी से घटती जाती है।

दिनेश इस समस्या के लिए प्रशासन को जिम्मेदार ठहराते हुए कहते हैं,

"हमारे गांव में 'विरोदा' से पानी आता है जो कि बांज के पेड़ों की जड़ों से निकलने वाली धारा है, लेकिन प्रशासन की गलत नीतियों के कारण इस स्रोत के पानी को कुछ और गाँवों में भी दिया जाता है जिसके चलते न तो हमारे गांव के लोगों को पर्याप्त मात्रा में पानी मिल पाता है और न ही बाकी के गाँवों को।"

गदरे (नहर), झरने और धाराएं ही प्राचीन समय से पर्वतीय क्षेत्रों में रह रहे लोगों की पीने के पानी की जरूरतों को पूरा करते आये हैं लेकिन पिछले कुछ समय से पानी के इन स्रोतों में पानी की निकासी लगातार घटी है। इन क्षेत्रों में किये गए तमाम शोध भविष्य में आने वाले पेयजल संकट की ओर इशारा करते हैं।

"किसी भी योजना को शुरू करने से पहले उस योजना के लिए डिटेल्ड प्रोजेक्ट रिपोर्ट (DPR) बनती है, मेरे द्वारा हमारे गांव के लिए हर घर जल योजना की रिपोर्ट विभाग से मांगी गयी ताकि पता लग सके कि इन नलों को पानी के किस स्रोत से जोड़ा जा रहा है और योजना पूर्ण न हो पाने के कारणों का पता चल सके। लेकिन विभाग DPR देने को तैयार ही नहीं है," दिनेश बताते हैं।

इसी प्रकार चमोली जिले के पैनी गांव में भी क्षमता से अधिक नल लगाने के कारण जिस प्रकार गांव में पानी की समस्या बढ़ी है उसको देखकर तो ऐसा ही लगता है जैसे हर घर जल परियोजना को जल्बाजी में बिना किसी पूर्व अध्यन के किया जा रहा है।

"घरो में नया नल तो लगा है लेकिन पानी का स्रोत वही पुराना है प्रत्येक घर में नल होने से लोग इस पानी का इस्तेमाल अपने घर के कामों के साथ-

साथ घर के आसपास के खेतों की सिंचाई के लिए भी करने लगे हैं जिसके कारण पानी की खपत और बढ़ी है पर जल आपूर्ति नहीं। यह एक नयी समस्या आज हमारे गांव के लोगों के सामने खड़ी है," पैनी गांव के मनमोहन बताते हैं।

मनमोहन बताते हैं कि हमारे गांव में पानी तो पहले भी आता था लेकिन जिस स्रोत से पानी आता है जो एक खुला गदेरा है, अगर थोड़ी भी बारिश होती है तो इसके पानी में मिट्टी मिल जाती है और पानी गंदला हो जाता है ऐसे में गाँव के लोगों को धारा से पानी लाना होता है जो गांव से काफी दूर है।

पानी की उपलब्धता नहीं, प्रबंधन है समस्या

ऐसा नहीं है कि राज्य में पानी की कोई कमी है। हमारे देश की दो बड़ी नदियाँ गंगा, यमुना और इन नदियों की अधिकांश सहायक नदियाँ भी उत्तराखंड के ग्लेशियर से ही निकलती हैं जो उत्तर भारत के अधिकांश हिस्सों में पानी की पूर्ति करती हैं। लेकिन ऐसा क्यों है कि पानी की प्रचुर उपलब्धता होने के बावजूद भी राज्य के अधिकांश पर्वतीय गांवों में पीने के पानी की समस्या बनी रहती है?

इसी वर्ष 22 मार्च को विश्व जल दिवस के उपलक्ष में एक सेमिनार को संबोधित करते हुए, डायरेक्टर जनरल उत्तराखंड स्टेट कॉउन्सिल फॉर साइंस एंड टेक्नोलॉजी (यूकॉस्ट) डॉ राजेंद्र डोभाल ने बताया कि उत्तराखंड राज्य में पानी की कमी नहीं है बल्कि सही प्रकार से पानी का प्रबंधन नहीं हो पाने के कारण जनता के सामने पीने के पानी की समस्या बनी हुई है।

साल 2018 की कैग रिपोर्ट के अनुसार उत्तराखंड उन प्रदेशों में आता है जहां 50% से भी कम जनसंख्या के लिए साफ़ और उचित मात्रा में पीने का पानी उपलब्ध हो। पानी की कमी के साथ ही प्रदेश भूजल के अत्यधिक दोहन, वनों की कटाई और सूखते हुए झरनों और जलाशयों की समस्याओं से भी जूझ रहा है।

इस विषय पर यूकॉस्ट में डिस्ट्रिक्ट कोर्डिनेटर और डीएवी कॉलेज में रसायन विभाग में प्रोफ़ेसर डॉ प्रशांत सिंह बताते हैं,

"हमारे कई शोधार्थी राज्य बनने के बाद से पेयजल की स्थिति पर लगातार शोध कर रहे हैं। ये सभी शोध भविष्य में गंभीर पेयजल संकट की ओर इशारा करते हैं। इसलिए हमें अपने प्राकृतिक जल स्रोतों सुरक्षित रखने के लिए ठोस कदम उठाने होंगे।"

डॉ प्रशांत सिंह आगे बताते हैं कि जल स्रोतों के घटते जल स्तर के लिए ग्लोबल वार्मिंग के साथ पहाड़ों में अनियोजित रूप से बन रही सड़कें, निर्माण कार्यों के लिए किये जाने वाले विस्फोटों के साथ पहाड़ों में बढ़ता चीड़ का जंगल जिम्मेदार है। हमें अपने प्राकृतिक जल स्रोतों को सुरक्षित रखने के लिए जरूरी कदम उठाने होंगे जिसके लिए हमारे द्वारा पानी की डिस्चार्ज की कमी को पूरा करने के लिए वैज्ञानिक तरीकों पर

काम किया जा रहा है। <https://indiaspendhindi.com/uttarakhand/jal-jeevan-missions-har-ghar-jal-scheme-running-without-water-in-uttarakhand-819020>

15. 'बागवानी पॉलिसी' बना रहा हिमाचल: जून में ड्राफ्ट पब्लिश होगा; 6000 करोड़ की फ्रूट-इंडस्ट्री के लिए पहली बार बन रही योजना (bhaskar.com) 24 May 2022

हिमाचल सरकार 'बागवानी नीति' बनाने जा रही है। प्रदेश में पहली बार विभिन्न फलों की खेती को प्रोत्साहन देने के मकसद से यह नीति तैयार की जा रही है। इससे पहले कभी भी बागवानी क्षेत्र के लिए पॉलिसी नहीं बनाई गई, जबकि विभिन्न फलों का राज्य के सकल घरेलू उत्पाद (GDP) में 6000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक का योगदान रहता है। अकेले सेब ही 4500 करोड़ से अधिक का होता है। अब राज्य को फल स्टेट बनाने की तैयारी है। इसी मकसद से करोड़ों रुपये की HP शिवा परियोजना कार्यान्वित की जा रही है।

स्टेक होल्डर्स के साथ बैठक कर चुका विभाग

बागवानी विभाग के मुताबिक, पॉलिसी को लेकर कुछ हितधारकों (Stake Holders) के साथ बैठक की गई है। पॉलिसी में हितधारकों के सुझाव को शामिल किया जाएगा। पॉलिसी को तैयार करने में विभाग द्वारा की जा रही बागवानी जनगणना के आंकड़े इस्तेमाल किए जाएंगे।

IT का पॉलिसी में भरपूर इस्तेमाल

सूत्रों की मानें तो बागवानी नीति में सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी (IT) के इस्तेमाल को तवज्जो दी गई है, ताकि बागवानों के लिए जो भी जानकारी जरूरी हो, वह विभाग की वेबसाइट पर आसानी से उपलब्ध कराई जा सके। इस पॉलिसी के लागू होने के बाद अधिकारी भी काम नहीं करने के बहाने नहीं ढूंढ पाएंगे।

पहले आओ, पहले पाओ की नीति पर मिलेगी सब्सिडी

IT ड्राइवन पॉलिसी के पीछे की मंशा विभिन्न योजनाओं के कार्यान्वयन में पारदर्शिता लाने के साथ हर काम समयबद्ध करना है। पॉलिसी लागू होने के बाद विभिन्न योजनाओं की सब्सिडी के आवंटन में पारदर्शिता आएगी। सभी लाभार्थियों को पहले आओ, पहले पाओ की नीति पर सब्सिडी दी जाएगी।

CAG ने भी की थी पॉलिसी बनाने की सिफारिश

दरअसल, भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (CAG) ने भी बागवानी विभाग की कार्यप्रणाली पर गंभीर सवाल खड़े किए थे और पॉलिसी बनाने की सिफारिश की थी, क्योंकि विभाग में अब तक विभिन्न स्कीमों के तहत अनुदान इत्यादि देने में कायदे कानूनों का ध्यान नहीं रखा जाता।

अब तक पॉलिसी नहीं होना शर्म की बात: सिंघा

प्रोग्रेसिव ग्रोवर एवं प्लम ग्रोवर एसोसिएशन के अध्यक्ष दीपक सिंघा ने बताया कि यह शर्म की बात है। राज्य की अर्थव्यवस्था और रोजगार में बागवानी क्षेत्र के सबसे महत्वपूर्ण योगदान रहता है, लेकिन आज तक इसके लिए पॉलिसी नहीं बनाई गई। उन्होंने पॉलिसी का स्वागत करते हुए कहा कि इससे बागवानी क्षेत्र के विकास को दिशा मिलेगी।

जून के आखिर तक सार्वजनिक होगा पॉलिसी का ड्राफ्ट

सचिव बागवानी अमिताभ अवस्थी ने बताया कि बागवानी पॉलिसी का ड्राफ्ट अंतिम चरण में है। इसे जून महीने के आखिर तक बागवानों की आपत्ति एवं सुझाव के लिए सार्वजनिक किया जाएगा। इसके लिए हितधारकों के साथ दो बार बैठकें की गई हैं। <https://www.bhaskar.com/local/himachal/shimla/news/the-draft-will-be-published-in-june-6000-crore-fruit-industry-being-made-policy-for-the-first-time-129842694.html>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

16. Disinvestment push ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) May 24, 2022

Good that the government has set the ball rolling, but the Pawan Hans episode is a wake-up call

It is a good sign that the government has already set the ball rolling on realising a significant chunk of its 65,000 crore disinvestment target this fiscal. As this newspaper reported on Saturday, the government is hoping to sell its residual stake in Hindustan Zinc (worth 36,600 crore), apart from indirectly held stakes in ITC (a partial stake sale) and Axis Bank. It is also attempting to complete the sale of Shipping Corporation of India, clear the way for the strategic disinvestment of Container Corporation of India, and invite expressions of interest for privatising IDBI Bank. Disinvestment secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey also said that the HZL stake sale proposal will be sent to the Union Cabinet shortly.

Early efforts like these are a welcome departure from past practices when too much is left to the final quarter, due to which some PSU offers are hustled through in a great hurry. The bulk of the proposed sales this fiscal have got held up for a raft of reasons. Given that it will need to spend close to Rs 1.8 trillion above the budget estimate for fertiliser and food subsidies, the government has to ensure that the disinvestment plan doesn't go off track once again. Already, it has the awkward distinction of missing its divestment targets three years in a row. The collection in FY22 stood at a mere Rs 13,531 crore against a targeted Rs 78,000 crore (revised downwards in Budget FY23 from Rs 1.75 trillion). Forming a larger disinvestment pipeline will ensure a far healthier appetite for offers of sale. A significant marketing effort also needs to be put into showcasing the strengths of the entities on sale so that these offers draw participation from a more diverse set of investors.

Against this backdrop, the government must draw the right lessons from the Pawan Hans mess it has landed in. The cloud over the sale of the public-sector chopper service provider could have been avoided if there had been better coordination between different wings of the government. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the sale of a 51% stake in the PSU to Star9 Mobility, a tripartite consortium, just nine days after the Kolkata bench of the National Companies Law Tribunal (NCLT) had ordered action against the lead member, Cayman Islands-based Almas Global Opportunity Fund, which had failed to pay the creditors of EMC Ltd, a power transmission company, after making the winning bid for the latter in insolvency proceedings.

While the reason behind the lapse is not clear yet, the revelation is deeply embarrassing for the government. It is very likely that the Pawan Hans sale will now have to be put on hold, making a mockery of the entire process as even a cursory due diligence would have spotted the track record of the winning bidder. This is not the first time that such a lapse has happened. In January this year, the sale of Central Electronics Ltd (CEL) had to be stopped after certain irregularities

regarding the winning bidder were flagged in political circles apart from allegations of undervaluation. According to Dipam's guidelines on qualification of bidders, any conviction by a court of law or indictment or adverse order by a regulatory authority that "casts a doubt on the ability of the bidder to manage the public sector unit when it is disinvested, or which relates to a grave offence would constitute disqualification." Per publicly available information, it would seem that if the consortium does meet the financial eligibility criteria, it is solely on the back of the lead member, which risks disqualification if an appeal against the NCLT order falls through. The Centre did well to clarify early on that the Letter of Award has not yet been given in the Pawan Hans sale and it is examining the matter legally. The way forward would be to ensure avoiding recurrence of such incidents. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/disinvestment-push/2535141/>

17. GST and Federalism (thestatesman.com) May 24, 2022

The May 19 ruling of the Hon'ble Supreme Court (SC) confirming a Gujarat High Court ruling that the Centre cannot levy Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) on ocean freight on Indian importers may have some unintended consequences, not exactly following from its ruling in this particular case but from its further observation that the Union and the State legislatures have "equal, simultaneous and unique powers" to make laws on GST and that the recommendations of the GST Council are not binding on them. This was a position well understood by both the Centre and the states, but the specific observation may alter the landscape in our fractious political landscape and may have given the opposition-ruled states which may have some grievance against the Centre on the issue of GST further grist to the mill. While the Court may have intended to promote "cooperative federalism", it may have harmed it unintentionally.

But first let us go into the case which deals with an old contentious issue.

For international trade, goods can be transported from one country to another through air or sea routes. For import of goods, services provided by the carriers are not treated equally under the GST regime.

While air freight ~ that is, the cost of services provided by the air transporter ~ is exempt from GST, ocean freight is charged under reverse charge mechanism in case the transporter is based abroad. Usually, it is the supplier of goods and services who should pay the GST on the supplied goods and services, but under the reverse charge mechanism, it is the receiver ~ in this case the importer ~ who pays the GST since the chargeability is reversed.

Imports can be either free on board (FOB) when the importer is liable to pay the freight in which case there is no dispute regarding chargeability of tax, but problem arises in the case of cost-insurance and freight (CIF) transactions in which the exporter pays the freight in addition to the cost of goods and insurance.

Under a notification issued in June 2017 after recommendation of the GST Council, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) levied GST at 5 per cent on the value of imported goods considering 10 per cent of the value of imported goods as "deemed ocean freight", which translates into a levy of 0.5 per cent GST on the value of imported goods as GST on services, besides Customs duty and GST on the imported goods.

The case with Indian importers is that while they are not paying for the freight, they are liable to pay the GST on it just because the exporter is based abroad in a non-taxable jurisdiction. In 2020, in the case of Union of India & Others Vs Mohit Minerals, an importer, the Gujarat High Court had held that the said notification did not have the force of law and struck down the levy on the ground that the reverse charge was ultra vires the parent enactment, the IGST Act of 2017. The government then approached the SC which has upheld the Gujarat High Court ruling.

The importers who had paid GST on freight will now be eligible for refund of the GST paid to the extent that has not been utilised as input credit.

So far there is no problem, but the problem arises in respect of the additional observations of the SC which may indeed alter the GST landscape, and lead to a fresh set of litigations and challenges to earlier Council decisions.

“The recommendations of the GST Council are the product of a collaborative dialogue involving the Union and the states.

To regard them as binding would disrupt fiscal federalism when both the Union and the states are conferred equal power to legislate on GST,” the SC has observed, noting further, and correctly, that the “federal system is a means to accommodate the needs of a pluralistic society... Democracy and federalism are interdependent to each other. Federalism would only be stable in a well-functioning democracy. Additionally, the constituent units of a federal polity check the exercise of powers of one another to prevent one group from exercising dominant power”.

But while observing that Article 246A of the Constitution, which gives the states power to make laws with respect to GST, treats the Union and the States as “equal units” and that “it confers a simultaneous power (on Union and States) for enacting laws on GST”, the SC probably did not consider adequately how the GST Council, represented by the Union and the states, has been functioning so far.

The Court’s interpretation that the Centre and the States are “autonomous, independent and even competing units” for the purpose of GST and that Article 279A constituting the GST Council envisions non-dependence of the Centre and the states on each may be correct only theoretically, but in reality, they are very much dependent on each other, and no spirit of cooperative federalism can prosper without such dependence. The ruling emphasised that the Parliament and state legislatures possess equal powers to legislate on GST. If the states ~ say those ruled by the opposition ~ take a cue from this and start legislating on GST bypassing the GST Council, a constitutional body created under the 101st Constitution Amendment, the Council itself may be rendered redundant, striking at the very root of the GST mechanism.

For the sake of records, the Finance Ministry has inferred that the SC order only reiterates the spirit in which the GST Council has been functioning and does not change anything.

Rules require that every decision of the Council to be supported by a majority of at least three-fourths of the weighted votes of the members present. The vote of the central government has a weightage of one third of the total votes cast, and the votes of all the state governments taken together have a weightage of two-thirds of the total votes cast in any meeting.

Of the 30 states and union territories, 18 are ruled by the NDA. This automatically makes voting an academic exercise only, unless the BJP's allies in the NDA switch sides. Yet so far, save a lone decision that hiked the rate on lotteries from 12 to 28 per cent, all decisions of the Council have been taken unanimously, reinforcing the spirit of cooperative federalism even in a country where opposition and the party in power at the Centre rarely look eye to eye on practically any issue. In the GST Council, the states and the Centre, despite their differences, function rather harmoniously with discussions veering on the merit and objectivity of the cases cutting across party lines.

The decisions reached in the Council are implemented by the Centre and the states through the normal legislative route under the respective acts, viz, the Central GST Act, the State GST Act and the Union Territory Act, and the IGST Act in case of imports and inter-state trade.

Ever since its inception, even where the states have voiced disagreements or given dissenting notes, they have implemented the decision of the GST Council in the right spirit.

Harmony does not necessarily imply perfect unanimity and may very well include contestations, but ultimately it is through the collaboration in reaching and implementing the decisions of the Council that the true spirit of cooperative federalism in our democracy is asserted.

In that sense, the GST Council is a unique and successful experiment that needs to be replicated in other areas of our polity and economy to resolve conflicting positions between the Centre and the states. It would be wrong to argue that the majoritarianism that is visible in some other domains of our polity also underpins the working of the Council.

The SC may have correctly observed that in case it was intended to make the GST Council a decision-making authority, such a qualification would have been included in articles 246A or 279A. But to treat the GST legislations mechanically without considering their long and arduous journey through the maze of our treacherous political system over a period spanning more than three decades would be tantamount to severely undermining the promise held out by GST to transform India into a common market by supplanting our antiquated, multi-layered, multi-point, multi-tax system circumscribed by an odious Inspector Raj.

In making the GST functional, both the Centre and especially the states had made a huge sacrifice in surrendering their taxing powers; it would also diminish this sacrifice.

Yes, the GST Council has seen some acrimonious exchanges, especially on the issue of GST compensation to the states that threatened to disrupt the cooperative federal architecture that the GST Council envisions. Now with the compensation regime coming to an end in another month's time, the SC ruling may have given an extra ammunition to the opposition ruled states to demand extension of the compensation scheme. It may also open a legal Pandora's Box with states challenging the constitutionality of earlier GST Council decisions. A unique federal institution without precedent that despite its inadequacies has been a shining example of cooperative federalism needs only to be strengthened to become instrumental in bringing convergence between the Centre and the states beyond politics.

It must not be allowed to become dysfunctional by any device, least by the apex court of the country. <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/gst-and-federalism-1503074865.html>

18. Food subsidy release delayed: FCI resorts to large short-term loans ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) May 24, 2022

The Food Corporation of India (FCI) has again started to take large amounts as short-term loans and wage and means advances from banks for financing its operations. The corporation has been relatively comfortable with the cash position over the last one year as the government promptly released the food subsidy amounts to it, after the practice of NSSF loans for subsidy financing was stopped in FY22 Budget for the sake of transparency of government finances.

The FCI is resorting to short-term loans again because the fiscal constraint has slowed release of subsidy to FCI.

Sources told FE that against demand of around Rs 85,000 crore towards the expenses for April-May, 2022, FCI has been provided with only around Rs 25,000 crore so far. To bridge the gap, it has taken short-term loans of around Rs 25,000 crore, sources said. Wheat procurement takes place mostly in these two months.

The finance ministry has provided Rs 10,000 crore as wage and means advance to FCI, the rest is being financed through short-term loans.

FCI is mandated to avail short-term loans which are of 90 days duration from scheduled banks to address cash flow mismatches. These short-term loans carry an interest rate in the range of 3.85-3.9% per annum.

Wage and means advances are released during the year and repayable out of the subsidy allocation for the year towards the end of the current financial year.

Official sources said that in coming months the government is expected to provide adequate financing for FCI, through which more than 70% of the government's food subsidy budget is routed.

Due to a huge mismatch between rising expenses because of open-ended procurement of rice and wheat under minimum support price (MSP) operations from farmers and cost of carrying excess stocks, between 2016-17 to 2020-21, the government had provided it funds from loans taken from National Small Saving Funds (NSSF) during 2016-17 to 2020-21 in lieu of food subsidy.

However, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech for 2021-22 had announced ending the practice of extra-budgetary borrowing from next fiscal by making provisions of Rs 3.35 trillion towards payment of NSSF loans.

The central issue prices of Rs 3, Rs 2, Rs 1 for a kg of rice, wheat and coarse grains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) have not been revised since 2013. On the other hand, FCI's economic cost (MSP to farmers, storage, transportation and other costs) of rice and wheat for 2022-23 is Rs 36.70 and Rs 25.88 per kg, respectively.

FCI procures and distributes more than 60 million tonne (MT) of wheat and rice annually. The corporation manages procurement, storage and transportation of rice and wheat to states for distribution, mainly for the NFSA and other welfare schemes.

For 2022-23, the central government has allocated Rs 2.06 trillion for food subsidy expenses out of which Rs 1.45 trillion or 71% is provided to FCI. However, following the extension of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, an additional Rs 0.8 trillion will be spent under food subsidy.

Currently, FCI relies on meeting its working capital loans through bonds, ways and means advances, and short-term loans.

More than 800 million people get highly subsidised 5-kg foodgrains per head per month under the NFSA. This includes around 25 million Antyodaya Anna Yojana households, which constitute the poorest of the poor. They are entitled to 35 kg per household per month at subsidised prices. <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/food-subsidy-release-delayed-fci-resorts-to-large-short-term-loans/2535376/>

19. Buoyant tax receipts to minimise extra borrowing in FY23: Analysts ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) May 24, 2022

Higher tax revenues will enable the government to minimise additional borrowing requirements, despite a fiscal expansion of close to Rs 2 trillion over the FY23 Budget estimate, provided no significant further relief measures are rolled out, analysts said.

The total additional expenditure is seen about Rs 2 trillion on account of higher subsidies on fertilisers, free grains scheme and LPG subsidy for Ujjwala beneficiaries in FY23. The excise duty cuts on auto fuels on Saturday would result in a revenue loss of about Rs 85,000-90,000 crore during the little over 10 months left in the current fiscal.

“We estimate that the nominal GDP growth in FY23 may be above 15% as compared to the budget assumption of 11.1%. The tax buoyancy may also turn out to be higher against the budgeted assumption of 0.9. Using a buoyancy for Centre’s gross tax revenues at 1.2 and a nominal GDP growth of 15%, growth in the Centre’s GTR may be nearly 18%,” said DK Srivastava, chief policy advisor, EY India.

This may result in an additional tax revenue collection of about Rs 2 trillion over and above the Budget estimates, Srivastava said.

The extra tax revenues could be used for the additional relief in fertiliser subsidies. “The need for additional borrowing in FY23 depends on the choices that the government makes as the fiscal year progresses. If global crude prices also come down marginally, the ongoing inflationary trends may be less of a problem. We anticipate only a marginal slippage in the budgeted fiscal deficit target of 6.4% of GDP,” Srivastava said.

In the event of no more significant shocks to the economy in the rest of the year, additional revenue will be able to absorb the excise cut and subsidy, said India Ratings chief economist DK Pant. “However, if there are more shocks than the additional borrowing requirement will depend on the magnitude of government intervention,” Pant added.

Direct tax and GST buoyancy have been strong, and if the two continue at the same clip as last year, the overall fiscal slippage could be about 0.2% of GDP (from the baseline budgeted fiscal deficit target of 6.4% of GDP for FY23), according to HSBC India economists Pranjul Bhandari and Aayushi Chaudhary.

“But because nominal GDP in itself is likely to be higher than budgeted (led by a higher deflator), the rise in the fiscal deficit in rupee terms could be high at around `1.5 trillion more than budgeted, if no other expenditure cuts are made,” the HSBC economists said.

According to HDFC Bank economists, the fiscal deficit to rise to 6.8% of GDP in FY23 leading to a slippage of Rs 1.6 trillion compared to the BE. “It’s still early days to predict whether this could mean extra market borrowings (current gross market borrowings at Rs 14.31 trillion for FY23) or could be financed through alternative sources (e.g. small savings fund),” the HDFC economists said in a note.

Of course, the government’s final fiscal math would also depend on whether tax collections are significantly higher than expected and if the government chooses to adjust other revenue expenditures to offset the rise in the subsidy bill or cuts down on the capex, they added.

A top government official told FE that the slew of indirect tax cuts announced on Saturday to contain inflation would require the Centre to calibrate revenue expenditure besides moderately increasing its borrowings in FY23. <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/buoyant-tax-receipts-to-minimise-extra-borrowing-in-fy23-analysts/2535352/>

20. Govt changes contract rules for highways, project cost to be sole factor ([business-standard.com](https://www.business-standard.com)) May 24, 2022

The ministry of road transport and highways, after inter-ministerial consultations, has changed the terms of awarding highway contracts under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM), where the project cost will be the sole factor for evaluation of bids.

Earlier, evaluation was done on the basis of combined value of project cost and operations and maintenance (O&M). The ministry also changed provisions under which O&M payments are made to contractors."

For flexible perpetual pavement, including structures, no maintenance charges will be paid for the first year.

It will be 0.40 per cent of the bid project cost each for the second, third and fourth years, and 0.60 per cent each for subsequent years. This is till laying of the renewal layer or end of the concession period, whichever is earlier, the notification by the ministry read.

Moreover, any O&M expenses incurred over and above the O&M payments will be borne by the concessionaire, the order read. There is a caveat that the scale of payments could also change based on the scope of the project.

Similar percentage-based provisions have been made for O&M payments in these contracts. These are based on the type of projects, such as rigid pavements and standalone bridges and tunnels.

Sector experts said that the need arises from previous bidding abnormalities by contractors. Players would bid arbitrary amounts in their O&M estimates, often leading to aggressive bidding for tenders. This was because lower O&M bids were influential factors in the award of contracts.

“It’s a positive development as it brings back sanctity in the bidding process. We would earlier have some situations of abnormally low O&M revenue bids which could have the potential of disruptions in future maintenance. With percentage based payments, it brings the bidding process on even ground and augurs well for long-term stability of the projects,” said Vishal Kotecha, director at India Ratings and Research.

The ministry has also changed provisions in the build-operate-transfer (toll) model. It now allows change of ownership in one year from the commercial operation date, instead of the earlier two years. https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/govt-changes-contract-rules-for-highways-project-cost-to-be-sole-factor-122052301771_1.html

21. Mumbai Metro Line 3 Completion Delayed To 2024, Project Cost up By Rs 10,000 Crore (*swarajyamag.com*) May 23, 2022

The due completion of Mumbai’s first underground Metro line 3 Colaba-SEEPZ-Bandra corridor has been delayed to 2024.

The Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL) will take another six months to begin the Phase-1. Even that is subject to the Metro car shed land issue getting resolved in the coming three months.

The original deadline for this project was in 2021 but multiple factors including the inability to find land for car shed have contributed to its postponement. Reportedly, there have been delays in the civil and electric work as well.

Accordingly, the work on the second phase of the Metro line from Colaba-Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) is also deferred to mid-2025.

The underground Colaba-SEEPZ stretch will have 27 underground stations after the state government announced a 2.5 km long extension making Navy Nagar the first station of this line.

The previous Maharashtra government led by Chief Minister (CM) Devendra Fadnavis had announced the plan of car shed at Aarey Colony. However, current CM Uddhav Thackeray scrapped the initiative and declared that it will be shifted to Kanjurmarg after opposition from environmentalists against location of metro car shed in Aarey colony.

But the Kanjurmarg plot ran into multiple litigations and lawsuits with even the central government staking its claim on the land.

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) is exploring options other than Aarey and Kanjurmarg lands for the same currently.

The project cost of the underground Metro line 3 corridor has shot up by Rs 10,000 crore to Rs 33,406 crore due to these regular postponements. The aforementioned 2.5 km long extension is expected to cost an additional Rs 2,031 crore.

The MMRCL is building a temporary facility at Sariput Nagar close to the Aarey car shed in order to accommodate and test a prototype train, Indian Express reports. The work on it was supposed to be finished by March 2022 following which the trials were scheduled.

However, the project is still unfinished and hence two eight-car trains are stuck at Sri City in Andhra Pradesh from last year. The authorities are unable to bring it to Mumbai due to the unavailability of parking space for the same. <https://swarajyamag.com/infrastructure/mumbai-metro-line-3-completion-delayed-to-2024-project-cost-up-by-rs-10000-crore>

22. How India's power crisis is self-made & why we could face another crunch during the monsoon (theprint.in) 24 May, 2022

The power crisis in India that made headlines in April might have eased as of now, with not only the mercury coming down a few notches but energy demand also dipping.

But, if a slew of communications from the power ministry to the states are any indication, sectoral experts say the current relief could be short-lived.

The overall power situation in the country remains precarious because of less availability of domestic coal. And, if coal stocks in India's thermal power plants are not ramped up before the monsoon, there will be a repeat of the crisis that India saw last October and in April 2022.

According to the daily coal stock report released by the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), as of May 22, in 109 of India's 165 thermal power plants, which are currently operational, the actual coal stock varied between 0 per cent to 24 per cent of the normative level. The total normative stock that these 165 plants are required to keep is 65,442 thousand tonnes.

For instance, pithead power stations (where a coal mine is located near the thermal power plant) have to keep a minimum of 15 days of coal stock, while power stations located more than 1,000 km away from the coal mine, also called non-pithead stations, have to keep a minimum stock of 30 days.

The 165 operational thermal plants are run by the Centre, state and private power producers.

Senior power ministry officials privately admitted the situation was tight, especially as coal accounts for 70 per cent of India's power requirement.

"We were able to manage the April crisis but unless states ramp up their coal stock, we will be staring at power shortage again during the monsoon season," said a senior power ministry official who did not want to be named.

The official added that not only will the irrigation load go up with the paddy cultivation season coming up, domestic and industrial demand will also increase because of the hot and humid weather in June-July. "Besides, production in coal mines decreases during the monsoon season," the official said.

Push to purchase imported coal, states reluctant

With domestic supplies unable to match the consumption, the Centre has been pushing states and gencos (power-generating companies) to import coal to run the imported-coal-based plants.

Of the 165 operational thermal power plants, 15 are designed on imported coal. The total installed capacity of these plants is 17,255 MW.

As on May 22, these plants had an actual stock of just 25 per cent of the normative stock of 4118.7 thousand tonnes that they are required to maintain. Imported coal is blended with domestic coal to the extent of 10 per cent to ease the pressure on domestic coal supply.

But there is a catch here. States have been reluctant to import coal because of the high cost, despite several directives from the power ministry since last December.

In its latest missive that the ministry shot off to the state power secretaries on 18 May, it admitted as much.

“In the light of the emergent situation, it is essential that the imported-coal-based plants run and the states import coal for blending as in the previous years. The Ministry of Power has issued directions under Section 11 of the Electricity Act that all the imported-coal-based plants start running and most of them have started running,” the letter, a copy of which is with ThePrint, states. “However, the import of coal by states for blending is not satisfactory.”

Rajasekhar, Fellow (Energy, Natural Resources and Sustainability) at the policy thinktank Centre for Social and Economic Progress, pointed out that “it is a no-brainer that blending expensive imported coal with domestic coal is definitely going to impact the generation cost, and the impact to the retail consumer depends on the quantum of such power purchased by the distribution utilities”.

He added that, firstly, the state regulator has to give consent to purchase expensive power. “Assuming there is regulator’s consent, given the financial condition of the utilities and their current dues to generating companies, the utilities are in a dilemma about handling the issue.”

Rajasekhar further said that while discoms (power distribution companies) do not want their liabilities swelling, they are wary of the trade-offs, i.e., between buying expensive power and creating liabilities, or resorting to optimal load-shedding.

“Generators are already not paid on time, and are wary of purchasing international coal, only to find that discoms won’t offtake (either because by the time it arrives the balance changes, or because they don’t see consumer cash flows commensurate with the higher generation purchases),” he added.

‘Centre arm-twisting states’

With gencos reluctant to import, the power ministry has now decided to act tough. In its 18 May letter to states, the ministry said: “...If the orders for import of coal for blending are not placed by gencos by 31 May and if the imported coal does not start arriving at the power plants by 15 June, all the defaulter gencos would have to import coal for blending purpose to the extent of 15 per cent to meet the shortfall in the remaining period up to 31 October 2022.”

Shailendra Dubey, Chairman of the All India Power Engineers Federation, told ThePrint that the April crisis had happened because of lack of coordination between different stakeholders — power, coal and rail ministries, state governments, discoms, and generation companies.

“We do not seem to have learnt our lesson. The Centre is again arm-twisting states to import coal on the ground that domestic supply will not be enough to meet the requirement,” he said. “But who will bear the high cost of imported coal? The power minister has admitted to states in his letter in May that the rate of imported coal is around \$140 per tonne.”

Dubey pointed out that because the coal shortage resulted from “policy lapses” of the Government of India, the power ministry should take up the responsibility to import coal on a government-to-government basis and ensure that the imported coal is made available to state gencos at the prevailing Coal India Limited rates.

“The states should not be penalised. For the policy lapses of the Centre, the financial burden must not be loaded on to states by way of high cost of imported coal,” he added.

Besides, Dubey said, the government should also ensure that enough railway rakes are available to transport the imported coal from ports to thermal power plants.

“Have the logistics been thought of? Just last month, we did not have enough rakes to transport domestic coal from the pitheads to the power plant. Do we have adequate rakes now?” he asked.

High demand, poor fiscal health of discoms led to April crisis

With the Indian economy opening up after the Covid lockdown, and scorching temperatures setting in much earlier this year, the power demand surged. Coal supply from domestic sources failed to meet the required demand, and discoms started resorting to load-shedding.

India’s power demand, which has been on a steady rise, reached an all-time high of 207 GW on 29 April. The peak power shortage was recorded a day earlier. At 10.8 GW, it was the highest since 2012.

Both power ministry officials and experts said the problem had been building up for long. “It’s not just a huge mismatch between demand and supply that triggered a power shortage last October and then again this April. There are multiple factors that led to the crisis. Poor fiscal health of discoms also played a big part in the crisis,” said an official.

At the heart of the power crisis in India is the financial position of the state discoms, which are reeling under mounting losses. India has about 32 power discoms, most of which are state-owned.

The power distribution sector serves as an important link in the entire value chain because revenues originate from the consumers of power at the distribution-end, and fund other players in the chain such as gencos and coal suppliers.

If the consumers do not pay for the power they consume, the revenue stream for the entire value chain gets disrupted, leading to losses for all goods-and-services providers.

States/UTs like Punjab, Delhi, and Tamil Nadu provide free electricity of up to 200-300 units to consumers, leading to local governments paying the discoms for the revenue gap.

According to a report by the Power Finance Corporation, a government undertaking, the state distribution utilities’ losses reduced to Rs 31,672 crore in 2019-20, from Rs 49,103 crore in 2018-19.

Data with the Prayas Energy Group, a Pune-based NGO, shows that subsidies to consumers form up to 30 per cent of the aggregate revenue of the power discoms.

At the beginning of May, the power discoms owed Rs 97,688 crore to the power generation companies, according to the Union government's Payment Ratification And Analysis in Power procurement for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of generators (PRAAPTI). The maximum amount that power discoms owe to generation companies is in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

The government also needs to address the huge aggregate technical & commercial losses of discoms. "System losses need to be controlled through technical as well as administrative reforms," said a senior CEA official. <https://theprint.in/india/governance/how-indias-power-crisis-is-self-made-why-we-could-face-another-crunch-during-the-monsoon/967821/>