

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (04.08.2022)

1. CAG: APPCB failed to check Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited's norms violations ([newindianexpress.com](https://www.newindianexpress.com)) Updated: August 4, 2022

The Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB) has failed to check the continuous non-compliance of emission norms by Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, said the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in its audit report presented in Parliament on Wednesday.

The CAG pointed out that it noticed that the APPCB has failed to check RINL's continuous non-compliance of the norms stipulated by regulatory authorities with reference to emissions, flaring of gases, installation of equipment, generation of hazardous waste in excess of authorisation, etc, and take necessary action during various inspections at the plant.

Audit noticed higher levels of carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂), PM₁₀ (Airborne particulate matter, a mixture of many chemical species) emissions compared to sustainability plan targets and norms.

There were excess fugitive and charging emissions from coke oven batteries.

"RINL did not rebuild its older coke oven batteries as required under Charter on Corporate Responsibility for Environment Protection, 2003. Emissions data from Online Continuous Emission Monitoring Systems was not reliable due to non-upgradation of obsolete Online Continuous Emission Monitoring Systems," the CAG report stated.

Specific energy consumption in the plant and overall fuel consumption rate in blast furnaces were in excess of the targets stipulated in RINL's Sustainability Plan, leading to the release of excessive greenhouse gases.

On the water pollution front also, effluents discharged by RINL plants were in excess as per the norms stipulated by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Further, the usage of high ash content boiler coal in thermal power plants led to the generation of higher quantities of fly ash.

"There has been an accumulation of blast furnace/steel melting shop slags, leading to air and land pollution," the report stated. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/andhra-pradesh/2022/aug/04/cag-appcb-failed-to-check-rashtriya-ispate-nigam-limiteds-norms-violations-2483911.html>

2. CAG pulls up SAIL, RINL for operational inefficiencies (thehindubusinessline.com) Updated: August 3, 2022

SAIL did not upgrade refractories, RINL delayed repairs to blast furnaces

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has pulled up state-run PSU steel majors, SAIL and RINL, for various operational inconsistencies and inefficiencies leading to losses running into crores of rupees.

As per reports tabled in Parliament on Tuesday, the CAG said, SAIL did not take adequate steps to upgrade and modernise its production capacity for refractories used in the steel-making process.

The company failed to constitute a refractory task force and assess annual requirements at the Durgapur Steel Plant, Alloy Steels Plant, and Indian Iron & Steel Company Steel Plant. This led to the procurement of excess inventory of ₹257.15 crore (March 31, 2020) while the inventory of refractories lay blocked for 15 to 20 years.

“SAIL also failed to develop a good vendor base and continued to procure items on a single tender basis,” it said.

For instance, the Rourkela Steel Plant procured tundish refractory, a foundry equipment, on a single tender for ₹113.39 crore in FY14–20, while the Bokaro Steel Plant procured refractory for ₹90.28 crore from the same supplier from 2015–16 to 2019–20 on a proprietary basis.

“Refractory management system in SAIL requires improvement so that in-house facilities are optimally utilised and costs for procurement of refractories are reduced,” the report tabled mentioned.

Hedging of loans

The audit noted that the decision to hedge the loan and interest “was not consistent”. Non-hedging of loans of \$400 million in terms of foreign exchange fluctuation led to avoidable expenditure of ₹194 crore. T

The company did not hedge interest on buyers’ credit (LIBOR) except in a few cases during March 2017 to December 2017.

“The critical ratios depicting SAIL’s financial position, like debt-equity ratio, interest coverage ratio, and net debt to EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation) ratio indicate financial instability and a worsening credit profile,” the report mentioned.

RINL pulled up

According to another report tabled by the CAG, RINL was pulled up for delaying repairs at its two blast furnaces and a failure to synchronise upstream and downstream production facilities caused a loss of nearly ₹6,700 crore.

The blast furnaces were commissioned in March 1990 and March 1992, with repairs being scheduled for 14 to 16 years from commissioning. However, against this, actual repairs were done nearly 24 years after commissioning, leading to deterioration in the health of furnaces and restricted operations.

“This caused a loss of production of 1.78 million tonnes of hot metal from 2011-12 to 2015-16 with a consequential loss of earnings of ₹1,396.64 crore,” it said.

There was a loss of production of 4.93 million tonnes of hot metal with a consequential loss of earnings of ₹1,844.82 crore as the blast furnaces were “not utilised to their rated capacities” because of a failure to synchronise and revamp other upstream and downstream facilities.

The loss of production of 2.36 million tonnes of hot metal with a consequential loss of earnings of ₹810.38 crore because of “forced shutdown of blast furnace No. 2 because of non-integration of upstream and downstream plants,” was also noted.

RINL reportedly delayed initiation of tenders and award of contracts for upstream and downstream plants, resulting in a mismatch between the production capacities of different units and an additional cost of ₹789 crore (approximately) for coke procurement. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/cag-pulls-up-sail-rinl-for-operational-inefficiencies/article65717297.ece>

3. CAG finds irregularities, violation of environmental norms by power generation companies (downtoearth.org.in) Updated: August 3, 2022

The Comptroller Auditor General (CAG), in its recent report, has found a series of irregularities in the three public sector energy companies audited by it.

The CAG published the report August 3, 2022. It dealt with the operational performance of the Kanti Bijlee Utpadan Nigam Ltd (KBUNL), fuel management of the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) and Srinagar Leh Transmission System of the Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd (PGCIL).

The compliance audit of the DVC in Jharkhand noted that there were multiple discrepancies with respect to fuel supply management, quality of coal, deficiency in sampling of coal, excess consumption of fuel and logistical issues.

The management did not take appropriate measures to address the major deficiencies highlighted in the earlier report. Similar aspects were reported to have recurred during the recent audit, the latest document noted.

It said the management continued to have issues in terms of avoidable delay in the development of coal blocks and the required size. The reasons cited were issues with the contractor.

The DVC incurred a loss of Rs 290.04 crore between 2014-15 and 2019-20, paying performance incentive to coal companies at Meija Thermal Power Station.

It was also observed that the daily coal stock position in most of the power stations reached critical levels on multiple occasions, incurring the DVC a loss of Rs 739.71 crore for being unable to produce power due to coal shortage.

The audit also found that there were logistical losses at transit and handling beyond permissible limits, causing losses worth Rs 201.92 crore.

It stated that customers had to bear the brunt of losses by paying Rs 323.34 crore due to the use of a higher grade of coal. The coal sourced has to be of certain size and particular grade, according to the report.

The coal supplying companies failed to ensure and check the appropriate sizes. This resulted in the DVC breaking the coal to required sizes and causing railway rakes to remain detained for longer than the permitted time.

The DVC also suffered losses of Rs 62.41 crore for excess consumption of fuel oil, in contravention of norms.

The CAG stated in its report, "All the deficiencies continuing over the years indicate the lack of seriousness on the part of the DVC in ensuring effective management of fuel for which responsibility needs to be fixed."

The KBUNL registered losses of Rs 137.87 crore due to non-compliance of Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) norms. The CERC is a central agency that allows power generation companies to determine tariffs.

The CAG audit stated that the KBUNL has been unable to generate electricity to its full capacity in the 15 years since its inception. It has thereby fallen short in catering to the power requirements of the country.

The company also failed to meet the norms laid out by the CERC in various aspects such as auxiliary power consumption, specific fuel oil consumption and non-scheduling of power for units and installing oversized machinery.

The overall failures resulted in higher cost of generation and non-recovery of losses from consumers. The actual cost is estimated to have increased by 65 per cent, amounting to Rs 2,063 crore, against the approved cost of Rs 3,154 crore.

The CERC did not approve Rs 121.99 crore of phased charges claimed by the company for delaying the completion of projects. The company also failed in recovering risks and a cost amount of Rs 74.39 crore due to inaction or delay in taking necessary steps towards it.

An additional penalty of Rs 49.93 crore was also levied on the company for lacunae in the logistics of handling coal. The KBUNL also failed to adhere to emissions norms and take measures for utilisation of ash as demanded by the Union environment ministry.

The Srinagar Leh Transmission System in Jammu and Kashmir was planned and implemented by PGCIL for the Jammu and Kashmir Power Development Department.

It was commissioned in January 2019, after a delay of 27 months from the scheduled date.

The CAG report stated that despite the commissioning of the line, the downstream transmission network, targeted to serve as a link to the state transmission network, could not be established as the Power Development Department failed to complete the same.

The result was that many regions could not avail power and receive benefits from the same, thereby escalating the construction cost to Rs 633.79 crore, from Rs 377.52 crore and finally approaching Rs 1,788.41 crore.

The repeated revision of line length, tower numbers and type of towers required for setting up the electricity network resulted in delaying the completion of the project. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/energy/cag-finds-irregularities-violation-of-environmental-norms-by-power-generation-companies-84143>

4. PMUY Data: The average LPG cylinder refills in 2020-21 increased because of PMGKP which has now decreased in 2021-22 ([factly.in](#)) Aug 04, 2022

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana or PMUY is a flagship scheme of the government aimed at encouraging the use of clean cooking fuel (LPG) for domestic purpose concomitantly trying to safeguard the health of women and children, by preventing chest congestion related diseases. Financial assistance is provided to encourage people to take up new LPG connections which is released in the name of the adult woman of the beneficiary's family. The scheme was launched on 1 May 2016 in Uttar Pradesh. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) appreciated the scheme for being a 'decisive intervention to check the indoor health pollution being faced by the women of the country'.

However, sustaining the use of LPG by the beneficiary families in the absence of a major subsidy or a limited subsidy of Rs. 200 per cylinder, remains a challenge. In this story, we look at the cylinder refill data under PMUY to understand the trends.

PMUY was extended in 2021 and again in 2022

Initially, the scheme was formulated to benefit only certain groups as per the Socio-Economic Caste Census exclusion criteria and was later expanded to include all those belonging to the Below Poverty Line. Under Phase I of the scheme, an annual target of 2 crore beneficiaries was set by the government for each of the three financial years from 2016-17 to 2018-19. However, in this period, over 7.18 crore connections were released which is 1.18 crore connections more than the target. Later, the target was set to provide 8 crore connections by 2020 which was achieved by September 2019. In 2021, Phase-II of the scheme was launched to release 1 crore deposit free LPG connection on pan India basis, in addition to the 8 crore LPG connections already released under Phase-I of PMUY. Again, in 2022, the Government extended the Scheme to release additional 60 lakh LPG connections under PMUY 2.0 on existing modalities.

30% of the LPG connections in India are under PMUY

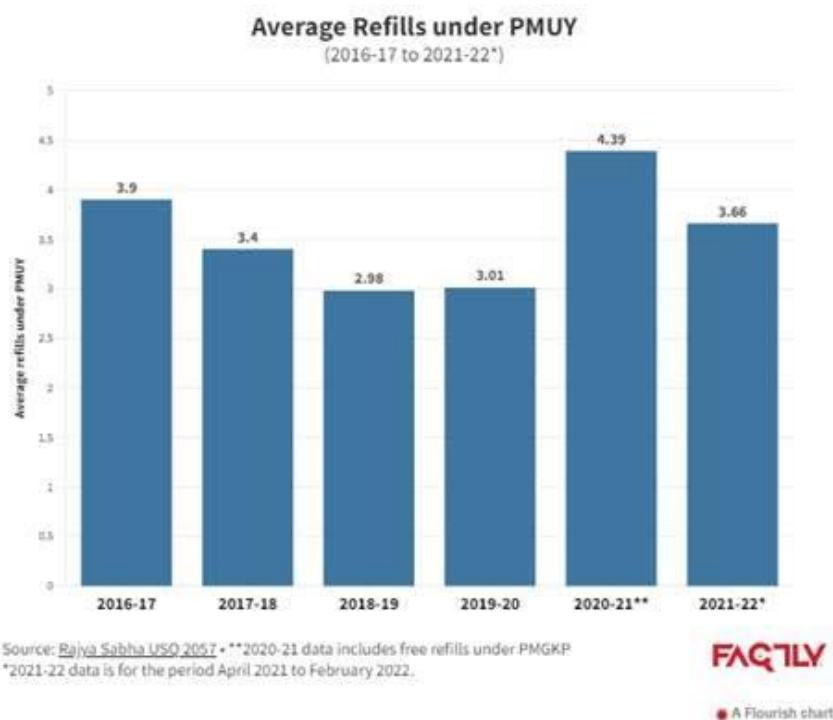
As on 04 July 2022, according to the PMUY website, a total of 9.34 crore connections have been released under PMUY since inception, including 1.35 crore connections released under PMUY 2.0. Further, the LPG coverage in the country has improved from 62% on 01 May 2016 to 99.8% as on 01 April 2021. As on 01 July 2022, there were 30.95 crore Domestic LPG connections in India. In other words, LPG connections issued under PMUY accounted for 30% of the total connections in the country.

Sustained use of LPG cylinders by beneficiaries remains a challenge

While the increase in coverage and number of connections is a step forward, the scheme can be said to be effective only if the beneficiaries continue to use LPG. The indicator to monitor this progress is tracking the number of refills under the scheme and the trend in average refills. This becomes critical in the light of steep hike in the LPG prices and the government's subsidy limited to Rs. 200 per cylinder for PMUY beneficiaries.

The price of a 14.2kg Domestic LPG Cylinder (Retail Selling Price at Delhi) has increased from Rs. 650.5 as on 01 May 2018 to Rs. 1053 as on 06 July 2022. That is, in around four years, the price of the regular domestic cylinder has increased by nearly 62%. Since the scheme caters to only those persons who belong to the Below Poverty Line, the affordability of cylinders may dissuade people from consuming LPG refills.

According to the data on the average number of refills under PMUY at the national level based on Parliament responses and CAG Report, there is a consistent decline in the average refills between 2016-17 to 2019-20, from almost 4 to nearly 3. However, in 2020-21, there was a sudden increase in refills under PMUY, with the average refills crossing 4 refills for the first time. In 2021-22, in the period from April 2021 to February 2022 for which data is available, the average refills stand at 3.66 cylinders, with one month left for the financial year to end.



Average increased in 2020-21 because of PMGKP

Average increased in 2020-21 because of PMGKP

The sudden increase in the average refills in 2020-21 can be attributed to the government's scheme that provided up to 3 LPG Cylinder refills free of cost to PMUY beneficiaries in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This announcement was made under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) to ameliorate the hardships faced by the poor due to economic disruption caused by the pandemic. The scheme was initially made effective for a period of 3 months starting April 2020, and was later extended till the end of September 2020, and then to 31 December 2020 for those beneficiaries who had been credited with the advance for buying refill but could not buy the refill.

Over 14.17 crore free refills were provided under the scheme to PMUY beneficiaries across the country. The majority of these refills were provided in Uttar Pradesh (2.7 crores), followed by West Bengal (1.73 crores), and Bihar (1.54 crore). More than one crore refills each were provided in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. These five states together accounted for 58% of the free refills provided under PMGKY in 2020-21. These five states also accounted for 58% of the beneficiaries under both phases of PMUY as on 01 July 2022. If the free refills under the PMGKP are excluded, then the average number of refills in 2020-21 goes below 3.

Most states recorded a drop in average refills except in 2020-21

To analyse the trends in the average number of refills consumed across states, those states with at least one lakh LPG connections under PMUY have been considered. The states have been categorized into three based on the number of connections.

These are- states with more than 50 lakh connections, those with 10 to 50 lakh connections, and those with 1 lakh to 10 lakh connections.

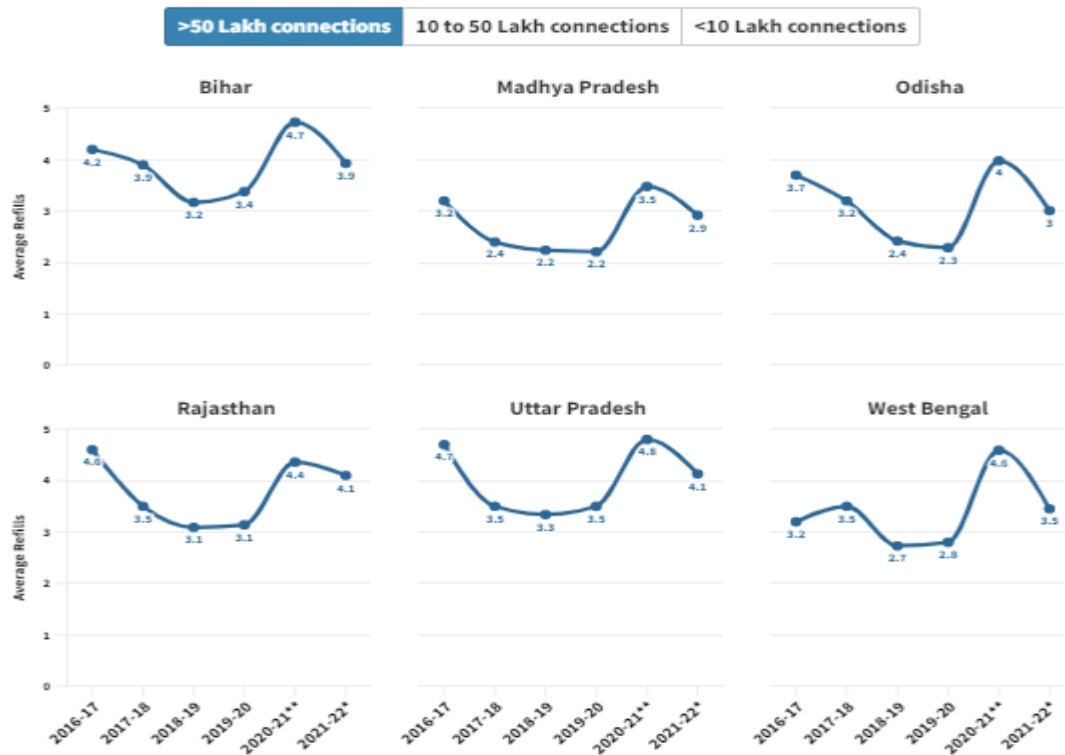
Like the national trend, the average cylinder refills peaked in 2020-21 and dropped in 2021-22 in all the states except Delhi.

Among the states with more than 50 lakh connections under PMUY, all six states saw a decline in the average number of refills between 2016-17 and 2018-19. Except for Bihar and Odisha, the remaining states witnessed a marginal increase in refills in 2019-20.

Similar trends were observed in Assam, Chhattisgarh, and Gujarat, which had 10 to 50 lakh connections. Of the remaining states in the category, Punjab and Tamil Nadu saw an increase in average refills up to 2018-19 followed by a drop in 2019-20. The average refills in Karnataka were less than 2 in 2016-17 which jumped to 4 in the following year.

Of the states with less than 10 lakh connections, Haryana saw an overall decline in refills from 6.7 in 2016-17 to 5.34 in 2021-22. In Delhi, there was a drastic increase in refills from 6.6 in 2017-18 to 12 in 2018-19, which dropped to 7.9 in 2019-20. In 2021-22, the average refills in Delhi was 6.2. In both Delhi & Haryana, the average refill number is significantly high than in other states.

State-wise average number of refills under PMUY
(2016-17 to 2021-22*)



Source: [Rajya Sabha, USQ 2057](#) • **2020-21 data includes free refills under PMGKP
2021-22* data is for the period April 2021 to February 2022

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• A Flourish chart

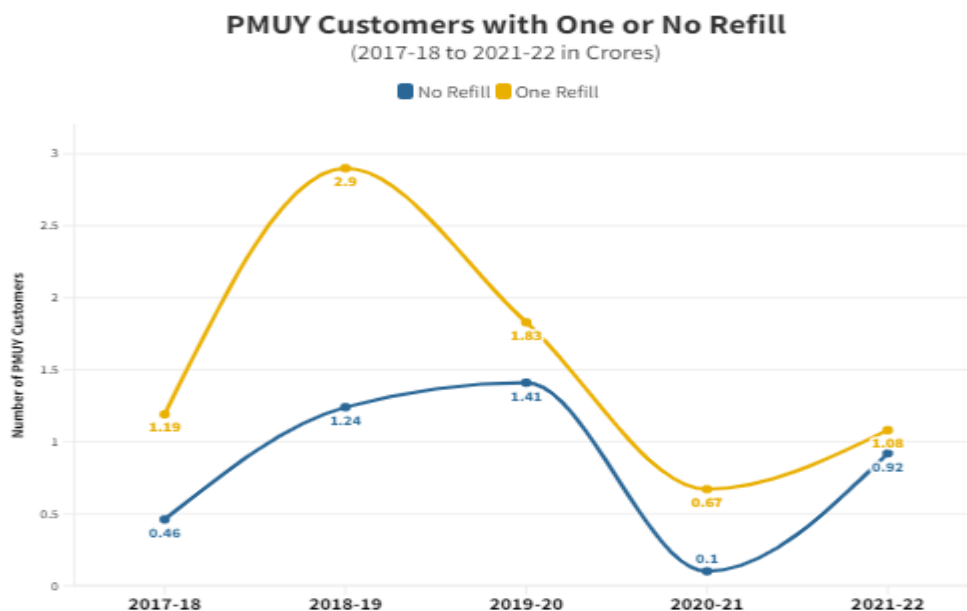
About 2 crore beneficiaries in 2021-22 took one or no refill

According to a response in the Rajya Sabha to a question on the total number of beneficiaries of PMUY who took one or no refills in the last five years, 1.65 crore customers in 2017-18, 4.14 crore in 2018-19, 3.24 crore in 2019-20, 0.77 crore in 2020-21, and 2 crore customers in 2021-22 took one or no refill. That is, they either did not take a refill at all or took only one refill (including the installation refill). A total of 2 crore PMUY customers out of the total 9.34 crore PMUY customers in 2021-22 accounts for 21.4% of the customers taking one or no refill. The response also stated that during 2021- 22, out of the total domestic active customers of 30.53 crores, 2.11 crore domestic LPG customers had not taken any refill while 2.91 crores domestic LPG customers had taken only one refill. That is, a total of 5.02 crore customers took either no or one refill.

(d) Year-wise details of LPG beneficiaries under first phase of PMUY, who have taken one refill (including installation refill) during the last five years are asunder:-

Financial Year	Number of Customers taken no refill under PMUY (in Crore)	Number of Customers taken only one refill (including installation refill) (in crore) under PMUY
2017-18	0.46	1.19
2018-19	1.24	2.90
2019-20	1.41	1.83
2020-21	0.10	0.67
2021-22	0.92	1.08

Source: *Rajya Sabha*



Source: *Rajya Sabha USQ 1740*

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• A Flourish chart

CAG report, 2019 noted that annual refill consumption for PMUY beneficiaries was low compared to non-PMUY consumers

The issue of sustained use of LPG cylinders under the scheme has been highlighted previously by multiple studies and reports. A CAG report from 2019 noted that the average annual refill consumption for PMUY beneficiaries has remained low (roughly half) as compared to non-PMUY consumers. The report also noted that there was a delay in the installation of new connections under the scheme. Further, it found that 14 lakh beneficiaries consumed 3 to 41 cylinders in one month. Nearly two lakh beneficiaries had an annual consumption of more than 12 cylinders. These point toward the risk of domestic cylinders being diverted for commercial purposes. Unsafe practices by beneficiaries such as placing stoves near the cylinder on the ground were also observed by CAG.

Another survey conducted by the Research Institute for Compassionate Economics in 2018 found that despite having LPG connections, about 78% of the respondents in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh used traditional wood chulhas (stoves) for cooking. These are also those states with a higher number of beneficiaries under PMUY.

Ecowrap noted that increasing prices will result in people going back to using unclean fuels for cooking

SBI's research report, Ecowrap, published in February 2020 stated that "PMUY has solved the problem of availability, but the affordability barrier still exists." As per their analysis, 54.2% of total PMUY consumers consumed up to 3 cylinders in a year or more while a family of 4 requires at least 3-4 cylinders per year. It noted that PMUY use among the rural households in states with low per capita income may be lower due to continuous increases in LPG prices and that the beneficiaries go back to using unclean fuels for cooking.

Gains made with PMUY stand threatened with an increase in prices

The PMUY has resulted in a large number of rural households shifting to use cleaner LPG fuel for cooking. However, these gains stand threatened in the light of the steep increase in LPG prices and the limited government subsidy of Rs. 200 per cylinder. Data also indicates that after the free cylinder intervention under the PMGKP increased the average refills in 2020-21, the average decreased in 2021-22. <https://factly.in/pmuy-data-the-average-lpg-cylinder-refills-in-2020-21-increased-because-of-pmgkp-which-has-now-decreased-in-2021-22/>

5. 'Where has money gone': Ex-telecom minister A Raja needles govt on 5G spectrum auction ([hindustantimes.com](https://www.hindustantimes.com)) Aug 03, 2022

DMK MP A Raja spent 15 months in jail over what came to be known as the 2G scam after Vinod Rai CAG blamed Raja's telecom ministry of causing a notional loss of ₹1.76 lakh crore by not auctioning the spectrum licences

Former union telecom minister A Raja, who was investigated for the grant of 2G spectrum licences in 2007 and spent 15 months in jail before his acquittal in 2017, on Wednesday demanded a probe into the 5G auction that ended this week, his comeback to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that led a bitter campaign against him over the 2G spectrum case.

The government has itself estimated that 5G would be sold up to 5 lakh crore. But now 5G has been auctioned for only 1.5 lakh crore,” Raja told reporters., a reference to the ₹4.3 crore reserve price set for a total of 72 gigahertz of spectrum in 22 telecom circles before the bids came in. The government realised only 35% of the reserve price.

“Where has the money gone? Where has the mistake taken place? This current government should investigate this,” said Raja, who was once considered the face of what came to be known as the 2G scam after the Comptroller and Auditor General’s office led by Vinod Rai claimed that the 2G allocation process in 2007-08 caused a presumptive loss of ₹1.76 lakh crore.

Raja was accused of rigging the allocation of the 2G mobile spectrum in what was then regarded as one of India’s biggest scams, which led to his resignation and contributed to turning a public mood against the then UPA government. In 2017, Raja and 34 others, who were charged by the Central Bureau of Investigation, were acquitted by a Delhi court which held that CBI “miserably failed to prove any charge against any of the accused, made in its well choreographed charge sheet”.

On Wednesday, Raja told reporters that when he recommended 30MHz allocation to TRAI, the then CAG Vinod Rai in 2010 said that it would lead to a loss of 1.76 lakh crore to the government. “And the bid received now for 51 GHz of 5G, which is so much more efficient, fast and expensive, is sold for a lesser amount,” Raja said.

The 5G auction concluded on August 1. The telecom ministry has said that 5G will roll out in India by October. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/exminister-a-raja-acquitted-in-2g-scam-needles-govt-on-5g-auction-seeks-a-probe-101659536049655.html>

6. 2G case accused DMK MP A Raja demands probe in 5G spectrum auction after it fetched less than CAG assessed ‘loss’ in 2G auction (opindia.com) August 3, 2022

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam MP A Raja demanded on 3rd august 2022 that the recent auctions of the 5G spectrum bands should be probed. Andimuthu Raja was the Telecom Minister in the UPA government and was one of the accused in the 2G scam of 2008-2009.

While interacting with the media, A Raja said that the 5G spectrum should have been sold at a cost of Rs. 5 lakh crores as claimed by the Union Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. A Raja said that the spectrum auction was done for Rs 1.5 lakh crores only, and therefore there is a huge scam in it. He compared the amount with the ‘scam’ amount of ₹1.76 crore in 2G auction as calculated by the CAG, and said that as 5G has more spectrum, it should have fetched more for the government.

A Raja said, “When I recommended only 30 MHz of spectrum to TRAI, the regulatory authority, the then CAG Vinod Rai said ₹ 1.76 lakh crore loss to the Government. But now 51 GHz of 5G spectrum is being sold for less amount.” He said that the government should investigate how much fraud is there in this auction. He also sought a probe of Vinod Rai’s 2G report. He stated that only an investigation can determine Rai’s purpose to make such an audit.

A Raja further said, “When you search for something on the internet, you will get results in 10 seconds when you use 2G, 5 seconds when you use 4G, and in 5G, you will get the results in a second. That is how efficient 5G is. When you compare the numbers based on this efficiency, the 5G auction should have attracted bids worth at least Rs 5 or 6 lakh crore. We don’t know if the planning or estimation was incorrect, if they simply got these numbers from the air, or if the Union government has colluded with certain corporate companies to conduct this scam. All of this has to be investigated now.”

A total of Rs 1.5 lakh crore worth of bids were made for the recently completed 5G auctions, with Mukesh Ambani’s Jio winning over half of the airwaves auctioned with a bidding of Rs 88,078 crore.

2G ‘scam’ and A Raja

Allegations about the allotment of coal blocks and the 2G spectrum had a significant impact on Indian politics during the UPA government. The CAG reports were devastating for the second UPA government. Due to the 2G spectrum being allocated without an auction, the CAG Vinod Rai had assessed a presumed loss to the exchequer of Rs 1.76 lakh crore in November 2010. While nothing actually was lost by the government, it meant that the exchequer would have benefited by a projected Rs. 1.76 lakh crore if the 2G spectrum had been auctioned.

It is notable that CAG had calculated the presumptive loss in the 2G auction in the range of Rs 58,000 crore and Rs 1.76 lakh crore, but the highest amount was only quoted by the media and it remained in public memory.

A Raja, the telecom minister at the time, was one of the accused. He was charged with altering the first-come-first-served rule by advancing the deadline for applications to be awarded spectrum in exchange for alleged bribes to benefit certain telecom companies. As the perpetrator of the fraud, Raja also spent time behind bars. However, in 2017, a special court acquitted everyone accused in the case, including A Raja. The court had said case was baseless and it was made by exaggerating things beyond recognition to astronomical levels. CBI had appealed against the verdict at the Delhi High Court, but the high court dismissed the appeal earlier this year. <https://www.opindia.com/2022/08/2g-scram-accused-a-raja-demands-probe-in-5g-spectrum-auctions/>

7. 5जी नीलामी में 4.3 लाख करोड़ की बेस प्राइस पर मिला महज डेढ़ लाख करोड़ (janchowk.com) August 3, 2022

5जी स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी की प्रक्रिया पूरी हो चुकी है इससे सरकार को डेढ़ लाख करोड़ का राजस्व मिला है। अब सोशल मीडिया पर यह बस तेज हो गई है कि अगर कैग की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार 2008 में 2जी के लिए सरकार को कम से कम 176000 करोड़ रुपए का अतिरिक्त राजस्व मिल सकता था तो 2022 में 5जी की नीलामी से इतना कम राजस्व कैसे मिला? अगर 12 साल पहले 2जी स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी से सरकार को 1 लाख 76 हजार करोड़ की

अतिरिक्त आमदनी हो सकती थी तो अब 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी से मिलने वाला अनुमानित राजस्व कम से कम 5 लाख करोड़ होना चाहिए था।

देश में अब तक की सबसे बड़ी स्पेक्ट्रम नीलामी सोमवार को खत्म हो गई। इसमें कुल 1,50,173 करोड़ रुपये के स्पेक्ट्रम की बिक्री हुई। इसी नीलामी को लेकर अब कांग्रेस नेता श्रीनिवास ने निशाना साधा है। उन्होंने ट्वीट करते हुए लिखा- 'कैग के विनोद राय कहां हैं? जिन्होंने 2008 में कहा था कि 2जी की नीलामी हुई, तो 1.76 लाख करोड़ का सरकार को घाटा हुआ था। और अब 2022 में 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम 1.50 लाख करोड़ में नीलाम हुआ तो सरकार को फायदा हुआ है। उन्होंने लिखा अब विनोद राय कहां हैं?'

श्रीनिवास ने एक अन्य ट्वीट में अरविंद केजरीवाल की फोटो के साथ लिखा- 'साफ है सब मिले हुए थे जी!

दरअसल 2जी स्पेक्ट्रम को लेकर पूर्व कैग विनोद राय की रिपोर्ट पर बीजेपी समेत, अन्ना आंदोलन के जरिए अरविंद केजरीवाल, किरण बेदी, बाबा रामदेव, वीके सिंह जैसी शख्सियतों ने तत्कालीन केंद्र की मनमोहन सरकार पर गंभीर सवाल खड़े किए थे और घोटाले के आरोप लगाए थे।

यही नहीं जब 2जी स्पेक्ट्रम केस मामले में 22 दिसंबर, साल 2017 में विशेष अदालत ने पूर्व केंद्रीय मंत्री ए राजा और द्रमुक नेता कनिमोझी सहित सभी आरोपियों को बरी कर दिया था, तब अरविंद केजरीवाल ने इस पर आश्चर्य जताया था। केजरीवाल ने तब ट्वीट करते हुए लिखा था कि 2जी घोटाला देश के सबसे बड़े घोटालों में से एक है। यह यूपीए के पतन की वजह था और इसने देश को हिला दिया था। आज इसके सभी आरोपी बरी हो गए हैं। क्या सीबीआई ने जानबूझकर जांच में गड़बड़ी की है? जनता जवाब जानना चाहती है। अब 5जी 2022 में 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम 1.50 लाख करोड़ में नीलाम हुआ तो इनकी अभी तक चूं भी नहीं निकली है।

2010 में आई एक सीएजी(कैग) रिपोर्ट में 2008 में बांटे गए स्पेक्ट्रम पर सवाल उठाए गए थे। इसमें बताया गया था कि स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी के बजाए पहले आओ, पहले पाओ के आधार पर इसे बांटा गया था। इससे सरकार को एक लाख 76 हजार करोड़ रुपए का घाटा हुआ था। इसमें इस बात का जिक्र था कि नीलामी के आधार पर लाइसेंस बांटे जाते तो यह रकम सरकार के खजाने में जाती।

गौरतलब है कि भारत में 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी में सरकार ने 4.3 लाख करोड़ रुपये स्पेक्ट्रम की बेस प्राइस रखी थी। नीलामी से उसको महज 1.5 लाख करोड़ रुपये मिले हैं। 2010 में जब स्पेक्ट्रम बेचा गया था तो कैग विनोद राय ने अनुमान लगाया कि अंतरराष्ट्रीय कीमत

के हिसाब से 1.76 लाख करोड़ रुपये मिलने चाहिए थे। न्यायालय में मामला गया। तत्कालीन संचार मंत्री ए राजा को घोटाले के आरोप में जेल भेज दिया गया।

कोर्ट से लेकर कैग तक बारह तेरह साल पहले उसे नीलामी करके 1.76 लाख करोड़ रुपये में बेच रहे थे। अब 5जी की नीलामी हुई है। सरकार ने अनुमान लगाया कि कम से कम 4.3 लाख करोड़ रुपये मिलेंगे मगर वास्तव में मिलने जा रहे हैं 1.5 लाख करोड़ रुपये।

लाख टके का सवाल है कि क्या किसी अखबार, जांच एजेंसी, कैग, सुप्रीम कोर्ट में यह क्षमता है कि वह सरकार को बताए कि 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम की अंतरराष्ट्रीय कीमत के हिसाब से कितना मूल्य था और बोली लगाने वाली 3 कम्पनियों से कार्टलाइजेशन कराकर उसे सरकार ने औने पौने भाव बेचकर कितने लाख करोड़ रुपये की कमाई की है?

फेसबुक पर गिरीश मालवीय ने लिखा है कि बहुत से लोग कहते हैं कि मोदी सरकार में भ्रष्टाचार नहीं हुआ, लेकिन क्या आपने पिछले 7-

8 सालों में मोदी सरकार के कामकाज के बारे में (कै) ग की रिपोर्ट की कोई भी खबर पढ़ी? भारत का नियंत्रक और महालेखापरीक्षक कैग संभवतः भारत के संविधान का सबसे महत्वपूर्ण अधिकारी है। कैग एक ऐसी संस्था है जो देखती है कि संसद द्वारा अनुमन्य खर्चों की सीमा से अधिक धन खर्च न होने पाए या संसद द्वारा विनियोग अधिनियम में निर्धारित मदों पर ही धन खर्च किया जाए। ये डॉ. भीम राव अम्बेडकर का कथन है।

कैग के माध्यम से ही संसद की अन्य सार्वजनिक प्राधिकरणों की, जो सार्वजनिक धन खर्च करते हैं उनकी जवाबदेही सुनिश्चित की जाती है और यह जानकारी प्रतिवर्ष जनता के सामने रखना जरूरी होता है।

2015 से पहले हर साल संसद में कैग की रिपोर्ट पर हंगामा होता था, घोटाला हुआ या नहीं हुआ बात दीगर है लेकिन 2जी नीलामी, कोयला ब्लॉक नीलामी, आदर्श हाउसिंग सोसाइटी घोटाला और 2010 कॉमनवेल्थ गेम्स जैसे अनेक प्रकरण उस वक्त कैग रिपोर्ट के द्वारा ही सार्वजनिक जानकारी में आए थे।

आपको जानकर आश्चर्य होगा कि मोदी सरकार में कैग का किस तरह से गला घोंटा गया है। इंडियन एक्सप्रेस द्वारा दायर आरटीआई आवेदन के जवाब में दी गई जानकारी से पता चला कि केंद्रीय मंत्रालयों और विभागों से संबंधित सीएजी रिपोर्ट 2015 में 55 से घटकर 2020 में केवल 14 रह गई। यानि मोदी जी के रहते संसद में यूपीए सरकार से लगभग 75% कम रिपोर्ट कैग की पेश हुई है, और जो पेश हुई हैं उनमें भी लीपापोती करने की कोशिश साफ़ नजर आती है।

गिरीश मालवीय लिखते हैं कि भ्रष्टाचार का ताजा उदाहरण आपके सामने है केंद्रीय कोयला मंत्री प्रहलाद जोशी द्वारा कुछ ही दिन पहले 25 जुलाई को सदन में दिए गए एक लिखित उत्तर में बताया गया कि देश में कोयले की कोई कमी नहीं है भारत में कोयले का उत्पादन 31% बढ़ा है, तो फिर आप ही बताइए कि एनटीपीसी पर और देश के विभिन्न राज्यों पर, विदेशों से बेहद महंगे कोयले के आयात का दबाव क्यों बनाया जा रहा है ? देश की कोल इंडिया लिमिटेड मात्र तीन हजार रुपये प्रति टन की दर से कोयला राज्यों को दे रही है। जबकि अडानी से कोयला खरीदने के लिये जो टेंडर डाले गए उसमें अडानी ने 30 से 40 हजार रुपये प्रति टन की दर से कोयला आयात के रेट दिए हैं। और अभी खबरें आ रही हैं कि दस गुना रेट पर कोयला आयात करने के टेंडर पास भी हो गए हैं इस तरह से जबरन 10 गुना महंगा विदेशी कोयला खरीदेंगे तो देश के करोड़ों उपभोक्ताओं को महंगी बिजली खरीदनी पड़ेगी।

ऑल इंडिया पावर इंजीनियर्स फेडरेशन (एआईपीईएफ) ने प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी से आग्रह किया कि वे बिजली मंत्रालय को राज्यों और उसकी बिजली उत्पादन कंपनियों को कोयले के आयात के लिए अपने जबरदस्ती दिए गए निर्देश को वापस लेने के लिए कहें, जिनकी उन्हें आवश्यकता नहीं है। फेडरेशन ने कहा कि 25 जुलाई को संसद में कोयला मंत्रालय के जवाब को देखते हुए महंगा विदेशी कोयला आयात जरूरी ही नहीं है।

इतनी बड़ी लूट खुले आम चल रही है लेकिन न कोई कुछ समझने को तैयार हैं न कुछ करने को ? कैग जैसी संस्था को किनारे लगा दिया गया है तो भ्रष्टाचार की रिपोर्ट देगा ही कौन , लोकतंत्र का चौथा स्तंभ कहा जाने वाला मीडिया तो पहले ही बिक चुका है !

5जी स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी सात दिनों तक चली, जिसमें चार कंपनियों ने भाग लिया था- रिलायंस जियो, भारतीय एयरटेल, वोडाफोन आइडिया और अडानी ग्रुप की अडानी डाटा नेटवर्क लिमिटेड। इसमें 1.5 लाख करोड़ रुपये से ज्यादा मूल्य के 5जी टेलिकॉम स्पेक्ट्रम की रिकॉर्ड बिक्री हुई। नीलामी में मुकेश अंबानी की कंपनी जियो ने सबसे अधिक बोली लगाई।

अनंतिम आंकड़ों के मुताबिक 1,50,173 करोड़ रुपये की बोलियां लगाई गईं। अत्यधिक उच्च गति के मोबाइल इंटरनेट संपर्क की पेशकश करने में सक्षम 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी की यह राशि पिछले साल बेचे गए 77,815 करोड़ रुपये के 4जी स्पेक्ट्रम से लगभग दोगुना है। यह राशि 2010 में 3जी नीलामी से मिले 50,968.37 करोड़ रुपये के मुकाबले तीन गुना है। रिलायंस जियो ने 4जी की तुलना में लगभग 10 गुना अधिक तेज गति से संपर्क की पेशकश करने वाले रेडियो तरंगों के लिए सबसे अधिक बोली लगाई।

इसके बाद भारतीय एयरटेल और वोडाफोन आइडिया लिमिटेड का स्थान रहा। बताया जाता है कि अडानी समूह ने निजी दूरसंचार नेटवर्क स्थापित करने के लिए 26 मेगाहर्ट्ज स्पेक्ट्रम खरी

दा है। सूत्रों ने कहा कि किस कंपनी ने कितना स्पेक्ट्रम खरीदा, इसका ब्योरा नीलामी के आं कड़ों के पूरी तरह आने के बाद ही पता चलेगा।

सरकार ने 10 बैंड में स्पेक्ट्रम की पेशकश की थी, लेकिन 600 मेगाहर्ट्ज, 800 मेगाहर्ट्ज और 2300 मेगाहर्ट्ज बैंड में स्पेक्ट्रम के लिए कोई बोली नहीं मिली। लगभग दो-तिहाई बोलियां 5जी बैंड (3300 मेगाहर्ट्ज और 26 गीगाहर्ट्ज) के लिए थीं, जबकि एक-चौथाई से अधिक मांग 700 मेगाहर्ट्ज बैंड में आई। यह बैंड पिछली दो नीलामियों (2016 और 2021) में बिना बिके रह गया था।

पिछले साल हुई नीलामी में रिलायंस जियो ने 57,122.65 करोड़ रुपये का स्पेक्ट्रम लिया था। भारती एयरटेल ने लगभग 18,699 करोड़ रुपये की बोली लगाई थी और वोडाफोन आइडिया ने 1,993.40 करोड़ रुपये का स्पेक्ट्रम खरीदा था। इस साल कम से कम 4.3 लाख करोड़ रुपये के कुल 72 गीगाहर्ट्ज रेडियो तरंगों को बोली के लिए रखा गया था। <https://janchowk.com/pahlapanna/govt-just-got-one-and-half-lakh-crore-from-the-auction-of-5g/>

8. 5जी नीलामी में गड़बड़? '2जी घोटाले' में जेल जा चुके ए राजा ने की जांच की मांग (livehindustan.com) August 3, 2022

देश का सबसे बड़ा घोटाला बताए जाने वाले '2जी स्कैम' केस में कोर्ट से बरी पूर्व केंद्रीय दूर संचार मंत्री और डीएमके सांसद ए राजा ने 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम नीलामी पर बड़े सवाल खड़े किए हैं और जांच की मांग की है। राजा का कहना है कि हो सकता है कि केंद्र सरकार और कुछ कंपनियों के बीच पहले से ही समझौता रहा हो। उन्होंने कहा, 'सरकार ने खुद ही पहले अनुमान लगाया था कि 5जी 5 लाख करोड़ तक बेचा जाएगा लेकिन अब इसकी नीलामी केवल 1.5 लाख करोड़ रुपये में हुई है। आखिर पैसा कहां गया, गलती कहां हुई? मौजूदा सरकार को इसकी छानबीन करनी चाहिए।'

ए राजा ने कहा कि जब उन्होंने 30MHz स्पेक्ट्रम आवंटन की सिफारिश की थी तब CAG विनोद राय ने कहा था कि इससे 1.76 लाख करोड़ का नुकसान हो गया है। अब 51GHz की नीलामी हुई है जो कि उससे बहुत ज्यादा है। बता दें कि 1 अगस्त को 5जी स्पेक्ट्रम की नीलामी खत्म हुई है। छह दिन नीलामी की प्रक्रिया चलने के बाद अंतिम बोली 1,50,173 करोड़ की लगाई गई। इस नीलामी में रिलायंस जियो, भारती एयरटेल और वोडाफोन आइडिया के अलावा अडाणी एंटरप्राइजेज भी शामिल थी। रिलायंस जियो ने सबसे बड़ी बोली लगाकर स्पेक्ट्रम पर हक जमाया है। वहीं सरकार का कहना है कि भारत में अक्टूबर तक 5जी सेवा शुरू हो जाएगी।

क्या था 2जी घोटाला?

2जी घोटाला राजनीति के गलियारों में काफी मशहूर था और इसे देश का सबसे बड़ा आर्थिक घोटाला बताया जाता था। 2014 के लोकसभा चुनाव में भी इस मुद्दे को खूब भुनाया गया। हालांकि बाद में इसके सभी आरोपी बरी हो गए। साल 2010 में महालेखाकार एवं नियंत्रक ने अपनी रिपोर्ट में 2008 में हुए 2जी स्पेक्ट्रम आवंटन पर सवाल खड़े करते हुए कहा था कि अगर इसकी नीलामी की जाती तो सरकार को अनुमानित तौर पर 76 हजार करोड़ रुपये का फायदा होता। हालांकि इसके लाइसेंस पहले आओ, पहले आओ की नीति पर दिए गए थे। इसके बाद सरकार और मंत्रियों पर सवाल उठने लगे और यह बड़ा राजनीतिक विवाद बन गया। सीबीआई ने इस मामले में पूर्व केंद्रीय मंत्री ए राजा समेत कई लोगों पर आरोप तय किए थे।

ए राजा को छोड़ना पड़ा था मंत्रिपद, जेल भी गए इस मामले में ए राजा को पहले तो मंत्री पद से इस्तीफा देना पड़ा और फिर 2011 में जेल भी जाना पड़ा। उन्हें 15 महीने के बाद जमानत मिली थी। 2017 में कोर्ट ने पर्याप्त सबूतों के अभाव में सभी आरोपियों को बरी कर दिया था। इसमें ए राजा के साथ कनिमोई, सिद्धार्थ बेहुरा, आरके चंदोलिया, शाहिद बलवा, संजय चंद्रा, विनोद गोयनका, गोतम दोषी, सुरेंद्र पिपारा और हरी नायर भी आरोपी थे। <https://www.livehindustan.com/national/story-a-rajaa-said-loss-of-govt-in-5g-spectrum-bid-should-be-investigated-has-gone-jail-in-2g-scam-6885255.html>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

9. Kerala's mounting public debt (dailypioneer.com) August 3, 2022

Kerala's public debt has almost doubled in the last seven years, reaching ₹3,32,291 crore in March 2022

The story so far: Over the past few months, Kerala's mounting debt liabilities have been brought into sharp focus with the Reserve Bank of India, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), and the opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) flagging the issue.

Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB)

A body corporate constituted by the Government of Kerala to mobilise financial resources outside of State revenue for infrastructure development of the State
Kerala Social Security Pension Ltd (KSSPL)

A state government entity for seamless disbursement of social security pensions by raising money from the open financial market and delinking pension payments from the State's treasury

The State's financial situation was recently highlighted by Kerala Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal in his sharp response against a slew of Central financial policies: cutting the fiscal deficit grant by ₹7,000 crore; discontinuation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) compensation worth around ₹12,000 crore; and a proposed move to consider the "off-budget" borrowings of State government entities such as the Kerala

Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) and Kerala Social Security Pension Ltd (KSSPL) as part of the State debt when fixing the State's net borrowing ceiling.

Here is a breakdown of Kerala's public debt situation:

What is the state of Kerala's public debt?

In June, the State Government informed the State Assembly that the cumulative debt of the State, as of March 2022, stood at ₹3,32,291 crore. This is a big leap from ₹1,89,768.55 crore in 2016-17. And according to the CAG, the ratio of public debt to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has risen from 20.43% in 2019-20 to 27.07% in 2020-21.

Why is Debt-GDP/GSDP ratio important?

It compares a government's public debt to its gross domestic product (GDP). By comparing what a country (or a state) owes with what it produces, the debt-to-GDP ratio indicates the ability to pay back its debts.

State finances have, in recent years, been marked by a steep rise in revenue expenditure, which has gone up from ₹91,096.31 crore in 2016-17 to ₹1,23,446.33 crore in 2020-21. Committed expenditure on interest payments, salaries, pensions etc. form a significant portion of this spending.

What is the CAG's latest assessment of Kerala's finances?

Adding fuel to the debate are the concerns surrounding 'off-budget' borrowings by state government instruments like the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB)

In the latest audit report on State Finances, the CAG advised the State to closely monitor debt sustainability and make "earnest efforts" to maintain a healthy debt-GSDP ratio. Open market loans constituted 54% of the total fiscal liabilities of the State. The committed liability of the Government as a percentage of the revenue expenditure rose from 61.22% in 2016-17 to 68.01% in 2019-20.

The CAG has also frowned upon off-budget borrowings made through KIIFB and KSSPL, whose combined outstanding liability equals ₹16,469.05 crore as on March 31, 2021. The KSSPL's outstanding liabilities of ₹10,848.61 crore constituted 65.87% of the total outstanding off-budget borrowing. During 2020-21 alone, Kerala resorted to off-budget borrowings to the tune of ₹9,273.24 crore. The CAG observed that they "will have an impact of increasing the liabilities of the State Government, leading to a debt trap over a period of time."

Kerala's GSDP loss of ₹1,56,041 cr in 2020-21 due to COVID-19 pandemic

The CAG further observed that the government should focus on the growth of its own tax revenue and take measures to improve it. Revenue receipts of the State increased from ₹75,611.72 crore in 2016-17 to ₹97,616.83 crore in 2020-21, recording a growth of 29.10%. However, the State's own tax revenue, the main source of revenue in revenue receipts, increased by only 13% and its share in the State's revenue decreased from 55.78% in 2016-17 to 48.82% in 2020-21. This points to the poor

collection of tax revenue during 2020-21, when the COVID-19 pandemic gripped Kerala.

What is RBI's analysis?

In June this year, a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) article, 'State Finances: A Risk Analysis,' prepared against the backdrop of the Sri Lankan crisis, swung the spotlight on the fiscal health of states with a higher volume of public debt. Kerala was identified as one of ten states with the highest debt burden, based on the debt-GSDP ratio.

Among the ten, Kerala also found a place in a sub-set identified as "highly stressed." The RBI article noted that the own tax revenue of states including Kerala have been on the decline, rendering them vulnerable.

Kerala is also among three states where the debt-GSDP ratio is projected to exceed 35% by 2026-27, a situation which requires "significant corrective steps" to stabilise the debt level, according to the RBI.

What is the State Government's position?

Kerala Finance Minister K. N. Balagopal, responding to the 'debt trap' warning, had maintained that while the State was indeed passing through a crunch phase, there was no danger of it free-falling into a debt trap. He has also been critical of the Centre's stand that off-budget borrowings should be considered part of the State debt, and reflected in the net borrowing ceiling.

Kerala has repeatedly blamed central policies for most of its current financial problems, especially the dip in its tax share from the Centre and the discontinuation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) compensation beyond June 2022.

At the same time, the State has launched efforts to step up tax collection. Last week, the Cabinet gave the nod for comprehensively revamping the State GST Department, a step which is expected to have a positive impact on increasing tax revenues.

What is the way ahead?

Experts advise a lean-and-mean strategy for the State at this juncture, keeping revenue expenditures down, while stepping up tax collection. The State will also need to put in serious efforts to stabilise debt levels, a step which the RBI too had recommended as a medium-term corrective measure for debt-burdened states.

In the long-term, however, both Mr. Balagopal and his predecessor Dr. Thomas Isaac understands that the State will have to grow its industrial output. Kerala needs to accelerate development, generate jobs using the possibilities offered by the knowledge economy and, give a fillip to the production sector, Mr. Balagopal had opined before presenting this year's budget.

Incidentally, Kerala has improved its ranking in the Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) index, a World Bank initiative of ranking States and Union Territories based on the business environment, by jumping to 15th rank from the 28th position in 2019. Moreover, as per the State Industries Department, Kerala is outpacing its 2022 target to register 1,00,000 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with more than 42,000 units registered during the first quarter of the current financial year. Minister for

Law, Industries and Coir P. Rajeeve has informed that the government has re-estimated its target from 1 lakh to 1.5 lakh MSMEs by the end of 2022-23. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/kerala-india-increasing-public-debt-explained/article65711518.ece>

10. ED notice a clear case of harassment, will seek legal measures: Kerala ex-minister (daijiworld.com) August 4, 2022

Thiruvananthapuram: Confirming receiving a notice from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) asking him to appear before them on August 11 in Kochi, two-time former State Finance Minister and top CPI-M leader on Thursday said this was a clear case of harassment and will seek legal opinion to decide whether to appear or not.

The reason for the ED to serve the notice is to find out from him the functioning of the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB), which had come under fire from the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

KIIFB was established as the principal funding arm of the government of Kerala in 1999. Its objective is to channelise funds for critical and large public infrastructure projects in Kerala.

In Kerala, CAG has become a persona non grata ever since economist turned Isaac, early last year took on the Constitutional body head on, when he was holding office. After slamming the CAG, the Pinarayi Vijayan government passed a resolution against the CAG report (which termed the off-budget borrowings through KIIFB as unconstitutional), with the Congress-led Opposition opposing it.

"This is the second notice that I have got from the ED asking me to appear. While the first one came last month asking me to appear with all the books of accounts, this time, perhaps they would have realised their folly and have not asked that," said Isaac to the media and added that he has been called under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

"However, this time they have asked me to appear with my details of accounts and assets of the past 10 years and it includes the companies, where I was director. The Reserve Bank of India is the regulatory body for FEMA and has never said that there was anything wrong. What's happening now is a clear case of harassment, and with regards to my assets, it's easy to prepare as I have nothing," added Isaac. <https://daijiworld.com/news/newsDisplay?newsID=986024>

11. Bungling slur against K'pada College Principal (dailypioneer.com) Updated: August 4, 2022

KENDRAPADA: Acting on the direction of Under Secretary, UGC, the Additional Secretary, Higher Education, Surendra Kumar Panda has on July 25 directed the Regional Director of Education, Bhubaneswar, to submit a report with suggestion within 15 days for taking necessary action over malfunctioning of office of the Principal-cum-Secretary, Kendrapada Autonomous College.

The direction was passed following an alumni and a former office bearer of ABVP, Abhimanyu Gochhayat of Kapaleswar filed a complaint with the Chairman, UGC, New Delhi, alleging financial bungling and administrative irregularities by the Principal-in-charge of Kendrapada Autonomous College, in May.

He alleged that that the autonomous status was extended to Kendrapada Autonomous College for a period of six years with effect from the academic year 2013-14 to 2018-19, including ex facto approval from 2011-2012 to 2012-2013. The college authorities, however, have failed to perform their role in the right way keeping the ideals/intention of the autonomous status of the college. Most unfortunately, the college has failed to open more new post graduates courses for the students. It's a matter of concern that in some departments there are no regular lecturers and they are being managed by guest teachers, while even, the departments where teachers are there, classes are not properly, complained Gochhayat.

The Principal –in-charge of the college himself does not take classes although he is supposed to do so as per the instructions of the Government where it is stated that he has to perform his duty as the Principal-in-charge of the college in addition to his normal duties as a faculty. Some departments are running without university affiliation, alleged Gochhayat.

The situation of the college particularly during the incumbency of the present Principal-in-charge Dr Rajendra Prasad Tripathy, Reader in Sociology, has deteriorated to a great extent at the cost of the students' interest and the reputation of the college, he stated.

Dr Tripathy has been involved in a number of financial irregularities of funds from different sources such as UGC grants and students donation without maintaining due procedure with transparency. Dr Tripathy and his wife Arnapurna Suar, the Reader of Economics, have been able to submit utilisation certificate (UC) in respect of their minor research projects to the Eastern Regional Office (UGC), Kolkata, without submitting the original bills and vouchers in the account section of the college, which was unearthed during the audit, alleged Gocchayat.

The Accountant General (G&SSA), Odisha considering his application earlier had requested the Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Higher Education, vide its letter No. AG(G&SSA) SS-III-vetting (B) Misc/19 20 1537 dated 6.3.20 to make a detailed inquiry related to corruption and other irregular activities in the college. The Governing Body of the college vide order to its president bearing No 15/2020 dated 4.10.2020 had suspended Dr Tripathy for his illegal actions and rampant financial irregularities. But Dr Tripathy was still clinging to his post of the Principal –in-charge of the college, the complainant said. <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2022/state-editions/bungling-slur-against-k---pada-college-principal.html>

12. कश्मीर के बाढ़ प्रबंधन योजना की क्यों हुई आलोचना? (thethirdpole.net) U
pdated: August 3, 2022

दक्षिण कश्मीर के संगम और श्रीनगर के राम मुंशीबाग इलाकों में पानी के स्तर बढ़ने के बाद 22 जून को सरकार ने कश्मीर घाटी में बाढ़ की चेतावनी दी थी। पानी का स्तर आधिकारिक

क तौर पर “बाढ़ के खतरे” वाले स्तर से नीचे था। लेकिन नदी के पानी ने श्रीनगर के बेमिना क्षेत्र में 20 से अधिक घरों की दो कॉलोनियों में पानी भर दिया। उत्तरी कश्मीर के बारामूला जिले के कम से कम तीन गांव अचानक बाढ़ की चपेट में आ गए।

कुछ दिनों बाद बारिश कम हो गई, और साथ ही बाढ़ का पानी भी वापस जाने लगा, लेकिन नदी का पानी जुलाई तक ऊंचे स्तर पर चलता रहा। फिर 29 जुलाई को कश्मीर के मौसम विभाग ने तीन दिनों तक लगातार बारिश के बाद ‘येलो वार्निंग’ जारी की। श्रीनगर में मौसम विभाग के उप निदेशक मुख्तार अहमद ने द थर्ड पोल को बताया, “बाढ़ की संभावना हो सकती है।”

कश्मीर में,

2014 की विनाशकारी बाढ़ की यादें अभी भी लोगों के बीच मौजूद हैं। हाल की चेतावनियों ने इस क्षेत्र की बाढ़ प्रबंधन योजनाओं की प्रभावशीलता पर कुछ सवाल खड़े किए हैं।

2014 के बाद कैसी रही बाढ़ प्रबंधन योजना

सितंबर 2014 में, झेलम नदी के क्षेत्र के कई हिस्सों में उफान के बाद कश्मीर घाटी में अब तक की सबसे भीषण बाढ़ आई थी। इस बाढ़ में 300 से अधिक लोग मारे गए थे और अरबों की संपत्ति का नुकसान हुआ था।

इस विनाशकारी बाढ़ के तुरंत बाद, केंद्र सरकार ने झेलम नदी और उसकी सहायक नदियों के लिए बाढ़ प्रबंधन योजना को मंजूरी दी। इस परियोजना को प्रधान मंत्री डेवलपमेंट पैकेज के माध्यम से फंडज़ दिए गए थे। और इस योजना को दो चरणों में विभाजित किया गया था।

पहले चरण के लिए 399 करोड़ रुपये सैंगशन किए गए थे जो अभी तक पूरा नहीं हुआ है। इस चरण में तलछट हटाने के लिए नदी की ड्रेजिंग करने की बात थी। ड्रेजिंग का मतलब है किसी भी नदी या झील के अंदर से भारी मशीन इस्तेमाल करके कीचड़ को निकालना। सरकार ने दावा किया कि यह चरण झेलम की निर्वहन क्षमता को 31,800 क्यूसेक से बढ़ाकर 41,000 क्यूसेक कर देगा। इसका मतलब यह है कि नदी अपने किनारों को ओवरस्पिल किए बिना लगभग 25% अधिक पानी के लिए जगह बना सकती है।

क्यूसेक क्या है?

झेलम नदी दक्षिण कश्मीर में वेरीनाग से बहती है, उत्तर की ओर श्रीनगर से होकर उत्तरी कश्मीर के बांदीपोरा जिले में वूलर झील तक पहुँचती है। 103 धाराओं और सहायक नदियों से पहुंचने वाले पानी के लिए झेलम नदी एकमात्र जल निकासी चैनल है।

कश्मीर के सिंचाई और बाढ़ नियंत्रण (आईएफ एंड सी) विभाग के अनुसार, पहले चरण का मुख्य उद्देश्य झेलम नदी और उसके मौजूदा बाढ़ स्पिल चैनल में कम से मध्यम परिमाण की बाढ़ से निपटने के लिए प्रमुख बाधाओं को दूर करना था। झेलम का बाढ़ स्पिल चैनल श्रीनगर के दक्षिण से वूलर झील तक चलता है, और इसका उद्देश्य है अतिरिक्त पानी को हटाना।

आईएफ एंड सी विभाग के एक अधिकारी ने द् थर्ड पोल को बताया कि बाढ़ प्रबंधन योजना के पहले चरण के तहत काम में मध्य कश्मीर के बडगाम जिले के शरीफाबाद क्षेत्र में और उत्तरी कश्मीर के नायदखाई गांव में बाढ़ फैलाने वाले चैनल की ड्रेजिंग शामिल है, ताकि इसे चौड़ा किया जा सके और इसकी वहन क्षमता बढ़ाई जा सके। इन जगहों पर दो पुल भी बनाए गए थे। नदी की वहन क्षमता बढ़ाने के लिए श्रीनगर और बारामूला जिलों में झेलम का ड्रेजिंग किया गया था।

विभाग ने बाढ़ फैल चैनल को चौड़ा करने के लिए 214.75 एकड़ राज्य भूमि और निजी भूमि का भी अधिग्रहण किया था।

आलोचना में वित्तीय हेराफेरी के आरोप भी शामिल

जून 2021 की एक रिपोर्ट में, भारत के नियंत्रक और महालेखापरीक्षक यानी सीएजी जो सरकारी कार्यों की सभी प्राप्तियों और व्यय का ऑडिट करने वाले अधिकारी हैं, उन्होंने आवश्यक लक्ष्यों को प्राप्त करने में बड़ी चूक के लिए आईएफ एंड सी विभाग की आलोचना की।

8%

सीएजी की एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, खानबल और कदलपाल के बीच नदी तल सामग्री के 142,000 क्यूबिक मीटर के लक्ष्य में सिर्फ 8% ड्रेजिंग की गई थी।

झेलम नदी के दो खंडों में हुए विकास पर आधारित सीएजी के रिपोर्ट के महत्वपूर्ण हिस्से में ये बताया गया है कि 1.42 लाख (142,000) क्यूबिक मीटर नदी तल सामग्री के लक्ष्य का केवल 8% तल सामग्री खानाबल और कदलपाल के बीच निकाला गया था, और 0.6 लाख (60,000) क्यूबिक मीटर के लक्ष्य के बावजूद, सेथर और सेम्पोर के बीच झेलम से कोई सामग्री नहीं निकाली गई।

सीएजी की रिपोर्ट में वित्तीय अनियमितताओं को भी उजागर किया गया था। खासकर उन मामलों को जिसमें अधिकारियों ने निश्चित राशि से अधिक पैसे खर्च करने वाले कागज़ पर हस्ताक्षर कर दिया था। 25 जुलाई 2022 को, जम्मू और कश्मीर और लद्दाख के हाई कोर्ट ने भी बहाली परियोजना के लिए केंद्र सरकार द्वारा प्रदान किए गए धन के उपयोग पर प्रतिक्रिया मांगी।

परियोजना का पहला चरण कोलकाता स्थित कंपनी रीच ड्रेजिंग लिमिटेड द्वारा शुरू किया गया था। ड्रेजिंग को मार्च 2018 में पूरा किया जाना था, लेकिन कंपनी कई बार अपने डेडलाइन से चूक गई और अप्रैल 2018 में आईएफ एंड सी विभाग द्वारा संचालन को बंद करने के लिए कहा गया। विभाग ने अभी तक परियोजना को पूरा नहीं किया है।

आईएफ एंड सी विभाग में कश्मीर क्षेत्र के मुख्य अभियंता नरेश कुमार ने द् थर्ड पोल को बताया,
“97% काम [पहले चरण पर] पहले ही पूरा हो चुका है, बाकी का 3% सितंबर 2022 तक पूरा हो जाएगा।”

विभाग के अन्य अधिकारियों ने उनकी पहचान साझा ना करने के शर्त पर द् थर्ड पोल को बताया कि 2016 की गर्मियों में अशांति और साइट की बाधाओं के कारण डेडलाइन पीछे छूट गई थी। ये खासकर शहर के हिस्से में हुआ। अधिकारियों ने कहा कि कम तापमान और ठंड की वजह से सर्दियों के महीनों के दौरान भी काम में देरी हुई, क्योंकि ज्यादातर मजदूर भारत के उन क्षेत्रों से आए थे, जहां कभी ऐसी ठंड का अनुभव नहीं हुआ था।

सीएजी रिपोर्ट में बिल्कुल रहम नहीं खाई। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया था कि ठेकेदार समय प्रबंधन में अपने दायित्वों को पूरा करने में नाकामयाब रहें और इस बात के लिए उन्हें सज़ा मिलनी चाहिए। हालांकि रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि नदी तल सामग्री के 7 लाख (700,000) क्यूबिक मीटर के कुल लक्ष्य का 98% ड्रेजिंग आखिरकार कर ही दिया गया था, लेकिन इसमें ये भी कहा गया है कि “निकर्षण छह साइटों पर निर्धारित आवश्यकताओं के अनुसार नहीं किया गया था। असलियत में, तीन जगहों पर 0.58 लाख घन मीटर [58,000 घन मीटर] अतिरिक्त बिस्तर सामग्री निकाली गई; दूसरी ओर, एक साइट पर बिल्कुल भी ड्रेजिंग नहीं की गई थी और दो साइटों पर कम ड्रेजिंग की गई थी।

बारिश और नदी में बढ़ते पानी की वजह से कई सवाल उठते हैं
जून में कुछ दिनों की बारिश के बाद ही पानी का स्तर बाढ़ के खतरे के स्तर तक बढ़ गया था। श्रीनगर के कर्णनगर इलाके में रहने वाले व्यापारी हिलाल अहमद मीर जैसे कई स्थानीय निवासियों ने अपनी निराशा व्यक्त की।

मीर पूछते हैं,
“यह बिल्कुल पैसे की बर्बादी है। अगर कुछ दिनों की बारिश के बाद नदी फिर से उफान पर आ जाती है तो 399 करोड़ रुपये कहां गए?”

ड्रेजिंग प्रक्रिया का बारीकी से पालन करने वाले सिविल इंजीनियर इफ्तिखार अहमद द्राबू का तर्क है कि ड्रेजिंग शुरू करने के लिए अधिकारी नदी के गलत हिस्सों को चुनते हैं।

द्राबू ने कहा,

“निकर्षण ऊपरी इलाकों में किया गया था - जिससे शहर [श्रीनगर] बाढ़ के प्रति अधिक संवेद नशील हो गया।” उन्होंने आगे तर्क दिया कि बाढ़ के खतरे को कम करने के लिए झेलम को अतिरिक्त चैनलों की आवश्यकता है। उन्होंने अतिरिक्त पानी रखने के लिए दो समानांतर चैनलों के निर्माण का समर्थन करते हुए कहा कि अकेले ड्रेजिंग से समस्या का समाधान नहीं होगा।

अगर कुछ दिनों की बारिश के बाद नदी फिर से उफान पर आ जाती है तो 399 करोड़ रुपये कहां गए? -हिलाल अहमद

वहन क्षमता में बढ़ोतरी से जुड़े सरकार के दावों पर सवाल उठाते हुए द्राबू पूछते हैं कि शहर एक बार फिर बाढ़ के खतरे को क्यों देख रहा है?

आईएफ एंड सी के नरेश कुमार ने इस सवाल पर ध्यान देने के बजाय कि बाढ़ का खतरा कम क्यों नहीं हुआ, इस बात पर ध्यान केंद्रित करते हैं कि योजना को क्या हासिल करना चाहिए था। उन्होंने द् थर्ड पोल को बताया कि बाढ़ प्रबंधन योजना के पहले चरण का प्रमुख उद्देश्य बाढ़ फैल चैनल में बाधाओं और बाधाओं को दूर करना था। उन्होंने कहा, “यह झेलम नदी से पड़शाही बाग में अतिरिक्त बाढ़ के पानी को 48 किलोमीटर की यात्रा के बाद सीधे वूलर झील में बदलने के लिए महत्वपूर्ण था”। उनका मतलब यह था कि पानी अभी भी बढ़ सकता है लेकिन अगर बाधाएं दूर हो जाएंगी तो उन्हें कोई खतरा नहीं होगा।

श्रीनगर सिंचाई और बाढ़ नियंत्रण विभाग के एक कार्यकारी अभियंता एजाज अहमद कीन ने द् थर्ड पोल को बताया:

“द्वितीय चरण में, आउटफ़्लो को बढ़ाने के लिए निचले क्षेत्रों में ड्रेजिंग किया जाएगा।”

सीएजी की रिपोर्ट द्वारा उठाए गया प्रमुख मुद्दा ये था कि “काम नियमों और शर्तों के अनुसार नहीं हुआ था [और] बढ़े हुए प्रवाह के लिए झेलम नदी में ड्रेजिंग कार्यों की प्रभावकारिता को सीमित करेगा।” उठाए गए बिन्दु इस बात से बिल्कुल संबंधित नहीं थे। द् थर्ड पोल ने सीएजी रिपोर्ट की आलोचनाओं के संबंध में आईएफ एंड सी विभाग से संपर्क किया, लेकिन विभाग ने टिप्पणी करने से इनकार कर दिया, और यह बताने से इनकार कर दिया कि क्या उन्होंने रिपोर्ट पर प्रतिक्रिया दर्ज की है।

8 जुलाई को, जम्मू और कश्मीर प्रशासन ने झेलम नदी और उसकी सहायक नदियों के बाढ़ प्रबंधन के दूसरे चरण के लिए 16.23 अरब रुपये आवंटित किए हैं। <https://www.thethirdpole.net/hi/514/96047/>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

13. **Can internal performance audit help boost Defence Ministry's functioning?** (financialexpress.com) Updated: August 3, 2022

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) took a significant step last month to bolster the 'Overall Internal Oversight and Risk Management Framework' by tasking the Controller General of Defence Accounts (CGDA) with the responsibility of carrying out outcome-based 'Performance/Efficiency Audit' of various functions and activities performed at different echelons in the defence establishment.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) took a significant step last month to bolster the 'Overall Internal Oversight and Risk Management Framework' by tasking the Controller General of Defence Accounts (CGDA) with the responsibility of carrying out outcome-based 'Performance/Efficiency Audit' of various functions and activities performed at different echelons in the defence establishment.

The new mandate covers wide-ranging subjects like utilisation of weapon systems and other assets, prioritisation of procurement, assessment of optimum inventory levels, recovery of the government dues, and IT systems for handling logistics, inventory management, and tendering. The mandate also extends to a critical 'review of the role, business process and performance of various organisations handling provisioning, indenting, procurement, tendering inspection, quality assessment, contract management, inventory, financial planning and budget, and processing of bills'.

It is not immediately clear whether this vast mandate is to be counterbalanced by reducing the scope of the transaction-based compliance audit – also called 'local' or 'internal' audit- which the Defence Accounts Department (DAD), headed by the CGDA, carries out through a large network of Local Audit Officers (LAOs). This internal audit is very extensive, unlike the statutory audit parallelly conducted by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India based on a smaller sample of transactions.

The Defence Accounts Department is one of the oldest institutions, tracing its origins back to the mid-eighteenth century when the first Military Pay Master was appointed by the East India Company in 1750 for handling finances of the Garrison at Fort Williams. In its present avatar, DAD is responsible for making personal and contractual payments, maintaining the accounts, rendering financial advice to the authorities from the MoD down to the lowest echelons in the armed forces which exercise financial powers, and of course, multifaceted 'local audit' of the defence establishments.

Over the years, local audits have been reduced to routine scrutiny of individual transactions relating to cash and stores carried out at the unit level and detecting aberrations vis-à-vis the rules which govern those transactions. A half-yearly report generated by the DAD based on internal audit findings received little attention in the Services Headquarters and the Ministry of Defence, not least because the findings were largely mundane.

Efforts by the Defence Accounts Department to conduct Performance Audit with a view to highlighting systemic lacunae did not receive much support from the auditees,

especially at the Service Headquarters and MoD who often argued that a 'subordinate' office of the MoD had no business to audit the functioning of the 'higher' echelons.

The notification issued by the MoD on July 14 removes this impediment which, at times, was faced by the audit teams conducting performance audit even at the lower echelons. The notification clearly stipulates that the audit teams conducting Performance/Efficiency (P&E) audit 'will have unfettered access to information, documents and files during the discharge of their internal Audit responsibilities'.

To identify the specific areas for P&E Audit and make sure that the audit findings receive due attention and corrective action is taken by the authorities concerned, MoD has also constituted an Apex Committee on Performance & Efficiency Audit (ACPEA) under the Defence Secretary. Other members include the Secretary (Defence Finance), Vice-chiefs of the three services, CISC, CGDA, DG (Acquisition), Additional Secretaries of the Departments of Defence and Military Affairs, and DG (R&M) of the Defence Research Development Organisation. The Additional CGDA will be the member secretary of the committee.

Intriguingly, important organisations like the Border Roads and Coast Guard are not represented in the committee.

With the MoD clearing the decks for P&E audit by the DAD, the department's responsibilities have suddenly increased exponentially. As a part of the new mandate, it will have to examine whether the programmes, systems, activities, and organisations are performing according to the pre-assigned roles and objectives. It will also have to assess the reliability of the internal control mechanisms, identify risk factors, and suggest systemic improvements.

This humongous responsibility calls for a very deep understanding of the ethos and functioning of the auditee organisations, the ability to segregate systemic lacunae from the mundane procedural aberrations, knowledge of the global best practices from which lessons could be learnt, and the ability to suggest pragmatic remedies for addressing the systemic lacunae or improving efficiency.

With its deep and all-pervasive participation in financial management at all echelons of defence establishments, DAD is undoubtedly best suited for the job. However, it will be a mistake to assume that it can hit the ground running. The new job would require many structural, administrative, and attitudinal changes.

The LAOs, who carry out routine local audit cannot be tasked with the new responsibility also as the nature of the audit they conduct is totally different from the P&E audit. Keeping this difference in view, dedicated teams of middle or senior-level officers of the Indian Defence Accounts Service (IDAS) with the requisite aptitude for audit will have to be raised.

Depending on whether the P&E audit is to be conducted simultaneously at various echelons, DAD will also have to figure out whether to create a multi-layered structure of P&E auditors or it will be sufficient to raise a few peripatetic teams at its headquarters in New Delhi and depute them to wherever the audit is to be conducted.

Under the present dispensation, IDAS officers' involvement in the audit function is very limited. However, there cannot be any meaningful P&E audit without their personal involvement, as this is an entirely officer-oriented task. It will require an attitudinal change on their part, as well as on the part of the auditee organisations. There is presently no love lost between the two. Winning mutual trust would be a big challenge.

Carefully crafted protocols and Standard Operating Procedures that, among other things, mandate defining of the scope of audit before its commencement and discussion with the auditee organisation on the findings before the audit report is submitted to ACPEA will be the key to developing that trust.

The trickiest part will, however, be to make practical recommendations for plugging systemic loopholes and improving the functioning of the organisations. It calls for not only very extensive domain knowledge that can be acquired only by transcending the immediate call of duty, but also the ability to figure out what prescriptions can work in the Indian context. <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/can-internal-performance-audit-help-boost-defence-ministrys-functioning/2615993/>

14. BSNL's handicaps make its revival a challenge (newindianexpress.com) Updated: August 4, 2022

The government is making one more effort to revive BSNL. It has announced an impressive Rs 1.64 lakh crore package for the ailing public sector telecom operator. Three years ago, the government had also announced another plan of Rs 69,000 crore to revive BSNL, but that was never fully implemented, nor did it turn around the firm.

The current package sounds very impressive, but the amount is not entirely a cash injection. A good amount of the Rs 1.64 lakh crore comprises administrative allocation of 4G spectrum and debt restructuring. The rest is made up of financial support and viability gap funding. At any rate, it will give the troubled firm some financial leeway to improve operations. Meanwhile, before the government announced the package, BSNL had reduced its bloated manpower, narrowed its loss and turned profitable at the operating level.

While the government expects that BSNL will see a complete turnaround within a couple of years, the optimism is probably misplaced. BSNL has already lost the 4G game to its private sector rivals. All three private sector companies will launch 5G services in some circles by the end of the year, even while BSNL puts together its Pan India 4G network. (Though the government may well end up as the largest shareholder in Vi or Vodafone Idea after the conversion of AGR into equity shares, it is operating as a fully private player for all extents and purposes).

The hurdles BSNL will have to surmount after the government unveiled the new package to remain a viable telecom services operator are daunting. The 2019 revival package envisaged the merger of BSNL with MTNL, the other government-owned telecom operator. It made sense because the creation of two separate government-owned telecom corporations from the Department of Telecom never had any logic behind it. MTNL was asked to provide services in Delhi and Mumbai, while BSNL would do the same in the rest of the country. Both firms ended up as loss-making, inefficient corporations while the private sector players ate into their market share. If

they weren't government companies, they would have died like several private sector players who failed to keep pace in the Indian telecom arena.

Earlier this year, however, the government announced that the merger of MTNL and BSNL was being deferred because of the accumulated debt of the two firms. It is likely that the fresh revival package with debt restructuring and financial support could see the merger going through in the next couple of years, but that is by no means certain.

The problem with BSNL (and MTNL) is that their historical advantages have eroded over the years. BSNL had a wider and deeper reach across the country than any private sector player primarily because most of its rivals were focusing on urban areas with better revenue potential.

For a long time, BSNL, therefore, retained a fairly strong grip in rural areas and even in small towns. Its landline network helped as well. It was also asked to execute a portion of the ambitious BharatNet project to give all Panchayats in the country high-speed broadband access.

The problem is that poor execution has marred its effort. And its stranglehold on rural and semi-urban areas has been reduced considerably because of the march of Reliance Jio, Airtel, and even Vodafone. Its inability to service its customers properly, absence of 4G networks, and therefore inability to give high-speed broadband to its customers have spoiled its reputation. The absence from the key markets of Delhi and Mumbai hasn't helped.

But BSNL's biggest problem is the same that plagues all PSUs. Despite being corporations, most PSUs have been unable to break out of the government office culture with little freedom, accountability or prospects for professional growth. In the fast-changing telecom technology arena, the ability to take quick decisions is critical for survival, and BSNL doesn't have that.

Also, government-owned entities suffer from another issue. They are expected to fulfil the social goals of the government and not just chase revenues and profits. That is why not all decisions are taken purely guided by commercial viability.

It is not that PSUs do not have some excellent employees at all levels. Many of the bigger PSUs have been a happy hunting ground for private companies looking for experienced people in different sectors. Erstwhile PSU employees often do very well after joining the private sector. This is primarily because they offer a better environment to take the initiative and because decision-making is quicker and often the focus is on output and outcome.

In most PSUs, and that includes BSNL, there is not enough operational freedom to take decisions quickly and improve operations. Critical decisions like entry into 4G and bidding aggressively for additional spectrum needs clearance from above. Asset monetisation cannot be done quickly. Nor can a culture of customer orientation and marketing be enforced because of the HR systems and processes.

When the government announces a revival package for any PSU, it rarely tries to fix the basic problem that hinders the PSU in the first place. And that is why few of its

revival plans work in banking or aviation. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/2022/aug/04/bsnls-handicaps-make-its-revival-a-challenge-2483761.html>

15. Parliamentary Panel Flags Slow Progress of Solar Parks and Ultra Mega Solar Power Projects ([swarajyamag.com](http://www.swarajyamag.com)) Updated: August 3, 2022

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Energy has expressed disappointment at the slow progress of the development of solar parks in the country and shortfall in the overall target.

The committee headed by Janata Dal (United) MP Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh, made these observations in its twenty-eighth Report on action-taken by the government on observations/recommendations contained in Seventeenth Report (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) on the subject 'Action Plan for Achievement of 175 GW Renewable Energy Target'.

Solar Parks

The Scheme for 'Development of Solar Parks and Ultra Mega Solar Power Projects' was rolled out on 12 December 2014 with aggregate capacity of 20,000 MW. Further, the capacity of this Scheme was enhanced from 20,000 MW to 40,000 MW on 21 March 2017.

Solar Park is a large chunk of land developed with all necessary infrastructures and clearances for setting up of solar projects.

The capacity of the solar parks is generally 500 MW and above. However, smaller parks (up to 20 MW) are also considered in states/UTs where there is shortage of non-agricultural land. Approximately 4 to 5 acres per MW of land is required for setting up of solar parks.

Status Update

The Committee in its report noted that there is a target to install 40 GW of Solar Power by setting up over 50 solar parks and Ultra Mega Solar Power Projects by 2022.

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) in its action-taken reply before the Committee stated that it has granted approval for 50 solar parks of aggregate capacity of 33.80 GW as on 31 December 2021. "Of this, only eight parks have been completed with commissioned capacity of 6,580 MW and six parks are partially complete with projects of 2,615 MW installed," it stated.

The Committee expressed dismay at the fact that although the Ministry has granted approvals for 50 solar parks with aggregate capacity of 33.80 GW, but it is less than the target of 40 GW by 6.20 GW. "The Ministry has not given any explanation regarding reduction in target at the level of approval itself," it stated.

Further, the report highlighted that there has been “no increase in the number of fully developed solar parks since 2020 and therefore, 42 solar parks are yet to be fully developed when the original deadline of December 2022, is knocking at the door”.

Making a shift in the original deadline of 2022, the Ministry in its reply said that it is making concerted efforts to achieve the target of completion of solar parks of aggregate capacity 40 GW by 2023-24.

Utilisation of Surplus Land

Keeping in view the fact that the solar power projects are land intensive projects, which require large flat tracts of shadow free contiguous land with accessibility, the Committee had specifically recommend that the Ministry should actively explore the option of using surplus land available with various public sector undertaking (PSUs) and different state governments for setting up of solar parks expeditiously.

The Committee had also suggested that the Ministry should encourage all the airports in a time bound manner, to set up solar projects on the lines of Kochi Airport which is the first fully solar-powered airport in the world. However, the Ministry has not responded to these suggestions. <https://swarajyamag.com/infrastructure/parliamentary-panel-flags-slow-progress-of-solar-parks-and-ultra-mega-solar-power-projects>

16. Thermal power plants should clean up their act (thehindubusinessline.com) Updated: August 4, 2022

The Power Ministry seems to be batting for these units, though

As a result of the dogged pursuit of local activists and residents for several years, the National Green Tribunal, in January 2022, passed an order penalising a thermal power station (TPS) in central India to the tune of ₹5 crore for failing to meet air pollution norms.

The order, later stayed by the Supreme Court, gave three months to the operator to take necessary steps to curb pollution in the region, failing which there would be a further penalty of ₹5 crore per month of non-compliance till six months, with provisions of further increased fine and prosecution if steps were not taken within six months.

The nature of the judgment reflects the power station’s impact on the location population. By refusing to install flue-gas desulphurisation (FGD) devices, the 2,920 MW power station has been reportedly responsible for considerable loss of life, and incidence of ill-health, in recent times, according to a study by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

FGDs can reduce sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions by 70 per cent in older units and by 92 per cent in newer TPSs. Yet, despite compelling evidence, the plant operators have not responded convincingly.

This, however, is not a one-off case of a TPS ignoring the social, economic, environmental and health impacts of coal-fired thermal power plants. Despite

mandating FGDs in 2015 and several extensions to the deadline, a mere 3 per cent of power generated comes from FGD installed units.

Several amendments

The 2015 emission standard notification by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), which mandated the installation of FGDs by 2017, has been amended several times to extend the deadline. Six months ahead of the latest deadline for Category A power plants (plants that are within a 10 km radius from cities with a million+ population), the Ministry of Power had written to MoEFCC to further the extension by two years and a soft push for 20 years — to 2035.

The deadline is meaningless as most of India's power plants would have reached the end of their lifespan by then. The letter raises questions about the Power Ministry's seriousness in meeting its responsibility towards cleaner power and public health.

The Power Ministry, while appearing indifferent to the installation of FGDs, was, by all accounts, not proactive when the emission norms were first mandated. In a 2018 affidavit to the Supreme Court, it wrote: "Ministry of Power has no role in either grant of environment clearance required to set up a plant or in permission for consent to operate. MoEFCC issued revised norms for PM, SO₂ and NO_x. Implementation/advancement of targets is to be taken by MoEFCC directly with the plant, as is being done by Central Pollution Control Board."

The letter continues to say that while the CEA (Central Electricity Authority) has prepared a phasing plan, the responsibility for implementation lies with the generating companies.

SO₂ and NO_x norms were introduced in India for the first time in December 2015. In a 2021 review of the new norms, the Ministry argued for doing away with the need to control SO₂ emissions.

Emission norms were eventually relaxed in favour of thermal power plants. In 2018, water usage norms were diluted, and later in May 2019, NO_x norms were relaxed for units installed between 2004 and 2016.

The Economic Survey of 2016-17 (chapter 5, volume 2) says: "The annual number of deaths linked to coal based power plants pollution is estimated to be around 115,000 and the total monetary cost is around US\$ 4.6 billion."

The Ministry should pull up power plant operators which have been lackadaisical in their efforts to install FGDs. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/thermal-power-plants-should-clean-up-their-act/article65722719.ece>

17. NHAI debt stands at Rs 3.49 lakh crore ([newindianexpress.com](https://www.newindianexpress.com)) 03rd August 2022

The total outstanding debt of state-owned National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) stood at around Rs 3.49 lakh crore as of March 31, 2022, Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said the fund required by NHAI for debt servicing in 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 will be Rs 31,282 crore, Rs 31,909 crore and Rs 30,552 crore, respectively.

Gadkari said the monetisation plan of operational highway stretches -- which has the largest share of Rs 1.6 lakh crore of the total asset monetisation plan of Rs 6 lakh crore over a period of 4 years, i.e.

FY22 to FY25, as per the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) announced recently by the Centre -- includes 26,700 km of highways of four lanes.

Till date, NHAI has monetised 26 stretches under toll-operate-transfer (TOT) and InvIT modes of monetisation.

According to the minister, the total budgetary outlay of the road ministry under BE 2022-23 is Rs 1,99,107.71 crore.

"In addition, NHAI envisages raising of Rs 15,000 crore from SPV and Rs 30,000 crore is investment envisaged from private sector participation," he said.

Replying to a separate question, Gadkari said Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh have confirmed that they are following the provision of the Motor Vehicle Act and the notification issued thereunder to ensure the appropriate electronic enforcement devices on National Highways at high risk and high-density corridors.

"Remaining states/UTs have not yet confirmed," he added.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued a notification on August 11, 2021, for electronic monitoring and enforcement of road safety, which mandates that the state government shall ensure that appropriate electronic enforcement devices are placed at high risk and high-density corridors on National Highways.

Implementation of the Motor Vehicle Act, 1988 and Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989 comes under the purview of the respective state governments/UTs.

Replying to another question, the minister said the use of steel slag in different pavement layers of highways is under the trial stage. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2022/aug/03/nhai-debt-stands-at-rs-349-lakh-crore-2483702.html>