

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (07.09.2022)

1. Start planning to shut down sick PSUs approved by cabinet, Modi govt tells ministries (theprint.in) 7 September, 2022

The Narendra Modi government has directed its ministries and departments to draw up an action plan to speed up the winding up and disinvestment of those public sector undertakings (PSUs) that have already received the cabinet's approval for closure, ThePrint has learnt.

The closure of loss-making and sick PSUs was discussed in a review meeting chaired by Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba on 12 August. From the minutes of the meeting accessed by ThePrint, he directed officials from different ministries to also give reasons if there was a delay in implementing the closure of such PSUs.

“We need to ensure that the government's resources are not wasted, and in cases where there is approval by the cabinet for closure of CPSEs (central public sector enterprises), autonomous bodies, and other entities, it must be implemented immediately,” a senior government official told ThePrint on condition of anonymity.

The meeting called by Gauba was essentially to discuss the roadmap for the central government to prepare for ‘Vision India@2047’, a plan to ensure that India is ranked among the top-three economies globally and is inching closer to the status of a developed nation.

PSUs are those companies in which the direct holding of the central government or other PSU is 51 per cent or more. According to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, there are a total of 607 PSUs in which the government either directly or indirectly holds a stake. About 90 companies did not give their financial statements to the CAG at the time of preparing the report. Of the 697, around 488 are government companies, six are statutory corporations, and 203 are government-controlled other companies.

In its December 2021 report, the CAG said that around 181 state-run companies had a net loss of Rs 68,434 crore in 2019-20, up from Rs 40,835 crore in 2018-19. Of these, 115 have incurred losses for three to five years in the past five years, whereas 64 have incurred losses continuously for five years. The accumulated losses of these 181 companies for two years, ending 31 March, 2020, comes to a total of Rs 1,55,060 crore.

BSNL and Air India were among the 14 companies that inflicted losses of over Rs 1,000 crore in 2019-20, according to the CAG report. Air India, however, has now been privatised and taken over by the Tata Group's Talace Private Limited.

On the disinvestment side, the Centre has managed to sell its stake in three companies — Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), and Paradeep Phosphates Limited (PPL) — raising about Rs 24,544 crore in the current financial year so far. Of this, over 90 per cent of the amount was collected by listing LIC.

In 2022-23, the government is estimated to raise Rs 65,000 crore through disinvestment and privatisation of state-run firms.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in June had said the principle of the government's disinvestment programme is not to shut down any unit or company, but to make them more efficient and professionally-driven. She stressed that the privatisation of PSUs was aimed at making the companies run more efficiently.

All government procurement through GeM

To encourage government procurement through the government e-marketplace (GeM) portal, Gauba had declared that all procurements by ministries and departments would be done through GeM and only if a product or service is not available on the portal would one look outside.

“It was also decided that reviews and monitoring of GeM procurement would be done on a monthly basis,” said the minutes of the review meeting chaired by Gauba.

Launched in 2016, GeM is an online platform for public procurement in India, set up with the objective to create an open and transparent procurement platform for government buyers.

According to a PIB release, GeM has about 61,440 government-linked buyer organisations listed on the platform, 47.99 lakh sellers and service providers, a listing of over 41.44 lakh products and 1.9 lakh services offerings.

Around 239 state-run firms are also registered on GeM and are making significant procurement through the portal.

In the financial year 2021-22, merchandise worth Rs 1,06,760 crore was purchased through the GeM portal. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal in July had said, “Aggregation of demand because of procurement, happening through a single portal, will help in reducing the cost of procurement also for government buyers.” <https://theprint.in/economy/start-planning-to-shut-down-sick-psus-approved-by-cabinet-modi-govt-tells-ministries/1118494/>

2. Cabinet approved plans to close sick PSUs started, Modi government told ministries ([newsx.com](https://www.newsx.com)) September 7, 2022

The public sector undertakings (PSUs) that have already been given cabinet approval for liquidation must be wound up and their investments sold off quickly, according to a directive from the Narendra Modi administration to its ministries and departments.

During a review meeting on August 12th, which was presided over by Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba, the closure of loss-making and ill PSUs was considered.

“We need to ensure that the government's resources are not wasted, and in cases where there is approval by the cabinet for closure of CPSEs (central public sector enterprises), autonomous bodies, and other entities, it must be implemented immediately,” a senior government official told media.

Gauba convened the conference primarily to talk about the national government's preparations for “Vision India@2047,” a strategy to make sure that India is one of the world's top three economies and is gradually moving toward the position of a developed country.

PSUs are businesses where the central government or other PSUs directly own at least 51% of the company. There are a total of 607 PSUs in which the government has an indirect or direct

stake, according to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India. At the time the report was being written, the CAG had not received the financial accounts from almost 90 companies. Six of the 697 are statutory corporations, and around 488 are government-owned businesses. <https://www.newsx.com/headlines/psus.html>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

3. Audit finds large-scale fraud in MP food scheme (ianslive.in) September 6, 2022

Massive irregularities have been found in the audit of Madhya Pradesh government's take home ration scheme.

Topping the list is fictitious production of take home ration to the tune of Rs 58 crore, which has been detailed in the audit by the Madhya Pradesh Accountant General.

The audit found that the six plants in MP manufactured take home ration way more than their capacity on 534 days in 2018- 19 to 2020-21.

The audit concluded that the manufacturing plants reported take home ration production way beyond their rated and permitted capacity which clearly indicated that the plant officials reported fictitious production.

"We compared the raw material needed and the electricity consumed vis-a-vis the THR production which revealed the production of an impossible quantity of THR. The fake production of THR stood at Rs 58 crore," the audit said.

The audit revealed data manipulation in the estimation of out of school adolescent girls leading to the fake distribution of THR worth Rs 110.83 crore.

Adding to the large-scale irregularities, the audit found there were no trucks to be found. Six THR plants claimed to have transported 1,125.64 tons of THR totalling Rs 6.94 crore.

Verification of the Vahan database of respective states revealed that these trucks used were actually registered as motorcycles, cars, autos and tankers or the trucks did not exist at all in the database.

The audit also found misappropriation of the THR stock worth Rs 62.72 crore as the ration transported by trucks or any other means was not in the warehouse.

The audit findings clearly indicate large-scale fraud and misappropriations in the identification of beneficiaries, production, transportation, distribution and quality control of take home rations. https://ianslive.in/news/audit_finds_large_scale_fraud_in_mp_food_scheme-901511/NATION/1

4. Cong cites audit to allege ration scam under MP CM's watch; govt says AG report not 'final conclusion' (theprint.in, economictimes.indiatimes.com) September 6, 2022

The opposition Congress on Tuesday cited the report of the Madhya Pradesh Accountant General (AG) to allege corruption in the “poshan-aahar” or supplementary nutrition scheme under the women and child development department wherein vehicles mentioned as trucks turned out to be motorcycles and cars.

Comparing the alleged irregularities in the scheme and the distribution of rations with the infamous Bihar fodder scam, Congress demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan who heads the Women and Child Development department.

Madhya Pradesh Home Minister and state government spokesman, Narottam Mishra, said the AG's report is an opinion and not the “final truth”.

“As per the report, till 2021, 4.05 MT take-home ration (THR) was distributed to 1.35 crore beneficiaries amounting to Rs 2393.21 crore. It specifically pointed out that the registration numbers of trucks mentioned in the records of the transport of food material turned out to be motorcycles, cars, autorickshaws, tractors and tankers when checked through the ‘Vahan’ portal of the transport department,” alleged former minister Sajjan Singh Verma and state Congress media department chairman KK Mishra in a press conference in Bhopal.

None of the registration numbers mentioned in the records was found to be of a truck, Verma alleged.

“The report states that as per the record food material was supplied from the plants situated at Baadi, Dhar, Mandla, Rewa, Sagar and Shivpuri. However, the examination of these records show that ration stock was not available at these places,” K K Mishra claimed.

The Congress leaders wondered “why scams take place in the departments headed by CM Chouhan”.

They compared the alleged scam with Bihar's fodder scam wherein registration numbers of vehicles listed as trucks were found to be fake and the registration numbers were found to be of scooters and other vehicles.

Home Minister Mishra told reporters that the AG's report is only an opinion and is a part of (the audit) procedure.

“Audit reports are scrutinised by the state government and it cannot be termed as the final conclusion. The report will also be examined by the Public Accounts Committee of the state Assembly. Many times, a member of the Opposition is the chairman of the panel and the report is examined at that level also” he said.

“It is incorrect to say that the report is a final (conclusion). All things are discussed during the scrutiny and even paragraphs get deleted. I have seen this,” the home minister added.

Addressing a press conference in Indore, former minister and Congress MLA Jitu Patwari alleged that ration worth Rs 111 crore was distributed only on papers.

“The scam happened in the distribution of ration (under the ‘poshan aahar’ scheme) when Madhya Pradesh was in the grip of the pandemic,” he alleged.

Patwari and Verma demanded a probe by an “impartial agency” and added that they will raise the matter in the winter session of the state Legislative Assembly.

Congress has asked 13 questions to the state government regarding the “scam” in the distribution of rations. <https://theprint.in/india/cong-cites-audit-to-allege-ration-scam-under-mp-cms-watch-govt-says-ag-report-not-final-conclusion/1118508/>

5. Large-Scale Fraud under Shivraj's Watch': How Massive Food Scheme 'Scam' Landed MP CM in Soup (timesnownews.com) September 6, 2022

Madhya Pradesh Accountant General (AG) has detected large-scale irregularities in the midday meal and free food scheme for children. The audit found that the number of beneficiaries was hugely inflated and that vehicles listed as trucks turned out to be scooters, motorcycles and autos. The AG has asked the chief secretary to hold an in-depth investigation through an 'independent agency' into the alleged scam and fix the responsibility of officials. The accountant general has also detected irregularities in the women and child development (WCD) department, being headed by the chief minister himself. Vehicles listed as trucks turned out to be scooters, motorcycles and autos and the number of beneficiaries was hugely inflated, says the confidential report accessed by TOI.

Video Link: <https://www.timesnownews.com/videos/times-now/india/large-scale-fraud-under-shivrajs-watch-how-massive-food-scheme-scam-landed-mp-cm-in-soup-video-94036163>

6. Madhya Pradesh में 'पोषण आहार' में बड़ा घोटाला आया सामने | CAG Report में खुलासा (hindi.hwnews.in) September 6, 2022

मध्य प्रदेश के एकाउंटेंट जनरल की छत्तीस पन्नों की एक गोपनीय रिपोर्ट ने महिला बाल विकास विभाग में बड़ा घोटाला उजागर किया है. इस रिपोर्ट में सामने आया है कि करोड़ों का कई किलो वजनी पोषण आहार कागजों में ट्रक पर आया लेकिन जांच में वो मोटरसाइकिल, ऑटो पर दिखाया गया है. रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक लाखों ऐसे बच्चे जो स्कूल नहीं जाते उनके नाम पर भी करोड़ों का राशन बांट दिया गया है.

Video Link: <https://hindi.hwnews.in/shows/news-report/cag-reports-rise-in-malnutrition-cases-in-madhya-pradesh/>

7. MP: निवाले पर डाका! मध्य प्रदेश में हुआ 110 करोड़ रुपये का पोषण आहार घोटाला, CAG रिपोर्ट से खुलासा (abplive.com) 06 Sep 2022

MP Food Scam: मध्यप्रदेश में पोषण आहार योजना (Poshan Aahar Yojana) में बड़ी गड़बड़ी सामने आई है. पोषण आहार योजना के तहत गरीब बच्चों और महिलाओं को मिलने वाला राशन भ्रष्टाचार की भेंट

चढ़ गया है. कैग रिपोर्ट (CAG Report) के मुताबिक, मध्य प्रदेश महिला बाल विकास विभाग में 110 करोड़ रुपये घोटाला सामने आया है.

चारा घोटाले की तरह किया गया पोषण आहार घोटाला!

सरकारी दस्तावेज में दिखाया गया कि हजारों टन राशन को ट्रकों पर ढोया गया, लेकिन जिन ट्रकों का नंबर दिया गया वो फर्जी निकले. असल में ये नंबर मोटरसाइकल, कार, ऑटो और टैंकरों के हैं. एमपी के इस घोटाले को भी उसी तरह अंजाम दिया गया जैसे कभी चारा घोटाले को दिया गया था.

CAG रिपोर्ट से हुआ घोटाले का खुलासा

आपको बता दें कि ये सारी जानकारी मध्य प्रदेश की सीएजी रिपोर्ट से सामने आई है. दावा है कि पोषण आहार योजना में करोड़ों की हेराफेरी हुई है. खास बात ये है कि एमपी में महिला बाल विकास विभाग मुख्यमंत्री शिवराज सिंह चौहान (Shivraj Singh Chauhan) के ही पास है.

मिली जानकारी के अनुसार, अभी सिर्फ कुछ ही जिलों की जांच हुई है और उसी में इतना बड़ा घोटाला सामने आया है. माना जा रहा है कि अगर पूरे प्रदेश में जांच की जाती है तो ये एक बड़ा घोटाला होगा.

क्या बोले राज्य के गृह मंत्री?

ये भी बता दें कि मध्य प्रदेश के 6 जिलों में पोषण आहार के कारखाने हैं और जितनी प्रोडक्शन कागजों पर दिखाई गई, असल में उतनी नहीं हुई है. हालांकि, राज्य के गृह मंत्री नरोत्तम मिश्रा सीएजी की रिपोर्ट से खासा इत्तेफाक नहीं रखते हैं. उन्होंने कहा कि ये सिर्फ एक सलाह भर है.

कांग्रेस ने की सीएम से इस्तीफे की मांग

कांग्रेस (Congress) ने आरोप लगाया कि सरकार ने करीब 111 करोड़ रुपये का राशन कागजों पर बांट दिया है. कांग्रेस पार्टी ने मामले में मुख्यमंत्री शिवराज सिंह चौहान से इस्तीफे की मांग की है. पूर्व मंत्री एवं विधायक जीतू पटवारी ने कहा, "एजी की मीडिया में सामने आई गोपनीय रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक प्रदेश में करीब 111 करोड़ रुपये का राशन कागजों पर बांट दिया गया. इस घोटाले के तहत राशन वितरण में तब भी फर्जीवाड़ा किया गया, जब प्रदेश में कोविड-19 का भीषण प्रकोप था."

उन्होंने कथित घोटाले पर राज्य सरकार को घेरते हुए आरोप लगाया कि सरकारी राशन के स्टॉक में गड़बड़ी की गई और कुपोषित बच्चों तक पहुंचने वाले पोषाहार की गुणवत्ता भी नहीं जांची गई. कांग्रेस विधायक ने मांग की है कि राशन वितरण की ये कथित गड़बड़ियां सामने आने के बाद मुख्यमंत्री शिवराज सिंह चौहान को अपने पद से तुरंत इस्तीफा देना चाहिए.

'ये घोटाला 250 से 300 करोड़ का हो सकता है'

पटवारी ने दावा किया कि किसी निष्पक्ष एजेंसी द्वारा जांच किए जाने पर कथित राशन घोटाला 250 से 300 करोड़ रुपये का निकल सकता है. कांग्रेस विधायक ने कहा कि विधानसभा के आगामी शीतकालीन सत्र में पार्टी राशन घोटाले का मुद्दा उठाएगी. <https://www.abplive.com/news/india/madhya-pradesh-food-scam-of-rupees-110-crore-cag-report-revealed-ann-2209358>

8. बच्चों के निवाले छिनकर मोटे हो रहे हैं भ्रष्टाचारी! पोषण आहार योजना 110 करोड़ रुपए का घोटाला, CAG की रिपोर्ट में हुआ खुलासा (ibc24.in) September 6, 2022

भोपाल: 110 Crore Scam in Poshan Aahar Yojana मध्य प्रदेश में पोषण आहार योजना में बड़ा घोटाला सामने आया है। योजना का लाभ लेने वालों की पहचान, उत्पादन, अनाज बांटने और क्वालिटी कंट्रोल में बड़े पैमाने पर हेराफेरी की गई है। कैग रिपोर्ट (CAG Report) के मुताबिक, मध्य प्रदेश महिला बाल विकास विभाग में 110 करोड़ रुपये घोटाला हुआ है। अब मामले को लेकर प्रदेश में सियासत भी शुरू हो गई है।

110 Crore Scam in Poshan Aahar Yojana सीएजी रिपोर्ट से खुलासा हुआ है कि हजारों टन राशन को ट्रकों पर ढोया गया, लेकिन जिन ट्रकों का नंबर दिया गया वो फर्जी निकले। असल में ये नंबर मोटरसाइकल, कार, ऑटो और टैंकरों के हैं। एमपी के इस घोटाले को भी उसी तरह अंजाम दिया गया जैसे कभी चारा घोटाले को दिया गया था। यहीं नहीं लाखों ऐसे बच्चे जो स्कूल नहीं जाते उनके नाम पर भी करोड़ों का राशन बांट दिया गया। सबसे हैरान की बात ये कि ये मंत्रालय खुद मुख्यमंत्री शिवराज सिंह चौहान के पास है। बताया जा रहा है कि अभी सिर्फ कुछ ही जिलों की जांच हुई है और उसी में इतना बड़ा घोटाला सामने आया है। माना जा रहा है कि अगर पूरे प्रदेश में जांच की जाती है तो ये एक बड़ा घोटाला होगा।

कांग्रेस ने की सीएम से इस्तीफे की मांग

कांग्रेस (Congress) ने आरोप लगाया कि सरकार ने करीब 111 करोड़ रुपये का राशन कागजों पर बांट दिया है। कांग्रेस पार्टी ने मामले में मुख्यमंत्री शिवराज सिंह चौहान से इस्तीफे की मांग की है। वहीं सांसद विवेक तन्खा ने ट्वीटर पर लिखा कि ईश्वर अब मप्र को यह दिन भी देखने पड़ रहे हैं। गरीब बच्चों के मुँह से निवाला में भी घोटाला। समाज शर्मिदा है। <https://www.ibc24.in/madhya-pradesh/110-crore-scam-in-poshan-aahar-yojana-just-like-chara-ghotala-in-mp-1105131.html>

9. The Great September Deluge: Climate Change: Kashmiris fear a repeat of the 2014 flood (brighterkashmir.com) September 6, 2022

Natural disasters are physical events caused by nature that leave a trail of destruction in terms of loss of property and human life. Changes in global climate and rising temperatures have increased their frequency in recent times.

Geo-climatic conditions in India make it one of the world's most disaster-prone countries and therefore, the management of such calamities, when they occur and its aftermath, become critical both within its borders and across the region.

India has experienced seven major natural disasters in the last 250 years. Five of these have occurred in the 21st century alone, among them being the floods in Jammu and Kashmir in September 2014.

Torrential rainfall and the swelling of the waters of the Rivers Jhelum and Tawi claimed the lives of around 550 people and damaged properties worth between Rs.5000 to Rs.6000 crores.

September 7 marks the eighth anniversary of the calamity but the residents of Srinagar and other areas the river that were majorly impacted by it, still fear a repeat notwithstanding UT administration assurances of plans being put in place to reduce recurrence.

Satellite observations of the floods and Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) analysis during its duration and in its aftermath reveal that nearly 43 square kilometres or 52.47 percent of low-lying land (that is below 1530 metres) was inundated.

Pre-flood and post-flood periods show a decrease of built-up land in the western, southern and eastern parts, inundation of nearly 221 square kilometres (220.85 sq. km or 55.62 percent) of road network.

The natural calamity's impact was felt both in the flooded and non-flooded zones, particularly in the context of reduced built-up growth i.e. -25.18 percent change in the flooded zone as compared to -17.32 percent change non-flooded zones as per a recent report prepared by The Third Pole, a platform that has dedicated itself to promoting information and discussion about the Himalayan watershed and the rivers that originate there.

Long-term recovery too, it states, has been seen to be higher in the non-flooded zone (31.84 percent growth) vis-à-vis the flooded zone (28.03 percent growth).

A separate ISRO study claims that the 2014 floods inundated 557 square kilometres of Kashmir and impacted the lives of at least 2.2 million people.

In June this year, worried Kashmiris feared the worst again when the UT government declared a flood alarm in the Valley after water levels rose at Sangam in South Kashmir and at Ram Munshibagh in Srinagar. River waters then had damaged Srinagar's Bemina area and at least three villages in Baramulla district.

In July, the UT meteorological department issued a "yellow warning" after three days of continuous rainfall, suggesting a flood-like situation.

These recent warnings have led people to raise questions about the region's much-touted flood management plans. Worrisome statistics like these most certainly demand more effective urban planning, primarily in areas close to major rivers and lakes in order to reduce catastrophic impact in the future.

So what is the situation vis-à-vis the 2014 flood affected? As per reports, victims in Srinagar and nearby areas are yet to get financial aid released by the Centre under the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund in 2015. Others are yet to receive assistance under the State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF). The delay in financial disbursement has led the aggrieved to demand Lt Governor Manoj Sinha's direct intervention in the matter.

On record, the UT administration claims that over Rs.500 crores has been disbursed among the affected families of 2014 under the Prime Minister's Development Package-2015. It also pegs the total number of flood-damaged homes at 77,569 (i.e. 5,526 completely damaged houses; 20,813 severally damaged and 51,025 partially damaged). Ninety six semi-constructed or under-constructed homes are listed as fully damaged; 54 as being severely damaged and 55 as being partially damaged.

The River Jhelum flows from Verinag in South Kashmir, northward through Srinagar to reach the Wular Lake in north Kashmir's Bandipora district. The river is the only drainage channel for water that reaches it from 103 streams and tributaries.

As of now, the PM's Development Package for the flood-hit areas and the affected has been divided into two parts – The first part involves an expense of Rs.3.99 billion (USD 50 million), which will be used for dredging the River Jhelum, i.e. removing sediment to enhance discharge carrying capacity from 31,800 cusecs to 41,000 cusecs. This will allow the river to accumulate and accommodate almost 25 percent more of water without over-spilling its banks.

The main objective in the first phase is to remove major bottlenecks in the river to deal with floods of low to moderate magnitude. Though dredging and widening work is claimed to be ongoing in the Sharifabad area of Budgam district and in Naidkhai Village in North Kashmir, and two bridges have also been constructed, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, which is constitutionally empowered to audit all receipts and expenditure of government works, has squarely criticised the UT Irrigation and Flood Control (IF&C) Department of major lapses in achieving required targets.

The CAG report on Kashmir states that only eight percent of the 1.42 lakh (142,000) cubic metres of river bed material have been dredged between Khanabal and Kadalpal, and that no material has been dredged from the Jhelum between Sether and Sempore, despite a target of 0.6 lakh (60,000) cubic metres to be achieved.

Officers of the department have also been charged with financial irregularities, signing off on amounts higher than authorised to do. These anomalous charges have prompted the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court to seek a response from the UT administration on how they are utilising central government funds for the restoration project and reasons as to why they are missing pre-determined deadlines.

It is another matter that the CAG report also says that 98 percent of the total target of 7 lakh (700,000) cubic metres of river bed material has been dredged, but it points out that “the dredging was not carried out as per the requirements fixed at six sites. It has questioned why 58,000 cubic metres of extra bed material was dredged out at three sites on the other hand, while no dredging was carried out at one site and less dredging was done at two sites.”

It is clearly acknowledged that flood management of the Jhelum and its tributaries has to be done on priority and comprehensively. <http://brighterkashmir.com/the-great-september-deluge--climate-change-kashmiris-fear-a-repeat-of-the-2014-flood>

10. ‘Bengaluru’s flood devastation is the tyranny of small decisions’: Water expert Vishwanath S (scroll.in) September 6, 2022

On Tuesday morning, Gaurav Munjal, the chief executive officer of education-technology firm Unacademy tweeted a video of his family and pet dog leaving their Bengaluru residential complex in a tractor. “Family and my Pet Albus has been evacuated on a Tractor from our society that’s now submerged,” his message said. “Things are bad. Please take care.”

Munjal was among the thousands of Bengaluru residents who have been forced out of their homes by the intense rains that have flooded several parts of the city, leading to waterlogged residential complexes, power outages, massive traffic jams and disruptions in flights.

So far, one person has been reported to have died as a result of the downpour.

The city, regarded as India's high-technology hub, received 99 mm of rain in the 24 hours until 8.30 am on Tuesday. The previous 24-hour period saw 131.6 mm of rainfall pour down on Bengaluru, its wettest day since 2014. The India Meteorological Department has predicted that heavy rain will continue until Friday.

But the intense rain is not the primary cause for the waterlogging – poor city planning is to blame, says Vishwanath S, an urban planner and civil engineer, who teaches a course on water as an adjunct professor in Azim Premji University.

Vishwanath, who has also worked on the Karnataka Water Policy in 2019 and is a technical advisor to the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board, explained why this spell of rains is causing unprecedented damage.

Excerpts from the interview:

Is heavy rainfall the only reason for the flooding?

No, that is not the only reason for urban flooding. It is bad infrastructural design.

For instance, roads themselves are not being defined properly and are acting as a barrier for water flow. The design of the storm water network, including the lakes and the drainage channels...the inability to connect the catchment areas to the drainage systems...All these issues have been incrementally getting worse over several years and now we are seeing the impact of ignoring all of it.

Concretising anything increases the water that runs off by factors of four and five. This means that if rainfall falls on soil, about 20%-25% will run off and come to the drain. However if you keep building, then the water that runs off will be 90%-95%. This water then needs a healthy system to be disposed of. Currently that system is severely underdeveloped.

Old Bangalore has barely been affected. Why is that?

Yes, the north, west and south are relatively not affected at all, or affected in a minor sense. It is the southeast [part of the city] which has been dominantly affected.

The parts of Bangalore that have not seen flooding, have seen an investment in storm water drains. So they are able to handle the floods for now.

But the southeast part is where the flooding is happening. This area is not only low-lying and is relatively flat, but has also seen an explosion in growth. In comparison to this reality, their investment in infrastructure has been very low. This area is on the outside of the Outer Ring Road and has been incorporated in Greater Bangalore.

Other than that the geographical terrain of Bangalore also plays a role.

Bangalore has the ridge line, the highest point to the land which separates two watersheds. On the west of which is the Kaveri Basin and on the east is the Dakshina Pinakini river. There is a steep slope so the water quickly runs off from the north to south.

The west of the city will be flooded if the storm water drains burst. But to the east of the ridge line, the flow of water is from west to east and it is slow and gradual. To add to this, the lay of the land in this area is very flat as it used to be paddy fields. In the absence of a field, the water does not run off slowly.

What this means is that the southeast part of Bangalore, which is already vulnerable due to how it is placed geographically, where the most robust system of infrastructure is needed, lacks government investment in robust infrastructure.

One of the biggest flood-affected layouts is the Rainbow Drive, which was an exemplar for water management. They had done rainwater harvesting, at the layout level. They had installed a sewerage treatment plant, they were doing solid waste segregation totally. They were dependent on one bore well for which they had done excellent rainwater harvesting, that was fulfilling all their needs. One of the best in the city, if not the country's best projects.

Now the storm water drain from outside the layout has brought water and dumped it at their gates, without crossing over the road and taking it to the next lake.

This is the Sarjapura Road, which is R feet above the Rainbow Drive entrance.

So instead of going to a lake, the water from here goes to the rainbow drive entrance and their water levels increase. The Sarjapur road drainage should have been more adequate to take the rain water and ensure it went all the way to the next lake and not just dump it elsewhere.

As a result, motorboats are being used to bring people out.

Now they are building a culvert.

Have policies and guidelines been flouted over the years for this situation to have developed?

The master plan that is now in place, which determines storm water drains and how it should be developed, is a 2015 master plan. It was developed in 2007 and was called the 2015 master plan. It has not been upgraded. These master plans have to be developed every ten years.

The next one which is the 2031 master plan, has been at a draft stage and gone through several stages of debates, but has not been notified. It was published in November 2017 but everyone is unhappy with something or the other in the plan.

Some sections are unhappy about the nature of mixed-use development that has been suggested. Some are unhappy with the peripheral use of the Ring Road that has been suggested. Some are objecting to the environmental consequences of the master plan.

What needs to be stressed is that on the ground you are doing nothing. As a result, there is no stormwater management master plan for the people of Bangalore.

Are poorer localities been affected too?

There are a lot of informal areas around the Information Technology hub that have been affected. These areas are not being documented or being shown. They may or may not be legal slums, which is more concerning as that means there is a good chance they would not even

have the inadequate drainage systems in place. Then there is the periphery of the state which is being affected, which is not being documented and shown either. The focus has been on the apartments worth Rs 9 crore or Rs 13 crore or the villas which have been flooded.

The area outside the city, called Mugalur, is not being adequately covered.

This is where all the water from the storm water drains come and join the Dakshina Pinakini river. The river has overflowed its banks, spreading across the banks. This has caused immense destruction to farm land. Those who grow flowers, vegetables and rice are deeply impacted. This stretch of the river goes for about 15 km till it reaches Tamil Nadu. So, all along the river the land along the banks have been affected.

For instance, there is a pig rearer I know there who woke up last night and saw water everywhere. First thing in the morning he saw his pig shed was getting submerged so he moved 300 pigs. Luckily, the village came together and helped him to get the cattle out.

There are farmers growing flowers and all of them are submerged. It is a complete crop loss. There are farmers growing fodder, it is a complete loss for them too.

More than a thousand pumping stations are submerged.

In terms of cost, the damage would be running into crores.

The State Disaster Relief Force and other teams are going into villas, but not to these river banks. People here are helping themselves.

This sounds like a full-blown crisis.

Yes, and it shall continue. It calls for documentation of who will be displaced when the encroachments happen. Will large office buildings and villas be removed? Less likely. Will the poor watchman be displaced? More likely.

Unless storm water drains are identified and marked with geo-tagging, it will always be the poor who will bear the bigger burden.

The climate crisis is already upon us. Temperatures have gone up by about 1 degree-2 degree Celsius, especially the minimum temperatures. The precipitation rate suggested when climate change strikes was a 6%-8% increase, that seems to be happening if we take the track record of the last three years. So now we have to prepare for a new normal, for rainfall of about 1000 mm-1200 mm annually, rainfall intensity of 180 mm per hour and continuous rainfall of three-four days. So that is the new normal we need to build infrastructure for.

Traditionally our infrastructure, including rooftop rainwater pipes and storm water drains, are designed for 60 mm per hour rainfall.

We need an audit to find where such a system is in place, and if is designed to prepare for such heavy rainfall.

In the absence of updated and relevant maps, or maps in the public domain, one cannot even scrutinise the extent of the concern.

What can we do in the short term and long term?

Short-term solutions would be an audit of the storm water drainage system, the lakes and removing every encroachment on these lands to protect the drains and lakes. The second is to ensure better links and connectivity between drainage systems. Identify them and fix them fast.

The long-term solutions would be to develop the 2031 master plan, including a storm water drainage plan and invest in that large-scale infrastructure factoring the changes due to climate change. Make the maps available to everybody.

However the government has gone into silence. They are not pushing themselves to develop better infrastructure.

Why is the CAG report from 2021 important?

The Comptroller and Auditor General is a constitutional authority. The audit was of the storm water drains and was awarded by the CAG for how nuanced it was.

Hopefully the government pays attention to it now. The report has gone in very thoroughly into the lacunas in the storm water management in the city. It is not a simple audit: it is what is called a performance audit. It looks at effectiveness, efficiency, what goes down institutionally, all that has been examined here.

What we are experiencing now, the flood devastation in Bangalore is the tyranny of small decisions. What happens is we take individual decisions when it is not raining, when it is a low year of rainfall, we do not understand the implications of our actions.

Suddenly, all the misdeeds cause a huge problem. We need a more robust oversight mechanism so that before any building is constructed we make sure it is legal. <https://scroll.in/article/1032209/bengalurus-flood-devastation-is-the-tyranny-of-small-decisions-water-expert-vishwanath-s>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

11. India, 7% plus annual growth, and the realities ([thehindu.com](https://www.thehindu.com)) SEPTEMBER 07, 2022

Given the desire to achieve developed country status in the next 25 years, the required rate is in the range of 8% to 9%

The National Statistical Office's real GDP growth estimate of 13.5% for the first quarter of 2022-23 is 2.7% points lower than the Reserve Bank of India's earlier assessment of 16.2%. Assuming that the central bank's estimates of the remaining three quarters of the fiscal year at 6.2% in 2Q, 4.1% in 3Q, and 4% in 4Q are realised, the annual GDP growth using the NSO's 1Q estimate works out to be 6.7%. Compared to the pre-COVID-19 GDP level of ₹35.5 lakh crore in 1Q of 2019-20, real GDP at ₹36.9 lakh crore shows an increase of only 3.8%. This indicates that the performance of the Indian economy is not fully normalised yet which would be consistent with a growth of 6.5% to 7%. In order at least to reach an annual growth of 7%, GDP may have to grow at about 5% in 3Q and 4Q of 2022-23.

Composition of growth

Out of the eight Gross Value Added (GVA) sectors, the first quarter growth performance is higher than the average of 12.7% in public administration, defence and other services (26.3%), trade, hotels, transport et al. (25.7%), construction (16.8%), and electricity, gas, water supply et al. (14.7%). Agricultural growth has remained robust, showing a growth of 4.5% in 1Q of 2022-23, which is the highest growth over nine consecutive quarters. Growth in manufacturing, at 4.8%, however, is much below the overall average. A more relevant comparison would be to look at the increase with respect to corresponding output levels in the pre-COVID-19 normal year, that is in 1Q of 2019-20.

In this comparison, manufacturing seems to have done better with an increase of 7% in 1Q of 2022-23 while the trade, hotels, transport et al. sector has remained below its pre-COVID-19 level by a margin of minus 15.5%. This was the main contact-intensive sector which suffered the most during COVID-19 and which may show better recovery in succeeding quarters. Construction has also increased by a small margin of 1.2% when compared to its 1Q 2019-20 level.

On the demand side, all major segments showed magnitudes in 1Q of 2022-23 that were higher than their corresponding levels in 1Q of 2019-20. Recovery in domestic demand has been reflected in the growth rates of private final consumption expenditure (PFCE), at 25.9%, and gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) at 20.1% over the corresponding quarter of the previous year. As compared to its 1Q 2019-20 level, the GFCF showed a growth of 6.7%. The ratio of gross fixed capital formation to GDP at current prices is 29.2% in 1Q of 2022-23 which is 1% point higher than the investment rate of 28.2% in the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

The contribution of net exports to real GDP growth is negative at minus 6.2% points in 1Q of 2022-23 since import growth continues to exceed export growth by a tangible margin. Such an adverse contribution of net exports to real GDP growth is an all-time high for the 2011-12 base series. It is likely that import growth will continue to exceed export growth in the next few quarters, both in real and nominal terms, considering prevailing high global prices of petroleum products and other intermediate inputs and India's growing demand for importing intermediate goods with a view to boosting 'Make in India'.

On the feasibility

The Indian economy may still show a 7% plus growth in 2022-23 provided it performs better in the subsequent quarters, particularly in the last two. Two important areas of policy support for this purpose would be to further increase the investment rate and to reduce the magnitude of negative contribution of net exports. Available high frequency indicators for the first four to five months of 2022-23 indicate continuing growth momentum.

Headline manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) was at an eight-month high of 56.4 in July 2022. It remained high at 56.2 in August 2022. PMI services were at 55.5 in July 2022, indicating 12 consecutive months of expansion. Outstanding bank credit by scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) grew by 15.3% in the fortnight ending August 12, 2022. Gross Goods and Services Tax collections have remained high at ₹1.49 lakh crore and ₹1.43 lakh crore in July and August 2022, respectively, although a good part of this may be due to the higher inflation levels of both Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and Consumer Price Index (CPI).

As seen in 1Q of 2022-23, GVA growth has been led by public administration, defence, and other services, with a growth of 26.3%. This has been driven by the central government's frontloading of capital expenditure. The Centre's capital expenditure grew by 62.5% during the first four months of 2022-23. This momentum needs to be maintained. This would be facilitated by a buoyant growth in the Centre's gross tax revenues, which showed a growth of nearly 25% during the first four months of the current fiscal year. The relatively high tax revenue growth is in turn linked to the excess of nominal GDP growth at 26.7% in 1Q of 2022-23 over the real GDP growth of 13.5%. Such a large gap between these two growth measures reflects a high implicit price deflator (IPD)-based inflation which is estimated at 11.6% in 1Q of 2022-23. This in turn is because of the ongoing WPI and CPI inflation trends where the former continues to exceed the latter. With buoyant tax revenue growth, fiscal policy may strongly support GDP growth without making any significant sacrifice on the budgeted fiscal deficit target.

Raise investment rate

In the light of likely development in 2022-23, how confident are we of achieving the growth rate of 6% to 7% over a normal base? Given our desire to achieve developed country status in the next 25 years, the required growth rate is in the range of 8% to 9%. In 2023-24, we must try to achieve a growth rate of 6% to 7%. The key to growth lies in raising the investment rate. Public capital expenditure has shown a rise. In crisis years, it is particularly good. It can crowd in private capital expenditure. But this cannot be the normal. Private capital expenditures, both corporate and non-corporate, must rise. It is pointed out that capacity utilisation in industry has touched 75% in 4Q 2021-22. This should help to attract private investment if demand for goods continues to increase. The output loss because of COVID-19 and the consequent lockdown is greater if we measure it from the trend line rather than the base of 2019-20. Had we maintained growth of 7% since 2019-20 in successive years, the real GDP would have been ₹183.4 lakh crore in 2022-23. Even if we achieve a 7% growth in 2022-23 over 2021-22, there is a shortfall of ₹25.7 lakh crore at 2011-12 prices. The international environment for growth is bleak. Developed countries even fear a recession. India's growth path in the next few years must depend on domestic investment picking up. Sector-wise growth in investment must be the focus of policymakers in removing bottlenecks and creating a favourable climate. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/india-7-plus-annual-growth-and-the-realities/article65858194.ece>

12. For a stronger economy: We need economic reforms beyond liberalisation ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) September 7, 2022

The Indian economy was expected to collapse due to the pandemic. But its recovery has been better than that of most countries. Appropriate counter-cyclical policy enabled this but it worked because reforms had reached a threshold of adequacy. In the recent past growth suffered because of an excessive focus on structural reforms while neglecting the smoothening of shocks. Current policy has responded to the latter. But talk of the necessity of reforms is again in the air. So what reforms are required?

A major objective of international institutions such as the IMF-WB is to ensure advantages to other countries from India's growth, in particular to their main financiers who are the large capital exporting countries. It follows that they want to ensure freer markets and fewer restrictions on all types of capital flows. Much of this is in India's interest since we need more capital and better integration with world markets. But a democracy cannot ignore the concerns of its own citizens. The IMF-WB holy trinity of structural land, labour and other market-

opening reforms harms many domestic citizens and, beyond a point, runs into severe resistance that imposes large political costs.

Liberalisation has reached a point of diminishing returns. Whatever was feasible in the above is surely in motion by now. Further organic reform will take place as states compete. Improving the supply-side has many other aspects. In choosing from the reform menu, the Centre must be guided by feasibility and pragmatism and ensure that benefits accrue to a majority.

The focus should be on leveraging the special circumstances that currently favour India. These include the impetus Covid-19 has given to digital aspects, where India has a comparative advantage, the possibility of supply chain diversification away from China, moving to a net zero economy and harnessing green initiatives as a source of investment and innovation. Attention should be given to developing skills and capabilities, improving employability, augmenting infrastructure, reducing logistics and other business costs through better Centre-state coordination, and enhancing the quality of governance and counter-cyclical regulation with good incentives. Much can be done to improve data use and privacy, functioning of courts and police. Instead of wasting political capital on reforms that encounter large resistance and shock the system, reforms should enhance favourable trends.

Yet, reform suggestions continue with the liberalisation agenda.

Privatisation of banks: There is a recommendation to privatise most public sector banks (PSBs), starting with those doing well. But the argument that PSBs are a drain on taxpayers' money is based on the experience of the last decade. In the 2000s, they were doing better than private banks and withstood the global financial crisis better. NPAs rose because they were pushed into lending to infrastructure where there are inherent asset liability mismatches for commercial banks. Moreover, it was the first time that the lending was to private companies. Therefore, a full resolution had to await the setting up of the missing regulatory framework for bankruptcy. Improvements in PSB governance and risk-based lending profiles have resulted in falling NPA ratios and strong capital adequacy even under the pandemic shocks. Social schemes that were a drain on PSB resources are now largely financed through direct subsidies by the government.

Diversity in institutions and approaches makes for a more stable financial sector. PSBs are trusted by many savers. They have garnered Rs 1.7 trillion in their Jan Dhan accounts, while private banks have hardly any. PSBs can leverage their advantages in low-cost deposits through many co-lending opportunities and partnerships. The economy has suffered very low credit growth through the last decade and is ready for a turnaround. Private banks alone could not increase credit adequately — when lending from PSBs had slowed. This is not the time to disrupt the recovery in credit growth. PSBs should be allowed to compete and raise resources on their own. Only those who cannot do so, or have other serious weaknesses, should be allowed to exit through the privatisation or merger route. The strong will prosper. The Chinese way of growth, where the public sector shrinks as the private sector grows faster, would work better for India also.

Overshooting of the exchange rate: There are recommendations that the rupee should be completely market-determined. It should be allowed to sink under foreign outflows since this would benefit exporters. But pass-through of exchange rate depreciation is much faster in Indian imports, which are dominated by dollar-denominated commodities such as crude oil. Indian exporters largely have little market power and are forced to share the benefits of depreciation. Many studies show they do not gain from volatility. As imported inflation rises,

monetary tightening follows and hurts the real sector. Real appreciation results in and requires more nominal depreciation. Any gain to exporters from overshooting is temporary. The fall in the exchange rate of the rupee from about Rs 8 in the 1990s to about Rs 80 currently has not brought about a sustained rise in exports.

Market panics and large deviations from competitive real exchange rates hurt the economy and most participants. Lower volatility in the real exchange rate helps both gainers and losers when there are changes in the rupee value. Both positive and negative deviations from equilibrium real rates are harmful. Only a fraction of the foreign portfolio flows (FPI) that look for trading benefits gain from volatility, not the majority that has a steady commitment and is here to benefit from India's growth. Trading FPIs want to be the first to go out, take profits and then wait for a rupee crash before coming back in. If they know there will be no crash, there is less incentive to be the first out. The country's risk premium falls. This may have contributed to a reversal of outflows.

Some rupee volatility is good and encourages firms to hedge currency risks. Central banks typically let the currency fall under outflows, so exiting FPIs get less. Then the bank comes in, buying low, stabilising the currency and reducing the overshooting. Trend depreciation has to compensate for inflation and productivity differentials. That US inflation exceeds that of India, and productivity tends to rise with growth, reduces the required depreciation. It helps exports if the rupee depreciates as much as major export competitors. Depreciation has been close to that of the Chinese currency. So intervention that prevents overshooting has only facilitated the working of markets and their discovery of equilibrium values. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/for-a-stronger-economy-we-need-economic-reforms-beyond-liberalisation-8135103/>

13. Thermal units get two-year breather on emission gear (financialexpress.com) September 7, 2022

The environment ministry has given a blanket two-year extension — the third one— to coal-based power plants for complying with desulphurisation norms. In a notification, the ministry has extended the deadline for installing flue-gas desulphurisation (FGD) units, which remove sulphur dioxide (SO₂) from the exhaust gases of thermal plants for all categories of power plants.

The ministry has also announced graded penalties for missing the new deadline, at Rs 0.40 per unit of electricity generated for a delay of 366 days and beyond.

The plants were originally supposed to install FGDs by 2017; this was later revised to 2019 with power plants seeking more time. However, with just 4% of power plants having installed, this another extension was awarded last year, till 2022, 2023 and 2024 for the non-retiring plants in the three categories, and 2025 for plants scheduled for retirement in the three categories.

Category A are those within a 10-km radius of the National Capital Region or cities having a million-plus population, category B are those within 10 km of critically-polluted areas, with all other thermal plants being category C.

With Monday's extension, non-retiring plants in category A get time till 2024, category B till 2025 and category C till 2026. All retiring plants have been allowed time till end 2027. Those being retired before 2027 don't need to install FGDs.

Despite lowering its SO₂ emissions over the last few years, India remains the top emitter globally, as per an analysis of NASA satellite data by Greenpeace and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. Thermal power plants are mainly responsible for this.

Just 40% of the country's total coal power capacity have awarded bids for installing FGDs, with NTPC accounting for the lion's share in these awards. It is likely that the plants have been seeking extensions on SO₂ compliance because of the capex incurred could affect their competitiveness. "Indian coal has high sulphur content. The extension of SO₂ norms is primarily to help coal plants to operate for long as they already face risks from lower prices of renewable power," says Vibhuti Garg, energy economist and Lead India, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

The power ministry had sought an extension on behalf of the coal-fired plant operators, citing higher costs, lack of funds, Covid-related delays and geopolitical tension with neighbouring China, which has restricted trade, Reuters reports. Stalling on retro/de novo fitting of plants with FGDs, however, may not work in the plants' interest. Chandra Bhushan, president and CEO of International Forum for Environment, Sustainability & Technology, says, "Every year of delay pushes up the cost of compliance for them."

Experts say sulphur oxides are primary pollutants, and further relaxation doesn't bode well for air quality in cities in proximity to coal-fired plants. They are also counted among the chief causes of non-communicable lung diseases in India. <https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/thermal-units-get-two-year-breather-on-emission-gear/2657680/>

14. Revdi culture debate: Why we need freebies in India ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) S Y Quraishi / SEPTEMBER 07, 2022

Elections in India are usually a time of enticing promises and elaborate offers when all politicians are suddenly and touchingly concerned by the everyday plight of the common citizen. Free electricity and water, cheaper food grain and fuel, bicycles, phones, laptops and wads of cash usually appear on the menu of offerings.

There are two questions here: First, is this fanciful, excessive and often misleading vein of promise-making indistinguishable from the state-led provision of basic goods in a rights-based, welfarist apparatus? Second, must there be judicial or EC intervention to tackle the issue of freebies?

The recent debate sparked by the Prime Minister's comments on what he termed "revdi culture" has reignited the significance of the above two questions. Let me first address the second question.

Promises made by the political parties, often driven by short-term electoral calculations, can be divided into two types: Promises made before the elections are announced and those made after. These promises are made by both the ruling and Opposition parties, with the ruling party

having a distinct advantage as they control the treasury. They are also in a rush to make such promises before the EC plays spoilsport with its much-dreaded model code of conduct.

The second type of promise is the one made through manifestos after the elections have been announced. The government cannot announce new schemes after the declaration of poll dates because of the model code of conduct. The promises made in the manifestos, however, do not attract the model code. This is also why the EC has no powers to question the manifestos as they are perfectly legal, however infeasible their promises may seem.

Even the SC, in its judgment dated July 5, 2013, accepted that the promises in manifestos cannot be construed as “corrupt practice” under the RP Act. However, it conceded that they do “influence the people and shake the roots of free and fair elections”. It directed the EC to frame guidelines with regard to the content of manifestos in consultation with all the recognised political parties. In their meeting with the Election Commission, angry political parties argued that in a healthy democratic polity it is their “right and duty” towards the voters to make promises to them through their manifestos. Agreeing with this in principle, the EC, however, underlined its “undesirable impact”.

In my opinion, neither the EC nor the SC can get involved in this perfectly legal and legitimate democratic instrument. Even if the promises are unrealistic or absurd, it is for the rival parties and the media to expose them. And the voters do remember which promises have been fulfilled and which have not been. They are now seen constantly rewarding good performance and punishing non-delivery.

Moreover, as matters of economic policy lie in the hands of elected representatives, neither the EC nor the SC must intervene in the purely political domain of the legislature. It is ultimately for the voter to judge the economic and fiscal implications of freebie policies.

We must now turn to the first question: Welfarism vs freebies. The PM’s remark about “revdi culture” is indeed surprising as it strikes at the legitimacy of welfarism itself, particularly state-led welfarism, as a suitable model of development in which his government has done enormous work.

Oxfam’s 2022 annual report on inequality in India has many troubling, stark revelations. The number of poor doubled to 134 million as its dollar billionaires’ wealth doubled. The richest 1 per cent have amassed 51.5 per cent of the total wealth while the bottom 60 per cent of the population a mere 5 per cent. All of these indications clearly suggest a picture of a nation that is more fractious and unequal.

Critics have pointed out that provisions to poor beneficiaries are termed as “revdi” while state-sponsored support to the rich is called “incentive”. In September 2019, the government slashed corporate tax rates for domestic companies from 30 per cent to 22 per cent, and for new manufacturing companies from 25 per cent to 15 per cent. The government took just 36 hours to implement this decision. The Oxfam report has stated that these corporate cuts resulted in a loss of 1.5 lakh crore.

The report further highlighted that the government managed to compensate for the shortfall in direct taxes (income tax, corporate tax and capital gains tax) by increasing indirect taxes (goods and services tax, excise and customs duty) during the pandemic. This directly led to a rise in

fuel prices impacting the prices of essential commodities such as foodgrain, which only impact the poor.

These policies are the main reason that helped make the rich richer, while the national minimum wage has remained at Rs 178 a day since 2020. Reduced federal funding to local administrations amidst growing privatisation in the health and education sectors has further boosted inequalities. Meanwhile, our nation is home to a quarter of the world's undernourished people, according to the World Food Programme.

Given this overall socio-economic context, it is important that we reaffirm the value and necessity of our welfare programmes, and the urgent need to expand them. Providing its citizens with food, education and employment is the most fundamental responsibility of a democratic state.

The so-called “freebie” promises like cheap foodgrains and free items of utility have actually done considerable good to further the dream of democracy. Starvation deaths haven't occurred since Rs 1-2 kg rice was introduced. The distribution of bicycles had improved enrollment and retention of girls in schools in Bihar. Employment guarantee schemes have brought visible relief to the rural poor.

Finally, I firmly believe that our nation would become a greater democracy if we redirect our concerned attention from “revdi” and “freebies” to rights and freedoms. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/revdi-culture-debate-why-we-need-freebies-in-india-8135143/>

15. NPAs from MUDRA loans in Maharashtra at 16.32% till June 2022: Official data (moneycontrol.com) SEPTEMBER 07, 2022

Nearly Rs 5,000 crore of loans or 16.32 per cent of the total bank assets in Maharashtra under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana to help small businesses are unpaid as of June 2022, as per official data.

Parbhani district in the backward Marathwada region of Maharashtra has the highest non-performing assets (NPAs) at 60.54 per cent, according to data released during the State Level Bankers Committee meeting held in Aurangabad on Monday.

The statistics illustrate the extent of hit taken by banks under these loans. The Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana was launched in April 2015 for providing loans to non-corporate and non-farm small/micro enterprises.

It can be noted that since the introduction of the scheme, many experts including former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan had warned about the possibility of high NPAs under the scheme.

As per the data, Rs 30,019 crore was taken as loan under the MUDRA scheme as of June 2022 by more than 52 lakh borrowers in Maharashtra. Out of this Rs 4,898 crore taken by 6.19 lakh borrowers has been classified as NPAs.

The outstanding loan amount in Parbhani district is Rs 759 crore, of which Rs 459 crore constitutes the NPA, it said. Parbhani is followed by Hingoli having NPAs of 33.31 per cent with Rs 111 crore of loans being unpaid, as per the data.

The third highest MUDRA NPA is in the state capital Mumbai at 29.97 per cent and the amount unpaid is Rs 248 crore, the data said. A dozen state-run banks account for a majority Rs 4,031 crore of the overall Rs 4,898 crore of sour loans, it said.

The NPAs of private sector banks stood at Rs 435 crore. Two regional rural banks have Rs 325 crore of NPAs and eight small finance banks have Rs 104 crore of NPAs under the scheme, the data said. A dozen state-run banks account for a majority Rs 4,031 crore of the overall Rs 4,898 crore of sour loans, it said. <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/economy-2/npas-from-mudra-loans-in-maharashtra-at-16-32-till-june-2022-official-data-9141931.html>

16. How India can floodproof its cities ([livemint.com](https://www.livemint.com)) Updated: 07 Sep 2022

Urban flooding is a problem long associated with Mumbai. With a steady increase in the occurrence and severity of extreme weather events, Mumbai has lost that relative exclusivity, with Chennai and now Bangalore revealing a propensity to be flooded. As climate change proceeds apace, cloudbursts and heavy downpours are likely to grow ever more frequent, and urban flooding is likely to become a more frequent, widespread and destructive challenge. It will not go away by ignoring it. India has to plan how to stay dry in a wetter future.

The modern economy cannot afford to shut down because it rained or because it did not for a longish period. Work will have to be housed in habitats that plan for and surmount adverse weather conditions. The short point is, floodproofing cities is not just about sparing their denizens occasional bouts of extreme inconvenience but also sustaining economic vibrancy of the city in question and of the country in general.

UN Habitat is an under-appreciated arm of the United Nations; actually, it is one of its more useful agencies that has, along with the grandiose declarations and targets habitual to the UN, substantive work on the kinds of urbanization the world must switch to, for a more sustainable future. Its conference in 2016, in Ecuador, produced a Quito Declaration on a New Urban Agenda, contained in whose soporific paragraphs are— one, a vision of sustainable urbanization; and two, substantive details on how to achieve it. It is a document that urban planners would do well to look up, apart from resources available at the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Not that India has too many of this breed of professionals. In 2015, the government informed Parliament that India had 5,000 urban planners. It is estimated that the number has gone up to some 6,000 now. Such scarcity of urban planning capacity does not blight developed countries. The state of California alone has 7,750, according to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, with the US national total coming in at 38,940.

The Quito declaration, later endorsed by the UN General Assembly, commits nations to “promoting the creation and maintenance of well-connected and well-distributed networks of open, multipurpose, safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces, to improving the resilience of cities to disasters and climate change, including floods, drought risks and heat waves, to improving food security and nutrition, physical and mental health, and household and ambient air quality, to reducing noise and promoting attractive and liveable cities, human settlements and urban landscapes and to prioritizing the conservation of endemic species”.

Ensuring that cities do not flood, that the water produced by excessive rain would flow away is as much planning and politics as engineering and design. Thriving cities demand ever expanding residential and office space. The temptation is high to fill up water bodies, canals and drains and build over these. That must be resisted, not only by conscientious city regulators but by a public sensitized to the need to keep open the channels through which water drains away from their environs. Keeping the cities open, drained and breathing must become part of the politics of urban governance, political promises before elections.

Storm water drains must be laid out such as to not interfere with the working of the sewage disposal system—otherwise, sewage could back up into places where it should not. The sewerage network must be planned, in terms of articulation, as well as depth, so that even wastewater from low-lying parts of the town's topography would drain away, if necessary into artificial wells, from which water can be pumped out through longish pipelines, if necessary. Water can be recycled, too, and made fit to drink, with modern technology.

Climate change means that towns can experience both extreme heat and excessive rains. Planning the layout of buildings to avoid the build-up of heat islands will also help build roads with drainage.

Sometimes, to prevent urban flooding, the basic work required might be outside the city altogether: desilting rivers that overflow, inundating towns instead of draining their runoff, and building walls to insulate a coastal town from rising sea levels.

India initiated a global coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. Indian city and state governments should not be shy about using its intellectual and other resources to prepare against urban flooding, nor the Central government, for that matter.

The cities in which the majority of India's future urbanites would dwell are yet to be built—India is only one-third or so urban, while China's level of urbanization is double that. India would also reach similar levels of urbanization, and fairly rapidly, should economic growth gather momentum. That would mean building new towns to accommodate another 46 crore Indians. It is high time India took urban planning and urban governance seriously. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/how-india-can-floodproof-its-cities-11662518723888.html>