

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (14.09.2022)

1. Rural employment scheme social audits marred by delays ([thehindu.com](https://www.thehindu.com)) UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 13, 2022

In four States, auditors' wages delayed as funds from Centre are yet to arrive

The Union Rural Development Ministry (MoRD) has told States that failure to carry out social audit of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) will invite action, including withholding of funds. However, it is the Centre that bears the administrative cost of these Social Audit Units, and inordinate delay in the release of funds has left many of these cash-strapped units nearly paralysed.

According to the report titled 'Social audit calendar vs audits completed' released on September 13 by the MoRD, only 14.29% of the planned audits have been completed in this financial year.

The Hindu made enquiries in four States — Kerala, Telangana, Himachal Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, which are ruled by both the BJP and Opposition parties. The Social Audit Units of these States had not received the administrative funds that the Centre owes them, and whatever little has come about has been delayed. Because of this, in Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, auditors' wages have been delayed by three months to one year.

The original MGNREG Act had provisions for social audit, though the auditing standards were laid down by the Comptroller and Auditor General were issued only on December 19, 2016. According to them, every Social Audit Unit is entitled to funds equivalent to 0.5% of the MNREGA expenditure incurred by the State in the previous year. The audit involves quality checks of infrastructure created under the MNREGA, financial misappropriation in wages, and checking for any procedural deviations.

This fund is released by the Centre in four tranches. The BJP-ruled Himachal Pradesh, for example, received ₹1.30 crore — the first instalment of this financial year — only last week. This is against a ₹4 crore liability this year and an additional ₹4.5 crore liability of the previous year. This amount was credited after desperate calls from the Audit Department, which was unable to pay its auditor for over a year.

Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh also has a remarkably similar story with the Centre's dues piling up to ₹9 crore.

In Kerala, too, for the last five to six months, the auditors were not paid because the funds were not forthcoming from the Centre. Even when the funds arrive, the Centre rarely pays the entire amount. In the last financial year, out of ₹20 crore that the Centre owes, only ₹4 crore was sent to Kerala, and this year, out of ₹18 crore liability, as of now, only close to ₹3 crore has been received. "The delay in disbursement of funds leads to near paralysis. Since we are unable to pay salaries for the auditors, there is a high attrition rate. We obviously cannot force them to travel to distant villages on their own without actually paying them," Kerala Social Audit Director M. Ramakantan told The Hindu.

According to the findings of a periodic report on social audits by the non-profit People's Action For Employment Guarantee, released last month, eight State Social Audit Units in 2020-21, and nine in 2021-22, have received less than half of the fund to which they are entitled. At least six States — Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Karnataka — received their share of funds from the MoRD over a year ago, in 2021.

In the peculiar case of Bihar, the Bihar Social Audit Unit has not received any funds since 27th April 2020 – since more than two years. Moreover, none of these states have got their full quota of funds. Three state- Maharashtra, Bihar, and Chhattisgarh received zero funds in 2021-22 to conduct social audits despite their collective expenditure of more than ₹6,000 crore in MGNREGA in FY 2020-21. The Social Audit Units in Jharkhand, Nagaland, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Karnataka were forced to take loans from their respective State governments in order to sustain their operations. Rural Development Secretary Nagendra Nath Sinha agreed that there have been delays in the disbursement of funds to a “few States”, though he said, the problem is limited to the ongoing financial year, because of the recent overhauling of the Public Finance Management System but it will be streamlined soon, he assured.

“The Social Audit Units were formed to check corruption in the MGNREGA implementation. To ensure their autonomy, they were to be funded by the Centre and not the State. Now, if our auditors are not paid, how will they fund their travel and meals? We are opening the doors to corruption simply by delaying their wages. And by forcing the Social Audit Units to take loans from State governments, the Centre is also asking us to surrender our autonomy,” the Director of a Social Audit Unit said on the condition of anonymity.

This has to be seen in the backdrop the Ministry's repeated reminders, the latest of which went out on August 5, directing the States to conduct social audits. Union Rural Development Minister Giriraj Singh has repeatedly said that if social audits are not conducted, MGNREGA funds to the States will be withheld.

Nikhil Dey, founder-member of the NGO Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, said that the Union government was using the social audit as an excuse. “Under no circumstance should the funds be withheld from the people who work. Yes, we need to have a social audit, we need to ensure transparency. But if it's not done, the worker who stands at the very end of the line should not pay for it,” Mr. Dey said. He alleged that the government does not care really about social audits because if it did, it would not delay the funds. “One way or the other, the government is using different excuses to cut MGNREGA outlay,” Mr. Dey said. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/mahatma-gandhi-rural-employment-scheme-social-audits-marred-by-delays/article65886687.ece>

2. Free power, don't arm-twist States (telanganatoday.com) 14 SEPTEMBER 22

It appears that the Union government is hell-bent to undo what Thomas Edison dreamt of. Edison wanted to make electricity so cheap that only the rich burn candles. But, the move of the Modi government appears to undo the noble objective that the inventor of incandescent electric light has for mankind.

Even though we are a Union of States, the federal structure is the heart and soul of the Indian Union. The Union being given a larger share of the cake in the form of Union List and Concurrent List does not mean that it can bulldoze States. This is not cooperative federalism, the leitmotif of Prime Minister Narendra Modi; rather, it is a Machiavellian attitude.

Many Infirmities

The proposed Electricity Bill is one of many such whips with which the Modi government wants to control the democratically elected State governments. States would be willing to go along with Union if the proposal benefits the poor and farmers. But, it is not; and, it is precisely the reason why every single State, including the BJP-ruled ones, albeit behind the curtain, is opposing the Bill lock, stock, and barrel.

There are many infirmities in the Bill, such as:

- It paves the way for fixing meters to agriculture pumpsets
- It restricts giving free or subsidised power to farmers, poor and downtrodden
- It permits private players to supply power by using transmission network of government-owned discoms
- There is no universal power supply obligation on private distribution companies. It has to be done only by government-owned discoms
- Modi government is putting a condition that only if meters are fixed, States would be allowed to get 0.5% additional resources under FRBM
- 20 lakh employees working in the government power sector would lose their jobs if this Bill becomes an Act

Let us look at how the above will impact farmers, marginalised sections and the poor.

Piecemeal

The Power Minister says the amendments to the Electricity Act, 2003, are not piecemeal but comprehensive. But, in reality, it is piecemeal. Let me give an example of how the Modi government is manoeuvring and selectively amending the parent Act. The Centre issued a directive – the Telangana CM too mentioned this in a discussion recently in the Assembly – saying that meters should be fixed to agriculture pumpsets.

It says that no connection shall be given without a meter and such meter shall be a smart pre-payment meter. It means, without fixing a prepaid smart meter, no power connection should be given. And, the argument of the BJP leader in the Assembly that there is no such move by the Modi government is nothing but tweaking the facts, and his theory is far from the truth.

Telangana and many other States are giving free power to farmers to reduce the latter's burden from huge input costs. Is it wrong? Through the Bill, the BJP government maliciously wants to fix meters and collect electricity charges from farmers and the poor! Is it not wrong? Despite repeated appeals, the Sileru hydropower project was given to AP in 2014!

Not just in Telangana, the farming community in many States are protesting. For example, in Srikakulam and UP, farmers burnt prepaid meters opposing the proposal. Cleverly, such a major change was brought through the backdoor – under the

Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020, fearing a backlash from farmers and the poor.

Secondly, as per the latest figures of April-June, 2022, released by the Centre, India's GDP is Rs 65 lakh crore. I ask: A country with Rs 65 lakh crore of GDP cannot show magnanimity in giving just Rs 1.2 lakh crore to farmers in the form of subsidies or free power? Being an agrarian country, can anyone justify denying this to farmers and the poor?

Thirdly, it is not that we have no power or there is less production of power. As per the Central Electricity Authority, the country's installed capacity is 4,04,178 Mw. These are of two types – base load ie, firm power (uninterrupted) and variable power. Base load is 2,42,890 Mw and the highest peak load stood at 2,10,793 Mw in June, 2022. This is the maximum that the country has used in a day so far since Independence. It is less than the base load. So, we have an excess of 1.6 lakh Mw. When we have no issues on the fiscal and generation side, why is the Modi government arm-twisting States like Telangana which are truly following to achieve the goal of a Welfare State?

National Electricity Policy

There was a proposal to formulate a new National Electricity Policy in place of the outdated existing one and, for this purpose a Committee was constituted long ago. But, so far the committee has not submitted its report. Instead of waiting for the recommendations and finalising a new National Electricity Policy, why is the Central government in a hurry to pass this Bill? Is it to hand over the country's power sector to sahurks? What kind of 'nation's interest' is this?

The Bill (Clause 5) allows private players, who may be cherry-picked, to supply power, by using the existing network of discoms, and shockingly the State Electricity Regulatory Commission does not have any say either in fixing charges or area of supply.

These private players use the discoms' network, established by spending lakhs of crores and spending thousands of crores on maintenance, and compete with the very same state-owned discoms! Secondly, there is every possibility that private licensees would prefer distribution of power to urban and industrial areas, leaving poor, rural and farmers to state-owned discoms.

In fact, there is a provision in the Bill which says that government companies will have universal power supply obligation, meaning only state-run discoms will provide power to all categories of consumers, and not private players! We have seen how private players in the telecom sector have shunned remote, hilly, tribal and inaccessible areas and it is the BSNL which is forced to go there. We know where the BSNL is now and where private players are sitting. Thirdly, this kind of experiment is underway in Mumbai where the domestic power tariff ranges between Rs 12 and 14 per unit which is the highest in the country! So, if we let this Bill pass, the same may happen to discoms.

Fourthly, the claim of the GoI that consumer is given a choice of power supply is a complete hoax. In fact, this Bill does not give any choice to consumers but to private players who can supply power as per their choice.

The Centre linking additional borrowing of just 0.5% of GSDP under FRBM to fixing meters to agriculture pumpset is bizarre. When it comes to borrowings by States, Article 293(1) states that the States are entitled to extend a guarantee to State PSUs within such limits as may be fixed by the State Legislature. But, shockingly, now, the Finance Ministry is treating the above borrowings as off-budget borrowings citing a CAG report. This is the first time that the GoI is treating off-budget borrowings as government borrowings, that too retrospectively! I ask: Is the Constitution supreme or the CAG report?

The country has to wake up and employees in the government power sector should wake up too, because, if this becomes an Act, there is a possibility that over 20 lakh employees working in Transcos, discoms and other related areas would lose their jobs.

Green Energy

The Prime Minister announced Panchamrit at Glasgow with 5 Nectar Elements – all relating to pushing green energy. No doubt, there are issues of public finances for energy transition, leveraging private sector finances, etc, but, despite all these, it is welcome, since the objective of COP26 is for a better future.

There are a couple of provisions (23 & 29) in the Electricity Bill which speak about renewable energy obligation and, again, it will be fixed not by the State Electricity Regulatory Commission (SERC) but by the Centre! The Bill makes non-compliance with renewable energy obligations a punishable offence. The point is: One should admit that the potential for renewable energy varies from State to State and SERC's fix percentage of renewable energy mix depends upon production. The GoI is imposing uniform renewable power purchase obligation for all States! How does 'one-size-fits-all' work? If Telangana follows this, the renewable power purchase obligation goes up from 8.5% to 21% of the total consumption which leads to burdening consumers and bringing down production of TSGenco plants!

Coal Blending

The other important aspect is mandatory blending of 10% imported coal with domestic coal. India has more than 350 billion tonnes and Telangana has nearly 9,000 million tonnes of proven coal reserves. Is it prudent to mine our coal reserves which are cheaper, or, to go in for mandatory coal imports? If one adds 10% imported coal to domestic coal, the cost of power goes up by 60-70 paise per unit! Who will pay – PM Modi or Union Power Minister?

Hence, there should be a holistic approach to the entire issue with informed debate and consultations with the States. We have seen how the farm laws ignited massive protests across the country. It was because they were enacted without consultation with the States, undermining federalism, giving no thought to the welfare of marginal farmers. Ultimately, the Prime Minister had to roll back the laws.

Similarly, the whimsical proposal to amend the Electricity Act, 2003, is nothing but muscling States and relegating them to a subaltern position.

Under the pretext of 'national importance', the Union is usurping the powers of the States, one by one! It has become 'rampant' during the last few years. This is a very

dangerous trend and if it is not stopped, the federal structure would be fumbled, tumbled and crumbled which is not good for the world's largest democracy.

The seeds of growth and development have to be sown in the States. The Centre has to help the States in putting water and manure to grow these seeds and make them become growth engines of India. This kind of joint effort is the beauty of cooperative federalism which strengthens the federal structure. So, all the Centre should do now is to take the States, stakeholders and experts on board, discuss the Bill threadbare before taking it up for second or third reading in Parliament. <https://telanganatoday.com/opinion-free-power-dont-arm-twist-states>

3. Central govt officials on tour allowed to travel by Tejas trains: Finance ministry (hindustantimes.com) September 13, 2022

Central government officials will now be entitled to travel on Tejas trains on their official tours, a notice from the ministry of finance issued on Monday said.

The Tejas-Rajdhani Express is a semi-high-speed train operated by Indian Railways. These are upgraded coaches.

'The matter regarding admissibility of travel by Tejas Express Trains on official Tour has been considered in this Department. It has been decided to allow Central government employees to travel by Tejas Express Trains for journey on Tour/Training/Transfer/Retirement, in addition to the Trains as mentioned in para 2 A (ii) of this Department's OM of even number dated 13.07.2017. Travel entitlement in Tejas Express Trains would be same as that of Shatabdi Trains as mentioned in para 2 A (ii) of this Department's OM of even number dated 13.07.2017,' the notice dated September 12, said.

According to the July 13, 2017 memo, the entitlement for the train journey depends on an employee's pay level in pay matrix and it allowed government officials to travel by premium trains/ premium tatkal trains/ suvidha trains like Rajdhani/ Shatabdi/ Duronto trains.

"By issuing a notice on Monday, the ministry added Tejas trains to the list of premium trains that the central government officers will now be able to officially travel in," an official said.

'In so far as the persons serving in the Indian Audit and Accounts Department are concerned, these orders are issued in consultation with the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, as mandated under Article 148(5) of the Constitution of India,' the latest order added. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/business/central-govt-officials-on-tour-allowed-to-travel-by-tejas-trains-finance-ministry-101663060591645.html>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

4. 'Data on stormwater drain encroachments wrong' (bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com) 14 Sep 2022

Social activists alleged that the BBMP authorities have misled the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the number of encroachments on stormwater drains that were cleared.

According to a complaint lodged with the BBMP Chief Commissioner by Right To Information Study Centre (RTISC) on Tuesday, BBMP engineers have informed the Comptroller and Auditor General in 2018 that 763 encroachments of stormwater drains were cleared, but BBMP Chief Engineer (Stormwater Drains) had informed in 2020 that 2626 encroachments of such drains were reported from all the zones of BBMP.

"The Chief Engineer (Stormwater Drains) has informed that 428 encroachments were cleared in 2016-17 and 1,484 in 2018-19. He said that 714 encroachments are yet to be cleared, and among them, 52 buildings are under litigation. This information given by the Chief Engineer is completely wrong," the RTISC said in their complaint.

S Amaresh, Managing Trustee of RTISC, said that he has filed an RTI application seeking information on the ward-wise details of buildings demolished and the quantity of debris transported to the designated places.

"I appealed to the BBMP Chief Commissioner to lodge a complaint with Karnataka Lokayukta against those responsible for not only providing wrong information to the Comptroller and Auditor General, but also for failing to implement the High Court order on encroachments," said Amaresh.

The CAG report for the year 2021 came down heavily on the BBMP for lack of financial discipline and incomplete storm water drains work.

The report recommended the BBMP to prepare a comprehensive database of stormwater drains in coordination with agencies like the BDA and BWSSB. <https://bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com/bangalore/others/data-on-stormwater-drain-encroachments-wrong/articleshow/94183886.cms>

5. The cost of Telangana's drive to plant two billion trees (apdirect.in) Scroll.in | 14 Sep 2022

The residents of Chittiramavaram, a small village ten kilometres away from Telangana's Kothagudem city, say they have been cultivating a plot of around 50 acres near the village for half a century. Among them is Gogula Lakshmi, who grew millets and vegetables in a two-acre plot within this area.

In February 2021, Lakshmi and the others had begun to prepare their fields to plant jowar, when the police arrived with forest officials. The police told the cultivators that the land belonged to the forest department, and that according to the law, they were encroachers.

As Lakshmi and other women from the village began to protest, a member of the police struck her head with a lathi, she told Scroll.in. She fainted from the blow. The police rounded up around 20 of her neighbours and relatives and charged them with assault, trespassing on government property, and obstructing government servants from doing their duty. The cultivators could not plant their crop.

A year and a half later, Lakshmi still suffers from bouts of nausea, dizziness and fainting. The accused residents of the village continue to fight the cases against them in Kothagudem's sessions court.

Lakshmi's family is one of thousands that have for decades been cultivating similar lands, adjacent to the fringes of the state's forests. Locally, she and the others are referred to as "podu" cultivators. Traditionally, podu cultivators cleared one patch of forest land, farmed it, then moved to another, while the first plot of land rested. They then returned to the first plot, while the second rested. Lakshmi's husband's forefathers practiced this form of cultivation. By Lakshmi's generation, however, most cultivators restricted themselves to one patch, usually growing labour-intensive food crops – but the term "podu cultivation" has remained in use.

On paper, much of this land belongs to the forest department. But this does not imply that all of it was at some point forested. In India, forest department land has, along with dense forest, also historically included tracts of grassland, as well as degraded forest. Many podu cultivators, such as Gogula Lakshmi, say that these unforested lands are the kinds of lands that they have been using, and that therefore they never felled trees to cultivate their crops.

Many podu cultivators, such as Gogula Lakshmi, say that these unforested lands are the kinds of lands that they have been using, and that therefore they never felled trees to cultivate their crops.

Nevertheless, since the 1970s, they began to find themselves in conflict with the state as the forest department sought to claim these lands. The villagers showed me documents pertaining to these conflicts, including affidavits that residents filed stating that they had been using the land, and requesting that it be assigned to them, as well as letters from the forest department summoning them to hearings in the matter.

The conflict has intensified since 2015, after the state's chief minister, K Chandrashekar Rao, launched an ambitious afforestation programme, named Telanganaku Haritha Haram, or a Green Garland for Telangana. The state claims that it is the third-largest afforestation programme in the world, ranking only behind afforestation initiatives in China and Brazil.

Government data suggests that the programme has seen significant success. In 2021, Babul Supriyo, the union minister for environment, forests and climate change, informed the Rajya Sabha that Telangana had achieved the second-highest expansion of its green cover of all the states in the year 2019-'21, ranking only behind Andhra Pradesh. Telangana contributed to 25% of the overall increase in forest cover across India that year, again ranking only behind Andhra Pradesh.

But these numbers conceal deep-rooted flaws in conception and execution of the afforestation programme. For one, as Gogula Lakshmi's story indicates, the state has allegedly been evicting people from lands over which the people claim to have rights.

Banoth Lakshmi and Gogula Lakshmi, residents of Chittiramavaram, have been fighting for access to a 50-acre patch of land that they say their families have cultivated since the 1950s. Photo: Mridula Chari

And Chittiramavaram's story is far from unique – similar accounts of podu cultivators protesting against land being taken over, and suffering police brutality, have been reported from across the state.

In June 2020, the police detained 14 Adivasi farmers and an activist who were protesting attempts to take over cultivated land in an incident in Lakshmidivipally mandal, in Bhadradi Kothagudem district. In April 2021, in Chintaguppa village in the same district, the forest department attempted to take over 27 hectares of forest land used for seasonal podu cultivation. A group of women allegedly tied the District Field Officer to a tree, the News Minute reported. In August 2021, in Yellanna Nagar in Khammam district, the police detained 21 Adivasi, Dalit and Other Backward Class women after they allegedly threw stones at forest department officials who had visited for an afforestation programme. In Bhupalpally district in September 2021, a podu farmer allegedly attacked, and attempted to set on fire, a forest official who had come to inspect a Haritha Haram site.

Contrary to the widespread assumption that planting trees is good for the environment, research from the last decade suggests that while there are several benefits to the measure, it falls short when it comes to climate change mitigation. That is, this work suggests that increasing forest cover alone is not enough to enhance carbon sequestration, or the capture and storage of carbon from the atmosphere.

"The general understanding is that forests sequester carbon," said Supriyo Chakraborty, a recently retired geoscientist from the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune, who has conducted research on carbon sequestration in the Kaziranga National Park. He added, referring to mass afforestation, "But there are many aspects to consider before undertaking such a big project." These factors include the sequestration capacities of different species of trees and of ecosystems.

Soils also play an important role in the carbon sequestration process. If soil organic matter is unusually high, it may act as a significant source of carbon as it decomposes, thereby reducing the carbon sequestration potential of an ecosystem. Chakraborty also noted that the sequestration process can also vary depending on the time period one considers. Some plants, such as wild grasses, may sequester more carbon during the growing season, he explained, but in other seasons they may emit significant carbon, resulting in a net emission of carbon.

According to the National Forest Policy of 1988, one-third of the area of each state should have tree cover. In 2014, Telangana had only 24% tree cover.

"The basic premise of Haritha Haram was to take up extensive plantation outside the notified forest areas to make the forest cover of 33%," said Vinay Kumar, additional

principal conservator of forests in Telangana, who oversees Haritha Haram. Essentially, he was drawing a distinction between forest land – that is, land held by the forest department, which need not always be forested – and forested land, which need not always fall under the forest department.

According to a document that a forest department official shared with me, since 2015, under Haritha Haram, the state has planted 171 crore trees outside forest lands and 21 crore trees on forest land, and rejuvenated 51 crore existing trees on forest land.

It is a massive interdepartmental scheme, one of several state-led schemes for mass afforestation that began around the time, including in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

Though the scheme is entirely run by the state, more than half of its funding comes from the Centre. Around 50% comes from the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme – since tree plantation is a source of employment, the state can budget salaries of workers and other expenses under the scheme. Another 17% comes from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority, which receives funds from industries and other enterprises when a state diverts forest land for them. The rest of the funds are drawn from various state departments.

Apart from direct funding, the Centre also indirectly pushes states to increase their green cover using ecological fiscal transfers, a financial instrument through which the Centre allots a greater share of tax revenue to states than they might otherwise have received, depending on how much forest cover they have.

The Centre has also been urging states to secure financing from abroad. In January, for instance, the Niti Aayog encouraged Telangana to seek financing from countries such as Switzerland, which are bound by international obligations to fund carbon offsets – that is, money that one country pays to another to compensate for carbon that the former emits into the atmosphere, and which the latter spends on carbon sequestration projects, such as tree plantation.

State afforestation schemes tend to have a bad reputation – seedlings and saplings, which are planted with much fanfare, are often not native to landscapes where they are planted and do not survive beyond a few years. At the national level, multiple reports, including from the Comptroller and Auditor General, have shown that compensatory afforestation funds are often misused or diverted to fund jeeps, laptops and other office supplies.

By that standard, Telangana's afforestation data suggests that Haritha Haram is successful.

The state has also adopted several relatively novel practices – it has, for instance, created a network of local nurseries, each called a Palle Pragathi Vanam, which provide saplings for land under the scheme. Unlike most plantation programmes, afforestation is managed at the local level, rather than through central plans – according to Vinay Kumar, this allows those on the ground to grow native trees, rather than fast-growing exotic species, such as eucalyptus, often used in plantations elsewhere in the country.

The state has gone as far as to amend its Municipal Corporation Act and the Panchayat Raj Act to legally enforce the new green cover that is coming up across the state: the District Collector now has the power to remove elected officials, such as the sarpanch and municipal corporation head, if they do not maintain a minimum 80% survival rate of Haritha Haram plantations in the areas they oversee. “That is the coercive method which has made survival of seedlings planted possible,” said Vinay Kumar. In forested areas, the survival rate of seedlings is 95%, Kumar said. The overall survival rate outside forest land is lower, at between 70% and 80%.

A total of 53 departments are participating in the scheme, which is spearheaded by the forest department. Their participation is crucial. In the seven years since the scheme was launched, the state has planted a little less than half the Haritha Haram saplings on land held by the forest department. The rest of the plantations are on land held by the other 52 departments. (Conflicts with podu cultivators, however, have largely been restricted to forest department lands – other lands were typically in possession of departments before they were given over for plantations.)

This level of government involvement has been possible only because of support from the highest offices, as I learnt from speaking to four officials across different levels in the forest department. This support is also apparent from government documents: the first talking point about strategy in a forest department summary of the scheme dated June 7, 2022, which a senior forest official shared with me, states, “There is a strong political will to implement the programme in the State.”

Indeed, the chief minister has frequently spoken of Haritha Haram being his dream for Telangana. As RM Dobriyal, principal chief conservator of forests in Telangana, told me, Rao is personally interested in the outcome of the scheme, and monitors every update that is made to it. Dobriyal added that before the launch of Haritha Haram, the state afforested an average of about 120 hectares a year – now it covers between 6,000 and 7,000 hectares a year.

Haritha Haram has seen a high degree of government involvement because of the support of Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, who has spoken of the programme as his dream for Telangana. Photo: KCR/Facebook

Many government staffers that I met believe in the value of Haritha Haram. S Srinivasa Rao, a forest guard in Telangana’s Aswaraopeta and Dammamet forest ranges, in Bhadradi Kothagudem district, swelled with pride when he mentioned his work for afforestation programmes.

“I feel proud to successfully get the land back after years, because I can see with my own eyes how different it is in our care,” he said, as he showed me a Haritha Haram plantation site in Aswaraopeta range. This land was earlier being used for podu cultivation by “encroachers”, he continued, but with new sapling plantations, they would no longer be able to cultivate it without cutting down trees – an offence that ordinary citizens hesitate to commit, he added, because the Forest Department usually pursues those cases with great stringency. There was considerable pressure from his seniors to implement Haritha Haram, he said, which made it his top priority.

Rao was also proud of the diversity of the saplings planted under Haritha Haram. He explained that in previous decades, the Telangana forest department would plant teak monocultures across the state, which it could then harvest to sell wood to industries. Now, he noted, the department is planting a variety of native trees as part of Haritha Haram.

Despite the successes of the programme's execution, its success in combating pollution or mitigating the impacts of climate change is less clear.

Recent studies have shown that afforestation programs do not do enough to offset carbon in meaningful ways. "Ecosystems, not tree planting campaigns, capture and store carbon," ecologist Forrest Fleischmann wrote in the journal *BioScience* in 2020, in a paper that presented an overview of current research on the topic.

Indeed, recent research in India also shows that different forest ecosystems absorb carbon in different ways. For instance, the study by Chakraborty, in Assam's Kaziranga National Park examined the amount of carbon dioxide that the forest both absorbed and emitted. It found that the forest was a net emitter of carbon, not an absorber: this was a result of carbon dioxide released by soil bacteria, likely in sediments deposited by the Brahmaputra river.

Some Central Indian forests can and do function as net carbon absorbers. This is a function of the different soil, climate and organisms of the region. For instance, the same group that studied Kaziranga studied a teak plantation in Madhya Pradesh and found that it acted as a net carbon sink, absorbing more carbon dioxide through the year than it released.

With very little data available on this question, it remains a matter of debate. According to Chakraborty, there are only about 20 flux towers across India that measure eddy covariance, or carbon emissions and intake in forest ecosystems, which is an insufficient number for a country of India's size and diversity.

As a paper in the *Annual Review of Environment and Sciences*, quoted by IndiaSpend noted, "In sum, the official Indian stance has consistently been that Indian forests are sequestering carbon and can sequester more. Some academic studies are beginning to question the biophysical basis of this claim, but no resolution has been reached."

The paper also noted that unthinkingly pursuing afforestation can have a great human cost. It argued that if India were to prioritise plantation programmes, without accounting for the traditional use of forest resources, the result would be an upending of the "devolution of rights" to forest dwellers, which had begun after the passage of the landmark Forest Rights Act in 2006.

A sacred anjan tree, with seven polished and coloured stones set in front of it, is part of evidence that the residents of Chittiramavaram have marshalled in their fight against the forest department. They have photographs of the tree that they say are from the 1980s, which establish that they were residents of the area since at least then – the clearing that surrounds the tree also indicates that the area was not forested at the time.

From 1971 onwards, a resident named Banoth Chandru, on behalf of himself and others of the hamlet from the landless Lambada or Banjara communities, which are classified as Scheduled Tribes in the state, submitted a series of applications to the forest department to be assigned land titles for a stretch of unforested land adjacent to the Ramavaram forest, near the village.

One such document, from the 1970s, which is in English and which local activist Gugolothu Dharma showed me, described the applicants as “landless poor peasants”. It noted that “even prior to 1956, we felled the petty forest growth and removed the stumps, bushes hither thither cleared the land and made it fit for cultivation”. But after a few years, “forest authorities objected and restrained us and subsequently we were allowed, again were restrained”, the document stated.

After locals made several applications, by the 1980s, the state assigned this land to Banoth Chandru and others, presenting them with a map of 13 plots of half a hectare each, a copy of which Lakshmi and her neighbours showed me. They cite the document, which bears the stamp of an official who was overseeing the Ramavaram forest range, as evidence that they are entitled to cultivate this land, though they do not formally own it.

This assignation of land to the residents of Chittiramavaram occurred under a sustained policy of the Andhra Pradesh government to enforce land reforms. According to the government, in all, it has assigned 42 lakh acres of land to landless cultivators under the 1977 Land Reforms Act.

But recipients of assigned lands do not receive a permanent title – they only have rights of cultivation. On paper, the land still technically belongs to the government, which leaves the recipients extremely vulnerable to displacement.

In contrast, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006, commonly known as the Forest Rights Act, confers permanent land titles to forest dwellers. The objective of the act is to “undo the historical injustice” done to forest-dwelling communities, to include them in plans to conserve forests and biodiversity, and to ensure some degree of security in their livelihoods and their rights to use land.

When the Forest Rights Act was enacted in 2006, Banoth Lakshmi and Gogula Lakshmi’s families applied for a title under that act. If their claims under the Forest Rights Act are approved, they will receive land titles. This means that they will be able to cultivate the land legally, and that it can no longer be used for Haritha Haram plantations.

Gugolothu Dharma, who is district president of the Telangana Girijana Sangha, a Communist Party of India (Marxist)-affiliated group that advocates for the rights of Adivasi people across the state, noted that the Forest Department had not responded to their claim. Dharma said that department officials had argued that the forest land in question falls within the limits of Kothagudem city’s municipal government, and that therefore the department cannot implement the act there. The department also cited satellite evidence to claim that the people of Chittiramavaram began to cultivate that land only after the December 2005 cut-off date mandated by the Forest Rights Act –

under the act, those who began cultivating a piece of forest land after this year are not entitled to avail of rights over it.

Though the Forest Department has not yielded, in July 2022, Lakshmi informed Scroll.in over a phone call that the department had unofficially agreed to let the people of the village cultivate 24 acres of the 50-acre stretch in dispute, and that the department had placed three rocks which serve as markers for the land the cultivators can use. A Forest Department official denied this claim.

Nevertheless, similar stories are fairly common across Telangana. In Errabodu hamlet of Khammam district, cultivators alleged that the forest department offered to grant half of a portion of land under dispute to the petitioners, many of whom had applied for pattas under the Forest Rights Act, on the condition that they not interfere with Haritha Haram plantation on the rest of the land. This offer was made only orally, and by lower level forest department officials, local residents claimed, and was not repeated by higher level officers.

“If we are going to lose everything it is better for us to have at least half of that,” said Narsingh Satyanarayana, a resident of Errabodu.

Samo Muthamma, Uma Rani and Kausalya, who are residents of Errabodu, are among those who allege that the forest department offered to let them cultivate half the area of the disputed land, on the condition that they would not protest the department planting trees for Haritha Haram on the rest of the area. Photo: Mridula Chari

I sent queries about these claims to senior and local forest department officials over email, and also spoke to them over the phone, but had not received official responses at the time of publication.

On paper, thousands of claims such as those of Banoth Lakshmi and Gogula Lakshmi, lie unaddressed. This is because, since 2010, according to several forest officials, there has been an effective moratorium in Telangana on considering claims for pattas under the FRA.

None of the forest officials I spoke to had any information about why this moratorium was unofficially imposed: they just said they had received orders to stop processing claims, and had followed them.

The state began to process halted claims at a large scale only in 2021, said L Ranjeet Nayak, District Forest Officer for Bhadradi Kothagudem district. In the district, he added, there had been “4,000 pending claims since 2009, but now only 100 are left” to be processed.

The forest department continues to claim that most podu cultivators are encroachers. In Bhadradi Kothagudem district alone, Nayak said, seven lakh acres of forest land are encroached upon by cultivators.

But some cultivators say that the forest department’s own records prove that they have been using the land for decades. Among them are residents of Satyanarayanapuram,

where forest department action has left a group of people entirely landless and without a livelihood. Satyanarayanapuram is a remote hamlet in Bhadravadi Kothagudem district, where people say they have been cultivating 250 acres of land since 1996.

As proof that they have been cultivating the land for at least two decades, they cite cases of trespass that the forest department has filed against them. Sixteen people were named in the first case in 2001, and another eight in a second case in 2002, both for trespassing on forest property and cutting trees. These were crimes before the Forest Rights Act of 2006, the locals explain – but they argue that after its passage, the cases serve as proof of the legitimacy of locals' claims of use of the land. Yet, when people attempted to file claims in 2016, they received no reply from the department.

At the end of 2020, the local government decided to press ahead with Palle Pragathi Vanam plantations on the disputed land, and also set up a tent on the land. Residents decided to fight back by attempting to sow the land. On January 6, 2021, they gathered on it and tried to sow red gram and green gram.

Soon after, 300 police officials, from two different beats, came to arrest them. They filed two cases against them: one, for gathering during the lockdown that was in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and a second for occupying forest land. A video from that day shows 67-year-old Vukkam Venkatamma lying unconscious on the ground as people gather around her.

“They threw us like dogs into a dog van,” said Vukkam Radha, one of those who was arrested. “We were using only 250 acres and they took it all. How can we be encroachers on our own land?”

The land was their only source of livelihood, villagers explained – Vukkam Lakshmi said they used to harvest around seven quintals of jowar and green gram per acre while they had possession of it. “We only had agricultural land,” she said. “None of us are job holders. So now we have to go elsewhere to work.”

Vukkam Radha alleged that while the government had paid compensation for loss of land and livelihood to cultivators in many parts of the state who had lost land to Haritha Haram, the residents of Satyanarayanapuram had not received anything.

“We have no lands now so we only do seasonal work,” explained Vukkam Mohan Rao. In some months they go to a nearby mango orchard to pluck mangoes for the owner of the plantation. In other months, they harvest cotton or chilli, also grown on others' lands. Sometimes, they obtain work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, but they typically do not receive their full entitlement of 100 days of work. The impact cascades down generations. Radha said she has had to take her children out of school as she can no longer afford to educate them.

Vukkam Radha, Vukkam Lakshmi and other residents of Satyanarayanapuram, stand in front of their village's plantation nursery, or Palle Pragathi Vanam. They used to cultivate this land until 2021. Photo: Mridula Chari

Not all claims are as straightforward.

This reporter visited a hamlet in Khammam district whose residents made vastly contradictory claims over their land. Some residents of the hamlet claimed that the land had been owned by a large landowner until just before Independence, and that they had occupied and cultivated it from around that period. Others, however, said that they had been occupying and cultivating it since around 2005.

Despite these conflicting claims, residents are fiercely protective of their land. In August 2021, when the forest department attempted to plant saplings on 25 acres they had been cultivating, locals destroyed the saplings and reclaimed the land. According to Nonavath Srinu, a resident of the hamlet, the forest department has since allowed them to cultivate the land and has promised not to take further action against them.

This case is just one of thousands that might not be easily resolved because of conflicting claims and inadequate documentation.

In November 2021, it appeared that cultivators like Gogula Lakshmi would have some respite. The chief minister of Telangana announced that the state government would regularise all podu land holdings. Those who wished to make claims for regularisation of their land had to send applications to the forest department by December 2021.

But as applications poured in, some districts received applications for far more forest land than they had recorded as being encroached. By April, the government had ceased to take action on the applications – it had reportedly not begun the verification process for any of the claims. Both Dobriyal and Kumar said that the process was ongoing.

For now, the people affected by Haritha Haram continue to grapple with a future of uncertainty and a loss of livelihood. Once almost every month, Gogula Lakshmi has to travel ten kilometres each way to attend the hearing of the assault case filed against her at the district court in Kothagudem city. She also has to set apart days on which to visit a hospital for treatment.

Meanwhile, Banoth Lakshmi is not giving up and has not accepted the state's informal compromise to allow them to use half the land. "We are 27 families – how are we supposed to survive on less than an acre of land?" she said. "Why should we give up land that our grandfathers were cultivating?" <https://apdirect.in/the-cost-of-telangana-s-drive-to-plant-two-billion-trees-268967.html>

6. Telangan distributed the States Wealth among Poor (indiaherald.com) 14 Sep 2022

According to Harish Rao, Telangana's debt-to-GSDP ratio of 23.5% is substantially lower than the national average of 55%. He asserted that telangana had risen to the top spot in the last eight years in terms of growth in state-owned tax revenue, with an increase of 11.5%. With 9.7%, odisha came in second, and haryana was right behind it with 9.2%. Despite making up only 2.9% of the country's population, telangana contributed more to the GDP in the last eight years, rising from 4% to 4.9%. "We divided the State's wealth among the needy, unlike the bjp government, which waived the corporate debts to benefit its buddies," he remarked.

Harish Rao recalled that the Union government was criticised by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) for getting off-budget loans of about Rs 6 lakh crore during the previous five to six years. He promised to congratulate the state's bjp MLAs and MPs if they were successful in receiving their back pay from the federal government. The Finance minister further criticised the Centre for applying a double standard to the FRBM Act's implementation by placing limits on the states while abstaining from doing so itself.

He claimed that, contrary to the 15th Finance Commission's suggestion, the Centre unilaterally decided to set limits on the state's borrowing without first creating the committee. The Central and State governments should be included in the high-powered intergovernmental committee to examine the borrowings. He asserted that despite telangana being eligible for loans up to 4% of its GSDP, it had forgone 0.5% of those loans out of consideration for the farmers because the Center insisted on attaching smart metres to agricultural pump sets. The 15th Finance Commission recommended that telangana receive Rs 6,268 crore under various heading based on its performance, but the Union government disregarded this suggestion as well. <https://www.indiaherald.com/Politics/Read/994533069/Telangana-distributed-the-States-Wealth-among-Poor>

7. तेलंगाना का कहना, केंद्र पर 1 लाख करोड़ रुपये से अधिक का बकाया है (jantaserishta.com) 13 Sep 2022

हैदराबाद, तेलंगाना के वित्त मंत्री टी. हरीश राव ने मंगलवार को दावा किया कि केंद्र सरकार पर बकाया धन, अनुदान और मुआवजे के रूप में राज्य का 1 लाख करोड़ रुपये से अधिक बकाया है। उन्होंने विधानसभा को बताया कि केंद्र पर 1,05,812 रुपये का बकाया है और यदि लंबित धनराशि जारी की जाती है, तो राज्य अपने 3.29 लाख करोड़ रुपये के कर्ज का एक तिहाई हिस्सा चुका सकता है।

यदि केंद्र इन निधियों को जारी करता है, तो राज्य को नए ऋण जुटाने की भी आवश्यकता नहीं होगी, उन्होंने "एफआरबीएम अधिनियम के कार्यान्वयन में केंद्र सरकार की दोहरी नीति - राज्य की प्रगति पर प्रभाव" पर संक्षिप्त चर्चा के जवाब में कहा।

हरीश राव ने आरोप लगाया कि केंद्र के एकतरफा फैसले और राजकोषीय उत्तरदायित्व और बजट प्रबंधन (एफआरबीएम) सीमा के तहत ऋण प्राप्त करने के लिए राज्य के खिलाफ प्रतिबंध लगाने से राज्य पर प्रति कूल प्रभाव पड़ रहा है।

उन्होंने राज्य के ऋणों पर भाजपा की आलोचना को खारिज कर दिया और दावा किया कि केंद्र सरकार के विपरीत, जिसने अपने ऋण चुकाने के लिए ऋण प्राप्त किया, राज्य सरकार ने पूंजीगत व्यय पर उधार खर्च किया और संपत्ति बनाई। उन्होंने बताया कि राज्य ने कालेश्वरम परियोजना मिशन भगीरथ, मिशन काकतीय और अन्य कार्यक्रमों जैसे सिंचाई परियोजनाओं को हाथ में लिया जिससे राज्य के लिए संपत्ति का निर्माण हुआ।

उन्होंने कहा कि रिजर्व बैंक ऑफ इंडिया की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक तेलंगाना की डेट रैंक देश में 23वीं है।

हरीश राव ने राज्य के प्रत्येक नागरिक पर प्रति व्यक्ति कर्ज को लेकर केंद्रीय वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण और अन्य भाजपा नेताओं के आरोपों को भी खारिज कर दिया।

उन्होंने कहा कि जहां केंद्रीय ऋण के परिणामस्वरूप प्रत्येक व्यक्ति पर प्रति व्यक्ति 1,25,679 रुपये का कर्ज है, वहीं तेलंगाना का कर्ज 94,272 रुपये प्रति व्यक्ति है।

तेलंगाना की अपनी हालिया यात्रा के दौरान, सीतारमण ने दावा किया है कि तेलंगाना में पैदा होने वाले प्रत्येक बच्चे पर 1.25 लाख रुपये का कर्ज है।

हरीश राव ने कहा कि तेलंगाना का ऋण-जीएसडीपी अनुपात 23.5 प्रतिशत है, जो देश के 55 प्रतिशत के अनुपात से काफी कम है।

उन्होंने दावा किया कि पिछले आठ वर्षों में, तेलंगाना ने 11.5 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि के साथ राज्य के स्वामित्व वाले कर-

राजस्व में वृद्धि के मामले में शीर्ष स्थान हासिल किया है। ओडिशा 9.7 प्रतिशत के साथ दूसरे, हरियाणा 9.2 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि के साथ दूसरे स्थान पर रहा।

देश की आबादी का केवल 2.9 प्रतिशत होने के बावजूद, पिछले आठ वर्षों में सकल घरेलू उत्पाद में तेलंगाना का योगदान 4 प्रतिशत से बढ़कर 4.9 प्रतिशत हो गया।

उन्होंने कहा,

"भाजपा सरकार के विपरीत, जिसने अपने दोस्तों को लाभ पहुंचाने के लिए कॉर्पोरेट ऋण माफ कर दिए, हमने राज्य के धन को गरीबों में बांट दिया," उन्होंने कहा।

हरीश राव ने याद दिलाया कि नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक (CAG) ने पिछले पांच-छह वर्षों में लगभग 6 लाख करोड़ रुपये के ऑफ-बजट ऋण प्राप्त करने के लिए केंद्र सरकार की गलती पाई।

उन्होंने कहा कि यदि राज्य के भाजपा विधायक और सांसद केंद्र से बकाया राशि प्राप्त करने में सफल होते हैं, तो वह उनका अभिनंदन करेंगे।

वित्त मंत्री ने राज्यों पर प्रतिबंध लगाकर एफआरबीएम अधिनियम के कार्यान्वयन में दोहरा मापदंड अपनाने के लिए भी केंद्र की खिंचाई की, लेकिन खुद उनका अभ्यास नहीं किया।

उन्होंने कहा कि केंद्र ने 15वें वित्त आयोग की सिफारिश के अनुसार समिति का गठन किए बिना राज्य के कर्ज पर प्रतिबंध लगाने का एकतरफा फैसला लिया। उच्चाधिकार प्राप्त अंतर-सरकारी समिति में उधार की समीक्षा करने के लिए केंद्र और राज्य सरकारें शामिल होनी चाहिए।

उन्होंने दावा किया कि हालांकि तेलंगाना अपने जीएसडीपी के 4 प्रतिशत तक ऋण लेने के योग्य था, लेकिन केंद्र द्वारा कृषि पंप सेटों के लिए स्मार्ट मीटर लगाने पर जोर देने के बाद, उसने किसानों की खातिर 0.5 प्रतिशत ऋण को छोड़ दिया था। केंद्र सरकार ने तेलंगाना को उसके प्रदर्शन के आधार पर विभिन्न मदों के तहत 6,268 करोड़ रुपये जारी करने की 15वें वित्त आयोग की सिफारिशों की भी अनदेखी की।

उन्होंने कहा कि प्रधान मंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने जीएसटी कार्यान्वयन द्वारा राज्यों के कर हिस्से को 32 प्रतिशत से बढ़ाकर 42 प्रतिशत करने का वादा किया था, लेकिन अधिक उपकर लगाकर, केंद्र ने राज्य को कर घटक कम कर दिया है।

जबकि केंद्र सरकार अपने राजस्व का लगभग 22.26 प्रतिशत उपकर और अधिभार के माध्यम से जुटा रही थी, राज्यों को अपने राजस्व का नुकसान हो रहा है और केंद्र द्वारा अर्जित कुल राजस्व का केवल 29.6 प्रतिशत ही समाप्त हो रहा है। उन्होंने कहा कि तेलंगाना को 33,712 करोड़ रुपये के राजस्व का नुकसान हुआ है।

उन्होंने टिप्पणी की कि यदि मूल्य वर्धित कर (वैट) जारी रहता तो राज्य को अधिक राजस्व प्राप्त होता।

उन्होंने आरोप लगाया कि केंद्र ने पिछड़े जिलों के विकास के लिए 1,350 करोड़ रुपये भी जारी नहीं किए हैं, और भाजपा पर "कमजोर राज्यों, मजबूत केंद्र" के अपने आदर्श वाक्य को प्राप्त करने के लिए संघीय भावना को नष्ट करने का आरोप लगाया। <https://jantaserishta.com/local/teelangana/teelangana-says-center-owes-more-than-rs-1-lakh-crore-1563054>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

8. IAF to buy 100 UAVs to protect bases after last year's drone attack on Jammu Air Force Station ([firstpost.com](https://www.firstpost.com)) September 14, 2022

In a significant step, the Indian Air Force has decided to buy 100 Unmanned Aerial Systems (UASs or UAVs) for surveillance and the security of IAF bases across the country. These drone systems will be bought from Indian vendors or Indian original equipment manufacturers (OEMs).

A first-of-its-kind drone attack at the Jammu airbase last year in June exposed the gaps in the security apparatus in force for sensitive military bases and thus highlighted the need to upgrade it to tackle newer threats. Two explosives-laden drones had crashed into the base causing damage to the roof of a building.

The IAF earlier had placed a Rs 155-crore order with Hyderabad-based firm Zen Technologies for the supply of anti-drone systems. The present procurement will be a big impetus to the capability of the Indian Air Force to counter such attacks, officials told News18.

The mini Unmanned Aerial Systems intended to be procured by IAF now will be used for surveillance, reconnaissance, and detection day and night at various IAF bases, with the capability to carry electro-optic (EO) and thermal imagers, high-altitude operation, and the ability to detect a human-size target from a long distance. This will enable the IAF to detect and counter both enemy UAV attacks as well as terrorist attacks on its bases.

Last year, the National Security Guards (NSG) said it had been deployed at the IAF stations in Srinagar and Jammu to provide anti-drone security cover to these vital installations. A day after the attack on the Jammu airbase, the Indian Army had

intercepted two more drones flying over the Kaluchak military base on the outskirts of Jammu city.

Following this, a large number of the orders for UAVs were earlier placed with Indian firms, most of which were under emergency procurement funds. This includes swarm drones, logistics drones as well as explosives-carrying loitering munitions that can detect a target and explode there. A majority of these drones have been procured by the Army alone.

In the last two years, the services have kept their focus on procuring modern platforms including the latest technologies, among them a range of UAVs with varying classifications as well as counter-drone systems. A majority of them are for Intelligence-Surveillance-Reconnaissance (ISR) missions.

Local formations of the Army have been procuring micro UAVs for limited surveillance missions. The Navy had also signed a contract with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) to procure an indigenous comprehensive Naval Anti-Drone System (NADS) with hard-kill and soft-kill features.

There are also plans to upgrade the Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) UAVs with the forces with advanced satellite communication and sensors for longer surveillance and reconnaissance missions, and arm them with air-to-ground missiles and laser-guided munitions for precision strikes.

However, a case to procure 30 MQ-9B High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) armed drones from the US, 10 for each of the defence services, costing a total of \$3 billion, is still pending with the government. <https://www.firstpost.com/india/iaf-to-buy-100-uavs-to-protect-bases-after-last-years-drone-attack-on-jammu-air-force-station-11248771.html>

9. Wheels off track for the Railways (thehindubusinessline.com) September 13, 2022

Full use of existing capacities and trying out cast wheels on high-speed passengers trains are the need of the hour

The Indian Railways (IR) has invited bids for setting up a plant with an assured offtake of around 80,000 forged wheels per year and announced that manufacturing was expected to start within the next 18 months.

Once India achieves high standards of manufacturing of wheels, it would export them mostly to European countries. It has caused some excitement among prospective bidders and railway watchers.

This ambitious plan, however, seems misplaced.

Wheels were in news recently because their non-availability at the Integral Coach Factory, Chennai, was likely to delay the turn-out of the much-awaited third rake of Train 18/Vande Bharat train.

These trains are in focus after the Prime Minister talked of 75 such trains in 75 weeks on August 15, 2021. With the progress of even the third rake being slow, its wheels, which were ordered from an Ukraine company and the first lot was stuck in the war zone, became a bone of contention.

Subsequently, the wheels were received in May and the train was turned out in August.

India's reliance on import of wheels has raised eyebrows. The criticism of IR for not manufacturing enough wheels became louder when it recently ordered 47,000 sets of wheels from a Chinese company.

Railroad wheels are either cast or roll-forged, with a prevailing engineering view that the metallurgy of forged wheels is more suited for trains. In reality, it is about the legacy of development of railroad wheels; while the manufacturers in the US adopted cast wheels, those in Europe and Japan developed forged wheels and it has been more about commercial pitching by companies.

Since the US did not have a vibrant system of passenger trains, railways worldwide employ forged wheels.

India began its manufacture of wheels decades back with Durgapur Steel Plant (DSP) developing forged wheels for locomotives and coaches and Rail Wheel Factory, Bangalore (RWF), starting with cast wheels for freight wagons.

Another Rail Wheel Plant (RWP) was set up in Bihar when the demand for cast freight wheels increased. While freight wheels are manufactured by RWP, RWF makes them and also wheels for old ICF and EMU coaches.

DSP did well in supplying forged wheels, but beset as it is with PSU bureaucracy and limited R&D resources, it could not deliver wheels in large numbers for newer LHB coaches and EMD/ABB locomotives and, therefore, a large number of such wheels are being imported for decades.

Wrapped in red tape

RWF developed cast wheels for LHB coaches. But there is no evidence of use of cast wheels in passenger trains in the speed range of 120 km/hr or above. In spite of computer simulations of cast wheels on LHB, albeit limited at 110 km/hr, the Railways heistated to try them out at higher speeds. RWF did push for it strongly but the IR bureaucracy balked at it.

So, import of forged wheels continues, with the numbers going up as the production of such coaches has been increasing.

RWF has supplied more than 4 million wheels and barring one or two cases, not one has failed whereas breakage of forged wheels is not uncommon. This is multiple times six sigma.

Nevertheless, it is foolhardy to now expect the IR to be bold enough to introduce cast wheels in faster passenger trains. The IR had entered into an agreement with

Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) in 2013 to set up a forged wheel plant at Rae Bareli to manufacture one lakh wheels per year for curbing imports.

After years of delays, the plant is ready but barring a supply of some hundreds of trial wheels, its full-scale operation is delayed, partly due to bureaucracy and partly due to the pandemic.

A plant set up with an investment of nearly ₹2,000 crore lies idle while the IR continues to import wheels.

ICF needed only a small number of 256 wheels for the first two Train18s. DSP was not capable of engineering and manufacturing them to the stiff timeline and so ICF had to import the wheels.

With the RINL plant not operational and DSP not able to meet even the existing requirements, wheels had to be imported for the next 44 Vande Bharat trains as well.

What is, however, curious is that the order was placed with a Chinese company, even after the government imposed restrictions on sourcing from Chinese firms.

The enhanced level of production of rolling stock alone in the country does not justify this bid to set up another plant.

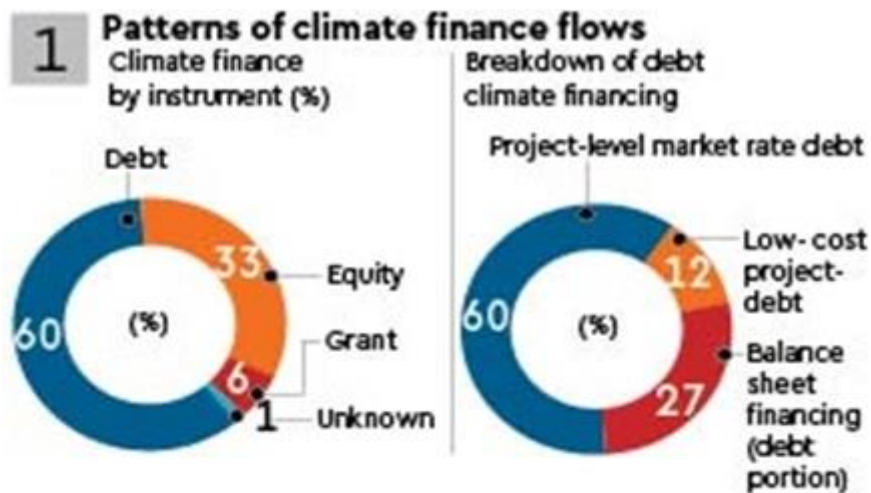
Instead, the government must have the Ministries of Railways and Steel work together to get the RINL plant going in full steam.

Moreover, the IR engineers should make bold to try out cast wheels in high-speed passenger coaches, albeit after validation. If these synergies work, neither import of wheels nor the latest tender would be necessary. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/wheels-off-track-for-the-railways/article65887173.ece>

10. A tough funding climate ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) September 14, 2022

Climate financing data analysed by Icrier researchers shows that most of the money flowing into developing G20 nations is in the form of concessional loans rather than grants. This could exacerbate debt distress in developing countries, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Also, the money is largely earmarked for mitigation efforts as opposed to adaptation efforts.



2 Mode of investment received
Finance flows in G20 developing countries (\$ million)

Country	Concessional loans	Grant	Equity	Total
Argentina	100	146		246
Brazil	127	1,051		1,179
China	100	405		505
India	881	463	133	1,478
Indonesia	478	373		851
Mexico	367	188		555
South Africa	557	90		648
Turkey	425	82		507

3 Finance requirement for climate action

Country	Period of study	Base year	Amount*
South Africa	2015-30	Not specified**	\$698 bn
India	2018-30	2011	\$5.25 tm
China	2016-30	Not specified*	\$8.42 tm
Brazil	Till 2030	2017	\$279 to \$298 bn
Mexico	2014-30	2017	\$126 bn
Turkey	2019-30	Not specified	\$64 to \$84 bn

Source: ICRIER *Cumulative requirement **assuming 2015 values #assuming 2016 values

Read against the backdrop of the increasing frequency of extreme weather events that are rooted in climate change, this means not enough attention being given to the needs of developing countries to secure their populations against such events. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/a-tough-funding-climate/2665773/>

11. The governance model to take on climate change ([livemint.com](https://www.livemint.com)) 14 Sep 2022

Our world is undergoing an economic transition that will require effective government action on many fronts to manage climate change, ensure public health and rebuild our middle classes through good jobs and innovation. But are our governments up to it? There is wide scepticism about governments' ability to lead and achieve positive change. Such doubts may be well-placed. Polarization and authoritarian populism, which are mutually reinforcing, have overrun the public sphere in many countries and

undermined the capacity of societies to mount collective action, both domestic and multilateral, against common problems.

Moreover, a longer-standing concern about government is that it has neither sufficient information nor the capabilities necessary to achieve positive structural change in the economy. Give governments too much power, the argument goes, and they will direct resources toward the wrong places and become captive tools of special interests. This argument lies at the heart of neoliberalism, and it will have to be overcome for any successor paradigm—like productivism—to succeed.

A more accurate account of state capabilities recognizes that they are neither inherited nor static. Rather, once appropriate priorities are set, they develop over time through experience, learning and trust-building with private entities. For public officials, the relevant question is not “Do we have the capacity?” but, “Have we established the right priorities and the correct mode of governance?”

Sceptics might say that this sounds good in theory but remains unachievable in practice. Just look around, and you can find failures of public governance almost everywhere—locally, nationally and globally. But as Columbia Law School’s Charles Sabel and David Victor of the University of California, San Diego, show in a new book, effective governance models do exist and have already made a big difference. The practice is there; it is the theory that is lacking.

Sabel and Victor focus on climate change, which is the greatest policy challenge of our time. It is also an area where governance is doubly difficult: regulations must not only be effective at the national level, they also must be negotiated globally among states with different interests and circumstances.

Sabel and Victor build their argument on the example of the 1987 Montreal Protocol, which has succeeded in curbing ozone-depleting substances (ODS) to the point where the ozone layer is now on course to full recovery. From the outset, ozone depletion and climate change looked like similar challenges, because both involve significant scientific and technological uncertainty and major differences among the positions of advanced and developing economies. That is why the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the first global climate agreement, took the Montreal Protocol as its model.

The Montreal Protocol and the UNFCCC both started out as very ‘thin’ regimes, relying on broad commitments to cut emissions (of ODS and greenhouse gases, respectively) by a certain date, but with little operational content. But the two regimes evolved differently. While the Montreal Protocol made steady progress by bringing firms and governments together to tackle concrete technological problems, climate-change agreements have often ended up stalled in global negotiations.

Sabel and Victor call attention to a key difference between the two regimes: the Montreal Protocol created sectoral committees in which ODS-emitting firms joined national regulators and scientists in seeking technological alternatives. These groups started small, but they expanded and multiplied as knowledge was accumulated, capabilities were acquired and trust was built among parties. This approach worked because the problem solving was devolved to local actors—namely, firms with the

requisite technological know-how. When innovation stalled, targets were reset. The result was a virtuous loop of on-the-ground innovation and top-level goal setting. Under the climate regime, by contrast, firms have been kept at arm's length from regulators, owing to fears that they would capture the process. But this has entrenched conflicts of interest and hampered innovation.

The Montreal Protocol is not the only successful case of what Sabel and Victor call "experimental governance." Additional examples can be found across a wide range of national and sub-national programmes, from the US Advanced Research Projects Agency–Energy (ARPA-E) to Ireland's agricultural-pollution regime. In each case, ground-level experimentation is coupled with higher-level goal setting. The successful practices that emerge from these collaborations are then routinized through dissemination and standard setting.

Nor are the success stories limited to environmental policy. ARPA-E, after all, is modelled on the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the US agency responsible for some of the landmark innovations of our time, including the internet and GPS. At the local level, the most successful initiatives to revitalize communities and create jobs take the form of private-public collaborations that bring together training programmes, businesses, non-profit groups and public officials to create new pathways to economic opportunity. Effective national industrial policies take a similar collaborative, cross-sectoral approach.

As Sabel and Victor explain, the general strategy in all these domains is to start out with ambitious, somewhat ill-defined goals. Programme leaders must acknowledge deep uncertainty and hence the likelihood of mistakes and false starts. There must be incentives for the parties with the most detailed and accurate information (typically firms) to look for solutions, which means that public agencies must establish some combination of sticks (the threat of regulation) and carrots (incentives and public inputs).

Since success depends on frequent reassessments and revisions, setting milestones and monitoring progress is crucial. When solutions do emerge, they can be generalized in the form of standards or regulations. Innovation lies at the centre of this process, because higher living standards (including a cleaner environment and better jobs) are possible only through enhanced productivity. This kind of policymaking differs from current approaches. From the experimental-governance perspective, the 'state versus market' dichotomy is simply irrelevant. States and markets are complementary. Economists' standard top-down, principal-agent model of regulation becomes unhelpful. To succeed, a new paradigm like productivism will have to transcend the stale ideologies of the past. Fortunately, the models of governance that it needs already exist, and in abundance. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/use-a-collaborative-governance-model-to-tackle-climate-change-11663086244752.html>