

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (30.11.2022)

1. CAGs of India, Chile sign MoU to support capacity building (thehindubusinessline.com) November 30, 2022

The Comptroller & Auditor General of India and the Comptroller General of the Republic of Chile signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen institutional and professional capacities and learn from each other's best practices. The MoU was signed at the Chilean capital of Santiago on Tuesday.

Both sides agreed to support capacity building and share methodologies in public audit and conduct training programmes in their respective countries under the new agreement.

The agreement was formally signed by Girish Chandra Murmu, Comptroller and Auditor General of India, and Jorge Bermudez Soto, the Comptroller General of the Republic of Chile.

Murmu, who is currently on an official visit to Chile, said that it was the right time to enter into a new phase of collaborative engagement and strengthen bilateral cooperation with Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) Chile. He said that SAI India was committed to working closely with SAI Chile while assuring them of support and commitment to synergise the capacity development initiatives and exchange of knowledge and information.

The MoU reaffirms the values and goals that both the supreme audit institutions have shared over a long period and the strong bond that exists between the two nations, he said.

Murmu said that this development will open up many opportunities for exchange of knowledge and experience between the SAIs and foster new cooperation and friendship between the two SAIs. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/cags-of-india-chile-sign-mou-to-support-capacity-building/article66201808.ece>

2. Pvt Insurers minting money in PM Fasal Bima Yojana (bizzbuzz.news) November 29, 2022

Mumbai: There are lots of irregularities in the ongoing flagship crop insurance programme being run by the central government, alleges Binoy Viswam, who is the Rajya Sabha member and leader of CPI Parliamentary party & Secretary, National Council.

The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), launched as the flagship farm insurance scheme in 2016, was initiated to provide insurance protection to farmers against crop losses due to natural calamities.

In his recent letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Viswam says that in recent years, there have been several reports of irregularities of grave nature committed by private insurance companies in settling insurance claims with farmers. This leads to the conversion of the scheme into a bonanza by the private companies to reap huge profits.

Talking to Bizz Buzz, Viswam said: "Naturally, farmers are denied their rightful protection under the scheme. Over the past five years, both the central government and State governments have contributed almost Rs1.265 lakh crore to the scheme to benefit our farmers. It is shocking

that, as per the available reports, only Rs87,320 crore have been paid to the farmers." According to him, the private sector insurers are able to do all that in connivance with the government.

This staggering data throws light on the handling of the funds of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. While public-sector insurance companies settled 90 per cent of farmers' claims, private sector companies such as Bharti AXA, Reliance General Insurance and Future General India Insurance pocketed enormous profits of nearly Rs39,201 crore without paying farmers their rightful dues. This is a scam of wider magnitude heralded by the corporates, he alleged.

According to him, Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan has already written to the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar regarding the same issue in Odisha.

The Rajya Sabha member urged the Prime Minister to look into this grievous matter and initiate a CAG audit on how farmers are being deprived by the corporates.

"I also request that all those private companies that have defaulted on insurance payments to the farmers be blacklisted. I further request that the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana be entrusted only with the public insurance companies," he said in his letter.

Naturally, the farmers are denied their rightful protection under the scheme. Over the past five years, both the central and State governments have contributed almost Rs1.265 lakh crore to the scheme to benefit our farmers. It is shocking that, as per the available reports, only Rs87,320 crore have been paid to the farmers <https://www.bizzbuzz.news/markets/pvt-insurers-minting-money-in-pm-fasal-bima-yojana-1182604?infinitemscroll=1>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

3. CAG Report: महालेखाकार की रिपोर्ट में खुली पोल, एक ढर्रे पर पंचायतें और निकाय, कर वसूली में भी नाकाम (jagran.com) November 30, 2022

देहरादून: पंचायतीराज संस्थाएं (जिला, क्षेत्र व ग्राम पंचायत) व शहरी नगर निकाय जब-तब बजट का रोना रोते रहते हैं। दूसरी तरफ इनके पास आय अर्जित करने के जो साधन हैं, उनका भी पूरा उपयोग नहीं किया जाता। राजस्व अर्जित करने के लिए पंचायतों व नगर निकायों ने जो कर लागू किए हैं, उनकी तक पूरी वसूली नहीं की जा रही। प्रदेश में 13 जिला पंचायतों में से 11 के करों और किराये में 9.04 करोड़ रुपये की कमी पाई गई है। वहीं, नगर निकायों की गृहकर की वसूली मांग के सापेक्ष 13 से 74 प्रतिशत ही रही है।

पंचायतीराज संस्थाओं व नगर निकायों की यह तस्वीर 31 मार्च 2018 व 2019 में समाप्त हुए वित्तीय वर्ष की लेखापरीक्षा में सामने आई। विधानसभा पटल पर रखी गई प्रधान महालेखाकार (लेखापरीक्षा) की रिपोर्ट में न सिर्फ करों की वसूली में अक्षमता की कहानी बयां की गई है, बल्कि विभिन्न वित्तीय गड़बड़ी को भी इंगित किया गया है।

87 लाख के पर्यटक गृहों से कोई आय नहीं

महालेखाकार की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक, चमोली जिले में वर्ष 2015-16 में 87.52 लाख रुपये से बनाए गए चार पर्यटक गृह अप्रयुक्त पड़े थे और इनसे कोई आय अर्जित नहीं की जा रही थी। चंपावत व चमोली

जिले में पिछड़ा क्षेत्र अनुदान निधि के तहत 8.74 करोड़ रुपये की लागत के 528 कार्य 4.90 करोड़ रुपये खर्च होने के बाद भी अधूरे मिले।

इसी तरह तरह विभिन्न योजनाओं के तहत 24.62 करोड़ रुपये की लागत के 1005 कार्य 17.16 करोड़ रुपये की उपलब्धता के बाद भी लक्ष्य से छह साल पीछे चल रहे थे। यहां तक कि ठेकेदारों से रायल्टी वसूल करने व श्रम उपकर काटे जाने को लेकर भी पंचायतीराज संस्थाएं सुस्त पाई गईं। 18 पंचायतीराज संस्थाओं ने 51.91 लाख रुपये का श्रम उपकर काटा ही नहीं और 10 पंचायतीराज संस्थाओं ने ठेकेदारों के बिलों से 17.31 लाख रुपये की रायल्टी काटने में परहेज दिखाया।

इसके अलावा मार्च 2019 तक 31 पंचायतीराज संस्थाओं ने विभिन्न योजना निधियों से अर्जित 6.40 करोड़ रुपये के ब्याज को संबंधित प्राप्ति शीर्ष (खाते) में जमा ही नहीं कराया। दूसरी तरफ ग्राम पंचायत स्तर पर खातों के रखरखाव आदि में तमाम तरह की अनियमितताएं पाई गईं।

किसी भी नगर निकाय की गृहकर वसूली 90 प्रतिशत से ऊपर नहीं प्रदेश में आठ नगर निगम, 41 नगर पालिका और 43 नगर पंचायतें हैं। गृहकर के रूप में निकायों को अच्छी खासी आय प्राप्त होती है। इसके बाद भी मांग के अनुरूप गृहकर वसूली का आंकड़ा 13 से 74 प्रतिशत के बीच सिमटा है। परीक्षण में शामिल 12 नगर निकायों में से किसी की भी गृहकर वसूली 90 प्रतिशत से अधिक नहीं पाई गई। दूसरी तरफ छह निकायों की वसूली 50 प्रतिशत भी नहीं पाई गई।

इसके अलावा 11 निकाय ऐसे पाए गए, जो दुकानों के किराये के रूप में 2.01 करोड़ रुपये वसूल करने में नाकाम रहे। पंचायतीराज संस्थाओं की भांति शहरी निकायों में भी रायल्टी की कटौती न करने और अनुबंधों पर स्टॉप शुल्क की कमी की बात सामने आई। लेखापरीक्षा में बिना व्यय उपयोगिता प्रमाण पत्र प्रेषित कर देने, लाखों रुपये के निष्फल व्यय व श्रम उपकर की कटौती न करने जैसे मामले भी पकड़ में आए। <https://www.jagran.com/uttarakhand/dehradun-city-principal-accountant-general-report-panchayats-and-civic-bodies-failed-in-tax-collection-23236934.html>

4. उत्तराखंड में बिना काम दिखाया 40 लाख का खर्च, नौ लाख के वाहन जाम (jagran.com) November 30, 2022

देहरादून। नगर निकायों की लेखापरीक्षा रिपोर्ट में विभिन्न तरह की वित्तीय गड़बड़ी भी पकड़ी गई हैं। नगर पालिका परिषद नैनीताल ने बिना काम के 40 लाख रुपये का न सिर्फ खर्च दिखा दिया, बल्कि काम की दूसरी किश्त की मांग भी कर डाली।

महालेखाकार कार्यालय की टीम ने पकड़ा गड़बड़झाला

नगर पालिका नैनीताल को दुर्गा शाह नगर पालिका पुस्तकालय के नवीनीकरण के लिए नवंबर 2015 में 56.41 लाख रुपये स्वीकृत किए गए थे। इसके सापेक्ष काम शुरू करने के लिए प्रथम किश्त के रूप में 40 लाख रुपये जारी कर दिए गए थे। नगर पालिका परिषद ने अप्रैल 2016 में पूरी राशि खर्च करने का जिक्र करते हुए इसका उपयोगिता प्रमाण पत्र भी जारी कर दिया। साथ ही दूसरी किश्त की राशि की मांग भी कर डाली। जब महालेखाकार कार्यालय की टीम ने यह गड़बड़झाला पकड़ा तो अधिकारियों ने कह दिया कि उपयोगिता प्रमाण पत्र गलती से जारी किया गया है। दूसरी तरफ नैनीताल में ही 9.31 लाख रुपये के निष्फल व्यय का मामला भी पकड़ में आया।

पांच साल बाद भी एक किलोमीटर नहीं चले वाहन

जवाहर लाल नेहरू शहरी नवीकरण मिशन के तहत 9.31 लाख रुपये से दो वाहन खरीदे गए थे। ताकि इनका प्रयोग घर-घर कूड़ा उठान से लेकर उसे लैंडफिल साइट में डालने में किया जा सके। यह वाहन जून 2013 में खरीदे गए थे, जबकि लेखापरीक्षा में इनका कोई उपयोग नहीं पाया गया। लेखापरीक्षा टीम की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक, वाहन खरीद के पांच साल बाद भी एक किलोमीटर तक भी उपयोग नहीं किया गया था। वर्तमान में दोनों वाहन खराब हालत में खड़े बताए गए हैं। यह बात भी सामने आई कि लैंडफिल साइट की अनुपलब्धता के चलते वाहनों का प्रयोग नहीं किया जा सका।

इन निकायों में पृथक्करण में मिली अनियमितता

नगर निकाय, कूड़ा (मीट्रिक टन में)

हल्द्वानी, 80

ऋषिकेश, 22

रामनगर, 15.20

विकासनगर, 08

पौड़ी, 08

गोपेश्वर, 05

जोशीमठ, 05

हरबर्टपुर, 04

सुल्तानपुर पट्टी, 03

रुद्रप्रयाग, 2.5

भगवानपुर, 01

153 मीट्रिक टन कचरा बिना पृथक्करण के एकत्रित

लेखापरीक्षा टीम ने पाया कि विभिन्न नगर निकाय ठोस अपशिष्ट नियमावली -2016 का अनुपालन नहीं कर रहे हैं। विशेषकर 11 नगर निकायों में लेखापरीक्षा के दौरान 153 मीट्रिक टन कचरा बिना विज्ञानी पृथक्करण के एकत्रित किया जाता पाया गया। इनमें ठोस अपशिष्ट और लैंडफिल के प्रसंस्करण के लिए उत्तराखंड पर्यावरण संरक्षण और प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड से कोई प्रमाण पत्र भी प्राप्त नहीं पाया गया। <https://www.jagran.com/uttarakhand/dehradun-city-cag-report-40-lakh-spent-without-showing-any-work-in-uttarakhand-23236958.html>

5. उत्तराखंड विधानसभा सत्र: 93 प्रतिशत ग्राम पंचायतें नहीं बना रहीं बजट, कैग रिपोर्ट में खुली पोल (amarujala.com) November 30, 2022

प्रदेश की 93 प्रतिशत ग्राम पंचायतें अपना बजट तैयार नहीं कर पा रही हैं। कैग रिपोर्ट में यह खुलासा हुआ है। इसके अलावा ग्राम पंचायतें ऑडिट आपत्तियों का जवाब देना भी उचित नहीं समझ रही हैं। सदन पटल पर रखी गई पंचायतों की कैग रिपोर्ट में मिला कि वर्ष 2017-19 में पंचायतों की ओर से बिल, भंडार, अग्रिम, अचल संपत्ति पंजिका, मस्टरोल, चेक निर्गत पंजिका का रखरखाव नहीं किया जा रहा है।

इसके कारण ऑडिट में वित्तीय लेन-देन स्पष्ट नहीं हो रहा है। डॉ. एपीजे अब्दुल कलाम ग्राम बदलाव योजना के दिशानिर्देशों के अनुसार किसी भी पंचायत में 2000 तक का नकद भुगतान सिर्फ सामग्री खरीदने और मजदूरी भुगतान की अनुमति है।

वहीं, तकनीकी निरीक्षण में पाया गया कि 14 ग्राम पंचायतों में नियमों का उल्लंघन कर दो करोड़ का नकद भुगतान किया गया। कैग ने पाया कि विकास परियोजनाओं के लिए पंचायतों के पास पर्याप्त धनराशि होने के बावजूद कार्य अधूरे पड़े हैं। छह योजनाओं के लिए 24.62 करोड़ की राशि स्वीकृति की गई थी, जिसमें निर्माण कार्यों के लिए 17.16 करोड़ की राशि जारी की गई थी।

जिला पंचायतों में 47 प्रतिशत पद खाली

प्रदेश के 13 जिला पंचायतों में केंद्रीयकृत और गैर केंद्रीयकृत संवर्ग के 608 स्वीकृत पदों में से 288 पद खाली पड़े हैं। इसके अलावा पंचायतीराज संस्थाओं में 1306 स्वीकृत पदों के सापेक्ष 970 कार्यरत हैं और 336 पद खाली हैं।

176 में 164 पंचायतों के पास कमाई और खर्च का कोई हिसाब नहीं

प्रदेश में 100 में से औसतन 93 पंचायतों के पास कमाई और खर्च का कोई हिसाब नहीं है। योजनाओं की बैंकों जमा धनराशि पर जो ब्याज बना है, उसे पंचायतों ने अपने पास दबा दिया। श्रम उपकर न काटकर ठेकेदारों पर भी कतिपय पंचायतों ने खूब मेहरबानी की है। पंचायतों में व्याप्त ये गड़बड़ियां कैग ने तकनीकी निरीक्षण के दौरान पकड़ी। दर्ज की गई आपत्तियों का जवाब देने में भी पंचायतों ने आनाकानी की। पंचायती राज संस्थाओं व शहरी स्थानीय निकायों पर वार्षिक तकनीकी निरीक्षण प्रतिवेदन के मुताबिक वर्ष 2017-19 के दौरान 176 ग्राम पंचायतों में से 164 ने बिल, भंडार, अग्रिम, अचल संपत्ति पंजिका, मस्टरोल, चेक पंजिका का रखरखाव नहीं किया। इस कारण इन 93 प्रतिशत ग्राम पंचायतों के ऑडिट में उनका वित्तीय लेन-देन स्पष्ट नहीं हो रहा है। वहीं तकनीकी निरीक्षण में पाया गया कि 14 ग्राम पंचायतों में नियमों का उल्लंघन कर 2 करोड़ का नकद भुगतान किया गया।

जिला पंचायतों में 47 प्रतिशत पद खाली

प्रदेश के 13 जिला पंचायतों में केंद्रीयकृत और गैर केंद्रीयकृत संवर्ग के 608 स्वीकृत पदों में से 288 पद खाली पड़े हैं। इसके अलावा पंचायतीराज संस्थाओं में 1306 स्वीकृत पदों के सापेक्ष 970 कार्यरत हैं और 336 पद खाली हैं। <https://www.amarujala.com/dehradun/cag-report-uttarakhand-assembly-session-93-percent-gram-panchayats-not-making-budget?pageId=1>

6. ऐसे कैसे बढ़ेगी पुष्कर सिंह धामी सरकार की आमदनी! कैग रिपोर्ट ने उठाए कई सवाल (livehindustan.com) 29 Nov 2022

उत्तराखंड के शहरी निकाय और पंचायतीराज संस्थाएं आर्थिक प्रबंधन में बुरी तरह फिसड़ती साबित हुए हैं। ऐसेमें अब पुष्कर सिंह धामी सरकार की आमदनी कैसे बढ़ेगी, इसपर भी सवाल खड़ा हो गया है। निकाय से लेकर पंचायत तक टैक्स वसूली में तो पिछड़ी ही हैं, वहीं संसाधनों की बर्बादी खुलेहाथों से की गई।

मंगलवार को विधानसभा के शीतकालीन सत्र के पहले दिन सदन में पेश की गई कैग रिपोर्ट (CAG Report) में इसका खुलासा हुआ है। शहरी निकाय ओल्ड पेशन योजना लागू होने के डेढ़ दशक बाद भी इससे बाहर बने हुए हैं। यह रिपोर्ट वित्तीय वर्ष 2018-19 की है। पंचायतीराज - ठेकेदारों पर दिखाई दरियादिली रिपोर्ट के अनुसार राज्य के 13 में से 11 जिला पंचायतों में सम्मति कर और किराया की वसूली नहीं की गई, नहीं पट्टे से आय का निर्धारण किया गया। इस कारण इन जिला पंचायतों में करों की आय में 9.4 करोड़ रुपए की कमी दर्ज हुई। 18 पंचायती राज संस्थाओं ने ठेकेदारों से 51.91 लाख रुपए का लेबर सेस और 17.31 लाख रुपए की रॉयल्टी भी नहीं वसूली।

वहीं पिछड़ा क्षेत्र अनुदान निधि के तहत चमोली और चम्पावत जिलेमें 8.74 करोड़ की लागत के 528 कार्यकारी पांच करोड़ रुपए खर्च करनेके बाद भी अधूरेपड़े हैं। इसके अलावा एक हजार सेअधिक कार्य 17 करोड़ रुपए का बजट उपलब्ध होनेके बावजूद अधूरेपड़े हुए हैं। इसी तरह चमोली जिलेमें 87.52 लाख रुप की लागत सेबनेचार पर्यटक अतिथि गृहगृ, बिना इस्तेमाल के पड़े हुए हैं। पंचायतों मेंबिल, स्टोर, मस्टररोल और सम्पत्ति रजिस्टर तक नहीं हैं।

बिना उपयोग खराब हो गए वाहन

कैग रिपोर्ट के अनुसार प्रदेश के शहरी निकायों मेंगृहगृ कर की वसूली 13 से 74 प्रतिशत के बीच ही हो पा रहा था। सैम्पल सर्वे मेंशामिल 12 मेंसेछह निकायों मेंगृहगृ कर वसूली पचास प्रतिशत सेकम थी। कोई भी शहरी निकाय 90 प्रतिशत सेअधिक कर वसूली के लक्ष्य को हासिल नहीं कर पाया।

चार निकायों नेदुकान किराया के रूप मेंभी 138 लाख की वसूली लंबित थी। वहीं निकायों पर कर्मचारियों का वेतन पेंशन बकाया के रूप मेंभी 52.88 करोड़ रुपए का बकाया चल रहा है। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार सैम्पल मेंशामिल 15 निकायों नेलागू होने के 12 वर्षबाद भी अंशदायी पेंशन योजना लागू नहीं की है। इस दौरान मंगलौर, नरेंद्र नगर, स्वर्गाश्रम, गोपेश्वर और कोटद्वान ने ठेकेदार से 13.52 लाख की रॉयल्टी भी नहीं वसूली।

नैनीताल नेघर- घर कूड़ा उठान के लिए 9.31 लाख रुपए मेंदो वाहन खरीदे थे, लेकिन उक्त वाहन एक किमी भी नहीं चल पाए। जवाब मेंपालिका नेबताया कि उक्त वाहन, कूड़ा को ट्रंचिंग ग्राउंड तक लेजानेके लिए खरीदे गए थे, लेकिन ट्रंचिंग ग्राउंड पालिका के पास उपलब्ध ही नहीं है। <https://www.livehindustan.com/uttarakhand/story-how-will-income-of-dhamsi-government-increase-like-this-many-questions-raised-in-cag-report-7421857.html>

7. CAG की रिपोर्ट में नगर निकाय व पंचायतों में पायी गयी गड़बड़ी (avikaluttarakhand.com) November 30, 2022

देहरादून। विधानसभा के शीतकालीन सत्र में पंचायती राज संस्थाओं और स्थानीय निकायों से जुड़ी नियंत्रक महालेखा परीक्षक की रिपोर्ट में भारी गड़बड़ी का खुलासा हुआ है। रिपोर्ट से साफ पता चल रहा है कि पंचायतों व नगर निकाय के कार्यों में काफी लापरवाही बरती गई।

निकाय व पंचायतों में राजस्व वसूली में भारी कमी, अपूर्ण निर्माण कार्य में ठेकेदारों को टैक्स में रियायत के मामले पकड़े गए। ब्याज को उचित खाते में नहीं रखा गया। ठेकेदारों की रॉयल्टी से कटौती नहीं की गयी। लाखों रुपये के उपकर की वसूली भी कई सवाल खड़े कर गयी।

निकायों में गृह कर वसूली में लापरवाही, कूड़ा प्रबन्धन, पेंशन, स्टाम्प शुल्क नहीं लिया जाना, वाहन खरीद, ठेकेदारों को छूट देने के मामले सामने आए।

नगरपालिका परिषद नैनीताल ने बिना कोई व्यय किए 40 लाख के उपयोगिता प्रमाण-पत्र भारत सरकार को प्रस्तुत किए। घर घर जाकर कूड़ा उठाने वाले वाहनों का उपयोग ही नहीं किया गया

पंचायती राज संस्थाओं के बाबत रिपोर्ट

मौजूदा समय में 13 जिला पंचायतें, 95 क्षेत्र पंचायत एवं 7,793 ग्राम पंचायतें हैं। पंचायती राज संस्थाओं का समग्र नियंत्रण निदेशक, पंचायती राज संस्था के माध्यम से प्रमुख सचिव/सचिव, पंचायती राज, उत्तराखण्ड शासन में निहित होता है। लेखापरीक्षा के अंतर्गत पंचायती राज संस्थाओं में विषयों के

हस्तान्तरण, आंतरिक लेखापरीक्षा, कम्प्यूटीकरण, रोकड़ बही तैयार करने, अग्रिम रजिस्टर का रख-रखाव और बजट की तैयारी के संबंध में कई कमियाँ पायी गईं।

पंचायतों की ऑडिट रिपोर्ट में यह कमियाँ पायी गयी

11 जिला पंचायतों में वर्तमान प्रावधानों के अनुसार विभव एवं सम्पत्ति कर तथा किराये / पट्टे से आय का निर्धारण एवं वसूली नहीं की जा रही थी। इसके अतिरिक्त, 11 जिला पंचायतों में करों एवं किराए की वसूली में ₹9.04 करोड़ तक की कमी देखी गई।

> पिछड़ा क्षेत्र अनुदान निधि के अंतर्गत, चंपावत एवं चमोली जिलों में ₹8.74 करोड़ की लागत के 528 कार्य, ₹4.90 करोड़ व्यय होने के बाद भी अपूर्ण थे। चमोली जिले में चार पर्यटक अतिथि गृह, जो 2015-16 के दौरान ₹87.52 लाख की लागत से पूर्ण किए गए थे, अप्रयुक्त पड़े थे और कोई राजस्व उत्पन्न नहीं हो रहा था।

18 पंचायती राज संस्थाओं में निर्माण कार्यों के लिए ठेकेदारों के बिलों से ₹51.91 लाख की राशि का श्रम उप-कर नहीं काटा गया था।

छः योजनाओं के अंतर्गत, ₹24.62 करोड़ की लागत के 1,005 कार्य ₹17.16 करोड़ की उपलब्धता के बाद भी अपूर्ण थे।

> मार्च 2019 तक 31 पंचायती राज संस्थाओं में, विभिन्न योजना निधियों पर अर्जित ब्याज ₹6.40 करोड़ को अनियमित रूप से रखा गया था। ब्याज को सुसंगत प्राप्ति शीर्ष में जमा किया जाना था।

10 पंचायती राज संस्थाओं में से आठ ने ठेकेदारों के बिलों से ₹17.31 लाख की रॉयल्टी की कटौती नहीं की थी और शेष दो ने ₹6.30 लाख की रॉयल्टी की कटौती की लेकिन संबंधित लेखा शीर्ष में जमा नहीं की गई।

ग्राम पंचायतों में बैंक समाधान, आन्तरिक लेखापरीक्षा, समितियों एवं उप-समितियों की बैठकों तथा सी ए जी द्वारा प्रस्तावित प्रारूपों में खातों का रखरखाव न करना जैसी सतत अनियमितताएँ थीं।

वर्ष 2017-19 के दौरान, ग्राम पंचायतों में बिल पंजिका, अग्रिम पंजिका, भण्डार पंजिका, अचल संपत्ति पंजिका, मस्टर रोल पंजिका, चैक निर्गत पंजिका और प्राप्ति पंजिका जैसी महत्वपूर्ण पंजिकाओं का रखरखाव नहीं किया जा रहा था। ₹48.17 करोड़ की रिवोल्विंग निधि, जिसका उपयोग जिला पंचायत के कर्मचारियों की सेवानिवृत्ति और पेंशन लाभों के लिए किया जाना था, का अवरोधन था।

शहरी स्थानीय निकायों से जुड़ी ऑडिट रिपोर्ट की गड़बड़ी

उत्तराखण्ड में आठ नगर निगम, 41 नगरपालिका परिषद एवं 43 नगर पंचायत हैं। शहरी स्थानीय निकायों का सम्पूर्ण नियंत्रण निदेशक, शहरी विकास विभाग के माध्यम से प्रमुख सचिव (शहरी विकास) उत्तराखण्ड शासन में निहित होता है। लेखापरीक्षा में शहरी स्थानीय निकायों के क्रियान्वयन में वित्तीय संसाधनों का उपयोग करने संबंधी अपर्याप्त क्षमता, वित्तीय वर्ष के अंत में अव्यथित अवशेष, आदि जैसी कई कमियाँ पायी गईं।

गृह कर का संग्रहण, मांग के सापेक्ष 13 से 74 प्रतिशत के बीच था। 12 में से शहरी स्थानीय निकाय कुल कर मांग के सापेक्ष 50 प्रतिशत गृह कर भी वसूल नहीं कर सकीं। इसके अतिरिक्त, निदेशालय के

निर्देशानुसार, कोई भी शहरी स्थानीय निकाय 2016-17 और 2017-18 के दौरान 90 प्रतिशत से अधिक गृह कर वसूल करने में सक्षम नहीं थी।

31 मार्च 2017 एवं 31 मार्च 2018 को क्रमशः सात एवं चार शहरी स्थानीय निकायों में दुकान किराया प्रभार की ₹138.39 लाख और ₹ 62.52 लाख की वसूली लम्बित थी।

ठोस अपशिष्ट प्रबंधन नियमावली के प्रावधानों का पालन नहीं किया जा रहा था क्योंकि वर्ष 2016-17 एवं 2017-18 के दौरान 11 शहरी स्थानीय निकायों में कम्पोस्ट प्लांट, प्रोसेसिंग कार्यकारी यूनिट एवं वैज्ञानिक लैंडफिल की अनुपलब्धता के कारण ठोस अपशिष्ट का पृथक्करण एवं प्रसंस्करण नहीं हुआ था।

चार शहरी स्थानीय निकायों के अभिलेखों से पता चला कि शहरी स्थानीय निकायों के सेवानिवृत्त सेवारत कर्मचारियों की पेंशन, सेवानिवृत्ति उपदान, भविष्य निधि, अवकाश नकदीकरण और वेतन/ बकाया के प्रति ₹52.88 करोड़ की देयताएं थीं।

नमूना जांच किए गए 15 शहरी स्थानीय निकाय में से किसी ने भी योजना प्रारंभ होने के 12 वर्ष से अधिक समय बीत जाने के बाद भी योजना के प्रावधानों के अनुसार नई अंशदायी पैशन योजना के प्रावधानों को लागू नहीं किया।

वर्ष 2016-18 की अवधि के दौरान, अचल संपत्तियों पर 33.31 लाख के स्टाम्प शुल्क की कम वसूली हुई।

नगरपालिका परिषद मंगलौर, नरेंद्र नगर, पौड़ी, ऋषिकेश, नगर पंचायत स्वर्गाश्रम जौक, नगरपालिका परिषद गोपेश्वर एवं नगर निगम कोटद्वार में निर्माण कार्यों के लिए ठेकेदारों के बिलों से ₹ 13.52 लाख की रॉयल्टी की कटौती नहीं की गई।

नगरपालिका परिषद, नैनीताल में घर-घर जाकर कूड़ा संग्रहण और लैंडफिल तक कचरा परिवहन की सेवाएं देने के लिए ₹9.31 लाख की लागत से दो वाहन खरीदें दोनों वाहन क्रय की तिथि से अनुपयोगी पड़े थे क्योंकि पांच साल बीत जाने के बाद भी उनकर एक किलोमीटर तक भी उपयोग नहीं किया गया था।

नगरपालिका परिषद गोपेश्वर, मसूरी और नगर निगम कोटद्वार में ठेकेदारों के बिलों से उप-कर (एक प्रतिशत) की राशि 6.09 लाख की कटौती नहीं की गई थी।

नगरपालिका परिषद नैनीताल ने बिना कोई व्यय किए 40 लाख के उपयोगिता प्रमाण-पत्र भारत सरकार को प्रस्तुत किए।

CAG ने क्या कहा

भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखापरीक्षक के (कर्तव्य, शक्ति एवं सेवा शर्तें) अधिनियम, 1971 की धारा 20 (1) के अधीन पंचायती राज संस्थाओं एवं शहरी स्थानीय निकायों की लेखापरीक्षा में सहायता एवं तकनीकी मार्गदर्शन के रूप में 31 मार्च 2018 एवं 31 मार्च 2019 को समाप्त हुए वर्ष के लिए यह प्रतिवेदन उत्तराखंड सरकार को प्रस्तुत करने हेतु तैयार किया गया है। प्रतिवेदन में कर्तव्य, शक्तियाँ एवं सेवा शर्तें अधिनियम, 1971 की धारा 14 के अधीन संबन्धित प्रशासनिक विभागों सहित, पंचायती राज संस्थाओं एवं शहरी स्थानीय निकायों के लेखापरीक्षा परिणामों को भी सम्मिलित किया गया है।

वर्ष 2017-18 एवं 2018-19 की अवधि की नमूना लेखापरीक्षा के दौरान संज्ञान में आए मामलों के साथ साथ वे सारे मामले जो पूर्व वर्षों में संज्ञान में आए परंतु जिन्हें पूर्व के प्रतिवेदनों में शामिल नहीं किया जा

सका, इस प्रतिवेदन में, जहां आवश्यक थे, समाहित किए गए हैं। भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखापरीक्षक द्वारा जारी किए गए लेखापरीक्षा मानकों के अनुरूप लेखापरीक्षा संपादित की गयी है। <https://avikaluttarakhand.com/uttarakhand/uttarakhandworrying-cag-report-found-irregularities-in-municipal-bodies-and-panchayats/>

8. कानून विभाग ने दिल्ली सरकार द्वारा रखे गए अधिवक्ताओं के बिलों का भुगतान करने से किया इंकार (bhaskarhindi.com) Nov 30, 2022

दिल्ली सरकार के कानून विभाग ने वित्तीय नियमों का पालन नहीं करने और कानून मंत्री कैलाश गहलोट द्वारा अनुबंधों की शर्तों के उल्लंघन के कारण लाखों रुपये के वकीलों द्वारा प्रस्तुत कई बिलों का भुगतान करने से इनकार कर दिया है। सूत्रों ने यह जानकारी दी।

कानून विभाग के एक सूत्र ने मंगलवार को कहा कि यह स्पष्ट प्रतीत होता है कि गहलोट ने ऐसे मामलों में पालन किए जाने वाले नियमों की पूरी जानकारी में ऐसा किया और जानबूझकर भुगतान न करने के इरादे से इसका उल्लंघन किया और इसके बजाय कानून विभाग को दोषी ठहराया।

सूत्र ने कहा, आखिरकार सरकार का कोई भी अधिकारी सीएजी द्वारा प्रतिकूल ऑडिट पैरा लागू करने के डर से अवैध वित्तीय भुगतान को माफ नहीं करेगा, जिसके कारण अक्सर एजेंसियों द्वारा जांच की जाती है और अधिकारियों का उत्पीड़न होता है।

कई अन्य लोगों में, वरिष्ठ अधिवक्ता कपिल सिब्बल द्वारा पेश किए गए 15,50,000 रुपये के बिल, और एक अन्य वरिष्ठ अधिवक्ता राहुल मेहरा द्वारा पेश किए गए 9,80,000 रुपये के बिलों को कानून विभाग द्वारा वरिष्ठ अधिवक्ताओं और एडवोकेट्स ऑन रिकॉर्ड (एओआर) की नियुक्ति के लिए आम आदमी पार्टी (आप) सरकार द्वारा बनाए गए नियमों से घोर विचलन का हवाला देते हुए खारिज कर दिया।

कानून विभाग कपिल सिब्बल और राहुल मेहरा और एओआर ज्योति मेंदिरत्ता और सुधांशु पाधी की विभिन्न मामलों में नियुक्ति के लिए भी सहमत नहीं है। सूत्रों ने कहा- गहलोट ने पूरी तरह से धोखा देकर और नियमों का उल्लंघन करते हुए ऐसा किया, जिसके लिए कानून विभाग द्वारा फाइल पर प्रस्ताव को कानून मंत्री की मंजूरी के लिए एक अधिवक्ता को नियुक्त करने से पहले अनिवार्य रूप से वित्त विभाग की सहमति की आवश्यकता होती है, जो निपटान के लिए लंबित कई अन्य विधेयकों पर भी प्रश्न चिह्न लगाता है।

प्रधान सचिव (कानून) ने कानून मंत्री, मुख्यमंत्री अरविंद केजरीवाल और उपराज्यपाल वी.के. सक्सेना को जीएनसीटी ऑफ बिजनेस ऑफ दिल्ली रूल्स (टीओबीआर) के नियम 57 के तहत नियमों के उल्लंघन को देखते हुए बिलों पर कार्रवाई करने में विभाग की अक्षमता की सूचना दी। गोविंद स्वरूप चतुवेर्दी बनाम एनसीटी ऑफ दिल्ली और अन्य के मामले में 28 मई, 2021 को एक गैर-आधिकारिक नोट के माध्यम से गहलोट द्वारा राहुल मेहरा से सीधे संपर्क किया गया था, जो केवल दिल्ली के मतदाता पहचान पत्र वाले अधिवक्ताओं को बीमा लाभ प्रदान करने वाली आप सरकार की योजना से संबंधित है।

इसी तरह, कपिल सिब्बल को गहलोट ने 23 अक्टूबर, 2018 के एक गैर-आधिकारिक आदेश के माध्यम से दिल्ली उच्च न्यायालय में डब्ल्यू(सी) 10494/2018 के मामले में लगाया था। यह मामला एक स्वतः संज्ञान रिट याचिका से संबंधित है, जिसमें उच्च न्यायालय द्वारा इस आशय के निर्देश के बावजूद, राष्ट्रीय राजधानी में विभिन्न पारिवारिक अदालतों में पीठासीन अधिकारियों की नियुक्ति नहीं होने का मामला अदालत ने उठाया था।

सूत्र ने कहा कि सिब्लल ने बिल को सीधे गहलोट को सौंप दिया था, जो निर्धारित प्रक्रिया का घोर उल्लंघन है। सर्वोच्च न्यायालय और उच्च न्यायालय में सरकार की ओर से वरिष्ठ अधिवक्ताओं को नियुक्त करने और भुगतान करने के मामले में निर्धारित प्रक्रिया में अधिवक्ताओं को उनकी नियुक्ति से पहले देय राशि का निर्धारण और फिर वित्त विभाग द्वारा स्वीकृत राशि प्राप्त करना शामिल है। उसके बाद ही फाइल पर कानून मंत्री की मंजूरी लेने के बाद ही किसी व्यक्ति को नियुक्त किया जा सकता है, जिसे एलजी द्वारा अग्रिम रूप से अनुमोदित किया जाता है। <https://www.bhaskarhindi.com/state/news/law-department-refuses-to-pay-bills-of-advocates-hired-by-delhi-government-431079>

9. State government defaults on deposit with national security deposit (NSD)/ Trustee Bank money collected from contribution of employees to NPS (tripurainfo.com) November 29, 2022

Agartala: In yet another glaring financial irregularity the state government has defaulted on depositing with the national security deposit/Trustee Bank the amount of money deducted from salaries of employees and officer towards contribution to the national pension scheme (NPS) , introduced in the state since July 2018 but actually in force from 2004 at the central level. This has cast a shadow of uncertainty over the post-retirement pension of employees and officers.

According to latest report of the CAG the state is yet to deposit 30% of dues on this head with the NSD, Trustee bank even after monthly deduction every month. Even though the default is considered by CAG as debt of the state government, failure to deposit the amount on time will lead to loss of interest and erosion of gain from pension of the employees and officers when they go on retirement. Despite the central law in force since 2004 the previous left front government of the state did not implement this in the interest of employees and officers. But shortly after coming to power the BJP-IPFT government introduced the NPS from July 2018 . According to the scheme 10% of the basic pay plus DA is deducted from the salaries of the employees and officers and the state government contributes the same amount for depositing with the NSD/Trustee bank.

The post-retirement pension under the scheme is beset by uncertainty because the NSD/Trustee bank invest the total amount in share market and capital market for return but what will happen in case there is a collapse of the share market or capital market is not clear . The pension of the retiring employees and officers will depend on the buoyancy of the market though the retiring employees and officers are due to get 60% of the amount deposited with interest at the time of retirement with the rest of the due pension still in the realm of uncertainty. Sources in the administration said that the government will deposit the entire arrear amount with interest and the employees and officers will not actually lose any thing but doubts asnd misgivings in the minds of employees and officers still persist. <https://tripurainfo.com/news.aspx?intnid=15891&title=State-government-defaults-on-deposit-with-national-security-deposit-NSD--Trustee-Bank-money-collected-from-contribution-of-employees-to-NPS>

10. PAG, organises ‘singing competition’ (nagalandpost.com) November 30, 2022

On the occasion of “Audit Diwas” observed by the Comptroller & Auditor General of India on November 16 each year, the office of the Principal Accountant General (PAG), Nagaland organised an inter-college “Duet singing competition” for colleges located in and around Kohima on November 23 in the State Academy Hall. In a press release, Accountant General,

Nagaland, sr. deputy accountant general (A&E) informed that the competition was in both the languages-Hindi and English.

The judges for the competition were Nagaland college of music and fine arts, adjunct faculty, Ameu Usou Zao; department of botany, Kohima Science College, assistant professor, Dr. Wenyitso Kapfo, and All India Radio senior announcer, Temjentiba. <https://nagalandpost.com/index.php/pag-organises-singing-competition/>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

11. Why a return to Old Pension Scheme will be a disaster (*livemint.com*) Updated: Nov 30, 2022

Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party, which is trying to dislodge Gujarat's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in the upcoming assembly elections, has promised to bring back the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) for government employees in the state. Punjab, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh which are ruled by non-BJP governments are already working on a return to OPS, which assures fixed pension. But India needs the National Pension System (NPS), which was launched in 2004. Not only can it deepen the equity market culture in India, investing in sound, fast-growing businesses and creating wealth, it also eases the burden on the Centre and the states. In some ways, the NPS is like a giant mutual fund. OPS, on the other hand, will eat into the revenue of states and is unsustainable over the long run.

1. How NPS creates wealth

Stocks are the best value-creators over the long term, more so in rapidly growing economies like India. However, in India, the equity market evolution is still in its infancy, with less than 3% of the population having direct exposure to stocks or mutual funds. Contrast this with the US where almost half the population (46%) invests in mutual funds. The NPS collects and pours thousands of crores of rupees from subscribers into equities. The NPS gives many more Indians exposure to the secondary and even primary markets. Between 50% (for government employees) to 75% (for private employees) of an NPS portfolio can be invested in shares, deepening the stock market culture and creating wealth for investors. Legendary investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala had predicted that the Nifty would cross 100,000 by 2030 (It's below 19,000 right now). In some ways, the NPS is like a mutual fund though it is less liquid and more risk-averse, with a lock-in period till retirement. It's regulated by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority while mutual funds come under the purview of Sebi.

Meanwhile, the OPS guarantees a pension payout, pegged at 50% of the basic pay at retirement, plus dearness allowance. There's no deduction from salaries for pensions, with taxpayers' money funding the OPS. This is clearly a big financial liability for states.

2. Slow, steady and systematic

The NPS can be thought of as a systematic investment plan (SIP) in equities and debt for millions of Indians. Currently, NPS has over 53 million subscribers contributing 10% of their basic salary, and the employers contributing 14%. It means regular savings in the most rewarding assets, managed by some of India's best fund managers, from Aditya Birla Sun Life Pension Management to HDFC Pension Management and LIC Pension Fund. A steady

contribution to the NPS every year can be equivalent to SIPs over decades across asset classes, predominantly equities.

SIPs are considered the best way to invest in the equity markets. For most investors, it means buying stocks over a period of time, through bull runs and bear hugs, ensuring they make the most of a long-term uptrend in stocks. In fact, government and private sector employees can invest across asset classes through the NPS, from equities and corporate bonds to government securities and alternative assets.

3. NPS is not just social welfarism

NPS can help catalyze economic growth over the next few decades. Most of NPS money will find its way into equities, capitalizing and supporting the valuations of sound and fast-growing businesses. Remember, India's stock market has nurtured some of its marquee corporates over the decades, from Reliance Industries to Infosys, helping them scale up and gain heft through IPOs and follow-on offers. These fast-expanding companies have created millions of jobs as well. Indeed, NPS, in some ways, ensures an egalitarian, equitable distribution of stock-market wealth. In contrast, the OPS saps resources of the Centre and state governments, eating into their revenues without necessarily yielding long-term productive investments.

4. OPS can bankrupt Centre, states

It's true that India seems to have a demographic dividend at the moment, with half of its population below 30. But India is also ageing rapidly. The share of elderly in the population is expected to rise from 8.6% (as per 2011 census) to 12.5% by 2030, reaching 20% by 2050, and over 25% by 2061. India will add 320 million people to its 60-plus population over the next 50 years. In this context, a guaranteed pension scheme can bankrupt the Centre and states. Between 1990-91 and 2020-21, the pension bill of the Centre has soared 58 times to ₹1.9 trillion. For states, the figure was 3.8 trillion in the same period, surging 125 times — clearly unsustainable numbers.

5. The global experience too is instructive

Remember how spiralling pension payments bankrupted Greece? It triggered the eurozone debt crisis and subsequent austerity measures forced Greece into a recession. In India, many states face a mountain of debt and can't afford unchecked social welfarism. An OPS is essentially a freebie which can ravage the balance sheet of states. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/mint-explainer-why-a-return-to-old-pension-scheme-will-be-a-disaster-11669724432542.html>

12. Budget 2023: How the finance ministry can kill many birds with one stone (*business-standard.com*) November 30, 2022

A Business Standard report says: "The Union government could target a fiscal deficit of 5.8-6 per cent of nominal GDP for 2023-24, and it should continue its capital expenditure push and look to simplify the personal income tax regime, economists recommended Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her team during their pre-Budget interaction on Monday."

The report doesn't say what the economists said about how this was to be achieved if, simultaneously, welfare spending would also need to be increased in a pre-election year. The next general election is due in April-May 2024.

Some questions arise from this annual interaction, which started about 40 years ago. Originally, it was a genuine brainstorming session, but by the mid-1980s, it had become an unwelcome ritual for the ministry.

Apparently, the finance minister has already had eight pre-Budget consultations this year.

"More than 110 invitees representing seven stakeholder groups participated in these meetings... The stakeholder groups included representatives and experts from agriculture and agro-processing industry; industry, infrastructure & climate change; financial sector and capital markets; services and trade; social sector; trade unions and labour organisations; and economists."

But do these consultations serve any purpose? A finance minister once told me he used the time spent at these meetings to clear long pending files, slowly, one at a time. Everyone thought he was taking detailed notes.

I asked him why he didn't just take written submissions. He asked me, "Kaun padhega?" (Who will read). Then he added that it was a good PR exercise.

But that was more than three decades ago, and both the brainstorming and the PR aspect have long since become a thing of the past. These pre-Budget meetings that finance ministers hold with industry bodies (who also send in written submissions), economists and other noisy people like journalists outlived their usefulness in the mid-1990s, and they can be safely discontinued.

That said, the substantive question arising from this year's meeting with the economists remains: how can the government increase welfare and investment spending and simultaneously reduce the deficit?

The obvious answer is by increasing revenue. But that also leads to the obvious question, how? And more importantly, if revenue increases, how will it be distributed between investment and welfare? Which of these two will be the residual element?

Ideally, investment must get the lion's share, and welfare should get the residual amount. But since 1995, it's been the other way around. This was understandable when there were coalition governments. The proportion has varied slightly since then, but welfare has always trumped investment because it translates into votes. It's a major reason for the usual slow pace of growth of the Indian economy.

My solution to the problem of welfare versus investment is to shift welfare spending into the capital spending account, saying it is an investment in social capital. After all, better nutrition, health and education are as important as any physical stuff.

I remember once the government announced a 40 per cent increase in expenditure on agriculture by precisely this shuffling. If the traditional standards had measured the increase, it was less than 10 per cent. The beauty was that all the items counted under agriculture should have been there from the start.

This is not very hard to do, either. The finance ministry's budget division can achieve it quite easily, thus killing several birds with one stone. The economists will be happy. The minister will be happy. And the rest of the government will be satisfied, too, because, remember, this is the last Budget before her next general election. https://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/budget-2023-how-the-finance-ministry-can-kill-many-birds-with-one-stone-122113000533_1.html

13. Extend PM-JAY health cover to the “missing middle”: NK Singh (*financialexpress.com*) November 30, 2022

Ahead of the Budget for 2023-24, 15th Finance Commission chairman N K Singh on Tuesday suggested a slew of measures for the health sector, such as the inclusion of middle-class households in the flagship Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) scheme, a Uniform Health Code and a dedicated financial institution for the sector.

To realise the potential growth in the health sector and to provide for universal health coverage, Singh said health needs to be shifted to the Concurrent List of the Constitution from the State List to help develop cohesive national policies for the development of the sector and boost health expenditure to 2.5% of GDP by 2025 from around 1% now.

“The PMJAY was an enormously positive development. But, universalisation of health insurance will be of great value in addressing what people call the ‘missing middle’; not rich enough to take private insurance, not poor enough to qualify otherwise,” Singh said speaking at industry body CII’s Health Summit here.

According to a Niti Aayog report unveiled in October 2021, at least 30% of the population, or 400 million individuals – called the missing middle in this report – are devoid of any financial protection for health. The PMJAY launched in September 2018, and State Government extension schemes, provide comprehensive hospitalization cover to the bottom 50% of the population or around 700 million individuals. Around 20% of the population or 250 million individuals – are covered through social health insurance, and private voluntary health insurance.

PM-JAY offers Rs 5-lakh-a-year free health cover to 107 million poor households (accounting for 40% of the population). Given that the upcoming Budget will focus on social sector issues, the government will likely extend the PM-JAY health cover for a nominal fee to the middle class families to help protect them from health-related expenditure shocks, sources had told FE earlier.

It is crucial to regulate the health sector to ensure the quality, standard of care and the assessment of service providers and hospitals for holding them accountable. “Just like in the case of the Securities Market Code announced in the last Budget, I am beginning to wonder, why can’t we have a uniform health code which will make an enormous difference to pharmacology, dentistry and some of the other things which are suffering from a myriad of conflicting regulations (of the Centre and states)?”

Judging from what happened in the Covid pandemic, Singh said health should be made part of the Concurrent List of the Constitution, which will enable many of these harmonizations of laws and many of the uniform standards to evolve.

Singh said there is no getting away from the fact that public outlays in the health sector need to be substantially augmented to reach 2.5% GDP by 2025. The public expenditure (30% by the Union and 70% by states combined) on health as a percentage of GDP in India has been around 1% of GDP whereas, much below the global peers. States, except Meghalaya, are spending less than 8% (a reasonable level) of their budget on the health sector, with the average being 5.18% in 2018–19.

There was a need to set up a dedicated development financial institution, which would facilitate access to requisite finances for the private sector to harness the enormous opportunities in this area, Singh said referring to the fact that similar financial institutions have been set up for housing, agriculture and even tourism.

Singh also said there was a case for constituting an All-India Medical and Health Service, as envisaged under Section 2A of the All-India Services Act, 195, for better administration of the sector.

Among others, he said the MBBS curriculum needs restructuring, making it competency-based. The asymmetry in the distribution of medical colleges in different parts of the country needs to be addressed.

What Singh Says:

Need a Uniform Health Code to harmonise, rationalise and streamline the multiplicity of Acts and regulations between Centre and States

Bring health into the Concurrent List of the 7th Schedule of the Constitution to make the Centre's intervention more meaningful

Need a development financial institution for the health sector to facilitate access to finances for the private sector

Set up All India Medical and Health Service for better administration of the health sector in the country. <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/extend-pm-jay-health-cover-to-the-missing-middle-nk-singh/2895937/>

14. Purchases via GeM portal exceed Rs 1 trillion so far in FY23 ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) November 30, 2022

Purchases of goods and services through the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal have exceeded Rs 1 trillion so far this fiscal, setting a fresh record on greater adoption of the online marketplace by central government ministries, departments, states and public-sector enterprises.

The public procurement through GeM stood at Rs 1.07 trillion in the entire FY22. Before that, purchases through the portal had breached the Rs 1-trillion mark in as many as four-and-a-half years.

GeM chief executive PK Singh said, "Our target for this fiscal was Rs 1.5 trillion but going by the trend we may reach Rs 1.80 trillion." Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh were the leading states that have scaled up purchases through GeM.

The GeM portal was launched in August 2016, as the Centre wanted to improve transparency in purchases of various goods and services by all the central government ministries, departments and public-sector firms and state governments, apart from providing a new-age platform for official procurement. While buyers are official entities, sellers – ranging from small business to large companies – are from both public and private sectors.

In July, the government also asked all its ministries and departments and central public-sector enterprises (CPSEs) to undertake all purchases through the GeM by the end of this fiscal. This directive has also contributed to the rise in procurement. <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/purchases-via-gem-portal-exceed-rs-1-trillion-so-far-in-fy23/2896065/>

15. Personal tax regime needs complete overhaul, says outgoing revenue secretary Tarun Bajaj (*financialexpress.com*) November 30, 2022

Indicating that the government is considering tax reforms as an unfinished agenda, outgoing revenue secretary Tarun Bajaj told FE on Tuesday that personal income tax regime required nothing short of a “complete overhaul”. Although the official said that his view was independent of the preparations under way for Budget FY24, he iterated that there was also a pressing need to align the capital gains’ tax rates and holding periods across asset classes to minimise the room for market-distorting tax arbitrage amongst products.

The broad direction, the official said, should be to ensure gains for most categories of individual taxpayers, and at the same time improve revenue buoyancy with a larger tax base and increased compliance. He cited the strong growth in corporate tax collections over the last couple of years despite the sharp tax cuts in September 2019 to drive home the point that lower rates actually bolster government revenue.

Bajaj said in personal income tax, minimal exemptions should be given and the tax brackets should be expanded. “For instance, the tax bracket (for 20% tax) can be from `5 lakh-15 lakh instead of `5 lakh-10 lakh. This can be a revenue-neutral exercise and the regime will be simpler,” the official, who will demit office on Wednesday, said.

He also said while certain exemptions such as insurance premium for senior citizens would still be needed, most such concessions could go. “Small savings give better interest rates and tax exemption also,” he noted, hinting that both of these benefits might not need to co-exist.

The Union Budget 2020-21 introduced a simplified personal income tax regime, where the tax rates are significantly lower for the individual taxpayers, if they choose to forgo certain deductions and exemptions. The optional regime, however, has found few takers – less than 1% of the taxpayers who filed returns through the Clear portal this year opted for this regime. Indications are that this regime will be done away with in the coming Budget.

In the older regime, however, some 70-odd deductions and exemptions are allowed such as standard deduction, the exemption for house rent allowance, leave travel allowance, deductions under Section 80C etc. In this regime, the tax rate moves rather steeply from 5% for income of Rs 2.5-5 lakh to 20% for Rs 5-10 lakh and 30% for above Rs 15 lakh.

Similarly, the capital gains tax regime can also be simplified, he said. “(Currently), there are various buckets, time periods, different tax rates and indexation,” Bajaj said, noting that it

should be looked into whether these could be changed to lesser number of buckets and time periods and similar kind of tax rates.

At present, the long term capital gains tax is more benign on listed shares. Other assets such as unlisted securities and real estate, however, attract higher rates and taxpayers need to hold on to them for longer period to avoid paying the higher rate of tax for shorter holdings. Bajaj also noted that tax reforms should be aimed at a simple tax regime so that litigation is reduced. “The atmosphere should be conducive. In case there are violations in our system and if they (who flout norms) want to come back into the mainstream and pay their taxes and penalty, we should allow that,” he said. The updated tax return is an example of this, Bajaj said, adding that the taxpayer here gets a chance to file an updated return and pay more taxes. <https://www.financialexpress.com/money/income-tax/personal-tax-regime-needs-complete-overhaul-says-outgoing-revenue-secretary-tarun-bajaj/2896126/>

16. Climate change, the biggest threat to global food security (timesofindia.indiatimes.com) November 30, 2022

Recently, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed warned that the world is facing an unprecedented hunger crisis as global hunger is on the rise, reversing decades of progress. The United Nations called out climate change, extreme weather events, conflicts and economic downturns are the key factors driving growing food insecurity. The past month has seen a heatwave in Europe that has caused record-breaking temperatures, heat-related deaths and raging wildfires from Portugal to the Balkans. The UK recorded an unprecedented 40.2° Celsius at Heathrow Airport and a red heat warning for the first time ever. It has been a similar situation in the US with unprecedented levels of heat across many areas of the country and some of the most severe wildfires in the US in recent history.

As we all know, the earth’s population is rapidly rising and is expected to touch almost 10 billion by 2050, requiring us to double food production in the next few decades. However, agriculture’s great vulnerability to climate change makes this a critical challenge. In fact, agriculture is a unique sector in the context of the environment, because while it is heavily impacted by the increasing pace of climate change, it is itself one of the major contributors to the problem. Why does this have huge implications for our planet?

Increased temperatures, weather variability, invasive crops and pests, and more frequent extreme weather events have all had detrimental effects on farming – from diminishing agricultural yields, to weakening the nutritional quality of produce on farms, to reducing farmer incomes. So, feeding an ever-increasing global population while decreasing environmental impact and maintaining natural resources for future generations is a key problem. Balancing food security and environmental sustainability is the need of the hour. This is a challenge that needs the world’s attention immediately.

The solution lies in a set of practices for farming collectively termed Climate-smart Agriculture (CSA). What does this entail? It is an integrated approach to managing landscapes, including crops, livestock, forests and fisheries, which addresses the interlinked challenges of food security and accelerating climate change. It seeks to achieve several important goals at once – increased productivity in agriculture, enhanced resilience to weather events and other challenges, increased carbon sequestration, and reduced emissions. It is a system powered by technology, digitization and data, and provides a comprehensive, environment-friendly approach to farming.

Some examples of Climate-smart Agriculture practices include:

-Using digitization, data and technology, farmers can select the right crops and seeds, the right time for sowing and harvesting, the optimal use of water resources and adoption of the right farming practices. Steps such as these can help address, and even reverse, the adverse effects of climate change.

-Constant monitoring of soil conditions, water availability and weather conditions can help farmers choose climate-resilient crops during extreme weather conditions.

-Using real-time data from satellite imagery and on-field IoT devices, farmers can identify over-irrigated or under-irrigated regions and take effective measures to manage optimal irrigation schedules, resulting in higher yield and quality while reducing input costs.

-Farmers can be encouraged and incentivized to adopt regenerative farming practices such as carbon farming and carbon sequestration, which help in long-term storage of atmospheric carbon in soil, plants, and micro-organisms.

-Agri-ecosystem stakeholders, including food value chain players, industries and governments, can come together to create carbon-credit models and encourage net-zero carbon farming to incentivize farmers to adopt climate-smart practices.

The unfortunate truth is that the legacy practices much of the world currently uses to cultivate and manage our land account for roughly a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions. This is the environmental impact of agriculture conducted in the present traditional way. Without immediate course correction at scale, this will have a catastrophic impact on food security in the future. Just for example, the global yield of vegetables and legumes is expected to drop by ~35% by 2100 due to water scarcity and increase in salinity, according to an industry report.

The good news is that global agriculture is probably the only sector that can be a net-zero emissions sector, and it is our collective responsibility to make that happen. It is imperative that governments and private sector entities join hands to incentivize CSA for stakeholders in the agriculture industry. The other fact to note is that the technology to enable CSA already exists and there are proven solutions that have been leveraging digitization and AI at scale to help farming become more efficient, productive – and most importantly – sustainable.

The first step would be to bridge the knowledge gap among farmers and various stakeholders in the agriculture ecosystem by providing clarity on CSA terminology, components and relevant issues and contextualizing them to regional cultural conditions. We also need to invest in research programs that develop climate-smart technologies, management methods and early warning systems, among other things. Supporting enabling policies and governmental incentives are other key measures to incentivize the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices. Climate change is a real and tangible threat to our existence, and it will take nothing short of a united effort to combat it and create a better life for us all. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/climate-change-the-biggest-threat-to-global-food-security/>

17. UN publishes flagship report on climate change impacting water resources ([hindustantimes.com](https://www.hindustantimes.com)) November 30, 2022

A United Nations report called ‘State of Global Water Resources 2021’ - a first of its kind launched Tuesday has underlined concerns about the effects of climate change on Earth’s already stressed water resources. The report published by the UN body - the World Meteorological Organisation, is expected to shed light on better monitoring and management of water resources. The flagship report is an overview of the status of water resources in each basin compared to the 30-year hydrological average of that basin.

5 points on the first annual ‘State of Global Water Resources’ report:

1) Extreme droughts and floods are visible consequences of climate change, felt through waters. The report highlights several places that reported either too little or too much rainfall including neighbouring country Pakistan which recorded the worst floods in a decade.

“The impacts of climate change are often felt through water – more intense and frequent droughts, more extreme flooding, more erratic seasonal rainfall and accelerated melting of glaciers – with cascading effects on economies, ecosystems and all aspects of our daily lives. And yet, there is insufficient understanding of changes in the distribution, quantity, and quality of freshwater resources,” said WMO Secretary-General Prof. Petteri Taalas.

2) India also faced extreme events in 2021, mostly due to heavy rainfall. The report says a total of 762 casualties were reported in India, with Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Uttarakhand states being the most affected states due to extreme weather events.

3) Constrained by growing demands and limited supplies, the current pace of managing water resources has left 3.5 billion with inadequate water access for at least one month per year. The UN states in its report that this number is expected to increase to 5 billion by 2050.

4) The report cites data by UN-Water which said between 2001 and 2018, 74% of all-natural disasters were water-related, a concerning revelation that stresses the need to integrate water into adaptation efforts.

5) The report estimates that about 1.9 billion people live in areas where the cryosphere - glaciers and ice caps, etc are available sources of freshwater. Melting glaciers, tropical cyclones, super typhoons, regional prolonged droughts, and hurricanes are occurring with increased intensity. Disturbance in hydrological cycles has left global food security management in a vulnerable state, the report warns. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/environment/un-publishes-flagship-report-on-climate-change-impacting-water-resources-5-points-101669785114637.html>.

18. Money to fight climate change: Are taxes the answer? ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) November 30, 2022

As the world struggles to check rising global temperatures, it is getting increasingly clear that the single-biggest challenge in putting up an effective response to climate change is the failure to mobilise adequate financial resources. The money currently being channelised for climate action is barely one to 10per cent of the estimated requirements.

At the recently concluded climate change meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, countries agreed that a complete transformation of the international financial system was needed to significantly scale up resources for climate action. Accordingly, the meeting called upon the multilateral development banks, lending agencies and other financial institutions to align their priorities with the global climate goals, and redesign their structures and processes.

Enormity of the problem

The final Sharm el-Sheikh agreement includes an estimate of the scale of money required. It says that the global transition to a low-carbon economy would likely require about US\$ 4-6 trillion every year till 2050. About US\$ 4 trillion would need to be invested annually in the renewable energy sector till 2030 if the net-zero emissions targets were to be achieved. The cumulative requirement of the developing countries, just for implementing their climate action plans, was about US\$ 6 trillion between now and 2030.

Of course, these are not mutually exclusive requirements. There would be considerable overlap. But even US\$ 5-7 trillion every year is a huge ask. It means that at least five per cent of the global GDP would need to be directed into climate action every year. It also shows how quickly the cost of inaction has been rising. Just a few years ago, the estimated requirements ranged between 1 and 1.5 per cent of global GDP.

The current requirements are, therefore, about two orders of magnitude higher than the money being made available. The US\$ 100 billion amount that the developed countries have promised to mobilise every year represents practically the entire money in play right now. And even this US\$ 100 billion has not yet been fully realised. Developed countries say they would reach this target by 2023. As of now, all that is flowing in is about US\$ 50-80 billion every year.

Overhaul of financial system

There are two main dimensions to the problem of climate finance — availability and access. The transformation of the financial sector needs to address both of these.

One straightforward way of ensuring funds is for the developed countries to increase their contributions. But even if this happens, it will likely result in only a marginal increase in the overall pie. The more significant jump would come from businesses and corporations investing money into green projects.

In social or health sector projects, every dollar of public money invested is expected to mobilise about four dollars in private money. In climate finance thus far, private investments have lagged behind public money. Barely 30 per cent of current financial flows are coming from private sources. There is a clear opportunity here.

But businesses and corporations do not invest unless they are reasonably sure of healthy returns. It is here that the international financial institutions can engage with governments, central banks, commercial banks and other financial players operating at national or regional levels to create the right environment for investments in green projects. Incentivising climate-friendly investments and discouraging, or even penalising, dirty investments would be at the heart of this approach.

The current rules and regulations of the global financial system make it extremely difficult for large number of countries to access international finance, particularly those with political instabilities, or weaker institutional and governance structures. The transformation would,

therefore, also involve simplification of practices, changes in the way risks to investments are assessed, and an overhaul of the credit rating systems.

Besides availability and access, there is a third element as well — transparency. Climate finance flows through a maze of channels — bilateral, regional, multilateral. It is in the form of grants, concessionary loans, debt, equity, carbon credits, and more. There are differences of opinion over whether a particular sum of money is actually climate-related. As a result, there are widely differing assessments of the quantum of climate finance currently being mobilised. This needs to be addressed.

Where will the new money come from?

Whether we like it or not, bulk of the additional financial resources to fight climate change would come from the pockets of the common citizen. There already are growing number of voices calling for an early fixing of carbon price, so that the carbon markets can start functioning quickly.

Invariably, this would, sooner or later, also result in different types of carbon taxes, even at the consumer level. The use of petrol and diesel, and other fossil fuels is almost surely going to be taxed. The production of coal is already being taxed for several years in India, and it has been generating valuable resources for the government, which has utilised it mainly for investing in clean technologies. These funds have also been utilised for works in the Clean Ganga Mission and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Newer forms of carbon tax are likely to be imposed on businesses as well. In many cases, these would filter down to the common person.

Many more innovative sources of money would have to be explored. For example, the efforts to prevent urban flooding in a city like Mumbai or Bengaluru can seek financial participation of the corporate houses who suffer losses because of damage to their assets or disruptions in activities. As of now, it is the job of the government to build resilient infrastructure or early warning systems. But very soon, it would make sense for the corporates to join hands and facilitate these processes. Bankers who have lent money to build up corporate assets, or the insurers of those assets, would have an interest in pushing businesses into doing so. It is likely that more climate money would be raised locally, rather than sourced from outside.

More money is flowing into the green economy than a few years ago, but the pace of increase is nowhere adequate. Unfortunately, when it comes to climate action, the other thing in short supply, besides money, is time. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/cop27-climate-change-funds-taxes-8297177/>

19. Data Protection Bill still has loose ends ([thehindubusinessline.com](https://www.thehindubusinessline.com)) November 29, 2022

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) recently published the draft Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 (DPDPB 2022) and invited comments on the same three-and-a-half-months after the withdrawal of PDP Bill 2019 from Parliament in August 2022.

Hence, it is useful to analyse the past, the pivot, the process of consultation, the principles, the procedure for grievance redressal, and the powers with the government before making a proposal.

Since the nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court had upheld the right to privacy as a fundamental right in 2017, five different documents on data protection law have been placed in the public domain time in as many years.

First, a committee of experts chaired by Justice BN Srikrishna published a white paper seeking comments in 2017. Second, it submitted its report and draft Data Protection Bill, 2018 (DPB 2018) to the government. Third, after inviting comments on the DPB 2018, the government introduced the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 (PDPB 2019) in Parliament and the same was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). Fourth, the JPC report including numerous amendments was tabled in 2021 after two years of deliberations. Fifth is of course, the DPDPB 2022.

However, it is a misconception that the discussions on privacy law in India began only after the 2017 privacy judgment that had emanated from a public interest litigation challenging constitutional validity of Aadhaar.

When the government set up the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) in 2009, privacy concerns were voiced afresh notwithstanding that in 2008 itself, some provisions pertaining to personal data protection had been included (by way of the 2008 amendments to the Information Technology Act, 2000).

To its credit, the government commenced consultations for a privacy law in 2010 even before the first Aadhaar enrolment by the UIDAI. Incidentally, that endeavour was anchored by the Department of Personnel and Training (DPT), the same department that administers the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

A group of experts chaired by Justice AP Shah had also prepared a report for the erstwhile Planning Commission to which the UIDAI was then attached. Over the following years, multiple 'leaked' drafts surfaced but remained unverified.

Though the term 'digital' has been included in the title of the latest draft, the scope of even its immediate predecessor was restricted to 'digital (personal) data' only. While this could be attributed to MeitY's remit, there are some noteworthy pivots.

Firstly, the phrase 'Right to privacy' is amiss from the preamble and even the explanatory note. Secondly, 'Non-Personal Data' (NPD) is totally out of the scope now. Thirdly, imprisonment provisions have gone out and the financial penalties are capped to specific values and no longer predicated on the global revenues. Fourthly, the proposed amendment to the RTI Act under DPDPB seems misplaced since the 'information' under RTI goes beyond digital personal data. In addition, considering that one is increasingly likely to become a digital citizen before achieving the age of 18 years, it may be worth lowering the age of consent to at least 16 years, if not lower.

The process

Like the recent draft Telecom Bill, the DPDPB relies on simple language shorn of proviso, and includes illustrations.

While the decision to undertake public consultation is welcome, MeitY should publish the comments received on its website, in line with the Pre-Legislative Consultative Policy, 2014. In fact, further window for counter-comments would also be useful. Comments and counter-comments should be published, perhaps without identifying those who wish to remain unanimous. Submission of comments should be possible in other channels besides MyGov.

In addition, it would be desirable for the Bill to be referred to a parliamentary committee as and when the same is introduced.

The explanatory note enumerates seven principles, like the nine proposed by the group of experts chaired by Justice Shah in 2012. With slight variations of terminology, these are universal, well almost. However, an explanatory note has only persuasive value and not the full force of law.

Certain powers are vested with the executive rather than being codified within the principal legislation. These include powers for notifying subordinate legislation, administrative steps and, at times, even powers for carving out exceptions and exemptions.

Firstly, the power to make rules must be narrowly crafted; for example, while the discretion for salary and perks for the chairperson and the members of the Data Protection Board of India (DPBI) may be vested with the government, numerical strength of DPBI, members' qualifications and the tenure must be specified within the principal legislation.

Secondly, even a 'lawful purpose' aka 'legality' cannot justify 'deemed consent' unless it also meets the other two parts of the triple test — 'necessity' and 'proportionality'. Thirdly, exemptions from compliance, partially or completely, must be limited to agencies responsible for law enforcement, intelligence, and national security only. Last but not the least, such powers must be subject to institutionalised judicial or legislative oversight.

Notwithstanding the direction within the principal legislation to use 'digital' technologies, the DPBI must proactively institutionalise and facilitate grievance redressal by those who want to or may be forced to use non-digital modes. Even a person without digital access or digital literacy should be able to exercise legal protection of one's 'digital personal data.'

Therefore, the consultation process must be more iterative and inclusive; the principles must be enshrined within the principal law; the age of consent be reconsidered, the government powers must be narrowed down and subject to external oversight. Lastly, the grievance redressal should be simpler.

Since 'Digital Personal Data Protection' is a subset of the fundamental 'right to privacy', DPDPB may be necessary but is insufficient for the latter's assertion and enjoyment in its entirety. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/data-protection-bill-still-has-loose-ends/article66201402.ece>

20. Bhopal: Rs 24 cr go 'waste' as water meter not networked (freepressjournal.in) November 29, 2022

Bhopal: A sum of Rs 24 crore spent on the installation of water meters in the city is going down the drain as none of the meters have been made functional yet.

The civic body has so far installed around 80,000 water meters to supply Narmada Water in the city, however, it failed to provide connections.

Around 2 lakh Narmada Water supply connections have been provided under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) with an aim to build basic civil amenities in urban areas. Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) will launch a survey to take stock of the status of installed water meters in the city. Water meters were installed specially in new Bhopal in colonies along Hoshangabad Road. Superintending Engineer (Water supply) Udit Garg said, so far 80,000 water meters have been installed in the state but as there is no networking so currently they are not functional. More meters will be installed in the city under Amrit Yojana-2 which is likely to be kicked off next year, said Garg.

According to BMC, around Rs 1,000 crore has been spent in the last 10 years in the name of Narmada water supply. Under this, 2,500 to 3,000 kilometer long distribution pipeline has been laid, however, currently water from Kolar and not Narmada is being supplied. For this reason, whenever there is a fault in the feeder line of the Kolar project, a large part of the city goes dry.

The state capital, which has a population of about 23 lakh, only 70 per cent of the population is getting tapped water supply. And here too, 70 per cent water supply is being done from the Kolar project.

The Department of Public Health Engineering and the civic body has spent crores of rupees on Narmada water supply, however, in the last 10 years, water supply could not reach even two lakh people of the city. <https://www.freepressjournal.in/bhopal/bhopal-rs-24-cr-go-waste-as-water-meter-not-networked>

21. The Morbi mishap: Not the first, not the last (*orfonline.org*) NOV 29 2022

A shortage of staff and funds and an outdated municipal governance system weigh the ULBs down, disabling them from properly executing their duties

In the background of impending state elections in Gujarat and other states, Morbi may have attracted greater notice than usual. The heightened attention was also a consequence of the recent tragedy that resulted in over 100 deaths, including a large number of children. However, public discussion and analysis have been concentrated on the possible irregularities in awarding the work, the flawed contracting processes and the arrest of cronies allowing the ‘real’ culprits to escape culpability. What appears to have missed the eye is that Morbi was not the first infrastructure failure in municipalities. They have been occurring on a regular basis across the country and in cities of all sizes.

Morbi, a town in Gujarat, located at a distance of 60 km from Rajkot, with a population of about 200,000 is situated on the Machhu river. Its suspension bridge, locally called ‘Jhulto Pul’, collapsed just four days after the bridge was reopened after repairs, killing 135 men, women, and children. The bridge was 230 metres in length and 1.25 metres wide, located 15 metres above the Machhu river. Built in the 1880s for royalty, it provided connectivity between the two palaces. The bridge is now owned by the local municipal body and is now operated as a toll bridge, maintained by the Oreva company since 2008. Following the collapse of the bridge and the tragedy, the Gujarat High Court, on 7 November 2022, filed a suo motu PIL and issued notice to the government, municipal authorities, and the state human rights commission

and demanded a report. Now that the High Court is seized the matter, some of the real reasons for the tragic event are beginning to emerge.

In March 2016, part of a flyover in Kolkata that was still undergoing construction fell, killing more than 50 people and injuring 80 others.

The intention of this article is to point out that Morbi is not the first municipal bridge that has collapsed. It has been preceded by many others and it is likely that many may follow if the overall disinterest in the well-being of the cities and their fundamental weaknesses are not addressed. These lie in the areas of planning, governance and finance.

First, let us list some of the bridge tragedies and collapses that have occurred during the last decade. In March 2016, part of a flyover in Kolkata that was still undergoing construction fell, killing more than 50 people and injuring 80 others. In June 2016, a wooden bridge near the Island Grounds of Chennai gave way leading to about 30 women falling into the Cooum river. Luckily, they were rescued and they escaped with minor abrasions. In July 2018, an overbridge in Mumbai's Andheri fell and killed two men. In September 2018, another flyover in Kolkata gave way. In March 2019, a foot overbridge in south Mumbai crashed killing six people and injuring 30 others. In April 2022, a section of under-construction bridge over the Ganga collapsed in Sultanganj, Bihar. In the same month, in Madhya Pradesh's Narmadapuram, a British-era bridge collapsed while a trailer truck was crossing it. Several other examples could be listed; suffice it to say that many built bridges in India appear to be unsafe and many that are under construction have been found lacking in due precaution and care.

Bridges are very significant pieces of infrastructure in cities. Their primary objective is to enable citizens to traverse a terrain obstacle that otherwise could not have been possible. The most prominent obstacles are water bodies such as river, sea, or sewers. In some instances, bridges may serve to provide quick travel across an area of heavy traffic congestion or allow safe passage, such as for pedestrians who otherwise would have had to negotiate through dangerous and fast-moving automobiles. It is more than evident that such bridges are critical for city transportation and city economy.

Bridges may serve to provide quick travel across an area of heavy traffic congestion or allow safe passage, such as for pedestrians who otherwise would have had to negotiate through dangerous and fast-moving automobiles.

An additional factor that has to be borne in mind in India is that a very large number of cities have huge traffic and human movement across such structures. At times, bridges have end-to-end traffic on them for hours. Additionally, many of the transport vehicles (trucks and multi-axle vehicles) crossing these bridges are frequently overloaded. Court rulings in regard to overloading and the penal action that ought to follow for erring vehicles are well laid out. However, their implementation leaves much to be desired and one would have to concede that overloading is taking place in large measure. This has implications for bridges in terms of their ability to take the load. It is extremely important that while specifying bridge strengths for construction, these factors need to be always taken into account.

Building bridge infrastructure is merely one part of the job. Bridges, like all other infrastructure, have to be maintained. While most municipal bodies in India have a department of roads, bridges generally happen to be clubbed with that department. One need not stress the fact that while road maintenance is important, bridge maintenance is doubly so. Bad roads

impede transportation and a city's economy; but a bridge collapse puts a complete break on transportation for a prolonged period and snuffs out lives. However, proper maintenance can prolong the useful life of bridges and prevent deterioration that leads to more extensive and costly repairs.

The fact that so many bridges have collapsed in different cities one after the other seems to point out that bridge infrastructure failure is a widespread phenomenon. An examination of the matter reveals that there could be several causes behind these occurrences. In rapidly expanding cities, there is a constant demand for more infrastructure. The rapid increase in automobiles results in greater traffic congestion mandating more bridges. At the same time, there is a larger backlog of maintenance, because every new piece of infrastructure is an additional piece to maintain. Urban local bodies do not appear to be able to deal with both, and in general, fresh infrastructure gets prioritised and maintenance requirements get relegated. Here again the reasons are several—lack of maintenance systems, lack of resources, lack of manpower and lack of internal capacity—all linked to ULB planning, governance and finance.

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The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is one of the few ULBs that has a Bridge Manual. It prescribes that each bridge should be inspected twice a year (April and October). This was not being meticulously followed till bridges actually fell. Post bridge collapses in Mumbai, the BMC undertook a bridge audit of the city's bridges in phases. The audit declared a total of 29 bridges that were dangerous and advised they be demolished. BMC has, accordingly demolished eight of them and the others have been shut down. While this has created added traffic congestion on certain roads, the administration cannot take the risk of leaving these bridges operational for fear of sudden failures. Most cities would lack a manual and a well laid out annual maintenance programme for bridges.

The lack of a bridge maintenance system gets compounded by the lack of staff as well as their competence for inspection and maintenance jobs. In case in-house engineers cannot undertake the job, outside consultants could be hired. However, most cities would not have the money to employ quality consultants. With inadequate finances, a shortage of quality staff and an outdated municipal governance system that is slow and cumbersome, ULBs find it difficult to face the onslaught of rising infrastructure demand and maintenance in their cities. While in many cases, malfeasance and irregularities may be present, the widespread nature of the problem needs to be seen in the light of fundamental deficits that are not getting fixed. Sadly, redressal does not lie with the cities as the levers of substantive control lie in the hands of the states. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-morbi-mishap-not-the-first-not-the-last/>