

## **NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (12.01.2023)**

1. **Budget 2023: How the original 3% fiscal deficit target eluded successive governments** ([moneycontrol.com](http://moneycontrol.com)) Updated: January 12, 2023

**Strong government finances are crucial for an economy's stability. While a law is in place in India for instilling financial discipline in government finances, the roadmap it spells out has been redrawn multiple times.**

"The fiscal affairs of a government, unlike a private company, are of direct concern to its citizens and to international parties which interact with it."

Thus began the January 2017 report (PDF) of the committee set up to review the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act.

The FRBM Act, which came into force in July 2004, spelt out a framework to improve government finances – both at the Centre and state levels. Ahead of the budget for 2023-24, Moneycontrol takes a look at what the law says and how various governments over the last two decades have acted.

### **Suspension of targets**

Under the FRBM Act, the Centre and states are mandated to reduce their fiscal deficit to 3 percent of GDP. While the original timeline said this should be achieved by 2008-09, it was done a year in advance. However, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India and the FRBM Review committee have said this was achieved by underreporting of true numbers and deferment of expenditure liabilities.

However, in early 2009, the FRBM Act's targets were suspended after the global financial crisis.

"Extraordinary economic circumstances merit extraordinary measures. Now is the time for such measures," the then finance minister, Pranab Mukherjee, said in his interim budget speech ahead of the general elections and in the aftermath of the onset of the global financial crisis. Mukherjee then announced a fiscal deficit target of 5.5 percent of GDP for 2009-10, saying the government would return to the FRBM targets "once the economy is restored to its recent trend growth path".

### **New consolidation roadmap**

In the interim budget before the 2014 general election, the then finance minister P Chidambaram set a fiscal deficit target of 4.1 percent for 2014-15.

His successor, Arun Jaitley, noted in his speech in the full budget in July 2014 that the target given by Chidambaram was "a very difficult task".

"Difficult, as it may appear, I have decided to accept this target as a challenge. One fails only when one stops trying," Jaitley said, saying that the fiscal deficit would be cut to 3 percent in 2016-17.

While Jaitley would go on to lower the fiscal deficit to 4.1 percent in 2014-15, the target underwent several revisions in subsequent years. In his second budget speech, Jaitley redrew the roadmap and said the fiscal deficit would be brought down to 3 percent in 2017-18.

### **FRBM review**

In his third budget speech, for 2016-17, Jaitley announced the setting up of the FRBM Review committee. His speech did not mention the fiscal deficit target for the year but budget documents showed it was set at 3.5 percent, as he had stated the previous year.

However, February 2017 saw the roadmap redrawn again, with the target for 2017-18 set at 3.2 percent. Jaitley said the fiscal deficit would be cut to 3 percent in 2018-19.

But come February 2018, the target for 2018-19 was set at 3.3 percent after the 2017-18 target was missed by 30 basis points. However, Jaitley did accept the FRBM Review committee's recommendation to bring down the Centre's debt-to-GDP ratio to 40 percent.

With Jaitley's health taking a turn for the worse, Piyush Goyal stepped in for the 2019-20 budget. The fiscal deficit target for 2018-19 had been missed by 10 basis points and a target of 3.4 percent was set for 2019-20. According to Goyal, this breach was due to the introduction of the income support scheme for farmers.

### **Escape clause activated**

With the economy slowing down – GDP growth fell to 3.7 percent in 2019-20 – Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman decided to activate the 'escape clause' inserted into the FRBM Act following the acceptance of some of the recommendations of the review committee.

As per the clause, the government can deviate from the fiscal deficit target by up to 50 basis points in cases of national security, war, a national calamity, collapse of the farm sector, far-reaching structural reforms with unanticipated fiscal implications, or a sharp fall in real GDP growth of at least 300 basis points below the average for the previous four quarters.

In her second budget speech, Sitharaman activated this clause, citing the unexpected fiscal impact of the structural reforms the government had undertaken - alluding to the corporate tax rate cuts of September 2019 and the introduction of the Good and Services Tax regime before that - as the reason. The target for 2020-21 was set at 3.5 percent and the deficit was projected to decline to 3.1 percent in 2022-23.

Less than two months after Sitharaman's Budget speech, the country was in lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic.

### **4.5 is the new 3**

The pandemic had a huge shock on the economy, which in turn decimated government finances: expenditure mounted while revenue was depressed. This led to the fiscal deficit for 2019-20 – a year which was already facing a sharp slowdown before COVID hit in the last quarter – rising to 4.6 percent, 120 basis points higher than the target.

The target of 3.5 percent for 2020-21 quickly became obsolete and the final number came at 9.2 percent as the government also used the opportunity to clean up its books.

Sitharaman rapidly brought down the deficit to 6.9 percent in 2021-22 – 10 basis points more than the target. She also said the Centre would bring it down below 4.5 percent by 2025-26, with states expected to reach a fiscal deficit of 3 percent by 2023-24.

No mention was made of the 3 percent target for the Centre.

For this year, Sitharaman set the target at 6.4 percent. And with the first advance estimate of this year's GDP giving a fiscal room of 35 basis points, the finance ministry is on track to meet it, if not beat it. <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/budget/budget-2023-how-the-original-3-fiscal-deficit-target-eluded-successive-governments-9848631.html>

**2. Mystery of vanishing monuments: Why we need to think about the way we preserve heritage** ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) Written by Bibek Debroy | Updated: January 12, 2023

### **Rajya Sabha standing committee report raises questions about Archaeological Survey of India's functioning**

**The ASI was set up in 1861. Post-Independence, how do we decide what is a national monument? Do we simply carry forward historical and arbitrary decisions? Shouldn't we de-notify those for which there is no hope? Is the ASI equipped to protect national monuments, or does it hinder the process?**

Where is the Barakhamba Cemetery in Delhi? Even those who are intimately familiar with Delhi will find it difficult to answer this question. Etymologically, the word monument means a burial place or tomb, erected in memoriam. Therefore, the Barakhamba Cemetery should be a monument, as it indeed is. Not only is it a monument, it is a national monument. The responsibility for protecting it vests with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Unfortunately, however, the ASI has lost the monument. Reminds one of what Oscar Wilde wrote in *The Importance of Being Earnest*: “To lose one parent, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness.” Lady Bracknell would have shuddered. ASI's monumental performance transcends both misfortune and carelessness. The agency has lost 24 monuments. They are untraceable.

Let me backtrack a bit and quote from the 324th report, submitted to Parliament on June 15, 2022. This is the report of Rajya Sabha's Standing Committee on transport, tourism and culture. The report focused on untraceable monuments. “The primary mandate of the Ministry of Culture is preservation and conservation of ancient cultural heritage and promotion of tangible and intangible art and culture. The Ministry manages all the Centrally Protected Monuments (CPMs) of national importance, through the Archaeological Survey of India. The Ministry, in its written reply furnished to the Committee, informed that there are 3,693 Centrally Protected Monuments and 4,508 State Protected Monuments in the country,” it notes.

Given India's geographical expanse, this figure for protected monuments is a small number, even more so if we focus only on the centrally protected ones. But despite this small number of centrally-protected ones, we lost monuments. At another point, the 324th report notes, “The Ministry, in its background note on the subject, stated that the CAG in its 2013 Report on ‘Performance Audit of Preservation and Conservation of Monuments and Antiquities’, submitted to Parliament on 23.8.2013, had reported that 92 monuments are missing. However, vigorous efforts to locate/identify the reportedly untraceable monuments based on verification

of old records, revenue maps and referring published reports were carried out by the respective field offices of Archaeological Survey of India. The exercise gave fruitful results and many monuments were traced out.” A monument vanishes and is rediscovered.

But, there are 24 that have still not been rediscovered. (There may be more that are untraceable, but this is the official figure.) One of these is Barakhamba Cemetery in Delhi. Barakhamba simply means 12 pillars and we will promptly think of Barakhamba Road. Barakhamba Road is evidently named after a house with 12 pillars of a 14th-century nobleman from the Tughlaq era. If this identification is correct, those antecedents of Barakhamba Road have long disappeared. Barakhamba Cemetery is different. It seems to have been in the Nizamuddin area. In the first decade of the 20th century, Maulvi Zafar Hasan told us, in his report on Delhi’s monuments, that this cemetery, also from the Afghan era, had become the executive engineer’s office. Subsequently, it became part of Ghalib Park or the nearby Lal Mahal. Hence, we will probably never be able to find it, despite ASI’s hopes of rediscovering it by using modern scientific tools. Some monuments are lost to urbanisation, and others are submerged. If they are completely destroyed, what hope is there?

The ASI was set up in 1861. Post-Independence, how do we decide what is a national monument? Do we simply carry forward historical and arbitrary decisions? Shouldn’t we denotify those for which there is no hope? Is the ASI equipped to protect national monuments, or does it hinder the process?

Among such missing monuments are the Kos Minars in Mujesar (Faridabad) and Shahabad (Kurukshetra). Kos Minars marked out the distance of one krosha (roughly 2 miles) and proliferated along the Grand Trunk Road, thanks to Sher Shah Suri. Some of them — in UP, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab, and even in Pakistan — are in excellent condition. But not those in Mujesar and Shahabad. Indeed, out of the 49 Kos Minars in Haryana, only eight remain. Others have been swallowed up by development, including those in Mujesar and Shahabad. The land on which Mujesar stood was acquired by the Haryana government in 1983, and handed over to a company that demolished the Kos Minar.

The last time the minar in Shahabad was seen was in 1955. The Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) acquired the land and developed it, the Kos Minar vanished in the process. If Kos Minars are along GT Road and if national highways expand and develop along GT Road, won’t they inevitably disappear?

Other than the rhetorical questions above, what exactly is a monument? The word tends to suggest a large structure. In the list of the 24 untraceable ones, why have a “tablet on treasury building” in Varanasi? Modern tablets have limited life. But traditional tablets can’t last for an inordinately long time either. That 324th report gives us a lot to think about and I have skipped the recommendations, several of which are about the ASI’s style of functioning and its human and financial resources. To quote one sentence, “If even monuments in the Capital city cannot be maintained properly, it does not bode well for monuments in remote places in the country.” <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/mystery-of-vanishing-monuments-why-we-need-to-think-about-the-way-we-preserve-heritage-8376445/>

### 3. **Why Nuclear Industry's Comeback Hopes Rest on Very Thin Ice** ([newsclick.in](https://www.newsclick.in)) January 12, 2023

**Nuclear power will not be the way out of our current 'truly global' energy crisis.**

A little over ten years after an earthquake and tsunami caused the Fukushima nuclear meltdown, Japan has chosen to embrace atomic energy—again. Before the 2011 disaster, nuclear accounted for around 30% of the power generated in Japan. Subsequently, the country's roughly fifty reactors were shut for maintenance, which meant Japan was deriving no electricity from nuclear energy.

Currently, nuclear generates 6.4% of power in Japan. But last December, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio declared his intent to raise nuclear's shares to 20 or 22% by 2030.

#### **What caused this dramatic shift?**

“Energy security has been a long-standing preoccupation in Japan, where electricity generation is overwhelmingly dependent on imported fossil fuels. Natural gas has become an increasingly important part of the mix, as the country sought to shut down polluting coal-fired plants and mothballed much of its nuclear power industry after the 2011 meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi station,” the NYT reported last April.

Japan, one of the largest importers of liquefied natural gas (LNG), relies extensively on Russia for supplies. With the war in Ukraine—one of the biggest LNG suppliers—upsetting global energy calculations, Japan was not left unscathed. Energy sanctions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine have strained supplies and sent costs spiralling. As energy supplies were hit worldwide, the International Energy Agency described the situation as a “truly global energy crisis”.

The war in Ukraine is, of course, not the lone factor. The climate change crisis has long required countries to clean up their act. With fossil fuels frowned upon, alternative renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydro and biomass are increasingly relied on. Nuclear energy, too, is being explored because of the perception it is clean and climate-friendly, primarily because of its supposed supposedly low carbon footprint.

However, the fortunes of the nuclear industry plummeted after the 2011 Fukushima disaster as public faith in the safety of nuclear energy diminished. Countries began shuttering nuclear reactors and abandoned plans for new nuclear power plants. Prominent names like United States-based Westinghouse, France's Areva and Germany's Siemens entered choppy waters, and the nuclear industry took a significant beating.

#### **Westinghouse, Areva and Siemens**

In 2017, Westinghouse Electric Company, a subsidiary of Japan's Toshiba, filed for bankruptcy in the United States. Massive cost escalations and time overruns at its Georgia and South Carolina projects put it on this path. Toshiba and Westinghouse had overestimated demand for nuclear power plants, and a string of confounding technical difficulties at their AP-1000 reactors exacerbated their time and cost overruns. Westinghouse is supposed to supply India with six AP-1000 nuclear reactors under the 2008 India-United States Civil Nuclear Agreement. It should set anyone thinking why India is keen on reactors which flunked in the United States.

Not just Westinghouse, Areva's financial debacle also added to the woes of nuclear power. In 2014, Areva posted a net loss of €4.8 billion after several preceding years of losses and technical, regulatory and legal problems. But the French government allowed Areva's bailout in which it owned 90% of shares. The bailout occurred through French electricity utility EDF taking a majority stake in the company for €2.5 billion, and French taxpayers bore this cost. The French government owns about 84% of EDF. Nuclear energy has long been a symbol of French national pride though questions about sustainability and economics refuse to go away. Areva is a source of many jobs, which prompted France not to let the company sink.

France relies on nuclear power for a significant chunk of its electricity. However, that is on the decline. Nuclear energy was 69% of total electricity consumption in 2021, down from 76.4% in 2000.

All is not well with EDF, now France's most prominent nuclear electric major. It is in debt for approximately \$45 billion and has had recurring problems at its power plants, including outages. India is in talks with EDF to supply European Pressurised Reactors (EPRs), which have a very public troubling worldwide record of massive cost overruns and delays.

Germany's Siemens, a prominent nuclear power name, also withdrew from the nuclear industry as the country decided to close its nuclear power plants after Fukushima.

When war struck Ukraine, the nuclear industry was staggering, its fortunes sinking. With heavy sanctions on Russian oil and gas exports, one outcome was an uptick in the preference for nuclear power. Some countries have started extending the life of existing reactors and planning new ones. This is despite well-known and mounting concerns that nuclear energy is neither clean nor environment-friendly because of long-term nuclear waste, nor even entirely safe—as Fukushima, Chernobyl, and the Three Mile Island disasters have proved.

Nuclear energy advocates hope it will play a larger role in addressing power needs. But their hope is overstated. One glance at the numbers shows the underwhelming share of nuclear energy in global electricity production. According to the BP Statistical Review, non-hydro renewables—solar, wind and biomass; gas, and coal accounted for the most significant shares of electricity production in 2021, with nuclear and oil bringing up the bottom. Similarly, the World Nuclear Industry Status Report (WNISR) observed that the share of nuclear energy in gross global commercial electricity generation in 2021 was 9.8%—“the lowest value in four decades”.

Against this backdrop, Japan hopes nuclear power will account for 20-22% of the electricity supply in 2030. In 2020, the figure was less than 5%. Japan's decision to reinstate nuclear energy is not likely to get a groundswell of support since people have not forgotten the Fukushima disaster, and its aftermath continues to unfold. In the public memory, doubts persist regarding the efficacy of contingency and evacuation plans to address potential accidents. People anticipate colossal traffic jams, a lack of escape routes, and getting stuck for days without access to food, water or toilets in case of a mishap.

### **Weak economic rationale**

It is not just continued public concern about the safety of nuclear power. The economics just does not cut it. Take the cost of under-development reactors, whose timelines and budgets are spiralling upward. For example, the Flamanville-3, a 1650 MWe reactor being built in France, was initially contracted to Areva and is now taken over by the electric utility EDF. Originally

scheduled to start in 2012, the reactor is plagued with delays and snowballing costs. Its total cost is pegged at 13.2 billion Euros, more than four times the original estimate, and is likely to start in 2024.

The Kakrapar project, where the 700 MWe, Unit 3 has been commissioned, is expected to cost Rs 19,220 crore, up from Rs 11,460 crore. Two upcoming reactors at Rawatbhata, Rajasthan, are expected to cost Rs 17,080 crore, not the earlier Rs 12,320 crore.

The high capital and operating costs of nuclear power make it less attractive compared with renewable sources of energy, which are far more economical. In India, wind and solar each contributed more than 150% of nuclear to national power generation in India in 2021.

In India, the price of solar energy is between Rs 2.2 and 2.5 per unit and prices are expected to dip. For solar power, though, storage costs and the rising prices of solar photovoltaic (PV) cells must be considered. A Global Wind Energy Council study has projected the levelised cost of energy (LCOE) or the net present generation cost for a generator over its lifetime at Rs 2.8-3.3/Kwh for 2022. The difference is stark compared with nuclear power tariffs. For example, NPCIL projects a tariff of 5.31/kWh for its upcoming Kakrapar units 3 and 4.

The following numbers from WNISR 2022 shed more light on international developments:

Unsubsidised average electricity generating costs declined between 2009 and 2021 in the case of solar PV from US \$359 to US \$36 per MWh, a 90% fall. For wind energy, the costs dipped 72% from US \$135 to US \$38 per MWh. For nuclear power, costs rose from US \$123 to US \$167 per MWh—a 36% jump.

### **Nuclear Waste Management**

And then, the elephant in the room—long-term nuclear waste—which often (conveniently) escapes acknowledgement.

“Despite decades of effort, the nuclear industry does not yet have a working solution for managing spent fuel and high-level waste, the most radioactive products generated by nuclear power plants,” writes physicist MV Ramana. The supposed answer is a long-term geological repository which will seal off nuclear waste for thousands of years. But there are significant uncertainties about the “long-term performance of repositories and behaviour of nuclear wastes” stored in such facilities and widespread public opposition at the prospect of nuclear waste repositories coming up near them. Therefore, Ramana writes, most countries have not yet been able to choose sites for nuclear repositories.

Nuclear waste, most of which is spent fuel, comprises many elements that emit radiation over different periods. Over time, radioactive materials are no longer radioactive, but some have relatively short half-lives, which means they could decay in seconds to weeks. This is the most dangerous aspect of spent nuclear fuel. Once its radioactivity lapses, some can be reprocessed for fresh reactor fuel or find other uses in medicine, radiation therapy and power production. Most of the material in spent nuclear fuel is the relatively stable Uranium-238, which exists in nature. But it can take hundreds of years for spent fuel to reach this level of radioactivity. And even after decaying to relatively safe radioactivity levels, the material can carry a complex chemical profile, making it difficult and expensive to store or deal with permanently.

Further, as reactors approach the end of their original lifecycles, they need to be decommissioned or permanently shut. This process, which requires a complete radioactivity clean-up and progressive dismantling, can run into decades and its costs mount to billions of dollars.

So the actual costs of nuclear power are not that of power production alone but also the effect on future generations, a timespan that engineering projects do not typically consider. As it is difficult to estimate the accurate cost of nuclear waste management, studies can minimise and underestimate those costs.

In a deep dive for The Guardian, journalist Samanth Subramanian writes about the timescales and costs of decommissioning the Sellafield nuclear power plant—the United Kingdom’s first atomic reactor, which started operations in 1950, manufacturing plutonium for nuclear weapons. Later, it generated electricity until 2003 and was also used to reprocess fuel or extract uranium and plutonium for used fuel rods. All of that has come to an end.

“From an operational nuclear facility, Sellafield turned into a full-time storage depot—but an uncanny, precarious one, filled with toxic nuclear waste that has to be kept contained at any cost,” Subramanian writes. The challenge of dealing with nuclear waste includes waiting thousands of years as radioactivity tapers off, especially in high-level waste. The spent fuel rods, radioactive metals and liquids cannot simply lie around all this time. It must be stored in sealed buildings and artificial ponds, which are not permanent. Ultimately, the waste must be safely hauled to an “ultimate strongroom”, a geological disposal facility or repository carved from boring hundreds of metres into rock. Timelines estimate the process will take approximately 120 years (until 2120) and cost £121 billion.

Sellafield presents the classic conundrum of the nuclear energy industry where countries embraced nuclear energy rapidly but are wrestling with nuclear waste, a by-product of that process.

As it weans itself off nuclear power, Germany still does not have a nuclear waste repository, which is unlikely to go smoothly. It has announced 90 possible locations for the nuclear repository, but strong opposition is expected in each place. Previous attempts did prove utterly divisive.

### **India’s nuclear waste**

India has 22 nuclear power plants and a slew of proposed reactors. Villagers near the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, built with Russian cooperation, have been protesting the storage of spent nuclear fuel from KNPP 1 and 2 at the plant premises. The political leadership of Tamil Nadu has demanded the spent fuel be transported to Russia. The government has demurred that the spent fuel is a “valuable recyclable fuel” that can be reprocessed to produce more fuel for next-stage reactors.

In December 2021, the government told the Lok Sabha that since a “very small quantity” of high-level waste is generated, there is no need for a deep underground geological disposal facility in the near future. SP Udayakumar of the People’s Movement Against Nuclear Energy warned in an editorial that the government cannot be haphazard or vague in nuclear waste management.



“If the Union and state governments, scientists and technocrats, have not managed to clean up the dangerous Bhopal waste that has been lying there for the past 38 years, how are they going to convince us about nuclear waste management? Nuclear waste management has to be planned from the beginning and not as we go along,” Udayakumar wrote.

There are tensions at KNPP over an Away from Reactor (AFR) store for spent nuclear fuel until a final repository is constructed. The uneasiness is because there seem to be no definite timelines for the final repository, without which the AFR may become permanent spent fuel storage. There are fears that other states may treat the Kudankulam AFR as a dumping ground for nuclear waste from their reactors.

Spent nuclear fuel, a part of which forms nuclear waste, can be highly radioactive. What happens to it, where, how it is stored, for how long, and the safety of storage arrangements are crucial public health questions the nuclear establishment must answer.

Kudankulam is not the only reactor generating spent nuclear fuel. At least 20 others in India generate spent fuel—what happens to that is a question.

It is unclear what lessons India learned from the Fukushima disaster. India’s nuclear regulatory authority, the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), remains weak despite warnings from the Comptroller and Auditor General and the IAEA. Even the Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority Bill 2011 has been effectively shelved.

Remarkably, countries have steered away from nuclear power after Fukushima, but Indian governments have pushed ahead. The adverse effects on energy supplies and prices of war in Ukraine made governments in Japan and Germany walk the nuclear power path again, but the economics and waste management problem of nuclear energy pose enormous hurdles for the sector.

A Massachusetts Institute of Technology study sums it up succinctly: “The prospects for the expansion of nuclear energy remain decidedly dim in many parts of the world. The fundamental problem is cost. Other generation technologies have become cheaper in recent decades, while new nuclear plants have only become costlier.” The costs make it a less attractive option as far as decarbonising is concerned.

Besides, the risk of geopolitical disasters at nuclear power plants can no longer be ignored, as when Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant was caught in the cross-hairs of the war in 2022. Hopes for a renewed nuclear industry stand on thin ice. Grand claims about its resurgence must be viewed with caution and scepticism. <https://www.newsclick.in/Why-Nuclear-Industry-Comeback-Hopes-Rest-Very-Thin-Ice>

#### **4. Horrific Crime Reaffirms Delhi’s Status as India’s Most Unsafe City for Women ([thediplomat.com](https://thediplomat.com)) January 11, 2023**

**A woman was hit by a car filled with drunk men, who drove on for 13 kilometers, dragging her body lodged in the car’s wheels.**

India’s capital New Delhi figures as the most unsafe metro city for women in the country, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data. On January 1, even as the world was ringing in the New Year, Anjali Singh, a 20-year-old woman riding a scooter was hit by a

car in Khanjawala, a Delhi suburb. The hit-and-run case took a horrific turn. Instead of helping the woman, the five men in the car, who were drunk, drove on for 13 kilometers, dragging the woman under the wheels of the car.

The victim's body was found naked on the side of the highway in the wee hours of the morning. Singh was an event manager and her family's sole breadwinner. The incident stunned India, drawing immediate parallels with the horrific gang rape of Nirbhaya in New Delhi in December 2012.

The victim, known in the media as "Nirbhaya," a 23-year-old physiotherapy intern was brutally raped by six men in the back of a moving bus in posh south Delhi. The drunken men raped her by turns, disemboweling her internal organs, leaving her bleeding and maimed on the side of the highway. She died a fortnight later after putting up a valiant fight. The massive public outrage, which manifested as street protests and candlelight vigils, forced the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government and Parliament to enact stringent laws to punish rapists, including the death penalty in cases of gruesome rape. Public anger even brought down the Congress-led Delhi government in elections in 2013.

A decade after that horrific rape, not much has changed on the ground.

Changes in the law notwithstanding, Delhi was and still is synonymous with being an unsafe city for women. In fact, the city witnessed a 40 percent spike in crime against women in 2020-2021. Whether it is rape, assault, abduction, or kidnapping, Delhi ranks the highest in all these violent crimes among all metros in the country.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has often claimed that India will be a much sought-after destination for business and tourism. However, its capital New Delhi is still unsafe for women. Foreign governments have consistently issued advisories to women tourists against traveling in India alone.

Importantly, responsibility for law and order in the national capital lies with the Modi-led BJP government and not the Delhi state government. Delhi Police report to the Union home ministry led by Amit Shah, Modi's right-hand man, and not the Delhi state government which is in the hands of the Aam Aadmi Party.

Following public outrage over Anjali's killing, the AAP government held the BJP government accountable for the lawlessness in the capital. After visiting Anjali's family and promising them a government job, an angry Manish Sisodia, deputy chief minister of Delhi said that such "incidents are worrying. It is unfortunate that BJP is only working against the Opposition instead of managing the poor law and order situation in the city. Their powers will be better utilised in managing crime."

The irony is that while ministers, parliamentarians, bureaucrats and judicial officers are provided with the best security, ordinary women in Delhi are unsafe and extremely vulnerable to horrific crimes. The people-to-police ratio in the capital is dismal with even the Comptroller Auditor General's Report highlighting the shortage of manpower in the Delhi Police.

The lack of police on Delhi's desolate stretches of roads and sprawling neighborhoods makes it easy for criminals to operate with impunity. As a result, women are not safe in public spaces,

especially after dark. Harassment and abuse are common occurrences and inadequate public transport makes it more challenging for women to step out of their homes.

Home Minister Amit Shah has been silent on the incident as has Smriti Irani, the otherwise vocal, high-profile minister for Women and Child Development. The Modi government has touted grand schemes for women like the “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” (Save the girl child, educate the girl child) program but has done little about women’s safety.

Reacting to Anjali’s killing, opposition parliamentarian Priyanka Chaturvedi pointed out that “Women’s (safety) issues are politicised but nothing is done about them.”

Political apathy to checking violence against women is shocking. At most, the political class responds with knee-jerk reactions to violent crimes. It has failed to look for long-term solutions. For instance, Delhi attracts the maximum number of poor migrants from neighboring states in search of employment. Stark income inequalities have also contributed to the spiraling crime graph in the capital but the authorities have done little to address these socioeconomic realities.

India is a deeply patriarchal and conservative society. Violence against women and girls is not uncommon. Women are expected to be homemakers and stepping out to work is frowned upon. As per the last Census, Women comprise just 11 percent of Delhi’s workforce, the lowest female workforce participation in the country, compared to 53 percent for men.

Whenever women are victims of violent crimes, questions are raised about their character and motivations for them being outside the home. It is alleged that Anjali was drunk. Questions are being raised about the nature of her job as an event manager and party organizer, which required her to stay out late at night.

Swati Mahiwal, the chief of Delhi’s Women’s Commission has urged people to refrain from victim-shaming Anjali. She has pointed out that Anjali died a painful death and should not have to suffer character assassination in addition.

Incidents like Anjali’s killing go on to further impeding women’s empowerment efforts. As countless women activists will validate, it will only make it more difficult for educated young women to step out to work, with families concerned about their safety and security. Therein lies the bigger tragedy.

Young, confident Anjali had purchased a two-wheeler from her own earnings to live and work independently and provide a better life for her impoverished family and six siblings. Her dream of empowerment in what is perceived to be a vibrant economy was cruelly shattered and nipped in the bud. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/horrific-crime-reaffirms-delhis-status-as-indias-most-unsafe-city-for-women/>

## STATES NEWS ITEMS

5. क्या है 163.62 करोड़ की वसूली का मामला? जिसमें AAP को मिला है नोटिस ([aajtak.in](http://aajtak.in)) January 12, 2023

दिल्ली सरकार के विज्ञापनों पर विवाद गहराता जा रहा है. सीएम अरविंद केजरीवाल पर सरकारी विज्ञापनों के रूप में राजनीतिक विज्ञापन प्रकाशित करने का आरोप है. एलजी ने इन विज्ञापनों पर खर्च 99.31 करोड़ वसूलने का आदेश दिया था. अब डीआईपी की सचिव ने ब्याज की राशि जोड़ते हुए AAP को कुल 163.62 करोड़ की वसूली का नोटिस भेज दिया है. जानते हैं क्या है यह मामला.

दिल्ली के सीएम अरविंद केजरीवाल पर सरकारी विज्ञापनों के रूप में राजनीतिक विज्ञापनों को प्रकाशित करने का आरोप लगा है. दिल्ली के एलजी वीके सक्सेना ने इस मामले में 20 दिसंबर को मुख्य सचिव को AAP से 30 दिन में 99.31 करोड़ रुपये वसूलने के आदेश दिया था. एलजी ने निर्देश में कहा था कि AAP सरकार ने 2015 के सुप्रीम कोर्ट के आदेश, 2016 के दिल्ली हाई कोर्ट के आदेश और 2016 के CCRGA के आदेश का उल्लंघन किया है, इसलिए उनसे यह वसूली की जाए. नोटिस में सरकारी धन का दुरुपयोग करके पार्टी को फायदा पहुंचाने की बात कही गई.

23 दिन बाद आम आदमी पार्टी के संयोजक यानी अरविंद केजरीवाल को वसूली का नोटिस जारी कर दिया गया. LG के आदेश के बाद सूचना एवं प्रचार निदेशालय (डीआईपी) की सचिव आईएस ऐलिस वाज ने यह नोटिस भेजा है. इस नोटिस में कुल 163.62 करोड़ रुपये का भुगतान करने को कहा गया है. दरअसल उसमें वसूली की मूल राशि में ब्याज को भी शामिल कर दिया गया है. जानकारी के मुताबिक पार्टी ने 31 मार्च 2017 तक 99.31 करोड़ रुपये राजनीतिक विज्ञापनों पर खर्च किए थे. इस रकम पर दंड के रूप 64.31 करोड़ रुपये ब्याज और लगाया गया है.

इस नोटिस में AAP को 10 दिन के भीतर पूरी राशि का भुगतान करने का भी अल्टीमेटम दिया गया. कहा गया है कि अगर समय से भुगतान नहीं किया गया तो नियमों के तहत पार्टी की संपत्तियों की कुर्की कराई जाएगी.

एलजी ने मुख्य सचिव को यह भी निर्देश दिया था कि ऐसे विज्ञापनों की जांच करें जिसमें मुख्यमंत्री और उनकी पार्टी को प्रोजेक्ट किया गया. इसके बाद दिल्ली सरकार के ऑडिट निदेशालय ने ऐसे सभी राजनीतिक विज्ञापनों का ऑडिट करने के लिए एक विशेष ऑडिट टीम भी नियुक्त की है.

### **सरकार ने धन का दुरुपयोग किया: कैग रिपोर्ट**

दिल्ली विधानसभा में पिछले साल 10 मार्च को कैग की एक रिपोर्ट पेश की गई थी. इसमें भी सरकारी विज्ञापनों को लेकर कहा गया था कि सुप्रीम कोर्ट के निर्देशों का पालन किए बिना 24.29 करोड़ रुपये के विज्ञापन प्रकाशित कर दिए गए. इसके अलावा 33.40 करोड़ रुपये के विज्ञापनों में से 80 फीसदी दिल्ली सरकार की सीमा से बाहर के प्रचार माध्यमों में दिए गए.

विज्ञापनों में मुख्यमंत्री, डिप्टी सीएम और मंत्री के फोटो भी छापे गए जो पूरी तरह से नियमों का उल्लंघन हैं. हालांकि AAP सरकार ने केंद्र व दूसरे राज्यों की सरकार की तरफ से दिए गए विज्ञापनों का हवाला देकर रिपोर्ट को नकार दिया था.

### **CCRG ने 2020 में भेजा था नोटिस**

CCRG ने 16 जुलाई 2020 को दिल्ली सरकार के एक विज्ञापन पर एक नोटिस जारी किया था. कमेटी ने दिल्ली सरकार के विज्ञापन पर सोशल मीडिया में उठाए गए बिंदुओं पर स्वतः संज्ञान लेते हुए यह नोटिस भेजा था. सोशल मीडिया पर लोगों ने मुंबई के अखबारों में दिल्ली सरकार के विज्ञापनों के प्रकाशित होने पर सवाल खड़े किए गए थे. आरोप लगाए गए कि ये राजनीतिक विज्ञापन हैं. कमेटी ने इस मामले में सरकार ने 60 दिन के भीतर जवाब देने को कहा था.

### **क्या कहता है सुप्रीम कोर्ट का आदेश**

सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने सरकारी विज्ञापनों को लेकर 13 मई 2015 के गाइडलाइंस जारी की थीं. इसमें कहा गया था कि सरकारी विज्ञापनों का कंटेंट सरकार के संवैधानिक और कानूनी दायित्वों के साथ-साथ नागरिकों के अधिकारों व पात्रताओं के अनुरूप होनी चाहिए.

### **सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने भी लगाई थी फटकार**

अप्रैल 2021 में दाखिल की गई आरटीआई से सामने आया था कि 2021 दिल्ली सरकार ने तीन महीने में विज्ञापनों पर 150 करोड़ रुपये खर्च किए गए, जबकि वायु प्रदूषण से निपटने के लिए सरकार ने उस साल केवल 124.8 करोड़ का बजट रखा था. वायु प्रदूषण का मामला जब सुप्रीम कोर्ट पहुंचा था तब कोर्ट ने वायु प्रदूषण कम करने के लिए कोई ठोस कदम न उठाने पर सरकार को फटकार लगाई थी और कहा था कि आप अपने प्रचार स्लोगनों पर ज्यादा पैसे खर्च कर रहे हैं.

## **AAP ने रिकवरी नोटिस पर उठाए सवाल**

दिल्ली की डिप्टी सीएम मनीष सिसोदिया ने ट्वीट किया कि बीजेपी ने दिल्ली सरकार की सूचना विभाग सचिव ऐलिस वाज से नोटिस दिलवाया है कि 2017 से दिल्ली से बाहर राज्यों में दिए गए विज्ञापनों का खर्चा मुख्यमंत्री अरविंद केजरीवाल से वसूला जाएगा. उन्होंने कहा कि दिल्ली के अखबारों में बीजेपी के तमाम राज्यों के मुख्यमंत्रियों के विज्ञापन छपते हैं, पूरी दिल्ली में इनके मुख्यमंत्रियों के फोटो वाले सरकारी होर्डिंग लगे हैं. क्या इनका खर्चा बीजेपी मुख्यमंत्रियों से वसूला जाएगा?

इससे पहले AAP प्रवक्ता सौरभ भारद्वाज ने भी प्रेस कॉन्फ्रेंस कर दावा किया था कि LG साहब बीजेपी के निर्देशों पर ऐसा कर हैं. उन्होंने कहा था कि दूसरे राज्यों की सरकारें भी विज्ञापन जारी करती हैं. बीजेपी की कई राज्य सरकारों ने भी विज्ञापन जारी किए जो यहां प्रकाशित हुए हैं. हम पूछना चाहते हैं कि विज्ञापनों पर खर्च किए गए 22,000 करोड़ रुपये उनसे कब वसूल किए जाएंगे? जब उनसे पैसा वसूल कर लिया जाएगा, तब हम भी 97 करोड़ रुपये दे देंगे.'

## **केंद्र ने 5 साल में विज्ञापनों पर 3723.38 करोड़ किए खर्च**

पिछले साल शीतसत्र के दौरान सूचना एवं प्रसारण मंत्री अनुराग ठाकुर ने कांग्रेस सदस्य सैयद नासिर हुसैन के सवाल के जवाब में राज्यसभा में बताया था कि केंद्र सरकार ने पिछले पांच साल में अपनी नीतियों और कार्यक्रमों के विज्ञापन पर केंद्रीय संचार ब्यूरो (सीबीसी) के जरिये 3,723.38 करोड़ रुपये खर्च किए हैं.

उन्होंने बताया था कि 2017-18 में विज्ञापनों पर 1,220.89 करोड़, 2018-19 में 1,106.88 करोड़, 2019-20 में 627.67 करोड़, 2020-21 में 349.09 करोड़ और 2021-22 में 264.78 करोड़ रुपये खर्च किए गए हैं. वहीं मौजूदा वित्त वर्ष में नौ दिसंबर, 2022 तक सरकार ने विज्ञापनों पर 154.07 करोड़ रुपये खर्च किए हैं. <https://www.aajtak.in/india/delhi/story/arvind-kejriwal-delhi-government-issued-recovery-notice-for-political-ads-after-lg-vk-saxena-order-aap-to-pay-163-crore-ntc-1614084-2023-01-12>

6. रायपुर के महालेखाकार कार्यालय में लाखों रुपए का गबन, विधानसभा थाने में की गई दोषियों के खिलाफ शिकायत ([thesootr.com](https://thesootr.com)) 12 Jan 2023

छत्तीसगढ़ के महालेखाकार कार्यालय में लाखों रुपए के गबन का मामला सामने आया है। कार्यरत कर्मचारियों का आरोप है कि समिति के पूर्व अध्यक्ष कुंडल राव एवं उनके कुछ साथियों

ने राशि का गबन किया है। कर्मचारियों ने इसकी शिकायत विधानसभा थाने में की और दोषियों के खिलाफ कार्रवाई की मांग भी की।

### **ऑडिट में 36 लाख रुपए का गबन मिला**

इस मामले में सीनियर ऑडिट ऑफिसर सुरेश कुमार ने कहा कि 7 फरवरी 2004 को महालेखाकार साख सहकारी समिति मर्यादित का गठन हुआ था। इसका उद्देश्य समिति के सदस्यों को कम ब्याज पर लोन देना है। समिति का कार्य बहुत अच्छे से चल रहा था, लेकिन एक वर्ष पूर्व ही कार्यकारणी के सदस्य द्वारा शंका जाहिर की गई कि राशि का गबन हुआ है। बाद में जब ऑडिट कराया गया तब लगभग 36 लाख रुपए का गबन होना पाया गया।

### **दस्तावेजों की जांच के बाद अपराध दर्ज होगा**

इस संबंध में कार्यकारणी द्वारा पंजीयक कार्यालय में शिकायत दर्ज की गई थी, लेकिन कोई कार्रवाई नहीं हुई। इसलिए सभी कर्मचारी आज विधानसभा थाने पहुंचकर दोषियों के विरुद्ध कार्रवाई की मांग कर रहे हैं। मामले में विधानसभा थाना के एसआई सिराज खान ने कहा कि समिति में पैसा जमा किया जाता है। पैसों के गबन का मामला सामने आया है। दस्तावेजों को खंगाला जा रहा है उसी के अनुसार अपराध पंजीबद्ध किया जाएगा। <https://thesootr.com/chhattisgarh/lakhs-of-rupees-embezzled-in-the-accountant-general-office-of-chhattisgarh/28967>

### **7. Gauhati High Court directs state to verify embezzlement of public money (indialegallive.com) January 11, 2023**

The Gauhati High Court directed the State Government to place the audit report before the Public Accounts Committee to verify the contentions raised by the petitioner as regards embezzlement of large amounts of public money meant for public purposes.

The PIL filed by Amguri Naba Nirman Samity has prayed for the following reliefs :-

(a) to direct the Respondent Authorities to conduct an Enquiry through a High Level Enquiry Committee in the matter of huge financial embezzlement committed during the course of implementation of various Schemes under the Director of Health Services, Government of Assam, during the financial years from 2009-2010 to 2019-2020;

(b) to identify the Government Officials and Contractors and any other persons involved in misappropriation of Govt. Fund and thereafter launch appropriate proceeding for their punishment and also for recovery of the misappropriated Govt. Fund from them;

(c) to direct Respondents to take into account the representations dated 31.01.2022, 15.09.2022 and 15.09.2022 submitted by the Petitioner and do the needful for disposal of the same and/or pass such other order(s) as the Court may deem fit and necessary.

– AND –



In the interim, pending disposal of the instant petition the High Court may be pleased to direct the Respondents to submit Status Report of the Enquiry initiated on the basis of the representations dated 31.01.2022, 15.09.2022 and 15.09.2022 if any, before the High Court.

M. Nirola, counsel for the petitioner, relying upon the audit report of the Accountant General (Audit), Assam, has submitted that there is large scale of embezzlement of public funds which is required to be investigated by an independent agency.

As against this, D. Saikia, Advocate General, Assam, has contended that the present PIL is not maintainable as the same is purely based on CAG report and it is also the function of the Public Accounts Committee to examine such report submitted by the CAG and to take remedial steps, if discrepancy is found. It is, therefore, contended by D. Saikia, that the allegations levelled in the petition may be referred to the Public Accounts Committee for their consideration.

Relying upon the judgment dated 19.05.2022 passed by a Division Bench of the High Court in the case of the very petitioner being PIL No. 68/2021 (Amguri Naba Nirman Samity vs. The State of Assam and Ors.), it has been submitted by the Advocate General, Assam, Assam that in a similarly situated case filed by the petitioner, the matter has been placed for consideration of the Public Accounts Committee.

A Division Bench of the High Court in Amguri Naba Nirman Samity (supra), in similar circumstances has observed thus:

“5. Under the circumstances, we are also of the view that since the allegations of embezzlement are based primarily on the CAG report, the competent forum i.e the Public Accounts Committee may have a look at the same so that in case any illegality is found, necessary remedial actions can be taken by the competent authority.

6. Accordingly, the State Government would cause these reports of the CAG, which according to the petitioner disclose embezzlement of large sum of public money meant for the Social Welfare Department to the PAC for doing the needful. 7. The State Government will accordingly cause the matter to be placed before the PAC within the period of 8 (eight) weeks.”

In the case on hand also the allegations made in the present petition are based on CAG report and, hence, the Division Bench of Chief Justice Rashmin Manharbhai Chhaya and Justice Soumitra Saikia observed that it would be appropriate to direct the State Government to place the same before the Public Accounts Committee.

Accordingly, the State Government is directed by the High Court to place the CAG report before the Public Accounts Committee to verify the contentions raised by the petitioner as regards embezzlement of large amount of public money meant for public purposes. The State Government will accordingly cause the matter to be placed before the Public Accounts Committee within a period of eight weeks from the date of receipt of a certified copy of this order. <https://www.indialegallive.com/top-news-of-the-day/news/gauhati-high-court-directs-state-embezzlement-public-money/>



**8. Rare mango variety found on Kerala Accountant General's Office campus to be popularised across the State ([thehindu.com](https://www.thehindu.com)) January 11, 2023**

By local standards, this mango is simply big – the biggest ones are said to weigh almost 2 kg. Once ripe, its succulent flesh is said to be quite delicious, but the mango remains a sweet puzzle for researchers.

The lone tree which produces it stands on the Accountant General's (AG) Office grounds in the Kerala capital and is believed to be a century old. The mango has remained rather unidentified, as researchers have been hard-pressed to identify the variety.

But starting Wednesday, it has a name, and steps have been taken to popularise it across the State. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the staff of the Secretariat and the AG's Office and researchers of the Centre for Biodiversity (CBC), the University of Kerala are leading the initiative.

Mr. Vijayan planted a sapling on the Secretariat campus, inaugurating a project to popularise the variety which has been christened 'Agaam' ('AG' for Accountant general and 'aam' for mango). More saplings will soon be planted at Cliff House and the campuses of the University of Kerala at Kariavattom and Palayam.

Incidentally, Mr. Vijayan too had a role in turning the spotlight on this plus-size mango, said members of his personal staff. The large mangoes had caught his attention as the tree is visible from his office at the Secretariat which sits across the road from the AG's Office.

The CBC too had been interested in this rare mango tree as part of its research project on local mango varieties. "We have not been able to find a second tree of this variety. The fruit is quite large, said to weigh nearly 2 kg. The one we weighed today (Wednesday) weighed 1.75 kg," said A. Gangaprasad, CBC Director and Professor, Department of Botany, University of Kerala.

The mango is in the news thanks to the efforts taken by Valiyavila Suresh, garden supervisor of the Secretariat; Rajmohan V., public relations officer, AG's Office; and Manoj M. R., research scholar at the university's Botany department.

Wedge graft procedure was followed for the propagation of the mango variety, said CBC officials. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/rare-mango-variety-found-on-kerala-accountant-generals-office-campus-to-be-popularised-across-the-state/article66365056.ece>

**9. 'Best before' stickers and hygiene rating app to be introduced in Kerala ([onmanorama.com](https://www.onmanorama.com)) January 12, 2023**

The Kerala government has rolled out a slew of measures to improve food quality.

Mayonnaise made using raw uncooked eggs has been banned. 'Best before' stickers have been made compulsory for food packets delivered from hotels and restaurants. To introduce public oversight in the functioning of food businesses, a hygiene rating app has been created.

These measures were announced on Thursday by health minister Veena George.

Mayonnaise is an egg-heavy thick dip served along with popular snacks like burgers, sandwiches and French fries. The ban has been imposed on the basis of the scientific understanding that Salmonella bacteria could be present in uncooked eggs. "If someone feels that they cannot do without eggs, they can use pasteurised eggs to prepare mayonnaise," the health minister said.

The decisions were taken during a meeting the minister had with representatives of hotels, restaurants, bakeries, catering services, and way side eateries on January 11.

The meeting also decided to introduce 'best before' stickers, just like in branded packaged food products, on parcels given out daily by food businesses. The minister said these proposed stickers will have two important pieces of information. One, the time of packing. Two, the time within which the food should be consumed.

The representatives of food businesses have agreed to introduce the stickers.

Steps will also be taken to set certain hygiene standards in food businesses. "For employees in restaurants and hotels, health cards are a must," the minister said. "It is the responsibility of the management," she said.

The government has also mooted the creation of a food safety supervisor in all food outlets.

Further, the minister said a hygiene rating app, which would soon hit Playstore, had been created. The public can download the app and play the role of a watchdog.

Though the minister said that licensing and registration were of critical importance and were mandatory, Kerala does not have an efficient mechanism to ensure that food businesses are brought within a supervisory system.

Under the Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, licence is mandatory for any Food Business Operator (FBO) like hotels, restaurants and catering businesses with an annual turnover of more than Rs 12 lakh.

On the other hand, petty FBOs with an annual turnover of less than Rs 12 lakh, like small retailers, street vendors, or temporary stall holders, will have to register with authorities like the local self-governments or the GST Department.

Reality is, there is an inordinate delay, ranging from 60 to even 120 days, in issuing licenses. Under the FSS Act, licenses are supposed to be issued within 60 days of receiving an application. If this is not done without either rejecting the application or informing the applicant of certain insufficiencies, the food business can start functioning.

Problem is, when an such a business begin operations without getting a license, it will not be included in the database of the Food and Safety Department, thus remaining insulated from the scrutiny of the Department

The health minister on Thursday spoke about a state-level Special Task Force, a sort of secret service, to conduct quick checks on hotels and restaurants. This is also an acknowledgement of the abysmally low number of food safety officials in Kerala.

It is a fact that many food businesses are outside the radar of the Food Safety Department but even licenced operators are not subjected to adequate checks. A recent CAG report observed that less than 30 percent of food business operators with a turnover of over Rs 12 crore were subjected to food safety inspection. In the case of petty operators like 'thattukadas', the CAG report said that not even nine percent were being inspected. <https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2023/01/12/health-ministry-veena-george-hygiene-rating-food-poisoning.html>

## **SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING**

### **10. Why India is eyeing Predator armed drones from the US ([indiatoday.in](https://www.indiatoday.in)) UPDATED: Jan 11, 2023**

To scale up its surveillance capabilities along the border with China in the Himalayan heights, India is looking to acquire from the US a fleet of Predator armed drones. The proposed deal is for 30 MQ-9 Reaper drones worth \$3 billion (around Rs 24,500 crore)—10 each for the Army, Navy and Air Force. This will be the first tri-service purchase to synergise the operational and procurement requirements of the Indian armed forces.

Military planners believe the Predator armed drones will strengthen India's offensive capabilities. While the deal is under process, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, which manufactures these drones, has tied up with Bharat Forge to produce landing gear components, subassemblies and assemblies for remotely piloted aircraft (read Predator drones). The US firm is confident that the collaboration will result in significant capability-building for both sides and provide an impetus to the unmanned aircraft industry in India.

Dr Vivek Lall, chief executive, General Atomics Global Corporation, said the company is looking forward to working with Bharat Forge in the critical area of aerostructure manufacturing. "Bharat Forge's expertise is known globally, and their outstanding contributions in the aerospace sector have inspired us to work together to build the next generation of the world's most advanced unmanned aerial vehicle," Lall said.

Navy chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar recently said that the case for procurement of Predator drones was under process. "We are discussing whether the numbers have to be rationalised," Kumar said.

Meanwhile, India's indigenous unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) Tapas is in its last leg of development. The medium-altitude-long-endurance UAV is being developed by the Bengaluru-based Aeronautical Development Establishment of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

In 2020, amidst the border tensions with China in eastern Ladakh, the Indian Navy had acquired for surveillance two MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones from General Atomics on lease. The two drones have completed over 10,000 hours of flying with the Navy, covering over 14 million square miles.

India has been using drones for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance sorties along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), over the Bay of Bengal, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Arabian Sea, and areas around Maldivian waters.

In 2019, the Donald Trump-led US administration had approved the sale of Predator-B armed drones to India. If it goes through, India will be the first country outside the NATO alliance to get such a weapon from Washington.

The strike capabilities of the Predator drone are well known. In January 2020, a Predator drone strike by the US had killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad. He was the commander of the powerful Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

The MQ-9B drone can carry payloads of about 1,700 kg over a range of 6,000 nautical miles. It can carry sensors and laser-guided bombs besides air-to-ground missiles, with a maximum payload of two tonnes.

Indian military planners claim that after having armed drone capability, the Indian forces will be able to launch remote-controlled operations and surgical strikes, such as on terrorist hideouts in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and engage targets on the Himalayan borders with China. To date, the Indian military only operates drones from Israel for surveillance and reconnaissance missions. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/why-india-is-eyeing-predator-armed-drones-from-the-us-2320287-2023-01-11>

#### **11. How the VSHORAD missile system will boost the Indian Army's mountain warfare prowess ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) January 12, 2023**

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) Tuesday accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) to procure the Very Short Range Air Defence System or VSHORAD (IR Homing) missile system, designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), among other weapon systems for the Army and Navy at a total cost of Rs4,276 crore.

The development comes amid the ongoing military standoff with China at the LAC in eastern Ladakh and reports of air violations by China along the LAC last year.

India has been in talks with Russia since 2018 to procure the Igla-S air defence missiles at a cost of \$1.5 billion under the VSHORAD programme in a bid to replace the Russian Igla-M systems which have been in use with the Army.

However, defence officials indicated that there has been little progress on that front and it has been put on hold for now with the strong government pitch for atmanirbharta (self - dependence) in defence. The latest AoN granted to the procurement of the DRDO-developed VSHORAD testifies that.

#### **What is the missile system?**

Meant to kill low altitude aerial threats at short ranges, VSHORADS is a man portable Air Defence System (MANPAD) designed and developed indigenously by DRDO's Research Centre Imarat (RCI), Hyderabad, in collaboration with other DRDO laboratories and Indian Industry Partners.

The DRDO, in September last year, conducted two successful test flights of the VSHORADS missile from a ground based portable launcher at the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur, off the coast of Odisha.

As per the defence ministry, the missile—which is propelled by a dual thrust solid motor—incorporates many novel technologies including miniaturised Reaction Control System (RCS) and integrated avionics, which were successfully proven during the tests conducted last year. The DRDO has designed the missile and its launcher in a way to ensure easy portability.

### **How will it help India?**

While the exact specifications of the missile are not immediately known, officers in the Army explained that being man portable and lightweight compared to the other missile systems in the Army's armoury, it can be deployed in the mountains close to the LAC at a short notice.

“When it comes to man portable air defence missiles, there was a critical gap in the Army's inventory, especially for the eastern and northern borders, though not so much for the western borders with Pakistan, for which India has the Soviet-vintage OSA AK missile systems,” an officer told The Indian Express.

“Others like the Akash Short Range Surface to Air Missile System are heavier with a theatre air defence umbrella of up to 25 km and can be deployed further away from the LAC for static formations,” he said, adding that they may not be the best bet for mountains.

When inducted, they will be a critical air defence missile for the forces, even for an all-equipped infantry unit, and will be the best option for mountain warfare, the officer said.

In a statement Tuesday, the defence ministry said that in view of the recent developments along the northern borders, there is a need to focus on effective Air Defence weapon systems which are man portable and can be deployed quickly in rugged terrain and maritime domain.

It added that the procurement of VSHORAD, as a robust and quickly deployable system, will strengthen India's air defence capabilities.

### **When are they expected to be inducted?**

The AoN is the first step in the long capital procurement process in defence. Not all AoNs accorded necessarily culminate into a final order.

However, with flight tests having taken place, defence officials estimate the missile systems can be delivered to the forces in another three to four years with industry support if the orders are placed on time. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/vshorad-missile-systeamy-mountain-warfare-prowess-8375754/>

## **12. Navy May Order More French Scorpene Submarines to Arrest Dwindling Fleet As China Increases Presence In Indian Ocean ([swarajyamag.com](https://www.swarajyamag.com)) Jan 12, 2023**

Indian Navy may give a repeat order of Scorpene submarines to the French to strengthen its dwindling submarine fleet, reports Hindustan Times.

A deal to build six Scorpene-class submarines at Mazagaon Docks Limited (MDL) with transfer of technology (ToT) was signed with the French in 2005.

These were named Kalvari-class submarines in the Indian Navy's service, the last of which was launched in April 2022, leaving the MDL production line empty.

The option clause wasn't exercised, Hindustan Times states, due to the insistence of the then navy chief Admiral Robin Dhawan, despite the suggestion of the then defence minister late Manohar Parrikar to exercise the option clause.

However, official sources say that the navy might now exercise this clause to buy more Scorpene submarines, Hindustan Times reports.

Repeated delays have happened in the Project-75I programme, where the navy is set to build six more submarines at an approximate value of Rs 40,000 crore.

This project has seen repeated hurdles and is unlikely to go through anytime soon due to a budget crunch after the Covid-19 pandemic as well as issues with the naval staff qualitative requirements (NSQR) and the liability clause, which led to the Germans, French and Russians withdrawing their proposals, resulting in a single vendor situation.

Indian Navy operates around 15 submarines, seven of which are Russian-made Kilo-class, four German-made U-209 submarines and four latest Kalvari-class submarines (two are in fitting out and trial stages).

These are not enough to look after an area of interest as large as the Indian Ocean at a time when Pakistan is set to receive eight AIP-equipped Chinese submarines over the next few years.

In comparison, the Chinese are building multiple warships and submarines every year.

The Chinese are flexing their muscles in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as well as the South China Sea.

Their 43rd task force for anti-piracy operations — an excuse to maintain a permanent presence in the IOR — set sail for the Gulf of Aden on 10 January 2023. They also have a military base in Djibouti and are eyeing the Pakistan's Gwadar Port as well.

The Hindustan Times report also says that the AIP tech touted as a game-changer is now being superseded by Lithium-Ion battery technology. Lithium-Ion batteries are said to be twice as efficient as the Lead Acid batteries earlier used by the submarines.

The Japanese with their 'Soryu-class submarines' have mastered the Lithium-Ion tech, and are moving away from AIP. Germans are already moving away from the AIP and the French have entirely gone nuclear.

This could lead to Indian Navy being left with older outdated tech while the world moves to newer tech. The report suggests the way out is to build new Kalvari-class submarines with DRDO AIP plug while retrofitting the older Kalvari submarines with DRDO AIP when they go for their mid-life upgrade.

This will prevent the MDL production line to not run dry and ensure that the hard-earned submarine-building and machine tooling skills are sustained. <https://swarajyamag.com/defence/navy-may-order-more-french-scorpene-submarines-to-arrest-dwindling-fleet-as-china-increases-presence-in-indian-ocean>

**13. FY23 Fiscal Math Benefited Solid Nominal GDP Growth, Above Target Tax Collections: Report** ([businessworld.in](https://www.businessworld.in)) January 12, 2023

**In the first eight months of FY23, the central government deficit reached 59 per cent of the full-year target, higher than 46 per cent from April to November 2021**

The financial year (FY) 2023 fiscal math has benefited from a robust nominal gross domestic product (GDP) growth of around 16 per cent against budgeted 11 per cent and above target tax collections due to better growth, reopening boost, formalisation, and tighter compliance, said DBS Bank in a report.

The growth was also impacted due to a pick up in nominal goods and services tax (GST) collections, which have helped to offset lower RBI dividends, fuel excise cuts, higher subsidies, and divestment miss.

In the first eight months of FY23, the central government deficit reached 59 per cent of the full-year target, higher than 46 per cent from April to November 2021.

Revenues, especially taxes, have been strong, with direct tax collections up 24 per cent year on year (YoY), helped by corporate and income tax collections.

Under indirect taxes, average monthly GST receipts are up 20 per cent YoY, benefiting from a lift in economic activity and import earnings. Nontax revenues (weaker RBI dividends) and divestment proceeds are up at a slower pace, with non-tax reaching 74 per cent of the end-year target by November 22 vs 92 per cent the year before.

"Dividends from CPSEs, especially in the energy sector which benefitted from high commodity prices, and banks are expected to make up for the shortfall in RBI's surplus transfer,' it added.

It also added that in midst of the pandemic, additional spending needs and adverse economic impact on revenues pushed fiscal deficits sharply higher.

While talking about the Union Budget, it stated, "We expect the FY24 Budget to focus on four priorities, including a rural focus, capex, and manufacturing push as well as prioritising macro stability." <https://www.businessworld.in/article/FY23-Fiscal-Math-Benefited-Solid-Nominal-GDP-Growth-Above-Target-Tax-Collections-Report/12-01-2023-461401/>

**14. NARCL gets Centre's blanket guarantee worth Rs 15,300 crore: Report** ([business-standard.com](https://www.business-standard.com)) January 12, 2023

The National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARCL) has been given a blanket guarantee worth Rs 15,300 crore by the Centre, a report in the Economic Times (ET) said. The banks will now be able to rely on government guarantees on the stop security receipts (SRs) issued by the NARCL during the liquidation.

"The guarantee gives banks the option to fall back on an instrument in case recovery is not as expected. Senior NARCL officials are already in Delhi to sign the documents and activate the guarantee," a person aware of the matter told ET.



The guarantee will be valid for five years and will cease to exist if the resolution is not made within five years. In 2021, the Centre had given a guarantee of Rs 30,600 crore to NARCL.

The aggregator has made bids for multiple accounts and the commercial banks are ready to transfer at least six proposals to NARCL. The biggest among these is Jaypee Infratech. It owes Rs 9,234 crore and NARCL offered Rs 3,570 crore to it for resolution.

Recently, NARCL also emerged as the highest bidder to take over two stressed entities of the Srei group as it submitted the "highest net present value bid of Rs 5,555 crore" among bidders.

NARCL's net present value bid, submitted in the 10-hour-long "challenge mechanism" conducted by the committee of creditors (CoC) on Tuesday, constitutes Rs 3,200 crore in cash, a Rs 1000-crore jump from the previous plans offered, an official said.

Although NARCL has a clear advantage for taking control of Srei Infrastructure Finance and Srei Equipment Finance, Authum Investment and Infrastructure, another bidder in the insolvency resolution process for the two stressed assets, was not out of the game even though it was behind marginally in the final and fifth financial challenge bidding round due to terms and conditions and legal compliance.

"As a result of failing to raise bids above Rs 4,800 crore, a consortium of Varde Partners and Arena Investors, another bidder in the resolution process, was out of the race during the third round," the official added. [https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/narcl-gets-centre-s-blanket-guarantee-worth-rs-15-300-crore-report-123011200184\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/narcl-gets-centre-s-blanket-guarantee-worth-rs-15-300-crore-report-123011200184_1.html)

#### **15. Prioritising progress over perfection ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) Jan 11, 2023**

The much talked about Data Protection Bill 2019, which was withdrawn by the Government in the month of August 2022 is back with a new version. It will be unfair to call it a revision of the previous Bill as this is largely re-written and bears little resemblance to the earlier version.

The government has attempted to strike a good balance of providing protection to the citizens (Digital Nagrik) with respect to privacy of personal information while minimizing cost of compliance and undue friction in the way of doing business. Privacy has remained a hotly debated topic for decades. While the generally acceptable privacy principles remain unchallenged, the way these principles are implemented and enforced remain an area of unsettled debate.

In addition to the seven principles on which the government is building this regulation, I would add that the current Bill also seems to follow another principle—‘progress over perfection’.

The current draft significantly simplifies many aspects compared to what we saw in the earlier version or what we are used to seeing in many parts of the world. For example, eliminating the need to further classify certain types of personal data as sensitive personal data may take away the ability to provide granular control but it significantly reduces the complexity, overhead, and risk of potential classification errors given the volume of digital data we process in our country. I work with a large number of Indian and global corporations and majority of the organizations struggle to keep their data classification current. While I am not suggesting a simple trade-off between privacy and cost of doing business, however, this approach can



substantially reduce the cost of doing business without taking away the rights of individual's privacy.

The Bill also introduces the concept of deemed consent. It may appear as a dilution of the explicit consent principle; but it is a good enabler of efficiency and eliminates unnecessary friction in circumstances where the delayed explicit consent may not be desirable. However, such a provision also brings forward serious misuse potential and therefore, the circumstances under which deemed consent can be used must be minimised. I expect a shorter and tighter list of deemed consent criteria in the final Bill.

The Bill is forward looking in many respects. The concept of right to nominate is an excellent framework in today's digital economy. With increase in digital assets and digitally controlled assets, this framework not only enables better management of personal information in the event of death or incapacity but also provides a direction for other regulations to follow.

The introduction of consent manager can have several positive outcomes. It is likely to give rise to newer business models and entities and will hopefully provide a relatively easier implementation ability to businesses, which may not be able to build internal capabilities and may benefit from standardized services provided by a consent manager.

Another significant change from the earlier version is the removal of criminal liabilities and introduction of graded financial penalties for non-compliance, which provides a more balanced approach for handling violations.

Being a father of an only daughter and a champion of inclusion, diversity & equity in KPMG in India, I couldn't ignore that not only the contents of the Bill are forward looking but the tone and language is equally contemporary. The document avoids use of masculine pronouns like he/his/him and instead uses the feminine pronouns like she/her. This is an incredible departure from the traditional approach and must be celebrated.

An interesting dimension on the applicability is the concept of digital data. The Bill limits its applicability to digital data only. This is a novel concept and appears to be another aspect of progress over perfection. This one limiting factor substantially improves the practicability of implementation where the data remains in paper form throughout the life cycle of data processing. However, this appears to be an afterthought—the definition and a few scenarios included in the Bill need some improvement to fully embed the concept of digital data with reasonable clarity.

While the current Bill is progressive in many ways and I compliment the government for following a comprehensive consultation process, there are many aspects of the implementation, which have been left out to be notified through Rules subsequently. The impact (both positive and negative) for such a far-reaching regulation will only be known when it is implemented, and the respective rules are prescribed and enforced.

I believe that in the fast-moving world of digitalisation, it is nearly impossible to develop a perfect legislation. For a country like India with its socio-economic diversity, the current Bill is a step in the right direction. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/prioritising-progress-over-perfection/2945174/>

**16. Food security scheme to cover 800 mn poor named as PMGKAY: Centre** ([business-standard.com](https://www.business-standard.com)) January 11, 2023

The central government's integrated food security scheme has been named as the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY), under which free foodgrains are being given to more than 80 crore poor people from January 1.

The move also comes amid Opposition's criticism over the government discontinuing free monthly distribution of 5 kilograms of foodgrains to poor people under a scheme that was also known as PMGKAY.

This scheme, which was launched in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic in April 2020, ended in December last year.

Last month, the government decided to subsume PMGKAY into two existing food subsidy schemes and consequently, the new integrated food security scheme came into force.

"The new scheme has been named as Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY)," the food ministry said in a statement.

Keeping in view welfare of the beneficiaries and in order to maintain uniformity across the states, free foodgrains will be provided under the PMGKAY for the year 2023 to the poor beneficiaries as per the entitlement under the the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Under the NFSA, the entitlement of foodgrains per person per month is 5 kg for priority households category, while 35 kg per family per month for Antodaya Anna Yojna (AAY) families.

Till December 2022, the NFSA beneficiaries were getting their foodgrains entitlement at a highly subsidised rate of Re 1, Rs 2 and Rs 3 per kg for coarse cereals, wheat and rice, respectively. Now, they will get it for free this year.

According to the ministry, necessary steps have already been taken for smooth implementation of the PMGKAY in the field. The ministry and state-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) officials are regularly interacting with state government officers for smooth roll out of the new scheme.

The central government will spend more than Rs 2 lakh crore in 2023 as food subsidy under the NFSA and other welfare schemes to remove the financial burden of the poor. [https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/food-security-scheme-to-cover-800-mn-poor-named-as-pmgkay-centre-123011101053\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/food-security-scheme-to-cover-800-mn-poor-named-as-pmgkay-centre-123011101053_1.html)

**17. Right signals. Turbo-charging the telecom sector** ([thehindubusinessline.com](https://www.thehindubusinessline.com)) January 11, 2023

The year 2022 was a game-changing one for the telecom sector, which crossed new milestones on the way. Bold reforms announced in September 2021 helped to improve the sector's viability. The stage was set for the successful completion of 5G spectrum auctions, which fetched the exchequer over ₹1.5-lakh crore — higher than any other auction. Operators

displayed a significant appetite for 5G, with 90 per cent of the total spectrum sold for 5G bands. The launch of commercial 5G services in October 2022 was a historic moment for the country.

The introduction of the draft Indian Telecommunication Bill, 2022 has been a step in the right direction. It has several positives, including the government's power to defer/waive operators' dues and graded penalty structure to minimise their financial burden. A more simplified system that eliminates the need for prior approval will help remove operational bottlenecks. Further, rebranding and repurposing the USO (Universal Service Obligation) fund to Telecommunication Development Fund and including R&D and new technologies under its ambit is likely to lead to better utilisation of the fund. Once the Telecom Bill is finalised by mid-2023, it will pave the way for more game-changing reforms in the future. However, broader business interest needs to be protected. Also, the ambit to cover new technology products/services may require a tailored approach.

### **Satellite communication**

The satellite segment has emerged as a hotbed of activity and innovation. Considering the strategic importance, the government has come up with a slew of reforms to enhance the ease of doing business and streamline clearances. It is likely to aid the speedy rollout of satcom services across the country.

Simplified scrutiny, self-certification in place of the MPVT (Mandatory Performance Verification Testing) of satellite antennas, and online processing of applications will go a long way in minimising the time taken for approvals. In addition, enhancing the scope of licences to include IoT is in line with global trends, with satellites playing a complementary role to terrestrial IoT services.

In 2023, significant investment is required to ramp up 5G network rollout across the country. Operators have outlined ambitious plans for pan-India 5G coverage and are expected to invest close to \$10 billion in 2023-24. A headline tariff hike is imminent to help bolster the financial health of operators as capex will be elevated in the next 1-2 years. Mobile data prices are still lower in India at \$0.17 per GB as compared with the global average of \$3.12 per GB. A viable cost structure is necessary for innovation to thrive and to capitalise on new 5G use cases. The current mobile tariff in India is still not sustainable in the long term. More frequent tariff hikes are likely in 2023, which will bolster ARPU (average revenue per unit). India's current mobile ARPU of \$1.8 is significantly lower than the global average of \$7.3. ARPU needs to be doubled in the long term for the sector's sustainability.

5G will be a defining theme in 2023. Operators have focused on offering enhanced mobile broadband as a key value proposition to start with as they look to steadily increase 5G coverage. As has been the case globally, initial consumer 5G use cases in India focus on immersive content/gaming using a combination of AR/VR/MR. More announcements from operators on this front are likely in the later part of 2023.

It is important to identify 5G use cases that have a wider impact on the lives of people. For instance, immersive education or for that matter 5G-enabled telemedicine. India needs to ride on the 5G innovation bandwagon to capitalise on the true benefits of the technology.

On the other hand, 5G fixed wireless access (FWA) has the potential to offer a flexible and cost-effective solution to connect sparsely populated areas. The higher bandwidth available in

households through 5G FWA would help to connect more devices and open-up access to a gamut of services.

This year could be that of 5G FWA in India. Enterprise-focused 5G use cases are likely to pick up from 2024 onwards, with a more mature ecosystem in place and focus on 5G standalone characteristics. It remains to be seen how private 5G networks will pan out in the country given the uncertainty around the allocation of 5G spectrum directly to enterprises.

#### Outlook in 2023

Given the positive momentum in the sector, it is important to turbocharge the telecom growth engine. To begin with, a simplified version of licences is required. Currently, all types of licences have the same general conditions and stiff compliances. It is important to streamline the different types of licences.

A different class of licence for operators who offer only B2B telecom services can be considered. Further clarity is required on the adjusted gross revenue (AGR) definition for the bundling of services with connectivity, which would become a larger reality with 5G.

Improving the financial health of the sector is important for innovation to thrive. A phased plan of action needs to be formulated to improve liquidity, create more avenues of investment, and enhance long-term sustainability. Regulatory levies on the Indian telecom sector are one of the highest in the world. Approximately, 30 per cent of the revenues of telecom operators is spent on taxes and levies.

In most countries, the licence fee is negligible, or a one-time upfront payment is required. The current licence fee of 8 per cent (including contribution to USOF) should be rationalised to ease operators' financial burden. Further, the accumulation of GST credits of approximately ₹32,000 crore has added to the working capital woes of the operators. Necessary measures should be taken for refunds of accumulated GST credits.

Substantial investment is required in setting up the underlying infrastructure. Subsidising fibre deployment through viability gap funding (example, USOF) can significantly help accelerate rollout. Bandwidth sharing can be mandated, and IP-Is should be permitted to bid. In addition, greater alignment is required between States and local bodies' Right-of-Way (RoW) policies in line with the Central RoW Rules.

A national dig-once policy can be formulated for fibre deployment across State and municipal roads and national highways. This will help to bring down costs and reduce time-to-market.

Exciting times are ahead for the telecom sector. Prudent policy measures have set the ball rolling. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/turbo-charging-the-telecom-sector/article66366426.ece>

**18. In Odisha, activists allege that funds meant for mine-affected villagers are being spent on hock ([scroll.in](https://scroll.in))** 12 Jan 2023

Every Sunday, Mahesh Beck plays field hockey on a dry patch of land near his village in eastern India. Yet he had not heard of the men's hockey World Cup happening in his state, or that a new multi-million-rupee pitch had been built 30 km away.

The field in Hemgir in Odisha state – which is hosting the 2023 Men’s FIH Hockey World Cup this month – is one of 16 new pitches and a 20,000-capacity stadium funded with cash allocated to improve the lives of local communities impacted by mining.

Odisha’s sports and youth services minister said in November that the state had budgeted about Rs 11 billion to host the tournament.

Given the affinity for hockey in the mineral-rich belt – where every village has its own team – regional officials have said the new infrastructure was built in rural areas to give budding hockey players easier access to world-class facilities.

Yet there have been recent protests in Odisha state – by villagers, charities and politicians – over the investment in hockey infrastructure using money set aside to boost local welfare, when communities are struggling with pollution, land degradation and water scarcity they say is caused by mining.

And many people, like Beck, say that the new Rs 98 million Hemgir ground is unlikely to improve their lives – especially when there are more urgent issues to address.

“I didn’t know about the new ground...(that) such a big hockey event was happening,” said Beck, 24, on the sidelines of a village meeting last month to discuss local forest rights amid growing fears of losing land due to mining expansion.

“Besides, I can’t afford to buy a ticket and watch a single match,” said Beck, who ekes out a living selling forest produce, growing a bit of rice and working informally in coal mining.

Odisha’s Sundargarh region – where Beck lives – is rich in coal and iron ore. The expansion of coal mining is considered key by the government to meeting India’s rising energy demand, while iron ore feeds the numerous steel industries in the area.

However, charities have objected to the spending on the upcoming tournament, saying it is a “misuse” of funds meant for a “just social transition” that considers local communities’ jobs and welfare needs in villages that are affected by mining.

They have called for more money to go to “high priority” social goals like healthcare, education and jobs, as mandated by rules governing the spending of funds collected from mining companies and handed out by District Mineral Foundations.

The rules of the District Mineral Foundations state that local communities must be involved in funding decisions, but villagers in Sundargarh said they were not consulted and that their consent for supporting the hockey tournament was assumed.

“This is a community-driven fund and they should have a say in what is essential for their development and well-being,” said Oram Deme, president of Anchalik Surakshya Committee, a group working for indigenous people’s rights in Sundargarh.

“People are told funds are there, don’t you want to spend it and their nod is taken as an informed approval,” Deme added. “Nobody knows what the plan is once the World Cup ends – who will maintain these grounds and who will really play here?”

State politician Shankar Oram, who sits on Sundargarh's District Mineral Foundation trust board, said that "money was allocated for hockey without discussion with the communities".

### **'Why not sports?'**

There are nearly 600 hockey teams in Sundargarh, which is often called the "cradle of Indian hockey" due to the number of players from the district who have played for the national team.

"Except for two months of monsoons, the game is played every week," said Susanta Behera, a sports writer who is working on a book to document the history of hockey in Sundargarh.

"You can gauge its popularity by the fact that at weddings, hockey sticks are gifted to couples."

The administrative head of Sundargarh, Gavali Parag Harshad, said the government was tapping into the area's love of hockey, and that using the welfare funds to build a stadium and the 16 pitches was in keeping with the rules of the District Mineral Foundations.

"'Why not spend on sports?' has been my question to those who criticise the idea," Harshad said.

"Players in every administrative block in the district will get a feel of playing on an international field. There will be changing rooms and gyms attached to the fields. Investing in sports is good."

Last month, Sundargarh organised hockey tournaments to raise awareness about the upcoming World Cup, which starts on January 13.

Beck's team played and lost, and he received a T-shirt bearing the logo of the event. He could not read what it said.

### **Coal jobs scarce**

Beck lives on the fringes of open-cast mining operations run by Mahanadi Coalfields, a subsidiary of state-run Coal India, in Basundhara.

Through the District Mineral Foundations – set up by the Indian government in 2015 – mining leaseholders like Mahanadi Coalfields must contribute 10%-30% of their royalties annually to improve welfare and job opportunities in areas impacted by the industry.

District Mineral Foundations, which have been set up in 600 districts across 21 states, held more than Rs 600 billion as of March 2022, according to mining ministry data.

Contributions to the funds rose by almost 25% compared to the previous year, reflecting an increase in mining activity, according to a October report by the Mineral Inheritors Rights Association and the Environics Trust, two non-governmental organisations.

Yet, report co-author Saswati Svetlana said the study across four states showed that "many projects that District Mineral Foundation websites indicate as sanctioned and completed do not even exist".

Villagers living around mines have not really benefited from District Mineral Foundation spending, and in the absence of audits, there is no check on how the money is spent, she added.

At the recent meeting in Beck's village, worried residents discussed the possibility of mining reaching their doorstep.

"We know there is coal buried deep under our land," said Beck's uncle Leious Kugur. "We are trying to understand our rights and how we can apply for land ownership certificates under the Forest Rights Act," the 55-year-old added.

"Laws are changing, being altered and mining is increasing. If we don't have our paperwork in order, we will get nothing."

At the heart of protests over mining and the perceived misuse of District Mineral Foundation welfare funds lies the fundamental fear "that everything will be lost and nothing gained", said Himanshu Upadhyaya, assistant professor at Azim Premji University.

Upadhyaya, who has tracked District Mineral Foundation audit reports and spending, said the fund was meant specifically for local development and not to build infrastructure in towns many km away.

"There should be great concern about it being used to make hockey fields because it has a special purpose, and it is very hard to see how hockey can change the lives of people who have been displaced, lost land or have no sustainable job."

Beck earns Rs 300 Indian a day when he gets a chance to work at the coalfields, loading and unloading trucks.

"Our expenses are growing. But the forest produce we gather is reducing, as is the farm produce because of all the mining and pollution," he said.

"We see the mining expand, but there are no good jobs for us there. The mines have taken more than they have given us."<https://scroll.in/article/1041629/in-odisha-activists-decry-that-funds-meant-for-mining-affected-villagers-are-being-spent-on-hockey>