

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (14.01.2023 to 16.01.2023)

1. Centre must review NFSA beneficiaries for Budget. Use Aadhar database, not 2011 Census (theprint.in) 16 January 2023

Like the Centre asked citizens to voluntarily give up LPG cylinder subsidy, a similar campaign could be run for NFSA beneficiaries.

After the Centre decided to provide free food grains to 81 crore beneficiaries in 2023 under the National Food Security Act, many rightfully expressed concern over the permanent nature of such an expenditure. However, the basis of the number of beneficiaries is not being questioned. After all, budget allocation falls if the number of beneficiaries falls.

This article examines the basis for determination of 81 crore beneficiaries.

“Until 1997, the Public Distribution System was universal in nature, however, the government introduced ‘Targeted Public Distribution System’...to focus on the poor. The coverage was linked to poverty estimates under two categories, namely, Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Above Poverty Line (APL). Later w.e.f. December 2000, government introduced “Antyodaya Anna Yojana” (AAY) in order to make TPDS more focused and targeted to poor and the poorest of poor (Antyodaya),” as per the 2020-21 annual report of The Department of Food and Public Distribution.

The report also states that the National Food Security Act (NFSA) de-linked the coverage under TPDS from erstwhile ‘poverty estimates’ to ‘population estimates’, which entitles 75 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of the urban population — nearly two-thirds or 121 crore of the country’s population (141 crore in 2022) to subsidised food grains.

Under the NFSA, the government provided five kilograms of food grains per person a month at Rs 3 per kg for rice and Rs 2 kg for wheat. The families covered under Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) get 35 kg of food grains per month.

Thus, the financial commitment under NFSA is about Rs 2 lakh crore per annum.

Was there a national debate before moving from poverty targeting to providing food as a legal entitlement? Did the Centre tell how expenditure under NFSA would be funded? Can a developing and resource-constrained country provide subsidised food grains to 67 per cent of its population? If poverty rates fall, should the number of beneficiaries be revisited?

The Centre determines poverty on the basis of consumption expenditure. The National Sample Survey (NSS) conducts consumption expenditure surveys every five years. It was last done in 2017-18 but the report was not made public for reasons unknown.

Hence, the 2011 Census and NSS consumption survey data from 2011-12 continue to be used even in 2023 to determine 81.5 crore beneficiaries.

Since NFSA is now linked to population estimates, subsidy will only increase and encourage illegal immigration.

Eligibility criteria for beneficiaries

Under NFSA, the Centre procures and transports food grains to designated Food Corporation of India (FCI) depots.

The state and union territories identify the eligible households to be covered under TPDS. They are also responsible for updating the criteria of eligibility.

The NFSA provides exclusion parameters, which are decided by states. For example, in Odisha, the government has approved nine exclusion criteria ranging from monthly income to owning of vehicles to having pucca houses with three or more rooms, according to a paper by S.K. Satpathy.

Similarly, states like Meghalaya and Bihar also have exclusion parameters. For example in Meghalaya anyone with kisan credit with limit > Rs 50,000 (rural). In Bihar's case, "to meet the shortfall in coverage of beneficiaries, the State Government modified the guidelines in December, 2014 and decided to include regular Group IV/D employees from SC/ST category working with State Government," according to the CAG report no 54 of 2015.

Aadhar database to reduce beneficiaries

When we have the One Nation One Ration Card scheme, should the criteria be decided by individual states? Can the Centre decide a pan-India criteria in consultation with states?

Started in 2015, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana aims to provide affordable housing. This calls for a review of exclusion criteria because ownership of a house is probably an exclusion criteria even though Odisha specified a pucca house with three or more rooms.

The criteria can include a household member availing bank loan above a predetermined amount, say Rs 3-4 lakh, by using Aadhar number for identification at a district and all-India level.

If the government has to correctly implement the exclusion criteria, Aadhar must be mandatorily required for purchase of items such as four-wheeler, refrigerator, Kisan credit card, among others.

Since the Centre manages the Aadhar database, it should take the responsibility of removing beneficiaries based on the exclusion criteria. Without exception, government employees cannot be beneficiaries.

Like the Centre asking citizens to voluntarily give up LPG cylinder subsidy, a similar campaign could be run for NFSA beneficiaries.

Over-dependence on rice and wheat under NFSA while ignoring millets and subsequent distortions in market and nutrition require a separate review.

In 2015, the Shanta Kumar Committee recommended bringing down the population coverage from 60 per cent to 40 per cent to "comfortably cover BPL families and some even above that." The committee also recommended gradual introduction of cash transfers in PDS, which can amount to savings of Rs 30,000 crore annually and still give better deals to the customer.

Since 2015, direct benefit transfer (DBT) has been implemented in Puducherry, Chandigarh, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

States with most NFSA beneficiaries

Based on a 2018 statement made by Minister of State for Consumer Affairs CR Chaudhury in the Rajya Sabha, the top nine states with highest number of NFSA beneficiaries are Uttar Pradesh (15 crore), Bihar (8.57 crore), Maharashtra (7 crore) West Bengal (6.01 crore), Madhya Pradesh (5.07 crore), Karnataka (4.46 crore), Rajasthan (4.02 crore), Gujarat (3.82 crore) and Tamil Nadu (3.57 crore).

If the number of beneficiaries above is taken as a percentage of the state's population (per Census 2011), the top nine states are Bihar (82.3 per cent), Assam (80.8 per cent), Jharkhand (80 per cent), Chhattisgarh (78.9 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (75.21 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (75 per cent), Nagaland (70 per cent), Karnataka (65.8 per cent) and Odisha (65.1 per cent).

Some of these states have strong manufacturing activities and contribute significantly to Goods and Services Tax. So, it might be worthwhile to review the list of beneficiaries of these states first. Some states also give free food grains above the Centre's allocation. A comparison of the list of beneficiaries of Centre and states might throw up interesting facts.

During a 2018 visit to Bastar, Chhattisgarh, I hired the services of a private taxi owner who had bought his vehicle, a Mahindra SUV, on a bank loan. He told me that his family received subsidised food grains under NFSA.

Even though NFSA is not based on poverty, the number of Indians living below poverty is a mystery. Various reports, academic papers and studies over the years have put different percentages of the Indian population to be living under the poverty line — from nearly 22 percent in 2013 to 14.6 percent in 2014-15 to 10.2 percent in 2019.

Food subsidy under NFSA contributes to the burgeoning fiscal deficit. Support the poor by all means but weed out those who are no longer at the bottom of the pyramid. And courts should not intervene since this is not a matter of law. <https://theprint.in/opinion/centre-must-review-nfsa-beneficiaries-for-budget-use-aadhar-database-not-2011-census/1316379/>

2. Flying Lies? Book review: Raises questions about Rafale deal that government hasn't answered adequately (freepressjournal.in) 15 January 2023

Rahul Gandhi and the Indian National Congress fought the 2019 elections with the slogan "Chowkidar Chor Hai"! The reference, of course, was to the deal for the Rafale aircraft with Dassault Aviation of France and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's role in it.

The lead-up to the election had seen tons of newsprint and hours of primetime debates focused on the subject, with new revelations, allegations and the government's justifications coming thick and fast. To many observers, it seemed that the deal would be a permanent millstone around the necks of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Mr. Modi.

But the Pulwama terror attack and the Balakot surgical strikes that followed changed the entire narrative. The supposed clean chits that the deal got from the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Supreme Court further strengthened the ruling party's claim that the entire controversy was a politically motivated ploy to malign Mr. Modi. Giving further credence to this claim was

the fact that the politician leading the charge – Rahul Gandhi – was the son of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, whose name will forever be linked to the Bofors scam.

Political narratives have moved on since the 2019 election. The BJP juggernaut continues to plough on, and Mr. Gandhi seems to have forgotten all about the Rafale deal and is now busy on his Bharat Jodo Yatra. In fact, no opposition party leader or the media wants to focus anymore on the issues surrounding India's largest arms deal.

All of them could do well with a careful reading of *Flying Lies* by Ravi Nair and Paranjay Guha Thakurta. This is a carefully, almost painfully researched look at the Rafale deal, the various controversies associated with it and the so-called clean chits the government got from CAG and the Supreme Court.

The bare bones of the story are well known, but it still bears recounting to understand the efforts the authors have put in. In 2001, the Indian Air Force (IAF) informed the Ministry of Defence (MoD) that it required six new squadrons of multi-role combat aircraft. This was later enhanced to a Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA).

The proposal was finally cleared by the Defence Acquisition Committee in 2007 and in August of that year, the Government sent out a 211-page Request for Proposal (RFP) to six global aircraft manufacturers. This was reportedly the most elaborate RFP ever in the defence aviation business. The size of the order was then estimated to be about Rs. 42,000 crore.

Almost four-and-a-half years after the RFP had been floated, in October 2011, Dassault Aviation's Rafale was selected as the aircraft to be inducted. After the BJP government led by Narendra Modi came to power, in 2015, there were reports that the price negotiations with Dassault were not going as envisaged, and the deal was effectively dead.

However, during his visit to France, in April 2015, PM Modi announced a deal with 36 ready-to-fly Rafale jets to India. Two months later, the RFP for 126 MMRCA was withdrawn.

Controversy has since dogged the government's decision on multiple issues – pricing of the aircraft, the fact that India ended up buying only 36 instead of the earlier envisaged 126 aircraft and the deal's links to Reliance ADAG, a group headed by Anil Ambani, supposedly close to Mr. Modi.

To deflect the criticism, the government and the BJP have twisted and turned and tried to obfuscate matters. This book bares most of them. It also punches holes in the CAG report that supposedly cleared the deal and Supreme Court's decision dismissing petitions challenging it. From all the efforts that the authors have put in, it is clear that everything about the Rafale saga is not as kosher as the government would want us to believe.

But it is a sign of the emasculated state of India's democracy that neither the opposition parties nor the media are asking these questions. It is also evident from the fact that the authors found no publisher courageous enough to publish this very well-researched book and one of the authors, Paranjay Guha Thakurta, had to self-publish it! <https://www.freepressjournal.in/book-reviews/flying-lies-book-review-raises-questions-about-rafale-deal-that-government-hasnt-answered-adequately>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

3. Error in survey number of 5 lakh land documents in database, says CAG ([newindianexpress.com](https://www.newindianexpress.com)) 14th January 2023

CHENNAI: Survey numbers of 5.06 lakh land documents have been wrongly recorded in Tamilnilam, the official database of the land administration department, during computerisation of land records in 20 taluks, says the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) audit report 2022 on land records management tabled in the Assembly.

With 1.48 lakh wrong entries, Tiruvallur district has the highest number of errors. The clerical error in assigning survey numbers for land parcels may affect a few hundred crore worth of property transactions, sources said. The CAG report said 23.24 lakh land documents have been digitised in 20 taluks in Tiruvallur, Chengalpattu, Tiruppur, Perambalur, The Nilgiris, Kanniyakumari and other districts. “Survey numbers of 15.03 lakh documents have been recorded correctly. But discrepancies were found in survey numbers of 5,06,518 documents,” the report said.

A sample study was carried out by the CAG in 20 taluks. Discrepancies were also found in computerised natham chitta in these 20 taluks. While owners’ names were missing in 293 documents, relatives’ names were not found in 328, the CAG said. Digitisation of land records has been marred by several deficiencies, including an abnormal delay in launching online services for natham land records and e-adangal, and delay in online patta transfers.

The report also pointed out deficiencies in data link between registration and revenue departments, asset management, data security and monitoring of the scheme. “Lack of validation controls in the software resulted in errors and discrepancies in capturing old survey numbers and assigning sub-division numbers as per rotation rules,” the report said.

Pattas were issued to private entities for 6.22 lakh land parcels across 111 towns as per Updating of Registry scheme in 1979, classifying it as ryotwari nanjai/punjai. However, these land parcels were registered as government land (sarkar punjai/nanjai) in Tamilnilam, the report said.

In response to CAG’s observation, revenue officials said nearly 3 lakh of 6.22 lakh cases have been resolved and remaining cases would also be addressed soon. “It is, however, a matter of concern that owners of about 3.22 lakh land parcels are put to hardship in getting patta transfers,” the CAG said. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamilnadu/2023/jan/14/error-in-survey-number-of-5-lakh-land-documents-in-database-says-cag-2537745.html>

4. CAG finds errors in computerized entry of TN land records ([millenniumpost.in](https://www.millenniumpost.in)) January 13, 2023

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has found significant differences between the physical records and computerized A-Register entry in 61 percent of the sampled villages with regard to total land area of the villages.

Continued erroneous classification of 3.22 lakh private land parcels as government land in the computerized land records has put the land owners to hardship. Also, multiple patta numbers

assigned to a single land owner in a village and redundant patta numbers hampered the workflow processing of online patta transfers.

On the farmers' crop entries, the CAG found that the e-Adangal data for the State, obtained from the Revenue Department, and analysed in respect of 18 taluks relating to seven out of eight sampled districts, that of the 38.87 lakh crop entries captured in the Fasli year 1429 (2019-20), 5,317 entries (0.14 per cent) were made by farmers through common service centres.

None of the farmers' entries were verified by the VAOs concerned despite mandatory 100 percent inspection.

As of March 2021, 1.42 crore computerized and validated Natham land records were not brought online even after four years. The e-Adangal project taken up in 2017 was not fully implemented, the CAG noted.

"Lack of validation controls in the application software resulted in errors and discrepancies in capture of old survey numbers and assigning sub-division numbers as per notation rules," the report for the year ended March 2021 on Performance Audit on Land Records Management in Tamil Nadu, tabled in the Tamil Nadu Assembly today, said.

"The digitised land records had errors and deficiencies. There were differences in land area between manual and computerized A-Register in 61 per cent of sampled villages. Though the department claims that all the field measurement sketches (FMS) in rural taluks are online, it was seen that 6.25 lakh out of 23.25 lakh (27 per cent) Sub-divisions in the A-Register had no entries in the FMS database," the report said.

Further, there were difference in land area in 2.27 lakh out of 15.89 lakh (14 per cent) Sub-divisions between A-register and FMS data. "About 3.22 lakh private land parcels were erroneously classified as government land in the computerized land records resulting in the private land owners not being able to transact their land in TamilNilam," it said.

As multiple patta numbers were assigned to the same land owner, all the land holdings of an individual in a village cannot be ascertained.

It recommended to the government to consider reviewing the computerized A-Register, Chitta and FMS to ensure their correctness and completeness so as to ensure error free conclusive titling.

Validating and bringing Natham land records online within a definite timeframe, making e-Adangal fully functional and integrate with TamilNilam on priority, imparting periodical training to VAOs and other line officials to avoid or minimise data entry errors and ensuring data entry is duly validated with physical records to ensure correctness were among the other recommendations.

Computerisation of land records has been in progress since 1998 and as per the latest target, the project should have been completed by March 2020. "It is, however, a matter of concern that due to the lack of adherence to deadlines for the project, the desired objectives of providing timely and efficient services to the citizen were yet to be achieved," the report claimed.

Hence, the government might consider accelerating the resurvey work besides complete pending settlement work in Town Survey in a time-bound manner, the CAG suggested.

It was observed that deficiencies in data security resulted in transfer / classification of government land as private land. "The department does not have a disaster recovery system in place to safeguard the critical data of TamilNilam. In the absence of Aadhaar seeding in land records database, the system does not have a provision to uniquely identify land owners," the CAG said.

It recommended speeding up Aadhaar seeding of land records to avoid multiple patta numbers for the same pattadhar and facilitate consolidation of land holdings of individual owners. <https://www.millenniumpost.in/big-stories/cag-finds-errors-in-computerized-entry-of-tn-land-records-505254>

5. CAG picks holes in management of land records in T.N., report tabled in Assembly (thehindu.com) January 13, 2023

As per the CAG report, 79 acres of government land were illegally transferred to individuals in Kodaikanal; 3.22 lakh private land parcels have been erroneously classified as government lands; deficiencies have been found in data security, monitoring

A report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India tabled in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly points to various deficiencies in the management of land records in the State, including an incident wherein login credentials were misused to illegally transfer 79 acres of government land to individuals in Kodaikanal in 2018-19.

The performance audit on land records management in Tamil Nadu (covering the period from 2016-21) stated that four Revenue Department officials misused the key password assigned to the RDO, Kodaikanal and transferred 32 hectares of land (about 79 acres) of government lands in 103 sub-divisions in Kodaikanal town between October 2018 and June 2019.

Though the government maintained that the classification of the lands involved have been restored to their original classification viz., 'Government' and that these lands were blocked for further land transactions, an audit in October 2021 found that in one instance the land parcel was not blocked and in three instances, though the land parcels were blocked, the name of the individual to whom the lands were transferred illegally continued to be displayed.

Differences in land area in manual and computerised records

One of the other principal findings in the report was that in 61% of the sampled villages, there were significant differences in the total land area of the village, between the manual and computerised A-Register. Over 3.22 lakh private land parcels were erroneously classified as government land in the computerised land records resulting in the private land owners not being able to transact their land in TamilNilam.

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In one instance, as multiple patta numbers were assigned to the same land owner, all the land holdings of an individual in a village cannot be ascertained, the report said. Despite integrating the data between Registration and Revenue Departments, 49% of Online Patta Transfer applications (not involving sub-division) were rejected, resulting in citizens applying for OPT again through Common Service Centres.

“Deficiencies in data security resulted in transfer/classification of government land as private land. The Department does not have a Disaster Recovery system in place to safeguard the critical data of TamilNilam,” the report said.

In the absence of Aadhaar seeding in the land records database, the system did not have a provision to uniquely identify land owners, it said. “Monitoring at all levels, especially at the district level, were deficient. In the three sampled districts, the monitoring committees did not meet even once.” <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/cag-picks-holes-in-management-of-land-records-in-tn-report-tabled-in-assembly/article66373637.ece>

6. Tamil Nadu's own tax revenue rises 37% to Rs 72,000 crore (timesofindia.indiatimes.com) Updated: Jan 14, 2023

CHENNAI: Indicating revival of economic activities postCovid, Tamil Nadu has registered a 37% increase in the state's own tax revenue to 72,441 crore in the first six months ending September of the current fiscal 2022-23, compared to 52,908 crore in the same period of 2021-22. This constituted 50.7% of the state's own tax revenue estimated for the whole year (2022-23) at nearly 1.4 lakh crore in the Budget estimates for 2022-23.

Helped by an even higher growth in the state's non-tax revenue and share in central taxes but lower components, the overall revenue receipts of Tamil Nadu increased by 32% to 1.1 lakh crore for the first six months ending September 2022 compared to 85,210 crore registered in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The 'Trends in Revenue Receipts and Expenditure' report of the Tamil Nadu government during the first six months of fiscal 2022-23 was placed in the assembly by minister for finance and human resources management Palanivel Thiaga Rajan on Friday.

TN's non-tax revenue grew by 50%

According to the report, the 1.1 lakh crore constituted 48.5% of the budgeted revenue of the state in the overall Budget Estimates 2022-23, which was pegged at a little more than 2.3 lakh crore.

As per CAG data, TN's total revenue at the end of September 2022 was 1.3 lakh crore, compared to 1.1 lakh crore at the end of September 2021. Stamps and registration as well as state goods and service tax (SGST) had grown by 39% and 37% in the first six months of 2022-23 at 8,662.1 and 26,285.3 crore respectively. According to the report, Tamil Nadu's non-tax revenue registered a growth of 50.8% at 5,994 crore till September 2022 compared to 3,974 crore till September 2021. But the collection till September constitutes 38.6% of budget estimates. The state government expects a shortfall due to poor collection performance and non-revision of rates of certain non-tax items that were expected this financial year, it said. However, the government is taking steps to improve revenue collection by fees and charges, the report said. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/tamil-nadus-own-tax-revenue-rises-37-to-rs-72000-crore/articleshow/96977499.cms#:~:text=CHENNAI%3A%20Indicating%20revival%20of%20economic,50.7%25%20of%20the%20state's%20own>

7. कैग: डेटाबेस में 5 लाख जमीन के दस्तावेजों के सर्वे नंबर में गड़बड़ी ([janta serishta.com](http://janta-serishta.com)) January 14, 2023

20 तालुकों में भूमि अभिलेखों के कम्प्यूटरीकरण के दौरान भूमि प्रशासन विभाग के अधिकारिक डेटाबेस तमिलनिलम में 5.06 लाख भूमि दस्तावेजों की सर्वेक्षण संख्या गलत तरीके से दर्ज की गई है, भूमि रिकॉर्ड प्रबंधन पर नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक (सीएजी) की ऑडिट रिपोर्ट 2022 कहती है। विधानसभा में पेश किया।

1.48 लाख गलत प्रविष्टियों के साथ, तिरुवल्लुर जिले में सबसे अधिक त्रुटियां हैं। सूत्रों ने कहा कि भूमि पार्सल के लिए सर्वेक्षण संख्या निर्दिष्ट करने में लिपिकीय त्रुटि कुछ सौ करोड़ मूल्य की संपत्ति के लेनदेन को प्रभावित कर सकती है। कैग की रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि तिरुवल्लुर, चेंगलपट्टूर, तिरुप्पुर, पेराम्बलुर, द नीलगिरी, कन्याकुमारी और अन्य जिलों में 20 तालुकों में 23.24 लाख भूमि दस्तावेजों का डिजिटलीकरण किया गया है। "15.03 लाख दस्तावेजों के सर्वेक्षण संख्या को सही ढंग से दर्ज किया गया है। लेकिन 5,06,518 दस्तावेजों के सर्वेक्षण संख्या में विसंगतियां पाई गईं।"

सीएजी द्वारा 20 तालुकों में एक नमूना अध्ययन किया गया था। इन 20 तालुकों में कम्प्यूटरीकृत नाथम चित्त में भी गड़बड़ी पाई गई। सीएजी ने कहा कि जहां 293 दस्तावेजों में मालिकों के नाम गायब थे, वहीं 328 में रिश्तेदारों के नाम नहीं मिले। भूमि अभिलेखों का डिजिटलीकरण कई कमियों से प्रभावित हुआ है, जिसमें नाथम भूमि अभिलेखों और ई-

अदंगल के लिए ऑनलाइन सेवाओं को शुरू करने में असामान्य देरी और ऑनलाइन पट्टा हस्तांतरण में देरी शामिल है।

रिपोर्ट में पंजीकरण और राजस्व विभागों के बीच डेटा लिंक, संपत्ति प्रबंधन, डेटा सुरक्षा और योजना की निगरानी में कमियों की ओर भी इशारा किया गया है। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है, "सॉफ्टवेयर में सत्यापन नियंत्रण की कमी के कारण पुराने सर्वेक्षण नंबरों को हासिल करने और रोटेशन नियमों के अनुसार सब-डिवीजन नंबरों को आवंटित करने में त्रुटियां और विसंगतियां हुईं।"

1979 में रजिस्ट्री योजना के अद्यतन के अनुसार 111 शहरों में 6.22 लाख भूमि पार्सल के लिए निजी संस्थाओं को पट्टे जारी किए गए थे, इसे रैयतवारी नंजई/पंजाई के रूप में वर्गीकृत किया गया था। हालांकि, ये भूमि पार्सल तमिलनिलम में सरकारी भूमि (सरकार पंजाई / नानजई) के रूप में पंजीकृत थे, रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है।

कैग के अवलोकन के जवाब में, राजस्व अधिकारियों ने कहा कि 6.22 लाख मामलों में से लगभग 3 लाख मामलों का समाधान किया जा चुका है और शेष मामलों को भी जल्द ही सुलझा लिया जाएगा। कैग ने कहा,

"हालांकि, यह चिंता का विषय है कि लगभग 3.22 लाख भूमि पार्सल के मालिकों को पट्टा हस्तांतरण प्राप्त करने में कठिनाई का सामना करना पड़ रहा है।" <https://jantaserishta.com/amp/local/tamil-nadu/cag-mistake-in-survey-number-of-5-lakh-land-documents-in-database-1930227>

8. **Jal Jeevan Mission crippled in Kerala** (hindupost.in) January 15, 2023

Jal Jeevan Mission, with which the Central government aims to bring drinking water to the entire country by 2024, including in the villages, is being systematically sabotaged in Kerala. Of the Rs.4,600 crore rupees allocated for Kerala, only Rs.1,200 crore has been spent with 13 months to go. The list of beneficiaries given by Kerala to the center is also fake. Kerala is 28th in the project ranking.

Incidentally, last week, the communist government approved a recommendation from the water resources department to increase the rate of piped drinking water by one paisa per liter. Left Democratic Front (LDF) convener E P Jayarajan informed reporters they examined the proposal and authorized the rate hike.

The LDF is a coalition of like-minded Abrahamic political parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI). These syndicate outfits anyway blindly nod to what the CPM dictates. Kerala Congress (Mani) leader Roshy Augustine has been the Minister for Irrigation, Ground Water Department, Water Supply, and Sanitation in the Pinarayi Vijayan Government since May 2021.

The government knew it was likely to raise public anger and decided to discuss the decision on the Left Democratic Front (LDF). Experts opined that such moves are aimed at helping the

packaged drinking water mafia that has a tight grip over proceedings in Kerala. Citizens are unaware of how the communists/water mafia have undermined the Jal Jeevan Mission.

In 2019, the central government launched PM Narendra Modi's pet project, the Jal Jeevan Mission. It was only in 2021 that Kerala even began discussions about the project. Since then, the central BJP government has allocated Rs.4,600 crore rupees to the state. Of this, only 1,200 crores were spent.

The Kerala Ministry for Water Resources informed central Jal Shakti (Water Resources) that they utilized this amount and supplied drinking water to 15.59 lakh consumers. These numbers were untrue, and the Implementation Support Agency (ISA) under Jal Jeevan Mission stated that this figure was fake. Less than two lakh Keralite families are beneficiaries of the Jal Jeevan Mission project.

Drinking water should be provided by forming a new plan. But the project is being implemented in the state by adding to the existing connection of Jalanidhi and the current projects undertaken by the Kerala Water Authority (KWA). Since 2021, 15.59 lakh beneficiaries have been created by falsely including their Aadhaar number on the Jal Jeevan website. With more connections than the current pipeline capacity, many areas are not even getting drinking water.

Per protocol, the beneficiary should bear 10 percent of the Jal Jeevan project cost. The central government provides 50 percent, while the state government pays the rest. But this agreement was overturned in Kerala, and the communist regime solitarily changed these provisions. Now, Gram Panchayats should share 15 percent and provide the land required for the project!

Such steps have become a massive burden for low-income panchayats, where the Jal Jeevan project has become impractical. The state government has not allocated funds to the project implementation agencies in a time-bound manner. With this, the project has stopped in 755 Gram Panchayats that have signed the agreement.

Big states like Haryana, Gujarat, Telangana, and Punjab have achieved what might have been unthinkable a few years ago, and all households have tap water connections. Bihar, with around 96 percent, is not far behind. In Kerala, where communists claim to be number one, it is about 46 percent. The supply of electricity, too, is mired in similar controversies but is a matter for another day. For communist anarchists, is federalism a one-way street?

Price Rise

Speaking to reporters about the price hike, Roshy Augustine, the Kerala water supply minister, declared that it would not be a burden for the common man. The hike will come into effect after March and help the government earn extra income. Media should take the price increase positively and help improve the service, he added.

According to the new tariffs, a family of four must pay an extra Rs.120 monthly. Since commercials and factories have not been accounted for, experts point out that the final burden will be double that amount.

At present, the lowest rate is Rs 4.41 paise per 1000 liters. This has also been increased to Rs.14.41. Citizens are penalized for settling the accumulated liability of Rs.2,391 crores of the KWA. Authorities claim that it costs an astonishing 23 rupees to purify one liter of water!

Communist Fakery & Federalism

This is not the first time the communist government has blatantly lied to the public and later shamelessly apologized to the center, claiming a 'mistake.' In October, Kerala State Finance Minister K N Balagopal stated in the assembly that the center owned Kerala GST compensation of Rs.4,466 crores but mentioned Rs.1,548 crores in a note handed over to Central Minister Nirmala Sitaraman.

It turned out that only Rs.780 crores were pending, and that amount was held back since Kerala state failed to submit audited reports. Balagopal then ranted about Kerala's revenue deficit, non-budget sources, borrowing criteria, state GDP, and whatnot. It remains unknown whether the communist leader presented the audited reports.

His predecessor, Thomas Isaac (with a Ph.D. in coir weaving), and his communist party have decimated the local coir industry. Isaac also introduced a shady white elephant, KIIFB, that now has estimated liabilities worth not less than Rs.60,000 crores that the citizens must bear. Exact figures remain unknown and are shrouded in secrecy.

Balagopal now says that KIIFB borrowings are not Kerala's direct liabilities! Yet, he pays thousands of crores in interest and refuses to get the accounts publicly audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). The KIIFB income comes mainly from a cess on fuel.

Incidentally, KIIFB sanctioned funding for 70 water supply projects worth Rs.4,428.763 crores and is being implemented by Kerala Water Authority (KWA). The only positive is that the allocation ceased in 2019, at least for major ones.

The situation was similar when it came to highway development. In December, Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, revealed that the Kerala government backtracked from its commitment to bear 25 percent of the expense incurred during land acquisition for the development of the National Highways. He added that constructing a one km stretch of national highway in Kerala costs an astonishing Rs.100 crore.

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan claimed that the agreement only applied to one highway and not other state projects. He brazened it out and added that highway expansion is the right of the state and not a freebie. Vijayan claimed discrimination since the central government bears the complete expense of highway construction in other states. The Kerala CM did not consider the exorbitant land rates in Kerala and the corruption/gawking charges involved.

Incidentally, Vijayan does not even handle the Kerala Public Works Department. His son-in-law, PA Mohammed Riyas, is the PWD minister, and Vijayan was covering up for him. Riyas is anyway busy whipping up communal passions in his bastion of Kozhikode.

Hypocrisy and Corruption

The water supply project at Chittarikkal, Hosdurg taluk in Kasargod, is a perfect example of the Kerala government's hypocrisy and corruption. Work began in 2012 but could not be completed for various reasons, even after setting aside a whopping Rs.12.3 crore rupees. Panchayat authorities provided basic facilities and land for the project.

They paid an extra Rs 49 lakh more than the tender amount to the initial contractor, but the work could not be completed. Another contractor was terminated, and Rs 1.3 crore was transferred from the panchayat's fund. Yet, nothing happened. Later, the panchayat alleged that the contractors' failure and the officials' laxity made it impossible to complete the project.

Somehow, after spending Rs.8.45 crores, 700 households were provided clean water since the last covid period out of an estimated 3,300. Having spent a whopping rupees one lakh thirty thousand per connection, even the World Bank understood that they were being taken for a ride and withdrew from the project.

Earlier this month, Rs.30.50 crore was earmarked for a new project. Jal Jeevan Mission has allocated 24 crores, KWA 3 crores, and KIIFB 3.5 crores for pipeline replacement. Two thousand six hundred existing connections also need to be repaired/replaced. Many of the existing roadside pipelines need to be substituted. A mini water treatment plant will be established, and ten new water reservoirs will be installed in different panchayat areas.

Several such projects have been abandoned across the state to be replaced by Jal Jeevan Mission projects. Authorities/politicians have looted crores, and that topic has been comfortably brushed under thick Panchayat carpets.

Meanwhile, Roshy Augustine and Antony Raju (Minister for Road Transport) are busy meeting Cardinal Baselios Cleemis, major archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. They are allegedly busy planning protests styled on the Vizhinjam anti-port anarchy. This time, they aim to protect the thousands of acres of highly eco-sensitive reserve forests in the hill ranges that Abrahamics have usurped for decades. <https://hindupost.in/featured/jal-jeevan-mission-crippled-in-kerala/>

9. Wait gets longer for better ambulances, no bidders for tenders ([newindianexpress.com](https://www.newindianexpress.com)) 14 January 2023

Hanumanth RG CEO, GVK-EMRI, told TNIE that the technical glitches seen in September 2022 were a one-off issue and were resolved in a day's time

BENGALURU: Karnataka's steps to replace the current service providers handling 108 ambulances, have not seen much progress as no bidders have made any offers in the tenders floated so far, health department officials said. GVK-EMRI is the company handling ambulance services for 14 years in Karnataka. The ambulance services have received several complaints in terms of quality, late response time of ambulances and even technical glitches in the server, causing abrupt withdrawal of services. The Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) 2022 report also highlighted the failure of services, with late response time and ambulances not being well-equipped.

Dr R Narayana, deputy director (EMRI-108), said, "We have not seen bidders making any offers so far, and floated a new tender on January 9. Certain requirements have been changed in the new tender and we are hoping to find an interested bidder very soon."

He said the government is planning to enforce stricter penalties and guidelines for the new service providers to ensure that enhanced quality of services are provided to the people. Several times, there has been a lack of accountability due to strict rules being laid down, and not much

was done in case of poor quality of ambulances or late response time shown by service providers, Narayana said.

Hanumanth RG CEO, GVK-EMRI, told TNIE that the technical glitches seen in September 2022 were a one-off issue and were resolved in a day's time. Being replaced after 14 years, he said that beyond the technical glitch, they have provided services on time. He accepted that the quality of certain old ambulances was not up to the mark, and could be changed with the new service providers. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2023/jan/14/wait-gets-longer-for-better-ambulances-no-bidders-for-tenders-2537710.html>

10. Apathy sinks Himalayas (*theshillongtimes.com*) Jan 14, 2023

Now Tehri, Mussorie crumble

Heaven is literally falling to human greed. It is just not Joshimath but even Tehri Garhwal, Karnaprayag, and Mussorie are also sinking and so may be many other parts at the crest of the Uttarakhand Himalayas. The Rs 12,000 crore Char Dham (CD) all-weather road projects spurring real-estate are gobbling up all.

Latest reports say that the earth movers are digging around Joshimath and other areas even as over 4000 persons have been evacuated and most houses have crumbled. Tragedies do not stop the road to hell. In 2013, Uttarakhand government had sought Rs 21,000 crores for ruthless reconstruction post the Himalayan deluge. It seems to be the catalyst for the present disaster.

The Tehri district is the latest to report cracks and land subsidence. An IIT Roorkee team is studying Karnaprayag. Chamba in the Tehri, around a CD tunnelling is the worst hit with houses crumbling. Seepages at Tehri dam are common, reports SP Rai of National Institute of Hydrology. Now a road from Mana to Lipulekh through sensitive hills with rare virgin forest is the latest danger.

In June 2013, after the Kedarnath tragedy this scribe mentioned "In all there are 244 hydel projects (HEP) of various sizes that are at various stages of planning and are to be constructed in the state. Some of these are already on stream. Others are coming up. Pancheswar dam being planned in Tanakpur is likely to be bigger than Tehri and biggest in India. Does that mean more disasters are awaiting the region?"

Unfortunately, it is so. Nobody listened to the cries of former minister Uma Bharati for not dislodging the image of presiding deity, Dhari Devi before the June 18, 2013 cloudburst. The CAG reviewed 42 hydel projects in 2009. It noted that over 200 more projects were coming up – almost at every 5 to 7 kms. The yearning for making Uttarakhand the "Urja Pradesh" has led to reckless development.

Ravi Chopra, former head of High-Powered Committee for CD roads mentions that a bypass around Joshimath was opposed by the townspeople. The 10-metre-wide road all around the state weakens the hills with digging, blasting, removal of green cover and aquifers.

Pristine Joshimath the gateway to heaven, Satopanth, from where Yudhisthir went to swarga; the peeth of Adi Shankaracharya; winter camp of Lord Badrinath, is as per legend may be enunciating the end of an era.

The policy failure and greed to generate thousands of crores of profits has led to a disaster evolving for decades and hastened by rapid activity of hydel tunnelling, road constructions and puncturing aquifers ill-suited for a delicate fragile region, the crown of the Indian subcontinent.

Ancient wisdom ordained for least activity around tenuous hills that are shaken with the mildest vibration. No wonder even the British resorted to the least activities and built lighter toy trains where possible. They avoided wanton destruction that the swadeshi gold diggers have delved into. The broad gauge railway being extend beyond Rishikesh could have been avoided.

The prophesy of the Nar and Narayan hills merging with the Badrinath temple vanishing seems coming true. It predicts the submergence of the temple with the Alaknanda and other rivers either vanishing or changing course.

The Himalayan shrines may have contributed to wanderlust and development of the livelihood of the locals. In itself it has culturally been supposed to be a sustainable but not large economy. Religious trekking from Rishikesh upwards added to the adventure and charm of the pilgrimage. It was for the spirit and not fun. Post-Independence the road constructions started threatening the fragile region with more landslides. With each decade greed sharpened and the massive Tehri dam was built even against the wishes of scientists and ministers.

These shrines were considered sacred not only for their spirituality but as a constant reminder to tectonically sensitive zone that controls the subcontinental climate.

Joshimath is an instance of how common man suffers for all ill-planned measures. Yes, Joshimath, facing literally a Himalayan disaster itself has been a thriving economy with a mere bank investment of a petty amount of Rs 900 crore! That is the total debt entire Joshimath owes. Surprising, that is for a population of about 30,000 serving pilgrims and tourists to Badrinath, Valley of Flowers, Hemkund and the ski rink Auli. The rink itself cost Rs 83 lakh and today earns Rs 4.5 crore a year but is termed a hazard. The 10-meter-wide CD road decays hills amid severe devastation with felling of large number of trees, destruction of aquifers, shrubs and fauna habitats.

Queer is the norm for planting trees. Trees felled on the hills are replaced with planting trees in Jharkhand or anywhere in the country. The official files do a wonderful ecological balancing. In 2010, the HNB Garhwal University study said tunnel boring machine punctured an aquifer on December 24, 2009 releasing millions of litres of water daily from NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad 520 MW hydel project. The researchers warned of the mishap's potential for "initiating ground subsidence." It was forgotten till December 2022 when the looming nightmare became a reality around Joshimath. This punctured aquifer gushing out water is the cause for Joshimath sinking, confirms Garhwal Commissioner Sushil Kumar.

In February 2021, around 200 people went missing as Dhauliganga and Rishibhanga rivers flooded the Tapovan head race tunnel.

Warnings of 1930 Swiss scientists, 1976 Commissioner MC Mishra on haphazard constructions and Supreme Court appointed committee of 2013 for seismically sensitive Main Central Zone advice against hydel projects were ignored. The CD project of the Border Road Organisation being touted as defence project, though it was not so earlier, is only aggravating the situation.

Incidents of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF), a UNDP and European Commission study mentioned that such floods are happening regularly. Notable incidents occurred in 1997, 2000 and 2005 in the Sutlej basin and in 1970 and 1978 in Alaknanda and Bhagirathi basins. In 2000 and 2005 it hit the Pong Dam, in Himachal, severely, damaging roads, habitations and scores of bridges.

Incidents of GLOF are reported in Sikkim, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal and Arunachal Pradesh. The Himalayas all around are crumbling. Dams and roads benefit the industry-real estate mafia damning the sensitive geology and livelihood. If unchecked it may have disastrous consequences and even lead to desertification of the cradle of the civilisation, the Ganga valley. The country must rise to stop it. <https://theshillongtimes.com/2023/01/14/apathy-sinks-himalayas/>

11. Experts Blame Human Actions for Recent Himachal Earthquakes; State's Condition May Worsen in the Years to come ([weather.com](https://www.weather.com)) Jan 14, 2023

On early Saturday, two back-to-back earthquakes, one of a medium intensity measuring 3.2 magnitudes on the Richter scale, rocked Himachal Pradesh, where climate change is already having a drastic and detrimental effect.

Also, indiscriminate drilling of the hills for constructing tunnels is forcing rural communities, mainly in fragile and eco-sensitive zones of Chamba, Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts, to raise clamour against upcoming hydropower stations with their houses developing cracks and natural water resources disappearing.

In recent years, seepage in the Chamera III project that washed off Mokhar village in the Chamba district, the bursting of the reservoir of the Aleo-II project in the Kullu district at its first testing, and the seepages in the Karchham Wangtoo tunnel are indicators of a disaster waiting to happen.

Currently, the 180 megawatts (MW) Bajoli Holi hydropower project in Chamba has been facing anger from the tribal Gaddi community as they fear the project is posing a threat to their houses and fields owing to cracks and seepage in private and public land.

The question is if the state has made a scientific assessment of disaster-prone areas, studied geological and hydrological impacts for strict compliance with environmental and safety norms and prepared exigency plans.

These frightening realities have been mentioned several times in performance audits by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) that is to ascertain the state's preparedness.

According to Himdhara, a state-based environment action group, the sheer negligence is evident at two levels: firstly, the failure to ensure compliance with environmental and safety norms by hydropower project authorities and the government, and secondly, the negligence towards the very impacts of unregulated hydropower development.

Local NGOs and green activists are also demanding that international financial institutions must be held accountable for their financing of disastrous hydropower projects in the Himalayas.

Several shortcomings surfaced during the crisis, admit government officials.

An official, requesting anonymity as he is not authorised to speak to the media, told IANS in case of disaster or natural calamity, coordination among state and Central agencies involved in relief and rescue operations is almost a miss.

"No nodal officer is appointed at the state level to coordinate and monitor the operations," he remarked.

Also, there is no mechanism for reaching out to the affected people in the shortest possible time and no round-the-clock dedicated helpline service to provide information regarding post-disaster actions.

"The state has no special chopper to handle emergencies. Only the chief minister's official chopper was deployed for airlifting victims," added the official.

The hills of Himachal Pradesh, especially in Kullu, Shimla and Kinnaur districts, are more prone to natural disasters like flash floods, cloudbursts and landslides.

Official data show more than 1,500 people have been killed in flash floods in the state in the past 20 years.

Besides the construction of mega hydropower projects, roads and large-scale unregulated mining are generating mountains of debris, responsible for increasing the magnitude of the natural calamity.

Often the debris is haphazardly dumped on hill slopes and eventually finds its way into rivers and streams, raising the bed level.

The carrying capacity of rivers and streams is reduced, and during heavy rain, they often change their course, causing widespread destruction downstream.

State Disaster Management Department Director Sudesh Kumar Mokhta told IANS the state is prepared to handle any exigency relating to landslides.

When asked about the state's preparedness and the need for an updated disaster plan in the wake of the sinking town of Joshimath in the neighbouring Himalayan state Uttarakhand, he replied: "We don't foresee any exigency like Joshimath in this (Himachal Pradesh) state."

But the question is: Like Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh has also been undergoing unplanned construction of road networks and hydropower projects.

The ground is sinking in several villages and towns of Himachal Pradesh's Chamba and Kinnaur, a wake-up call for authorities as the robust forecasting system is a miss in the state.

A devastating earthquake in 1905 severely damaged property in the Kangra region, including St. John's Church, where many British officials were buried and claimed over 20,000 lives.

The frightening reality of a performance audit in 2017 on disaster management, with a specific focus on earthquake and fire, conducted by the CAG said 90 per cent of buildings, mainly houses, in rural areas of the state do not follow safe construction rules.

In Shimla town, 83 per cent out of a sample of 300 selected buildings were highly vulnerable if a major earthquake occurred.

However, the construction of buildings and houses in rural areas (89 per cent of total houses) is not regulated by any law.

Construction of seismic-resistant buildings in rural areas has, thus, not been ensured, the CAG had observed.

This is a wake-up call for authorities as the seismic sensitivity of the state is high. Seven out of 12 districts have over 25 per cent of their area falling in seismic zone V (very high damage risk). <https://weather.com/en-IN/india/news/news/2023-01-14-experts-blame-humans-for-recent-himachal-earthquakes>

12. दो भूकंप के लगे झटके, हिमाचल जर्जर जमीन पर विराजमान (*newsnationtv.com*) Jan 14, 2023

शिमला: हिमाचल प्रदेश में शनिवार तड़के एक के बाद एक दो भूकंप आए, जिनमें से एक मध्यम तीव्रता का था, जिसकी तीव्रता रिक्टर पैमाने पर 3.2 मापी गई थी।

साथ ही सुरंगों के निर्माण के लिए पहाड़ियों की अंधाधुंध ड्रिलिंग ग्रामीण समुदायों को, मुख्य रूप से चंबा, किन्नौर और लाहौल-स्पीति जिलों के नाजुक और पर्यावरण-संवेदनशील क्षेत्रों में, आगामी जलविद्युत स्टेशनों के खिलाफ आवाज उठाने के लिए मजबूर कर रही है, जहां उनके घरों में दरारें पड़ रही हैं और प्राकृतिक जल संसाधन गायब हो रहे हैं।

हाल के वर्षों में, चमेरा श्री परियोजना में रिसाव, जिसने चंबा जिले के मोखर गांव को बहा दिया, कुल्लू जिले में एलेओ-

द्वितीय परियोजना के जलाशय का पहले परीक्षण के दौरान फटना और करछम वांगटू सुरंग में रिसाव आपदा प्रतीक्षा के संकेतक हैं।

वर्तमान में, चंबा में 180 मेगावाट की बाजोली होली जलविद्युत परियोजना को आदिवासी गद्दी समुदाय के गुस्से का सामना करना पड़ रहा है क्योंकि उन्हें डर है कि यह परियोजना निजी और सार्वजनिक भूमि में दरारें और रिसाव के कारण उनके घरों और खेतों को खतरा पैदा कर रही है।

सवाल यह है कि क्या राज्य ने आपदा-

प्रवण क्षेत्रों का वैज्ञानिक मूल्यांकन किया है, पर्यावरण और सुरक्षा मानदंडों के सख्त अनुपालन

के लिए भूगर्भीय और हाइड्रोलॉजिकल प्रभावों का अध्ययन किया है और अत्यावश्यक योजनाएं तैयार की हैं?

नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (सीएजी) द्वारा प्रदर्शन ऑडिट में इन भयावह वास्तविकताओं का कई बार उल्लेख किया गया है, जो कि राज्य की तैयारियों का पता लगाने के लिए है।

राज्य आधारित पर्यावरण कार्रवाई समूह हिमधारा के अनुसार, सरासर लापरवाही दो स्तरों पर स्पष्ट है। पहला, जलविद्युत परियोजना प्राधिकरणों और सरकार द्वारा पर्यावरण और सुरक्षा मानकों के अनुपालन को सुनिश्चित करने में विफलता और दूसरा अनियमित जलविद्युत विकास के बहुत प्रभावों के प्रति लापरवाही है।

स्थानीय एनजीओ और हरित कार्यकर्ता भी मांग कर रहे हैं कि अंतरराष्ट्रीय वित्तीय संस्थानों को हिमालय में विनाशकारी जलविद्युत परियोजनाओं के वित्तपोषण के लिए जवाबदेह ठहराया जाना चाहिए।

एक अधिकारी ने नाम न छापने का अनुरोध करते हुए कहा कि वह मीडिया से बात करने के लिए अधिकृत नहीं हैं, उन्होंने आईएनएस को बताया कि आपदा या प्राकृतिक आपदा के मामले में राहत और बचाव कार्यों में शामिल राज्य और केंद्रीय एजेंसियों के बीच समन्वय लगभग खत्म हो गया है।

उन्होंने टिप्पणी की, संचालन के समन्वय और निगरानी के लिए राज्य स्तर पर कोई नोडल अधिकारी नियुक्त नहीं किया गया है।

इसके अलावा कम से कम संभव समय में प्रभावित लोगों तक पहुंचने के लिए कोई तंत्र नहीं है और आपदा के बाद के कार्यों के बारे में जानकारी प्रदान करने के लिए चौबीसों घंटे समर्पित हेल्पलाइन सेवा नहीं है।

अधिकारी ने कहा, राज्य के पास आपात स्थिति से निपटने के लिए कोई विशेष हेलिकॉप्टर नहीं है। केवल मुख्यमंत्री के आधिकारिक हेलिकॉप्टर को पीड़ितों को एयरलिफ्ट करने के लिए तैनात किया गया है।

हिमाचल प्रदेश की पहाड़ियों, विशेष रूप से कुल्लू, शिमला और किन्नौर जिलों में, अचानक बाढ़, बादल फटने और भूस्खलन जैसी प्राकृतिक आपदाओं का खतरा अधिक है।

आधिकारिक आंकड़े बताते हैं कि पिछले 20 वर्षों में राज्य में अचानक आई बाढ़ में 1,500 से अधिक लोग मारे गए हैं।

मेगा जलविद्युत परियोजनाओं के निर्माण के अलावा, सड़कें और बड़े पैमाने पर अनियमित खनन मलबे के पहाड़ पैदा कर रहे हैं, जो प्राकृतिक आपदा की भयावहता को बढ़ाने के लिए जिम्मेदार हैं।

अक्सर मलबे को पहाड़ी ढलानों पर फेंक दिया जाता है, अंततः नदियों और नालों में अपना रास्ता खोज लेता है, जिससे तल स्तर बढ़ जाता है।

नदियों और जलधाराओं की वहन क्षमता कम हो जाती है और भारी बारिश के दौरान वे अक्सर अपना मार्ग बदल लेते हैं, जिससे नीचे की ओर व्यापक विनाश होता है।

राज्य आपदा प्रबंधन विभाग के निर्देशक सुदेश कुमार मोख्ता ने आईएनएस को बताया कि राज्य भूस्खलन से संबंधित किसी भी आपात स्थिति से निपटने के लिए तैयार है।

पड़ोसी हिमालयी राज्य उत्तराखंड में जोशीमठ के डूबते शहर के मद्देनजर राज्य की तैयारियों और एक अद्यतन आपदा योजना की आवश्यकता के बारे में पूछे जाने पर उन्होंने जवाब दिया, हमें इसमें जोशीमठ जैसी किसी भी आपात स्थिति की उम्मीद नहीं है।

लेकिन सवाल यह है कि उत्तराखंड की तरह हिमाचल प्रदेश में भी सड़क नेटवर्क और पनबिजली परियोजनाओं का अनियोजित निर्माण हो रहा है।

हिमाचल प्रदेश के चंबा और किन्नौर के कई गांवों और कस्बों में जमीन धंस रही है, जो अधिकारियों के लिए एक चेतावनी है क्योंकि राज्य में मजबूत पूर्वानुमान प्रणाली की कमी है।

1905 में एक विनाशकारी भूकंप ने कांगड़ा क्षेत्र में संपत्ति को गंभीर रूप से क्षतिग्रस्त कर दिया, जिसमें सेंट जॉन चर्च भी शामिल था, जहां कई ब्रिटिश अधिकारियों को दफनाया गया था और 20,000 से अधिक लोगों की जान ले ली थी।

आपदा प्रबंधन पर 2017 में एक प्रदर्शन ऑडिट की भयावह वास्तविकता, जिसमें भूकंप और आग पर विशेष ध्यान दिया गया था, सीएजी ने कहा कि राज्य के ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में 90 प्रतिशत भवन, मुख्य रूप से घर सुरक्षित निर्माण नियमों का पालन नहीं करते हैं।

शिमला शहर में,

300 चयनित इमारतों के नमूने में से 83 प्रतिशत एक बड़ा भूकंप आने पर अत्यधिक संवेदनशील थे।

हालांकि, ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में भवनों और घरों का निर्माण (कुल घरों का 89 प्रतिशत) किसी भी कानून द्वारा विनियमित नहीं है।

कैग ने पाया कि, ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में भूकंपरोधी भवनों का निर्माण, इस प्रकार, सुनिश्चित नहीं किया गया है।

यह अधिकारियों के लिए एक वेक-

अप कॉल है क्योंकि राज्य की भूकंपीय संवेदनशीलता अधिक है। 12 में से सात जिलों का 25 प्रतिशत से अधिक क्षेत्र भूकंपीय क्षेत्र (बहुत अधिक क्षति जोखिम) में आता है।

बाकी हिस्से सिस्मिक जोन फोर (हाई डैमेज रिस्क) में आते हैं। <https://www.newsnationtv.com/india/news/two-quake-one-warning-himachal-it-on-very-haky-ground-336199.html>

13. Rajasthan: अवैध खनन को लेकर कांग्रेस विधायक का अपनी ही सरकार पर तंज, बोले- 'राजस्थान कई जोशीमठों को देगा जन्म' (abplive.com) Update: Jan 14, 2023

जोशीमठ (Joshimath) आज जो देख रहा है, अगर रेगिस्तान में अवैध खनन को नियंत्रित नहीं किया गया, तो 25 साल बाद राजस्थान (Rajasthan) में भी देखने को मिलेगा. यह चेतावनी एन वायरनमेंट एक्सपर्ट (Environment Expert) ने दी है. कांग्रेस विधायक भरत सिंह (Congress MLA Bharat Singh) ने प्रदेश में अवैध खनन में लिप्त लोगों की संवेदनहीनता का जिक्र करते हुए चुटकी ली. उन्होंने कहा, कई पहाड़ियां हैं जो राज्य में गायब हो गई हैं. दूसरी ओर स्थानीय लोगों द्वारा कचरा डंप करके मैदानी इलाकों में पहाड़ियों का निर्माण किया गया है.

विधायक भरत सिंह हमेशा से अवैध बालू खनन के मुद्दे पर मुखर रहे हैं और अपनी ही सरकार पर हमलावर रहे हैं. उन्होंने हाल ही में मुख्यमंत्री अशोक गहलोत को एक पत्र लिखा और राज्य के खनन मंत्री प्रमोद जैन भाया को भूमाफिया करार देते हुए बर्खास्त करने की मांग की.

कांग्रेस विधायक ने अपनी ही सरकार पर लगाया ये आरोप मीडिया से बात करते हुए सिंह ने कहा, जोशीमठ की कहानी राजस्थान में भी दोहराई जाएगी. यह दुख की बात है कि जब स्थिति नियंत्रण से बाहर हो जाती है तो सरकारों को इस मुद्दे की गंभीरता का एहसास होता है. हमारे राज्य में भी जोशीमठ की कहानी दोहराई जा रही है. प्रदेश में अवैध खनन ने कई चुनौतियां पेश की हैं, लेकिन सभी हाथ पर हाथ धरे बैठे नजर आ रहे हैं. आपदा आने पर वे नींद से जाग उठेंगे.

कांग्रेस विधायक ने आगे कहा, इस क्षेत्र में पूरी पारिस्थितिकी बदल गई है. कहानी का दुखद पहलू यह है कि ऐसे तथ्यों की आर्थिक संभावनाओं को ध्यान में रखते हुए, इसकी आर्थिक परिधि के तहत समीक्षा की जा रही है और इसलिए सभी ने इस अवैध कार्य में हाथ मिलाया है.

संयुक्त रूप से वे पहाड़ियों को निगल रहे हैं. उन्होंने कहा कि वह 23 जनवरी को जयपुर में विधानसभा सत्र शुरू होने वाले दिन खनन मंत्री के निर्वाचन क्षेत्र में विरोध प्रदर्शन करेंगे.

पर्यावरण कार्यकर्ता ने लगाया ये आरोप

इस बीच पर्यावरण कार्यकर्ता महेंद्र कच्छवा ने कहा, अवैध खनन और राजस्थान पर्यायवाची बन गए हैं. वास्तव में इन माफियाओं ने जंगलों को भी नहीं बखशा है और बाघों की नस्ल को खतरे में डालते हुए जंगलों के मुख्य क्षेत्रों में प्रवेश कर गए हैं. रणथंभौर में कोर बाघ संरक्षण क्षेत्रों में भारी तबाही हुई है. 1,100 हेक्टेयर भूमि में फैले क्षेत्रों में कई अवैध खदानें चल रही हैं.

कच्छवा ने जोर देकर कहा, दुख की बात यह है कि खनिकों ने जंगलों में 30 फीट गहरे गड्ढे खोदे हैं, यहां तक कि रामगढ़ अभयारण्य के अंदर के इलाकों में भी जहां बाघिन प्रसव के लिए जाती है, तेजी से अतिक्रमण हो रहा है और जंगलों के अंदर खनन हो रहा है और शिकार भी बड़े पैमाने पर हो रहा है. इससे आसपास के इलाके भी प्रभावित हो रहे हैं.

नमक माफियाओं के अवैध खनन से सांभर झील सूखी

महेंद्र कच्छवा ने कहा, जवाई अभयारण्य, रणथंभौर राष्ट्रीय उद्यान और सांभर झील में इन अवैध खनन माफियाओं का दबदबा है. सांभर क्षेत्र में नमक माफियाओं का दबदबा है. इसका नतीजा सामने है. जो झील कभी मई-

जून में सूख जाती थी, वह अब सूख गई है. नवंबर और दिसंबर में. कारण साफ है, इसे (अवैध खनन) रोकने के लिए कोई प्रशिक्षित समर्पित कर्मचारी नहीं है और इसके खिलाफ आवाज उठाने वाले कर्मचारियों के लिए कोई सुरक्षा नहीं है. आखिरकार राज्य में खुलेआम हत्याएं हो रही हैं.

सिंह की तरह उनका भी मानना है कि राजस्थान भविष्य में जोशीमठ जैसी स्थिति देखेगा. जो हम जोशीमठ में झेल रहे हैं,

25 साल बाद आप यहां वैसी ही स्थिति देखेंगे, जैसे अतिक्रमण और खनन बढ़ रहा है और क्षेत्र कंक्रीट के जंगल में तब्दील हो रहा है.

अधिकारियों की नाक के नीचे होते हैं अवैध खनन

एक अन्य पर्यावरणविद् बाबूलाल जाजू ने कहा, अवैध खनन ने राज्य को दयनीय स्थिति में ला दिया है. यह (अवैध खनन) भरतपुर, अलवर, राजसमंद और कई अन्य जिलों जैसे लगभग सभी जिलों में चल रहा है. इसके कारण नदियां सूख गई हैं. अधिकारियों की नाक के नीचे खुले आम नदियों से रेत निकाला जा रहा है, जिससे जलीय जीवन प्रभावित हुआ है.

उन्होंने चेतावनी देते हुए कहा, अगर अवैध खनन पर पूर्ण विराम नहीं लगा तो जोशीमठ की कहानी निश्चित रूप से राजस्थान में दोहराई जाएगी. जोशीमठ की कहानी का कारण लालच और अवांछित विकास की लालसा है. वे प्रकृति को व्यवसाय में बदलना चाहते हैं. वही कहानी यहां दोहराई जा रही है. अनियंत्रित विकास का लालच है, जो 'कैंसर' बन जाएगा और लोगों को रुला देगा.

राजस्थान खान विभाग ने किया सुप्रीम कोर्ट के आदेश का उल्लंघन

2018 में सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने एक केंद्रीय अधिकार प्राप्त समिति की रिपोर्ट का भी हवाला दिया कि , राज्य के अरावली क्षेत्र में 31 पहाड़ियां गायब हो गई हैं. शीर्ष अदालत ने कहा था कि राजस्थान में पहाड़ियों का गायब होना दिल्ली में प्रदूषण के स्तर में वृद्धि का एक कारण हो सकता है. इससे पहले नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) की रिपोर्ट में भी कहा गया था कि राजस्थान खान विभाग ने अरावली पर्वत श्रृंखला में खनन के खिलाफ सर्वोच्च न्यायालय के आदेश का उल्लंघन करते हुए खनन पट्टे प्रदान, नवीनीकरण और विस्तारित किए.

राजस्थान में अवैध खनन, जिसमें अरावली पर्वत श्रृंखला में तांबा, सीसा, जस्ता, रॉक फॉस्फेट, सो पस्टोन, सिलिका बालू, चूना पत्थर, संगमरमर और जिप्सम का एक समृद्ध भंडार है, ने वर्षों में कई पहाड़ियों को धराशायी कर दिया है. हाल ही में ब्रज क्षेत्र में अवैध खनन के विरोध में राज्य में एक संत ने आत्मदाह कर लिया और आरोप लगाया कि अवैध खनन के कारण पवित्र पहाड़ियां गायब हो रही हैं. <https://www.abplive.com/states/rajasthan/rajasthan-congress-mla-targets-ashok-gehlot-government-over-illegal-mining-says-joshimath-sinking-situation-will-arise-2307932>

14. Illegal mining will lead to many Joshimaths in Rajasthan, warn veterans (themeghalayan.com, thehansindia.com) Update: Jan 14, 2023

What Joshimath is seeing today will be seen in Rajasthan somewhere after 25 years if the present menace of illegal mining remains unchecked in the desert state, veteran environmentalists say while warning of a "disaster which is out of expectation".

What Joshimath is seeing today will be seen in Rajasthan somewhere after 25 years if the present menace of illegal mining remains unchecked in the desert state, veteran environmentalists say while warning of a "disaster which is out of expectation".

"There are many hills that have gone missing in the state. In fact, on the other hand, hills have been created on plains by the locals by dumping garbage," Congress MLA Bharat Singh quipped while mentioning the insensitivity of people engaged in illegal mining in the state.

Singh has been vocal on the issue of illegal sand mining and has been attacking his own government.

He recently wrote a letter to Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and demanded the dismissal of state Mining Minister Pramod Jain Bhaya, terming him "land mafia".

Speaking to IANS, Singh said, “Joshimath story will be repeated in Rajasthan too. It is sad that governments realize the gravity of the issue when the situation goes out of control. In our state too, Joshimath’s story is being repeated... The illegal mining in the state has thrown many challenges out, however, everyone seems to be sitting with folded hands. They will wake up from slumber when disaster happens.”

The Congress MLA further said, “The entire ecology has changed in the region. The sad part of the story is that such facts are being reviewed under its economic ambit, keeping monetary prospects in mind and hence everyone has joined hands in this illegal act... Unitedly, they are engulfing hills.”

Singh said that he will protest in Mining Minister’s constituency on January 23, the day when the Assembly session starts in Jaipur.

Meanwhile, environmental activist Mahendra Kachhwa, said, “Illegal mining and Rajasthan have become synonymous. In fact, these mafias have not even spared forests and have entered the core areas of forests, threatening the tiger breed. There has been massive destruction in Ranthambore in core tiger conservation areas... many illegal mines are running in areas spread over 1,100 hectares of land.”

“The sad part is that the miners have dug 30 feet deep pits in jungles, even in areas inside Ramgarh Sanctuary where tigress goes to deliver. There is rapid encroachment and mining inside jungles and hunting also goes rampant. If forest area gets disturbed, the surrounding areas will also be affected,” he added.

“Jawai Sanctuary, Ranthambore national park, and Sambhar lake are all dominated by these illegal mining mafias. Salt mafias dominate in the Sambhar region. The results of it are out in open. The lake which once used to dry during May-June has now dried in November and December... The reason is simple, there is no trained dedicated staff to check it (illegal mining) and there is no protection for the staff who raise their voices (against it). Eventually, open murders are being reported in the state,” Kachhwa asserted.

Like Singh, he also believes that Rajasthan will see a Joshimath-like situation in the future. “What we are facing in Joshimath, after 25 years you will see the same situation here as encroachment and mining are increasing and the area is turning into a concrete jungle”.

Babulal Jaju, another environmentalist said, “Illegal mining has brought the state into a pathetic situation. It (illegal mining) is going on in almost all districts like Bharatpur, Alwar, Rajsamand, and many more. Rivers have dried up because of this malpractice. Sand has been dug out from rivers openly under the nose of officials which has affected the aquatic life.”

He warned: “Joshimath story will surely be repeated in Rajasthan if there is no full stop to illegal mining. The reason behind Joshimath’s story is greed and lust for unwanted development. They want to turn nature into business. The same story is repeated here. There is greed for uncontrolled development, which will become ‘cancer’ and will leave people crying.”

In 2018, the Supreme Court also referred to a central empowered committee report that 31 hills or hillocks have vanished in the state’s Aravalli area. The disappearance of hills in Rajasthan could be one of the reasons for the rise in pollution levels in Delhi, the apex court had said.

Earlier, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report also said Rajasthan's mines department granted, renewed, and extended mining leases violating Supreme Court's orders against mining in the Aravali mountain range.

Illegal mining in Rajasthan which has a rich reserve of copper, lead, zinc, rock phosphate, soapstone, silica sand, limestone, marble, and gypsum in the Aravalli mountain range has razed several hills over the years, said sources.

Recently, a saint self-immolated in the state protesting against illegal mining in the holy Braj area alleging that holy hills are disappearing courtesy of illegal mining. <https://themeghalayan.com/illegal-mining-will-lead-to-many-joshimaths-in-rajasthan-warn-veterans/>

15. Gujarat model was development on steroids—Free land, large loans, nearly zero interest rates (*theprint.in*) 14 Jan, 2023

Narendra Damodardas Modi was born in September 1950 to a low-caste family. He grew up with six siblings in a semi-finished house in a remote Gujarat village. When he was eight years old, he joined the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the belligerent Hindutva organization. From that early start, he rose in prominence as a leader in Gujarat's BJP. Modi jackknifed into the national and international consciousness in February 2002, when hordes of Hindus massacred Muslims under his watch as Gujarat's chief minister. He showed little compassion for those who suffered and refused to condemn the riots.

Soon after the riots, though, Modi sensed political and economic trouble when business owners complained about the continuing Hindu and police violence against Muslims, civil rights activists, and journalists. Many businesses threatened to stop investing in Gujarat. In late April, an industry leader warned that not just Gujarat but India would "pay dearly" for the state's failure to protect minorities. Veteran industrialist Rahul Bajaj sustained the denunciation. "Events like the Gujarat carnage will impede our economic progress," Bajaj wrote in the *Hindustan Times*. At a conclave of industrialists in February 2003, amid a continuing chorus of criticism from businesses, Bajaj looked at Modi and asked him, "We would like to know what you believe in, what you stand for, because leadership is important."

A furious Modi dismissed his critics as "pseudo-secularists." He recast himself as a friend of business and began marketing Gujarat as a prime business location. In September 2003, with the help of the businessman Gautam Adani, Modi established Vibrant Gujarat, planned as a once-every-two-years gathering to sell Gujarat to Indian and foreign industrialists. Adani and other businessmen—including Mukesh Ambani—signed agreements with the Gujarat government to fund and operate large investment projects.

Modi's rebranding effort went national in 2004. A new phrase—"the Gujarat model of development"—became associated with him as he campaigned that year for the BJP's Lok Sabha candidates (Figure 21.1). The narrative of Modi as a development champion grew exponentially.

In late 2006, Mukesh Ambani led a delegation of Indian businessmen to the United States to market "Vibrant Gujarat." Modi, however, had set his eyes on a bigger prize: Ratan Tata, India's most respected business name. An opportunity arose in 2008 when the frustrated Tata

announced he was pulling his car manufacturing investment out of West Bengal because there was no meeting of the minds with the farmers protesting against his acquisition of their land. As Modi described it, he sent a three-word text message to Tata: “Welcome to Gujarat.” Tata did not disappoint. He became Narendra Modi’s brand ambassador, singing his praises to a worldwide audience on Fareed Zakaria’s Sunday morning program on CNN. Modi invited other Indian and foreign businessmen. He promised them that in Gujarat, instead of “red tape,” a “red carpet” awaited them. The accolades for Modi descended into silliness. Anil Ambani, Mukesh’s younger brother and one of India’s leading businessmen, chimed in. He said that Modi was “the lord of men, a leader among leaders and the king among kings.” Tata added that he had been “stupid” to have not invested more in Gujarat.

The Gujarat model was marauding development on steroids. For businesses, it was bonanza time! They received virtually free land, large loans at nearly zero interest rates, generous tax breaks, and no-fuss environmental clearances. The taxpayer bore the cost. In early 2013, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (the same body that highlighted improper allocation of spectrum and mining rights by Manmohan Singh’s central government) rapped Modi’s Gujarat government for granting approximately \$120 million (750 crore rupees) in “undue” favors to big business. “The major beneficiaries of government’s largesse,” the Press Trust of India reported, were “big corporate entities like Reliance Industries, Essar Steel and Adani Power.

The favored businesses invested in capital-intensive projects with large price tags well suited to flashy announcements. Petroleum (the fastestgrowing industrial sector in Gujarat), steel, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals projects fit that pattern. The projects boosted GDP but created few new employment opportunities. They polluted the land and rivers flagrantly while also depleting the state’s groundwater.

Gautam Adani embodied the Gujarat model. Born in 1962, Adani dropped out of college in 1978 to enter the diamond trade. He soon became an export-import trader and industrialist. In the late 1990s, he embarked on infrastructure projects. The Gujarat government sold Adani land at rates that were far below the market price. He received highly underpriced natural gas from a government-owned company and paid a much lower than contractually stipulated penalty for delays in supplying electric power to the state’s grid. His projects caused irreparable damage to waterways and the livelihoods of fishermen, and when he seized community pasture lands, he destroyed valuable mangroves. From 2000 until 2013, Adani’s business turnover increased fourteenfold to reach \$8.5 billion. His capital-intensive projects created only a limited number of jobs, and these were mainly for skilled workers.

Since the state’s budget prioritized giveaways for big business, expenditure on education, health, and other welfare services suffered. As University of Chicago philosopher Martha Nussbaum emphasized in a clinical dissection, Gujarat’s human development indicators placed it about in the middle of the range achieved by Indian states, which was an unworthy achievement given how low the general condition of Indian human development was. Moreover, in the context of Gujarat’s high GDP growth, the state’s human development performance, including on such measures as life expectancy and female literacy, was “not just middling but downright bad. <https://theprint.in/pageturner/excerpt/gujarat-model-was-development-on-steroids-free-land-large-loans-nearly-zero-interest-rates/1313695/>

16. Sharks who grabbed State land under the hammer (greaterkashmir.com) 15 Jan, 2023

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir government has occasionally revealed the names of powerful politicians and businessmen who are in possession of sizable amounts of state land or land that was transferred under the now-defunct Roshni scheme. However, the government has now set a deadline of January 31 to remove all encroachments from this land.

All Deputy Commissioners in J&K have been instructed by the government to guarantee that all encroachments from state property, including Roshni and Kahcharai, are removed by the end of the current month and to submit a compliance report.

Vijay Kumar Bidhuri, Commissioner Secretary to the Government, Department of Revenue, has instructed all Deputy Commissioners to ensure that all encroachments on state land, including Roshni and Kahcharai land, are removed to the extent of 100 percent by January 31, 2023.

The Commissioner Secretary of Revenue has also instructed the Deputy Commissioners to develop a daily anti-encroachment drive strategy and designate Additional Deputy Commissioners as District Nodal Officers for coordination and efficient drive implementation.

Official sources said that the encroachment list involves highly influential persons of J&K including politicians from all major political parties and businessmen who have taken prized locations for peanuts.

The main beneficiaries under the act were the sister concerns of J&K's two top political parties – the Nawai Subah Trust of the National Conference and Khidmat Trust of the Congress. Lands at prominent locations were transferred to both of these institutions and the rate set by the statutory committee was between Rs 1.10 crore per kanal to Rs. 1.20 crore per kanal which was having a market value of more than Rs 13 crore, which means that a rebate of 85 percent was given to the institutions having links with two of the biggest political parties of the state.

“The Deputy Commissioners should constitute teams of Revenue officers for removal of encroachments and personally monitor the drive and both the Divisional Commissioners should also monitor the drive on a regular basis,” a circular issued in this regard said.

A daily progress report has also been requested by the government through the respective Divisional Commissioners with the concerned Assistant Commissioner (Central) serving as the Nodal Officer.

Additionally, the Divisional Commissioners have been asked to deliver the combined reports through the Financial Commissioner Revenue to the Administrative Department Revenue by 5 pm in the format developed by the Deputy Commissioners by 4 pm each day.

The Deputy Commissioners are required to provide information regarding the total amount of encroached land on the day, the amount of encroachment removed day by day, and the balance for State land, including Roshni and Kahcharai, in order for the government to have a clear understanding of the progress made each and every day up until January 31, 2023, which is the deadline for finishing the exercise.

The benefits of regularisation granted to the beneficiaries under the Roshni Act were withdrawn by the Division Bench of the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir, which was led by the then Chief Justice Gita Mittal, when handling the PIL No 19/2011 and other related concerns.

Additionally, the DB had given the Central Bureau of Inquiry (CBI), the nation's top investigative agency, control over a number of FIRs and the entire scheme with instructions to submit regular progress reports so that the High Court could keep track of the investigation.

Marred by irregularities, the influential took the cream from history's most controversial law that was based on illegality, the implementation details suggest a clear and brazen discrimination at the regional levels.

As per the official figures, the government could generate just Rs 77 crore, of which Rs 22 crore was collected from Jammu and Rs 55 crore in the Kashmir division, but the land transferred is three times more in the Jammu region.

In Jammu, according to January 2018 details, the government transferred 1, 58,512 kanal of land. It got Rs 22.63 crore to the state's Consolidated Fund. On average, a kanal of land was given at a throwaway price of Rs 1428.

While in the Kashmir division, against a receipt of Rs 54.27 crore, 13,732 kanal were given to 11,247 people. This makes a cost of a kanal land at Rs 39,522.

Interestingly, Srinagar city fetched the highest revenue under this scheme, a total of Rs 52.17 crore receipts were generated from 375 kanal of land transferred which meant a kanal of land was transferred at Rs 14 lakh.

The indictment of the scheme had come months before the 2014 floods.

Subash Chander Pandey, the then Principal Accountant General (PAG), termed it history's major scandal. His auditors investigated the cases between November 2012 and July 2013, probed its evolution, changes and implementation and came out with a damning report. He told reporters that the entire chain of bureaucracy in the state resorted to non-cooperation, thus delaying the submission of the report to the state assembly in time.

"The Roshni Act was systematically diluted and damaged by making deficient rules with having very weak committees to implement it and giving rebates and giving agricultural land free of cost which was against the Act," the PAG had told reporters.

"Our conclusion is that the government acted beyond the authority given by the Act and violated it."

CAG termed the interventions during the era of former chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad "irregular" and "illegal".

The PAG suggested fixing the accountability for the 'highly questionable' amendments made to the original law initially in the former chief minister Mufti Muhammad Sayeed's era and later by the Azad government.

Listing “substantive deviation”, the CAG report listed instances in which a huge mass of land was categorised as agricultural land and given free of cost.

The act was believed to be a revolutionary step in the annals of history in Jammu and Kashmir after the Agrarian Reforms Act.

It was hoped that the legislation would help boost the farming sector and in turn generate substantial revenue for funding power projects across the state.

The rules under the act were also notified.

Under the provisions of the act, applications for conferment of ownership rights were to be filed up to March 31, 2007.

The scheme initially envisaged the conferment of proprietary rights of around 20.55 lakh kanals (1,02,750 hectares) to the occupants of which only 15.85 percent of land was approved for vesting of ownership rights.

Jammu and Kashmir Law Commission under the aegis of its chairman Justice (Retd) M K Hanjura had submitted a detailed 53-page report, which revealed shocking results on the Roshni Act.

The commission termed the act as a “typical example of the fences swallowing the crop. These are covered in dust from top to toe. The state has gone against the grain in legislating the act and in framing the rules. It prepared the chicken feed for itself and the bees sowed the wild oats. It has blessed its flowers and the weeds. Such legislation where a huge chunk of land comprising thousands of kanal in which the public, in general, had an interest has been conveniently allowed to be transferred to the trespassers and the encroachers by a blatant misuse of the public trust and power cannot find a place in any nook and corner of the Indian State.” <https://www.greaterkashmir.com/todays-paper/front-page/final-ultimatum-sharks-who-grabbed-state-land-under-the-hammer>

17. Is Assam NRC now nobody’s child? (timesofindia.indiatimes.com) Jan 14, 2023

The controversy surrounding the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam refuses to die down. Recently, a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India highlighting massive financial anomalies and bureaucratic lapses was tabled in the state assembly.

This has opened a Pandora’s box with an NGO, Assam Public Works (APW), on whose petition the Supreme Court had ordered updating the citizens’ list in 2009, levelling fresh allegations against former NRC coordinator Prateek Hajela and a few other individuals.

In June last year, Hajela’s successor, Hitesh Dev Sarma, had with Assam government’s Vigilance and AntiCorruption Branch alleging graft and money laundering during the former’s tenure. But no action has been taken on the complaint so far.

The NRC was first prepared for Assam in 1951 based on the Census of that year under the directive of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The objective was to weed out illegal immigrants who had entered Assam from erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh). During a review of the

implementation of the Assam Accord in May 2005, the then Congress government in the state had agreed for updating the 1951 NRC. The historic Accord signed in 1985 marked the culmination of the six-year Assam Agitation that demanded detection and deportation of illegal immigrants irrespective of their religious affiliations.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court had also ordered updating the NRC on a petition filed by APW. Subsequently, Registrar General of India (RGI) issued a notification on December 5, 2013 to begin the mammoth task of updating the citizens' register.

Civil society organisations and indigenous groups welcomed the decision as the NRC was perceived to be critical to identifying millions of illegal settlers in Assam. But what was supposed to be a safeguard for greater Assamese identity and culture against a demographic onslaught of illegal immigration turned out to be a dud.

Needless to say, the ruling BJP had taken the credit after the NRC exercise was completed. And now, it has stopped short of abandoning the matter. The final list released on August 31, 2019, had excluded over 19 lakh applicants out of a total 3.3 crore whose fate will be determined by foreign tribunals. There is speculation that many of those excluded are genuine citizens, whose claims may be stuck due to improper documentation or some technical errors.

Even the Congress staked claim ahead of the release of the final list. "It is my own baby. The BJP didn't take much care of my baby. As a result, it has become defective. The baby is defective because you did not provide sufficient food or sufficient nourishment. Instead of growing as a healthy baby, it has become a weak and sick baby," former CM Tarun Gogoi had said in an interview with The Wire in August 2018.

More than three years since the NRC exercise was completed, but the Registrar General of India (RGI) is yet to notify the list. Amid this delay came the CAG report which is, in fact, a stinging comment on the manner in which then NRC coordinator Prateek Hajela handled the entire work.

The audit report flagged issues such as – "exorbitant profit of over Rs 155 crore retained by System Integrator (Wipro) on operator's wage"; "deviation from the contract" that led to "unauthorised expenditure of over Rs 10 crore in connection with the engagement of third-party monitoring consultants and an excess expenditure of Rs 1.78 crore on project management"; "avoidable expenditure to the tune of Rs 7 crore in software development through change request"; "haphazard development of NRC software with risk to confidentiality and integrity of data", among others.

It is not clear yet what action the government will take against individuals and entities who made a big mess of the NRC exercise. The state where 860 people had sacrificed their lives in the hope of an "infiltration-free Assam" certainly deserves an answer from the ruling dispensation. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/northeast-diary-is-assam-nrc-now-nobodys-child/articleshow/96983471.cms?from=mdr>

18. बंगाल में केंद्रीय योजना में धांधली के आरोप पर टकराव, केंद्र की रिपोर्ट पर ममता सरकार को ऐतराज (tv9hindi.com) Update: Jan 15, 2023

प्रधानमंत्री सड़क योजना के आवंटन के बावजूद सौ दिन के काम का पैसा अभी तक बंद है. प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना की स्वीकृति के बावजूद इसका आवंटन अब तक अटका हुआ है. केंद्रीय ग्रामीण विकास मंत्रालय ने इस स्थिति में राज्य का दौरा करने वाली केंद्रीय टीम (पिछले साल की शुरुआत में आई टीम और मई में केंद्र को अपनी रिपोर्ट सौंपी) की रिपोर्ट राज्य को भेज दी है, लेकिन ममता बनर्जी सरकार इसे मानने के लिए तैयार नहीं है. इसे लेकर केंद्र और राज्य सरकार के बीच फिर से टकराव बढ़ने के आसार हैं.

प्रशासन के मुताबिक रिपोर्ट के मद्देनजर मंत्रालय ने अनुशंसा की है कि सांसदों को केंद्र पोषित परियोजनाओं में शामिल किया जाए और रिपोर्ट में पाई गई कमियों के संबंध में उचित कार्रवाई की जाए.

योजना के कार्यान्वयन में भाजपा सांसदों को शामिल करने की सिफारिश

हालांकि, सूत्रों ने कहा कि केंद्रीय टीम की रिपोर्ट में बड़ी रकम के लिए तीन केंद्रीय योजनाओं - प्रधान मंत्री ग्राम सड़क योजना, प्रधान मंत्री आवास योजना (ग्रामीण) और 100-दिवसीय कार्य समीक्षा सारांश का उल्लेख नहीं किया गया है. केंद्र के लिखित संदेश में कहा गया है कि बीजेपी सांसदों ने पहले सीएजी (नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक) और केंद्रीय सतर्कता आयोग द्वारा केंद्रीय परियोजनाओं की कामकाजी स्थिति का ऑडिट करने की मांग उठाई थी. बता दें कि पिछले शुक्रवार को केंद्रीय पंचायत राज्य मंत्री कपिल मोरेश्वर पाटिल ने भी कहा था,

“हमारे मंत्री यहां सभी सर्वेक्षण पूरे होने के बाद ही पैसा देंगे.” हालांकि, राज्य का विरोध यह है कि केंद्रीय दल की प्रासंगिक रिपोर्ट वस्तुतः ‘अहानिकर’ है. हालांकि, इसका उपयोग बल द्वारा राजनीतिक उद्देश्यों को पूरा करने के लिए किया जा रहा है. गरीब उपभोक्ताओं को खतरे की ओर धकेला जा रहा है.

ममता बनर्जी के मंत्री ने राजनीतिक हित साधने का लगाया आरोप

पंचायत मंत्री प्रदीप मजूमदार के शब्दों में,

“शासन स्तर पर इस पर चर्चा की जाएगी. लेकिन क्या इन सभी नियमों का पालन सभी राज्यों में हो रहा है या सिर्फ इसी राज्य के लिए? इस सब के पीछे राजनीतिक मंशा इस बार उपभोक्ताओं को समझानी होगी.” बता दें कि अगस्त 2021 में बीजेपी के 20 सांसदों ने केंद्रीय ग्रामीण विकास मंत्री गिरिराज सिंह को पत्र लिखकर शिकायत की थी कि राज्य के शासक-नेताओं ने राज्य में ठेकेदारों-

इंजीनियरों की मिलीभगत से पैसा खर्च किया है और प्रधानमंत्री ग्राम सड़क योजना के काम में

बीजेपी सांसदों को शामिल नहीं किया गया है. राष्ट्रीय ग्रामीण अवसंरचना विकास एजेंसी (एन आरआईडीए) ने शिकायत को 'बहुत गंभीर' बताते हुए मामला उठाया था. उसके आधार पर केंद्रीय टीम ने पिछले साल की शुरुआत में राज्य का दौरा किया और मई में केंद्र को एक रिपोर्ट दी. मंत्रालय ने राज्य को रिपोर्ट भेज दी है और 'कमी' को पूरा करने के लिए आवश्यक कदम उठाने का निर्देश दिया है. <https://www.tv9hindi.com/state/west-bengal/west-bengal-kolkata-news-confrontation-on-the-allegation-of-rigging-in-the-central-scheme-in-bengal-mamata-government-objected-to-the-report-of-the-center-au116-1663148.html>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

19. Slow work-in-progress ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) Updated: January 16, 2023

Ahead of the Union Budget for FY24, there are indications of the government going slow on big-ticket privatisation or strategic disinvestments. Rather than set ambitious targets, the focus is on concluding a few deals where the process has already begun. The difference between privatisation or strategic disinvestment and disinvestment is that the former entails a shift of management control of a central public sector enterprise (CPSE) to the acquiring private party whereas the D-word involves incremental sales of listed CPSE scrips while the government retains control. Although strategic disinvestments depend on prevailing market conditions and bidders' interest, the fact is that progress has been somewhat underwhelming. As the forthcoming fiscal is the last one before national elections, the government perhaps also considers it politically inopportune to sell-off CPSEs. In FY22 and the current fiscal, only Air India and Neelanchal Ispat Nigam Ltd went to the Tata Group. This limited progress contrasts sharply with the sweeping agenda announced in Budget 2021, which also included BPCL, Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India, IDBI Bank, BEML, Pawan Hans, besides two public sector banks and a general insurance company. There is no movement on PSBs. Plans for BPCL have been shelved in part due to concerns regarding the absence of pricing autonomy for state-run oil marketing companies. The Centre will also exit IDBI Bank once it gets "upside value".

The upshot is that strategic disinvestment is still a work-in-progress despite the government's stated intention that it has no business to be in business. Since 2016, it had given an "in principle" approval to privatise 36 CPSEs, but succeeded in only 10 cases including Air India and NINL.

These are HPCL (FY18), Rural Electric Corporation, HSCC (India) Ltd, NPCC and Dredging Corporation (FY19), THDC India Ltd, NEEPCO and Kamarajar Port Ltd (FY 20). However, some of these transactions are strictly not privatisation. HPCL was taken over by another state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation. Similarly, REC was taken over by state-owned Power Finance Corporation. Government-owned entities cannot get deeper into business with each other when the stated intention is to get them out of it. Air India and NINL, however, were successful privatisations although the receipts to the exchequer were relatively paltry or nil. In FY 22, the sale of Air India amounted to only a fifth of disinvestment receipts. In FY23, the sale proceeds of NINL did not accrue to the exchequer as the government does not hold equity. The eight other privatisations since 2016 raised only an average of 28% of disinvestment receipts.

The question naturally is whether the ruling NDA regime can succeed with the P-word any more than the earlier Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA regime did? Going slow on sell-offs may appear expedient due to the forthcoming national elections but the fact is that privatisations the world over are the stuff of scandal. Although the Vajpayee-led NDA successfully privatised Maruti, the telecom player VSNL, among others, this drive attracted political lightning like no other reform did and was stalled effectively since FY03. Privatisation is a fraught exercise as there are too many vested interests opposed to it, including affiliates of the ruling party like the Swadeshi Jagran Manch. If the NDA government is keen on this exercise, it must not only speed it up but also implement it in a highly transparent manner so that it does not get easily derailed. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/slow-work-in-progress/2949034/>

20. Getting more from taxation ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) January 16, 2023

The government needs to expand the tax base and not tax the already-taxed some more. Sustainability and realisation of tax must be made the focus of the regime

Every year, budget planners are confronted with raising more taxes to increase the government's revenue while keeping taxpayers satisfied. However, more often than not, this exercise ends up loading more taxes onto the handful of sincere taxpayers as there is certainty about them paying up, and there is an assumed belief that they will be able to bear additional taxes given their profile. As a corollary to this, it is a tough call to bring the untaxed into the tax net; however, there is enough evidence that this approach is losing steam. In a country of more than 135 crore people, till July 31, 2022, only a little over 5.8 crore income tax returns (ITRs) were filed for 2022-23, which is just above 4% of India's population. Further, the number of people who declare their annual income as being above ₹1 crore is just 131,390. This brings to light the stark reality of how a sizeable chunk of Indians who should be paying taxes avoid paying them. This leads us to ponder over mopping up tax revenue without further taxing the taxed and by bringing tax evaders under the tax ambit. Even fractional rates of taxes on the untaxed can mop up significant revenue.

For corporate taxes, the number of legal business entities in India is staggering. However, those paying taxes make for a low number. Besides, we have a growing problem of online businesses operating from outside Indian territory and are yet allowed to sell competing goods and services in India. Regarding personal taxes, high taxpayers are only a small fraction of the total. The number of luxury cars far exceeds the number of taxpayers. This anomaly means the goods are funded by the evaders. No country can build a strong foundation with this.

India had 8.22 crore taxpayers, which includes individuals and corporates in FY20. In contrast, the two-wheeler population is about 18 crore, with the cheapest scooters costing about ₹50,000. Industry estimates show that around 17,000 luxury vehicles were sold in the country between January-June 2022 alone. But this kind of expense hardly matches actual income tax returns by rich Indians. Clearly, scooter or luxury car ownership numbers do not tally with the number of people honestly filing taxes. So, there is an urgent need for stringent compliance, with technology playing a critical role in tracking the expenditures of individual taxpayers.

In India, the tax-to-GDP ratio is around 20%, which is below par if we compare it with other rapidly developing economies. It is because only a small percentage of the population pays taxes. Enhanced compliance in tier II cities, targeting professionals as well as businesses who do not avail of presumptive taxation, will enhance the tax base. Such measures will enable the government to remove cess and surcharges that individuals and corporates pay on top of tax

paid on earned income. These add to the total tax payout, and can go as high as 42% in the case of individuals as the surcharge on individual taxation is around 10 to 35%.

Per a recent FICCI study, *Illicit Markets: A Threat to Our National Interests*, the estimated tax loss to the government in two highly regulated and taxed industries—tobacco products and alcoholic beverages—is over ₹28,500 crore. Goods with higher profit margins, like gold, tobacco, and alcohol, are highly taxed and lead to massive tax evasion and smuggling. The need of the hour is to parallelly arm enforcement agencies with cutting-edge technologies to catch smugglers and underground operators. Second, lowering the tax rates in these industry segments will eradicate tax evasion, resulting in more tax collection.

The focus should be on the quantum of tax and making the incidence of tax lower to fuel growth and wealth creation as against the rate of tax and making that number bigger. For example, we are witnessing huge investments in startups and the emerging innovative and disruptive technology space. For this sector to become India's next tech boom and create more wealth, we should ideally look at a 10-year liberal tax approach around capital gains, backed by enabling regulations that can open the floodgates for wealth creation, taking India towards becoming a \$10-trillion economy by 2030.

Sustainability and realisation of tax need to be considered. Many science companies have shifted their IPRs to tax heavens and remit royalties to these regions to evade taxes. A consistent and less complex taxation system will not only reduce tax evasion but also encourage domestic and foreign investors. To enable better profitability and encourage investments, taxes should be moderate for new emerging sectors, particularly the technology sector. The government needs to expand the tax base and not tax the already taxed some more and leave some totally out of the net. This will lead to the collection of more taxes, bring relief to the honest taxpayer, and also enable the government to showcase visible development of public infrastructure and facilities like health and education. Let's focus on compliance and simplify and expand the tax base. It will require an overhaul in the Indian taxation system, and what better time than the upcoming Union budget to start on this task that will put a smile on both the honest taxpayers' and the exchequer's faces? <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/getting-more-from-taxation/2949031/>

21. **How in First Eight Years of Modi Government, Nearly Rs 12 Lakh Crore 'Disappeared' (thewire.in) 16 January 2023**

Based on information supplied by the finance minister, we estimate that the total non-performing assets between 2014-15- 2021-22 years amount to Rs 66.5 lakh crore. Of this, the written-off quantum appears to be Rs 14.5 lakh crore.

There are reasons to believe that some Rs 12 lakh crore have been systematically siphoned off from banks in the first eight years of Narendra Modi's rule – mainly by big corporate borrowers. This was/is done quite 'legitimately' by taking loans for units and then getting them written off as unrecoverable non-performing assets (NPAs). The scale of that is 4-6 times higher than the internationally accepted norm. Obviously, such a massive but smooth operation is simply not possible without complete political backing. Every GM, ED or CMD of a bank knows that when he is told by someone representing the core of political power "to lend to X", he jolly well does it. Down the line, "technical feasibility and economic viability" appraisals are made 'positive' and "due diligence" is damned. The few people from this racket that we see in jail now are those who were not protected by political bosses or have run foul of them.

Before we proceed, let us clarify to those who are not familiar with this term that ‘NPA’ refers to bank over-dues for more than 90 days. Though this appears rather harsh, lenders do not swing their axe immediately. Banks go through various painful stages when dealing with NPAs – categorising them under different criteria as ‘sub-standard’, ‘doubtful level 1’, ‘doubtful level 2’ and so on, until they putrefy enough to reach the status of ‘loss assets’. Enterprises whose loan and interest reach the final write-off stage in 4 years are those that have crossed all stages of consideration and loan restructuring, and the money lent to them has disappeared into thin air. We are well aware that all NPAs are not caused intentionally, and that is why it is internationally accepted that 1-2% of the total lending may turn into NPAs. A certain percentage of this, maybe half a percent is ‘written off’ due to factors beyond control.

The International Monetary Fund’s 2021 report indicates that the NPA ratio vis-à-vis gross lending is around 1% in the US and the UK. This is because strict probity is enforced by regulators and regimes have to go if financial irregularities come out. Canada does even better, at 0.4%. In the same range are South Korea (0.2% in 2020) and Switzerland (0.7%). China, which is quite harsh with financial criminals, maintains an NPA ratio of 1.7% and even Malaysia manages to keep it at 1.7%, while Indonesia is not too bad at 2.6%. Lax Italy has a gross NPA ratio of above 3%, but it is Russia with its stupendous 8.3% NPA ratio which appears shocking. Everyone knows that the regime there is in cahoots with crony oligarchs and public assets are looted at will. Through most of Modi’s years, India’s gross NPA ratio has been as bad as Russia’s and the mainstream media has not ever screamed.

The finance minister (FM) replied to my question in the Rajya Sabha on December 13, 2022 that the “gross NPAs of SCBs (scheduled commercial banks, which means all banks put together) rose from a ratio of 4.1% on 31.3.2014 and peaked at 11.46% as on 31.3.2018”. Her MoS mentioned in another reply that the peak was actually “12.17% in the last seven years”. Though this gross NPA ratio declined to 5.9% on March 31, 2022, it went up again to 6.5% in September 2022. The FM congratulates herself and the government for “its strategy of recognition, resolution, recapitalisation and reforms”, but much of this is just hyperbole to cover up a hyper-crater. The RBI’s Financial Stability Report of December 29, 2022 says we are not yet out of the woods. and predicts that the gross NPA ratios of PSBs (public sector banks) may swell to 9.4% in September 2023. The gross NPA ratio may also “go up to 5.8% for private banks and to 4.1% for foreign banks”.

To balance their books, gross profit-making PSBs were made to show consistent losses by this regime, as all their surpluses were devoured by NPAs. We may recall that during UPA-II, public sector banks earned profits between Rs 35,000 crore and Rs 50,000 crore rupees per year. Yet, in just four years (2015-16 to 2019-20) of NDA rule, the same banks made a total loss of just over Rs 2 lakh crore, because they had to provide for NPAs.

The FM’s reply of December 13, 2022 is that the gross non-performing assets of SCBs (ie, all banks) have risen from Rs 2.51 lakh crore on March 31, 2014 to Rs 9.63 lakh crore in March 2018 means that NPAs went up by nearly 4 times in 4 years. This excruciating bleeding provoked bank unions and activists to get on to the warpath – to find out where this money was going. India has never witnessed such colossal NPAs and the scale of write-offs is just unimaginable. A debater as the Finance Minister at this juncture is quite counter-productive, because the more she bats hyper-aggressively — unlike any other FM we have seen in several decades — and declares everything as a “great achievement”, the more everyone sees through the hot air.

The rot may well have started during UPA-II (2009-14), when Manmohan Singh, the ex-RBI governor and economist PM, set aside Rs 1.93 lakh crore to provide for NPAs, but the NPA ratio was between 3-4%. But a non-economist PM who can scale up everything must be given credit here too – as his banks had to provide five times more for loss-burdened NPAs in five years from 2015-16 to 2019-20. NPA provisioning then rose to a mammoth total of Rs 10.16 lakh crore.

Upscaling is an art some can master – as is also evident from the fact that the very same Enforcement Directorate (ED) that had carried out 112 searches during Manmohan Singh's entire tenure of 10 years ramped up its operations by 27 times in Modi's first 8 years. That's quite some upscaling, and no one can miss the “my way or the highway” message to industry and finance and, of course, to opposition parties.

‘Inspired lending’ to friendly corporates

It is likely that a portion of dubious loans sanctioned in the previous regime spilt over into the NDA's early years, but since we now are now nearly nine years under Modi, the lion's share of loss-making lending must have happened during his regime.

The mess is due largely to ‘inspired’ lending to friendly corporates, especially big houses. Most of the loot-and-scoot fraudsters like Nirav Modi or Mehul Choksi have alleged connections with the PM or the BJP – how much this helped in overawing banks to lend to them will never be known. There is an eerie silence on the over Rs 1 lakh crore owed to banks even as most Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group companies face bankruptcy proceedings.

Modi has never hidden his pro-corporate bias and V. Ranganathan has calculated that while corporate tax collection came to 3.34% of the GDP during Manmohan Singh's second term, it came sharply down to only 2.3% of the GDP during Modi's second term. Consequently, the burden of taxation is borne by hapless common citizens through cruel rates of GST, central taxes, duties and personal income tax. To understand what Modi's relief of 1% of GDP gifted to corporates means, well, it is the maximum Modi spends for the entire education sector. This massive lowering of taxes on corporates is thus an enormous favour and may not have gone unreciprocated. One party is so flush with funds now that it appears unbeatable.

Besides, making PSBs go through book losses suited the pro-privatisation lobby that is invariably anti-public sector. It forgets that the losses of private banks are almost as high – thanks to the Chanda Kochhar, Rana Kapoor and PMC Bank heads. When DHFL caused a loss of Rs 34,615 crore, it hit 17 banks, including private and public. ABG Shipyard, a shipbuilding firm based in Gujarat (one cannot miss the irony) defrauded a consortium of 28 banks, both public and private, of Rs 22,800 crore. Wilful defaulters simply cannot get away scot-free or fly away to cushy foreign shores without the direct and indirect assistance of the regime. Even if we are not allowed to get to the bottom of the truth now, transaction records will be there in multiple offices, for later forensic analysis.

Incidentally, the All India Bank Employees' Association studied the ‘salvage’ process of 13 big NPAs involved in insolvency proceedings and found that banks “took a ‘haircut’ of”, i.e., lost 64% of the NPAs amounting to Rs 4.47 lakh crore. Interestingly, these units were then gift-wrapped and handed over to regime-friendly corporates like Reliance, Vedanta, Arcelor Mittal, Tata and Piramal. Old promoters must have surely taken out more than their investment, through the age-old techniques of under-invoicing and over-invoicing. Thus while the personal

wealth and pomp of corporate defaulters increase, borrowers in retail, agriculture and MSME segments are hounded by banks for small amounts.

How much money is ‘lost forever’?

The total NPAs of all scheduled commercial banks, ie, PSBs plus private and foreign banks, for the first eight years of Modi’s rule (2014-15 to 2021-22) to Rs 66.5 lakh crore. This is based on FM’s replies in parliament which covers 7 years and 9 months and we have made a projection for the last quarter. More important is to know how much has actually been written off from these NPAs in eight years. As this is not readily available, we extrapolated data from the FM’s statement of December 18, 2022 that “over Rs 10.09 lakh crore have been written off by scheduled commercial banks in the past five financial years”. Since the total NPAs of all banks for these five years came to Rs 48.21 lakh crore, the percentage of write-offs to NPA is 22.34. Thus, when the total NPAs for Modi’s first eight years amount to Rs 66.5 lakh crore, the written-off quantum appears to be Rs 14.5 lakh crore.

But even after write-off, some amounts can still be obtained from borrowers or sale proceeds and, in all fairness, this has to be calculated to arrive at a total-total loss. We find from the ministry’s replies in parliament, that some 13% of the losses over the five years (Rs 10.09 lakh crore) could be retrieved. In other words, more than Rs 8.8 lakh crore of gross NPAs have vanished irretrievably. Let us give more allowance to banks and assume that not 13% but some 20% of the written-off amount of Rs 14.5 lakh crore is later retrieved. This still means that the nation has lost at least Rs 11.6 lakh crore or close to Rs 12 lakh crore, gone forever, during Modi’s first eight years. This amount is more than the annual revenues and budgets of half a dozen big states put together. It is as large as the average annual GST collected in 2017-18 or 2018-19 or 2019-20.

For accounting purposes, of course, banks take out two of the three constituent categories of ‘gross NPA’ and then declare the rest to be ‘net NPA’. This may halve the amount but is largely a window-dressing exercise. The real picture is what we have postulated. It is up to the finance ministry to respond to these numbers. The “lost forever” money actually belonged to common depositors and small investors like us, and was also cannibalised from the earnings of banks. Bofors was a Rs 64 crore scandal and here the amount is Rs 12 lakh crore. If criminal action can be taken for petty financial losses, it is time to institute similar criminal action against those who enrich corporate India at the cost of common citizens. <https://thewire.in/business/modi-government-npas-loans-write-off-12-lakh-crore>

22. In India, 5% own more than 60% of country’s wealth: Oxfam report ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) Updated: January 16, 2023

The report titled 'Survival of the Richest' further said that if India's billionaires are taxed once at 2 per cent on their entire wealth, it would support the requirement of Rs 40,423 crore for the nutrition of malnourished in the country for the next three years.

Oxfam India’s report on inequality in India released on Monday finds that just 5 per cent of Indians own more than 60 per cent of the country’s wealth, while the bottom 50 per cent of the population possess only 3 per cent of the wealth.

The report, “Survival of the Richest: The India story”, also says that between 2012 and 2021, 40 per cent of the wealth created in India has gone to just 1 per cent of the population and only

a mere 3 per cent of the wealth has gone to the bottom 50 per cent, adding that the total number of billionaires in India increased from 102 in 2020 to 166 billionaires in 2022.

The combined wealth of India's 100 richest has touched \$660 billion (Rs 54.12 lakh crore) — an amount that could fund the entire Union Budget for more than 18 months, the report stated.

“While the country suffers from multiple crises like hunger, unemployment, inflation and health calamities, India's billionaires are doing extremely well for themselves. The poor, meanwhile, in India are unable to afford even basic necessities to survive. The number of hungry Indians increased to 350 million in 2022 from 190 million in 2018. The widespread hunger is resulting in 65 per cent of the deaths among children under the age of 5 in 2022, according to the Union Government's submission to the Supreme Court,” Amitabh Behar, CEO of Oxfam India, said.

The wealth of the top 10 richest in India stands at Rs 27.52 lakh crore (\$335.7 billion, an increase of around \$110 billion which is an 32.8 per cent rise from 2021).

“Following the pandemic in 2019, the bottom 50 per cent of the population have continued to see their wealth chipped away. By 2020, their income share was estimated to have fallen to only 13 per cent of the national income and have less than 3 per cent of the wealth. Its impact has been exceptionally poor diet, increase in debt and deaths. This is in stark contrast to the top 30 per cent, who own more than 90 per cent of the wealth, with the top 10 per cent owning more than 80 per cent of the wealth concentrated in the top three deciles. The wealthiest 10 per cent own more than 72 per cent of wealth, and the top 5 per cent own nearly 62 per cent of the total wealth, which is higher than the pre-pandemic years (2018-19), and the top 1 per cent own more than 13 times the wealth owned by the bottom half of the society, with nearly 40.6 per cent of the total wealth in India,” finds the report.

Oxfam adds that India has the world's highest number of poor at 228.9 million. On the other hand, the total number of billionaires in India increased from 102 in 2020 to 166 billionaires in 2022.

“Before the pandemic, in 2019, the Central Government reduced the corporate tax slabs from 30 per cent to 22 per cent, with newly incorporated companies paying a lower percentage (15 per cent). This new taxation policy resulted in a total loss of INR 1.84 lakh crore and had a significant role in the 10 per cent downward revision of tax revenue estimates in 2019-20. To increase revenue, the Union Government adopted a policy of hiking the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and excise duties on diesel and petrol while simultaneously cutting down on exemptions. The indirect nature of both the GST and fuel taxes make them regressive, which invariably burdens the most marginalized,” it has said.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation reported that the all-India inflation rates based on both CPI (Consumer Price Index) (General) and CFPI (Consumer Food Price Index) were consistently higher in rural India (7.56 per cent) than urban India (7.27 per cent) in September 2022.

“Though overall inflation declined in October, the gap between rural and urban inflation only widened, reaching nearly 2.5 times the gap in September 2022. Moreover, the weightage for “food products” in the inflation calculation is nearly double in rural India compared to urban

India reflecting how food inflation in rural India has primarily driven the average increase in prices of commodities,” it added.

In 2020-21, the projected revenue foregone of the government in the form of incentives and tax exemptions to corporates is INR 1,03,285.54 crore.

Oxfam India has said that the failure to tax rich people and corporations fairly exacerbates inequality as governments then resort to taxing the rest of society more. Heavy reliance on consumption taxes like VAT “increases inequality and is regressive in nature because poor people pay a larger share of their incomes”.

The bottom 50 per cent of the population at an All-India level pays six times more on indirect taxation as a percentage of income compared to top 10 per cent, it has said.

Of the total taxes collected from these food and non-food items, 64.3 per cent of the total tax is coming from the bottom 50 per cent. A little less than two-third of the total GST is coming from the bottom 50 per cent, as per estimates, one-third from middle 40 per cent and only three to four per cent from the top 10 per cent. <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/economy/indias-richest-1-own-more-than-40-of-total-wealth-oxfam-8384156/>