

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (14.12.2022)

1. 24 centrally-protected monuments 'untraceable', no follow-up by Centre: Parliamentary panel ([deccanherald.com](https://www.deccanherald.com)) 13 December 2022

As 24 centrally-protected monuments in India, including the Barakhamba Cemetery located at the Capital's Connaught Place, continue to remain "untraceable," a Parliamentary panel has noted that the Union ministry of culture has done little to follow up; neither has it tried to trace the monuments, or, carry a survey of other monuments which were not part of the audit.

Citing a performance audit of the CAG, which had included a joint physical inspection along with the Archaeological Survey of India of over 1,655 monuments and sites, the Rajya Sabha standing committee on transport, tourism and culture has said that it is "perturbed" to find that "the Barakhamba Cemetery in the very heart of the Capital city" is among the untraceable monuments.

In all, there are 3,693 centrally-protected monuments and sites in the country.

"If even monuments in the Capital city cannot be maintained properly, it does not bode well for monuments in remote places in the country," the committee's report states.

Apart from the Barakhamba Cemetery, the untraceable monuments include ruins of a temple circle at Uttar Pradesh's Mirzapur dating to 1000 AD, two Kos Minars – one at Faridabad's Mujesar and another at Kurukshetra's Shahabad, a 12th Century Temple at Rajasthan's Baran, besides another monument at the Capital – the Inchla Wali Gumti at Mubarakpur Kotla.

The committee also pulled up the culture ministry for not attempting to find out how many other monuments were untraceable, as the audit was carried out only among 1,655 of the 3,693 centrally-protected monuments.

The ministry, in a written reply to the Committee, said that untraceable monuments were all ASI-protected monuments, but their exact location and condition could not be determined, due to various factors, such as "rapid urbanisation, non-availability of proper details about their location in the gazette notification, difficulties in tracing in remote locations, dense forests, etc."

The CAG report of 2013 had declared 92 monuments to be "missing," but the ASI has since then managed to find some – 42 monuments have been identified and out of the remaining 50 monuments, 14 are affected by rapid urbanisation, 12 are submerged by reservoir or dams and the location of the remaining 24 remain untraceable.

Many of these sites, the committee noted, continue to be unguarded, with only 6.7 per cent or 248 sites having a security system.

"The Committee notes with dismay that out of the total requirement of 7,000 personnel for protection of monuments, the government could provide only 2,578 security personnel at 248 locations due to budgetary constraints," the report states. <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/24-centrally-protected-monuments-untraceable-no-follow-up-by-centre-parliamentary-panel-1171464.html>

2. No plan to restore old pension scheme, Centre tells Parliament (scroll.in) 13 December 2022

There is no proposal under consideration for restoring the old pension scheme in the country, the central government told the Lok Sabha on Monday during the Winter Session of Parliament.

Union Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad stated the government's stance on the matter in response to a question by All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen President Asaduddin Owaisi.

In the old pension scheme, employees get 50% of their last drawn basic pay plus dearness allowance on retirement. Under this system, employees do not have to contribute to their pensions on their own.

Under the new pension scheme, individual savings are pooled into funds during the employment period. Individuals can choose from a range of schemes promoted either by public sector banks or private companies.

The new pension scheme came into effect on April 1, 2003.

On Monday, Karad said that the state governments of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand have informed the Centre and Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority, or PFRDA, about their decision to restart the Old Pension Scheme for their employees.

He also said that a notification on the Old Pension Scheme has been passed by the Aam Aadmi Party government in Punjab.

He added that the state governments have been informed that under the PFRDA regulations, funds deposited in the form of the government contribution and employees' contribution towards the national pension system cannot be refunded and deposited back to the state government.

In November, Comptroller and Auditor General of India Girish Chandra Murmu had said that relaunching of the old pension scheme in some states could be financially risky for their governments. <https://scroll.in/latest/1039661/no-plan-to-restore-old-pension-scheme-centre-tells-parliament>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

3. UDAY scheme: Kerala State Electricity Board draws flak from CAG (thehindu.com) 13 December 2022

CAG report states that the financial losses of the electricity board shot up by 161.47% and long-term debt by 318.72% between 2015-16 and 2020-21. It further says that the State failed to reap the benefits of Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has found that the financial losses of the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) shot up by 161.47% and long-term debt by 318.72% between 2015-16 and 2020-21. The State-run power utility has drawn criticism from the CAG for failing to reap the benefits of Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY), a national

scheme launched in 2015 to improve the finances and operational efficiencies of power distribution companies (DISCOMs).

KSEB's loss increased from ₹696.96 crore in 2015-16 to ₹1,822.35 crore in 2020-21, while long-term debt rose from ₹3,753.51 crore to ₹15,716.79 crore, "mainly on account of employees' pension liability," the CAG observed in a report on the KSEB's performance before and after the implementation of UDAY tabled in the Assembly on Tuesday.

'Opportunity lost'

UDAY was launched by the Centre with the financial turnaround of DISCOMs as its primary objective. This was to be done through takeover of their debt by State Governments. But the Kerala government and the KSEB did not opt for the financial turnaround component and, instead, signed up for improving only the operational efficiency. As a result, the operations of KSEB resulted in continuous losses in all financial years during 2015-21, the report said.

"Thus, the gains in operational efficiency due to the implementation of UDAY Scheme did not translate into improved financial performance for KSEB. By not opting for the Financial Scheme, the KSEBL lost an opportunity to make a stitch in time to arrest its plunging losses," the CAG noted.

'Smart metering'

Under UDAY, smart meters were planned for consumers with monthly usage above 200 units, but Kerala failed to implement it, although a Central government grant of ₹38.94 crore was available for it. "In this regard, it is pertinent to mention that 22 States/Union Territories have installed (as on December 24, 2021) 34.25 lakh smart meters under the Smart Meter National Programme of GoI," the CAG noted. "The installation of smart meters in nine States/Union Territories through Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) resulted in an average increase of 20.50% in revenue (₹264 crore per annum), improvement of 21% in billing efficiency, and reduction of 11-36% in Aggregate Technical & Commercial loss of DISCOMs," the report added.

It may be noted that the smart metering scheme under UDAY was different from the prepaid smart metering now announced under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS)

Recommendations

The CAG wants Kerala to fully analyse and take advantage of schemes having financial and operational implications for State government undertakings/companies.

KSEB should adopt measures to prune administrative and power procurement expenses and ensure recovery of costs through efficient management of resources. It should consider implementing smart metering solutions for improving the efficiency of its electricity distribution operations and enhancing revenue, the report said. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/uday-scheme-kerala-state-electricity-board-draws-flak-from-cag/article66258767.ece>

4. KSEB draws CAG flak for failure to curtail staff cost ([newindianexpress.com](https://www.newindianexpress.com)) 14 December 2022

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The Comptroller and Auditor General report on the Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) scheme which was tabled in the assembly on Tuesday,

has severely criticised the KSEB for its faulty implementation. The report states that the monitoring and implementation of the scheme have been found inadequate during UDAY and post-UDAY periods as the KSEB failed to curtail employee and power-purchase costs.

The UDAY scheme was launched by the Centre in 2015 to ensure the financial turnaround of power distribution companies that have been facing a huge losses. The CAG report states that the KSEB had not considered the liabilities towards pension payments and pay revision of its employees. Moreover, the Board could not reap the full benefit of the scheme by deciding to opt out of the financial turnaround package.

This led to continuous losses in the KSEB's operation network during 2015 - 21. "The Board did not devise key performance indicators on areas of aggregate technical and commercial loss and metering/billing/collection efficiencies as envisaged in the MoU on UDAY scheme," says the CAG report. But a KSEB official pointed out that the objective of the UDAY scheme could not be achieved across the country due to the pandemic. It should be recalled that the consumers were given a grace period of two billing cycles of four months to pay their dues.

"KSEB was made a company in 2013. But it took another four years to get IT exemption for it. It was the employee's contribution which was being given as pension to retired employees before the Board was converted into a company. Post 2013, the pension amount was going to the National Pension System Trust which saw the liability of the Board going up," said a senior KSEB official.

The CAG has recommended the state government to fully analyse the UDAY scheme and take advantage of all its provisions as the scheme has crucial financial and operational implications. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2022/dec/14/kseb-draws-cag-flak-for-failure-to-curtail-staff-cost-2527899.html>

5. Kerala Governor's travel expenses 9 times higher than allocated amount: RTI ([thefederal.com](https://www.thefederal.com)) 13 Dec 2022

The on-going tussle between the Governor and the elected governments in many non-BJP states has triggered a debate over the functions and duties of the office of the Governor. This has also given rise to a discussion on the expenses incurred by the Governor's office.

In this regard, a clutch of RTIs has brought to light interesting aspects about the functioning of the Governor's office in Kerala. It is found that Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan is a frequent flier out of Kerala and the money spent for travel is nine times higher than the allocated amount (in the budget). This year, from January to November, the Governor was not in Kerala for 142 days. In 2021-2022, the Governor was out of station for a total of 223 days.

80% allocated amount spent in seven months

In the current financial year, the amount allocated for the Governor's travel is Rs 11.88 lakh. It is found that 80 % of the allocated amount was spent within the first seven months — till July. Raj Bhavan has written a letter to the government for an additional amount of Rs 70 lakh for his travel. This is documented in the letters sent by the Governor's Principal Secretary to the Pinarayi Vijayan government.

A letter, dated 27th July, seeks additional funds amounting to Rs 25 lakh for the Governor's flight expense. The letter contains the details of the amount allocated in the budget and the amount spent so far (till July). Another letter, dated 4th August, seeks the approval of Rs 50 lakh (in addition to Rs 25 lakh requested in the previous letter) for meeting the flight expenses of the Governor for travelling in and out of the state. This additional amount of Rs 70 lakh has been allocated by the government by an order dated 23rd August.

The travel documents prove that the Governor made his trips mostly to Delhi, UP and Maharashtra. He also travelled to states such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh.

During the first six months from January to June (2022), the Governor was out of station for a total of around three months (88 days). The expense of the Governor does not come under the scrutiny of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). Hence, no questions are usually raised over the travel expenses of a Governor of any state.

Rs 19.38 lakh spent over 'gifts'

The information sought by Raju Vazhakkala, an RTI activist, shows that the Governor spent Rs 19.38 lakh over 'gifts' in the last three years (2020 to 2022). According to the RTI reply, it is not known who received the money.

Between 1st April and 31st October 2022, the Governor has given Rs 12.5 lakh as gifts. The amount of money spent under "gifts" in 2020/21 was Rs 2,49,956, but in 2021-22 (till March) this stood at Rs 4,38,788. The details of the people (their names and addresses) who received the money are not kept on record, Raj Bhavan wrote in a reply to Vazhakkala's RTI request.

The Governor has often raised the allegation against the state government that the latter has been trying to 'appoint their people'. However, the letters sent from the Raj Bhavan to the government prove that the Governor's office has been trying to do the same. For instance, a letter sent by the Governor to the Chief Minister (dated 29th December 2020) urges the government to consider regularising the services of 20 casual workers at Raj Bhavan.

The same letter also seeks the regularisation of the services of the photographer who works for Raj Bhavan. In Kerala, regularising of casual workers in government service has often invited the wrath of youth organisations and trade unions. Such regularisations would thrash the hope of the unemployed youth anticipating an appointment through the Public Service Commission. <https://thefederal.com/states/south/kerala/kerala-governors-travel-expenses-9-times-higher-than-allocated-amount-rti/>

6. Maharashtra cabinet approves resumption of Jalyukta Shivar water conservation project (freepressjournal.in) December 13, 2022

The Maharashtra Cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Mr Eknath Shinde on Tuesday approved the launch of Jalyukta Shivar Yojana (JSY) 2.0, a water conservation scheme to provide water in scarcity areas. The Jalyukta Shivar Yojana was launched and implemented during the BJP-led government between 2014 and 2019 but during the MVA rule it was not pursued. After CAG's scathing observations about irregularities, the MVA governments had instituted an inquiry into JSY.

After the Shinde Fadnavis government came to power on June 30, at the first cabinet the Deputy Chief Minister Mr Devendra Fadnavis had asked the water conservation department to immediately start the JSY as the CM had given his consent for the same. However, the cabinet today took a formal decision for its revival.

In 2014, Mr Fadnavis, who was leading the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance government, had launched the flagship JSA which aimed to make Maharashtra drought-free. The ambitious water conservation scheme was to be implemented in phases.

Earlier, the JYS was implemented during the period 2015-2019 and irrigation facilities were created for 39 lakh hectares. About 5000 villages will be newly included in this campaign in the next 3 years. It was implemented in 22,593 villages and nearly 6,32,896 works were completed by creating a water storage capacity of 27 lakh TCM. About 20,544 villages got a water supply and there was a rise in the production of agriculture, especially in Rabi season.

According to the Chief Minister's Office, under the JYS 2.0 the soil and water conservation works will be undertaken in the eligible villages which were not included in the first phase. Similarly, in the villages where the first phase of JYS has been implemented but there is still a need for water in the villages, these works will also be done through people's participation.

There will be committees under the chairmanship of District Collectors as well as sub-divisional officers at taluka level for the coordination of JYS campaign. The work costing more than Rs 3 lakh will be awarded through e Tendering. All soil and water conservation works will be mapped and updated maps will be uploaded on Jio portal.

The catchment area will remain a planning factor while preparing the village plan. Technical and administrative approval will be given after the nod of the final plan by Gram Sabha. After completing the works as per the village plan, the water sufficiency report of the village will be prepared.

Maintenance will also be done for completed schemes. Public awareness will also be created through the water literacy campaign of the villagers in the villages. The plan will include the sustainability of crop productivity as well as the creation of collective irrigation facilities and other aspects.

It must be mentioned here that after the break up of the Shiv Sena and BJP alliance and the formation of Shiv Sena-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government, the JSY was stayed.

The CAG in its report, which was tabled in the state legislature during the monsoon session on September 8, 2020, had observed that Fadnavis' pet scheme had little impact in achieving water neutrality and increasing groundwater level despite the state spending a whopping Rs 9,633.75 crore. The CAG had castigated the BJP-led government for lack of transparency in the execution of works and inadequate monitoring by the department. The CAG, which conducted the audit for January to December 2019, submitted its report in June 2020.

Thereafter, the MVA formed a committee headed by the former additional chief secretary Mr Vijay Kumar in his 70-page report had cited a large number of irregularities and lapses in JSY. The committee had found that in several works the bills were drawn without any actual work on the ground. Several projects were completed without due permission while ignoring

technical norms. <https://www.freepressjournal.in/mumbai/maharashtra-cabinet-approves-resumption-of-jalyukta-shivar-water-conservation-project>

7. **Maharashtra Cabinet approves Jalyukta Shivar 2.0** ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) 14 Dec 2022

The state Cabinet on Tuesday cleared the decision to implement Jalyukta Shivar 2.0.

As announced in the first Cabinet meeting of Eknath Shinde-Devendra Fadnavis government, the pet project of Fadnavis has made a comeback. In October, The Indian Express had reported on the scheme.

The 2.0 version will cater to around 5,000 villages, where technical works of water conservation, such as deepening and widening of water bodies, construction of small earthen dams and digging of farm ponds, will take place. The other component will deal with over 22,000 villages where water conservation works were carried out during 2014-19.

“The work planned is about spreading water literacy, water management and conservation principles,” an official said.

The scheme came under scanner after the MVA government wrapped it up and ordered an inquiry based on the CAG report that questioned its effectiveness. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/jalyukta-shivar-2-0-approved-8323236/lite/>

8. **बीआरएबीयू में 6 करोड़ की अनियमितता, बिना समायोजन राशि बांटी** ([samacharnama.com](https://www.samacharnama.com)) 14 Dec 2022

बीआरए बिहार विश्वविद्यालय की ऑडिट में पांच करोड़ 61 लाख की वित्तीय अनियमितता सामने आई है। यह अनियमितता वर्ष 2015 से 2022 तक में पकड़ी गई है। महालेखाकार की ऑडिट टीम ने वित्तीय अनियमितता पर अपनी रिपोर्ट विश्वविद्यालय और सीएजी को सौंप दी है। ऑडिट रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि बिहार विश्वविद्यालय में बिना पहले की राशि का समायोजन हुए दोबारा एडवांस के तौर पर राशि बांटी गई। जिस व्यक्ति को एडवांस दिया गया, उसका नाम और पदनाम भी रजिस्टर पर नहीं मिला है। ऑडिट की 112 पेज की रिपोर्ट में बिहार विवि में कई जगह अनियमितता उजागर की गई है। इस रिपोर्ट के आने के बाद बिहार विवि के कई सेक्शन में हड़कंप मच गया है। ऑडिट टीम ने कहा-कितनी राशि का समायोजन नहीं हुआ, उसका पूरा ब्योरा अपनी रिपोर्ट में लिखकर दिया है। रिपोर्ट बताती है कि बिहार विवि ने निजी कंपनी को एडवांस में रकम दी, लेकिन उसके समायोजन पर कोई काम नहीं हुआ।

बिना परचेज कमेटी से पास कराये भुगतान बिहार विवि में बिना परचेज कमेटी से पास कराये 58 लाख 62 हजार की राशि गोपनीय प्रिंटिंग को दे दी। यह राशि 2015-16 से 2021-

22 तक दी गई है. ऑडिट टीम ने जांच में पाया कि बिहार विवि ने 23 दिसंबर 2017 से 13 अप्रैल 2018 तक विभिन्न विषयों के प्रश्नपत्रों की छपाई कराई. इस प्रिंटिंग की राशि तत्कालीन कुलपति के मौखिक आदेश से बिना कोई टेंडर भुगतान कर दी गई. इतना ही नहीं, इस राशि के भुगतान के बाद पोस्ट डेटेड इकरारानामा 2017-20 अवधि के लिए नौ अप्रैल 2021 को तीन वर्ष बाद किया गया.

बिना टेंडर प्रिंटिंग प्रेस से कर लिया अनुबंध

ऑडिट रिपोर्ट में बिना टेंडर के प्रिंटिंग प्रेस से अनुबंध कर लेने का मामला सामने आया है. इस प्रिंटिंग प्रेस को 257.73 लाख रुपये का भुगतान किया गया है. ऑडिट टीम ने अपनी रिपोर्ट में लिखा है कि गोपनीय प्रिंटिंग प्रेस की फाइलों में नोटशीट नहीं लिखी गई थी. 18 जुलाई 2014 को एक करार किया गया. इस करार में कोई अवधि नहीं तय की गई थी. ऑडिट टीम ने जांच में पाया कि बिहार विवि की तरफ से करार से पहले एजेंसी का चयन टेंडर से नहीं किया गया था.

विवि में अवैध नियुक्ति का हुआ खुलासा ऑडिट टीम की रिपोर्ट में बिहार विवि में अवैध नियुक्तियों का भी खुलासा हुआ है. ऑडिट टीम ने कहा है कि संबद्ध डिग्री कॉलेज में पद सृजन समिति व अभिषद अनुमोदन की प्रत्याशा में एक डिग्री कॉलेज में 37 पद का सृजन कर दिया. पद सृजन के बाद 1.89 करोड़ का भुगतान भी हो गया. <https://samacharnama.com/city/gaya/Irregularity-of-6-crores-in-Gaya-BRABU-distributed-amount/cid9441914.htm>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

9. Income support for Bharat ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) December 14, 2022

Ahead of the Union Budget for FY24, a member of the official think-tank Niti Aayog, Ramesh Chand, has backed the provision of a quasi-universal basic rural income scheme through a more inclusive version of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Yojana, which provides Rs 6,000 to 110 million small and marginal farmers. This scheme should also include agricultural labourers, construction and non-farm workers who are in very sizeable numbers. Chand told this newspaper that “everybody who satisfies some criteria such as people exempt from income tax or total income up to a threshold level of should be given the support”. The proposal certainly has merit considering the narrative of distress in the countryside. During the pre-Budget rounds of consultation, farmer representatives even asked for higher PM Kisan income support in view of the input cost escalation. During the last eight years, the average annual growth of 5% per annum in daily wages for agricultural labourers has also been eroded by inflation, according to RBI’s latest Handbook of Statistics on States. It merits mention that even former chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian—who floated the idea of a truly universal basic income scheme as a “conceptually appealing idea” in the Economic Survey for 2016-17—suggested not so long ago a quasi-UBRI scheme for 60-80% of the rural poor.

The big question pertains to the affordability and feasibility of a quasi-UBRI scheme. Chand, for his part, does not give any numbers beyond the conversion of PM Kisan, adding that other subsidies could be subsumed at a later stage. Prima facie, spreading the existing amount over a larger number of beneficiaries in the countryside is unlikely to benefit either the farmers or agricultural labourers. Over three years, financial support of more than Rs 2 trillion has been provided to small and marginal farmers, which came in handy particularly during the nationwide lockdown to battle Covid-19 in 2020. These numbers have to be scaled up if there is political will to extend assistance to the bottom of the rural pyramid by scrapping subsidies or even taxing agricultural incomes, as has been suggested by a former revenue secretary, Tarun Bajaj. Quasi-UBRIs, or UBIs, have considerable appeal among economic reformers who prefer a minimalist State as it represents a possible alternative to various social welfare programmes that are not effective in bringing down rural poverty. It is far better instead to scrap these programmes and subsidies, and provide a direct cash transfer to the beneficiaries.

As for feasibility, rolling out a quasi-UBRI per se ought not to pose problems as there is already a critical mass of similar schemes that have been implemented in the various states without fiscal stress and can be scaled up like Rythu Bandhu of Telangana or Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) of Odisha, that is more inclusive in providing financial assistance to all cultivators and tenants who do not have titles to their land and landless agricultural labourers. Leveraging these best practices can definitely help PM Kisan become a quasi-UBRI.

Research has shown that income support from this scheme constituted 6-7% of the annual income of farmers at an all-India level in FY19, which was higher for poorer states. Including agricultural and non-farm labour towards a nationwide quasi-UBRI is certainly an appealing idea whose time has come. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/income-support-for-bharat/2912041/>

10. Railway ministry drops proposal for monetisation of stations on PPP mode (economictimes.indiatimes.com) Updated: Dec 13, 2022

The ministry of railways has dropped its proposal for monetisation of stations on public-private partnership mode.

Earlier, the Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has said that "government has taken a clear and firm stand that railways will not be privatised, the issue has been approved at the cabinet level."

According to the PTI sources, projects will now be taken up under engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) mode. The ministry of railways has been asked to expedite monetisation of other assets, including trains, goodsheds, hill rail, stadiums, railway colonies and railway land parcels among others.

"The largest asset class (stations) dropped. Stations earlier proposed on PPP mode are now being taken up under EPC mode. Likely realisation from asset monetisation of Indian Railways assets under NMP (National Monetisation Pipeline) in the current fiscal has been now estimated at Rs 4,999 crore," the source said.

"The ministry has so far raised only Rs 1,829 crore against the target of Rs 30,000 crore in the current financial year."

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in a meeting with Niti Aayog CEO Parameswaran Iyer on November 14 reviewed the progress of NMP implementation.

An e-mail sent to the official spokesperson of the ministry of railways seeking comments remained unanswered.

Earlier this year, the then NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant had said the government's plan to monetise railway assets by allowing private players to run trains did not attract enough investors due to lack of proper structuring and the railway ministry is looking at it afresh.

According to the NMP document, a total of 400 stations, 90 passenger trains, railway stadiums and colonies, and the famed Konkan and hill railways were among the assets identified by the government for monetisation.

In August 2021, Sitharaman announced the Rs 6-lakh crore NMP over four years to unlock value in infrastructure assets across sectors. Niti Aayog in consultation with infrastructure line ministries had prepared the report on the NMP.

The asset monetisation does not involve selling of land and it is about monetising brownfield assets.

Assets are monetised through models like public-private partnership (PPP); operate, maintain, transfer (OMT); toll, operate, transfer (TOT); and operations, maintenance and development (OMD) modes.

In EPC projects, the government pays the developer for constructing the highway while the toll revenues accrue to the government.

The government has monetised assets worth Rs 33,422 crore under the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) in 2022-23 so far, with the coal ministry leading the list by raising Rs 17,000 crore, and the ports and shipping ministry surpassing its overall fiscal target.

In 2021-22, the government surpassed the programme's first-year target of Rs 88,000 crore by completing transactions worth Rs 1 lakh crore. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/railways/railway-ministry-drops-proposal-for-monetisation-of-stations-on-ppp-mode/articleshow/96200276.cms>

11. 6 BEL Officials Booked for Alleged Irregularities in Awarding Defence Contracts in Air Force's IACSS ([news18.com](https://www.news18.com)) DECEMBER 14, 2022

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed an FIR against six officials of defence PSU Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), including its former chairman and managing director (CMD), for alleged irregularities in awarding contracts in the Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACSS).

According to the FIR, a Preliminary Enquiry conducted almost a year ago revealed alleged irregularities and violation of work contracts in Preliminary Project Report (PPR), Detailed Project Report (DPR) and Civil Work Contract under IACSS Phase-II by six BEL officials in

criminal conspiracy with three private firms — RD Konsultants, SR Ashok and Associates and CS Constructions from 2011 to 2017.

The CBI has booked Sunil Kumar Sharma, former general manager and CMD of Network Centering System of BEL, former GM RK Handa, then Senior Deputy General Manager Gurjit Singh, senior DGM SS Chaudhary, NCS BP Pahuja and DGM (Infra) of NCS, Manish Goyal. The FIR also includes names of RD Konsultants and Rahul Bhuchar of CS Constructions, SR Ashok & Associates and CS Constructions and others.

“On the basis of reference from Gokul Nagarkoti, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi, a Preliminary Enquiry was registered on 11.11.2021 against unknown officials of Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), M/s RD Konsultants and unknown persons and was entrusted to the undersigned for conducting enquiry,” the FIR stated.

The preliminary enquiry revealed that the Directorate of IACCS in letter dated May 27, 2011 to SK Sharma, GM (NCS & UH), BEL, Ghaziabad, asked for a Detailed Project Report to process the case and obtain sanction from the defence ministry for implementing the project for the next five IACCS nodes on a turnkey basis to include civil works alongside building of infrastructure.

The enquiry further revealed that BEL had already negotiated the price with RD Konsultants, and the noting of PK Bhola, main accused, for making a committee in this regard and the approval for the same by SK Sharma, GM (NCS), seems to be just a formality.

The PE further revealed that in the noting, RK Handa, GM (NCS), gave false justification for negotiation held with RD Konsultants, and the CMD finally approved the proposal to hire RD Konsultants for the preliminary work for Rs 13.236 lakh.

The enquiry further revealed while giving job contracts or making correspondence with IACCS Directorate SS Chowdhary, then senior DGM (marketing), BEL, preliminary project report was never mentioned, and the IACCS directorate had been only asking for the project report.

The consultancy contract for Preliminary Project Report, the Work Contract Manual and CVC Circulars, were violated by the BEL officials.

According to the FIR, the impression was made that there was no idea or discussion about the design and costing with BEL. In the DPR tender process, no reason was given for allotting an e-tender and the tender was called manually.

The enquiry has further revealed that facts were concealed in the DPR file and not taken into consideration while awarding the order of Rs 15.94 crore for preparing draft detailed project report to RD Konsultants.

The initial investigation also revealed that Sunil Kumar Sharma was involved in the conspiracy since the beginning of awarding the Preliminary Project Report contract to RD Konsultants. So, in the chain of the same criminal conspiracy, Sharma along with BP Pahuja and others approved the deviations of Least Cost Method, which is beyond his power, and 8% increase in cost recommended by RD Konsultants and involved the firm in the tender committee to select vendors for executing contracts. Therefore, L&T was awarded three costliest

sites. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/6-bel-officials-booked-for-alleged-irregularities-in-awarding-defence-contracts-under-air-forces-iacss-6611689.html>

12. Govt approves Rs 1.64 lakh crore revival package for BSNL ([business-standard.com](https://www.business-standard.com)) December 14, 2022

The government has approved a revival package of Rs 1,64,000 crore for revival of BSNL. Replying to supplementaries during Question Hour in Lok Sabha on Wednesday (14 December), Communications Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said this project will totally transform BSNL.

The revival measures focus on infusing fresh capital for upgrading BSNL services, allocating spectrum, de-stressing its balance sheet and augmenting its fibre network by merging Bharat Broadband Nigam Limited (BBNL) with BSNL. Vaishnaw said BSNL is going to implement indigenously developed 4G and 5G technology stat.

He said the days have gone when BSNL was a cash cow. The reasons for losses of BSNL are high employee cost over the years, debt burden, stiff competition in the market and lack of 4G services (except on a limited basis in certain areas). https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-cm/govt-approves-rs-1-64-lakh-crore-revival-package-for-bsnl-122121400506_1.html

13. Cushion against vulnerabilities ([millenniumpost.in](https://www.millenniumpost.in)) 13 Dec 2022

The government, on December 9, sought Parliament's approval for an additional expenditure of Rs 2,14,580 crore to fund higher subsidy bill on the three Fs — food, fertiliser and fuel. The subsidy bill that started rising exponentially since the onset of the pandemic will remain high through the ensuing fiscal; even though the factors that had led to the increase, initially, have subsided significantly. The original amount budgeted for FY 2022-23 was Rs 3,17,866 crore. With the additional expenditure sought, the overall expenditure cost for the fiscal will stand at Rs 5,32,446 crore, which is second only to Rs 7,06,007 crore in 2020-21. As a matter of fact, India's fertiliser sector has been under serious strain this year. After the budgetary allocation was made for this sector in February, the Russia-Ukraine war broke out — taking the prices of both imported fertilisers and raw materials to the roof. The government had to intervene to safeguard farmers from any unforeseen vulnerability, as also to buttress the fertiliser companies that have been recording suboptimal profits year after year. But the current tranche of increase in expenditures have come at a time when the fallouts of the Russia-Ukraine war have toned down a bit, if not significantly eliminated. If the world does not undergo any major shock in the coming months, chances are that things will return to normal for the fertiliser sector. This raises the speculation of extra savings in the times to come. However, it may be noted that fertiliser is just one major component of the set of items that drive subsidy bill. Of the total 5,32,446 crore subsidy bill projected this year, fertiliser constitutes Rs 2,14,511 crore. Another Rs 2,87,179 crore is accounted for by the food sector. The government has extended the free-grain Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) till December this year, even as the worst of times for food insecurity appears to have gone now. The onset of the pandemic in 2020, and the resultant loss of jobs for those belonging to the lower strata of the socio-economic spectrum, had put India's food security to test. The response was the public distribution system (PDS) which, as a medium of implementation of PMGKAY, witnessed a record distribution of rice and wheat. Since India's food security has improved significantly as the pandemic recedes, the chances are that the government may discontinue the PMGKAY after December. Yet

another contributor to the subsidy bill is petroleum, with an overall outlay of Rs 30,756 crore in the current fiscal. On this front, too, after the disruptions caused by the pandemic and the war, things have assumed normalcy of sorts. The prices of international crude oil have come down to the pre-war levels. Furthermore, India, even when the world was struggling in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, had secured its oil supplies through efficient diplomacy. Though threats remain, the situation regarding all the three Fs has been non-alarming. The government's decision to increase the budgetary outlay for subsidies might be aimed at creating a safety valve, but is not certainly an urgency. It is expected that the government's expenditure plans may exceed the actual outgo in the coming months and the next fiscal — generating a significant amount of savings. It will be interesting to see as to what use these savings are put to. The economy needs a cushion but it will be more tempting for the government to deploy the savings in such a manner that would yield political dividends. While subsidies played a critical role during the turbulent years of the pandemic and the war, their need in normal circumstances may not be as pronounced. More importantly, as the experts argue, the government must recalibrate its fertiliser subsidy policy to achieve maximum outcome with the least use of chemical fertilisers. <https://www.millenniumpost.in/editorial/cushion-against-vulnerabilities-502083>

14. India's wheat stocks fall to 6-yr low in Dec as prices jump to record high ([business-standard.com](https://www.business-standard.com)) December 14, 2022

Indian wheat stocks held in government warehouses for December fell to the lowest in six years, government data showed on Tuesday, as prices jumped to a record high on rising demand and falling inventories.

Lower state reserves could hobble the government's efforts to release stocks to cool wheat prices, something it does regularly for bulk buyers such as flour and biscuit makers.

Wheat reserves in state stores totalled 19 million tonnes at the start of this month, down from 37.85 million tonnes on Dec. 1, 2021.

The current stocks for December are at the lowest since 2016, when inventories had fallen to 16.5 million tonnes because of back-to-back droughts in 2014 and 2015 that curtailed wheat output.

"The new crop supplies would start only after four months. The government's task of calm prices is becoming more difficult every month," said a Mumbai-based dealer with a global trade house.

"It can't release more than 2 million tonnes in a month to bring down prices. The market needs much more as farmers supplies have nearly stopped and traders are slowly releasing stocks," he said.

The government stockpile depleted by around 2 million tonnes in November, according to data compiled by the Food Corporation of India.

Wheat prices have surged in India despite the world's second-biggest producer of the grain implementing a ban on exports in May as it was stung by a sudden drop in crop yields.

Local wheat prices have jumped nearly 28% since the May ban on exports and ruling at 26,785 rupees a tonne on Tuesday.

Wheat production in the new season would rise to normal levels but prices would remain elevated until the new season supplies gain momentum from April, said a New Delhi-based trader.

Indian farmers have planted wheat on 25.6 million hectares since Oct. 1, when the current sowing season began, up 25.4% from a year ago. https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-s-wheat-stocks-fall-to-6-yr-low-in-dec-as-prices-jump-to-record-high-122121400128_1.html

15. Chargesheet in grain transport tender scam: Ashu, Singla changed labour, cartage and transportation policy to benefit select few ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) Updated: December 14, 2022

The Punjab vigilance bureau, in its 1,556-page chargesheet in the alleged foodgrains transportation, labour and cartage scam, has said that former Congress minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu in connivance with Rakesh Kumar Singla, the former deputy director (now dismissed) of food and civil supplies department, “made changes in the labour, cartage and transportation policy for 2020-21 to benefit certain individuals and to eliminate some others from the tendering process.”

The chargesheet accessed by The Indian Express, adds that one of the accused, contractor Telu Ram, in his statement said that he gave Rs 6-lakh bribe for just one meeting with Ashu, and the amount was given to Pankaj Meenu Malhotra, who introduced himself as ‘Ashu’s PA’.

Telu Ram, in his statement, also claimed to have given Rs 31 lakh as bribe to different individuals including Rs 20 lakh to Singla and one iPhone to an officer, to bag foodgrains transportation tenders for Ludhiana district when Ashu was a minister.

The vigilance, while quoting the written statement submitted by IAS officer KAP Sinha, then posted as principal secretary in food and civil supplies department, said the statement has corroborated that even as then deputy director Singla faced six departmental chargesheets, including that for wheat damage, irregularities in grain distribution and obtaining PR in Canada and allegedly causing loss of at least Rs 85 crore to the department, he was still promoted as chairman of central vigilance committee (CVC) on Ashu’s orders.

Ashu was inducted as food and civil supplies minister in the cabinet of former CM Captain Amarinder Singh in 2018. He is currently lodged at Patiala jail after his arrest on August 22, 2022. Singla, also a native of Ludhiana, is currently absconding and has been declared a proclaimed offender. He is believed to be hiding in Canada.

Singla was appointed CVC chairman on June 21, 2018, and was tasked with inspecting crates that were supplied to procurement agencies on February 15, 2019. Singla was also given the charge of labour, cartage and transport policy on January 2, 2019, the chargesheet mentions, adding that all these appointments were made even when he was ‘already under scanner and faced several departmental enquiries.’

Sinha, who was with the department from March 2017 to June 2020, submitted, "...Rakesh Kumar Singla was deputy director when I joined. He was facing five chargesheets and another enquiry for his Canadian PR. He was also demoted from deputy director to assistant director following HC order and appointing him as CVC wasn't under my purview. Singla was made CVC on Ashu's orders dated June 21, 2018."

The chargesheet adds that during Ashu's tenure, expenditure incurred by the department in Ludhiana was inflated in 2020-21 and 2021-22 compared to 2019-20. "Compared to 2019-20, Rs 3.21 crore more was spent on transportation in 2021-22 and 2020-21; on cartage Rs 4.20 crore more was spent and on labour, Rs 2.18 crore more was spent," reads the challan.

The vigilance has also submitted a report by the food supply officer which says that a total of Rs 14.78 crore were spent more in rabi procurement season 2020-21, kharif season 2020-21 and kharif 2021-22 in Doraha, Khanna, Ludhiana-1, Ludhiana-2, Payal, Sahnewal, Jodhan and Malaud.

The vigilance chargesheet further says that Telu Ram in his statement said that he paid Rs 6 lakh bribe to Pankaj Meenu Malhotra, who called himself as 'Ashu's PA', just to arrange one meeting with the former minister.

'Ashu de PA Malhotra ne mantri naal gall karaan de 3 vaari 6 lakh rupaye laye san... (Ashu's PA Malhotra took 6 lakh from me in three installments for making me speak to him),' says Ram's statement in the chargesheet.

"During interrogation, Telu Ram revealed that to bag tenders for clusters Raikot, Jodhan, Mullanpur Dakha, Payal and Talwandi Bhai, he met Malhotra who introduced him to Ashu. The former minister had told him to meet Singla..," the chargesheet reads.

Telu Ram's statement reads, "When I met Ashu, he said that he will call Singla and get my work done. I then met Singla at his residence in Rajguru Nagar, Ludhiana. He said I have to pay Rs 30 lakh. After tenders were opened in my favor, I paid Rs 20 lakh to Singla in various installments and he had said that he will give the money to Ashu. Singla also said that he finalises tenders for other districts too after Ashu's approval. I then paid Rs 2 lakh to DFSC Sukhvinder Singh Gill and gifted him an iPhone worth Rs 1.15 lakh and paid another Rs 3 lakh to DFSC Harveen Kaur."

The chargesheet adds that Telu Ram had mentioned during investigation that he kept all chats and WhatsApp call records with Singla and Malhotra in his Samsung phone but when the probe started, Singla told him to dispose it of else they all will be in trouble. Ram said that he then dumped the phone near Sutlej river on Ludhiana-Phillaur road and put the SIM in a simple Nokia phone and stopped using WhatsApp.

Vigilance said that entries of bribe money that Ram gave to officials were found written in his pocket diary. The samples of his handwriting have been sent to forensic for verification.

The vigilance also submitted that as per Chandigarh civil secretariat records, another accused Inderjit Singh alias Indi, who also claimed to be 'Ashu's PA', was was hired as a special assistant on Ashu's orders. "It was a political appointment which was done on Ashu's orders dated February 13, 2018," reads the chargesheet.

Pankaj Meenu Malhotra was not the official PA of Ashu but still he claimed to be so in public and accepted bribes, the document adds.

Of 18 clusters in Ludhiana district, there was an unusual increase in labour, cartage and transportation charges of 9 clusters in 2020-21 and 2021-22, says the vigilance probe, which was conducted on the complaint of Gurpreet Singh of Nawanshahr. In his complaint to the vigilance, Gurpreet had claimed that he himself was a contractor for Mullanpur cluster and grain arrival capacity for 2020-21 for Mullanpur was shown as 1 lakh MT, which was unusually inflated. He had submitted that works he did for Rs 2.25 crore in previous years were inflated to Rs 4 crore in new tenders due to which he and several other small contractors could not apply.

FIR in the case was registered under sections 420 (cheating), 409 (criminal breach of trust), 467 (forgery of valuable security, etc), 468 (forgery for purpose of cheating), 471 (using as genuine a forged document), 120B (party to a criminal conspiracy to commit an offence) of the IPC and sections 7, 7 (A), 8, 12 and 13(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act at the vigilance bureau police station in Ludhiana on August 16. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ludhiana/chargesheet-in-grain-transport-tender-scam-ashu-singla-changed-labour-cartage-and-transportation-policy-to-benefit-select-few-8323312/>