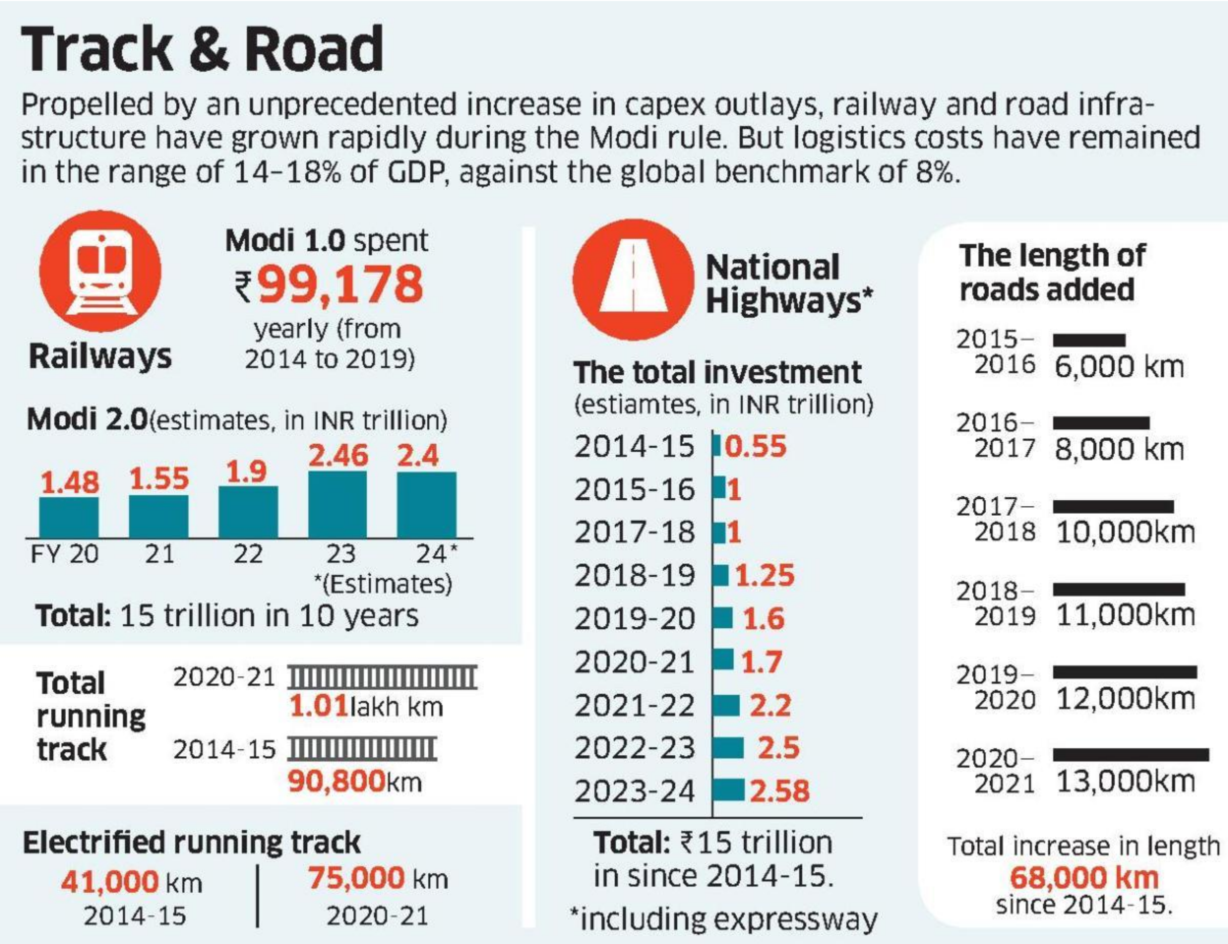
NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (02.03.2023)

1. Gati Shakti falls short, it needs a ministry to put logistics on fast track *(deccanherald.com)* March 02, 2023

The question is whether the Modi government's Rs 12.5 trillion investment in Indian Railways has provided the necessary impetus to railway traffic and revenue



The one area where there has been exceptional consistency and accentuation by the successive Modi governments is spending on transport infrastructure like roads and railways. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and Indian Railways are are allotted Rs 2.58 trillion and Rs 2.4 trillion, respectively, as capital expenditure (capex) in FY 24, out of the total capex outlay of Rs 10 trillion. That is, about 50% of the capex was allotted to the two ministries of roads and railways in FY 24. Since 2014, the allocation of capital expenditure on these two sectors has seen an unprecedented increase.

First, consider the railways. Against the average yearly spending of Rs 45,980 crore during 2009–14 under UPA, Modi 1.0 spent Rs 99,178 crore annually. Over the last 10 years, the Modi government has spent approximately Rs 15 trillion,, with an annual increase in allocation. This kind of increased allocation is much beyond Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation. As a result, the total running track increased to 1.01 lakh km in 2020–21 from 90,800 km in 2014–15, and the electrified running track increased to 75,000 km in 2020–21 from 41,000 km in 2014–15. The output in terms of improved rail infrastructure is evident.

The question is whether the Modi government's Rs 12.5 trillion investment in Indian Railways has provided the necessary impetus to railway traffic and revenue.

The railway passenger traffic (including both suburban and non-suburban) decreased from 1,147 billion PKM in 2014–15 to 590 billion PKM in 2021–22, which is understandable given the setback created by the Covid-19 pandemic. On the contrary, this reduction in passenger traffic should have helped the Indian Railways improve its finances, as, on average, it has been subsidising its fares by about 50%. However, the revenue-earning railway freight traffic increased from 682 billion TKM in 2014–15 to 872 billion TKM in 2021–22 at a CAGR of 3.57%. When the railway tracks were freed from IR's operation of fewer passenger service trains, IR should have grabbed this opportunity to scale up its freight traffic significantly.

The High Density Network (HDN) of Indian Railways has been carrying about 120% to 200% of its capacity since the 1990s. As per the World Bank estimates, in emerging countries, freight traffic would increase by about 1.25 times that of GDP growth.

The sub-optimal growth of revenue-earning freight traffic by IR over the last eight years has led us to surmise that the huge capital expenditure on railway infrastructure since 2014–15 has facilitated IR to reduce the overload and of its tracks on HDN to some extent but not to increase its freight traffic or revenue.

The very nominal increase in rail freight traffic since 2014–15 shows that IR has not gotten its act together. The recent CAG report also highlighted the same. Because transportation costs account for a significant portion of logistics costs, only when freight traffic shifts to rail will logistics costs be reduced. Then comes the National Highways (NH), which includes expressways. The total investment in national highways has been close to Rs 15 trillion since 2014–15.

The length of roads added to the National Highways since 2014–15 is about 68,000 km. Taking advantage of improved road infrastructure, freight and passenger movement by road has been increasing slightly exponentially, and this has essentially resulted in a modal shift of freight and passenger traffic from rail to road. As a result, such a massive expansion of the NH/Expressways network has not reduced the logistics costs.

The Economic Survey 2023 admits that the logistics costs in India have been in the range of 14–18% of GDP, compared to the global benchmark of 8%. The introduction of e-vehicles for both passenger and freight transport may reduce the operating cost as electricity is much cheaper than diesel and petrol. But there is a caveat. The upfront investment in electric vehicles is huge, and when that is accounted for in the logistics costs, the logistics costs may not decrease.

Although the government has spent equally on both rail and road transport infrastructure, it appears that IR did not turn this huge investment into a business opportunity. Spending on infrastructure has the maximum multiplier effect of 3, which is not achieved in any other spending by the government and hence falls under constructive spending.

However, in any pattern of investment, there are four stages: input, processes, output, and outcome. The government's huge spending on road and rail infrastructure has worked well in the first three stages. Reduced logistics costs should be the outcome of this huge investment.

The Gati Shakti scheme was introduced with the aim of seamless integration of the movement of goods at reduced cost and time, involving about 23 ministries and departments. The synergies that have been aimed at by the Gati Shakti scheme between various ministries of the central government and state governments do not seem to have happened.

Although FY 2023–24 may be the last year of the Modi 2.0 tenure, the government may have to think about forming a ministry of Gati Shakti to coordinate the efforts of various ministries and departments.

The reduced logistics costs would moderate the increase in WPI first and then CPI. It is as critical as the efficacious use of the infrastructure created as much as the creation of physical infrastructure. https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/panorama/gati-shakti-falls-short-it-needs-a-ministry-to-put-logistics-on-fast-track-1196339.html

2. Probability of disasters in India 'to increase' with the addition of nuclear reactors *(counterview.net)* 02 March 2023

At a time when the Union government is planning/ commissioning scores of additional nuclear reactors in different parts of the country, there is a critical need for our people to take cognisance of the associated risks and costs to the larger society.

The nuclear disasters at Chernobyl and Fukushima had disastrous impacts on the local communities. What is of critical interest in these two cases is the appreciable speed with which the local communities were shifted out of the danger zone.

Whereas the then USSR and Japan had much larger resource bases and much lower population to rescue/ rehabilitate, it is difficult to imagine the associated impacts and costs to our society from any such unfortunate nuclear disaster in India, which has much lower resource base and much larger population around nuclear power projects.

Additionally, the then USSR and Japan have been associated with a high level of technological, quality and safety standards. If these two techno-economically developed countries could not avert the nuclear disasters, would it be rational to assume that the probability of such disasters, in 22 operating nuclear reactors and scores of others being added in our country, is very low or negligible?

In this larger context of a considerable number of nuclear reactors being operated/ planned/ commissioned in India, the credible probability of such disaster scenarios must have huge relevance to our authorities requiring them to take all possible measures to minimise the impacts to our communities.

Are our authorities and the associated project communities prepared for such eventualities? It is difficult to assume so, when we also consider the fact that none of the credible concerns of civil society, since decades, have not even been acknowledged by the concerned authorities, let alone satisfactorily addressing them.

Multiple representations in this regard to Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), PMO, Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), and the state government of Karnataka have not even been acknowledged. In such a deplorable scenario, the rational thinkers may wonder as to who amongst the multiple authorities will accept the overall responsibility for the consequences of one or more unfortunate nuclear disasters in the country.

In this larger context, some of the major issues worthy of urgent consideration for civil society are:

-The probability and the consequences of a nuclear disaster in India will increase with the addition of nuclear reactors as being planned/ commissioned now;

-it is impossible to state with any degree of conviction that our authorities and the project proximity communities are suitably trained/ prepared for such eventualities. The example of the Kaiga Atomic Power Project, Karnataka, can be cited in this regard: even with the best intention among our authorities, it is difficult to imagine that in the case of any unfortunate nuclear accident in this project site, all the people in the safety zone can be evacuated safely within the stipulated time because of the hilly and difficult terrain;

-have all the people living in safety zones in each of the nuclear project sites been correctly identified; their location and contact details are available to the authorities to enable early notification and easy evacuation?

-have suitable places for temporary shelter and rehabilitation identified, and kept ready for urgent usage?

-have suitable and adequate first aid, medical and hospital facilities been identified for urgent usage?

-have an adequate number of suitably trained medical personnel identified for urgent deployment?

-have an adequate number of suitable vehicles for peoples' evacuation identified for urgent deployment?

Similar to the case of the Kaiga Atomic Power Project, Karnataka, where no clarification from the state authorities is forthcoming for such credible concerns, it is conceivable that a similar lack of preparedness is prevailing in other nuclear power project sites also.

In the context that the forcibly displaced people from a few dam- based projects in Karnataka have not been rehabilitated satisfactorily even after a few decades, our own recent past experience should indicate the absence of any effective rehabilitation policy/ practice in the country. Additionally, where are the suitable locations in our country to rehabilitate such thousands of families, if more such projects keep coming up?

In such a dismal scenario, there is a critical and urgent need for civil society groups to seriously consider effectively engaging the concerned authorities so as to persuade them to diligently act to adopt the safer option of eliminating/ minimising the very need for nuclear power reactors in our country.

In the overall context of the electric power sector in the country, it can be credibly argued that nuclear power plants are not essential for the satisfactory operation of the national grid, and that nuclear power is the costliest source of electricity.

The entire civil society, hence, has the critical role to diligently consider all the associated issues, such as the overall costs, risks and all the credible alternatives available to our country, and persuade the concerned authorities to adopt the most rational approach in meeting our electricity demand through non-nuclear power options; especially the new and renewable energy sources, of which the country has enormous potential.

In this larger context, the PDF of a detailed representation to the Prime Minister with regard to the Kaiga Atomic Power Project, Karnataka (click here) can reveal many such serious concerns to our communities, and the scenario of much benign and better options to meet the legitimate demand for electricity of our people. https://www.counterview.net/2023/03/probability-of-disasters-in-india-to.html

3. CAG Report No 20/16 on E-Auction of coal mines- public interest concerns *(countercurrents.org)* E A S Sarma | 01 March 2023

To

Shri A L Meena
Union Coal Secretary

Dear Shri Meena,

I refer to the CAG Report No 20/2016 on E-Auctions conducted by your Ministry for allotment of coal blocks, following the judgement of the Hon'ble Supreme Court holding earlier coal block allotments to be illegal.

In particular, I invite your attention to the following observations of the CAG:

Inadequate competition:

"in the auction of Sarisatolli and Trans Damodar coal mines, which were put up for auction on 27 December 2014, West Bengal Power Development Corporation Limited (WBPDCL) was disqualified (February 2015) for non-payment of additional levy. This was done despite the fact that for the coal mines for which WBPDCL was held as defaulter, the prior allottee, as per the amended definition, was a JV company i.e. Bengal Emta Coal Mines. Therefore, this disqualification was not as per the existing provisions….

Disqualification of WBPDCL from participating in the auction of Sarisatolli and Trans-Damodar coal mines, on the basis of it being a prior allottee and not depositing the additional levy within the prescribed time, was not as per the existing provisions"

"Audit noted that in 11 out of the 29 coal mines successfully auctioned during the 1st and 2nd tranche, QBs ranging between two and three were from the same company/parent-subsidiary company coalition/JV coalition. Audit could not draw an assurance that the potential level of competition was achieved during the Stage II bidding of these 11 coal mines auctioned in the first two tranches"

A Case study in Chapter 5 of the report refers to a particular coal block in the case of which a single bidder thwarted competition by setting up subsidiaries, which raises concerns about price discovery and the unauthorised means adopted by the bidder to corner a coal block, making a mockery of the bidding process.

Unauthorised diversion of coal from captive mine:

"MOC's replies need to be viewed in light of the fact that though the vesting order of Sarisatolli coal mine was issued on 23 March 2015 and the proposed diversions were approved in August 2015, but the intimations of the proposed diversions were given to the MOP, CERC, SERC and the concerned State Government only on 20 January 2016, after the issue was raised by Audit"

When the CAG findings became public, there were news reports at that time (https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india-cag-picks-holes-in-coal-mines-auction-by-nda-govt-341047) referring to how some bidders short-circuited the auction process to subvert competition at the cost of genuine price discovery.

Apparently, your Ministry, for some reason, was reluctant to act on the CAG report at that time.

More recent news reports (https://thewire.in/government/centre-ignored-cags-finding-that-rp-sanjiv-goenka-used-shell-companies-to-win-coal-auction-report) refer to the same CAG report of 2016 on one particular private business conglomerate choking competition to coirner a valuable coal block, apparently on the basis of information accessed from the CAG office. If what has been reported is correct, it calls for a comprehensive investigation, as such a manipulation of the sanctity of the auction process would have defeated the very idea of competitiuon that an auction procedure was intented to achieve.

In particular, I wish to raise the following questions for the Coal Ministry to examine.

-CAG's findings in this case were specific and have implications for the integrity of a competitive auction. Did the Ministry get more details from the CAG office and take immediate follow-up action?

-If a bidder has tried to hoodwink the Ministry, should not the Ministry have initiated action against the concerned bidder and revoked the coal block allotment with a deterrent penalty?

-According to the CAG report, there were at least 11 such cases of aborted competition. In the light of the earlier judgement of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, was it not incumbent on the part of the Ministry to have taken the CAG's findings with a sense of seriousness they deserve and taken the investigation to its logical end?

-One of the findings in the CAG report is about unauthorised diversion of coal by a business group. Did the Ministry adequately penalise the concerned group?

It is somewhat distressing that, instead of the Ministry taking the CAG findings seriously and taking action, it should remain silent, while it is the media investigations that should bring the details underlying the CAG report to the public domain.

It is ironic that the present government which rightly followed up on an earlier CAG report and adopted competitive resource auctioning as the means to discover the price of scarce natural resources such as minerals and spectrum, the same government should fail to take cognizance of the revealing findings that emerged from a subsequent CAG report.

I hope that your Ministry will take necessary action now, though belatedly.

Regards,
Yours sincerely,

E A S Sarma
Former Secretary to Government of India
Visakhapatnam
https://countercurrents.org/2023/03/cag-report-no-20-16-on-e-auction-of-coal-mines-public-interest-concerns/

4. Govt suspends foreign funding licence of CPR *(hindustantimes.com)* 02 March 2023

The Union government has suspended the foreign funding licence of leading think-tank Centre for Policy Research (CPR) for allegedly violating provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), people familiar with the development said on Wednesday.

The policy think-tank said it was "absolutely confident" that the matter will be resolved "speedily" and that it continues to cooperate fully with the authorities.

"The suspension was ordered on Monday based on prime facie evidence that certain provisions of FCRA were not followed by the think-tank," said an official from the Union home ministry, requesting anonymity. "After suspension, thorough investigation will take place and further decision will be taken."

In a statement released on its website, CPR said all its balance sheets are in public domain, adding that it will explore all avenues of recourse available.

"We are in complete compliance with the law and are routinely scrutinised and audited by government authorities, including the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. We have annual statutory audits, and all our annual audited balance sheets are in public domain. There is no question of having undertaken any activity that is beyond our objects of association and compliance mandated by law," the statement read.

Operational since 1973, CPR is a non-profit think-tank that caries out research on a wide range of policy-relevant topics. Meenakshi Gopinath, political scientist and former principal of Lady Shri Ram College, is the chairperson of CPR.

The government's move against the think-tank has come months after the Income Tax department in September 2022 conducted a "survey" at the CPR premises as part of its probe into foreign funding to various organisations. The department had also conducted I-T survey at two other organisations — Oxfam India and Bengaluru-based Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation (IPSMF) — along with CPR.

People cited above said the I-T department had submitted its findings to the government, after which the FCRA division of the home ministry took the decision to suspend the CPR's licence on Monday.

Under FCRA, the licence of an organisation can be suspended for 180 days during which it cannot receive any foreign funding and the amount lying in its foreign funding account can be used only with prior approval of the MHA.

Among the donors of CPR include Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the University of Pennsylvania, the World Resources Institute and the Duke University. The policy think-tank also receives grants from the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR).

The official cited above said the CPR has been asked to give clarification and documents regarding FCRA funds received by it. The FCRA licence of CPR was last renewed in 2016.

"In light of the current MHA order, we will explore all avenues of recourse available to us... We are absolutely confident that the matter will be resolved speedily, in fairness and in spirit of our constitutional values," the CPR statement added. "…CPR has and continues to cooperate fully with the authorities."

As on Wednesday, a total of 16,419 FCRA-registered organisations are operational in the country. https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/govt-suspends-foreign-funding-licence-of-cpr-101677702247466.html

STATES NEWS ITEMS

5. Rajasthan: CAG exposes irregularities in mining *(newindianexpress.com)* 02 March 2023

JAIPUR: A report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India has created quite a stir in Rajasthan by exposing the lousy working of the mines department. The report claims that besides illegal mining, the state mines department is also responsible for financial irregularities on a large scale due to which Rajasthan has lost over Rs 100 crores in revenue. The report said the department did not use free technology to curb illegal mining though it had options, including remote sensing data from Google Earth.

The CAG report has identified illegal mining in 83.25 hectares in 122 cases using remote sensing data and GIS techniques. It was clear from the result that illegal mining is happening in nearly 34% mining leases. Inspection of 14 mining leases by the audit teams have found that illegal mining of 13.37 lakh metric tonnes of minerals has taken place, the cost of which is Rs 1 billion or Rs 11 crores.

The CAG report asserts that the department did not detect illegal mining due to non-use of modern technology and non-inspection of mining leases by the officials. https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/mar/02/rajasthan-cag-exposes-irregularities-in-mining-2552317.html

6. 'Discoms failed to implement rural power scheme properly' *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* March 02, 2023

Jaipur: CAG finds several lapses in the implementation of Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) by discoms which led to missing of targets. Declaration of unelectrified villages as electrified, failing to meet feeder segregation targets, non-replacement of defective meters causing loss of Rs 50 crore among several others were flagged by CAG in its report.

The accounting watchdog of the government said Discoms failed on all the three parameters of segregation of feeders, strengthening the distribution infrastructure and achieving 100% electrification under DDUGJY.

Out of the 33 districts for which discoms formulated detailed project reports for which Rs 2819 crore has been sanctioned, the CAG selected nine districts or 27.27% of the project for detailed evaluation of implementation.

It said that discoms did not prepare the need Assessment document for identifying the need for feeder separation and gaps in sub-transmission and distribution network. Additionally, they did not involve the planning wing of their departments. This lead to poor performance in setting up the farm and non-farm feeder segregation.CAG said discoms could achieve feeder segregation target of only 7.73%. Feeder segregation is key for providing quality power, checking theft and improving efficiency.

Similarly, discoms were required to identify critical gaps in sub-transmission and distribution network considering all relevant parameters for efficient management. But they did not conduct any study. This led to change of location for setting up sub-stations at 91 places (44% of planned substations) causing delay and extra expenses.

IT said that the discoms did not replace 3626 defective metres despite sanction of Rs 97 crore under DDUGJY. Jodhpur discom did not make any provision for replacement of 2.08 lakh defective metres. They had to give replace of Rs 50 crore for non-replacement of defective meters to the consumers as per the provision.

Discoms also incorrectly declared unelectrified villages as electrified. Even after implementation of DDUGJY, they could not achieve 100% electrification, the CAG said. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/discoms-failed-to-implement-rural-power-scheme-properly/articleshow/98350176.cms

7. कैग की रिपोर्ट:निकायों की गलती से 2584 कर्मियों को एनपीएस में ~8 करोड़ का नुकसान, जयपुर निगम को 149 लाख का झटका *(bhaskar.com)* March 02, 2023

कैग की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार स्थानीय निकाय और यूडीएच में अनियमितताओं के साथ अफसरों एवं कर्मचारियों की बड़ी लापरवाही भी सामने आई है। कैग की रिपोर्ट में सामने आया है कि स्थानीय निकायों की लापरवाही से नई पेंशन योजना से जुड़े कर्मचारियों को भारी नुकसान उठाना पड़ा। राज्य में एक जनवरी,

2004 को या उसके बाद नियुक्त हुए राज्य सरकार के कर्मचारियों के लिए सरकार ने अंशदायी पेंशन योजना शुरू की है।

अंशदान राशि को अंतरिम उपाय के रूप में ब्याज वाले सार्वजनिक खाते में जमा करवाना आवश्यक था। स्थानीय निकाय निदेशक के अभिलेखों की नमूना जांच में सामने आया कि जनवरी 2004 से जून,
2021 की अवधि के दौरान भर्ती किए गए 38 हजार कर्मचारियों में से 2584 कर्मचारियों का स्थायी सेवानिवृत्ति खाता संख्या जारी नहीं किया गया।

इस वजह से इस अवधि तक का कर्मचारियों से वसूल पेंशन अंशदान एवं समान अंशदान की सकल राशि 85.42 करोड़ रुपए ट्रस्टी बैंक के खाते में ट्रांसफर नहीं की गई। हालांकि, सरकार ने बताया कि 27.89 करोड़ रुपए कर्मचारियों के प्रान खातों में जमा करवाए जा चुके हैं। कुल मिलाकर नई पेंशन योजना की अंशदान राशि 57.53 करोड़ रुपए ट्रस्ट के खातों में ट्रांसफर नहीं किए जाने से कर्मचारियों को 8 करोड़ 19 लाख रुपए का आर्थिक नुकसान उठाना पड़ा।

जयपुर निगम: ई-निलामी के सफल बोलीदाता को तय समय में मांग पत्र नहीं दिए
निगम ने वर्ष 2018-19 में अपने क्षेत्र में स्थित 50 विज्ञापन बोर्डों के लिए ई-निलामी की प्रक्रिया शुरू की। ई-निलामी में सफल बोलीदाता को निर्धारित समयावधि में मांग पत्र जारी न करने के परिणाम स्वरूप निगम को 149.20 लाख के राजस्व की हानि हुई।

बीकानेर: बिल्डरों पर न्यास की मेहरबानी:
नगरीय विकास न्यास बीकानेर के दस्तावेजों की नमूना जांच में सामने आया कि बिल्डर्स को अगस्त,
2018 से मई 2019 के दौरान विभिन्न उद्देश्यों के लिए भवनों के निर्माण की अनुमति दी गई थी। श्रम सेस की वसूली नहीं की गई। इसके तहत 77 लाख रुपए की वसूली की जानी थी, लेकिन सिर्फ 5 लाख रुपए की वसूली ही की जा सकी। दो बड़े समूहों से 49 लाख रुपए के बदले एक भी रुपया वसूल नहीं किया जा सका। https://www.bhaskar.com/local/rajasthan/jaipur/news/2584-workers-lost-8-crores-in-nps-due-.-civic-bodys-mistake-149-lakh-blow-.-jaipur-corporation-130990730.html

8. 5 UP districts have no government college; Ayodhya College runs with 3 contract teachers *(news.careers360.com)* 01 Mar 2023

During the ongoing budget session of the Uttar Pradesh assembly, higher education minister Yogendra Upadhyaya informed the UP Vidhan Sabha that Government Women's College in Paraswan village of Ayodhya, a constituent college of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Avadh

University, is running with only three contractual teachers. A total of 59 students are enrolled, spread across the college's eight programmes.

Meanwhile, a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), tabled in the UP assembly on February 22, stated that no state university or college was among the top 100 higher educational institutions (HEIs) in India. The audit covered the period 2014-19 and was carried out during the year 2019-20.

The report stated that five districts did not have any government degree college, while five others did not have a men's or co-educational government degree college. A total of 20 districts of Uttar Pradesh did not have either a government or non-government aided girls' college.

UP college enrollment, employability

The gross enrollment ratio (GER) of the state during 2019-20 was 25.30%, lower than the all-India average of 27.10%. To achieve a GER of 40%, the state must provide colleges in underserved districts, the CAG recommended.

For detailed examination, the CAG selected two state government-run universities – Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith Varanasi (MGKVP) and University of Lucknow (UoL) along with 10 colleges affiliated to these universities. During 2014-20, the average percentage of programmes with focus on employability in MGKVP and Lucknow University was only 21% and 10% respectively, the CAG report found. The report has recommended that there should be "timely revision of curriculum" and courses should have "focus on employability".

As against the prescribed ratio of 20:1, the student-teacher ratio (STR) of government colleges in UP during 2019-20 was 49:1. The STR in arts, commerce and science streams in MGKVP during 2019-20 was 54:1, 52:1 and 53:1 respectively. During the same period STR of UoL in arts, commerce and science streams was 18:1, 39:1, 12:1 respectively.

MGKVP, Lucknow University result delays

The delay in Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith result declaration during 2014-20 ranged up to 273 days (except in 2018-19); Lucknow University result could be delayed by 175 days during 2017-20, the CAG report found.

According to UGC regulations, fees to be charged from each student should be approved by the affiliating university. However, CAG found that both Lucknow University and Kashi Vidyapith did not approve fees structure for their affiliated private colleges and the state did not have any specific policy for opening of universities and colleges.

"In order to make higher education affordable the State Government and the Universities may regulate the fee structure of private colleges," CAG has recommended. https://news.careers360.com/up-government-college-lucknow-university-mgkvp-kashi-vidyapith-cag-report-result-fees-vidhan-sabha

9. CAG की रिपोर्ट में बड़ा दावा, देश के टॉप-100 में नहीं है UP की एक भी स्टेट यूनिवर्सिटी *(navbharattimes.indiatimes.com)* 01 Mar 2023

उत्तर प्रदेश आबादी के हिसाब से देश का सबसे बड़ा राज्य है। यहां कई राज्य विवि, इंजीनियरिंग कॉलेज और अन्य इंस्टीट्यूट हैं। लेकिन राज्य का कोई भी स्टेट विवि भारत के टॉप-100 विश्वविद्यालयों में शामिल नहीं है। इसका दावा सीएजी की एक रिपोर्ट में किया गया है। भारत के नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक की तरफ से सदन में हाल में एक रिपोर्ट पेश की गई थी। जिसमें कहा गया है कि राज्य का कोई भी स्टेट विवि और कॉलेज टॉप-100 में नहीं शामिल हैं।

लखनऊ और वाराणसी के इस विवि की सबसे खराब हालत

रिपोर्ट में लखनऊ विश्वविद्यालय और बनारस की महात्मा गांधी काशी विद्यापीठ को सबसे बद हाल बताया गया है। आपको बता दें कि दोनों ही यूनिवर्सिटीज से हर वर्ष करीब 60000 स्टूडेंट्स पढ़ाई करके निकलते हैं। लेकिन रोजगार पाने लायक सिर्फ एक ही हजार होते हैं। सबसे बड़ी बात इन दोनों संस्थानों को यह भी नहीं पता है कि यहां से पास आउट होने के बाद छात्र क्या कर रहे हैं।

स्कॉलरशिप का लाभ उठाने में सबसे आगे

पढ़ाई के मामले में यहां के छात्रों का हाल सबसे खराब है। लेकिन स्कॉलरशिप के मामले में ये सबसे आगे हैं। दोनों ही विश्वविद्यालयों में करीब 60 प्रतिशत स्टूडेंट्स स्कॉलरशिप का लाभ उठा रहे हैं। रिपोर्ट में दावा किया गया है कि इन विश्वविद्यालयों के छात्रों में स्किल की कमी है। यही वजह है कि इन्हें रोजगार ज्यादा नहीं मिल पा रहा है।

कैग की रिपोर्ट में दिए गए हैं 12 सुझाव

उत्तर प्रदेश की शिक्षा व्यवस्था को लेकर कैग ने कई चौकाने वाले खुलासे किए हैं। साथ ही कैग की रिपोर्ट में 12 बिंदुओ पर सुझाव भी दिए गए हैं। रिपोर्ट में दावा किया गया है कि उच्च शिक्षा में एनरोलमेंट 25.30 प्रतिशत पहुंच गया है, जो कि राष्ट्रीय स्तर से 27.10 बहुत कम है। साथ ही रिपोर्ट में उच्च शिक्षा में छात्र और शिक्षक के अनुपात को भी बताया गया है। जिसके मुताबिक राज्य में 150 शिक्षकों पर 1 शिक्षक हैं। जबकि राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर 20:1 है। https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/education/education-news/up-not-a-single-state-university-top-100-in-country-cag-report/articleshow/98337095.cms

10. Gomti River Front: रिवरफ्रंट पर बेकार खर्च कर दिए 49.59 करोड़, कैग ने विधानसभा में पेश की रिपोर्ट *(amarujala.com)* 01 Mar 2023

सपा सरकार में शुरू गोमती रिवरफ्रंट पर म्यूजिकल फाउंटेन वाटर शो के लिए 49.59 करोड़ रुपये बेकार में खर्च कर दिए गए। यह आज तक शुरू नहीं हुआ। कैग ने विधानसभा में पेश रिपोर्ट में कहा, इसकी बोलियां आमंत्रित करना सरकार की पेशेवर विफलता थी।

कैग ने अधिशासी अभियंता लखनऊ मंडल शारदा नहर के अभिलेखों की जांच में पाया कि शासन ने गोमती तट पर अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर का म्यूजिकल फाउंटेन शो स्थापित करने का फैसला लिया था। व्यय वित्त समिति ने वर्ष 2015 में यह कहते हुए इसके लिए 45 करोड़ अनुमोदित किए कि ऐसे फाउंटेन भारत में नहीं बनते। इन्हें विदेश से मंगवाना होगा। 21 और 22 जुलाई 2016 को इसके लिए कोटेशन आमंत्रण सूचना प्रकाशित की गई, पर वैश्विक निविदा जांच के लिए प्रक्रिया का पालन नहीं किया गया। बोली प्रक्रिया में प्रतिस्पर्धा का अभाव रहा।

जांच में पाया गया कि फाउंटेन के डिजाइन, आपूर्ति के लिए 44.69 करोड़ की तकनीकी स्वीकृति, सिविल एवं विद्युत कार्यों की लागत को शामिल किए बिना जारी की गई। शारदा सहायक के मुख्य अभियंता ने मैसर्स एक्वाटिक शो को 41.43 करोड़ रुपये फाउंटेन की खरीद और डिजाइन के लिए जारी कर दिए। फाउंटेन शो का प्रदर्शन 2017 में होना था। बाकी 10 प्रतिशत राशि इसके चालू होने के बाद दी जानी थी। उपकरण खरीद में 12.59 करोड़ सीमा शुल्क आदि पर भी खर्च किए गए।

शासन की ओर से बताया गया कि सीबीआई व प्रवर्तन निदेशालय की जांच चल रही है। यह पूरी होने के बाद फाउंटेन स्थापना का प्रस्ताव है। https://www.amarujala.com/lucknow/cag-report-on-fountain-of-gomati-river-front-2023-03-01

11. Gujarat Debt Jumps to Rs 3.40 Lakh Crore; Opposition, Economists Raise Concern *(thewire.in)* 02 March 2023

Last year, the Comptroller and Auditor General had already warned the state against rising public debt, noting that the state was "falling into a debt trap".

The public debt of Gujarat has jumped to Rs 3.40 lakh crore from Rs 3.20 lakh crore recorded at the end of March last year. The opposition and experts from the state have raised concerns over ballooning debt and falling revenues. Last year, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) had warned the state against rising public debt, noting that the state was “falling into a debt trap”.

The latest figures were revealed by the government on Tuesday, February 28, while presenting the state’s annual budget. “Our earlier estimates had suggested Gujarat’s public debt will be Rs 3,50,000 crore. But, as per the latest revised estimates, it stands at Rs 3,40,000 crore. By next year, it will go up to Rs 3,81,000 crore as per our estimates," said Mona Kanadhar, principal secretary (economic affairs) of the state's finance department, according to news agency PTI.

Another finance department official, J.P. Gupta, principal secretary, however, said that the state debt was well within the 27% limit of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in line with existing norms. "Our GSDP is Rs 22 lakh crore at present. At 27%, we can bear a debt of Rs 5.75 lakh crore. However, Gujarat's debt is under Rs 3.5 lakh crore," said Gupta, according to the news agency.

With the rise in public debt, every resident of the state has Rs 48,500 debt on their head in comparison to Rs 46,000 last year. In response to Opposition queries in the state assembly, the government said that it had paid Rs 23,063 crore in interest on public debt in the fiscal year 2021-22, and additionally, Rs 24,454 crore in debt was reduced and paid in instalments.

Last year in March, the CAG had warned the state of "falling into a debt trap", noting that Gujarat would have to repay 61% (Rs 1.87 lakh crore) of its total Rs 3.08 lakh crore (old figures) of public debt in next seven years, Indian Express reported.

"Debt maturity and repayment profile indicate a commitment on the part of the government for debt repayment or debt servicing. The maturity profile of outstanding stock of public debt as on March 31, 2021 indicates that 61% of the total public debt would be repayable within the next seven years which may put a strain on government budget during that period," the CAG report had warned.

The CAG was prescient. It had said, "In view of the increasing committed expenditure on one hand and revenue deficit on the other, the state government would have to work out a well-thought-out borrowing-repayment strategy to avoid falling into a debt trap."

Experts from the state have raised concerns over the rise in the public debt. Eminent economist and former vice chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapith, Sudarshan Iyengar told New Indian Express, "Debt is required to run any state, but the key question is how this debt is repaid. Most state debts are repaid through various taxes, so if the state's debt rises, it is almost certain that the government will raise taxes on the general public in the coming days to compensate." https://thewire.in/economy/gujarat-debt-opposition-economists-concern

12. Gujarat to raise Rs 17,000 crore through disinvestment *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* March 02, 2023

The Gujarat government, according to sources, is expected to raise Rs 17,630 crore through disinvestment of state public sector undertakings (PSUs).

Independent legislative research institute PRS Legislative Research has said the significant increase of the budget outlay for 2023-24 means the state government intend to divest stake in government-run companies.

PRS Legislative Research agency, quoting figures provided by the state government during the budget speech last week, said that the 23% increase in budget outlay is primarily because of the government expects to raise Rs 17,630 crore from divesting itself of its holdings in SPSUs.

Over the past few years, the state government's budget outlay has been increasing by between 4% and 5% from the previous year. This year's budget outlay shot up by 23%.

"The government has projected revenue of Rs 17,630 crore from non-debt capital receipts. This excludes revenue from taxes or Union government grants. The government has projected an increase of about 5,000% in revenue from capital receipts. This clearly shows that the state government is looking to raise about Rs 17,000 crore through disinvestment," a top source said.

Sources said that the government's stake in at least two of the state's top four or five companies could be partially or fully sold. Immediately after the budget speech, state finance minister Kanu Desai, without naming a company, said the government would explore disinvestment from SPSUs to raise funds.

Sources in the state government confirmed that disinvestment is being explored.

According to the latest CAG report, there were 91 SPSUs in the state of which 18 are inactive. Of the 91 SPSUs, four SPSUs are listed on stock exchange(s). "At least seven SPSUs are listed entities. All entities are highly valued and profitmaking. The state also has land and buildings in addition to other assets that can be monetized," the source said. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/state-to-raise-17k-cr-through-disinvestment/articleshow/98349963.cms

13. Increase revenue receipts: CAG to KHADC *(themeghalayan.com)* March 02, 2023

The CAG suggested that the Council needs to identify and implement internal cost-saving measures, while not compromising on its core functions and the state government also needs to increase predictable and adequate lines of funding to the institution in a timely manner.

SHILLONG: The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has recommended the need for the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) to take steps to increase its own revenue receipts so that they are able to improve spending on programmes and schemes of the Council.

"The Council may undertake detailed budgetary analysis and reviews to identify untapped eligible revenue resources and for estimating revenue receipts more accurately. Council may also plan for utilization of balances accumulated over the years," the CAG said in its report for the year ended March 31, 2015, tabled by KHADC chief Titosstarwell Chyne on March 1.

The report said the KHADC collected its revenue through taxes on Profession, Trades & Employments, Other Administrative Services, Other Economic General Services, etc.; share of taxes placed by the state government on taxes on vehicles, Forest And Mines & Minerals and resources made available by the state government through the state plan.

In 2014-15, KHADC generated Rs 11.44 crore from its own sources and taxes; Rs 11.06 crore was received as share of taxes from the state government, Rs 23.55 crore as grants-in-aid from Government of India/Government of Meghalaya and Rs 0.11 crore as recovery of loans and advances.

As such, the KHADC is primarily dependent on external sources of funds (75 per cent) as against its own sources of funds (25 per cent).

It said the total revenue receipts of KHADC increased by 71 per cent from Rs 26.89 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 46.05 crore during 2014-15.

The increase in revenue receipts in 2014-15 was primarily due to 13th Finance Commission Grant which enhanced grants-in-aid from Rs 2.37 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 23.55 crore in 2014-15, with a fall of 27 per cent in share of royalty on Mines & Minerals.

In 2014-15, the share of grants-in-aid (Rs 23.55 crore) and royalty on Mines & Minerals (Rs 10.61 crore) constituted 74 per cent of the total revenue receipt (Rs 46.05 crore) of the KHADC.

The total revenue expenditure of the KHADC decreased by 7 per cent from Rs 30.93 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 28.79 crore in 2014-15. The decrease in revenue expenditure in 2014-15 was primarily due to a decrease in expenditure under Arts and Culture (97 per cent) and Public Works (13 per cent).

In 2014-15, Secretariat General Services (48 per cent), Forest (15 per cent) and Public Works (8 per cent) together accounted for 71 per cent of the revenue expenditure.

The CAG suggested that the Council needs to identify and implement internal cost-saving measures, while not compromising on its core functions and the state government also needs to increase predictable and adequate lines of funding to the institution in a timely manner.

Scrutiny of budget estimates for the year 2014-15 vis-à-vis actual receipt and expenditure revealed significant variations between budget estimates and actual figures of receipts and expenditure.

In 2014-15, the actual receipts and expenditure of the KHADC fell short of the budget estimates (Bes) by 56 and 72 per cent, respectively.

The shortfall between the Bes and actual collection of revenue for the year 2014-15 indicated that KHADC had not been able to make its revenue collection mechanism effective to the extent of the projections made under the BEs.

However, Council was observed to have utilized only 51 per cent of total available funds during the year 2014-15, out of which 84 per cent was spent on revenue expenditure, while 15 per cent on capital projects of the Council and 1 per cent on loans and advances.

“Council may put efforts to comprehensively map untapped, but eligible, revenue sources and put in place a plan for strict enforcement of tax and fee collections. The Council may need to undertake detailed budgetary analyses and reviews to identify and resolve challenges regarding financial sustainability,” the CAG said.

At the end of March 2015, Utilization Certificates involving Rs 15.98 lakh were not submitted by the Council to the state against the grant-in-aid pertaining to previous years, it said, while asserting that the Council may ensure timely submission of Utilization Certificates to the state government with respect to grants-in-aid received in conformity with actual utilization for the purpose it was disbursed. https://themeghalayan.com/increase-revenue-receipts-cag-to-khadc/

14. KHADC tables Rs 46 crore vote on account as Budget Session begins *(highlandpost.com)* March 01, 2023

The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) today tabled a vote on account amounting to Rs 46, 27, 16,190 for the three months from April 1.

This was done on the opening day of the KHADC's budget session. However, after today's business, the session was adjourned until March 6.

Chief Executive Member (CEM) Titostarwell Chyne said that the vote on account has been presented because the executive committee was unable to prepare the full budget due to auditing of the council by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), which took up the officials' time. The full budget will be presented in four months' time.

Out of the planned expenditure of Rs 46.27 crore for the first quarter of the upcoming financial year, the lion's share, Rs 27.53 crore, has been allocated to the Civil Works and Development Department, General Administration Department Rs 9.29 crore, Law Department Rs 15.37 lakh, Revenue Budget and Finance Department Rs 2.11 crore, Forest Administration Department Rs 2.38 crore, Administration of Justice and Judicial Department Rs 1.45 crore, Legislative Department Rs 1.86 crore, Education Department Rs 3.40 lakh and Enforcement Scheme to protect tribal land and interest Rs 1.43 crore.

Chyne also tabled the CAG reports pertaining to the 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17 financial years.

Last year, the CAG pointed out that all three district councils in the state were guilty of delays in the submission of their accounts for audit.

Meanwhile, the reports of the executive committee in matters related to the election of the Syiem of Mylliem were also presented.

It was informed that Ainam Manik Syiem, who had been Acting Syiem of Mylliem, was elected with 31 votes out of 41 to be full Syiem in the election on February 20.

The executive committee therefore recommended to the council that Syiem be appointed as Syiem of Hima Mylliem for life.

The reports of the executive committee in matters related to the election of Sirdar Wahlong informed that Nastarfield Rymmai secured the highest number of votes – 477 – and was appointed as the Sirdar of Wahlong. https://highlandpost.com/khadc-tables-rs-46-crore-vote-on-account-as-budget-session-begins/

15. Madhya Pradesh takes a loan of Rs 76 crore per day: FM M Jagdish Devda in assembly *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* March 01, 2023

BHOPAL: Madhya Pradesh government takes a loan of around Rs 76 crore per day. In past seven months from June end 2022 to February 1, the state government has taken a loan of Rs 16,000 crore.

The information was shared in the state assembly on Wednesday. Out of the total Rs 16,000 crore loan taken between June 29 to February 1, a loan of Rs 4,000 crore was taken on February 1 last month. In September last year too, the government took a loan of Rs 4,000 crore, which means half of the total loan taken in just two of the seven months.

The interest on the loans' ranges between 7.46% to 8.64%. The loan amount was Rs 2,000 crore on seven out of the nine occasions while on two times, the loan amount was Rs 1000 crore. The due date of the loans is between 2032 to 2038.

The information was shared in response to a question of Congress MLA Mevaram Jatav by the finance minister Jagdish Devda in a written reply. The minister also informed that in the financial year 2021-2022 till March 31, the government paid an interest of Rs 18445.91 crore.

It was also informed in the reply that comptroller and auditor general partial accounts or report of the year 2022- 2023 was awaited due to which the per person loan information cannot be given. As per the government, the loans taken by the government are utilized for financing productive development programmes and projects to be implemented in state. It mainly bears cost of development schemes.

The loans taken from the government of India and from other sources were mainly utilized for development of the state and for the creation of remunerative assets such as construction of dams, improvement of transport services, grant of loans to third parties like cultivators, local bodies, loan to power generation, power transmission among others. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/madhya-pradesh-takes-a-loan-of-rs-76-crore-per-day-fm-jagdish-devda-in-assembly/articleshow/98348744.cms

16. Realty firm challenges Centre's directive for action against its apartment project near Mangalavanam *(thehindu.com)* March 01, 2023

The Kerala High Court has issued notice to the Union Ministry of Environment , Forest and Climate Change, State Pollution Control Board, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, and the Chief Wildlife Warden on a petition filed by Tata Realty and Infrastructure Limited challenging the Ministry's directive to the Pollution Control Board to take action against the firm for obtaining environmental clearance for its apartment project ,Tata Tritvam, near Mangalavanam in the city, allegedly by concealing the correct information on the forest area.

The Ministry had alleged in its letter addressed to the State Pollution Control Board that the firm had not provided correct information in its application seeking environmental clearance with respect to distance from the "Mangalavanam bird sanctuary" and it had started construction before the grant of environmental clearance.

The petitioner-firm pointed out that it had already clarified to the Ministry that Mangalavanam was sought to be declared as an eco-sensitive zone by a notification dated September 7, 2020.

However, the notification was still in the draft stage and had not been notified as yet. Besides, the project was not within 400 metres from the Mangalavanam bird sanctuary as alleged.

Despite the fact that there was no eco-sensitive zone near the project site, the petitioner, by way of abundant caution, had also submitted an application on April 1, 2016 seeking sanction of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).

However, it did not get any reply and so, the same was therefore only to be viewed as having received deemed approval. The allegation of the Centre was based on a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) which was prejudiced one.

In fact, it had obtained the permits of the Kochi Corporation as well as clearance from the State Pollution Control Board. The project had also received occupancy certificates from the Corporation in 2016 and the apartments were also duly allotted and handed over to buyers.

The petitioner alleged that the Union Environment Ministry issued the directive to the Pollution Control Board to take action against the petitioner without conducting a proper inspection and without appreciating the actual facts.

Therefore, the action of the Ministry was "unreasonable, arbitrary and violative of the principles of natural justice"

The court, while issuing the notice, restrained the pollution control board till March 17 from initiating further proceedings against the firm on the basis of the communication from the Union Environment Ministry. https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Kochi/realty-firm-challenges-centres-directive-for-action-against-its-apartment-project-near-mangalavanam/article66567896.ece

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

17. India's target for net zero emission and its feasibility *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* March 1, 2023

It is agreed that; global warming due to "Green-house gases" (GHG) emission must be reduced. With growing economies and population, per-capita emission is rising every year. In sequel, global warming is endangering future-sustainability. GHG emission of one nation affects entire globe and hence; it is a global problem. That must be resolved by all nations in a judicious manner.

In 2021, at COP-26, India announced an ambitious target for achieving net zero GHG-emission by 2070. This requires investment in research for developing cost-efficient technologies and domestic manufacturing of equipment. Replacement cost of existing equipment shall be huge particularly in the energy and industrial sector. Import dependency might accelerate trade deficit to un-sustainable level. I firmly believe; India shouldn't overburden "current-sustainability" for "future-sustainability". Yes-an affordable portion of current savings must be invested for future-sustainability. Hence, gradual switching over to green-technology could be a right choice.

India must review; whether aforesaid target is feasible and affordable? Considering huge investment backlog, whether India has enough financial resources? India can't escape from its global obligations. However, it should be shared judiciously among all global partners. Considering current global-turmoil, there should be initial moratorium for 3/4 years till normalcy is achieved. During moratorium, there should be fresh negotiations based on the principles of "equity and justice".

In 2019 (base-line year), after "carbon-sinking", per-capita "net-emission" in globe was about 4.5 Tons, 14.7 Tons in USA, 7.6 Tons in China and 1.8 Tons in India. Several countries had exceeded 20 Tons. Thus, emission is co-related with "per-capita income". Therefore, judicious targets must be fixed for each nation linking with their "per-capita income" and "per-capita emission". Simultaneously, Inter-globe transfer of technology must be facilitated and the long-term cheap funds must be available from developed nations.

Aforesaid "carbon-sinking" (negative emission) through forestation might be about 1.6-1.8 T per capita on the global-average basis. Needless to say that, per-capita land in India is abnormally low. Hence, carbon-sinking target must be fixed on "per-capita land" basis. Such judicious approach will motivate all nations for reducing net GHG-emission to an acceptable level, if not at zero level. In future, World might succeed in capturing carbon/methane from large emitting sources and thereafter, Zero-emission shall be easily achievable.

During CY-2019, India's gross GHG-emission was 3274 Million Ton (MnT) and net-emission was 2959 MnT. Sector wise break-up is as under. This includes methane gas emissions. One cubic-meter "methane gas" is almost equivalent to 21 cubic-meters of "carbon emission".

Carbon Emission in India in CY-2019

Item	**MnT**	**Gross emission Share**
Power(Electricity)	1120	34.2%
Transport	292	8.9%
Industry	928	28.3%
Agriculture	585	17.9%
Waste Water & Solids (mostly from municipal waste)	202	6.2%
Residence	147	4.5%
Gross Emission	**3274**	**100%**
Less: Forest sink	-345	-10.5%
Net emission	**2929**	**89.5%**

Source: Mc-Kinsey Report Oct-2022

India must draw a sector-wise and year-wise composite plan and identify "low-hanging fruits" with maximum output with quick pay-back of investments. Methane is mostly emitted from Agriculture, human, animal and municipal-wastes (solid and liquid). That needs priority because; besides GHG emission, this causes pollution hazards affecting human health. Few sample suggestions are mentioned below; those are low-cost solutions.

-Out of total 585 MnT GHG-emissions from agriculture, "Rice cultivation" emits about 120/125 MnT and dairy farms along with "Gobar" emit about 240 MnT. GHG emission from "rice cultivation" can be reduced by 65-70% by switching to "sprinkler irrigation". Eventually, the water shall be saved and the Rice production shall increase by 25-30%. Gobar may be used for producing "Gobar-gas" which shall reduce GHG-emission by about 40-50%. Eventually, the "Gobar-gas" shall be cheaper comparing to imported LPG. Burning of about 100/150 MnT crop-residues may be stopped and industrial uses may be explored. That will reduce GHG-emission besides air pollution. Likewise, there are ample scopes of reducing Agriculture emission with low-investment and quick pay-back besides benefitting farmers.

-Municipal "waste-water" (including sewage) emits about 202 MnT which is mostly discharged without treatment causing methane emission. That should be treated along with power generation and/or producing organic manure. Municipal "solid-wastes" also emit methane during rain and while burning, it emits carbon. Those must be processed and/or used for power generation. Lot of segregated/processed solid waste can be re-circulated in the industry. Such circular-economy shall reduce industrial emission and save energy.

-Transport sector emits about 292 MnT. That can be reduced to about 40-50% by shifting goods-transport to energy-efficient Rail-transport and by shifting passenger-traffic from private-cars to Public-transport. Eventually, both actions shall reduce logistics cost and save imported energy besides reducing GHG-emission.

-Carbon-sink is about 345 MnT, mainly from forest which can be increased 2/3 times with proper plan. Currently, only 10% of total forest land is having deep forest, 50% is moderate forest and 40% is with nil-forest. Hence, forestation can be increased excluding mineralized zones. Several mountains are dominated with soil with lesser stones; those must get priority for forestation to protect land-slides. Minor forest-produce trees may be selected having economic values and/or having higher emission such as "Peepal". By this, "carbon-sink" and "forest-Agriculture" shall be clubbed delivering quick pay-back of investment besides generating income for local residents.

However, the subject experts should study each sector and draw composite plan giving emphasis on the pay-back of investments with affordable compromise on the financial viability. Yes-investment in research and technology must be liberal. During interim period, investment in the costlier "green-energy" should progress in slow-manner till we resolve problems related to storage, cost-economics and imports. By this, I believe; India can protect both, current and future sustainability and also discharge its global obligation. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/indias-target-for-net-zero-emission-and-its-feasibility/

18. India lagging behind on sustainable development goals *(telegraphindia.com)* Updated: March 2, 2023

While India is set to achieve the targets by 2030 on some indicators like full vaccination, electricity access, personal bank accounts and multi-dimensional poverty, there are a number of other targets that are not going to be achieved

Arecent research study led by a professor from Harvard University has found that India is off-target on a number of sustainable development goals indicators. The United Nations had come up with a set of 33 indicators in 2015 which was agreed upon by 195 countries, including India. Most of the indicators on which India is performing poorly relate to poverty, health, gender and the environment. While India is set to achieve the targets by 2030 on some indicators like full vaccination, electricity access, personal bank accounts and multi-dimensional poverty, there are a number of other targets that are not going to be achieved. These targets include improved water, child marriage, health insurance for women, and reduction in partner violence. Estimates have been made regarding the delays in achievement. For some targets, the delays would be marginal; but for others, the delay could be as much as decades. For instance, the target for partner violence would only be achieved in 2090 going by current trends. The data for this study were drawn from two National Family Health Surveys done in 2015-16 and, again, in 2019-2021. While some scholars have raised questions about the NFHS data, the overall results are still a matter of concern. Without meeting all the SDGs, the transition towards sustainability would not be feasible. Hence, despite India's good performance in targets like under-five child mortality or internet access and improved sanitation, the failure to meet the other targets would drag down its overall performance.

India's ranking in many global indicators of development has been poor in recent times. On the Environmental Performance Index, India has slipped to the last place out of 180 countries. Environmental conservation is an important pillar of sustainable development. India's poor performance stems from two distinct tendencies. The first is the importance that is given by the government to development projects overriding environmental concerns. The second is the social conservatism that India exhibits, especially in terms of gender inequalities. Thus the paucity in performance in partner violence, child marriage of girls, health insurance for women and the use of modern contraceptives. Material opulence and social conservatism dominate the public discourse. Unfortunately, this would not add up to sustainable development. https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/slip-up-editorial-on-india-lagging-behind-on-sustainable-development-goals/cid/1919856

19. The case for open, verifiable forest cover data *(indianexpress.com)* Updated: March 2, 2023

India is one of the few countries to have a scientific system of periodic forest cover assessment that provides "valuable inputs for planning, policy formulation and evidence-based decision-making". Since 19.53% in the early 1980s, India's forest cover has increased to 21.71% in 2021. Adding to this a notional 2.91% tree cover estimated in 2021, the country's total green cover now stands at 24.62%, on paper.

Forest and tree cover

While the Forest Survey of India (FSI) started publishing its biennial State of Forest reports in 1987, it has been mapping India's forest cover since the early 1980s.

India counts all plots of 1 hectare or above, with at least 10% tree canopy density, irrespective of land use or ownership, within forest cover. This disregards the United Nation's benchmark that does not include areas predominantly under agricultural and urban land use in forests.

India forest cover data All land areas with tree canopy density of 40% and above are considered dense forests and those between 10-40% are open forests. Since 2003, a new category — very dense forest — was assigned to land with 70% or more canopy density.

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Since 2001, isolated or small patches of trees — less than 1 hectare and not counted as forest — are assessed for determining a notional area under tree cover by putting together the crowns of individual patches and trees.

NRSA versus FSI
The National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) under the Department of Space estimated India's forest cover using satellite imagery for periods 1971-1975 and 1980-1982 to report a loss of 2.79% — from 16.89% to 14.10% — in just seven years.

While reliable data on encroachment is unavailable, government records show that 42,380 sq km — nearly the size of Haryana— of forest land was diverted for non-forest use between 1951 and 1980.

However, the government was reluctant to accept such a massive loss and, after much negotiations, the NRSA and the newly established FSI "reconciled" India's forest cover at 19.53% in 1987.

Significantly, the FSI did not contest the NRSA finding that the dense forest cover had fallen from 14.12% in the mid-1970s to 10.96% in 1981, and reconciled it to 10.88% in 1987.

Old forests lost
In India, land recorded as forest in revenue records or proclaimed as forest under a forest law is described as Recorded Forest Area. These areas were recorded as forests at some point due to the presence of forests on the land. Divided into Reserved, Protected and Unclassed forests, Recorded Forest Areas account for 23.58% of India.

Over time, some of these Recorded Forest Areas lost forest cover due to encroachment, diversion, forest fire etc. And tree cover improved in many places outside the Recorded Forest Areas due to agro-forestry, orchards etc.

In 2011, when the FSI furnished data on India's forest cover inside and outside Recorded Forest Areas, it came to light that nearly one-third of Recorded Forest Areas had no forest at all. In other words, almost one-third of India's old natural forests — over 2.44 lakh sq km (larger than Uttar Pradesh) or 7.43% of India — were already gone.

Of what remains of forests in Recorded Forest Areas, only a fraction is dense forests.

Natural forests shrink
Even after extensive plantation by the forest department since the 1990s, dense forests within Recorded Forest Areas added up to cover only 9.96% of India in 2021. That is a one-tenth slide since the FSI recorded 10.88% dense forest in 1987.

This loss remains invisible due to the inclusion of commercial plantations, orchards, village homesteads, urban housings etc as dense forests outside Recorded Forest Areas. The SFR 2021, for example, reports 12.37% dense forest by including random green patches like the ones The Indian Express sampled.

The FSI provides no specific information on the share of plantations in the remaining dense forests inside Recorded Forest Areas. But its data offers some hints. Since 2003, nearly 20,000 sq km of dense forests have become non-forests. Much of that loss is compensated by nearly 11,000 sq km of non-forest areas that became dense forests in successive two-year windows since 2003.

These are plantations, say experts, since natural forests do not grow so fast.

Natural vs manmade

The steady replacement of natural forests with plantations are worrisome. First, natural forests have evolved naturally to be diverse and, therefore, support a lot more biodiversity. Simply put, it has many different plants to sustain numerous species.

Secondly, plantation forests have trees of the same age, are more susceptible to fire, pests and epidemics, and often act as a barrier to natural forest regeneration.

Thirdly, natural forests are old and therefore stock a lot more carbon in their body and in the soil. In 2018, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) flagged India’s assumption that new forests (plantations) reach the carbon stock level of existing forests in just eight years.

On the other hand, plantations can grow a lot more and faster than old natural forests. This also means that plantations can achieve additional carbon targets faster. But compared to natural forests, plantations are often harvested more readily, defeating carbon goals in the long term.

Until the mid-1980s (SFR 1987), the forest cover was estimated through satellite images at a 1:1 million scale. The resolution then improved to 1:250,000, reducing the minimum mappable unit size from 400 to 25 hectares.

Since 19.53% in the early 1980s, India’s forest cover has increased to 21.71% in 2021.

By 2001, the scale improved to 1:50,000, bringing down the unit size to 1 hectare, and interpretation went fully digital.

One outcome of this refinement of the scale was that the forest cover fell within the forest area while it increased outside. That is because “many small blank, non-forested and/or degraded forest patches” became discernible within the forest land that earlier appeared as a larger green chunk. Similarly, several small woodlots or plantations outside forest areas became visible.

The forest cover fluctuated with every change in technology and the radical refinement in 2001 made the data incomparable with the previous assessments. But the FSI also got into a habit of revising its data in every successive report ever since.

Between 1997 and 2005, our forest cover jumped by 9%, gaining 56,774 sq km, and dense forest cover increased by 10% or 36,160 sq km. Since 2015, the total gain is 12,294 sq km, including 5,297 sq km of dense forests.

Open, participatory

The FSI compares some interpreted data with the corresponding reference data collected from the ground under the National Forest Inventory (NFI) programme. In 2021, it claimed to have established an overall accuracy of 95.79% in identifying forests from non-forests. However, given the limited resources, the exercise was limited to less than 6,000 sample points.

Yet, the FSI never made its data freely available for public scrutiny. Inexplicably, It also bars the media from accessing its geo-referenced maps.

"In 1995, we shifted to our own satellite. The forest maps are based on the images purchased from NRSA, another arm of the government. Look at Brazil. They are losing forests at an alarming rate. But whatever be the quality, their forest data is open and free," a former Environment ministry official said.

Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) maintains an open web platform, TerraBrasilis, for queries, analysis and dissemination of data on deforestation, forest cover change and forest fire.

Since lack of manpower limits the FSI's scope for verifying the quality of remotely sensed data in the field, making the field data freely available to the public may also ease its burden.

With environmental awareness on the rise, say experts, thousands of researchers and enthusiasts can volunteer to verify the country's forest data on the ground and be proud custodians of this vital national asset. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/india-forest-tree-cover-data-deforestation-explained-8474163/

20. CCS clears Rs 10k cr training platforms for IAF, Navy *(indianexpress.com)* Updated: March 2, 2023

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday approved the acquisition of critical training platforms for the Navy and the Indian Air Force (IAF) — including three cadet training ships from the Larsen & Toubro Limited (L&T), and 70 Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)-made HTT-40 Basic Trainer Aircraft.

As per the defence ministry, the CCS accorded approval to sign a contract with L&T for the acquisition of three cadet training ships worth Rs 3,108.09 crore.

The ships will be procured under the Buy Indian-IDDM (indigenously designed, developed and manufactured) category of the defence acquisition procedure—the manual governing all defence capital procurements.

The delivery of ships is scheduled to start from 2026 and will be used in the training of officer cadets, including women, at sea after their basic training to meet the future requirements of the Indian Navy, the defence ministry said in a statement.

"The ships would also provide training to cadets from friendly countries with the aim to strengthen diplomatic relations," the ministry said, adding that the ships can also be deployed for evacuation of people and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations.

The ships will be constructed at L&T shipyard in Kattupalli, Chennai, and the project is estimated to generate an employment of 22.5 lakh man-days over a period of four-and-half years.

A senior officer of the Navy explained that training on Cadet Training Ships form the very foundation of a sea-going officer.

The CCS also approved the procurement of 70 HTT-40 Basic Trainer Aircraft from HAL for the IAF at a cost of Rs 6,828.36 crore. It will be supplied over six years.

The HTT-40—a tandem seat trainer has an air-conditioned cockpit, modern avionics, hot refuelling, running change over and zero-zero ejection seats.

“The procurement will include associated equipment and training aids including simulators. Being an indigenous solution, the Aircraft is configurable for upgrades to incorporate the futuristic requirements of Indian Armed Forces,” the defence ministry said.

As per the defence ministry, the HTT-40 has about 56% indigenous content which will progressively increase to over 60% through indigenisation of major components and subsystems in the future. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ccs-approves-procurement-of-70-basic-trainer-aircraft-for-rs-6828-cr-8473997/