

## **NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (19.04.203)**

### **1. World Heritage Day: The missing Nicholson and other problems with India's monuments ([economictimes.indiatimes.com](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com)) April 18, 2023**

If you read about the statue of John Nicholson, the notorious East India Company officer who led the assault on Delhi in the 1857 war, and plan to visit it at Kashmere Gate, you are not going to find it there. The statue was shipped to Northern Ireland in 1958, though the government continues to list it among the existing Monuments of National Importance (MNI).

Nicholson's statue is one of the many missing monuments that continue to be listed by the government. According to a 2013 audit conducted by the Comptroller and Auditor General, there are 24 "untraceable" monuments that are still being considered as the MNIs. the number might actually be higher due to a lack of proper documentation.

This and many other problems with India's monuments are the subject of a recent government report titled 'Report on Monuments of National Importance: The Urgent Need for Rationalization'. The report identifies various problems with India's MNIs and suggests ways to fix them.

The MNIs are officially conserved by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which functions in accordance with The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 2010 (AMASR Act 2010), but this report was prepared by Sanjeev Sanyal, Jayasimha K.R. and Apurv Kumar Mishra of the Economic Advisory Council of the Prime Minister.

The report identifies three main problems with the MNIs: selection issues; skewed distribution of monuments across the country; and inadequate expenditure used for protecting MNIs.

#### **Selection issues**

A key issue with the current list of monuments is the criteria based on which a number of monuments were considered of national importance, with nearly 2,584 monuments in the current list having been shifted en masse from the colonial era lists with most never having been reviewed for cultural significance, historical relevance or even national importance, over the years. The report calls for these monuments to be visited and reevaluated in order to be placed on the new lists.

The report highlights three main selection errors being made: minor monuments as monuments of national importance; movable antiquities considered monuments of national importance; and untraceable monuments still being considered monuments of national importance.

The issue of minor monuments being considered MNIs is that minor monuments with no cultural significance are being accorded the same resources as major monuments which leads to the overall loss of an already limited resource pool.

Smaller, standalone antiquities that can be moved are also an issue because it is difficult to offer them individual protection, and moving them to a museum will not only free up space on the list but will bring the object closer to being viewed. Furthermore, antiquities that are located in the open also carry the imposition of 'prohibited' area and 'regulated' area rules, causing complications and logistical problems for development activities. Therefore, antiquities should not be included in the MNI list.

"Untraceable" monuments, like the statue of John Nicholson, must be removed from the list.

How to define an MNI?

Selection of the MNIs is also flawed because the existing criteria for declaring a monument as a "monument of national importance" in India is not well defined. Neither the AMASR Act 1958 nor the National Policy for Conservation, 2014 has a proper definition for what 'national importance' stands for. In the absence of any well-defined principles, the selection process is rather arbitrary. Currently, the ASI has a standard operating procedure that entails filling out a form and formation of a Technical Evaluation Committee, which is at best a procedural formality.

The lack of well-defined procedures also means that a number of existing monuments were just shifted from the colonial-era lists which may no longer have any significance to modern India. Many of these monuments don't have any information about their provenance, including their historical importance, geographical descriptions, cultural and architectural significance, due to the lack of a comprehensive database for all the 3,695 MNIs that are currently registered with the ASI.

### **Geographically skewed distribution of monuments**

The second overarching issue with the current MNI list is the overall imbalance in geographical distribution of the MNIs. Nearly 60% (2,238 out of 3,695) of them are located in just five states: Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

While it is possible that a historically significant city like Delhi will have a cluster of sites, large forts, and palaces which may count as one site, it does not translate to why culturally and historically significant states like Bihar (70), Odisha (80), Chhattisgarh (46) and Kerala (29) have disproportionately fewer MNIs.

### **Inadequate expenditure for protecting MNIs**

India's total expenditure on the MNIs is very little and inadequate to take care of these large-scale monuments. What's more, a significant proportion of the allocated amount is mostly spent on peripheral activities and annual maintenance. Furthermore, there is also an imbalance in the distribution of these resources across the country.

According to the report, of the Rs 428 crores allocated in 2019-20, the city of Delhi with 173 monuments was allotted Rs 18.5 crore, while Uttar Pradesh with 745 monuments was allotted just Rs 15.95 crore. Maharashtra with 286 monuments was only allotted Rs 20.98 crore.

The imbalance also exists because the revenue collected at selected monuments through various sources like ticketing, photography, filming, etc. is not properly utilised by the Ministry of Culture or by the ASI. Moreover, the government has not been able to come up with other sustainable revenue generation models.

### **The remedies**

After identifying the problems, the report offers some recommendations. First, the ASI should review and rationalize the existing list periodically. It should also publish a list of notifications with detailed information on the monuments that do make it into the list.

Another important recommendation is that the ASI should hand over the protection and upkeep of each monument to the respective states and should denotify any standalone antiquities. These antiquities can be moved to a museum.

The funds allocated for the preservation of the MNIs should be increased and the ASI should make an effort to retain the revenue generated from tickets, events, fees and other sources.

The ASI should also create a comprehensive list of criteria and procedures for declaring a monument an MNI. The criteria should include: historical significance and provenance; geographical description; cultural and architectural significance; importance in the development of civilization or culture; and significance as a source of inspiration or education. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/world-heritage-day-missing-nicholson-and-other-problems-with-indias-monuments/articleshow/99585280.cms?from=mdr>

## 2. अतीत को वर्तमान से जोड़ने वाली धरोहरों की उपेक्षा क्यों? ([hindi.oneindia.com](http://hindi.oneindia.com)) Apr 18, 2023

मुख्य रूप से तीन प्रकार की धरोहरें होती हैं- सांस्कृतिक, प्राकृतिक एवं अमूर्त। सांस्कृतिक धरोहरों में भौतिक या कलाकृतियों जैसी मूर्त सांस्कृतिक धरोहर शामिल हैं। ये आम तौर पर चल और अचल धरोहर के दो समूहों में विभाजित होती हैं। जहाँ अचल धरोहर में इमारतें, ऐतिहासिक स्थान और स्मारक आदि सम्मिलित होते हैं, वहीं चल धरोहर में ग्रंथ, दस्तावेज, चल कलाकृतियाँ, संगीत और ऐसी अन्य वस्तुएँ शामिल होती हैं, जिन्हें भविष्य के लिये संरक्षण योग्य माना जाता है।

प्राकृतिक धरोहरों में वनस्पतियों एवं जीवों सहित ग्रामीण इलाके और प्राकृतिक पर्यावरण आदि शामिल होते हैं। इसमें ऐसे प्राकृतिक भूदृश्य भी शामिल किए जा सकते हैं, जो महत्वपूर्ण सांस्कृतिक विशेषताओं को समेटे हों। अमूर्त धरोहरों में सामाजिक मूल्य एवं परंपराएं, रीति-रिवाज एवं प्रथाएं, सौंदर्यात्मक एवं आध्यात्मिक आस्थाएं, कलात्मक अभिव्यक्ति, भाषा और मानव गतिविधि के अन्य पहलू शामिल हैं।

स्वाभाविक रूप से, भौतिक वस्तुओं की तुलना में अमूर्त सांस्कृतिक धरोहर को संरक्षित करना अधिक कठिन है। निःसंदेह ये सभी धरोहरें हमें अपनी जड़ों एवं गौरवशाली परंपराओं से जोड़ती हैं। इन्हें देखकर हम तत्कालीन सामाजिक, सांस्कृतिक, राजनीतिक, धार्मिक, एवं आर्थिक स्थितियों एवं व्यवस्थाओं का सहज एवं यथार्थ अनुमान ही नहीं लगा सकते, अपितु इन अवशेषों को देखकर हम सभ्यता के ज्ञात एवं उपलब्ध इतिहास के भी पार झांक सकते हैं।

यही कारण है कि हर सजग एवं प्रबुद्ध समाज अपनी ऐतिहासिक धरोहरों की विशेष देखभाल एवं सहेज-संभाल करता है। परंतु दुर्भाग्य से ऐतिहासिक एवं पुरातात्विक महत्त्व की इन धरोहरों के संरक्षण में बरती गई घनघोर लापरवाही एवं सतत उपेक्षा का गंभीर एवं चिंतनीय मामला संज्ञान में आया है। निःसंदेह ऐसी उपेक्षा एवं लापरवाही के लिए व्यवस्था एवं सरकारें अधिक उत्तरदायी होती हैं, पर अपनी इन ऐतिहासिक-सांस्कृतिक धरोहरों के प्रति देश के शिक्षित एवं नागरिक-समाज की उदासीनता भी मन को कहीं गहरे में कचोटती है। इन्हें कथित विकास या अवैध अतिक्रमण आदि की भेंट न चढ़ने देने में नागरिक-समाज प्रहरी की भूमिका निभा सकता है।

उल्लेखनीय है कि इस समय देश भर में ऐतिहासिक एवं पुरातात्विक महत्त्व के 3693 स्मारक हैं, जिन्हें केंद्र सरकार संरक्षित करती है। इनमें से 50 स्मारक अप्राप्य (लापता) हैं। बीते वर्ष, 8 दिसंबर को केंद्रीय संस्कृति मंत्रालय द्वारा गठित संयुक्त संसदीय स्थाई समिति की ओर से प्रस्तुत रिपोर्ट में कहा गया, "...यह गंभीर चिंता का विषय है कि भारतीय पुरातत्व सर्वेक्षण (संस्कृति

मंत्रालय) के संरक्षण में राष्ट्रीय महत्त्व के कई स्मारक तेजी से गायब हो गए हैं। ये स्मारक शहरीकरण, जलाशयों और बांधों के पानी में जलमग्न होने के कारण खो गए हैं। वहीं, कुछ स्मारकों का स्थान नहीं मिलने और घने जंगलों में उन्हें खोज न पाने की वजह से भी वो गायब हो गए हैं।

इन लापता स्मारकों में 11 उत्तर प्रदेश के हैं। वहीं, दिल्ली और हरियाणा के दो-दो स्मारक लापता होने वाले स्मारकों में शामिल हैं। इनके अलावा इस सूची में असम, पश्चिम बंगाल, अरुणाचल प्रदेश और उत्तराखंड के स्मारकों के भी नाम शामिल हैं। भारतीय पुरातत्व सर्वेक्षण (एएसआई) के अनुसार, इन स्मारकों में से 14 तेजी से शहरीकरण के कारण खो गए हैं। वहीं, 12 जलाशयों या बांधों की वजह से पानी में डूब गए और बाकी 24 की जगह को खोज पाना असंभव बताया गया है, क्योंकि ये अनट्रेसबल हैं। अनुमान है कि या तो इनका अस्तित्व ही नहीं रहा या अतिक्रमण आदि के कारण इन्हें पहचान पाना संभव नहीं।

इसी रिपोर्ट के अनुसार वर्ष 1930, 1940 और 1950 के दशक में बड़ी संख्या में संरक्षित स्मारकों की पहचान की गई थी, परंतु स्वतंत्रता के बाद उन्हें संरक्षित करने के स्थान पर नए स्मारकों की खोज पर ध्यान केंद्रित किया गया। इस रिपोर्ट में भारतीय पुरातत्व सर्वेक्षण एवं संस्कृति मंत्रालय की विभिन्न संस्थाओं में खाली पड़े पदों की ओर भी संकेत किया गया है और उस पर गंभीर आपत्ति प्रकट की गई है। समिति की रिपोर्ट में बताया गया है कि एएसआई के आर्कियोलॉजी काडर में 420 पद स्वीकृत हैं, जिनमें से 166 पद खाली हैं। संरक्षण काडर में कुल स्वीकृत पद 918 हैं जिनमें से 452 पद खाली हैं।

बजट की कमी के कारण इस समय 3693 संरक्षित स्थलों में से केवल 248 स्थलों पर सुरक्षाकर्म तैनात हैं। इन 248 स्थलों पर 2578 सुरक्षाकर्मियों की तैनाती की गई है। सभी संरक्षित स्थलों की सुरक्षा की दृष्टि से उन्हें निश्चित ही इससे कहीं अधिक कर्मियों की आवश्यकता पड़ेगी और उपलब्ध कर्मियों एवं संसाधनों का कुशल व संतुलित प्रबंधन भी करना होगा।

उल्लेखनीय है कि 2013 में नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक ने भी अपनी तरह के पहले भौतिक सत्यापन अभ्यास के पश्चात 92 स्मारकों को "लापता" घोषित किया था। कैग की रिपोर्ट में तब यह भी रेखांकित किया गया था कि भारतीय पुरातत्व सर्वेक्षण (एएसआई) के पास संरक्षित स्मारकों एवं कलाकृतियों का कोई राज्यवार लिखित ब्यौरा (डाटाबेस) नहीं है। स्मारकों के गायब होने का मामला 2017 में लोकसभा में भी उठा था। तत्कालीन केंद्रीय संस्कृति मंत्री महेश शर्मा ने तब ऐतिहासिक एवं संरक्षित स्मारकों की विलुप्ति एवं अतिक्रमण के प्रश्न पर उत्तर देते हुए कहा था कि "अरुणाचल प्रदेश में कॉपर टैंपल, असम के तिनसुकिया में शेरशाह की बंदूकें, दिल्ली में बाराखंभा और पश्चिम बंगाल के नदिया जिले में बमनपुकुर किले के खंडहर गायब हो चुके हैं और उनका पता नहीं लगाया जा सकता। जिन स्मारकों का पता नहीं लगा है, उन्हें खोजने के लिए पुराने रिकॉर्ड्स का सत्यापन, रेवेन्यू मैप, प्रकाशित रिपोर्ट, भौतिक निरीक्षण और टीमें की तैनाती की गयी है।"

सुखद है कि कैग द्वारा लापता घोषित 92 स्मारकों में से 42 को पुनः ढूँढ लिया गया है। भारतीय पुरातत्व सर्वेक्षण ने पिछले 8 सालों में 8,478 गांवों का सर्वेक्षण किया है। इन गांवों में 2,914 पुरातात्विक अवशेष पाए गए हैं, जिन्हें सहेजने का काम चल रहा है। आजादी के बाद से अब तक 19 राज्यों और केंद्र शासित प्रदेशों में स्थित केंद्र संरक्षित स्मारकों व स्थलों से 210 चोरी की घटनाएं हुई हैं, जिनमें 486 वस्तुएं अपने स्थान से गायब मिलीं, उनमें से 91 वस्तुएं बरामद कर ली गयीं हैं और अन्य की बरामदगी के प्रयास चल रहे हैं। संस्कृति मंत्रालय एवं एएसआई को यह याद रखना होगा कि ये धरोहरें देश की ऐतिहासिक-सांस्कृतिक पहचान व गौरव की जीवंत प्रतीक हैं।

ये अतीत, वर्तमान और भविष्य को जोड़ने वाली कड़ी हैं। ये वर्तमान द्वारा भविष्य को सौंपी जाने वाली अमूल्य धराती हैं। इनका क्षरण देश की सभ्यता और संस्कृति का क्षरण है। स्वाधीनता के अमृत महोत्सव में लालकिले के प्राचीर से पांच प्रण की घोषणा

करते हुए प्रधानमंत्री ने विरासत पर गर्व करने की बड़-चढ़कर बातें की थीं, परंतु दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण है कि उन्हें संरक्षित करने की दिशा में भारतीय पुरातत्व सर्वेक्षण एवं संस्कृति मंत्रालय की ओर से कोई ठोस पहल एवं गंभीर प्रयास नहीं किए जा रहे।  
<https://hindi.oneindia.com/opinion/world-heritage-day-2023-neglect-the-heritage-which-connects-the-past-with-the-present-765551.html?story=6>

### 3. Inside the Centre's plan to boost Indian airlines overseas (*livemint.com*) Apr 19, 2023

MUMBAI: In 2017, the aviation ministry was headed by Ashok Gajapathi Raju, a leader of the Telugu Desam Party, which was an ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) until 2019. BJP leader Jayant Sinha was his deputy. In an odd case documented at the time, the deputy stymied his own minister. An attempt by Raju to increase the flying rights to Dubai was blocked by Sinha, who was of the view that certain carriers from West Asia, including Emirates, Dubai's flag carrier, had built a business model at the cost of Indian carriers. And to this date, Dubai and India have not been able to agree on increasing bilateral foreign flying entitlements despite several requests by the former.

A scathing report on India's bilateral aviation pacts with several countries, issued a few years earlier by Vinod Rai, then the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), may have influenced Sinha's views on bilateral aviation pacts.

"It is undoubtedly true that the liberalised policy towards foreign carriers in the bilateral agreements benefitted the Indian traveller, but what it did to Indian carriers is an entirely different story. The sequence of events, which took place between mid-2007 and mid-2010 — a period of three years — wreaked havoc on Indian carriers, both public and private," Rai wrote in his memoir, *Not just an accountant*, published in 2014.

In the book, Rai writes that Emirates was the biggest beneficiary of India's largesse between 2007 and 2010. The entitlement is at 66,000 seats/week and the last increase was agreed upon in early 2014.

Rai was the CAG when the government's auditor published reports on the then civil aviation ministry's handling of the bilateral aviation pacts, as well as on decisions around Air India, then the country's national carrier. The findings of those audit reports, along with reports on coal auctions and the auction of telecom airwaves, were used by opposition parties to hammer the United Progressive Alliance government during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, and helped bring the Narendra Modi-led BJP to power.

The CAG's audit findings have shaped the views of the BJP government, which is not happy that city states such as Dubai and Singapore have developed their airports as aviation hubs fed by a large number of passengers from India. This has led to an unofficial ban on any increase in bilateral flying rights by India, and that proscription is in place even today.

#### Boosting Indian carriers

Several international airlines have been working hard to sway India's firm stand and negotiate an increase in bilateral flying rights. So far, their efforts have not borne fruit. To a large extent, that is because the government is of the view that Indian carriers, which have access to a huge captive market, can become global players.

The plan of making Indians fly on Indian carriers has been given some momentum with the sale of Air India to the Tata Group and the airline company's subsequent record order for 470 aircraft, 70 of which are wide-bodied planes that can fly the long haul to markets in Europe, the UK, the US and Canada. IndiGo, India's largest domestic carrier, is also reportedly negotiating a large aircraft order that may include wide-bodied planes.

In an interview with Mint, Union civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia also stated that an audit of bilateral usage by Indian carriers is on and any further decision on bilaterals would be taken post the audit. But, he added that the government, in consultation with stakeholders, is also working on a plan to make Delhi airport India's first aviation hub, a key part of its larger strategy to get Indians to travel abroad on Indian carriers.

#### Sixth freedom traffic

In India, Emirates has always been based in Mumbai, but that changed recently, when the airline shifted its offices to Delhi. The reason for the shift: The management wants its India representative closer to the government to negotiate a deal on an increase in bilateral rights.

Emirates is not the only one. At an aviation conference held in Delhi last month, almost all the international airlines in attendance sought an increase in flying rights with India. They include Emirates, Jazeera Airways and Turkish Airlines. Separately, Malaysian carriers, Qatar and Singapore Airlines have also sought increase in entitlements.

These airlines have a network spanning the globe and are supported by a large airport in their home country that facilitates the hassle-free transfer of passengers coming from one country and going to another. In aviation parlance, such passengers are known as sixth freedom traffic: they are passengers flying from country A to country C via country B, which is the home country of the airline carrying them. Barring Jazeera Airways, each one of the airlines mentioned above wants flying rights to carry sixth freedom traffic from India.

Emirates, Turkish, Qatar and Singapore, among others, do not have a large market in their home countries and hence need passengers from a third country like India to fill their planes beyond their home country.

Industry analysts estimate that even today, about 60% of total passengers flying out of India in airlines from these countries are sixth freedom passengers going to Europe, the UK and the Americas. To tap this traffic, the government wants Indian carriers to increase direct connections to these markets. Most of the countries seeking rights do not have a captive market in their home countries, whereas India is home to 1.4 billion people and a growing middle class.

Making a case for more rights for Dubai, Emirates president Tim Clark said that the airline wanted to contribute to India's growth story. "We want to be part of it (the growth story). We are not here to threaten... We are here to add value to the Indian economy ... by providing a range of products that other carriers are not able to, operating to multiple destinations where we know the Indian demand is....," Clark said at a conference in Delhi last month.

Another airline, Jazeera Airways, on the other hand, says it does not have any plans to carry sixth freedom traffic from India. "We are a very small airline with 19 airplanes... neither us or Kuwait Airways (another airline from the country) have any interest or capability to carry long-haul connecting traffic on routes that interest expanding Indian carriers. Our focus is just to

cater to the home market of India and Kuwait," the airline's CEO Rohit Ramachandran told Mint.

#### What local carriers want

While foreign carriers want bilateral flying rights to increase, domestic carriers do not see lack of rights as an impediment to their international launch or expansion plans.

For instance, Akasa, India's newest airline, believes that there are enough rights available to launch international flights to the Middle East. "It will either be the Middle East or Far East because that's all we can fly to. And you can narrow it down to where the bilaterals are available. And, in some cases, airlines are squatting on rights but not utilizing them—that evaluation is on at this stage," Akasa's chief commercial officer Praveen Iyer told Mint.

Another airline executive, who did not want to be named, supports the government's approach and does not want India to offer any more foreign flying rights to countries with network carriers. "In the short- to medium-term, passengers may have to pay high fares but Indian airlines will benefit during that period since there is a plan by Indian companies to expand internationally," the executive said.

#### Minister's view

While foreign airlines may have a list of demands, the Indian government does not seem to be in the mood to entertain airlines that are eyeing sixth freedom traffic from India.

"It is important for me to give every avenue possible to my customer. That means certainly looking at international airlines and increasing their footprint into India... but also looking at our flag carriers growing their footprint internationally," said Scindia. "And that is why I have been stressing to our airlines that we need to induct more wide-body aircraft so that we can cross the seven seas and make our mark there. I am very glad that in the last 1.5 years, many airlines have now started ordering wide-body aircraft."

He added India would also want to see foreign airlines providing point-to-point connectivity. "My insistence is not necessarily only direct connectivity from but also direct connectivity to. Therefore, encouraging foreign carriers to also directly fly to India from their countries," he added.

While not giving a free hand to global network carriers that want sixth freedom traffic from India is one part of the government's strategy, the other part is to prepare airports to become aviation hubs and have airlines align with that.

#### The two-pronged plan

There are two key prerequisites for any country to become an aviation hub. One is a strong airline that has a global network connecting all the key parts of the world. The second is supporting airport infrastructure that allows a smooth transfer of international passengers from one aircraft to another.

With the Tata Group-owned Air India placing a record aircraft order, India will soon have its own global airline providing direct connections to key markets such as the US, the UK, Europe and Canada, along with other short- and medium-haul destinations to the east of India.

As for the other part of that strategy, the government has set in motion a plan to prepare airports in India to become aviation hubs. It has decided to start with the airport in Delhi, where changes will be made to ensure timely connectivity between flights and reduce connection times to a minimum.

“We are working with stakeholders to look at how we can prepare Delhi airport to become a hub. A consultant will be hired to look at international comparables to see how we can go about doing that. So, that is work in progress,” Scindia said.

Explaining the requirements to become a hub, Scindia explained: “We need a concentration of airlines, domestic to international connectivity, and minimum connect time between airlines. We need to ensure that the volatility in terms of arrival and departures between flights is flattened out.”

All these aspects will be looked at by the consultant, which will submit its report in the second half of this calendar year. Further down, the plan is to include other major airports of the country, too, thus, providing connections to every part of the country. The consultant is likely to study models followed by airports such as Heathrow (London), Dubai, Doha and Singapore.

Much to be fixed

Industry veterans believe that India has the potential to become an aviation hub and that the country may not have to depend heavily on sixth freedom traffic since it has a huge passenger base.

“India absolutely has the potential, market, and need to create its own world-class hubs, and the government making this a priority is commendable,” said Sanjiv Kapoor, aviation veteran and CEO-designate of Jet Airways.

Kapoor suggests that India could learn from global airports and bring in a lot of efficiencies within the existing airport infrastructure.

“For hubs serving domestic-to-domestic and domestic-to-international connections such as in the US and EU, security is typically done only at the originating airport and not again at the connecting airport,” he pointed out. “In India currently, passengers are required to go through security again at the connecting airport even if arriving on a domestic flight, and this impacts speed, efficiency and throughput, which are essential for hubs.”

Similarly, he said, hub airports with multiple terminals such as Singapore, Dubai, Frankfurt and London Heathrow offer airside connectivity between terminals to maximize efficiency and reduce connection time and hassles, he added. While India may not need a lot of sixth freedom traffic, easing transit visa norms for passengers transferring via India would be a step in the right direction, said Kapoor.

The government has started working on a plan to turn India into an aviation hub. Aircraft inductions by Air India and IndiGo are key spokes in that plan. Air India’s planes will start joining the fleet from mid-2025 and IndiGo’s induction of the Airbus 321 XLR, which can fly up to Amsterdam, will also start only 2025.

In the interim, however, Indian flyers will have to continue to choose from the limited flights available to go overseas, and very likely pay higher fares. That is, perhaps, a small price to pay



considering the bigger plan to have Indians flying on Indian airlines when they travel abroad. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/fly-local-go-global-11681844191169.html>

## **STATES NEWS ITEMS**

### **4. Chandigarh estate office caused ₹18 cr loss to exchequer (*hindustantimes.com*) Apr 19, 2023**

Pointing to irregularities in the functioning of the UT Estate Office, Sector-17, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India revealed that the department had caused a loss of about ₹18 crore to the government exchequer in the financial year 2021-2022.

Pointing to irregularities in the functioning of the UT Estate Office, Sector-17, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India revealed that the department had caused a loss of about ₹18 crore to the government exchequer in the financial year 2021-2022. (HT File)

The report revealed that the estate office had failed to keep records of government receipts and dues of ground rent. Besides, the cash books and service books were also not in order.

#### **Non-recovery of ground rent, GST from petrol pump sites**

The CAG report revealed that the estate office failed to recover ground rent and goods and services tax (GST) from 13 petrol pumps and LPG sites which caused a loss of ₹7.22 crore to the exchequer.

#### **₹4.58 crore lost owing to lackadaisical approach**

The audit also revealed that about ₹4.58 crore was lost due to the lackadaisical approach of the officials. In 2018, the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM, South) had issued a show-cause notice over a building violation under his jurisdiction and directed the assistant estate officer (AEO) and SDO (building) to remove the encroachment. But the department concerned failed to remove the violation and did not even raise the demand for violation charges, which ran into ₹4.48 crore. As per the Chandigarh Estate Rules, 2007, when a building violation and/or misuse of a site or building comes to the notice of the estate office, 15 days' notice is issued to the allottee. The lessee is given two months to remove the violations, failing which penal charges at the prescribed rate per square feet are levied.

#### **Excess contractual manpower cost UT ₹3.55 crore**

The audit report also found that in 2021-22, UT hired at least 35 more contractual employees than the sanctioned strength that caused a loss of ₹3.55 crore to the government exchequer. As per rule 1.3.4 of the manual for procurement of consultancy and other services 2017, 'outsourcing of services' implies the deployment of outside agencies on sustained long-term (for a year or more) for services which were traditionally being done in-house.

#### **₹1.11 crore not recovered from motor booths**

The UT estate office failed to recover an outstanding amount of ₹1.11 crore from various motor booths in the city. During the audit, it was found that the said amount was to be recovered on account of ground rent/service tax/GST and interest in respect of various allottees.

#### **'Bring more transparency'**

RK Garg, the president of Second Innings' Association, a senior citizens body, who had filed an RTI for the CAG report, said, "The officials concerned should act more responsibly. After

all, this is public money and should be used judiciously. Senior officers should make sure the system is more transparent and should work as per the parameters laid by the watchdog authority.” <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/cag-report-reveals-irregularities-in-ut-estate-office-causing-rs-18-crore-loss-to-exchequer-in-fy-2021-22-utestateoffice-cagreport-losses-chandigarh-transparency-101681859247987.html>

**5.1 3 fuel stations, LPG sites owe Chandigarh Rs 7.22 crore: CAG** (*tribuneindia.com*)  
Apr 19, 2023

The UT Estate Office has failed to recover the ground rent, and goods and services tax (GST) in respect of various fuel stations and LPG sites to the tune of Rs 7.22 crore, an audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has revealed.

According to the report, a test check of records of the group 6 branch maintained in the Estate Office for 2021-22 revealed the department had failed to recover ground rent and GST from 13 sites.

The report further pointed out lackadaisical approach on part of the Estate Office causing a revenue loss to the tune of Rs 4.58 crore.

The case pertains to a building violation in the area under the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM)-South, where in 2018, the SDM issued a show-cause notice for building violation and directed the Assistant Estate Officer and SDO (Building) to remove an encroachment, but the department concerned failed to remove the violation and failed to raise the demand of violation charges to tune of Rs 4.58 crore.

As per the Chandigarh Estate Rules-2007, when a building violation or misuse of a site or building comes to the notice of the Estate Office, a 15-day notice is served on the allottee/lessee regarding the violation and a period of two months is given to remove it, failing which penal charges at the prescribed rate per square feet is to be paid every month.

The report also pointed out hiring of excess outsourced manpower against the total sanctioned strength caused a loss of Rs 3.55 crore to the government exchequer.

The Estate Office paid the amount to nearly 35 employees who were deputed in excess. As per rule 1.3.4 of the Manual for Procurement of Consultancy and Other Services-2017, ‘outsourcing of services’ implies deployment of outside agencies on a sustained long term (for one year or more) for the performance of other services which were traditionally being done in-house by employees of ministers/ departments.

Also, the Estate Office failed to recover an outstanding amount of Rs 1.11 crore from various motor booths in the city. During the audit, it was found the amount to be recovered on account of ground rent/service tax/GST and interest in respect of various allottees was outstanding. The booths were allotted in various markets of the city as per the Allotment of Sites on Leasehold Basis to Auto Spare Parts Dealers and Auto Repair Mechanics in Chandigarh, Scheme, 1999.

**Other losses to exchequer**

-Rs 4.58 cr demand not raised for building violation in area under SDM-South due to lackadaisical approach of Estate Office

-Rs 3.55 crore loss to government exchequer for hiring outsourced manpower in excess of the sanctioned strength

-Rs 1.11 cr outstanding amount not recovered by Estate Office from various motor booths in the city, says CAG report

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/chandigarh/13-fuel-stations-lpg-sites-owe-chandigarh-rs-7-22-crore-cag-498700>

## 6. **Delhi LG directs special audit of power subsidy amount disbursed to discoms by Kejriwal govt** (*theprint.in*) Updated: April 18, 2023

Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Tuesday issued directions to the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission to conduct a Special Audit of Distribution Companies (DISCOMs) with respect to Electricity Subsidy released by the Government of NCT of Delhi to DISCOMs for financial years 2016-17 to 2021-22.

As per the directions, the audit will be carried out through Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) empanelled external auditor, to ensure that the subsidies reach the targeted beneficiaries in the most transparent and efficient way.

Last week, LG Saxena slammed the Kejriwal government for not conducting the audit of Rs 13,549 crore given to private DISCOMs during past six years.

According to a statement, released on April 14, from L-G office, Delhi L-G Vinai Kumar Saxena said it supported for power subsidy to the poor and reiterated amounts being given to discoms should be audited to ensure non-pilferage.

In the statement, the lieutenant governor questioned the Kejriwal government for not invoking Section 108 of the Electricity Act, 2003, to make it compulsory for Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) to audit discoms till now, while underlining the fact that audit by CAG-empanelled auditors cannot and should not be considered as substitute to Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) audit.

In another instance, Vinai Kumar Saxena expressed his surprise that the government appeal in the Supreme Court against the High Court order quashing CAG audit of discoms had been pending for more than seven years and asked the government to expedite the same by filing appeal for urgent hearing.

On March 26, an L-G office source alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government and its functionaries were making baseless, false and misleading statements after being caught red-handed in the act of benefiting and providing undue financial favours to private discoms.

The source further said that the chief secretary submitted a report to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as well as Delhi L-G Vinai Kumar Saxena, pointing out that the power department is not following the statutory advice of Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) on “subsidies being paid to the discoms”. <https://theprint.in/india/delhi-lg-directs-special-audit-of-power-subsidy-amount-disbursed-to-discoms-by-kejriwal-govt/1526539/>

**7. Delhi govt orders external audit of discoms over subsidies** ([timesofindia.indiatimes.com](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com)) Updated: April 19, 2023

NEW DELHI: Delhi government on Tuesday directed Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission to conduct a special audit of the discoms over power subsidies released to them from 2016 to 2022.

Delhi government said the purpose of the audit was to ensure that the residents of Delhi received electricity subsidies in a transparent and fair manner. "This special audit of power companies has been ordered on the instructions of CM Arvind Kejriwal. It will be conducted by a CAG-empanelled (external) auditor for Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission for financial years 2016-17 to 2021- 22," it added.

The government said power minister Atishi had informed that on March 27, the Kejriwal government sent the file regarding the audit to the lieutenant governor but he sat on it for three weeks. "Finally, after getting the file approved by the LG on Tuesday, the Kejriwal government issued a notification for conducting the audit. However, the LG is taking credit for it," the government stated.

The LG office did not respond to the comments.

The order issued by special secretary (power) Ravi Dhawan stated that exercising the powers under Section 108 of Electricity Act 2003, the LG has given a direction to the power regulator for conducting the audit. It will ensure that the subsidies reach the targeted beneficiaries in the most transparent and efficient way, the order stated.

Atishi said, "The LG has approved the file sent by the chief minister today, after which the notification has been issued. The audit is necessary to know whether there was any wrongdoing on the part of the power companies."

While approving the government's proposal, the LG, however, had said the audit conducted by agencies empanelled with CAG couldn't be considered as sufficient supplant for an audit by government auditors and also questioned the delay on the government's part to allow it. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/delhi-govt-orders-external-audit-of-discoms-over-subsidies/articleshow/99596381.cms?from=mdr>

**8. CAG seeks to scan AP's revenue, spend trends** ([timesofindia.indiatimes.com](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com)) Updated: April 18, 2023

AMARAVATI: The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has directed the state finance department to provide access to Central Financial Management System (CFMS) managed by the state treasury department.

The CFMS will provide real-time data of revenue receipts and expenditure. The state government is, however, yet to take a call on the issue.

Sources said principal auditor general, CAG, has asked special chief secretary (finance) to provide access to CFMS portal so that they could get real-time information on revenue and expenditure trends.

In a letter to the government, the CAG also sought information about 200 subjects from the state government. Sources said that it sent a detailed note and a format in which the finance department should submit details of budgetary allocations and spending by each department.

The CAG wanted the finance department to share detailed spending trends of 31 core departments. It also wanted the government to share details of recruitment, wages, disciplinary action against the personnel and the salaries being paid to them in a prescribed format.

The CAG observed that it wanted to know more about debts being secured by the state government from different sources. The CAG had already asked the government to submit financial statements of all the public sector undertakings (PSUs).

The CAG in its previous report had made comments against delay in submission of financial statements by the PSUs. Opposition parties had lodged several complaints with the CAG and the Union finance ministry raising doubts about the state government securing loans by giving guarantees to the PSUs. Interestingly, the state government is disclosing debts taken by it and withholding the information about the debts taken through the PSUs. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amaravati/cag-seeks-to-scan-aps-revenue-spend-trends/articleshow/99596758.cms?from=mdr>

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

#### **9. For carbon credits, turn to Railways ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) Updated: April 19, 2023**

Under its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), India now stands committed to reducing the emissions intensity of its GDP by 45 per cent by 2030, from the 2005 level and achieving net zero by 2070.

The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act 2022 aims to manoeuvre India on the right track. The Act gave a green signal to the Centre for creating a carbon credit trading scheme. BloombergNEF research report says that the total value of carbon credits produced and sold could reach \$1 trillion globally by 2037. Thus, participation in the carbon trading market is prudent both from an environmental and commercial angle.

#### **Per capita emission**

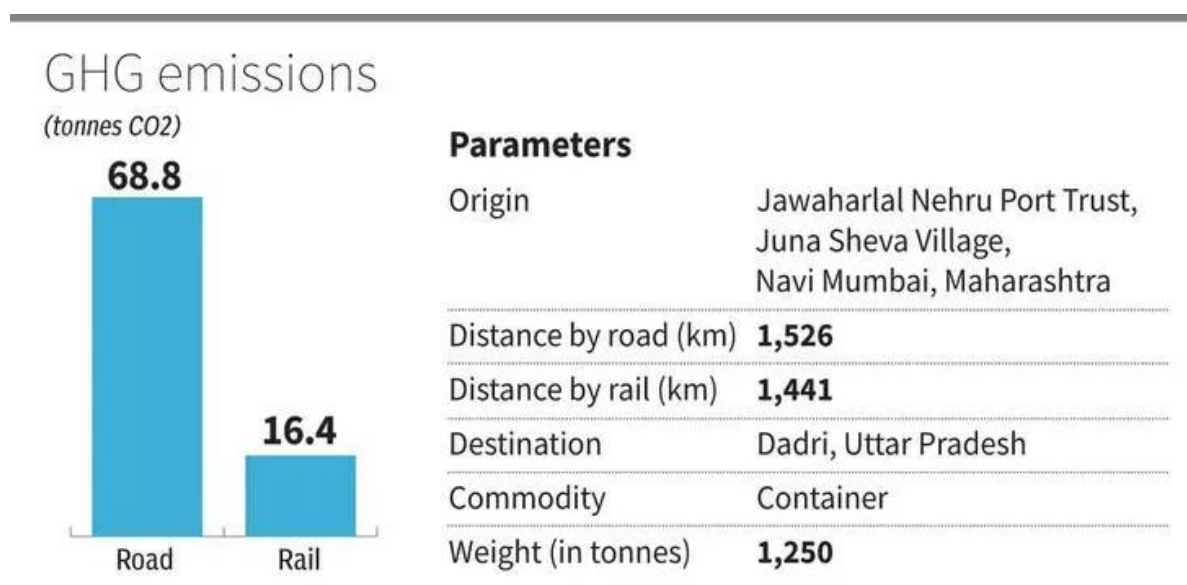
India's per capita emissions currently stand at a mere 1.8 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e (versus the US at 14.7 and China at 7.6). However, India is the world's third-largest emitter at 2.9 Giga Tons CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (around 4.9 per cent of global emissions). Article 17 of the Kyoto Protocol allows countries that have emission units to spare — emissions permitted to them but not “used” — to sell this excess capacity to countries that are beyond their targets thus enabling emissions trading. This was reaffirmed in Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

India leads the pack, accounting for 40-50 per cent of annual carbon credits sales and having 1,685 projects registered under UNFCCC's CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) as of March 2022.

According to India's Third Biennial Update Report (2021) to UNFCCC, the transport sector is estimated to have contributed to 274 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions per year in 2016, accounting for roughly 11 per cent of the total emissions generated by the entire economy.

Around 70 per cent of freight movement and 90 per cent of passenger movement can be attributed to the road sector alone, which is the most carbon-intensive mode of all available options. Rail freight typically produces lower emissions per tonne-km than road freight, mainly due to the more fuel-efficient locomotives and the lower rolling resistance of trains compared to trucks. Therefore, the potential for rail systems to earn carbon credits is immense owing to their low carbon emission intensity (approx. 23 per cent of roadways).

The Delhi Metro has earned 4.4 million carbon credits which were generated through innovative technologies of regenerative braking etc. and due to Modal Shift. Following suit, in December 2022, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs advised metro rail corporations to register for carbon credits.



### The ecosystem

The carbon credit ecosystem follows a set of guidelines and protocols for registering and issuing carbon credits, which are established by the standard issuer. Each standard maintains its own registry, and notable examples include CDM, Verra, and Gold Standard. To obtain credits, projects undergo a thorough assessment by a third-party auditor. After issuance, the project developer may either sell the credits to a buyer or utilise them for their own purposes.

According to IEA, transport as a sector accounted for 37 per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> from end-use sectors globally in 2021 and it could reach as high as 50 per cent by 2030. Yet the transport sector comprises only 0.34 per cent of all registered CDM projects.

The process of turning carbon credits from a concept to reality can be challenging, as it often involves upfront investment, lengthy gestation periods, and the possibility of not being approved. Nevertheless, gradual efforts are being made in the projects where the sheer volume and the large scale of the project make it worthwhile for participation in carbon markets.

Recently NCRTC, which is implementing Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) project across the NCR, also invited bids for assessing the potential of carbon credits. Dedicated freight corridors (DFCs) — from Ludhiana to Dankuni (EDFC) and Dadri to JNPT Mumbai (WDFC) — are expected to make freight movement — less carbon and energy intensive. With

commissioning expected to be completed by March 2024, DFC alone is estimated to lessen carbon emissions by 455 million tonnes over a 30-year period.

Indian Railways' commitment to achieving complete electrification by December 2023, reaching net-zero emissions by 2030, and boosting the Railways' share in freight transport to 45 per cent by 2030 — creates a distinctive prospect to utilise carbon markets. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/for-carbon-credits-turn-to-railways/article66752282.ece>

**10. PSU banks list assets for sale to NARCL after finance ministry nudge**  
([economictimes.indiatimes.com](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com)) 19 April 2023

The government-promoted asset reconstruction company will evaluate accounts of about 300 distressed companies with cumulative loans of Rs 3lakh crore for acquisition this fiscal year, said people aware of the development.

Following a nudge from the finance ministry last fortnight, most government-owned banks identified companies they would prefer to sell to National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARCL), the people cited above said. NARCL will identify about 20-25 accounts from the list for acquisition this fiscal year.

The list includes Videocon Industries, Future Retail, Future Enterprises, GTL, Visa Steel, Kwality, Gayatri Projects, Era Infra, Reid and Taylor India, and Coastal Energen.

During a recent meeting with the CEOs of public sector banks, the finance ministry directed lenders to actively consider the sale of loans NARCL which was set up to help banks clean their books.

In recent weeks, NARCL has offered to acquire Vidarbha Industries for Rs 1,150 crore, Rolta for Rs 600 crore and VOVL for Rs 1,100 crore.

Lenders are in the advanced stage of concluding the documentation for Dharani Sugars and Chemicals, for which the NARCL was declared the winning bidder at an uncontested Swiss challenge auction. It offered Rs 222.5 crore for the purchase of Rs 619 crore loans.

Rainbow Papers is the next loan to be auctioned wherein NARCL has given Rs 87 crore anchor offer for Rs 1,136 crore loans.

This year, NARCL is expected to accelerate the acquisition of loans as it has gained expertise after being in operation for over a year now.

Last financial year, it missed its self-imposed target of buying ₹50,000 crore loans during the initial teething problems for operating a newly formed ARC.

In FY23, NARCL acquired Rs 10,378 crore loans of three companies - Jaypee Infratech, SSA International and Helios Photo Voltaic. All three loans were acquired for Rs 3,636 crore through a combination of cash and security receipts.

NARCL had given binding bids for many companies, but some of the offers were rejected, while in some cases, lenders received improved counter offers.

For instance, lenders rejected the Rs 360 crore offer for GTL since it was below their expectations. Lenders were seeking Rs 550 crore from the ARC. Similarly, they plan to sell McNally Bharat loans to Nalwa Steel, who offered Rs 424.2 crore last week. It also offered Rs 228 crore to acquire Mittal Corp, but lenders sold the loans to Phoenix ARC, who gave an improved counteroffer of Rs 405 crore.

All the offers by NARCL have a 15:85 structure - 15% of the consideration is paid upfront, and the remaining 85% is paid on the recovery of dues. The government guarantees any shortfall in the promised recovery as announced in the budget for FY21. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/banking/finance/banking/psu-banks-list-assets-for-sale-to-narcl-after-finance-ministry-nudge/articleshow/99594699.cms>

#### **11. Centre approves 8 projects worth ₹638 cr under Namami Gange ([livemint.com](https://www.livemint.com)) 18 April 2023**

Eight projects worth approximately ₹638 crore were approved in the 48th meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), the Ministry of Jal Shakti said in a statement.

In an attempt to clean River Hindon, which is a tributary of River Yamuna, four projects worth Rs. 407.39 crore were approved for pollution abatement in the Shamli district. These projects are part of the comprehensive Hindon Rejuvenation Plan. Hindon river is identified as Priority I polluted river stretch. The projects which were sanctioned are to prevent the flow of polluted water into Krishna River.

The four projects in Shamli district include construction of 5 Million Litres per Day (MLD) Sewage Treatment Plant (Nirmal Jal Kendra), 5 KLD Septage Co-treatment Facility, Interception & Diversion (I&D) and other works in Babri and Bantikhera villages; 5 MLD STP, 5 KLD Septage Co-treatment Facility, Interception & Diversion (I&D) and other works in Banat town; 40 MLD STP, 20 KLD Septage Co-treatment Facility, Interception & Diversion (I&D) and other works in Shamli town; and 10 MLD STP, 10 KLD Septage Co-treatment Facility, Interception & Diversion (I&D) and other works in Thanabhawan town.

As part of preparations for the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, in 2025, one project for development of 7 ghats in Prayagraj was also approved in the EC meeting. The ghats include Dashashmedh Ghat, Quila Ghat, Naukayan Ghat, Gyan Ganga Ashram Ghat, Saraswati Ghat, Maheva Ghat and Rasulabad Ghat. These ghats will have amenities such as area for bathing, change room, universal access ramp, drinking water points, flood lights for night, kiosks, landscaping etc.

Two more sewerage management projects were approved in the 48th EC meeting, one each in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. In Bihar, a project to construct 3 STPs (7 MLD, 3.5 MLD and 6 MLD in Zones 1 and 2 respectively), among other works, was approved at an estimated cost of Rs. 77.39 crore. These projects will prevent the flow of polluted water into River Kiul, a tributary of Ganga.

In Madhya Pradesh, one project to construct a 22 MLD STP, 2.38 MLD Common Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) and other works was approved at a cost of Rs. 92.78 crore. This project will prevent the flow of polluted water into River Kshipra, which is sub-tributary of Yamuna.



During the meeting, G. Asok Kumar, DG, NMCG urged the officials from the States to do solar farming on the STP sites and promote the use of solar power to run the Nirmal Jal Kendras.

He also exhorted the officials to use grills to separate and dispose solid waste from the drains that are flowing into the Rivers. Pointing out that it is the responsibility of the state governments to maintain the assets created under Namami Gange Programme, DG, NMCG said that Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) being adopted by the ULBs for cleaning of existing ghats should be communicated to NMCG.

Another project for ghat development was approved for Haridwar, Uttarakhand where Akhand Param Dham ghat will be constructed at a total cost of Rs. 2.12 crore. The project includes construction of Shop/Kiosk (for Ghat pe Haat activities), yoga/meditation lawn, handicap ramp, promenade, platform for cultural and religious activities etc.

‘Namami Gange Programme’, is an integrated conservation mission, approved as ‘flagship programme’ by the Union Government in June 2014 with budget outlay of ₹20,000 crore. This project is aimed at accomplishing the twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/centre-approves-8-projects-worth-rs-638-cr-under-namami-gange-11681827611465.html>

## **12. Defence Ministry approves proposal for bringing in industry-friendly reform related to AHSP ([indiatoday.in](http://indiatoday.in)) April 19, 2023**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved a proposal for bringing in industry-friendly reform related to Authority Holding Sealed Particulars (AHSP). The AHSP is the authority which is responsible for generating, maintaining, updating or declaring obsolete the entire history and technical information of defence products.

So far, Directorate General of Quality Assurance (DGQA) has been the AHSP for the majority of defence items designed, developed and manufactured by various DPSUs and private Industries. Under the existing procedure, certain bottlenecks were experienced by the industry to bring timely improvements in their products and technologies in line with changing times.

Therefore, the Defence Ministry has decided now to liberalise the AHSP procedures and make it industry-friendly.

The Indian defence companies, which have developed products, systems, subsystems, components on their own indigenous capabilities (except critical stores), will now be allowed to own and account for their final designs and specification as AHSP.

In case of any change in the sealed particulars, a simplified mechanism representing all the concerned stakeholders, including the industry, will take a decision. The DGQA will notify the detailed procedure in this regard within two months.

The DGQA has also been asked to examine all AHSPs with them and rationalise the entire list within two months. They have been, further, advised to transfer the AHSP to the industry at the earliest. It will be another significant step of the government to further encourage the ease of

doing business. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/defence-ministry-approves-proposal-for-reform-related-to-ahsp-for-business-ease-2361752-2023-04-19>

### 13. **Climate-spoofing cities for the future** (*freepressjournal.in*) April 19, 2023

Somewhere online I came across an article that talked of Urbanism, and the beautiful opportunity cities offer us to combat climate change. Yes. The beautiful opportunity to combat climate change!

I had to read that a few times to convince myself I didn't need new glasses or a new therapist.

I can fully appreciate pleasure of writing, and writing well, and I can say this, since I am new to writing as a columnist — writing can get us carried away; it isn't hard to get lost in your own brilliance at the use of the English language, especially when you are in the flow, and you have a hero-like image of yourself holding up a beacon for humankind, but “opportunity” was not the word I expected to see.

Over the last few months I have been thinking about cities, sustainability, emissions and the prospects of an urbanised future. And recently have chanced upon articles floating around talking about “Greening the City” and “Net Zero Cities”. Business journals, op-eds and keynote addresses that have been waxing eloquent about a bright and green urban future, peppered with current industry jargon and catchphrases that make them sound sufficiently important, networked and most importantly, convincing.

Written by large multi-million dollar international organisations, foundations educational stalwarts. Reports and op-eds filled with quadruple hyphenated description of urban futures, that impress and confound average mortals like myself.

Each second article or report will carry climate, smart, resilient, green and infrastructure, in different sequences and in newer permutations and combinations with other more recent buzzwords that are trending in the development and urban sectors.

Given the size of projects and expenditure earmarked by governments for urban development, there is little doubt that these are never-ending opportunities — whether you are on the building side or the proposing side of the business. So it is not surprising to find them singing praise and serial renames JNNURM or the Smart City Mission, but I guess that comes with the territory and the mood of the moment!

Domain publication and research across the globe indicated that over 50% of the world's human population now lives in cities. And together are responsible for about 70% of the greenhouse gas emissions we have no choice but to live with.

But the question to me really is — in the 21st century, are cities even a good idea?

Every other decade the high priests of the temples of Urbanism conjure a new vision to reinvent the great sinkholes that are our cities. Some years ago, there was the SEZ. More currently it is the “Smart City Project” that is failing to be even averagely intelligent. And the future, from the recent buzzwords I have gathered, is probably going to be called Global Climate Resilient Urban Reimagination Project!

Sinkholes that suck the money and the joie de vivre of millions who keep these money machines going, in a never-ending cycle of work, sleep, and weekends to make money to live in over priced real estate to spend their waking hours travelling to and from work to pay for the things they don't need to buy.

Apparently the per capita carbon emission in cities is going down, which seems to be driving a renewed eagerness to push for more urbanised cities? What are the benchmarks? And what are they based on? Less than London? And Paris? Or Buenos Aires?

There is a tipping point, beyond which a city stops being efficient, stops being live-able and is actually unviable. Where the combined costs of infrastructure and energy spends are a multiple of their small town counterparts. But a good indication of it would probably be walking, its last square kilometre to assess the quality of life its teeming millions to make any meaningful discovery.

Team City will argue the case of culture and art and history and heritage, but the truth, especially in the large metropolitan cities of India that seem to grow unabated, swallowing in hinterland after hinterland, is that reality is for a special chosen few.

A larger share of the population of these cities still grapple for decent living conditions, accessible transport to work and the hope of saving for their children's futures.

And again it is useful to note, that this group (at an estimated 65% or more) are actually not much of a relevant argument — cities were never meant for the working class, they were there to provide an easily accessible work force and keep things economically viable.

Are cities better places to live in? If you compare them to a village with poor internet, bad roads, and non existent healthcare the answer is a self evident Yes! But is that the standard we are going to work with?

Whatever the creative number-crunching might indicate, it is impossible that small, human powered transport scale communities, pooled into clusters can be more energy-consuming than the colossuses we have for cities globally.

The sad part is by the time that point has been arrived at, governments and real estate and the financial markets have invested too much to allow these cities, they are the proverbial gift that keeps on giving. Mammoth cities, in decline, plugged into all manner of life support to sustain the coffers.

But given the absolute transformation of engineering and logistics services and the IT industry, one could easily imagine a future without the need for cities as they have been for the last 200-odd years.

It is — or perhaps it is not — surprising that since the onset of the industrial revolution, which is essentially from where modern city planning takes its roots (not culture, or art, or religion or pastries) the nature of the city has remained unchanged.

Urbanism requires faith! Belief, sadly has no room for objectivity. Belief and the first principles don't really go hand in hand, and there in lies a 200 years of Human history. To the Urbanist,

Urbanism is religion! <https://www.freepressjournal.in/analysis/climate-spoofing-cities-for-the-future>

**14. Off the 'Track': Richer by A Vande Bharat, Rajasthan Still Awaits Railway Connectivity to 3 Districts** (*news18.com*) April 19, 2023

Last week, Rajasthan got its first Vande Bharat train for Ajmer and Jaipur. However, Banswara, the southern district of the state, still awaits railway connectivity. The project to connect Banswara with trains has been “shelved”, railway officials have told News18. A similar situation affects the lives of people in the Tonk and Karauli districts.

According to ministry documents seen by News18, it was in 2011-12 that the around 190-km Ratlam-Dungarpur via Banswara line was proposed. The state government had agreed to provide land and share 50 per cent of the final construction cost of the project, as per the initial plan. However, it has been more than 10 years but the district, predominantly inhabited by tribals, is yet to get train connectivity.

“The deal was that the Rajasthan government will provide land free of cost and will also bear 50% cost of the project. However, they (the Rajasthan government) have managed to acquire a little over 35% of the land required for the project and have also refused to share the 50% cost. Instead, they requested that the entire construction cost should be borne by Railways,” a ministry official told News18 on condition of anonymity.

The total requirement of land for the project was 1,736 hectares. The state government has acquired just 646 hectares. Also, it deposited only Rs 200 crore as the construction cost of the project, said officials.

**WHAT RAILWAYS SAYS**

According to the ministry, since the Rajasthan government has neither provided the total land required for the project nor deposited its share to the Railways as per the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), “the project is presently held up”.

“The project has been shelved,” another official from the North Western Railway (NWR), who did not wish to be named, told News18.

The Railways has also said that on the state government’s request, it did a bankability study of the project.

“As per the report, the cost of the project, excluding the cost of the land, was Rs 4,262.35 crore with the Rate of Return as (+) 2.73 %...If the cost of the complete land for setting up of this project is also included then the Rate of Return of the project will be further reduced,” the Railways had said.

As per the ministry, the government of Rajasthan has been requested to make the project viable by providing land free of cost.

“However, the state government has not agreed to provide land free of cost. The project is held up on this account,” the ministry added.

## **SIMILAR SITUATION IN TONK AND KARAU LI**

Not just the Banswara district but Tonk and Karauli are also waiting for railway connectivity. Tonk, which is around 100 km from state capital Jaipur, shared the same pain as Banswara.

According to the Railways, the 165-km-long new line between Ajmer and Sawai Madhopur via Tonk was approved in 2014 on a 50:50 cost-sharing basis between the Ministry of Railways and the Government of Rajasthan. The land was to be provided free of cost by the state government.

The ministry said it had requested the Rajasthan government for providing the funding and land.

“The Rajasthan government refused to share the cost of the project. The Railways has conducted a bankability study for the project. As per the study, cost of the project in 2021 was assessed at Rs 2,215.27 crore with land and Rs 1,823.13 crore excluding land cost. The Rate of Return of the project is (-) 7.85% with land and (-) 7.08% excluding land cost. Since the Government of Rajasthan has refused to share the cost of the project, the project is held up on this account,” the ministry added.

A railway line between Dholpur and Karauli has also been a long-pending demand.

## **WHAT STATE GOVERNMENT SAYS**

Since being re-elected in 2018, Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot has time and again raised this issue and asked the Railways Ministry to connect these districts with trains. Even last week, during the inauguration of the Delhi-Ajmer Vande Bharat, he urged Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to connect the headquarters of Banswara, Tonk, and Karauli with the Railways.

In a tweet in Hindi, Gehlot, in November 2019, had said that the “state government is ready to pay the cost of land acquisition for the ambitious project of Dungarpur-Ratlam-Banswara rail line. If the central government cooperates in bearing the construction cost, then it will be easy to complete this project of connecting the tribal areas of the state with the rail line”.

In June 2019, Gehlot, in a series of tweets had said: “Ratlam-Dungarpur via Banswara railway line should be initiated. Dholpur-Sarmathura broad-gauge line should be started soon along with an extension of route up to Gangapur City. Similarly, Ajmer-Sawai Madhopur via Tonk railway line work should also be started.”

Gehlot, who took part in the fifth Governing Council Meeting of NITI Aayog in Delhi, also tweeted that he drew the attention of the think tank to some long-pending rail projects in the state.

“For special rail projects, the cost of land acquisition should be borne by the states, while the Centre should take the responsibility of the rest of the cost of the project,” he said in the June 2019 tweets.

The Union Budget 2023-24 has prioritised the push for infrastructure development as the ministries of Railways and Road Transport and Highways bagged the highest allocation after the Defence Ministry. As Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget for 2023-24 on February 1, for Railways the highest ever outlay at Rs 2.40 lakh crore was set

aside. However, the future does not seem so bright for these Rajasthan districts. <https://www.news18.com/india/off-the-track-richer-by-a-vande-bharat-rajasthan-still-awaits-railway-connectivity-to-3-districts-7581085.html>

**15. Bengal saved Rs 18.8 cr in Mid-Day Meal scheme from April to Sep 2022, says Min ([millenniumpost.in](https://www.millenniumpost.in)) 18 April 2023**

State Education minister Bratya Basu claimed that the state government has saved Rs 18.8 crore in the mid-day meal scheme across state schools from April to September 2022, refuting the report of the 13th JRM (Joint Review Mission) that had alleged misappropriation of Rs 100 crore in the scheme.

“The hurried submission of the report by the 13th JRM, which had not even been signed by the lone representative of the state government had stirred quite some turbid waters regarding loss of Rs 100 crore. Now, during submission of our clarifications on the basis of that very report, it transpires that, far from suffering the loss of Rs 100 crore, the state government has actually saved Rs 18.8 crore! Will the chairperson of the JRM kindly care to explain this unprecedented callousness instead of raising a storm in the teacup?” tweeted Basu.

According to sources, the revelations surfaced while carefully reviewing the portal. “If they had rechecked once, then such confusion would never have happened,” an official in the department said.

The JRM report that surfaced in a section of media stated that there was an over-reporting of over 16 crore meals with the corresponding material cost works out to Rs 100 crore.

The Central government had recently sought opinion from the state government on the JRM’s report on mid-day meal, asking the latter to send the same within four weeks. However, the state sent its report within two days by attaching the facts and figures obtained from the portal.

Last Wednesday, Basu had denied the charges of irregularities and said that the report of the JRM did not have the signature of the Project Director, State Cooked Mid-Day Meal Scheme, who was the representative of the state government in the JRM. He raised questions over the role of JRM for not considering the state government representative’s inputs in the report.

“What, therefore, is the ‘Joint’ in the Joint Review Committee, if the report is not even shared with him for his opinion or views,” Basu had said in a written response that he shared on his Twitter handle. <https://www.millenniumpost.in/bengal/bengal-saved-rs-188-cr-in-mid-day-meal-scheme-from-april-to-sep-2022-says-min-515613>