

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (03.05.2023)

1. Proliferation of Fake Aadhaar Cards a Threat to Integrity of 2024 Elections: EAS Sarma ([moneylife.in](https://www.moneylife.in)) May 02, 2023

Highlighting widespread public concerns about the linking of Aadhaar with the electoral rolls, because of reports of the proliferation of fake Aadhaar in several states, EAS Sarma, former secretary to the government of India, reiterated that the election commission of India (ECI) should address each concern he has expressed and place its detailed point-wise response in the public domain. The former secretary also called for an independent forensic audit of the whole gamut of the Aadhaar system commissioned by the comptroller and auditor general of India (CAG).

Mr Sarma, in his letter to Rajiv Kumar, chief election commissioner, refers to an article, "India's election peril, Aadhaar and the missing Census- Bogus Aadhaar cards imperil both Census and elections" written by senior journalist RN Bhaskar.

"Mr Bhaskar's article, based on the government's replies in the Parliament and other authentic information, shows that there are at least nine states today in which the number of Aadhaar numbers exceeds the projected population of the states. This number was seven in February 2020. States, where the number of Aadhaar exceeds the population, may further increase in the coming days on the eve of the 2024 elections. These facts are fully known to the government but no action has yet been taken, raising questions about its intent," he says.

In the article, Mr Bhaskar showed that between 31 December 2021 and 28 February 2023, in almost all the states, excluding Andaman and Nicobar (A&N), Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, there has been a suspicious surge in the number of Aadhaar. "The average surge at the all-India level is 2.7%, with nine states showing surge rates in excess of that. In Meghalaya, the surge in Aadhaar has been as high as 24.5% and 9.3% in Assam."

"Twenty states had registered a swell in Aadhaar registrations within a 15-month period from 31 December 2022 and 28 February 2023. What is worrisome is that many of these states are alongside international land borders. The highest surges have taken place in North Eastern states, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. That does call for a major investigation," Mr Bhaskar wrote in his article.

Ms Sarma, the former secretary, says in previous letter, he had expressed doubts about the ECI being ready for conducting 2024 elections in a manner fully compliant with the representation of the people act of 1951 (RPA51), maintaining booth-wise secrecy of voting, use of upgraded electronic voting machines (EVMs), 100% cross-verification of EVM votes w.r.t (with regard to) ballot count, based on functional voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT).

"In particular, I expressed my concern about the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) loading the board of Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) with its representatives, knowing well that BEL is the company that is closely involved in the design and supply of EVMs and other equipment to the election commission," Mr Sarma says.

"There have been widespread public concerns about the linking of Aadhaar with the electoral rolls, in view of reports of the proliferation of fake Aadhaar in several states, which in turn can lead to manipulation by some political parties of the electoral rolls to their advantage," the former secretary says, adding, "When I brought one such recent report from Moneylife to the attention of the unique identification authority of India (UIDAI), the response I received was casual, unconcerned, betraying a sense of indifference and callousness on the part of that authority."

With Aadhaar becoming omnipresent in the lives of people today, with their bank accounts, permanent account number (PAN) cards, health data, electoral identity and whatnot, linked to their Aadhaar numbers and with huge amounts of bank transfers made regularly by the Union ministries directly to the bank accounts of individuals, the scope for misuse of the Aadhaar and proliferation of fake Aadhaar has steeply increased, Mr Sarma points out.

He says, "As rightly indicated by Mr Bhaskar in his article, the only authentic way to weed out fake Aadhaar is by a cross-verification with the Census figures but the government has conveniently foreclosed that option."

"Can the election commission, instead of blindly depending on Aadhaar-based identity, undertake a comprehensive mission to conduct a door-to-door verification of the electoral roll details, well before the 2024 elections? From the numerous letters I have written to the Commission over the last few months and the Commission's well-calculated silence in response, like many other concerned citizens, I cannot repose confidence in the Commission's resolve to undertake such an exercise, nor am I sure about its willingness to come clean on revamping the EVM and VVPAT systems, 100% verification of the votes with reference to the

paper count and ensuring a level-playing ground among the political parties," the former secretary says.

In the absence of census data and in the absence of adequate public trust in the Commission's willingness to authenticate the electoral rolls independent of Aadhaar linking, according to Mr Sarma, the only alternative as suggested by Mr Bhaskar, seems to be that CAG should commission an independent forensic audit of the Aadhaar to ensure that fake Aadhaar are identified and weeded out.

"I once again demand that the election commission for once addresses each and every concern I have expressed in this letter and the earlier letter dated 19 April 2023, and place its detailed point-wise response in the public domain for every concerned citizen to see, discuss and debate whether the Commission is in a position to conduct the 2024 elections in a manner fully compliant with the RPA51. I would request the Commission if it is genuinely inclined to address the issue of fake Aadhaar and their likely impact on the 2024 elections," Mr Sarma says. <https://www.moneylife.in/article/proliferation-of-fake-aadhaar-cards-a-threat-to-integrity-of-2024-elections-eas-sarma/70614.html>

2. **Has Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme Reduced Gender Imbalance?** ([youthkiawaaz.com](https://www.youthkiawaaz.com)) Simran Pavecha | May 03, 2023

I vividly remember travelling on the highway once, when my eyes set upon a line written on the back of a truck. It said, 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao'.

I was bewildered by it, so I turned to my mother and asked her what it meant. In clean and simple words she told me that it was about saving the girl child and encouraging their education. Still quite confused, I innocently asked her as to why we needed to save the girl child, what had happened to them? I don't remember getting an answer to this question, but I think that I know the answer quite well now. The statistics speak for themselves.

India's Gender Imbalance

India is the only large country in the world where more baby girls die than baby boys. The gender differential in child survival is currently 11 per cent. Additionally, according to UNICEF's 2021 report, India is home to the largest number of child brides in the world: 223 million child brides – a third of the global total. The NFHS-5 (National family Health Survey) found that 71.5 percent of women (15-49 years) are literate whereas 84.4 percent of men in the country are literate.

It is extremely disheartening to see the backwardness of our society when it comes to the girl child. It sees the girl as an object for marriage and for raising kids only. Girls are denied equal opportunities despite being equally as competent as boys.

Keeping this in mind, the Government of India launched the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' (save the daughter, teach the daughter) campaign in 2015 which was aimed at prevention of gender biased sex selective elimination, ensuring survival & protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child. This is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education. The campaign is targeted across the country, but the primary target areas include Bihar, Haryana, UP, and Punjab.

From spreading awareness about the need to educate girls to acting as an effective movement that spreads this message, it has yielded some positive results. It has been quoted in communication from the government as a proactive initiative for dealing with gender-based discrimination against the girl child with the 161 districts that have been a part of the initial implementation of the BBBP scheme having witnessed an improving trend of SRB in 104 districts.

However, there are still certain areas it lacks upon, mainly in terms of budgetary planning and lack of monitoring. It was noted that during the period from 2016 to 2019, a large portion, nearly 78.91 percent was spent only on media campaigns and advocacy alone. The same could have been better utilised in terms of development of schools, grant of more scholarships, and opportunities.

The parliamentary committee led by Heena Vijaykumar Gavit, in December 2021, while discussing the report titled 'Empowerment of Women through education with special reference to 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' mentioned in the report that the huge spending on national-level media campaigns for the scheme also violated the INR 50 lakh provision earmarked for each district under the scheme.

As per the report of Comptroller & Auditor General of India (CAG), due to inefficient allocation of funds, the scheme fell short in social, economic, and general sectors.

While some things have happened, much more needs to be done. While the media campaign under the scheme has done an exemplary job of raising the issue of son preference, regular monitoring of the progress of the scheme, as well as

implementation of defined parameters are essential for forming better state-level and district-level policies to improve parameters that affect girls.

Since BBBP is one of the most important vehicles of the government to improve child sex ratio in backward regions and ensure education of the girl children, it is imperative that necessary steps be taken to strengthen the implementation of the scheme.

The slogan of 'Beti Bachao' has the power to uplift millions of girls from the shackles of patriarchy, dominance, illiteracy and abuse. Saving the girl child is not just a gender issue, it is a national one. <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2023/05/has-beti-bachao-beti-padhao-scheme-reduced-gender-imbalance/>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

3. Census, updation of NPR delayed for over three years (economictimes.indiatimes.com) May 03, 2023

The BJP's manifesto may have promised National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Karnataka during the upcoming polls but the nationwide Census and updation of the National Population Register (NPR) have been delayed for more than three years in a row. Initially, the Covid-19 pandemic was cited as one of the reasons for the postponement of the decennial exercise. However, with less than a year for the general elections in May 2024, the Registrar General of India (RGI) has so far not issued any fresh notifications.

The Union home ministry, in written replies before Parliament, has informed that "Till now, the government has not taken any decision to prepare the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) at the national level."

The NRC was first prepared in Assam with the objective of weeding out illegal migrants. The final list released in August 2019 had excluded over 19 lakh applicants out of 3.3 crore. However, the Assam NRC and final data have been fraught with anomalies. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has flagged large-scale anomalies in the Assam NRC.

In fact, the Union budget for Census was slashed from Rs 3,676 crore in the last budget to Rs 1,564 crore this year. "Census, survey and statistics/Registrar General of India (RGI), includes provisions for the office of the Registrar General and

Census Commissioner of India and various schemes of RGI, including National Population Register and expenditure on Census 2021," it said.

However, officials told ET that the RGI is setting up data centres at various locations across the country and recently appointed Indian Administrative Services Officers (IAS) as director of Census Operations and Citizen Registration at various locations across states. "The effort is to hold a digital Census but the dates are yet to be decided. Even if the Census is conducted before the general elections, the findings can be made available only by 2024- 25. The Census enumeration will be preceded by house-listing enumeration where the exercise for NPR is to be held," explained an official on the condition of anonymity.
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/census-updation-of-npr-delayed-for-over-three-years/articleshow/99943723.cms>

4. First acquire land fully, then launch schemes, says UP govt
(timesofindia.indiatimes.com) May 03, 2023

NOIDA: The UP government has told industrial development authorities across the state not to launch any plot scheme before acquiring land for such projects.

The order, issued by UP special secretary Nidhi Srivastava on May 1, comes after a recent observation by the Allahabad high court on a case filed by a developer that alleged it was yet to get 25 acres of land from the Noida Authority for the Sports City project.

'ACTION UNJUSTIFIED IF LAND NOT GIVEN'	
GOVT ORDER	SPORTS CITY CASE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Development authorities should not launch any plot scheme before acquiring land➤ Taking punitive action against developers for not completing project in time is unjustified if land has not been handed over 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ A developer of Sports City project in Noida's Sector 152 approached Allahabad HC, challenging Authority's decision to restrict sale of flats for not completing work in time➤ In April, HC asked Authority to explain how it could take action without giving 25 acres of land to the developer <p>Next hearing is scheduled for May 8</p> 

"A strict stand has been taken by the High Court while hearing a case that in projects launched by the industrial development authorities, that area is also allotted which is not acquired. It takes a lot of time to acquire this type of residual land. Due to this, the entire plot is not available to the allottee. Apart from this, punitive actions are also taken against the allottees of such allotted plots (for failure to complete the project on time)," the letter said.

"Therefore, the authorities should not issue advertisement for allotment without acquiring or purchasing the private land included in the plan or plot proposed for allotment," it added.

Last month, the Allahabad HC directed a senior government official, not below the rank of special secretary, to file a reply in a case filed by ATS Homes in 2022.

ATS Homes, which was selected as the lead developer for constructing an international-level cricket stadium and the Sports City in Noida's Sector 152, had told the court that the project was supposed to come up on 125 acres of land, but it was yet to get possession of about 25 acres.

On this, HC has asked Noida Authority how it could propose action against the developer for failure to complete construction when the builder had not been allotted the entire land needed for the project.

The next hearing in the case is scheduled for May 8.

ATS had approached the high court after Noida Authority, in 2021, restricted the sale of flats and threatened action for not completing the project in time. Apart from sports facilities, the project also includes development of residential and commercial properties.

Noida Authority officials could not be reached for comment till Tuesday evening.

Recently, the state's principal accountant general (AG) had also asked the Noida Authority to ensure that the plots it allots to developers aren't disputed. The official had cited an additional payout of Rs 295 crore that had to be made to landowners for the plot on which DLF Mall of India now stands in the NCR city.

The accountant general had also asked the Authority how land was allotted when the plot hadn't been acquired properly and whether any action had been taken against the officials who were responsible for the error.

In another case, the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) is yet to acquire 55 of around 140 plots that it had allotted to industrialists in Sector 33 about a decade ago. The Authority has promised to purchase the land in the next three months and hand it over to the entrepreneurs. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/noida/first-acquire-land-fully-then-launch-schemes-says-up-govt/articleshow/99945883.cms>

**5. ‘CAG’s allegations of irregularities against AIADMK will be probed’:
MK Stalin (newindianexpress.com) May 3, 2023**

CHENNAI: Chief Minister MK Stalin on Tuesday said the irregularities during the previous AIADMK regime highlighted in the recent reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General would be probed into and that the wrongdoers will have to face the music.

He was speaking at the Ungalil Oruvan session. Responding to a question about the charges made in the CAG reports about the irregularities in floating tenders by the Public Works Department, the scheme for modernising the police department, the project for providing housing facilities against the previous AIADMK regime, Stalin said, “People know about the ‘corrupt governance’ of the AIADMK and the CAG report has just confirmed it with evidence. Further investigations on these findings would be initiated.”

The CM also said due to the amendments made to the Prevention of Corruption Act in 2018, certain prior permissions and approvals are required for taking up further investigations. In reply to a statement that AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami’s ‘valour’ has vanished after his visit to New Delhi, Stalin said, “For EPS or his partymen it is nothing new to go to Delhi with all valour and to return as deflated balloons.”

On the SC reiterating the view that a time frame should be set for governors to give their assent to the bills adopted by the state assemblies, Stalin said, “If a governor puts bills into the backburner, there can be no other disgrace to the democracy than this.”

To a question on Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s remarks in Telangana that reservations for Muslims would be cancelled if the BJP comes to power there, the DMK chief said it only showed their ill feeling towards the minorities.

“In a country that has secularism in the preamble of its Constitution, the home minister speaking like this is a breach of the Constitution. People are watching everything. He has spoken so for electoral gains,” he added. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2023/may/03/cags-allegations-of-irregularities-against-aiadmk-will-be-probedmk-stalin-2571533.html>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

6. India makes big gains in cutting foodgrain losses ([thehindubusinessline.com](https://www.thehindubusinessline.com)) May 2, 2023

Foodgrains lost in storage and transit is a major cause for concern. Apart from weakening food security, it hurts the environment through greenhouse gas emissions.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), in a 2019 report, estimates that for every kg of food lost in the supply chain in Central and South Asian regions, about 2.2 kg CO₂ equivalent is emitted, adding to the problem of global warming and climate change which are a major threat to agricultural output across the world.

In India, the Food Corporation of India (FCI) is the nodal Central agency for ensuring food security of the nation, by managing the supply chain of wheat and rice. FCI, along with allied State government agencies, procures wheat and rice (in the form of paddy) and small quantities of coarse grains at Minimum Support Prices (MSP) and directly credits the money into farmers' accounts. The payment for the entire purchase comes from the Union Government and forms the central pool stock.

The average share of wheat and rice purchased by the FCI in the last 10 years has been about 31 per cent and 38 per cent of country's production, respectively. And due to the expansion of procurement and the government's commitment to farmers for open-ended purchase of wheat and rice, the share has risen to as high as 48.38 per cent for rice in 2020-21 and 40.23 per cent for wheat in 2021-22. The central pool stock is distributed among 813 million beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) across the nation through more than 5 lakh fair price shops.

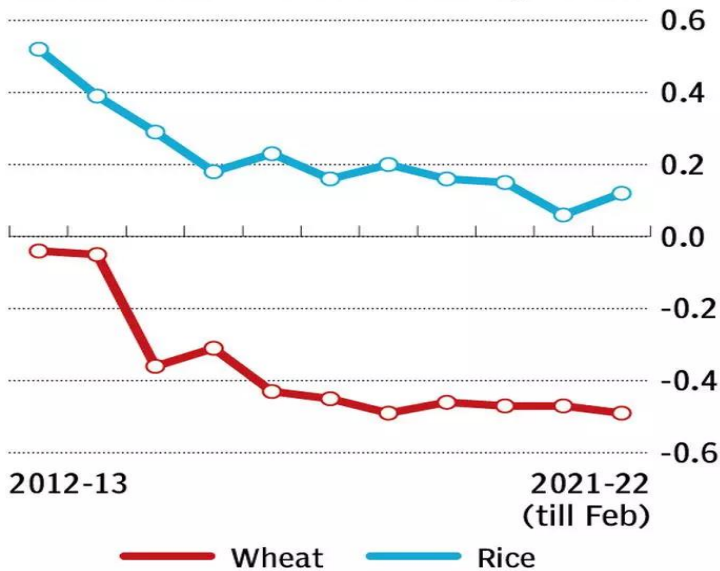
While foodgrains procured by State agencies are distributed within the State to meet their requirements, the surplus is taken over by FCI for storage and distribution in deficit States through their civil supplies agencies. In the process,

FCI transports about 66 per cent of rice procured in 10 surplus States and 82 per cent of wheat procured in three surplus States.

FCI has helped save about 4.7 million tonne (mt) of food in the last decade, by gradually reducing its operational losses in the supply chain of the central pool of wheat and rice stocks. These savings come from the reduction of two main sources of operational losses — storage and transit.

Healthy shift (in %)

Trend of storage loss/gain of wheat and rice in FCI's operations



Status of transit loss in FCI's operations (in %)



The storage loss for rice, which is prone to losing moisture during long-term storage, was about 0.52 per cent in 2012-13. However, with constantly improving operational practices and effective monitoring, it has gradually come down to 0.12 per cent in 2022-23. In the case of wheat, which is hygroscopic in nature and can gain or lose moisture more easily depending on environmental condition, the overall storage gain has risen from 0.04 per cent to 0.49 per cent during the same period. Thus, FCI has helped save 17.90 lakh tonne (lt) of wheat and 18.15 lt of rice during the last 10 years.

Financially, at current value, the savings to the central exchequer amount to ₹10,300 crore and environmentally it has enabled to cut CO2 emission by 7.93 mt.

More commendable

Similarly, transit loss has also declined substantially from 0.47 per cent in 2012-13 to 0.22 per cent (of quantity dispatched) in 2022-23 due to improved operations, standardised procedure and small innovations. FCI has saved about 10.75 lt of wheat and rice, valued at about ₹3,500 crore, from transit loss. The reduction in transit loss is more commendable as FCI had to double its distribution operations due to Covid and transported about 100 mt additional foodgrains across the country for PMGKAY (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana), to mitigate the adverse impact among vulnerable citizens.

The considerable improvement in storage and transit losses during the last decade has been possible due to various strategies adopted by FCI. These include inspection of warehouses by senior officers, augmenting covered storage capacity to avoid open storage of wheat, revamped security system with CCTV to ensure timely and periodic checks, improvisation of loading and unloading process, and keeping spilled grains safe for collection by laying plastic sheets in wagons.

Also, coordination with the Railways for good quality wagons, use of electronic seals to keep the wagons safe from en route pilferage, and making loading and unloading officials more accountable have helped reduce transit losses.

In a six-year-long study, ICAR-CIPHET concluded that there has been negligible losses due to pests, rodents or birds in FCI godowns. A small amount of loss has been attributed to godown operations and a more significant amount to loss in moisture, mainly for rice. The results of the study has enabled FCI arrive at a realistic norm for storage loss due to loss/gain of moisture and storage operations.

The efforts of FCI during the last decade to reduce food loss by more than half will not only help achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12.3 target — to cut food waste by half and also to significantly reduce food loss by 2030 — earlier but also serve as an inspiration to other large global food systems for ensuring food sustainability. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/india-makes-big-gains-in-cutting-foodgrain-losses/article66805033.ece>

7. Highest ever GST collection indicator of stable economic growth, say experts ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) May 2, 2023

The highest-ever GST collection in April indicates a favourable trend signaling growth in domestic demand and the subsequent growth in the Indian economy. Experts indicate that this also shows that the collection indicates better business compliance and steady growth but global growth continues to be a headwind.

GST collection grew 12 per cent in April to Rs 1.87 lakh crore. This is the highest monthly mop-up since the rollout of the indirect tax regime. Out of the gross GST revenue collected in the month of April 2023, Rs 38,440 crore is CGST, Rs 47,412 crore is SGST, and Rs 89,158 crore is IGST (including Rs 34,972 crore collected on import of goods) and cess is Rs 12,025 crore, the finance ministry said. “The increased collections are likely an indicator of a stable growth in the Indian economy. Highest ever collections also appears to be a result of March being the last month of the financial year,” said Saurabh Agarwal, Tax Partner, EY LLP.

The revenues for April 2023 are 12 per cent higher than the GST revenues in the same month last year. The previous high collection was in April last year which equated to Rs 1.68 lakh crore. There is generally a surge in GST collections in April, added Rajani Sinha, Chief Economist, CareEdge and explained that GST collections have been upbeat staying above the Rs 1.4 lakh crore mark for the 14th month in a row”. Tanushree Roy, Director- Indirect Tax , Nangia Andersen India, pointed out that, “Record GST collections in April 2023 emphasize a favourable trend signaling growth in the Indian economy coupled with increased compliances by businesses. March 2023, being the end of the financial year, also contributed to the increased GST collections.”

“It will not be surprising if we touch Rs 2 lakh crore a month by the end of current fiscal. Apart from economic growth led by higher consumer demand, greater emphasis on technology including advanced data analytics is the key reason for this growth. It may be a right time for the GST council to reinstate the discussions

on GST rate rationalization,” said Pratik Jain, Partner, Price Waterhouse & Co LLP.

The performance can also be attributed to encouraging domestic demand conditions and improved compliance measures. “This comes on the back of the monthly GST collections crossing Rs 1.4 lakh crore continuously during FY23 and hence is a testimony to the good economic growth and the enhanced efforts aimed at improving compliances. Majority of large states have reported a 20 per cent plus growth over the same period last year, indicating a broad level growth across sectors and states,” said MS Mani, Partner, Deloitte India.

Going forward, experts opined, the easing of inflationary pressures may further support the overall domestic demand in the economy. Even so, as Rajani Sinha said, “We also remain cautious on external demand conditions as global growth slows.” <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/highest-ever-gst-collection-indicator-of-stable-economic-growth-say-experts/3071753/>

8. Sound policies ([dailypioneer.com](https://www.dailypioneer.com)) 03 May 2023

Just as sorrows come in droves, sometimes good things also come in twos. On Monday, the government announced that it collected Rs 187,035 crore in April as goods and services tax (GST). It is the highest ever GST collection in a single month. In fact, it is for the first time that the gross GST collection has crossed Rs1.75-lakh crore mark. The same day we also came to know that Manufacturing PMI increased to 57.2 in April, up from 56.4 in March, according to S&P Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index. This was also the fastest ever improvement in factory production. The April GST collection is 12 per cent higher than that in April 2022. Also, the revenues from domestic transactions (including import of services) are 16 per cent higher than the revenues from these sources during April last year. Another feat in the last month was on 20th, the highest ever tax collection on a single day, when Rs 68,228 crore was paid through 9.8 lakh transactions. The GST mop-up elicited a response from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He tweeted: “Great news for the Indian economy! Rising tax collection despite lower tax rates shows the success of how GST has increased integration and compliance.” Needless to say, technology has played a great role in integration. The Modi regime’s reliance on technology is immense. All its decisions and policy announcements, whether they are related to infrastructure development or welfare measures, are predicated upon adoption of the latest technology available.

The two developments, the highest ever GST mop-up and the fastest ever improvement in manufacturing, seem to be linked. Manufacturing PMI had also done well in March. Is industrial growth finally picking up? Two months' data is not sufficient to answer this question; we will have to wait for some time to see if the measures that the Government has introduced in the recent past have yielded dividends. It is, however, indisputable that some signs are comforting. The index of industrial production (IIP) for February showed manufacturing growth of 5.3 per cent. This was not very good, especially because the base was very low—0.2 per cent in February 2022. For the April 2022-February 2023 period, however, there was a rise of 4.9 per cent, which was against 13 per cent in the corresponding period in 2021-22. Importantly, capital goods, indicating capacity addition to the economy, have been doing very well. In the first eleven months of the last fiscal, capital goods grew by a whopping 13.4 per cent, against a very high 19 per cent in the corresponding period in 2021-22. On the whole, the government's instincts and policies—with emphasis on lower taxation, economic reforms, and infrastructure development—are sound. It just has to stay the course—and not get swayed by the compulsions of electoral politics.

<https://www.dailypioneer.com/2023/columnists/sound-policies.html>

9. Number of families seeking work under MGNREGS continues to fall post-pandemic, figures reveal ([indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com)) May 2, 2023

The number of families availing the benefit of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) continues to fall post the Covid-19 pandemic, with 6.19 crore households availing of the rural job programme during the 2022-23 financial year compared to 7.25 crore in 2021-22 and 7.55 crore in 2020-21, shows the official data.

However, the demand for work under NREGS is still higher than its pre-Covid levels when the number of families who availed of the scheme stood at 5.48 crore in 2019-20 and 5.27 crore in 2018-19.

The MGNREGS performance in the last five years

Financial Year	Total Households Worked [in crore]	Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment [in lakh]	Average days of employment provided per household
2018-19	5.27	52.59	50.88
2019-20	5.48	40.6	48.4
2020-21	7.55	71.97	51.52
2021-22	7.25	59.14	50.07
2022-23	6.19	36.01	47.84

MGNREGS numbers The NREGA guarantees 100-day wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

NREGS was launched in the 200 most-backward rural districts of the country in 2006-07 and was extended to an additional 130 districts during 2007-08; and to the entire country from 2008-09. The scheme saw a spike in demand for work during 2020-21 when a record 7.55-crore rural families availed of its benefit in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak. In fact, the scheme became a safety net for migrants who returned to their villages during the pandemic-induced lockdown in 2020. However, since 2020-21, the figure has been declining — 7.25 crore in 2021-22 and 6.19 crore in 2022-23.

The Economic Survey 2022-23, presented in Parliament earlier this year, had attributed the year-on-year (YoY) decline in monthly demand for MGNREGS work to the “normalisation of the rural economy due to strong agricultural growth and a swift recovery from Covid-induced slowdown, culminating in better employment opportunities.”

However, activists blame the introduction of mandatory attendance through the National Mobile Monitoring System App (NMMS), Aadhaar Based Payment System, and cut in the budget for the dip in the number of families availing of the NREGS. A parliamentary standing committee too has expressed concerns over the reduction of Rs 29,400 crore in the rural job scheme budget for the financial year 2023-24.

The NREGA guarantees 100-day wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The data shows that the average days of employment provided per household too came down to 47.84 days during 2022-23 from 50.07 days in 2021-22. The figure stood at 51.52 days in 2020-21. The average days of employment provided per household during the financial year 2022-23 is even lower than the figure of 48.4 days recorded in 2019-20 during the pre-Covid time.

Only 36.01 lakh families completed 100-day wage employment under the NREGS during 2022-23, which is the lowest in the last five years—59.14 lakh in 2021-22, 71.97 lakh in 2020-21, 40.60 lakh in 2019-20 and 52.59 lakh in 2018-19.

Observing that the MGNREGS is “a last resort of succour” for jobless people, the Standing Committee on Rural Development & Panchayati Raj said, “The Committee are concerned to note that the Budget Estimates for MGNREGS has been reduced by Rs. 29,400 crore for 2023-24 when compared to Revised Estimates of 2022-23.”

“The Act governing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme provides ‘Right to Work’ to such deprived sections of the rural populace who are willing to work. It is a last resort of succour for the jobless section who don’t have any other means to feed them and their family members, said the committee headed by DMK member Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, in its report presented in Parliament during the budget session. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/mgnregs-families-seeking-work-continue-fall-post-pandemic-8586919/>

10. Subvention schemes need better targeting ([financialexpress.com](https://www.financialexpress.com)) MAY 03 2023

Two sectors that gained traction in rural India in the last five decades are dairy and microfinance. Both involved the latent power of women in the rural areas. About 2 crore people depend upon livestock for their livelihoods; it contributed 16% to the income of small farm households and an average of 14% for all rural households. This growth led to increased availability and consumption of milk, eggs and meat. The investment in fixed assets in rural India indicates additional income generating capability as dairy animals and equipment have the highest share in the total investment, followed by cattle sheds.

Microfinance has a big role in these investments. A majority of small farmers and landless labourers have had little credit history, and finding capital from formal sources is difficult for them. As per MFIN Micrometer, loan disbursements by microfinance companies increased 19% to Rs 77,877 crore during the quarter ending December 2022 and the total microfinance loan portfolio rose to Rs 3.21 trillion. Peer guarantee and negligible documentation requirement of the microfinance sector ensure enthusiastic adoption at the bottom of the pyramid. The dairy farmer, being in a position to get regular payment for milk, is able to make timely repayments, making her an ideal borrower.

While the exact share of dairy in microfinance is not known, industry estimates put it at 20% . While initial investment is made in non-descript breeds of milch animals, as the borrower reaches the second or third cycle and is in a position to avail larger loans, she buys crossbred cows, buffaloes, or high-milk-yield cows, which cost ₹50,000-90,000. With a contribution margin of ₹5/litre and lactation days of ~300/year, the net generated income annually would be ₹45,000. For a micro credit borrower who borrows ₹45,000 at 18%, the EMI for two years would be ₹2,496; so, in effect, she is left with ₹1,250 per cow per month. Besides utilising largely underemployed women productively, the sector helps empower them.

The government provides interest subvention for dairy processing and infrastructure through interventions like Dairy-processing & Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF), Supporting Dairy Cooperatives & Farmer Producer Organizations (SDCFPO), and Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF). However, these are meant for institutions and industries that are at the second- or third-level of the supply chain. The primary unit in the dairy supply chain are the farmers (women microfinance borrowers), who end up paying anything between 15-24% interest on loans. But they get no direct benefit from interest subvention or concessional finance from the government, especially in states where dairy co-operatives and private industry are not very strong. Thus, the benefits of the schemes are reaped by comparatively better-off farmers in richer states like Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. One needs to enable rural borrower families in the poorer regions to look at raising resources at a cheaper rate.

It is time that the department of animal husbandry (DAHD), RBI, and NABARD understand that the interest subvention scheme needs to bring poor MFI borrowers in backward districts into its fold. Per DAHD's Annual Report, the allocation for AHIDF was ₹113 crore, and less than ₹7 crore was spent on interest subvention. Similarly, ₹1,167 crore is earmarked for subvention from an outlay of ₹11,184 crore. But, the projects sanctioned till 2021 were to the tune of about ₹5,100

crore—less than half the outlay. DAHD must devise a scheme to deploy these unused funds for interest subvention that can directly benefit dairy-farmer MFI borrowers, for the next two or three years. These beneficiaries should necessarily be resident of the 100 aspirational districts identified by the NITI Aayog.

The DAHD already has an ambitious plan to make use of an Aadhaar equivalent for animals. This unique number could be used by banks or MFIs to link the animals to owners' Aadhaar and bank accounts. If the interest subvention is made available only once—for one animal linked to one Aadhaar—there would be no room for misuse. This will make direct passing of the subvention to the dairy farmers easy for the government.

This will eliminate inefficiencies and augment dairy farmers' income. For example, if 10,000 women borrowers in 100 backward districts are given `5,000 each as interest subvention, the total outlay will be `500 crore. Such subventions will not only result in a reduced interest burden on borrowers, but may prompt them to purchase a better yielding variety of milch animals and enhance their income over time.

As poverty alleviation through collectivisation is the key feature of the National and State Rural Livelihood Missions and the Self-Help Group-Bank Linkages programme of NABARD, they too can be roped in. Geographically targeted interest subvention will result in enhanced high-quality milk production. In the medium- to long-run, it will result in demand for larger investment in infrastructure and processing capacity in the dairy sector in backward regions. Over time, these regions would not only help us attain nutritional security but will enable an atmanirbhar India. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/subvention-schemes-need-better-targeting/3072069/>

11. Red signal (telegraphindia.com) MAY 02 2023

The Vande Bharat train is finally here in Kerala. Just one set of 16 coaches, and that's a good beginning. The train's arrival was celebrated by throngs of people in every station it stopped. The state wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party celebrated the train with laddoos distributed in thousands and the garlanding of coach drivers like heroes. 'Modi's Vishu (new year) gift to Kerala,' was the narrative. The prime minister, Narendra Modi, landed in Kerala to flag off the train, as he has done with the previous Vande Bharats. In Trivandrum, a pre-planned but spontaneous-looking roadshow was held, which he has never attempted before. After all, Kerala is the other elusive Gaulish state, a pluralist-socialist bastion, that the BJP wants to

conquer. The BJP has claimed patronage of the train service more than any other party. What if the Indian National Congress were to claim patronship of trains? Perhaps the list would be an easy 10,000 across India.

In contrast, the SilverLine semi-high speed rail that the state government has proposed has not garnered as much enthusiasm. The Left parties are, hence, a disappointed lot. The project has faced multiple setbacks, including widespread criticism for being too expensive, an ecological disaster, and for its potential to displace thousands of people from their homes. Experts and public opinion-makers have exposed errors and data-fudging in its design, alignment, traffic and passenger surveys, cost estimates, budget estimates, and its economic and financial rates of return. The Environment Impact Assessment of the project itself exposed the hydrological disaster this rail line would cause to an ecologically fragile Kerala: 80% of the project — to be built on embankments — could impact 164 hydrologically-sensitive zones, it said. The project documents, including the detailed project report, are awaiting approval from the railway board for almost three years. Queries regarding estimated budgets, alignments and land acquisition have not been satisfactorily answered. The project's social costs have also been a concern, with attempts to force a social impact assessment resulting in public protests and police brutality. The unavailability of adequate construction material and the possible opening up of more quarries have raised environmental concerns. The scenes of violence during the yellow survey stone-laying by K-Rail officials with police support shocked the public, further maligning the project.

While the conflict between these two rail projects does look political, it is, in fact, a matter of two different paradigms of rail development in India. On the one side are the crazily expensive high-speed rail lines run on standard gauge and funded largely by loans from global banks and agencies. The technology and the operations are imported and the running cost would eventually fleece the State. The flagship bullet train, Modi's dream rail between Mumbai and Ahmedabad costing a whopping Rs 1.08 lakh crore, is one of them. While this project faced serious opposition, especially from farmers led by the Left parties, it is ironic that the same Left has proposed a similar project — the SilverLine — for Kerala. It is a toned down, semi-high speed version of the same.

The other paradigm follows the progressional development approach of the Indian railways, aiming at indigenous, semi-high speed and high-speed rails. Train 18, as the Vande Bharat was called, was the result of such an approach. This semi-high speed train comprises electric multiple units that can attain a speed of up to 160 kilometres per hour. A significant advantage is that it can run on India's broad

gauge rail network, making it adaptable across the nation. This would, however, require improvement of signalling systems, modification of track geometry, removing curves and the straightening of lines for it to achieve its maximum speed. The cost of a 16-carriage train set is Rs 115 crore. The railway ministry says the rail lines in Kerala can be improved to take speeds of 130 kmph in three and a half years. Further improvement to 160 kmph would require a fresh DPR, but it is still better than pursuing the SilverLine. The state estimates the cost for the SilverLine to be Rs 64,000 crore and claims it can be completed in five years. But no other agency, including the NITI Aayog or the railway ministry, thinks so. They pitch the cost to be at least double the estimates. The high priority bullet train that costs more than Rs 1 lakh crore has overrun its cost and time estimates. The well-known economist, K.P. Kannan, who has studied project cost and time overruns, estimates that the SilverLine could take 37 years to complete. This actually means that with the indigenous, low-cost development that the public sector Indian railways has embarked on, trains such as the SilverLine would end up being a financial drain on the public and, worse, could be outdated by the time it begins its journey.

The negligible ecological impact of improving the present railway lines to run the Vande Bharat is also an advantage, with additional land acquisition needed only for straightening curves or if a dedicated third and fourth line is required, as in Kerala. The social impact, including on livelihoods, is also minimal compared to the massive number of families that may have to be relocated for the SilverLine. The story of the bullet train was also no different.

However, are trains like the Vande Bharat affordable for the common people? A single journey in AC Chair Car costs Rs 1,590 while the Executive Chair Car costs Rs 2,880 for eight-hour travel covering 588 km from Trivandrum to Kasaragod. In contrast, a day train like the Jan Shatabdi from Trivandrum to Kannur, covering 502 km, costs only Rs 220 for a Chair Car and Rs 755 for an AC Chair Car. This is what the common travellers can perhaps decently afford. For any of the night trains from Trivandrum to Kasaragod, the tickets are Rs 360 for the Sleeper, Rs 945 for 3AC, and Rs 1,325 for 2AC. The Vande Bharat, which offers modern facilities and food and would soon replace other trains due to its speed and developmental prospects, would increase the burden on common citizens who would be left with no other choice. Technological progress such as the Vande Bharat is surely welcome, but such progress should not be at the cost of affordability for the common people. As train travel becomes more luxurious and expensive, the poor may be gradually excluded.

The SilverLine or, for that matter, the bullet train is a worse deal for the common people than the Vande Bharat. Despite proponents of the SilverLine branding the train as one for the poor, the cancer patients, and farmers, the ticket charges proposed are exorbitant. The proposed rate for AC Chair Car from Trivandrum to Kasaragod in 2020 was Rs 2.75 per km, amounting to approximately Rs 1,457. This rate is expected to increase by 6% annually and could reach Rs 3,500 in 2030, assuming the train starts running by then. Furthermore, the cost of the project itself is an underestimate, and the price of tickets could double.

At this rate, neither trains like SilverLine and the bullet train nor the Vande Bharat are an affordable option for the common, middle-income class in India. While the Vande Bharat is a welcome development, the tickets need to be priced lower, and the government should stop politicising the train. Meanwhile, the Left government in Kerala would do well to summarily drop the SilverLine project that already looks like a Nandigram or Singur moment for the Left parties in their last stronghold. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/red-signal-the-threat-to-affordable-train-travel-in-new-india/cid/1933937>

12. Demography is not destiny but it does shape economic outcomes ([livemint.com](https://www.livemint.com)) MAY 03 2023

A huge population is an advantage only if we have enough jobs to convert a demographic fact into an economic opportunity

The United Nations (UN) has said that India will overtake China as the world's most populous country this year. The statement has naturally attracted a lot of public attention. There can be some debate on whether this demographic event will take place this year or not. India has not had a full census since 2011. All we have right now are estimates. The UN says that there will be 1.43 billion Indians by the middle of 2023. Indian government estimates are lower. The Technical Group on Population Projection of the Indian census office said in July 2020 that it expects a population of 1.39 billion in 2023—or 53 million less than the UN estimate. However, there is little doubt that India will inevitably overtake China on the population front. It is only a matter of time.

The UN report has reignited the old debate whether India can take advantage of its demographic advantage before its labour force peaks and the population begins to age. And especially whether India can catch up with China before the demographic window shuts in the coming decades, especially as that country moves into a slower lane because of factors ranging from a declining labour force, misallocation

of capital and perhaps low productivity growth in case the West's geopolitical thrust to deny it access to new technologies is not countered with domestic innovation. Meanwhile, a fact check: India is currently around 15 years behind China in terms of per capita income at market exchange rates. In other words, our current level of average income is what China had in 2007.

One useful starting point is to compare contemporary India with some other successful Asian economies when they were at a similar demographic juncture in earlier years. The one number considered here as a broad proxy for the demographic structure in a country is the median age of its population—or the age of the person in the middle in case every citizen is lined up in either ascending or descending order of age. India right now has a median age of around 28 years. Many other Asian peers had a similar median age earlier, from Japan in 1970 to Malaysia in 2017 (see chart). This is broadly the point when most of these countries were in the midst of extraordinary economic booms. Not everything can be ascribed to demographics. For example, China had a median age of 28 in 1999, and the subsequent economic acceleration also coincided with its entry to the World Trade Organization.

Economists usually account for economic growth in terms of its three main drivers: the size of the labour force, the investment rate and productivity growth. A country whose people are mostly of working age tends to have higher domestic savings and investments, since the number of dependents per working person is relatively low. There are some nuances to be considered. For example, the quality of the labour force in terms of education, health and skills also matters. The usual thumb-rule is that countries in their early stages of development tend to drive economic growth using more inputs; typically, they have a higher investment rate as well as an increasing labour force. Productivity tends to play a more important role in the later stages of development.

The data shows how India and six other successful Asian economies fare in terms of average income, the investment rate and labour force participation when their median age was 28. The numbers tell an interesting story. First, each country had a very different level of per capita income when its median age was 28. That also partly reflects initial conditions in the year they had a similar age structure as India's today. Second, the investment rate in each of these countries at that point of time was broadly in the same range, between 25% to 40% of gross domestic product. Vietnam and Malaysia are on the lower side, Japan was at the higher end, while China maintained a very high investment rate in the two decades after 1999.

The big difference between India and the other six countries is in the labour force participation data, or how many people of working age are in the labour force. India's labour force participation rate is much lower than what the others reported at that time, and this gap ranges from 15 to 32 percentage points. Much of this wide gap is explained by very low levels of female participation in the labour force, as the table here shows.

The upshot: India has been unable to productively employ its young population, especially females. The result is that Indian economic growth in recent years has been largely powered by the more intensive use of capital as well as productivity growth. Many recent statistical studies have highlighted the same structure. One way to boost potential growth is to create the conditions for higher employment, something that India has been struggling with in recent decades, even though the claims of "jobless growth" may be exaggerated.

Having the world's largest population is an advantage only if there are enough jobs to convert a demographic fact into an economic opportunity.
<https://www.livemint.com/opinion/columns/demography-is-not-destiny-but-it-does-shape-economic-outcomes-11683045962709.html>

13. IMF's moderate response despite urgent climate needs ([orfonline.org](https://www.orfonline.org))
MAY 02 2023

The recent climate resilience loan packages that has been introduced by the IMF fall short

Climate change and pandemic preparedness are challenges that seriously threaten low-income and vulnerable middle-income countries. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) set up a lending toolkit called the Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST) to help address these challenges. The first tranche of loans was given to five countries: Costa Rica, Barbados, Jamaica, Bangladesh and the Seychelles—all of them are vulnerable to climate change. But an analysis of the terms and conditions of the structure shows that it does not go far enough to be an effective tool to combat the large and looming issues.

Why RST?

The role of RST is to complement IMF's loans that are currently accessible to all countries under the General Resources Account (GRA) sources, and to low-income countries under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT). These existing instruments are used by members facing short- and medium-term challenges. The

goal of RST is to broaden the lending support by providing affordable and longer-term financing to enhance economic resilience and sustainability.

RST hopes to support climate-vulnerable countries in reducing and managing macro-financial risks stemming from climate change. It is a concessional debt financing facility with a repayment period of 20 years and a 10.5-year grace period. The RST funding will be priced modestly with a margin of up to 100 basis points (in three tiers) over the three-month Special Drawing Rights (SDR) interest rate.

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The access cap for eligible members is lower than 150 percent of the quota or SDR 1 billion. The starting point of access determination is an access norm of 75 percent of the quota – the maximum amount IMF gives as loans to member countries.

Some examples

A look at the recent RST loans provides a glimpse of the practical aspects of the program. For one, the loan sizes varied widely for countries, from US\$183 million for Barbados to US\$1.4 billion for Bangladesh. Also, the use cases were customised. For instance, Jamaica's loan was intended for reforms aimed at creating incentives to switch to renewables, increase energy efficiency, develop green financial instruments, and manage climate risks in the financial sector. These reforms are expected to catalyse private and official financing for climate-related investment.

For Bangladesh, the RST complemented other IMF loans that are intended to support macroeconomic stability and lay the foundations for strong, inclusive, and environmentally-sustainable growth. RST aims to supplement other available loans by expanding the fiscal space to finance climate action priorities and catalyse additional financing, and make the economy climate resilient.

Few shortcomings

That said, according to IMF's own estimate, the one-time US\$1.4 billion loan is extremely low compared to the country's annual climate-related investment of US\$12 to 16 billion. Also, Bangladesh is not able to design its own economic policies as the stringent conditions of the RST loan are not different from earlier

loan packages. For example, the terms require the country to increase government revenue, make fuel-price market-driven, liberalise the domestic electricity sector, and limit public spending—economic measures that have little to do with climate action.

The loan facility also has a few limitations on its effectiveness. For one, RST will not make much of a dent in small and vulnerable countries as the loan quota is tied to their SDR quota, which is dependent on GDP size. The small loans can do little to address the financing needs of the smaller countries with small economies but a high need for climate financing.

Two, there are stringent conditions and eligibility criteria that limit the reach. The facility depends on whether the countries have the ability to pay back, which may make it difficult for vulnerable countries to qualify. Even if one qualifies, providing more loans to countries that are already burdened with high debt may aggravate the situation. Too much debt can reduce the fiscal space for climate mitigation and adaptation investments.

Three, the interest rates charged are not very different from what IMF charges middle-income countries (MICs). It is not seen as concessional by small countries and there is an additional service charge of up to 50 basis points.

RST will not make much of a dent in small and vulnerable countries as the loan quota is tied to their SDR quota, which is dependent on GDP size.

Four, even if countries take up this facility, it is very small vis-à-vis the need. The annual climate adaptation costs for developing countries are projected to be US\$140-300 billion by 2030 and US\$280-500 billion by 2050. This is nowhere close to being met by the US\$50 billion size suggested by IMF's Managing Director for this facility.

Five, the mechanism doesn't address the serious challenge of the need to be just and inclusive in the green transition, faced by developing countries. A forced green transition not well aligned with the just in transition principle will be a penalty, instead of a panacea.

Effective remedy

The RST's size and role is currently uncertain and will depend on countries' interest in channeling their SDRs. It is therefore important for the RST to show that

it provides an additional benefit to the IMF's existing lending resources and does not displace these.

To make the RST truly catalytic and genuinely concessional, the size and quota of the fund should be increased and replenished every year, and make it a zero-interest loan like the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust.

Additionally, the RST should work together with the World Bank and other international public financial institutions to support climate financing. The World Bank has historically been the primary source of climate financing among them. Therefore, it is crucial to have a cohesive strategy among these institutions to address climate change effectively. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/imfs-moderate-response-despite-urgent-climate-needs/>

14. Illegal Sale of Soil by Contractors in Surat Jeopardizes Gujarat's Water Revolution: Sujalam Sufalam Jal Abhiyan under Threat (theblunttimes.in) May 2, 2023

It's disheartening to learn that some of the contractors awarded with soil excavation work in the villages of Olpad taluka are blatantly violating government norms and causing losses to the State exchequer.

Surat: The Sujalam Sufalam Jal Abhiyan is a significant initiative taken by the Gujarat Government to bring about a water revolution in the state. The scheme aims to rejuvenate water resources and ensure the availability of clean water to the people. Under the sixth phase of the program, the government has launched a mass movement across the state to achieve these objectives. However, it is disheartening to learn that some of the contractors awarded with soil excavation work in the villages of Olpad taluka are blatantly violating government norms and causing losses to the State exchequer.

It has come to light that a contract agency with political clout has managed to obtain the contract for soil excavation in several villages in Olpad taluka. Instead of carrying out the work in line with the government norms, the contractor is excavating a vast amount of soil from the villages namely Kareli, Paria, Olpad, Sonakhadi, Lavacha, Pinjrat, Mor, Pardi Zankhri, Vadoli, Selut, Sarol, Kudiana, and Segwachama in Olpad taluka and selling it to private builders. This practice has caused losses worth crores of rupees to the state government's exchequer.

The illegal excavation and sale of soil by the contractor are not only detrimental to the Sujalam Sufalam Jal Abhiyan's objectives but also to the environment. The uncontrolled soil excavation can lead to soil erosion and degradation, making it difficult for the vegetation to grow and harming the local biodiversity.

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel has stated that the works going on under the Sujalam Sufalam scheme have resulted in adequate availability of irrigation and drinking water to farmers and people. Not only that, excavation of soil provide large scale of daily employment, also results in the soil being used by farmers in their fields. Income is also generated by purchasing such soil for use in related development works.

Darshan Naik, general secretary of Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee (GPCC) has submitted a complaint to the Commissioner of Geology and Mining, Government of Gujarat for initiating a thorough investigation into the illegal activities going on in the Olpad taluka in the name of Sujalam Sufalam scheme. Naik has demanded that all the transport trucks should be fitted with GPS location trackers, trucks should not be allowed to ply during the night hours, forming a committee of local representatives in the villages etc. to curb the illegal selling of the excavated soil to the builders.

Moreover, selling the excavated soil to private builders may lead to the depletion of natural resources and further contribute to environmental degradation. The government should take strict action against the contractor and ensure that such violations do not occur in the future.

It is high time that the government takes a stern stance against such malpractices and ensures that the Sujalam Sufalam Jal Abhiyan's objectives are achieved. The initiative aims to transform the water scenario in Gujarat and create a sustainable future for the state. It is essential that all stakeholders involved in the scheme work in line with the government norms and contribute to its success.

The illegal sale of excavated soil by the contractor in Olpad taluka is a severe violation of government norms and detrimental to the environment. The government should take immediate action against such malpractices and ensure that the Sujalam Sufalam Jal Abhiyan scheme's objectives are not compromised. The success of the scheme depends on the cooperation of all stakeholders, and it is essential that they work towards achieving its objectives.
<https://theblunttimes.in/illegal-sale-of-soil-by-contractors-in-surat->

15. West Bengal needs waste water treatment and reuse policy to save rivers: Experts ([timesofindia.indiatimes.com](#)) May 03, 2023

KOLKATA: A recent report by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) estimates that urban areas in West Bengal generate 5,457 million litres per day (MLD) of sewage, but the installed treatment capacity is only 16%, resulting in untreated wastewater being discharged into rivers and other water bodies. Nitin Bassi, Programme Lead at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) suggested that adopting a comprehensive state-level wastewater treatment and reuse policy can help plug this gap and improve river health.

He added that the state-level policy should define both discharge and reuse-specific treated wastewater quality standards, following the guidelines of the National Framework on Safe Reuse of Treated Water.

According to CEEW analysis, urban centres in India will generate about 44,000 MCM of domestic wastewater by 2050, making substantial investments in wastewater treatment necessary for rejuvenating India's polluted rivers. To this end, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMGG) has taken steps towards cleaning Ganga, and this approach should be replicated for other polluted river stretches in India, Bassi said.

The 48th meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) was held recently, where eight projects worth approximately Rs 638 crore were approved. Four projects worth Rs 407.39 crore were approved for pollution abatement in the Shamli district as part of the comprehensive Hindon Rejuvenation Plan. These projects are aimed at preventing the flow of polluted water into Krishna River, a major tributary of Hindon. The four projects include the construction of sewage treatment plants, septage co-treatment facilities, interception and diversion (I&D) works, and other infrastructure in various towns and villages in the district.

Additionally, one project for the development of seven ghats in Prayagraj was approved as part of preparations for the Mahakumbh in Uttar Pradesh in 2025. Two more sewerage management projects were approved, one each in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The Bihar project includes the construction of three sewage treatment plants among other works, while the Madhya Pradesh project includes the construction of a sewage treatment plant and common effluent treatment plant, among other infrastructure.

During the meeting, G. Asok Kumar, DG, NMCG, urged officials to promote the use of solar power on STP sites and separate and dispose of solid waste from drains flowing into

rivers. He also emphasized that it is the responsibility of state governments to maintain assets created under the Namami Gange Programme and urged them to communicate the standard operating procedures being adopted by the urban local bodies (ULBs) for cleaning existing ghats to the NMCG.

Finally, a project for ghat development was approved for Haridwar, Uttarakhand, where Akhand Param Dham ghat will be constructed at a cost of Rs. 2.12 crore. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/west-bengal-needs-waste-water-treatment-and-reuse-policy-to-save-rivers-experts/articleshow/99950807.cms>