NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (08.03.2023 to 09.03.2023)

1. A Look at What Made Modi's PMAY Gramin Scheme a Success *(inventiva.co.in)*
March 9, 2023

Modi's government has built 29 million homes in rural India since coming to power in 2014, Constituting 6 per cent of rural households in India. The Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) completed nearly 7.5 million homes between 2014 and 2016 and still needs to be met, with another 4 million units yet to be constructed.

Providing direct cash transfers to verified bank accounts, setting up the state nodal account, and implementing other reform processes enabled this.

Currently, 21.35 million homes have been built across India, of which 9.45 million (44%) are for SC/STs, and 2.79 million (13%) are for minorities. Poorer states, regions, and districts are where most homes are built.

With PMAY-Gramin, social and regional disparities were bridged. An outstanding performance report by the Comptroller and Auditor General provided insight into all IAY critical failures that needed to be addressed before PMAYG could be planned.

Therefore, we developed housing typologies, agroclimatic zone-wise and soil-type-wise, by the best architects from the Universities to avoid repeating the same mistake.

Based on formal housing studies, they developed over 200 housing designs adapted to local climate, earthquake, wind, flood, rain, and other factors. States adopted them following intensive discussion and deliberation. a look at what made modi's pmay gramin scheme a success

For poor households to be dignified, conducted an extensive costing exercise. The homework defended Rs 1.5-1.6 lakh (including 90 days of MGNREGS work and the SBM toilet). Connections to power, gas, and water are also prioritized.

Fortunately, the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC-2011) results were released in July 2015, which allowed us to identify the program's beneficiaries.

In addition to housing type and roofing material, it provided detailed information about the structure. Households were fairly honest because they did not know why the SECC was being conducted.

As well as being fair, the enumerators made accurate assessments. Those Gram Panchayats with two kutcha rooms were mapped using SECC data and ratified by the Gram Sabha.

Based on the SECC, 40.3 million households were identified as Kutchas, of which 25.4 million had been validated and confirmed to be Kutchas. PMAY identities were assigned using the SECC 2011 temporary identification numbers.

To ensure that the house’s woman would be a co-owner, efforts were made to ensure this. More than two-thirds of families are owned or co-owned by women.

A parallel process of following GPS-tagged assets in real-time, validating bank accounts, and making direct transfers to valid accounts was also carried out.

Throughout the process, technology was used as a means, not an end. For each beneficiary, physical records of their name and signature were necessary to ensure they did not receive a PMAY house.

Since there are physical records, the person who geotagged may be held responsible if they got it by corruption. The MIS, even for incomplete IAY homes then, was fully functional before PMAY Gramin was launched.a look at what made modi's pmay gramin scheme a success

The district-specific accounts were closed and created a single state nodal account with credit for the state and central shares. Construction of this scale required trained masons, which was addressed by a 45-day on-site certificate training program.

These initiatives have also resulted in the creation of Rani Mistris (women masons). Due to the complex nature of construction, the training was conducted in the homes of Divyang, widows, and the ill. The old kutcha home was geotagged mandatory, as well as the image before.

As a result, about 20.3 million of the 25.4 million validated homes were turned down. Several other new kutcha homes had to be built for intergenerational families.

Surveying the same was very challenging. Many came forward seeking housing, including many who had already received IAY homes (and whose condition had deteriorated).

It will be necessary for housing policies to define intergenerational housing entitlement, or else a never-ending demand will emerge. By 2024, it will build six million new homes to serve nine million new beneficiaries.

The partnership between state and local governments is critical to the PMAY Gramin. States in the mainland contribute 40% of funds, while the Himalayan and northeastern states contribute 10%.

Several Secretaries of State participated in writing the Framework for Implementation. The states consistently supported initiatives to improve financial management and governance and build capacity.a look at what made modi's pmay gramin scheme a success

In this massive effort, they worked together and respected one another. We designed awards for performers and ranked states and districts together, tracking laggard blocks.

In partnership with states, they negotiated banks to fund bigger aspirational homes for beneficiaries. Ajay, Prashant, Nagesh, and Ramakrishnan’s enthusiasm and hard work made this project successful.

The difference was made with teamwork, technology, partnerships, public information, direct transfers to validated accounts, and geotagging.

Externally evaluated by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), N R Bhanumurthy's program reveals what has worked and what hasn't, and the recommendations and findings of the Common Review Mission were invaluable.

PMAY Gramin, therefore, deserves more funding in the budget. Rural housing has many multisectoral growth impacts as well.a look at what made modi's pmay gramin scheme a success

Metals, cement, pipes, fittings, glass, etc., are all in demand. In this way, poverty-stricken households are provided with jobs, and their dignity is restored – a win-win situation for economic development and social progress. https://www.inventiva.co.in/trends/what-made-modis-pmay/

STATES NEWS ITEMS

2. Dead men working and paid too: CAG report on MGNREGS in Punjab *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* March 8, 2023

CHANDIGARH: A Comptroller and Auditor General of India report tabled in the Punjab assembly on Tuesday.has flagged multiple gaps in the implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Punjab by "employing dead persons, fraudulent payments and fictitious works to lack of planning and inefficient financial management".

The performance audit report of the scheme from April 2016 to March 2021 pointed out the failure of the authorities to conduct baseline and door-to-door survey for ensuring rights-based entitlement to eligible beneficiaries, resulting in the preparation of labour budget on basis of ad hoc figures.

During the audit, serious deficiencies in issuing and updation of job cards (JC) were noticed, and it also came to light that many job cards in 14 gram panchayats were executed in the name of dead individuals, their attendance recorded and payments made to them. Taking serious note of the lapse, the audit has recommended that the department fix responsibility of the erring officials for not conducting door-to-door survey, nonupdation of job cards, not preparing development plan and irregular change in the number and nature of works at block levels.

The audit team found the financial management inefficient as the department failed to utilise the available funds despite huge pending liabilities of Rs 426.90 crore. in the release of funds attracted interest liability of Rs 18.70 crore. Wide variations in the monitoring software (NREGASoft) and the certified financial accounts were also noted. To avoid delay in the utilisation of funds, the department has been asked to ensure that funds are released to the implementing agencies on time and timely payment of due wages made to the workers, besides taking steps to resolve the issue of nonpayment of unemployment allowance to the eligible beneficiaries. The report observed that the department did little for maintaining transparency in release of payments and for execution of works.

The mandatory records, like measurement books and muster rolls were not maintained and the NREGASoft system lacked necessary checks. The audit also unearthed cases of fraudulent payments and fictitious works, pointing out that the operational guidelines were not being followed. It has been recommended that the department should ensure updation of job cards and prepare the estimates for works as per laid-down norms.

The department also failed in ensuring timely disposal of complaints, constitution of vigilance cell, appointment of state and district quality monitors and farming of citizens' charter. For proper implementation of the scheme, the state employment guarantee council (SEGC) and the department have been advised to ensure intensive monitoring while the council may look at a state-level evaluation of the scheme. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/dead-men-working-and-paid-too-cag-report-on-mgnregs-in-punjab/articleshow/98489499.cms

3. Punjab debt Rs 2.6L crore, likely to cross Rs 5L cr in 10 years: CAG *(tribuneindia.com)* March 8, 2023

The way the state's finances are being managed, Punjab's public debt is likely to cross Rs 5 lakh crore in 10 years. This fact came to the fore in a report on 'State Finances' for 2021-22 prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General and tabled in the Assembly on Tuesday.

How borrowed funds were utilised

The state used the borrowed funds for meeting the current consumption and repayment of interest on outstanding loans but it is not a healthy trend. During 2017-22, the government utilised between 59% and 73% of its current borrowings for repayment of earlier borrowings. State incurred 64% of the total revenue expenditure on committed liabilities, leaving only 36% for the priority sector

-Subsidies constituted 11 per cent to 18 per cent of the revenue expenditure during 2017-22
-Power subsidy constituted a major portion of the total subsidies ranging between 68 per cent and 99 per cent
-During 2021-22, the government spent ? 8,010 crore (25 per cent of the borrowed funds) on capital expenditure which showed a notable improvement in utilisation of borrowed funds towards creation of concrete assets

The way out

-The government may consider forming a committee to assess the reasons for insufficient return on investment from statutory corporations, government companies, cooperative banks and societies and to suggest the remedial measures
-The state may ensure time-bound completion of the incomplete projects
-The government should mobilise its resources to minimise dependence on borrowings

The CAG observed that taking the past trends into account, by 2031-32, the projected outstanding debt stock will increase to Rs 5,14,697 crore approximately. “Resultantly, revenue deficit will increase to Rs 50,134 crore and the ratio of interest payment to revenue deficit will increase to 118 per cent,” the CAG observed.

During the five years of the Congress rule, former Finance Minister Manpreet Badal repeatedly made claims about bringing the state out of the financial mess but, during his tenure, the state added Rs 66,000 crore to the existing debt.

The CAG observed that the total debt had been on the rise as it increased by 33.89 per cent from Rs 1,95,152 crore in 2017-18 to Rs 2,61,281 crore in 2021-22, which included the outstanding long-term loans raised by the state government for one-time settlement of Legacy Cash Credit Accounts for food procurement operations during 2016-17; issuing of bonds for clearing debts of Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) in compliance with the implementation of the Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY) during 2015-17.

As far as debt maturity and repayment profile is concerned, the state has to repay 24.92 per cent (Rs 90,545 crore) of its public debt within three years, 14.58 per cent (Rs 52,959 crore) between 3-5 years, 16.76 per cent (Rs 60,891 crore) between 5-7 years and 20.38 per cent (Rs 74,028 crore) between 7-10 years. It signifies that the state has to repay 76.64 per cent of its debt (Rs 2,78,425.29 crore) in 10 years.

As per the CAG, the state will have to repay a public debt of Rs 27,843 crore (including approximate interest in respect of debt outstanding at the end of 2021-22) annually till 2031-32. “In addition to the debt outstanding at the end of 2021-22, the state will have to resort to further borrowings every year to cover the resource gap, which will result in increase in debt and more funds being utilised for repayment of earlier borrowings,” the report said. https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/state-debt-2-6l-crore-likely-to-cross-5l-cr-in-10-years-cag-486142

4. Congress govt in Punjab had Rs 52,000 crore surplus in its last fiscal for development: CAG *(indianexpress.com)* March 8, 2023

Rebellion, subsequent coup and change of the guard in Punjab Congress in 2021-22 fiscal during its regime cost development of the state as the Amarinder Singh-led government could not utilise an amount of Rs 52,834.52 crore it had saved in its kitty for the election year.

According to a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), “During 2021-22, an expenditure of Rs 1,26,570.48 crore was incurred against a total budget provision of Rs 1,79,405.00 crore resulting in total savings of Rs 52,834.52 crore. Out of the total savings, an amount of Rs 42,039.66 crore (79.57% of savings) was surrendered during the year. All surrenders were made on the last day of the financial year.”

Sources said that the Amarinder Singh government had planned to pump in the amount (Rs 52,834.52 crore) to carry out massive development work ahead of 2022 assembly elections in the state. The government was able to generate excess funds after Centre enhancing the FRBM

(Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) limit during the Covid pandemic to allow the states to tide over economic crises then.

However, rebellion started brewing in the Congress over several issues that resulted in a coup and finally in the removal of Amarinder Singh as chief minister in September 2021. Congress leader Charanjit Singh Channi was handed over the baton. Amarinder Singh's government spent several months in handling the rebellion as the then AICC chief Sonia Gandhi had constituted a panel headed by Mallikarjun Kharge to look into the infighting.

"This did not give him time to utilise the money for development in the state. Every MLA was promised Rs 5 crore to be utilised in their constituencies. But when the CM of the day is running to Delhi with files to defend himself to his party leadership, how would he concentrate on the state," said a government functionary, who was also in the thick of things during the Amarinder Singh government. Channi virtually got three months and spent whatever he could, the source added. "But it was not easy to float a development scheme in three months, call tenders and then start the projects. That is why 79.75% of the money available was surrendered.

CAG rap

Criticising the then government, the CAG – in its report tabled in Punjab Vidhan Sabha on Tuesday – said that the state government's budgetary process was not sound during the year and there were savings under several grants. Expenditure of Rs 3,492.28 crore was incurred without making budget provision.

"In 24 cases, augmentation of provision of funds by re-appropriation orders proved unnecessary because expenditure did not come even to the level of the budget provisions. Anticipated savings of Rs 10,794.86 crore were not surrendered leaving no scope for utilising these funds for other developmental purposes. Excess expenditure of Rs 37,737.49 crore incurred during 2015-20 required regularisation."

Debt trap

The CAG has also commented on the debt trap that the state is in. Its report said, "As on March 31, 2022, market loans amounting to Rs 1,93,598 crore (including UDAY bonds) along with interest were due for repayment. The state will have to repay market loans of Rs 59,940 crore (31%) (Rs 55,250 crore as principal and Rs 4,690 crore as interest) during the next five years, i.e. up to 2026-27. Market loans of Rs 85,281crore (44%) (Rs 79,278 crore as principal and Rs 6,003 crore as interest) will have to be repaid in subsequent five years period up to 2031-32. This means that in the next five years (2022-27), on an average, the state will have to make repayment of Rs 11,988 crore annually of the market loans which will go up to Rs 17,056 crore in the subsequent five years (2027-32). Remaining Rs 48,378 crore (25%) (Rs 45,214 crore as principal and Rs 3,164 crore as interest) will be repayable after 2032.

The report further said, "The state government stated (December 2022) that the state of Punjab had incorporated a Debt Management Unit in the Department of Finance that had been actively looking at the maturity profile of the debt and taking proactive steps to avoid regions of high concentration. The state has been extending the yield curve by issuing long-term securities.

"Revenue expenditure met out of net available borrowings ranged between 12% and 28%. Net capital expenditure ranged between 4 per cent and 8 per cent during the period 2017-21 except for the year 2019-20 when it was 31%. The borrowed funds were being used mainly for meeting current consumption and repayment of earlier borrowings instead of capital creation/development activities. However, during 2021-22, the state government spent Rs 8,010 crore (25% of the borrowed funds) on capital expenditure which showed notable improvement in utilisation of borrowed funds towards creation of concrete assets."

The CAG has now suggested that the state government may consider forming a committee to assess the reasons for insufficient return on investment from statutory corporations, government companies, cooperative banks and societies and to suggest the remedial measures.

The CAG has suggested that the state may ensure time-bound completion of the incomplete projects, the state government should mobilise its resources to minimise dependence on borrowings.

It may place on record the debt servicing capacity of the institutions before providing guarantees/loans.

Future guarantees/loans may be predicated on furnishing of the audited accounts of the entities concerned to whom guarantees are provided. https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/congress-punjab-amarinder-singh-rs-52000-crore-development-cag-report-8485120/

5. 16 public firms at 14,712cr loss, must liquidate: CAG *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)*
Mar 8, 2023

Chandigarh: The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has recommended a sell-off of the Punjab government's 16 inactive state public sector enterprises (SPSEs), as they have accumulated losses of over Rs 14,712 crore and the net worth of 13 of these SPSEs has eroded to Rs 8,263 crore, against an equity investment of Rs 529 crore.

A CAG audit report, which has asked the state government to take a policy decision for the liquidation process of SPSEs, was tabled in the Punjab legislative assembly on Tuesday. The figures, according to the CAG report, date to March 31 last year.

The CAG report for 2021-22 observed that these 16 inactive SPSEs were neither contributing to Punjab's economy nor meeting intended objectives.

It has come to the fore that many of these SPSEs were not generating sufficient revenue to meet their expenses on loan interest. It was also observed that out of the total loss of Rs 440 crore incurred by 17 SPSEs in Punjab, loss of Rs 396 crore was incurred by three SPSEs - Punjab Agro Foodgrain Corporation Limited, Punjab State Grains Procurement Corporation Limited and Punjab State Civil Supplies Corporation Limited.

The report highlighted that of the 16 SPSEs, four are under liquidation. These inactive SPSEs have investment of Rs 57.23 crore. The investment towards capital is Rs 23.24 crore (state government's Rs 17.05 crore and others' Rs 6.19 crore) and long-term loans of Rs 33.99 crore (state government's Rs 14.71 crore and others Rs 19.28 crore). "This is a critical area as investments in inactive SPSEs do not contribute to the economic growth of the state," mentioned the report.

Top-three SPSEs which contributed to maximum profit totalling Rs 1,595 crore are: Punjab State Power Corporation Limited, Punjab State Warehousing Corporation and Punjab State Transmission Corporation Limited. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/16-public-firms-at-14712cr-loss-must-liquidate-cag/articleshow/98489507.cms

6. 'Congress govt spent ₹3.4k cr without budget in last fiscal'
(timesofindia.indiatimes.com) Updated: Mar 9, 2023

Chandigarh: Pointing out that the previous Punjab government of the Congress spent Rs 3,492 crore in the year 2021-22 without setting aside this money in the original budget or supplementary demands, the comptroller and auditor general (CAG) has advised the state government to prepare realistic financial estimates backed by correct assessment of resources and potential.

In its report tabled during the Vidhan Sabha's ongoing budget session on Tuesday, the CAG has claimed that Punjab's budgetary system was not up to the mark in the last financial year, as the money's overall utilisation was 70.55% of grants and appropriations. Manpreet Singh Badal was finance minister between 2017 and 2022.

The report reads that: "There were savings under several grants. In 24 cases, augmentation of money provision by reappropriation orders proved unnecessary, because the expenditure did not come even to the budgeted level. Anticipated savings of Rs 10,794 crore were not surrendered, leaving no scope for utilising these funds for other purposes."

It came to the fore that Rs 4,699 crore of savings under 17 grants and seven appropriations were not surrendered, while the savings under some grants were surrendered on the last day of March 2022. Under seven major heads, more than 50% of the expenditure was done in March 2022. The audit revealed that the allocations based on unrealistic proposals that overstretched the potential of resource mobilisation, besides poor monitoring, weak implementation, lack of internal control, were behind an expenditure rush at the fag-end of that year. Excessive savings under some heads deprived the other departments of funds. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/congress-govt-spent-3-4k-cr-without-budget-in-last-fiscal/articleshow/98489489.cms

7. कैग रिपोर्ट में खुलासा: पंजाब की 14 ग्राम पंचायतों में 18 'मृतकों' से करा दिए विकास कार्य
(bhaskar.com) Updated: Mar 8, 2023

पंजाब में 14 ग्राम पंचायतों में 18 मृतकों को विकास कार्य करते हुए पाया गया है। इन मृतकों की हाजिरी भी मनरेगा रजिस्टरों में लगातार लगती रही और जॉब कार्ड भी अपडेट होते रहे। ये खुलासा कंट्रोलर एंड

ऑडिट जनरल ऑफ इंडिया (कैग) की साल 2023 की पहली रिपोर्ट में हुआ है। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार पंजाब में मनरेगा के अमल को लेकर हर स्तर पर अनियमितताएं पाई गई हैं।

पंजाब में मनरेगा स्कीम के तहत गांवों में घर-घर जाकर कोई सर्वे नहीं किया जा रहा है ताकि उन परिवारों का पता लगाया जा सके, जिन्हें मनरेगा के तहत रोजगार की जरूरत है। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार फील्ड ऑडिट (सितंबर 2021 से अप्रैल 2022) के दौरान यह पाया गया कि 14 ग्राम पंचायतों में ऐसे 18 मामले सामने आए हैं, जहां पर मृतकों के नाम पर जॉब कार्ड बनाए गए थे और उनसे कई तरह के विकास कार्य करवाए जा रहे थे। इन मृतकों को नियमित भुगतान भी किया गया। हाजिरी रजिस्टर में उनका काम चल रहा था। कैग ने पंजाब सरकार को लिखा है कि ऐसे मामलों की जांच करवाई जाए।

315 मामलों में परिवार के दो सदस्यों को जारी किए जॉब कार्ड कैग ने 37 पंचायतों में 315 ऐसे मामलों को भी पकड़ा है, जिनमें एक एक ही परिवार को दो जॉब कार्ड जारी किए गए थे। करीब 31 ऐसे जॉब कार्ड धारक भी मिले जो कि दोनों जॉब कार्ड पर काम कर भुगतान भी ले रहे थे। https://www.bhaskar.com/local/chandigarh/news/in-14-gram-panchayats-of-punjab-18-dead-got-development-work-done-131014590.html

8. CAG pulls up NAAC for discrepancies in processes *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)*
Updated: Mar 9, 2023

MUMBAI: The office of the Comptroller and Auditor Ceneral (CAG) has pulled up the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for glaring "discrepancies" in its assessment processes. The country's quality assessment body awarded "arbitrary grade points" to several higher education institutes (HEI) across the nation, the CAG has said in a note sent to NAAC with queries, asking it to respond.

The CAG went through confidential peer-team assessment reports of NAAC and in its note, pointed to discrepancies in several cases, with observations not matching with the scores given.

'Why award points for absent indicators?'
Pulling up NAAC for 'discrepancies' in its assessment processes for accreditation of higher education institutes across the nation, the CAG has cited several examples, like when the peer team visited a college in Bellampally, Andhra Pradesh, for inspection, it was found that unwanted waste was being burnt in the open, which caused air pollution. For this act, the college was awarded the highest score of four marks. In another instance, Bhavana Trust College of Commerce, Deonar was lauded for being on "the path to becoming plastic- free" but merely given one mark, zero being the lowest.

Another college, which did not prepare or adhere to the academic time-table, was given a score of four, as was one more which did not celebrate national days or sensitise students towards their constitutional obligations. "There are discrepancies in 29% of test-checked cases, i.e., 41 out of the total 133 HEIs (higher educational institutes)," noted the CAG.

The auditor's note sent to the NAAC director asked why high-grade points were given for indicators like green energy or rainwater harvesting despite the fact that such facilities were not installed at institutes. In some cases, high points were given for aspects about which colleges were silent in their report submissions. Random cross-verification of reports of certain institutions by the auditors also showed that grades awarded by peer team members were not in line with the submission made by colleges, the note said.

On Tuesday, NAAC issued a note stating that its assessment was "done transparently and professionally" and that its processes were "robust, transparent, ICT-driven and automated." https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/cag-pulls-up-naac-for-discrepancies-in-processes/articleshow/98503926.cms?from=mdr

9. Vouchers in support of claimed expenses missing: CAG report *(theshillongtimes.com)* March 09, 2023

SHILLONG, March 8: The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report for the year ending March 31, 2014, has detected irregularities in the expenditure of discretionary grants in the KHADC.

As per the report, which was tabled in the recently concluded budget session of the KHADC, Rs 14.50 lakh was sanctioned as discretionary grants to Council members with stipulation that necessary Utilisation Certificate (UCs) be submitted against the claim.

The CAG stated that the sanction, however, had no stipulation regarding furnishing of necessary vouchers in the support of the expenditure claimed.

“Scrutiny of the records revealed that during 2013-2014, against the sanction, 29 members submitted claims with KHADC for release of Rs 14.50 lakh as discretionary grants. The claims were, however, submitted together with the UCs for the amount claimed on the same date without any support vouchers against the expenditure incurred,” the CAG stated in its report.

Secretary of the Executive Committee in the KHADC made payment of Rs 14.50 lakh as discretionary grants without any supporting vouchers, the CAG revealed. It further observed that in the absence of necessary vouchers evidencing proper utilisation of grants, the veracity of expenditure of Rs 14.50 lakh incurred out of KHADC’s fund could not be ascertained.

Meanwhile, as per the report for the year ending March 31, 2015, the KHADC sanctioned Rs 13.75 lakh as discretionary grants during 2014-2015 to its members.

Again, the sanction had no stipulation regarding furnishing of necessary vouchers in support of the expenditure claimed, the CAG report said.

Scrutiny of the records revealed that during 2014-2015 against the sanction, 28 members submitted claims with KHADC for release of Rs 13.75 lakh as discretionary grants. “The claims were, however, submitted together with the UCs for the amount claimed on the same date without any support vouchers against the expenditure incurred,” the CAG stated in the report.

“No comments were offered by the council on the audit observation. The council should have clearly defined objectives and activities that need to be taken up by the members for utilisation of discretionary grants. Council may also maintain proper accounts along with relevant supporting documents to ensure utilisation of DG for bonafide purposes," the CAG stated in the report. https://theshillongtimes.com/2023/03/09/vouchers-in-support-of-claimed-expenses-missing-cag-report/

10. Uttarakhand: With no disaster management plan in place, earthquake fear stalks the state *(citizenmatters.in)* Mar 8, 2023

The land in the hill towns, not just in Joshimath, is sinking. Unusual climate events are a distinct probability. Earthquakes cannot be ruled out, given that that the entire state of Uttarakhand lies in a highly sensitive seismic zone. All this adds up to the possibility of a worst case scenario in case of major natural disaster, which experts do not rule out, especially once the rains set in.

And the state government is ill prepared to meet such a calamity if it occurs.

One indication of this lack of seriousness is the proposal to appoint an engineer as the head of the Landslide Mitigation and Management Centre, instead of an eminent geologist. The setting up of such a centre was cleared by the state cabinet in August 2022. The proposed appointment has drawn flak from the scientific community.

Land subsidence, as happened in Joshimath and other places in Uttarakhand, is just one problem the people of the state face. The recent devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria has again brought to the fore the dangers of a similar catastrophe in the Himalayas which is one of the most geologically fragile areas. More than 700 small intensity earthquakes occur beneath the Himalayas every year which point towards the vulnerability of the entire Himalayan region to such an occurrence.

Which underlines the need for the state, always prone to natural disasters, to be well prepared to meet any such eventuality. But there is little confidence that the state is taking the necessary steps to strengthen its disaster management systems.

Recurring disasters, poor management

Although the state was the first in the country to have a separate disaster management ministry, past experience of disaster management shows that civilian administration virtually crumbled when faced with such an event. It was the personnel of the National level Disaster Relief Force, army, police and para-military personnel deployed who actually provided the needed relief to the affected population.

Uttarakhand has been facing natural disasters frequently. The state is seeing major road and other construction projects whose ecological effects have been repeatedly ignored, triggering natural disasters in the mountains in the shape of floods, landslides, earthquake, forest fires, cloud bursts or snow avalanches.

The fear is that the current year could see some or all of these disasters occurring. The scale of which could be unprecedented.

Claims versus reality

Past experiences have shown that any disaster in the mountains is more problematic to deal with, because of topography and inaccessibility to the affected areas. The past two earthquakes in the Uttarakhand region, namely in Uttarkashi in 1991 and Chamoli in 1999, had amply shown the inadequacy of the state government machinery to deal with such natural calamities. Rescue, relief and rehabilitation work by the local authorities was done in an unscientific and ad-hoc manner, often leaving victims to fend for themselves.

Similar is the situation at Joshimath presently. Successive governments have failed to learn any lessons from past experiences. Despite having a new ministry of disaster management, questions remain on how well the state is prepared to manage a disaster of bigger magnitude.

Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority officials claim they have trained people right up to the village panchayat level on what to do, particularly in case of an earthquake. Awareness and training campaigns and mock drills are regularly held at the ground level with an aim to cover all the villages of the state. Efforts are also on to have village level disaster management plans.

"We have been asked not to talk to media on the issue, only senior officials are authorised to talk," said Piyush Rautela, Executive Director of Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority, who is well experienced in disaster management. Officials claim that equipment required for any disaster is already with the panchayats and SDRF, police, panchayat members and District Disaster Mitigation Officers who are regularly trained and oriented to meet any such eventuality.

Rapid urbanisation due to internal migration to district headquarters, towns and cities from rural areas and mushrooming of constructions on hill slopes has put many more human lives in danger in case of a quake. Especially the many buildings that have come up in the vulnerable seismic zones like Mussoorie, Nainital and Rajpur in the foothills of Mussoorie.

As per a survey of Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority, 19,000 government buildings including schools and hospitals are vulnerable to earthquake.

There is no special disaster management plan keeping in view the state's unique geographic and topographical conditions. Past experience has shown that people are left to the mercy of the elements during the crucial first 24 hours after such a disaster, as the civil machinery takes a long time to react. This was seen during the Kedarnath deluge in June 2013 and many other disasters of smaller magnitude, when no relief reached the victims in the first 24-48 hours.

State's slow response

A performance audit report in 2015, prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) on the 2013 Kedarnath flash floods, blamed the state government of the time for being unprepared and failing to learn from previous natural disasters.

The report rapped the state government for its slow response which, it says, actually aggravated the disaster that caused widespread destruction in five hill districts.

Need of the hour

There is an urgent need to formulate a disaster management strategy for the hilly areas with active participation of the local communities taking into consideration the unique geographic conditions.

“The disaster management strategy should be community-oriented and should focus on primary schools where locals, teachers and villagers should be involved in preparing for any such eventuality,” said Padma Bhushan Dr Anil Joshi, head of Himalayan Environmental Science and Environmental Studies (HESCO), a voluntary body.

“The nature of the disasters striking any particular region should be identified and the vulnerable areas like landslide prone, seismically active, cloud burst or snow avalanche prone areas should be mapped and identified”.

Specialised scientific institutes like Geological Survey of India, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, and specific departments of various universities particularly located in the hill states should come up with maps identifying the various disaster prone areas so that planners, officials and the public could be aware of the dangers.

These institutes can also act as centres for human resources development, providing specialised training to officials, employees, youth and women who can be roped in for help during a disaster. The training and skill development would prepare people for better management of the rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts.

These agencies and groups should not only be made aware of the types of disasters likely to strike and the areas likely to be affected but provided training and orientation courses from time to time to deal with any kind of calamity.

The rural mountain areas require a different kind of approach since most of the villages are inaccessible and away from the main roads. It had been seen that the villagers found it extremely difficult to carry their injured to the road heads to be transported to the main hospitals. Similarly, a separate strategy should be adopted for the urban areas of the hill states, which are densely populated.

Disasters strike without warning. This fact calls for preparedness to be maintained at every level of government administration and voluntary sector. “The disaster preparedness in Uttarakhand needs to be spruced up,” says Anoop Nautiyal who heads an NGO Social Development of Communities (SDC). “We have the excellent ‘Orissa Model’ to emulate which worked exceptionally well to manage a natural disaster like cyclone. The preparedness should be in totality”. Nautiyal had earlier headed the emergency ambulance service 101 in the state.

The Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority (USDMA) and its’ earlier version, the Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre (DMMC) said that it has already trained thousands of personnel particularly among police and revenue officials, and holds regular 20-day training programme at the National Institute of Mountaineering, SSB Gwaldam and Himalayan Adventure Institute, Kempty.

The proof of that will lie in the response to a future disaster, which experts says, is inevitable.

Earthquake resistant housing techniques taught by Laurie Baker forgotten

It was the abandonment of traditional knowledge in using earthquake resistant techniques in building construction that led to have damage to life and property in the Uttarkashi 1991 and Chamoli 1999 earthquakess.

Well known architect, the late Laurie Baker, a staunch proponent of using low cost local materials in construction, had visited Uttarakhand thrice to share with villagers and local masons the techniques to build earthquake resistant houses using local materials. He held a workshop with 22 local masons at Budna village in Ghansali tehsil of Tehri Garhwal district (when)

Baker had also trained 15 masons at Joshimath in Chamoli district telling them to retain traditional wisdom in building houses. His practical wisdom and his sketches were collected and put together as a manual for constructing quake resistant and low cost houses in the Himalayan region. His techniques soon faced a major test when the Chamoli earthquake struck on March 29, 1999.

The houses built by built stood strong while so many other cement and steel building collapsed. Unfortunately, today few remember Laurie Baker or traditional wisdom in building houses.
https://citizenmatters.in/uttarakhand-joshimath-natural-disaster-management-earthquake-32983

11. Much ado about nothing *(telanganatoday.com)* 9 MARCH 23

Hyderabad: In the AAP liquor policy for 2021-22, the government has nothing to do with the sale of liquor in the State and permitted private shops to do. It was implemented in Nov 2021. Manish Sisodia was the Minister in charge of the Excise Department. The AAP government claims that its liquor policy was aimed to end the liquor mafia and black marketing, increase revenue, improve consumer experience and ensure equitable distribution of liquor vends.

The AAP government also claimed that there is no such thing as a liquor scam and that they formulated the best and most transparent policy in the country. The Delhi government also gave certain relaxations to sellers, such as permission to offer discounts to consumers to boost sales and to set their own prices irrespective of the MRP of the product.

The government reported a substantial 27% increase in income from the policy, generating around Rs 8,900 crore.

Brewing Trouble

But, the Economic Offences Wing of Delhi Police, which is under the control of the BJP Government at the Centre, started creating trouble. As a follow-up action, supposedly on some report of the then Chief Secretary, Delhi, that Sisodia bent rules and violated the law and provided undue benefits to liquor licensees, the Lt Governor – who again is a nominee and representative of the BJP government at the Centre – sought a CBI investigation. Later, at the insistence of the Lt Governor, the 2021-22 liquor policy was scrapped in July 2022.

Now in this entire liquor policy, the allegations are that there were financial quid pro quo transactions by Sisodia and that more than a hundred crores were received as kickbacks from the liquor licensees, labelled as South Group, who benefitted from Sisodia.

At the insistence of the Lt Governor, the witch-hunting started with the CBI getting into the field, followed by the ED.

Common Knowledge

The basic question any person with common legal knowledge would ask is: the liquor policy is an Executive Act of the State, and the financial implications of it would be considered and scrutinised during the audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. If there are irregularities found, including financial, the CAG would surely be duty-bound to point them out and hold the government to task.

Here, simply on the complaint of the Chief Secretary, Delhi, the action had been initiated. It clearly appears that the Central government, which is at loggerheads with AAP, was waiting for the slightest and lamest excuse to jeopardise and destabilise the AAP government.

On the face of it, this so-called liquor scam remains only in allegations and it is highly doubtful if it can come to any legal conclusions or see the light of day.

It is to be seen that the ED and the CBI, along with the I-T department, have become not just parrots in cages singing the tune of the powers at the Centre, but over the years have come to be subservient to the Central government under whose control they are working, instead of acting as per law and not at the will, want and wish of the persons in power.

A recent example of how these supposed to be independent agencies are being manipulated is the case of the Election Commissioner of India, wherein the Supreme Court refused to let the Election Commissioner be any agent of the Central government and so, formed a committed with the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India and the leader of opposition in Parliament, thereby making it clear that these agencies, including the Election Commissioner, are acting as agents of the persons in power at Centre.

Blatent Misuse

In its long course of history, it is seen how blatantly the ED had been misused and used as an agency of harassment, victimisation and ruination against all those who were not in line with the party in power. It is said that about 51 cases arising out of PMLA (Prevention of Money

Laundering Act) are pending against Members of Parliament and 71 are pending against Members of the Legislative Assembly in our country.

This clearly establishes how these central investigative agencies are being used as tools to carry out political vindictiveness. It is to be seen that the ED cases never stood the scrutiny of courts of law and a vast majority of cases die a failure death.

It is not yet out of public memory when the BJP harassed the then Congress government under the leadership of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the 2G Scam. The BJP went out hammer and tongs on this issue and discredited the Manmohan Singh government, created a political storm that he was heading a corrupt government and wiped him out in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. After the BJP's victory, the said 2G scam vanished. After six years, it came to be like Shakespeare's 'Much ado about nothing.'

The same policy is being adopted now in the liquor scam with the targeting parties being AAP and the BRS, which apparently the BJP is unable to touch in any which manner. These two parties are rock firm in their respective States. So, the only way for the BJP is to bring back its earlier strategy and create a story, sensationalise it and blow it to huge proportions to make it look like a scam of the decade.

The saddest part is once the persons surrender to those in power at the Centre, action against them is dropped and the same accused persons are absorbed into the BJP and given full protection. They turn from sinners to saints. We have standing examples of Sujana Chowdary and CM Ramesh from Andhra Pradesh. The same happened in West Bengal and Assam where leaders of the Trinamool Congress and the Congress respectively were threatened by these agencies and absorbed into the BJP. All cases against them died a natural death.

In Telangana, the BJP does not have a strong or massive people base. The Congress too is on the weakest turf in the State. To throw out the BRS is not an easy job. Neither the BJP nor the Congress has a people's leader like K Chandrashekhar Rao. Hence, the saffron party has one and only way– discredit Rao.

The Supreme Court must follow a similar approach as it has done in the case of the Election Commissioner and form Appointing/Selection Committees consisting of the PM, CJI and the leader of the House in Parliament for appointing heads of the central agencies like the ED, the CBI and Income Tax to ensure fairness and transparency and help these departments act without fear and favour, and only in pursuance of law and purposes as ordained by law. https://telanganatoday.com/opinion-much-ado-about-nothing

12. Why Adani's mega project plans in AP are unlikely to go the Ras Al Khaimah way *(thefederal.com)* 9 March, 2023

Adani Group's investments in Andhra Pradesh are the highlight of the two-day Global Investment Summit, held on March 3-4 in the coastal city of Visakhapatnam.

Amid the disastrous fallout of the Hindenburg report and call for investigation into Adani's investment in Andhra Pradesh by activists, the undeterred Gautam Adani-led group announced a mega investment programme for the state.

The proposed investments are spread across sectors as wide as ports, power, cement, logistics, edible oil and data centres. The Adani Group wants to partner with AP in Corporate Social Responsibility (CRS) programmes as well. There is even talk that the group is looking to acquire the public sector Vizag Steel Plant.

Widespread footprint

When placed on a map, Adani's footprint can be seen in every district of Andhra Pradesh in one form or the other, reminiscent of the hype generated by Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) 15 years ago.

Between 2004 and 2009, when Congress strongman YS Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR) was the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Ras Al Khaimah was the buzzword.

RAK, one of the seven emirates of the UAE, was unknown in the state till then. Overnight, the tiny but wealthy emirate of the UAE acquired fame in Andhra Pradesh. YSR visited the emirate in July 2005, exactly a year after he swept to power in 2004, defeating the TDP's Chandrababu Naidu.

In an unusual move, crown prince and deputy leader Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi rolled out the red carpet for him. The visit made RAKIA, the investment authority of the RAK, a major player in YSR's development narrative.

RAKIA here, RAKIA there

RAKIA was seen everywhere. A bauxite mining project with an investment of $2 billion was planned in the thick of reserved forest in the then Visakhapatnam district. Then, RAKIA proposed to develop a financial hub and a healthcare city at a cost of ₹22,500 crore. Even 471 acres of land was also allocated to the project, known as Hyderabad Economic City (HEC).

Another massive project RAKIA was offered was the Vadarevu and Nizampatnam Ports and Industrial Corridor (VANPIC) in Prakasam district at a cost of ₹16,900 crore. The project involved the development of two ports, port corridors and a string of small ports all along the 900-km-long coastline of AP. With VANPIC, it was said, the state would become the maritime capital of India.

Investment déjà vu?

At the recent investment summit, Karan Adani, the scion of the Adani empire, laid out the road map of the group, which looks like a photocopy of RAK's programme.

He said the group would invest about ₹20,000 crore soon in various projects in the state. The group is now operating two important ports, Krishnapatnam and Gangavaram. In the next five years, it would not only double the capacity but also transform these ports into industrial port cities.

The group wants to develop a renewable power project with a combined capacity of 15,000 MW across five districts — Anantapur, Kurnool, Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram. It is already working on developing a 400 MW data centre in Visakhapatnam. The group also proposes to set up cement plants in Kadapa and Nadikudi (Guntur district) with a combined capacity of 10M tonnes per annum. Karan said the Adani Group is committed to the state's port-based development vision.

"Our footprint in the state of Andhra Pradesh is getting bigger as I speak on this occasion," he announced proudly.

RAK dream gone sour

While the parallels are tangible, it must be recalled that Ras Al Khaimah's plans fell apart. YSR's government managed to get the necessary clearances, but the projects could not get enough support after his fatal helicopter crash in 2009. Subsequent Congress chief ministers did not favour them due to charges of corruption.

N Kirankumar Reddy, who was the Chief Minister between November 2010 and March 2014, cancelled the deals signed with RAK following the Opposition's outcry and CBI investigations. The Hyderabad Economic City proposal was cancelled in 2012, as was the much talked about VANPIC deal, touted to develop AP into the maritime capital of India, in 2013.

Later, massive protests from tribal people and environment activists made the prestigious bauxite project a non-starter. In February 2007, an MoU was signed between the government of RAK and the government of Andhra Pradesh to set up an alumina plant and smelter in AP.

Since the area falls in the 'reserved forest' of Visakhapatnam where no private mining is allowed, the state roped in AP Mineral Development Corporation to mine the bauxite to AnRak, the executive agency to circumvent the ban. A report by University of East Anglia research scholar Patrik Oskarsson thoroughly exposed the dark side of the MoU — official collusion and suppression of information, undervaluation of mineral wealth and huge loss to exchequer.

This led the Union Tribal Welfare Ministry to oppose the project despite clearances by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Union Tribal Welfare Minister Kishore Chandra Deo, who hails from the area, wrote a letter to the then governor to annul the MoU using his discretionary powers.

YSR govt in dock

The main complaint against the YSR government was why the state government had favoured private companies like Jindal South West (JSW) and RAKIA with little experience in the bauxite sector over public sector NALCO, which was also an interested party.

In his report, Oskarsson wrote: “When private companies with no previous experience in alumina or aluminium production were selected ahead of an experienced and profitable public sector company which could have operated entirely in the Scheduled Areas, the AP government was in effect choosing a more difficult solution with less potential for public income.”

The CAG also reported gross undervaluation of the ore in its 2013 report. The TDP government, which came to power in 2014, was in two minds about cancelling the project since it was the TDP government led by N Chandrababu Naidu that had first mooted the idea of bauxite mining. But the abduction of TDP leaders from the area who supported bauxite mining and the killing of one of them by Maoists finally clinched the issue. On November 16, 2015, Naidu’s cabinet resolved to put bauxite mining on hold.

Protests in forest

Adani’s Pumped Hydro storage power plant, proposed in the same forest zone that sounded the death knell for RAKIA’s bauxite project, is also facing the wrath of tribal people. The huge project will require thousands of acres of forest land which cannot be leased to the private sector as it falls in areas governed by the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.

Thousands of people facing the threat of displacement have upped the ante against the project. An action committee has been formed by tribal people to oppose the project. Mobilisation is taking place to organise protests in the forest on the lines of the anti-bauxite agitation, said committee convenor Bonangi Chinna Padal.

“We have submitted memoranda against the project to government officials. In the next phase we will intensify our agitation, as our people did in the case of bauxite,” Padal told The Federal.

Call for probe

Meanwhile, opposition is building up against the series of decisions taken by the state government in favour of the Adani Group, including the sale of stake held by the state in the Gangavaram port.

Former Union Secretary EAS Sarma wants a thorough probe by an independent agency into all decisions taken by the state government in favour of the Adani Group.

“The 130 acres of land allotted in Vizag to set up a data centre by Adani Group at throwaway price is objectionable. The market value of the land is about ₹4,000 crore. As per the land use policy of the state, the price of the land allotted to private agencies in the name of public purpose should not be less than 10 per cent of the market value. So, the price of the land should be ₹400 crore. But the state allotted this at a cost of a meagre ₹130 crore,” Sarma said. All Adani projects have their own share of serious complaints, according to him.

Silent opposition

Opposition TDP is intriguingly silent on the Adani Group getting such extraordinary favours from the state government.

The political situation in the 2010s was favourable for protests against decisions taken by the YSR government: weak Congress government, mass movements, and the opposition party's campaign against alleged corruption in the government. All these culminated in a CBI inquiry into every major decision taken by YSR in the areas of mining and ports. Ras Al Khaimah became persona non grata and was driven out.

But now, given Adani's political clout, Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's relationship with the Centre and weak opposition voice, despite widespread charges of irregularities by the government, it is difficult to assume that history would repeat itself in Andhra Pradesh. https://thefederal.com/states/south/andhra-pradesh/why-adanis-mega-project-plans-in-ap-are-unlikely-to-go-the-ras-al-khaimah-way/

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

13. Defence Ministry signs contracts for procurement of indigenously developed 70 Basic Trainer Aircraft, 3 Cadet Training Ships *(newsonair.com)* March 7, 2023

The Defence Ministry has signed the contracts with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Larsen & Toubro Limited for procurement of 70 HTT-40 Basic Trainer Aircraft and three Cadet Training Ships. The contract was signed in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Recently the government had approved the procurement of 70 HTT-40 trainer aircraft from HAL at a cost of over six thousand 800 crore rupees. The government had also signed a contract with L&T for acquisition of three Cadet Training Ships worth more than three thousand 100 crore rupees. HTT-40 Trainer Aircraft will meet the shortage of basic trainer aircraft of the Indian Air Force for training of newly-inducted pilots. The aircraft will be supplied over a period of six years. Cadet Training Ships will cater to the training of navy officer cadets. The ships will be indigenously designed, developed and constructed at L&T shipyard in Kattupalli, Chennai. The project will generate an employment of 22.5 lakh man-days over a period of four-and-half years. https://newsonair.com/2023/03/07/defence-ministry-signs-contracts-for-procurement-of-indigenously-developed-70-basic-trainer-aircraft-3-cadet-training-ships/

14. Living with extreme climate events *(financialexpress.com)* March 9, 2023

India needs early warning systems at the neighbourhood scale to plan for the alleviation of the impact of extreme climate events on the economy

Headlines tend to focus on how extreme events such as heatwaves have been made worse by global warming and how much worse they will get in the future. It is clear that the future is already here and heatwaves are becoming worse year after year, especially over North and North

West India. There has to be greater attention on protecting people, crops, and forests, and other living species from heatwaves. The most effective tool for managing heatwaves and other extreme events is the Early Warning System, at decision-timescales and at impact spatial-scales. The timescales are days to weeks and spatial scales are at the kilometre level.
The necessary scientific understanding exists for delivering early warning systems at critical timescales, and models are already delivering some of this. Even as IMD's skill on heatwave early warnings continues to improve, the last-mile gaps are still too large in making this information usable at the requisite temporal and spatial scales. Some background on the anatomy of heatwaves in the Indian subcontinent can highlight the challenges in improving the forecasts further.

Weather and climate models have made amazing advances in the last few decades. With the only 'given' being the energy from the sun at the top of the atmosphere, these models can predict all features of weather and climate, from the monsoon to active and break periods, El Niños and La Niñas, heatwaves, heavy rains, etc. Even as the models continue to get better, there are some shortcomings that are inevitable. Models have a high accuracy in predicting temperatures at continental scales but are not as sharp at the local levels. They are much less sharper at predicting rainfall at any scale.

India has invested over Rs 1,000 crore since 2009 on establishing and improving weather and climate models, which have yielded impressive results such as improved forecasts of weather, cyclones, and the monsoon. Cyclone forecasts save lives and property and greatly alleviate the worst of impacts. Far too many lives and properties are still lost each year, requiring that the forecasts system be made end-to-end to ensure that the improved forecasts reduce exposure, vulnerabilities, and risk for all.

When it comes to extreme events, two issues need urgent attention. The first is skillful forecasting over a continuum of timescales from short (1-3 days) and medium (3-10 days) to extended (2-4 weeks) ranges. The second is the downscaling of the forecast—typically at the order of 10 km—to neighbourhood scales. The three timescales together are generally referred to as subseasonal-to-seasonal or S2S forecasts. Subseasonal refers to timescales shorter than a season and is best thought of as the active/break periods of the monsoon. Other seasons over India are also dominated by this intrinsic subseasonal timescale.

India's forecast system continues to stay integrated with a unified system to deliver the forecasts at S2S timescales . The use of the S2S forecasts on the ground requires a so-called Ready-Set-Go approach developed under the auspices of the World Climate Research Program under the World Meteorological Organization. India is a member of the international S2S project. Ground-level adaptation of the Ready-Set-Go framework for managing heatwaves and other extremes is an urgent need for the country.

The extended-range forecasts serve the Ready step where resources are prepared in response to the longer-lead forecasts—the cooling centres, hydration packs, the hospitals, etc. The medium-range forecasts bring more specific information on where heatwaves are most likely and serve the Set step—preparing the workforce to handle the disaster and run a systems-check. The Go step relies on the skillful short-range forecasts for action on prevention, rescue and recovery.

The key step to sharpen the forecasts of the models, from scales of ~10 km to the village level of ~10 metres, relies on big data approaches using AI and machine learning. Many examples exist in India on such scaling; for example, the IMD forecasts have been rendered at farm-scales to issue advisories for irrigation and shown to save water without reducing crop yields. Such early warnings at scale have to be produced for water, agriculture, energy, transportation and health to manage the extreme events in temperature, rainfall, cyclones, and so on.

Once the Ready-Set-Go system is fully in place, all citizens need to be trained to ingest the information and reduce their own exposure and vulnerabilities to hydroclimatic hazards. Morbidities, mortalities, and losses in productivity and crop yield cost India significantly each year. Indian scientists, private sector, NGOs, and the government must work on advancing forecasts skills, focussed forecasts, and bringing science and technology to serve the public . India's sustained economic growth will be a great challenge without such early warning systems.
https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/living-with-extreme-climate-events/3002758/

15. Electricity transition in India's renewable-rich states needs to accelerate, says study *(india.mongabay.com)* 8 March 2023

To meet India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets, the centre and states must play a crucial role. However, renewable energy-rich states are not utilising their full energy potential, claims a report published by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), an international think-tank.

The report that appeared on February 26 found that Karnataka is leading in the transition to clean energy while Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal need to maximise their renewable energy potential. Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra, which were earlier front-runners in initiating reforms in the renewable sector, also falling behind in meeting their renewable potential, says the report. Progress has not been consistent across all the dimensions, particularly for Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, it adds.

Researchers analysed 16 Indian states that account for 90% of the country's annual power requirement on four key dimensions of electricity transition: decarbonisation, the power system's performance, power ecosystem readiness, and policy and political commitments.

Under decarbonisation, the researchers explored the state's preparedness to shift away from fossil-based power. They studied states' ability to incentivise greener market participation to understand the performance of the power system. For the third category (readiness of the power ecosystem), these researchers studied states' power system reliability to ensure electricity supply for the transition.

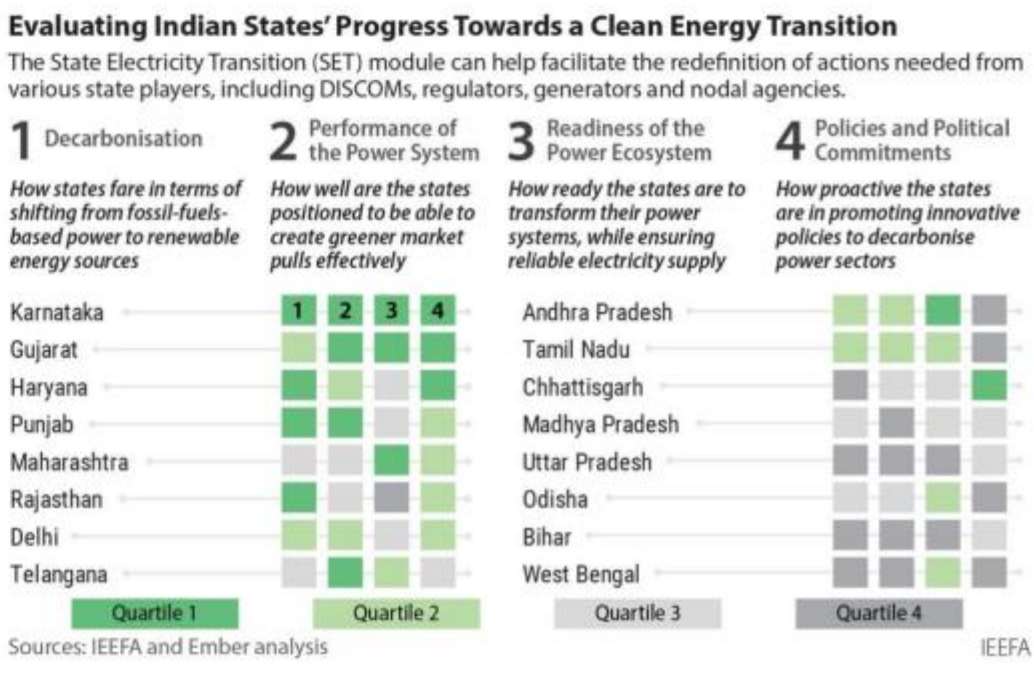
Underlining the importance of the electricity sector for achieving India's NDCs targets, the report says, "Most of the NDC targets have the electricity sector as the foundation. Hence, it is important to set crystallised pathways for transitioning the electricity sector in India."

The report explains the electricity transition as a means to move away from producing electricity through fossil fuels to producing power with renewable energy. This transition includes innovative policies, green market participation, efficient technologies, and reliable supply.

India's global commitments, made at the COP26 climate conference in 2021, includes 500 gigawatts (GW) of non-fossil electricity capacity, 50% cumulative electric power installed from non-fossil fuel resources, reducing carbon emissions by one billion tonnes and reducing emissions intensity of its GDP by 45%. The government has set a deadline of 2030 to achieve all these targets as well as achieve net zero by 2070.

Dependence on coal and old fleets slows down states
To understand the state's decarbonisation performance, the study looks at five criteria, including renewable energy mix in the state's power supply, the potential of renewable energy utilised, old coal power capacity in operation, the emission intensity of the power sector, and state energy efficiency index.

Based on these criteria, researchers found that states like Karnataka, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Haryana are doing well across parameters. Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh scored low on most parameters.



Source: IEEFA & Ember Analysis

Gujarat and Maharashtra, which are performers in the renewable sector, appeared mid-table in the ranking which came as a surprise.

The dependence on the coal sector emerged as one primary reason for those states that were ranked low. Gujarat still has a considerable proportion of older coal power plants in its coal fleet

(19%). Similarly, 19% of Maharashtra operational coal fleet is older than 25 years. Their renewable energy share in total energy capacity is 10% and 11%, respectively.

Among all the states, Uttar Pradesh had the highest share of coal power capacity older than 25 years (35%). States like Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and West Bengal, heavily dependent on coal, must catch up in utilising their renewable potential, says the report.

Performance of the power system

To study the state's power system, researchers delved into the performance of discoms (power distribution companies), outstanding payment to power developers, GDAM participation, and performance on individual renewable targets.

GDAM stands for Green Day Ahead Market. It is a green energy market mechanism where any entity can produce and supply renewable energy to discoms/states.

Karnataka again appeared on top here, followed by Punjab, Telangana, and Gujarat. Karnataka purchased and sold the highest electricity volume (~ 614 million units (MUs)). The southern state is also one of the few Indian states which crossed its renewable energy targets for the end of 2022. Gujarat purchased and sold just ~27MUs through GDAM, as per the report.

In this category, researchers also explored Aggregated Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses. It is a combination of energy due to several reasons, including technical, theft and losses due to inefficiency in billing. The Indian government has targeted to keep AT&C losses between 12%-15%. However, the report said RE-rich states like Rajasthan and Maharashtra lag because of AT&C losses. The loss stood at 18.9% in Maharashtra, while for Rajasthan, it was 18%.

In the discoms rating, Karnataka, which is the top performer in other categories, did not score well. Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal were the poorest in terms of performance of the power system.

Regarding achieving renewable targets, Telangana and Gujarat were other front-runners in terms of performance of power systems. Telangana is the best-performing state in meeting its renewable energy targets set for the end of 2022 (2 GW), with an installed capacity of 5 GW. Gujarat has installed 18 GW of renewable energy by September 2022.

Is the ecosystem ready?

To understand if states are ready for efficient electricity utilisation, the researchers looked into the quality of supply/power shortage, feeder segregation, smart metering, and electricity intensity of GDP. Installation of smart meters is meant to overcome metering issues, leading to reduced AT&C losses. Feeder segregation ensures two separate feeders for agricultural and non-agricultural connections to ensure timely action to manage power loads.

The report found that Karnataka has also exceeded its feeder segregation targets. It also completed 100 percent of its smart meter target. Andhra Pradesh also scored well in most of these parameters. Gujarat met its smart meter and segregation targets too. However, progress on many of these parameters appeared lagging for other RE-rich states like Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu.

For example, Rajasthan reported the highest shortage of power supply of 489MU in 2021-22. It also met only 39% of its feeder segregation target and 70% of its smart meter target. Tamil Nadu was also midway in the ranking in this segment because of the slow growth of feeder segregation.

While Bihar performed well in feeder segregation (218% success) and low intensity of the state GDP, it appeared lagging because of power shortage and poor smart meter coverage (45%).

Uttar Pradesh scored worst in smart meter progress with 29% coverage of its target. Haryana's smart meter coverage was 53%.

Punjab and Haryana moving towards transition

Haryana and Punjab showed surprising results, moving rapidly towards electricity transition, noted the report. Saloni Sachdeva Michael, Energy Analyst at IEEFA and one of the report's co-authors, told Mongabay-India that Haryana and Punjab were a pleasant surprise.

"Both states have better tapped into their RE potential than others. Haryana is utilising 19% of its RE potential, and Punjab is approximately 25%. If we look at the discom health and outstanding payments by the discoms to generators, both states have shown significant improvements. Punjab has reduced its overdue/owed payment from 116% in March 2018 to 53% in March 2022. For Haryana, this fraction increased from 88% in March 2018 to 91% in March 2022; despite the increase, it was still better than other states," she said.

Commenting on the lower RE intake of many states, Raghav Pachouri, leading Energy and Power sector modeling in Vasudha Foundation, told Mongabay-India that it is likely to be tackled with the proposed Electricity Amendment Bill, which makes RPO compliance mandatory and fines for defiance.

"The proposed Electricity Amendment Bill 2022 has a provision of imposing a penalty in case of non-compliance with Renewable power obligation (RPO). Further, the bill has also proposed that the RPO for a state should not be below the minimum percentage prescribed by the central government. These amendments will force states to integrate more RE in their electricity portfolio," he said. The bill, however, is yet to see the light of day. After getting introduced in the Lok Sabha was sent to a Parliamentary Committee for more scrutiny. https://india.mongabay.com/2023/03/electricity-transition-in-indias-renewable-rich-states-needs-to-accelerate-says-study/

16. Renewable subsidies on coal to result in lower emissions in India: Study *(business-standard.com)* March 08, 2023

Combining renewable subsidies and higher tariffs on coal would lower the emissions by nearly one-third in India by 2030 compared to the current policies, according to a study carried out by two IMF economists.

The study, conducted by Margaux MacDonald and John Spray, notes that the two steps would also decrease coal imports by 14 per cent by 2030, thus increasing resilience to global changes in energy prices and improving energy security.

Released on Tuesday, the study observes that India has made significant progress towards meeting its emissions reduction targets under the Paris Agreement, but with current policies total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions would nonetheless increase by more than 40 per cent by 2030.

While a modest increase in short-term emissions may be necessary to meet poverty reduction and energy security goals, a more rapid scaling up of current policies could help lower emissions considerably over the medium term and bring India closer to a path to net zero by 2070, it said.

The two economists said that their research shows an alternative emissions trajectory could be achieved by scaling up current policies.

One of our proposals includes a gradual increase in subsidies on the use of renewable energy coupled with higher taxes on emissions, in addition to the many targeted policies that India has focused on, it said.

This would have the added benefit of early reduction in the reliance on imported fuels, helping to ensure universal access to energy, and lessening the negative health effects of pollution.

External climate financing and technology transfer would help mitigate costs and ensure sustainability.

In our model, combining renewable subsidies and higher tariffs on coal (roughly equivalent to ramping up India's existing excise duty on coal) would result in nearly one-third lower emissions by 2030 compared to current policies, said the IMF paper.

In this scenario, growing energy demand is met through a gradual increase of renewable energy and by allowing coal power to taper off, thus exceeding the goal of 50 per cent non-fossil fuel electricity capacity. Under such a policy, not only would the share of renewables rise significantly but overall electricity supply would increase, it said.

While this policy has clear environmental benefits, the economists estimate that the policy will result in a modest reduction in the level of real gross domestic product (relative to projections based on current policies) as firms and consumers pay higher taxes.

However, enough fiscal revenues would be raised to compensate the poorest citizen to such an extent that the policy would be progressive overall. Additionally, the small cost of this policy is less distortionary than other options, they noted.

Lower emissions would have significant benefits. Increasing renewable energy usage and allowing coal to taper off in this policy scenario would lead to a 2.5 per cent reduction in pollution, saving lives and leading to fewer missed school and workdays. It would also decrease coal imports by 14 per cent by 2030, thus increasing resilience to global changes in energy prices and improving energy security, the IMF paper said. https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/renewable-subsidies-on-coal-to-result-in-lower-emissions-in-india-study-123030800145_1.html

17. Substandard foodgrains cause loss to national exchequer, detrimental to people's health: HC *(tribuneindia.com)* March 08, 2023

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has observed that substandard foodgrains not only cause loss to the national exchequer, but are also detrimental to the health of people across the country. The assertion by Justice Jasgurpreet Singh Puri came nearly 18 years after the CBI found that a “large number” of millers had stored rice below the prescribed standards during simultaneous raids at different centres across the state.

Assertion came 18 years after CBI probe

The assertion by Justice Jasgurpreet Singh Puri came nearly 18 years after the CBI found that a “large number” of millers had stored rice below the prescribed standards during simultaneous raids at different centres in the state.

Justice Puri also upheld the decision of the FCI’s board of directors permitting further business dealings with the millers after three or five years, as the case may be, subject to depositing the amount of loss suffered, along with the penal interest.

Taking up a bunch of four petitions filed by rice millers, Justice Puri observed the matter pertained to crop year 2004-2005.

The investigation was conducted by the CBI and even the challan was presented against a number of millers. Some FCI officials were also allegedly involved and even the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act were invoked.

Referring to the submissions in all the four writ petitions, Justice Puri observed the petitioners at no point of time averred that the stocks were not substandard. It was also stated that the petitioners were not at fault. There was, in fact, no evidence of them being at fault. At the same time, it is also averred that the stock might have deteriorated with the passage of time.

Justice Puri observed there was, however, no denial in clear terms regarding the allegations pertaining to the deteriorated rice stock. Rather, the stock found by the CBI during the raid was not up to the mark and did not conform to the specifications. The foodgrains after being processed became a part of the central pool coordinated by the FCI before being distributed across the nation for consumption by citizens.

Justice Puri also took note of the contentions by the counsel for the parties that some of the millers had deposited the amount. But the petitioners had not done so. The Bench, during the course of hearing, was on the other hand told by FCI counsel that the recoverable amount ran into “lakhs of rupees per petitioner”.

Dismissing the petitions, the Bench added the condition imposed by the Board of Directors could not be dubbed as harsh as substandard quality of the foodgrains had not been denied. Moreover, the decision itself had not been challenged. Only the forwarding letter was challenged.

As such, relief could not be claimed by the petitioners otherwise also. In the totality of facts and circumstances, the court did not find any merit in any of the four petitions. https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/substandard-foodgrains-cause-loss-to-national-exchequer-detrimental-to-peoples-health-hc-486163