NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS (09.05.2023)

1. Why are MiG-21s still in service in India despite several recent crashes? *(indiatoday.in)* 08 May 2023

The MiG-21 is often called the 'Flying Coffin' and the 'Widow Maker' for the sheer number of crashes it has suffered over the years, killing several pilots.

A MiG-21 fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force crashed during a routine training sortie near Suratgarh in Rajasthan on May 8, the Indian Air Force (IAF) said in a statement.

The pilot ejected safely from the aircraft, with minor injuries. The police said at least three civilians were killed and as many were injured on the ground, reported news agency PTI.

In a statement, the IAF said, "The pilot ejected safely, sustaining minor injuries. An inquiry has been constituted to ascertain the cause of the accident."

Bikaner's Inspector General of Police, Om Prakash, said the pilot made all efforts to avert human casualties and crash-landed on the outskirts of a village.

Over 2,000 people gathered at the crash spot and the police and administration are trying to maintain law and order, he said.

May 8, 2023: An Indian Air Force MiG-21 fighter jet crashed in Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district, leading to the deaths of two civilians on the ground. However, the pilot of the aircraft is safe.

July 28, 2022: An Indian Air Force MiG-21 trainer fighter jet crashed in Rajasthan, killing two pilots - Wing Commander M Rana and Flight Lieutenant Advitiya Bal.

December 24, 2021: Wing Commander Harshit Sinha died after the MiG-21 he was piloting crashed in Jaisalmer during a training sortie.

October 12, 2022: The Navy's MiG 29K fighter jet crashed off Goa coast. The pilot survived the crash.

August 25, 2021: A MiG-21 Bison aircraft crashed in Rajasthan's Barmer. The pilot was safe.

May 12, 2021: 28-year-old Squadron Leader Abhishek Choudhary was killed when his MiG-21 Bison crashed near Moga in Punjab after taking off from the Suratgarh airbase in Rajasthan.

March 17, 2021: Group Captain Ashish Gupta was killed when his MiG-21 crashed after taking off from the Gwalior airbase.

January 5, 2021: A MiG 21 Bison crashed in Rajasthan's Suratgarh. The pilot survived.

ABOUT MiG-21

The MiG-21 Bison is the first supersonic jet aircraft in the aviation history and also the most-sold fighter jet in the world. While it's more than 60 years old, the MiG-21 is still in service with the Indian Air Force, with four active squadrons, and has been updated to match Generation 3 fighter jets. The jets are currently being used only as Interceptors with a limited role as fighter jets and are mostly used for training exercises.

The Soviet Air Force - credited with designing the aircraft - removed it from service in 1985. By then, countries ranging from the US to Vietnam had inducted the aircraft into its air forces. After 1985, Bangladesh and Afghanistan removed it from service.

As for India, the aircraft was inducted into the air force in the 1960s and completed their retirement period in the mid-1990s. Despite this, they are still being upgraded. In October 2014, the air force chief said that India's security is threatened by the delay in removing the old aircraft from service because some parts of the fleet were outdated.

Further, being a single-engine aircraft means it is always under threat. The chance of a plane crash increases when a bird collides with it or the engine fails.

It is often called the 'Flying Coffin' and the 'Widow Maker' for the sheer number of crashes it has suffered over the years, killing several pilots.

WHY ARE THEY STILL IN SERVICE?

The Indian Air Force had to keep the MiGs in service longer due to the delays in the induction of new fighter aircraft. Due to the delays, the IAF is facing a crunch to maintain a certain squadron strength to guard India's skies.

Delays in the indigenous Tejas programme, political controversy surrounding the Rafale deal and the slow-paced procurement procedure meant that MiGs had to be kept in service longer than usual, beyond its retirement period - the mid-1990s.

RETIREMENT

July 2022: The Indian Air Force (IAF) drew up a three-year plan to phase out the remaining four MiG-21 fighter squadrons with one of them set to retire from service in September. The plan is to retire all the four MiG-21 squadrons by 2025, people familiar with the development said.

CAG ON MiG-29K

July 2016: MiG-29K planes face operation deficiencies, CAG said

India's mainstream naval fighter jet plane MiG-29K faces operational deficiencies due to defects in engines, airframe and fly-by-wire system leading to very low availability, top government auditor, the CAG, said.

How did the MiG-21 aircraft get the name of 'Flying Coffin'?

The MiG-21 aircraft, with all its versions, formed the backbone of the fleet of the fighter aircraft of the IAF, and the number of crashes in the IAF were the highest in this category. Most of these versions had been licence-produced in India.

There were many inquiries into the crashes amid allegations of poor safety record of these aircraft with more than 170 pilots killed in accidents, as per data from the Defence Ministry in the past. More than 20 aircraft have crashed since 2010 and 38 between 2003 and 2013. The high rate of accidents earned the aircraft the nickname of 'Flying Coffin". https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/why-are-mig-21s-still-in-service-in-india-despite-several-recent-crashes-2376381-2023-05-08

2. Freebies sending states neck-deep into debt *(dailypioneer.com)* 08 May 2023

States are borrowing recklessly as freebies empty their coffers. The burden of debt is more in States where more expenditure is being made on free schemes

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been repeatedly cautioning in his speeches that the politics of free 'revadis' (freebies) is ruining this country. It is seen that in the last one or two decades political parties in different states have been announcing different types of free schemes to woo the voters. Free electricity, free water, free women's travel in public transport, cash transfer to all farmers based on their land, free Mangal Sutra, free Laptops, free scooters, free TVs and many such freebies schemes are frequently announced by the states. Many political parties have been the beneficiary of these freebies, and have been successful in capturing the governments in some states.

The Reserve Bank has said that the state governments are making public borrowing, over and above what was announced in the budget, which is a matter of concern. In the year 2020, the Andhra Pradesh government raised huge debt over and above announced in the budget. Apart from Andhra Pradesh, the Reserve Bank has cautioned 9 more states that their borrowings have far exceeded their capacity. Of these, Punjab, Bihar, Kerala and West Bengal are said to be under extreme stress. The Reserve Bank report states that the average government borrowing in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Haryana and Kerala is more than 5 per cent of their respective state GDP. Government borrowing is 9.6 per cent in Punjab and 6.1 and 6.0 per cent in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal respectively. Apart from this, it is 5.3 per cent in Haryana and 5.1 per cent in Kerala.

It is worth mentioning that India is a Union of States, therefore the debt of both the central government and the state governments together is called General Government Debt. The FRBM Committee, given the FRBM Act 2003, had recommended in 2017 that the debt-to-GDP ratio of the General Government (both central and state governments) should be less than 60 per cent, with the debt limits of the central and state governments to be 40 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

The year 2020-21 was extremely unfortunate for the country and the world. On the one hand, the income of the governments decreased by a huge amount and on the other hand, the expenditure on health, social services and food aid increased enormously, to deal with the pandemic.

Naturally, the total liabilities of the Central Government as a proportion of GDP increased from 50.9 per cent in 2019-20 to 61.01 per cent in 2020-21. But after that, it decreased to 57.33 per cent in 2021-22 and to 55.88 per cent in 2022-23. Similarly, the total liabilities of state governments as per cent of GDP, which were 26.66 per cent in the year 2019-20, increased to 31.08 per cent in 2020-21, which later declined to 28.71 per cent in 2021-22 and 27.87 per cent in 2022-23. The total liabilities of the General Government (central and state governments together) increased from 77.56 per cent in 2019-20 to 92.09 per cent in 2020-21. After this, it decreased to reach 86.04 per cent in 2021-22 and 83.75 per cent in 2022-23.

Significantly, both the deficit and the liabilities of the Central Government are very transparent and there is no possibility of misrepresentation of the same. But the same cannot be said about the liabilities of the state governments. Recently, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has also made some observations about the budgetary and fiscal management of the states. In these comments too, concern has been expressed about the debt of the state governments based on the data till the year 2020-21. The CAG says the debt to GSDP ratio in most states is higher than the targeted 20 per cent (as per FRBM). It reached 48.98 per cent in Punjab, 42.37 per cent in Rajasthan, 37.39 per cent in West Bengal, 36.73 per cent in Bihar, 35.30 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, 31.53 percent in Madhya Pradesh, 27.80 percent in Telangana, 27.27 percent in Tamil Nadu and 26.47 percent in Chhattisgarh in 2020-21.

It is worth noting that the CAG's figures for debt are different from the figures given by the state governments. And if borrowings of state government enterprises and guarantees given by the state government are also included, then by 2020-21, the debt GSDP ratio in Rajasthan would be 54.94 per cent and in Punjab, it would be 58.21 per cent. In Andhra Pradesh also it has been estimated at 53.77 percent. Notably, it has reached 47.89 per cent and 47.13 per cent in Telangana and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

It is 40.35 per cent and 40.51 per cent in West Bengal and Bihar respectively, and 39.94 per cent in Tamil Nadu. If the adjusted liabilities of these state governments as estimated by the CAG are compared with the figures provided by the state governments, it appears to be 10 to 20 percentage points higher. That is, it can be said that the burden of liabilities on the state governments is much more than the figures published by the state governments. Although, the liabilities of the Central and State Governments are more than the prescribed limit as per the FRBM Act, as per the assessment done by the CAG, the gap of the State Governments with the suggested limit in FRBM, is widening continuously.

Freebies and increasing debt in the states

Regarding Andhra Pradesh, the Reserve Bank of India says that Punjab is the highest spender on freebies. Notably, 45.5 per cent of the total tax revenue is spent on free schemes in Punjab and 30.3 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. Talking about the state's gross domestic product, 2.7 per cent of the state's gross domestic product is spent on free schemes in Punjab and 2.1 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. Apart from this, in Madhya Pradesh 28.8 per cent of the tax revenue is spent on subsidies, in Jharkhand this expenditure is 26.7 per cent of tax revenue.

Significantly, according to the assessment of the CAG, the general debt is more in those states, where more expenditure is being made on free schemes. In this, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh are at the top. Where the bulk of the total revenue is spent on free schemes. Apart from Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu is another southern state which spends more on free schemes. Although Delhi is far ahead in free schemes, due to this debt Delhi does not increase because the per capita revenue of the state is almost twice that of the national arrangement.

However, due to free electricity, free water and free travel in public transport for women by the Delhi government, the financial condition of Delhi has become very precarious. All the promises made by the Aam Aadmi Party before coming to power, such as building 20 new colleges, providing free WiFi, building 20,000 public toilets, creating a women's security force, installing 5 lakh CCTVs, expanding health facilities, creating 8 lakh jobs creation, skill training to one lakh youth etc. have all gone in the air till now. The civic amenities of Delhi are getting badly affected. Far from building new roads, flyovers, schools and colleges, Delhi's health services are also getting badly affected.

When a state spends such a large proportion of its tax revenue on free schemes, its capital spending on essential services and infrastructure will naturally fall short. The debt on such a state government goes on increasing, due to which social services like education and health as well as transport and other essential services are also affected. For the development of any state, it is essential to increase investment. In the absence of infrastructure, investment is affected and due to this, the development of the state and creation of job opportunities is also affected. The development of the country must be accelerated by curbing the free schemes given by the states. https://www.dailypioneer.com/2023/columnists/freebies-sending-states-neck-deep-into-debt.html

3. PM-CARES fund got Rs 12,691.82 crore as donation in 3 years *(deccanherald.com)*
May 08, 2023

The controversial PM-CARES fund attracted a donation of Rs 12,691.82 crore in three years of which Rs 535.43 crore were foreign donations, according to an official document.

The Receipt and Payment Accounts showed that it has Rs 5,415.65 crore as balance as on March 2022 after spending Rs 3,716.29 crore for various Covid-19 related schemes in 2021-22 fiscal.

With the pandemic ebbing, the contributions to the fund saw a decline in 2021-22 compared to the previous fiscal.

The PM-CARES or the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Funds was set up on 27 March, 2020 with the Prime Minister as the ex-officio chairman. It attracted criticism from the Opposition as it was not open to RTI or audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

According to the Receipts and Payments Account documents, voluntary contributions from India was Rs 3,075.85 crore in 2019-20 while it rose to Rs 7,183.77 crore the next fiscal, the highest. In 2021-22, it came down to Rs 1,896.76 crore.

When it comes to foreign contributions, it was Rs 39.67 lakh in 2019-20 and it rose to a high of Rs 494.91 crore in the next fiscal and then slid to Rs 40.12 crore in 2021-22. For the three fiscals, the fund received an interest of Rs 263.98 crore.

The Fund spent Rs 3,976.17 crore in 2020-21 for various projects, including for providing ventilators, welfare of migrants and oxygen plants, procuring vaccines and setting up two laboratories.

The spending in 2021-22 was Rs 3,716.29 crore for reactivating ICU bedded Sardar Vallabhai Patel Covid-19 centre in Delhi, procuring oxygen concentrators and setting up two Covid-19 hospitals in Jammu and Kashmir among others. https://www.deccanherald.com/national/pm-cares-fund-got-rs-1269182-crore-as-donation-in-3-years-1216880.html

4. **Ujjwala, LPG Policy Confine Women to Dark Smoke Chambers** *(newsclick.in)* 09 May 2023

The objective of providing access to clean fuel and safeguarding women's health through PMUY contradicts policies that cause the price of LPG cylinders to shoot up.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed at the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) launch in Uttar Pradesh's Ballia district on May 1, 2016: "The scheme will not only help reduce cost for each family but also lead to improvement in women's health."

Modi said that the experience of his mother cooking for him on a traditional stove (chulha) inspired him to alleviate the pain of women compelled to use traditional stoves. However, the scheme's performance and his government's policy contradict its objectives and the speech, which professed emotional connection and the desire to help poor women. This reality can be better understood from the government data rather than its narrative.

Government Data bely claims

The National Statistical Office's (NSO) 2019 figures showed that households in rural areas and deprived communities continue to have restricted access to LPG. The NSO's Time Use Survey revealed that 47% of rural households are still dependent on wood and dung cakes, exposing women to smoke and harmful pollutants and resulting in severe and long-term health issues.

Besides, gender norms burdening women with gathering fuel for traditional stoves prevent them from accessing education, jobs and timely medical care. In contrast, a higher proportion of urban households relied on LPG as cooking fuel. While 86% of urban households used LPG, only 7% relied on wood and dung cake.

In rural India, only one-third of Scheduled Tribe (ST) households and one-half of Scheduled Caste (SC) households used LPG as the primary cooking fuel. For Other Backward Classes (OBC) and "other" category (apart from STs, SCs and OBCs), the corresponding proportions stood at 55% and 59%, respectively. However, it was found that a comparatively higher proportion of SC and ST urban households were dependent on non-LPG cooking sources.

The NSO findings sharply contrast Modi's claims and the Centre's yardstick to declare PMUY a success. Under the scheme, 7.19 crore connections were issued till March 31, 2019, increasing the countrywide LPG coverage from 61.90% in May 2016 to 94.30 % in April 2019. In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha in February 2021, the Union minister for petroleum and natural gas pegged the all-India LPG coverage at 99.5%.

The high decibel celebration around the rapid increase in the proportion of households with LPG connection camouflages a fundamental issue: Are people using LPG for cooking?' The near-universal LPG coverage would be a mere gimmick if people don't use these connections for the objectives mentioned in the scheme.

The survey shows that despite the near 100% LPG coverage, a significant portion of households, especially in rural areas, cannot use LPG for cooking. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India's 2019 PMUY report, which provides data from 2016-17 till 2018-19, revealed a growing divergence between LPG coverage and average refill consumption.

The report highlights two issues: LPG cylinder use by domestic connection holders has been declining consistently, and many of the scheme's beneficiaries cannot refill cylinders. The average annual refill consumption for PMUY stood at 3.9% in 2016-17 and slumped to 2.98% during 2018-19.

In a reply to the Rajya Sabha, the ministry of petroleum and natural gas said that the average annual refill consumption by PMUY consumers rose marginally to 3.01% in 2019-20, saw a substantial increase to 4.39% in 2020-21 and slumped to 3.66% again in 2021-22 (till February 2022).

The abrupt rise in 2020-21 could be attributed to the provision of three free refills per user under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY), announced in 2020. More than 14.17 free refills were provided under PMGKY. The drop in average annual refill in 2021-22 in the backdrop of the end of free provision of cylinders stresses the impact of the refill cost on the access to LGP.

An analysis of the number of PMUY (Phase 1) beneficiaries who didn't refill cylinders or refilled them only once revealed a substantially high number of beneficiaries facing barriers to accessing LPG. Out of approximately eight crore beneficiaries in Phase 1, two crore either took no refill or only one (including installation refill) in 2021-22. Moreover, 2.11 crore out of 30.53 crore domestic active consumers had not taken any refill and 2.91 crore had only one.

The persistently low average refill consumption and the high number of consumers who either do not take any refill or take very few refills show the households' inability to afford regular LPG refills.

FALLING SUBSIDY, RISING PRICES MAJOR HURDLES

Ensuring access to clean cooking fuel, like LPG, requires more than providing connections alone—refills also have to be made affordable for households. The annual fall in average refill consumption clearly indicates that LPG is becoming increasingly inaccessible. The trend has been synchronous with the rising price of LPG refills. In March 2016, the price of a subsidised domestic LPG cylinder (in Delhi) was Rs 513.50. From May 2020, the subsidy was stopped, forcing consumers to buy them at increased market rates, which rose to Rs 1,000 in 2021.

In June 2022, the government announced subsidy only for PMUY beneficiaries. However, instead of providing LPG cylinders at a fixed price, the government now provides consumers with a subsidy of Rs 200 per refill. The steep hike in the price of LPG cylinders and the withdrawal of the subsidy mostly impact relatively poor households.

The LPG cylinder price has now been left to the open market devices. Hence, with the subsidy pegged at a fixed amount and the market price of LPG cylinders soaring, the widening gap between market price and subsidy falls burdensomely on households consuming LPG. The impact of the increasing financial burden greatly limits the capacity of poor households to refill cylinders.

The objective of providing access to clean fuel and safeguarding women's health through PMUY contradicts government policies that cause the price of LPG cylinders to shoot through the roof. In effect, this deprives households of access to a clean cooking fuel. The pain of women that Modi claimed to help assuage with the help of PMUY has instead been aggravated by the withdrawal of the subsidy.

The Ujjwala (bright) scheme, combined with the government's policy on domestic LPG, has actually confined women to the dark smoke chambers of choolhas. Therefore, the PMUY's failure in achieving its objectives has added the scheme to the list of several other gimmicks that resulted in the opposite of what their names suggest. https://www.newsclick.in/ujjwala-lpg-policy-confine-women-dark-smoke-chambers

STATES NEWS ITEMS

5. Are 'Freebie Schemes' Pushing Telugu States In 'Deep Debt'? *(hydnews.net)* 8 May 2023

Telugu states, which include Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, have been implementing various freebie schemes in recent years, including cash transfers, free food, and subsidies for various services. While these schemes have been popular with the public, there are concerns that they could be pushing the states into deep debt.

Both states have faced significant financial challenges in recent years, with Andhra Pradesh in particular struggling with a large debt burden. The implementation of freebie schemes has been a key part of the state's efforts to improve the lives of its citizens, but there are concerns that the cost of these schemes is unsustainable.

Critics argue that these freebie schemes may be popular with voters, but they are not fiscally responsible. They point out that the states may have to borrow heavily to finance these schemes, which could lead to even more debt and potentially harm the long-term economic growth of the region.

However, supporters of these schemes argue that they are necessary to address the needs of the poor and marginalized sections of society. They argue that these schemes can help reduce poverty and inequality, and that the benefits of these schemes will ultimately outweigh the costs.

On the other hand states are borrowing recklessly as freebies empty their coffers. The burden of debt is more in States where more expenditure is being made on free schemes.

Significantly, both the deficit and the liabilities of the Central Government are very transparent and there is no possibility of misrepresentation of the same.

Prime Minister Modi has been repeatedly cautioning in his speeches that the politics of free ‘revadis’ (freebies) is ruining this country. It is seen that in the last one or two decades political parties in different states have been announcing different types of free schemes to woo the voters. Free electricity, free water, free women’s travel in public transport, cash transfer to all farmers based on their land, free Mangal Sutra, free Laptops, free scooters, free TVs and many such freebies schemes are frequently announced by the states. Many political parties have been the beneficiary of these freebies, and have been successful in capturing the governments in some states.

The Reserve Bank has said that the state governments are making public borrowing, over and above what was announced in the budget, which is a matter of concern. In the year 2020, the Andhra Pradesh government raised huge debt over and above announced in the budget. Apart from Andhra Pradesh, the Reserve Bank has cautioned 9 more states that their borrowings have far exceeded their capacity. Of these, Punjab, Bihar, Kerala and West Bengal are said to be under extreme stress. The Reserve Bank report states that the average government borrowing in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Haryana and Kerala is more than 5 per cent of their respective state GDP. Government borrowing is 9.6 per cent in Punjab and 6.1 and 6.0 per cent in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal respectively. Apart from this, it is 5.3 per cent in Haryana and 5.1 per cent in Kerala.

It is worth mentioning that India is a Union of States, therefore the debt of both the central government and the state governments together is called General Government Debt. The FRBM Committee, given the FRBM Act 2003, had recommended in 2017 that the debt-to-GDP ratio of the General Government (both central and state governments) should be less than 60 per cent, with the debt limits of the central and state governments to be 40 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

The year 2020-21 was extremely unfortunate for the country and the world. On the one hand, the income of the governments decreased by a huge amount and on the other hand, the expenditure on health, social services and food aid increased enormously, to deal with the pandemic. Naturally, the total liabilities of the Central Government as a proportion of GDP increased from 50.9 per cent in 2019-20 to 61.01 per cent in 2020-21. But after that, it decreased to 57.33 per cent in 2021-22 and to 55.88 per cent in 2022-23. Similarly, the total liabilities of state governments as per cent of GDP, which were 26.66 per cent in the year 2019-20, increased to 31.08 per cent in 2020-21, which later declined to 28.71 per cent in 2021-22 and 27.87 per cent in 2022-23. The total liabilities of the General Government (central and state governments together) increased from 77.56 per cent in 2019-20 to 92.09 per cent in 2020-21. After this, it decreased to reach 86.04 per cent in 2021-22 and 83.75 per cent in 2022-23.

Significantly, both the deficit and the liabilities of the Central Government are very transparent and there is no possibility of misrepresentation of the same. But the same cannot be said about the liabilities of the state governments. Recently, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has also made some observations about the budgetary and fiscal management of the states. In these comments too, concern has been expressed about the debt of the state governments based on the data till the year 2020-21. The CAG says the debt to GSDP ratio in most states is higher than the targeted 20 per cent (as per FRBM). It reached 48.98 per cent in Punjab, 42.37 per cent in Rajasthan, 37.39 per cent in West Bengal, 36.73 per cent in Bihar, 35.30 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, 31.53 percent in Madhya Pradesh, 27.80 percent in Telangana, 27.27 percent in Tamil Nadu and 26.47 percent in Chhattisgarh in 2020-21.

It is worth noting that the CAG's figures for debt are different from the figures given by the state governments. And if borrowings of state government enterprises and guarantees given by the state government are also included, then by 2020-21, the debt GSDP ratio in Rajasthan would be 54.94 per cent and in Punjab, it would be 58.21 per cent. In Andhra Pradesh also it has been estimated at 53.77 percent. Notably, it has reached 47.89 per cent and 47.13 per cent in Telangana and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

It is 40.35 per cent and 40.51 per cent in West Bengal and Bihar respectively, and 39.94 per cent in Tamil Nadu. If the adjusted liabilities of these state governments as estimated by the CAG are compared with the figures provided by the state governments, it appears to be 10 to 20 percentage points higher. That is, it can be said that the burden of liabilities on the state governments is much more than the figures published by the state governments. Although, the liabilities of the Central and State Governments are more than the prescribed limit as per the FRBM Act, as per the assessment done by the CAG, the gap of the State Governments with the suggested limit in FRBM, is widening continuously.

Regarding Andhra Pradesh, the Reserve Bank of India says that Punjab is the highest spender on freebies. Notably, 45.5 per cent of the total tax revenue is spent on free schemes in Punjab and 30.3 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. Talking about the state's gross domestic product, 2.7 per cent of the state's gross domestic product is spent on free schemes in Punjab and 2.1 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. Apart from this, in Madhya Pradesh 28.8 per cent of the tax revenue is spent on subsidies, in Jharkhand this expenditure is 26.7 per cent of tax revenue.

Significantly, according to the assessment of the CAG, the general debt is more in those states, where more expenditure is being made on free schemes. In this, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh are at the top. Where the bulk of the total revenue is spent on free schemes. Apart from Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu is another southern state which spends more on free schemes. Although Delhi is far ahead in free schemes, due to this debt Delhi does not increase because the per capita revenue of the state is almost twice that of the national arrangement.

However, due to free electricity, free water and free travel in public transport for women by the Delhi government, the financial condition of Delhi has become very precarious. All the promises made by the Aam Aadmi Party before coming to power, such as building 20 new colleges, providing free WiFi, building 20,000 public toilets, creating a women's security force, installing 5 lakh CCTVs, expanding health facilities, creating 8 lakh jobs creation, skill training to one lakh youth etc. have all gone in the air till now. The civic amenities of Delhi are getting badly affected. Far from building new roads, flyovers, schools and colleges, Delhi's health services are also getting badly affected.

When a state spends such a large proportion of its tax revenue on free schemes, its capital spending on essential services and infrastructure will naturally fall short. The debt on such a state government goes on increasing, due to which social services like education and health as well as transport and other essential services are also affected. For the development of any state, it is essential to increase investment. In the absence of infrastructure, investment is affected and due to this, the development of the state and creation of job opportunities is also affected. The development of the country must be accelerated by curbing the free schemes given by the states.

In conclusion, while the implementation of freebie schemes has certainly helped improve the lives of many people in Telugu states, there are legitimate concerns about the financial sustainability of these schemes. It is important for the state governments to balance the need for social welfare with fiscal responsibility, and to carefully evaluate the costs and benefits of these schemes before implementing them. https://hydnews.net/2023/05/are-freebie-schemes-pushing-telugu-states-in-deep-debt/

6. ₹ 2,000 Crore Liquor Scam in Chhattisgarh: Enforcement Directorate *(ndtv.com)*
May 08, 2023

An alleged liquor scam worth more than ₹ 2,000 crore has been unearthed in Chhattisgarh, the Enforcement Directorate has claimed, at a time when a similar case in Delhi continues to make headlines. The central agency has alleged that an IAS officer and a liquor baron are the "kingpins" of the alleged scam.

Liquor businessman Anwar Dhebar, the brother of Congress leader and Raipur Mayor Aijaz Dhebar, was arrested in the case by the Enforcement Directorate or ED on Saturday.

The agency said IAS officer Anil Tuteja, posted as joint secretary in the state's industry and commerce department, and Mr Dhebar were the "kingpins" of a syndicate, comprising high-level state government officials, private persons and political executives.

It said its probe has found that 30 to 40 per cent of the total liquor sold in the state between 2019 and 2022 was illegal. This 30 to 40 per cent of country liquor was sold along with listed branded liquor at govt stores and the revenue did not go to the government.

The "massive scam" in the liquor trade generated corruption money of more than ₹ 2,000 crore between 2019-22, the ED claimed, adding it was used for electioneering among other things.

The Enforcement Directorate also claims it has evidence of an exchange of ₹ 14.41 crore between the liquor baron and the IAS officer.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has rubbished the allegations and dubbed the ED's claim as "false and baseless". "As the Assembly polls were nearing in the state, the disappointed BJP was trying to defame the Congress government using the ED", he claimed.

The state polls are due this year-end.

"It was the Raman Singh-led BJP government's decision to sell liquor through a corporation in 2017 in the state. No change was made in distilleries, officers, transporters and placement agencies linked to the liquor trade in the state since 2017. The revenue collection from liquor increased from ₹ 3,900 crore in 2017-18 to ₹ 6,000 crore in 2022-23 which clearly shows that the ED's claim of a decline in revenue collection due to alleged corruption is baseless," Mr Baghel said.

The BJP has been using the ED to hatch a conspiracy to defame the state government as the Assembly election is nearing in the state," he added.

His remarks echo several opposition leaders' charge that the central government has been allegedly using probe agencies to target non-BJP leaders.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has conducted audits of the state's excise department and given it a clean chit, he claimed.

The BJP has, meanwhile, targeted the Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government over the alleged scam.

"Bhupesh Baghel ji, who swore with holy Ganga water in his hand, and the Congress party told where the money of liquor went, robbery was done in the government treasury. In 15 years, the debt that was not given in Chhattisgarh was a debt of one lakh crore. Along with raiding the treasury, the health of the public has also been played with. Fake liquor has been sold in a government shop by forming a private company. There is a scam of 2000 crores," alleged BJP MP Santosh Pandey.

The Income Tax Department has filed a charge sheet against Anil Tuteja in a Delhi court, on the basis of which the Enforcement Directorate had registered a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act or PMLA last year.

The allegations are seen as an embarrassment for the Baghel government in the election year.

The ED's allegations come months after the CBI started probing that the liquor policy implemented by the Delhi government last year, which ended government control over the sale of liquor in the capital, gave undue advantages to private retailers. It alleged the involvement of the "highest levels" of Arvind Kejriwal's government in the swindle.

Manish Sisodia's arrest by the CBI in February was the highest-profile arrest in the case so far. He was arrested by the ED in March in a money laundering case related to the scam.

https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/rs-2-000-crore-liquor-scam-in-chhattisgarh-enforcement-directorate-4016794

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

7. 40% of Litigation by Centre & States Unnecessary & Frivolous: Supreme Court *(livelaw.in)* May 08, 2023

The Supreme Court on Monday orally expressed its disapproval over the central and the state governments' practice of filing 'frivolous' and 'unnecessary' appeals. Justice BR Gavai said:

"Forty per cent of litigation by the union and the state governments are unnecessary. We heard a case today over a former employee receiving Rs 700 extra per month. Over this, the government will spend Rs 7 lakhs in an appeal. The money comes from the public exchequer."

Earlier in the day, a bench of Justices Gavai, Vikram Nath, and Sanjay Karol had dismissed a special leave petition filed by the state of Gujarat. In this appeal, the government challenged an order by the Gujarat High Court directing it to grant the benefit of a single increment to a retired driver formerly in the services of the government and revise his pension. While dismissing it, Justice Gavai noted that another bench had refused to entertain the petition on the ground that the loss to the state exchequer, as a result of the high court's direction, was a meagre Rs 700. "This order was passed by a single judge and upheld by the division bench of the high court. Still, you go on filing an appeal," the judge said, pulling up the counsel for the state of Gujarat.

Justice Gavai said, "If we find such petitions are filed by the state or by the Centre, we will impose exemplary costs. We are saying this in the presence of the solicitor." Solicitor-General for India Tushar Mehta was in the courtroom, arguing in the batch of petitions challenging the third extension given to the term of Enforcement Directorate chief SK Mishra and the Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Act, 2021.

The solicitor general interjected, explaining that appeals are filed after taking opinions from law officers. "We are very conservative when it comes to this," he said.

"We happen to disagree," said Justice Gavai.

On a lighter note, Solicitor-General Mehta recalled how legendary lawyer and former Attorney-General CK Daphtary was once asked by a bench of the apex court why he had not advised his client against filing a petition, despite there being no merit to it. Mehta recounted, "The court told CK Daphtary that there was nothing in a matter. He replied that he knew that. The bench then asked him why he did not advise his client accordingly. Daphtary responded, 'The client did not want my advice. He wanted your advice.'"

Last month, The Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud also emphasised the need for governments to switch from adversarial litigation to alternative dispute resolution routes, particularly mediation, in order to 'declog' Indian courts, and promote an alternative, collaborative, interest-based conception of justice. The chief justice, while speaking at a national conference on mediation organised by the Delhi High Court Mediation and Conciliation Centre, said that the motto of governments, particularly the union government should be ‘Mediate, don't litigate’. https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/supreme-court-litigation-centre-states-frivolous-unnecessary-228234

8. India's pledge to stop new coal power plants to hit key states *(economictimes.com)*
May 09, 2023

India's plans to stop building new coal-fired power plants beyond those already under construction mark a significant victory for climate campaigners keen to cap pollution from the second-largest coal user after China.

The new draft policy, which still has to be approved by the federal cabinet, would signify more aggressive climate targets by the world's fifth-largest economy, and would leave China as the only major nation openly adding new coal capacity.

However, if imposed the new coal capacity restrictions may pose a serious challenge to several of India's key states which are major contributors to the national economy and remain overwhelmingly reliant on coal for electricity generation.

India's three largest states by gross domestic product (GDP) are Maharashtra in the west, Tamil Nadu in the south, and Uttar Pradesh in the north, data from India's Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) shows

Collectively, they account for more than 30% of the country's GDP, are home to roughly a third of India's population. All are major manufacturing hubs that rely on low operating costs to ensure global competitiveness.

All three states are also heavily reliant on coal-fired power for electricity, with more than 75% of their collective electricity generation coming from coal in 2022, according to data from think tank Ember.

That means that the main drivers of India's economy are at risk of being hobbled by any sudden curtailment to low-cost energy generation if the new proposals are enacted and result in reduced supply of coal-fired power.

Other major states in terms of GDP contribution include West Bengal (5.8%) in the east and Telangana (4.6%) in the south, which are even more coal-reliant than the average of the three largest states.

Overall, the heavy coal reliance of state energy systems throughout the country underscores the challenge facing New Delhi as it tries to craft an effective national decarbonisation road map that does not jeopardise economic momentum and job growth.

The new proposals make clear that whatever coal capacity is already under construction in India will proceed.

A total of 32,000 megawatts of new coal power is currently being built in India, according to the Global Energy Monitor (GEM).

Once completed, that would boost current operating capacity by close to 14%, and lift total Indian coal capacity to beyond 266,000 MW, GEM data shows.

More than 40% of the capacity under construction is in India's three largest states, and a further 20% is in West Bengal and Telangana.

The states of Jharkhand and Bihar in the east of India also have significant coal capacity expansions under way, GEM data shows.

RENEWABLE OFFSETS?

Alongside the widespread swell in coal capacity is even faster growth in renewables energy supply capacity across India.

Total India electricity generation from clean sources has jumped by 22% from 2019 to 2022, with sharp growth occurring in big states like Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana.

As India's electricity generation from coal has grown by 16.6% over the same period, clean energy generation is generally growing faster than coal-fired generation in key areas, and will continue to accelerate thanks to strong support from the central government and incentives for local businesses.

However, coal remains king throughout the country's largest powerconsuming hubs of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, as well as large swaths of the east, as power producers try to keep pace with rapidly rising energy demand growth and work to keep power costs as low as possible.

And while the new proposed bans on fresh coal plant construction promise to cap coal use over the long term, the government has ensured that key state energy systems will be able to lift coal-generation capacity over the near term by allowing in-construction projects to proceed.

Proponents of immediate cuts to coal power use may be disappointed that several new coal projects will still emerge.

But with New Delhi responsible for India's near-term economic momentum as well as its longer-term emissions profile, it makes sense that policymakers want to provide some leeway for power producers to lift coal use over the coming years, before enforcing tougher coal use standards in the decades ahead. The opinions expressed here are those of the author, a columnist for Reuters.
https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/coal/opinion-indias-pledge-to-stop-new-coal-power-plants-to-hit-key-states/100087517

9. IAF working on phasing out remaining three squadrons of MiG-21 jets *(economictimes.indiatimes.com)* May 09, 2023

Rajasthan's Hanumangarh on Monday has once again put the spotlight on the Indian Air Force's aging fleet of Sovietorigin aircraft which have been involved in around 400 accidents since their first induction in the early 1960s. Three people were killed after the MiG21 fighter aircraft crashed into a house in Hanumangarh in Rajasthan shortly after it took off for a routine training sortie from the Air Force Station at Suratgarh.

The MiG-21s used to be the mainstay of the IAF for a long period of time. After its induction in the early 1960s, the Indian Air Force procured over 870 MiG-21 fighters to boost its overall combat prowess.

However, the aircraft has a very poor safety record. According to official data, the MiG-21s were involved in 400 crashes in the last six decades.

At present, the IAF has three MiG-21 squadrons with a total of around 50 aircraft, according to officials.

The IAF last year finalised a timeline of three years to phase out the remaining Mig-21 fighter squadrons. The IAF also plans to start the phasing out of the three squadrons of Mig-29 fighter jets in the next five years, they said.

The plan to phase out the Soviet-origin aircraft fleet is part of the IAF's modernisation drive.

"The MiG-21 phase-out plan is on track," said a military official. The official said the phase-out plan is not linked to the recent accidents involving the platforms.

As part of the IAF's modernisation plan, the defence ministry in February 2021, sealed a Rs 48,000 crore deal with the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the procurement of 83 Tejas jets.

The IAF has already procured 36 Rafale jets to enhance its combat capabilities.

The IAF is also in the process of acquiring 114 Medium Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA).

In March last year, Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhat said in Rajya Sabha that 42 defence personnel were killed in accidents involving aircraft and helicopters of the three services in the last five years.

The total number of air accidents in the last five years was 45 out of which 29 involved IAF's platforms, according to official data.

Two pilots of the IAF were killed in July last year when their twin-seater Mig21 trainer aircraft crashed during a training sortie near Barmer in Rajasthan.

An ALH Dhruv crashed on Thursday following a "hard landing" in Kishtwar in Jammu and Kashmir.

In a rare accident in January, a Russian-designed Sukhoi-30MKI jet and a French Mirage-2000 had a mid-air collision.

In October last year, a weapon system integrated version of an Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) of the Indian Army crashed near Tuting in Arunachal Pradesh.

Another ALH-WSI had crashed into the massive Ranjit Sagar reservoir near Pathankot on August 3, 2021 in which two Army pilots were killed.

Between March 2017 to December 2021, 31 people lost their lives in accidents involving 15 military helicopters that included four ALH, four Cheetah, two ALH (WSI), three Mi-17V5, an Mi-17 and a Chetak, according to official details.

In December 2021, Gen Bipin Rawat, India's first Chief of Defence Staff, his wife Madhulika and 11 other armed forces personnel died when an Mi-17VH helicopter crashed near Coonoor in Tamil Nadu. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/iaf-working-on-phasing-out-remaining-three-squadrons-of-mig-21-jets/articleshow/100078558.cms?from=mdr

10. Dismantling old ships won't reduce India's carbon footprint — it will only create more problems *(indianexpress.com)* 08 May 2023

On February 24, the Director General of Shipping issued a notification imposing age restrictions on ships in India. This was promoted as a "pro-environment" move intended to improve the quality of Indian tonnage. However, the policy could not only fail to decrease carbon emissions but could also significantly hamper the Ministry of Shipping's ostensible push to enhance coastal shipping.

The notification imposes an age restriction on ships that can berth at Indian ports. Earlier, no such age restriction was applicable to ships in India (foreign and Indian flag). Once a ship was of a certain age, norms related to its inspection by the Indian Register of Shipping were tightened, requiring more regular check-ups at shorter intervals with dry docking. Now, the Director General of Shipping intends to do away with cargo ships older than 25 years altogether, albeit after three years. Such a policy has also been adopted for vehicles and other carbon emitters to make way for new-age engines and better environment standards. So, what is the issue with ships?

Ships are quite unlike vehicles. The average cost of fabricating a new mini bulk carrier (MBC) — the smallest class of cargo vessel used almost exclusively for coastal shipping — is between Rs 25-30 crore. Indian shipping has remained a historically challenging sector to raise funds for. Considering the high cost of shipbuilding, the Indian government's measures to provide viability gap funding and provide the shipping sector "infrastructure status" will fall short of meeting industry requirements, especially for smaller ship owners who lack the deep pockets of large shipping lines.

This problem is further aggravated as ships are not readily available in showrooms and need to be commissioned from shipyards, and India is woefully undersupplied on this front. Most public sector shipyards are focused on the building of larger ships for defence purposes. Private shipyards in India are few and far in-between. The two largest ones, ABG Shipyard and Bharati Shipyard, went bankrupt in the 2010s. Not only does shipbuilding in India struggle because of its capital-intensive nature, skilled manpower is also inadequately available.

The notification issued by the Director General of Shipping is estimated to affect 90 per cent of MBCs currently sailing in India. Most of these ships are unlikely to be replaced due to financing challenges and the non-availability of shipyards. This would result in fewer ships and more cargo shifting away from coastal shipping to road and rail logistics. Instead of improving the quality of Indian tonnage, this would defeat the Ministry of Shipping's objective to reduce carbon emissions in India. As compared to road or rail, shipping has lower levels of carbon emission. Ninety per cent of the world's goods move via the sea but shipping only accounts for 2.9 per cent of global emissions. By creating norms that significantly hamper the prospects of coastal shipping, the notification issued by the Director General of Shipping will prove detrimental to the cause of reducing India's carbon emission. Moreover, road and rail logistics are also more expensive across distances above 500 miles and therefore, the diminishing of coastal shipping is also likely to have an inflationary impact by raising input costs for various commodities.

A viable alternative would be for the Director General of Shipping to come out with strict standards for ships on the subject of environmental compliance. Ships don't die easily: When the steel wears thin, it is simply cut out and replaced; when the engine gets old, it is swapped; when the sewage treatment system becomes outmoded, it is redesigned. The retrofitting or rebuilding of ships is common. Considering this, it would be far more cost-effective and practical for the Director General of Shipping to demand higher environmental standards from existing Indian tonnage rather than purging it entirely. Ship owners should be forced to reduce their carbon footprint. But this can be done in a manner that is not forceful and counterproductive. There are engineering solutions to integrate new age fuels such as green hydrogen and green ammonia in old ships as well.

The Ministry of Shipping has made great efforts to improve the standard of coastal shipping in India. For instance, coastal ships have priority berthing at major ports and also enjoy concessional wharfage rates. The focus on developing inland waterways too has been beneficial in this respect. However, in one fell swoop, the notification issued by the Director General of Shipping could undo this progress and significantly hamper efforts at decarbonisation and improving the share of coastal shipping in Indian logistics. Instead, a more measured and tactical response could balance both objectives simultaneously. https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/dismantling-old-ships-reduce-indias-carbon-footprint-problems-8598407/

11. ‘Biodiversity funds hardly spent on its conservation’ *(hindustantimes.com)* May 09, 2023

An analysis found that only 0.44% of the total assistance cumulatively given to 8 states in the past two years by National Biodiversity Authority has been allocated for establishing Biodiversity Heritage Sites.

A new analysis on State Biodiversity Boards has revealed that funds provided to them by state governments and the Centre are hardly being used for their primary purpose of biodiversity conservation. It has also revealed that funds allocated to states remain meagre compared to what they may require to meet their goals as specified under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2002—conservation and management of biodiversity heritage sites, socio-economic development of areas from where biodiversity is accessed for commercial or other purposes.

The analysis by Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE), to be released soon, found only 0.44% of the total assistance cumulatively given to 8 states (states that responded to LIFE’s RTI queries on how funds are used) in the past two years by National Biodiversity Authority has been allocated for establishing Biodiversity Heritage Sites.

There are 40 biodiversity heritage sites in the country currently as per data on NBA’s website. Such Biodiversity Heritage Sites are areas that support unique, ecologically fragile ecosystems -- terrestrial, coastal and inland waters and, marine having rich biodiversity comprising of any one or more of the following components: richness of wild as well as domesticated species or intra-specific categories, high endemism (limited to only 1 location), presence of rare and threatened species, keystone species among others. They also include sacred groves.

Out of the total of 21 responding states, details with respect to financial assistance from NBA were available for 16 states for 2021-22 and for 14 states for 2022-23 respectively through RTI responses.

It was found that, the NBA assistance to states had a very large variation. In 2021-22 it ranged from ₹72 lakhs to as low as 7 lakhs. Haryana received ₹72 lakh from Centre, whereas Uttar Pradesh received lowest, around ₹7 lakhs. Haryana was followed by Kerala, Nagaland, Assam and Punjab in terms of funds received from NBA. Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Chhattisgarh were on the lower side of the assistance from the NBA.

In the following year, (2022-23), the trend remained largely similar based on data till September 2022 through RTI. Haryana again had received the highest allocation from the NBA, ₹47 lakh. Haryana was followed by Uttar Pradesh but Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal were among those that received the lowest of around ₹1 lakh each.

State Biodiversity Board also receive funds from state governments to meet their goals. In 2021-22, the funds provided by states ranged from ₹11 lakh to ₹16 crores. Punjab has allocated only ₹11 lakh, whereas its neighbour, Haryana allocated ₹16 crores. In 2022-23 also, Punjab has the lowest allocation of ₹14.5 lakhs among 14 states that responded, whereas Haryana and Kerala have had allocation of ₹10 crores each.

“Though the Act, or the Rules framed thereunder does not have any specific mandate as to how much assistance NBA will have to provide to any particular state and/or on what basis such amount has to be decided; however, such skewed variation among the states raises concerns,” the report states while adding that NBA may not have considered needs of state biodiversity boards while deciding the amount to be granted to any particular state.

Manipur and Nagaland for example which received ₹5 lakh and ₹6 lakh respectively from the NBA for 2022-23 were not given any funds by their state governments for 2022-23. Interestingly, Haryana has the lowest forest cover in the country at 3.63%. Haryana has faced criticism from environmental activists and experts for dragging its feet on providing legal protection to Aravallis.

The Biodiversity Act 2002 states that the State Biodiversity Fund shall be applied for : the management and conservation of heritage sites; compensating or rehabilitating any section of the people economically affected by the notification ; conservation and promotion of biological resources; socio-economic development of areas from where such biological resources or knowledge associated thereto has been accessed; and meeting the expenses incurred for the purposes authorised by this law.

“All states including Haryana need to focus on using the funds for biodiversity conservation, as mandated in the Act. Instead of weakening protection to biodiversity rich areas, they should see the fund as an opportunity to conserve and streamline use of these funds,” said Kankana Das, Principal Analyst at LIFE’s Kolkata office.

An analysis of the component-wise assistance by the NBA reveals that, highest share of funds is for hiring of contractual and/or outsourced personnel, followed by creation of Biodiversity Management Committees, preparation of People’s Biodiversity Register, developing and revamping of website, celebration of international biodiversity day etc.

HT sought a response from NBA on May 5 on the disparity in allocations by state governments to their respective state biodiversity boards (₹11 lakh to ₹16 crore); the utilisation of funds by Haryana, which has among the lowest forest cover in India; and on the adequacy of the allocations for state biodiversity boards to take up biodiversity conservation work such as declaring biodiversity heritage sites.

NBA did not respond to HT’s queries.

“The biodiversity boards are relatively recent environmental institutions. They have the potential to design proactive conservation programs foregrounding village level biodiversity management committees along with regulating disproportionate distribution of profits during commercial access to bioresources. However, for almost two decades role of these boards has remained at the side-lines of the environmental discourse. As the international protocols on climate change, biodiversity and resource rights are converging, biodiversity boards can be an important institution through which decentralized and multi-disciplinary initiatives for biodiversity conservation can be designed and operationalized,” explained Kanchi Kohli, environmental law and policy researcher.

The Biological Diversity Amendment Bill 2021, introduced in Lok Sabha in December 2021, exempts Ayush practitioners from the ambit of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, and facilitates access to biological resources and traditional knowledge by the Indian traditional medicine sector. Legal experts have, however, expressed concerns that easing the norms for the sector could be detrimental to ecology and go against the principle of sharing commercial benefits with indigenous communities.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has booked Ritwick Dutta, LIFE's founder for receiving foreign contributions from American NGO Earthjustice, which, the agency says, funds legal professionals to litigate against coal projects CBI's first information report (FIR) against environmental lawyer Ritwick Dutta for alleged violation of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) refers to his involvement "in criticising government policy" and "agitating" farmers against "industrialist and industrial policy of the government."

The FIR states that Dutta had mentioned the example of activities of Adani (company) in Australia in an email to a representative of Earth Justice, which allegedly contributed to Dutta's environmental law firm Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment on several occasions. "They mentioned the example of Adani's activities of Adani in Australia. It appears from this that they were planning to target Indian entities undertaking projects outside India. Such litigations lead to delay in projects impacting public interest by denying energy security to citizens of the nation. Further, it is also impacting economic interests of nations outside geographical boundaries of India," the FIR states. https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/analysis-reveals-state-biodiversity-board-funds-not-being-used-for-conservation-in-new-delhi-raising-concerns-about-allocation-disparities-101683570661396.html

12. Defusing the climate time bomb for a liveable future *(deccanherald.com)* May 08, 2023

While releasing the synthesis report of the sixth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned nations that the climate time bomb is ticking. He noted that humans are responsible for all global warming in the past 200 years; the rate of temperature rise is the highest in the last 200 years; and carbon dioxide concentrations are the highest in at least two million years.

According to the UN Secretary General, the synthesis report is a guide for defusing the climate time bomb and a survival guide for humanity. He gave a clarion call for fast-tracking climate action by all countries so that the Paris climate goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius is achievable.

The IPCC report calls for rapid and far-reaching transitions across all sectors to achieve deep and sustained emission reductions in order to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all.

This involves the deployment of low- or zero-emission technologies, reducing and changing demand through infrastructure design and access, sociocultural and behavioural changes, increased technological efficiency and adoption, social protection (climate or other services) and protecting and restoring ecosystems.

The report suggests a package of mitigation and adaptation measures to reduce emissions in different sectors and activities. In the energy sector, it calls for supply- and demand-side measures to reduce the carbon footprint of the energy sector, which contributed 34% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2019.

This includes drastically reducing dependence on fossil fuels, carbon capture and storage of remaining fuel systems, shifting to renewable energy sources (wind, solar and small-scale hydropower), fostering energy security and diversification by relying on low-emission electricity and improving storage and energy efficiency.

The industrial and transport sectors accounted for 38% of global GHG emissions in 2019. The report calls for coordinated action throughout value chains to promote all mitigation options, including demand management, energy and material efficiency, circular material flows, abatement technologies and transformational changes in production processes.

For the transport sector, the report suggests that sustainable biofuels, low-emission hydrogen and derivatives (including ammonia and synthetic fuels) can support mitigation of CO2 emissions from shipping, aviation, and heavy-duty land transport but they require production process improvements and cost reductions. Electric vehicles powered by low-GHG emission electricity have large potential to reduce land-based transport GHG emissions.

Advances in battery technologies could facilitate the electrification of heavy-duty trucks and complement conventional electric rail systems. The environmental footprint of battery production and growing concerns about critical minerals can be addressed by material and supply diversification strategies, energy and material efficiency improvements and circular material flows.

World population projections by UN agencies suggest that by 2050, about 68% of the population will reside in urban areas. Urban systems are therefore critical for achieving deep emission reductions and advancing climate-resilient development.

Key adaptation and mitigation elements in cities include considering climate change impacts and risks (e.g., climate services) in the design and planning of settlements and infrastructure; land use planning to achieve compact urban form, co-location of jobs and housing; supporting public transport and other modes such as walking and cycling; efficient design, construction, retrofit, and use of buildings; reducing and changing energy and material consumption; sufficiency; material substitution; and electrification in combination with low emissions sources.

Urban transitions that offer benefits for mitigation, adaptation, human health and well-being, ecosystem services and vulnerability reduction for lowincome communities are fostered by an inclusive long-term planning that takes an integrated approach to physical, natural and social infrastructure.

Green/natural and blue infrastructure supports carbon uptake and storage, and either singly or when combined with grey (buildings, roads, stormwater) infrastructure, can reduce energy use and risk from extreme events such as heatwaves, flooding, heavy precipitation and droughts, while generating co-benefits for health, human well-being and livelihoods.

The agriculture, forestry and other land uses (AFOLU) sector, which accounts for 22% of global GHG emissions, provides several low-cost climate mitigation options at less than $20 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO2-eq).

Conservation, improved management and restoration of forests and other natural ecosystems offer the largest share of economic mitigation potential, with reduced deforestation in tropical regions having the highest total mitigation potential.

Ecosystem restoration, reforestation and afforestation can lead to trade-offs due to competing demands on land. Minimising trade-offs requires integrated approaches to meet multiple objectives, including food security.

Demand-side measures such as shifting to sustainable healthy diets and reducing food loss/waste and sustainable agricultural intensification can reduce ecosystem conversion and methane and nitrous oxide emissions and free up land for reforestation and ecosystem restoration.

Sustainably sourced agricultural and forest products, including long-lived wood products, can be used instead of more GHG-intensive products in other sectors. Effective adaptation options include cultivar improvements, agroforestry, community-based adaptation, farm and landscape diversification and urban agriculture.

These AFOLU response options require integration of biophysical, socio-economic and other enabling factors. Some options, such as conservation of high-carbon ecosystems (e.g., peatlands, wetlands, rangelands, mangroves and forests), deliver immediate benefits, while others, such as restoration of high-carbon ecosystems, take decades to deliver measurable results.

The UN Secretary General proposed a Climate Solidarity Pact to G20 under which all big emitters, including India and China, make extra efforts to cut emissions, while wealthier countries mobilise financial and technical resources to support emerging economies in a common effort to keep the Paris climate goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius alive.

It is disappointing that while billions of dollars have been mobilised by wealthy countries at a short notice to give military aid to Ukraine, they have failed to mobilise $100 billion per annum for assisting developing countries to transit to a climate-resilient development path as envisaged under the Paris Climate Accord. https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/panorama/defusing-the-climate-time-bomb-for-a-liveable-future-1216721.html

13. Joda mining: Government incurs losses worth crores *(orissapost.com)* May 09, 2023

Joda: A total of 59 mines out of the 90 under Joda mining circle in Keonjhar district are lying closed due to a host of statutory regulations, sources have informed. As a result, both the Centre and the Odisha government are losing revenues worth several crores of rupees.

Moreover, the provision of separate rules for the payment of mining premiums has led to a decline in competition in the mining and industrial sectors. This has resulted in losses for the new leaseholders, experts pointed out. According to information available from the Mining department, the 59 mines are lying closed due to delays in approval of a series of statutory regulations like the Forest Conservation Act, the Environment Clearance Act and the Plan of Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM). The concerned ministries of the Union government give approval to these regulations on the recommendations of the state government.

However, due to lack of proper coordination between the Odisha government and the Centre and the absence of proper follow up by the leaseholders, 59 mines have failed to get approval for operation. Among the 31 mines that are in operation in the Joda mining circle, 10 have been acquired through auction by the leaseholders after 2020. Over 874.84,000 lakh MT minerals have been mined in 2022-23 FY and 718.34,000 lakh MT minerals transported to various destinations. This has resulted in collection of Rs 16,894 crore as revenue.

However, had the other 59 mines been in operation, revenues could have gone up manifold. The Odisha government and its allied bodies are not the only ones suffering from revenue losses, the collection of the National Minerals Exploration Trust (NMET) has also declined.

On the other hand, leaseholders who got the mines through auction are paying higher premiums to run those. The leaseholders of the remaining 21 mines whose tenures are in force have been exempted from paying premiums. They are only paying revenues and their share to DMF. When contacted, mine owner and scribe Sirish Chandra Mohanty said that the Centre should implement its 'One Nation, One Tax' rule which will usher in healthy competition and transparency in the mining and industrial sectors. https://www.orissapost.com/joda-mining-government-incurs-losses-worth-crores/

14. Massive lithium reserves discovered in Rajasthan *(newindianexpress.com)* 09 May 2023

JAIPUR: Substantial reserves of lithium have been identified in the Degana municipality of Nagaur district in Rajasthan, according to the Geological Survey of India (GSI).

GSI has claimed that the amount of lithium present in these reserves can meet 80 per cent of the country's total demand. The discovery of these reserves could help reduce India's dependence on China for Lithium, which is used in batteries for mobiles, laptops as well as electric vehicles. Because of its high cost and the increase in demand all over the world, it is also called 'White Gold'.

GSI officials say this lithium reserve is much bigger than the reserves found in Jammu and Kashmir. In February this year, 5.9 million tonnes of lithium reserves were discovered in Jammu and Kashmir.

Lithium deposits in Rajasthan have been found in the same Renwat hills of Degana town and its surrounding areas. The GSI team went to Degana not to search for lithium, but to search for tungsten. But there they discovered deposits of lithium.

According to the report of Geologist Devendra Singh of Barmer, along with the Renwat hills of Degana in Nagaur district of Rajasthan, Barabar in Pali district, Bap area of Jodhpur, Pokaran of Jaisalmer, Kuchaman and Didwana of Nagaur district, Sujangarh and Talchhapar of Churu and Pachpadra in Barmer district may also have Lithium deposits. https://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2023/may/09/massive-lithium-reserves-discovered-in-rajasthan-2573438.html