

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. Galgotias University Hosts Event on ‘Ethical Audit’ with CAG G.C. Murmu as Chief Guest (*telegraphindia.com*) Jan 31, 2024

Galgotias University recently hosted an event on "Ethical Audit," featuring G.C. Murmu (IAS), the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, as the esteemed chief guest. The event, held on Monday, provided an insightful discussion on the significance of morality in our lives and the imperative need for ethical conduct in all spheres.

Addressing the students, G.C. Murmu emphasised the vital role of morality in shaping our actions and decisions. He stressed the importance of being morally and legally responsible in every aspect of life, urging individuals to integrate ethical principles into their academic and personal endeavours.

Murmu highlighted the crucial role of education in fostering moral values, advocating for the incorporation of ethics into the curriculum to instill a sense of integrity and responsibility among students. He underscored that morality is indispensable for personal growth and societal progress, emphasising its significance in both joyous and challenging times.

Expressing gratitude for the success of the event, Dr. Dhruv Galgotia, CEO of Galgotias University, shares, "We are immensely grateful for the success of the 'Ethical Audit' event and the valuable insights shared by G.C. Murmu. At Galgotias University, we recognize the paramount importance of morality in shaping individuals and society. Through initiatives like the 'Ethical Audit,' we aim to instil ethical values and principles in our students, empowering them to lead with integrity and contribute positively to the world. This aligns perfectly with our vision of 'Viksit Bharat@2047,' an initiative by the Government of India to transform our nation into a developed entity by 2047."

Suneel Galgotia, Chancellor honoured the esteemed chief guest by presenting a meticulously crafted memento, symbolising our profound appreciation for his invaluable contributions to the discourse on ethical governance and societal integrity.

Suneel Galgotia, Chancellor, Galgotias University, reflects "In the pursuit of excellence, ethics becomes our guiding light, illuminating our path as we navigate the vast expanse of knowledge and innovation. It is not merely about achieving success, but about how we achieve it. Integrity, woven intricately into the fabric of our actions, becomes the cornerstone upon which true success is built."

Aradhana Galgotia, Director Operations, Galgotias University, expressed "At Galgotias University, we believe that ethical conduct isn't just a choice, it's a responsibility. By fostering a culture of integrity, we sow the seeds for a future where every action resonates with honesty and purpose."

The event concluded with the rendition of the national anthem, symbolising a collective commitment to upholding ethical values and principles in society.
<https://www.telegraphindia.com/edugraph/campus/galgotias-university-hosts-event-on-ethical-audit-with-cag-g-c-murmu-as-chief-guest/cid/1997422>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

2. 'Mother of all scams': Citing CAG report, BJP alleges Rs 2 lakh crore 'scam' under Mamata Banerjee govt (*financialexpress.com*)

Updated: January 31, 2024

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) cited a CAG report to allege that “mother of all scams” to the tune of about Rs 2 lakh crore had taken place in Trinamool Congress-ruled West Bengal.

Speaking at a press conference, BJP West Bengal president Sukanta Majumdar said that the CAG report is a “slap on her government’s face”. He also accused the TMC government in the state of treating money from the public exchequer as her own.

“CAG has reported a massive financial misappropriation in West Bengal. State finance audit report of Bengal showed irregularities, potential fraud and fund assimilation. Bengal government has not provided the certification of work completion for projects worth over Rs 2 lakh crore,” he said.

BJP’s national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia took a dig at the INDIA bloc, a grouping of 28 Opposition parties to take on the BJP-led NDA in the Lok Sabha election, claiming that every constituent of the alliance is working against the people of India and democracy.

He alleged that “mother of all scams” has been found out in West Bengal even though Banerjee speaks about “Maa, mati and manush”, and called the CM a “chor” (thief) and the “kingpin of the corrupt”.

According to them, the report highlighted over 2.4 lakh utilisation certificates, required to be submitted for completed projects within a fixed time, were not done so by the state government. The total money involved is around Rs 1.95 lakh crore, they added.

The BJP leaders alleged that Rs 3,400 crore was withdrawn from the contingency fund by the TMC government and one-third of the amount was for the utilisation by the home ministry, which is headed by Mamata Banerjee.

“Was this money given to Rohingyas, her family members or for triggering riots,” Bhatia asked. <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/mother-of-all-scams-citing-cag-report-bjp-alleges-rs-2-lakh-crore-scam-under-mamata-banerjee-govt/3380376/>

3. BJP Alleges "Big Scam" In West Bengal, Cites Centre's Auditor CAG Report (*ndtv.com*)

Updated: January 31, 2024

The BJP on Wednesday cited a CAG report to allege that "mother of all scams" to the tune of about ₹ 2 lakh crore had taken place in Trinamool Congress-ruled West Bengal.

In a press conference, BJP West Bengal president Sukanta Majumdar accused the state government headed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of treating the public money like her own.

"Her government has tried to loot public money everywhere. The CAG report is a slap on her government's face and exposes it," Majumdar alleged.

In strong-worded remarks, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia alleged that the "mother of all scams" has been found out in West Bengal even though Banerjee speaks about "Maa, mati and manush".

He alleged that the Trinamool Congress president was a "chor" (thief) and the "kingpin of the corrupt".

"It is a battle of two ideologies," Bhatia said and claimed that all constituents of the INDIA bloc are part of an ideology that centred on corruption and family rule while the Modi government is dedicated to promoting honesty and ridding society of graft.

According to Bhatia and Majumdar, the report highlights that over 2.4 lakh utilisation certificates, required to be submitted for completed projects within a fixed time, were not done so by the state government. The total money involved is around ₹ 1.95 lakh crore, they added.

Both the leaders alleged that ₹ 3,400 crore was withdrawn from the exigency fund by Banerjee's government and one-third of the amount was for the utilisation by the home ministry which is headed by her. The government has not accounted for the money, they said.

"Was this money given to Rohingyas, her family members or for triggering riots," Bhatia asked.

Bhatia alleged that be it the Congress, AAP, RJD or the TMC, no one should believe they are above law. Several leaders who had this kind of an arrogance are behind bars, he added.

He said she has forgotten that the baton of law straightens up the worst of the corrupt. He hit out at the state government for a recent incident in which Enforcement Directorate officials were attacked by a violent mob close to a TMC leader whose house they had gone to raid as part of their probe in a corruption case. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/bjp-cites-centres-auditor-cag-report-alleges-big-scam-in-west-bengal-4968792>

4. 'CAG report' counter from PM Modi to TMC leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay over plea on dues (*telegraphindia.com*) Feb 1, 2024

Sudip Bandyopadhyay, the leader of the Trinamul Congress in the Lok Sabha, said he had approached the Prime Minister in Parliament on Wednesday and taken up with him the "non-payment of funds" by the Centre, but Narendra Modi had asked him to read the CAG report first and then, they would discuss the matter.

Bandyopadhyay was seated very close to Modi during the President's address to Parliament on Wednesday. The Trinamul MP said he had approached the Prime Minister and reminded him that a delegation of Trinamul legislators led by Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee had met Modi last month over the pending funds.

"Since I was seated very close to the PM, I reminded him that the chief minister herself and other MPs had raised with him the non-payment of dues and told him that the dues should be released," Bandyopadhyay told journalists. "To this, the PM told me to read the CAG report and then we will talk. There was no scope (time) for more talks," he added.

Bandyopadhyay accused the central government of depriving Bengal of its rightful dues and forcing Trinamul to launch a fresh "satya graha". "Now, we will decide what our next step would be during the current session of Parliament," he said.

Bandyopadhyay's charge led to a counter-attack with state BJP president Sukanta Majumdar accusing the Bengal government of massive financial irregularities.

"The CAG report shows massive financial misappropriation in Bengal. The audit shows efforts were made by the Mamata Banerjee government to loot money everywhere. The report is a slap on the face of the Mamata government," Majumdar told a media conference at the BJP's headquarters here.

The Balurghat MP claimed that the CAG had found that the state government had not provided "utilisation certificate for Rs 3,400 crore appropriated from the contingency fund". <https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/cag-report-counter-from-pm-modi-to-tmc-leader-sudip-bandyopadhyay-over-plea-on-dues/cid/1997505>

5. BJP ने कैग रिपोर्ट का हवाला देकर बंगाल सरकार पर 'भ्रष्टाचार की जननी' होने का आरोप लगाया (*ndtv.in*) 1 Feb 2024

भारतीय जनता पार्टी (BJP) ने बुधवार को भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) की कथित रिपोर्ट का हवाला देते हुए आरोप लगाया कि पश्चिम बंगाल सरकार 'सभी भ्रष्टाचार की जननी' है और तृणमूल कांग्रेस के शासनकाल में करीब दो लाख करोड़ रुपये का घोटाला हुआ है।

भाजपा प्रदेश इकाई के अध्यक्ष सुकांत मजूमदार ने यहां आयोजित संवाददाता सम्मेलन में आरोप लगाया कि मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी के नेतृत्व वाली राज्य सरकार जनता के पैसे को अपना पैसा मानकर दुरुपयोग कर रही है।

मजूमदार ने आरोप लगाया, "उनकी सरकार ने हर जगह जनता का पैसा लूटने की कोशिश की है. कैग की रिपोर्ट उनकी सरकार के चेहरे पर तमाचा है और उसे बेनकाब करती है." भाजपा के राष्ट्रीय प्रवक्ता गौरव भाटिया ने कड़ी टिप्पणी करते हुए आरोप लगाया कि भले ही ममता बनर्जी "मां, माटी और मानुष" की बात करती हैं, लेकिन पश्चिम बंगाल में तृणमूल सरकार 'सभी घोटालों की जननी' है।

उन्होंने आरोप लगाया कि तृणमूल कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष 'चोर' और 'भ्रष्टों की सरगना' हैं. भाटिया ने कहा, "यह दो विचारधाराओं की लड़ाई है." उन्होंने दावा किया कि विपक्षी 'इंडिया' गठबंधन (इंडियन नेशनल

डेवलपमेंटल इंकलूसिव अलायंस) के सभी घटक उस विचारधारा के हैं, जिसके केंद्र में भ्रष्टाचार और परिवार का शासन है, जबकि मोदी सरकार ईमानदारी को प्रोत्साहित करने वाली और समाज को भ्रष्टाचार से छुटकारा दिलाने वाली है।

भाटिया और मजूमदार के मुताबिक रिपोर्ट में रेखांकित किया गया है कि निर्धारित समय के भीतर पूर्ण परियोजनाओं के लिए करीब 2.4 लाख उपयोगिता प्रमाण-पत्र जमा करने की आवश्यकता थी, लेकिन राज्य सरकार ने ऐसा नहीं किया। उन्होंने कहा कि करीब 1.95 लाख करोड़ रुपये की परियोजनाओं के लिए उपयोगिता प्रमाण पत्र जमा नहीं कराया गया है।

दोनों नेताओं ने आरोप लगाया कि ममता बनर्जी सरकार ने आपातकालीन निधि से 3,400 करोड़ रुपये निकाले थे और एक तिहाई राशि गृह मंत्रालय के उपयोग के लिए थी, जिसकी प्रमुख वह स्वयं हैं। उन्होंने कहा कि सरकार के पास इस राशि का कोई लेखा-जोखा नहीं है।

भाटिया ने सवाल किया, “क्या यह राशि रोहिंग्याओं, उनके परिवार के सदस्यों को दिया गया था, या दंगे भड़काने के लिए दिया गया.” भाटिया ने आरोप लगाया कि चाहे कांग्रेस हो, या आम आदमी पार्टी (आप), राष्ट्रीय जनता दल (राजद) या तृणमूल कांग्रेस किसी को यह नहीं मानना चाहिए कि वे कानून से ऊपर हैं। उन्होंने कहा कि इस तरह का अहंकार रखने वाले कई नेता सलाखों के पीछे हैं।

भाटिया ने कहा कि वह भूल गई हैं कि कानून का डंडा बड़े से बड़े भ्रष्टाचारी को सीधा कर देता है। उन्होंने हाल की एक घटना के लिए राज्य सरकार पर निशाना साधा, जिसमें प्रवर्तन निदेशालय के अधिकारियों पर एक तृणमूल नेता के समर्थकों ने तब हमला कर दिया था जब वे भ्रष्टाचार के एक मामले की जांच के सिलसिले में उसके घर छापेमारी करने गए थे। <https://ndtv.in/india/bjp-targets-bengal-government-citing-cag-report-4970074>

6. CAG submits report on Kaleshwaram (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Feb 1, 2024

Hyderabad: Th Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS) was submitted to the government on Wednesday.

CAG reportedly found fault with the irrigation officials and the previous government on various issues pertaining to the execution of the lift irrigation project.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/cag-submits-report-on-kaleshwaram/articleshow/107307989.cms>

7. Punjab has no tech mechanism to check illegal mining, says CAG (*hindustantimes.com*) Jan 31, 2024

As per the Punjab mining policy and NGT, the state should use geo-tagging, geo-fencing and electronic surveillance to check the menace, but records revealed that technology was not used by water resources dept

Chandigarh : The Comptroller and Auditor General on India (CAG) has pointed out the failure of the Punjab government to use technology and electronic surveillance such as geo-tagging and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to detect and check illegal mining in the state.

In its annual review of the working of public works divisions for the financial year 2022-23, the office of the principal accountant general (accounts and entitlements) said the Punjab State Sand and Gravel Mining Policy, 2018, required and the National Green Tribunal (NGT) ordered use of geo-tagging, geo-fencing and electronic surveillance to check illegal mining, but a test check of records of in three drainage divisions showed that the technology was not used by the water resources department to detect and check illegal mining.

Rampant illegal sand mining has been a challenge for successive governments in the state. The present AAP government is also under fire from the opposition parties for “failing to effectively deal” with this hot button issue so far.

The report said that as per Clause 21 of the Punjab State Sand and Gravel Mining Policy, geo-tagging of the mining area will be carried out while conducting physical inspection as the boundary of the mines will be checked using the coordinates recorded in GPS device, and the monitoring team can check whether any mining activity is going on outside the permitted area or not. The state government also provided for geo-tagging of mines in the new Punjab State Minor Mineral Policy, 2023, notified in March last year.

On February 26, 2021, the NGT had directed the Punjab government to use electronic surveillance through UAVs or remote sensing surveillance, especially in areas where sand mafias are active. It said night vision drones could also be used for checking mining activity. The test check of records in Amritsar, Phagwara and Golewala divisions, which had jurisdiction over sand mining sites, revealed that they were not using geo-fencing, geo-tagging and UAVs to detect and check illegal mining.

The federal auditor also looked at the mechanism for monitoring illegal mining, including the formation of district/sub-division-level teams.

According to the Punjab District Mineral Foundation Rules, 2018, each district was required to set up District Mineral Foundation to work for the interest and benefits of persons, and areas affected by mining-related operations with one of its functions being to check illegal mining and take preventive measures from time to time. It said the directorate of mining issued a notification in March 2016 on monitoring and prevention of illegal mining under which the deputy commissioner was to prepare a roster for district/sub-division-level teams of authorised officers and dedicated police force for monitoring and prevention of illegal mining. The authorised officer was required to submit weekly reports to the deputy commissioner.

“Test check in Amritsar and Phagwara divisions that had jurisdiction over sand mining sites revealed that records with regard to preparation of roster, weekly/fortnightly reports of checking were not available with the division in the absence of which it could not be ascertained whether any district/sub-division-level team was formed, roster prepared and followed for checking illegal mining,” according to the annual review report. Also, no details of activities undertaken by the District Mineral Foundation to prevent illegal mining were available on records.

A senior mining department officer said they received the review report only a couple of days ago and “would surely look into the observations made therein”.

8. ग्राम सरकार को पूरी तरह से पारदर्शी बनाने के लिए हरियाणा सरकार ने नियमों में किया बदलाव, प्रमाणित ऑडिटर्स की देखरेख में होगा ऑडिट (suryasamachar.com) January 31, 2024

चंडीगढ़: शासन की सबसे निचली ईकाई यानी पंचायती राज संस्थाओं जिसे हम तीसरी सरकार भी कहते हैं में भ्रष्टाचार हमेशा से ही बड़ी समस्या रही है। आये दिन ऐसे मामले सामने आते रहते हैं जिसमें पंचायती राज्य संस्थाओं में गबन की खबरें आती रहती हैं। लेकिन बिना किसी खर्ची और पर्ची के साथ पूरी तरह से पारदर्शी सरकार चलाने में विश्वास रखने वाले मनोहर लाल की सरकार ने हर कदम पर ऐसे प्रावधान बनाये हैं जिससे शासन में किसी भी स्तर पर भ्रष्टाचार का मामला सामने न आये और आम जन का विश्वास चुने हुए सरकार पर बना रहे।

इसी कड़ी को आगे बढ़ाते हुए हरियाणा सरकार की ओर से एक अहम फैसला लिया गया है ताकि पंचायती राज संस्थाओं और शासन के सबसे निचली ईकाई यानी पंचायत के कामकाज के प्रति लोगों का भरोसा बढ़े और सरकारी फंड का समुचित इस्तेमाल हो सके।

क्या है प्रदेश सरकार का फैसला

दरअसल प्रदेश सरकार ने ये फैसला लिया है कि अब पंचायतों और नगर निकायों का लेखापरीक्षा नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक द्वारा प्रमाणित ऑडिटर्स ही ऑडिट करेंगे। इससे वित्तीय अनियमितताओं की जांच करने और जवाबदेही तय करने में काफी मदद मिलेगी।

क्या कहते हैं अधिकारी

डिप्टी कंट्रोलर और ऑडिटर जनरल सुबीर मलिक की इस एडवाइज पर कार्रवाई करते हुए चीफ सेक्रेटरी संजीव कौशल ने फाइनेंस डिपार्टमेंट के अतिरिक्त मुख्य सचिव को ब प्रमाणित ऑडिटर्स से ही ऑडिट कराने के लिए लिखा है।

ऑडिट की कमियां होंगी दूर

सरकार के इस फैसले से पहले ही डिप्टी कंट्रोलर और ऑडिटर जनरल ने सरकार को सलाह दी थी कि फाइनेंस कमीशन के अलावा सीएजी और हरियाणा सरकार के लोकल निधि ऑडिटर द्वारा किए गए ऑडिट में गड़बड़ियां मिल चुकी हैं। पंचायतों और नगर निकायों में खातों के रखरखाव में भी काफी कमियां सामने आई थीं। इसलिए यह जरूरी है कि सीएजी प्रमाणित होशियार ऑडिटर्स से ही ऑडिट प्रक्रिया को पूरा कराया जाए।

स्थानीय स्तर पर योग्य ऑडिटर्स की भारी कमी

हरियाणा में लोकल लेवल पर योग्य ऑडिटर्स की काफी कमी है। क्योंकि चार्टर्ड अकाउंटेंट और अन्य योग्य पेशेवर अकाउंटेंट बड़े शहरों से दूरी और कम पैसे के कारण गांवों और छोटे शहरों में काम लेने और काम करने में रुचि नहीं रखते हैं। इस समस्या से निपटने के लिए ऑडिटर जनरल ने सरकार को सलाह दी है कि स्थानीय क्षेत्रों में काम करने के इच्छुक अकाउंटेंट का एक समूह बनाकर और इन निकायों के अपेक्षाकृत सरल खाते तैयार करने के लिए जरूरी कौशल रखने से इस समस्या को काफी हद तक सुधारा जा सकता है।

स्थानीय अकाउंटेंट के प्रमाणन की हुई व्यवस्था

सीएजी ने नवंबर 2022 में अकाउंटेंट के लिए ऑनलाइन प्रमाणन कोर्स का एक सेट विकसित करने के लिए इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ चार्टर्ड अकाउंटेंट्स ऑफ इंडिया के साथ एक ज्ञापन पर हस्ताक्षर किए। इसने तीन महीने के पाठ्यक्रम शुरू किए। साथ ही ग्रामीण और शहरी क्षेत्रों के लिए दो-दो कोर्स शुरू किए हैं। <https://suryasamachar.com/2024/01/31/haryanas-manohar-lal-government-changed-the-rules-to-make-village-government-completely-transparent/>

9. Rajasthan News: IFMS 3.0 को लेकर केंद्र व राज्य सरकार ने मांगी विस्तृत रिपोर्ट, बेनीवाल ने भी उठाया था मुद्दा (amarujala.com) 31 Jan 2024

Ifms 3.0 में टेक्नोलॉजी शिफ्टिंग के नाम पर अनाप-शनाप खर्च को लेकर केंद्र और राज्य सरकार के वित्त विभाग ने जिम्मेदार अधिकारियों से रिपोर्ट मांगी है। इसके साथ ही राज्य में 2010 से 2021 तक Ifms 1.0 और Ifms 2.0 को चलाने वाली स्टेट NIC से भी उसके सेंट्रल ऑफिस ने इस मामले में विस्तृत रिपोर्ट मांगी है।

सीएस ऑफिस ने भी मांगा जवाब जानकारी के मुताबिक मुख्य सचिव सुधांशु पंत ने इस मामले में ई सिलिंग सॉफ्टवेयर के जरिए स्थापित की गई सुपर ट्रेजरी के एक अन्य मामले में भी वित्त विभाग से ब्योरा मांगा है। इसमें पूछा गया है कि

नेट टेक्नोलॉजी से ऑरेकल पर शिफ्ट करने के कारण क्या रहे और अब तक इस पर कितना खर्च हुआ? साथ ही इससे जुड़ी प्राइवेट कंपनीज की डिटेल् भी उन्होंने मांगी। ऑटोमेशन के कारण राज्य के खजाने को अब तक हुए नुकसान व कारणों को लेकर भी वित्त विभाग को रिपोर्ट तैयार करने के लिए कहा गया है। सूत्रों के मुताबिक अब सरकार जल्द ही इस संबंध में निर्णय लेगी।

सीएजी ने भी बार-बार जताई थी आपत्ति गौरतलब है कि सीएजी ने भी इस व्यवस्था को गलत बताते हुए बार-बार सरकार को पत्र लिखे थे। जिस सुपर ट्रेजरी सिस्टम को लागू करके कुछ अधिकारी राज्य की संपूर्ण भुगतान प्रणाली पर कंट्रोल करके बैठे थे और नियमों में उसके लिए कोई बदलाव नहीं किया गया था, न ही वित्त मंत्री स्तर पर इसकी अनुमति ली गई थी।

ऑटोमेशन के चलते 500 करोड़ के डबल पेमेंट Ifms 3.0 में मैं जिस भुगतान प्रणाली को लागू कर अफसर वाहवाही लेना चाहते थे, उसमें पिछले साल ही 500 करोड़ रुपए से ज्यादा के डबल पेमेंट हो गए थे। इसके अलावा ऑटोमाइजेशन के चक्कर में एक ऑफिस की सैलेरी दूसरे ऑफिस में उठ गई। मृतकों के खातों में वेतन और पेंशन चले गए। कई कर्मचारियों को अलग-अलग ऑफिसों से वेतन क्रेडिट हो गए। एसआईपीएफ में ऑटोमेशन से 100 करोड़ के गलत भुगतान हो गए। सोशल सिक्यूरिटी पेंशन में ऑटोमेशन से 1000 करोड़ के गलत भुगतान हुए।

विधानसभा में भी उठा मुद्दा अमर उजाला ने व्यवस्था की इस खामी को लेकर लगातार खबरें कीं। विधानसभा में खींवर विधायक हनुमान बेनीवाल ने भी इस मुद्दे को उठाया। वहीं पिछली सरकार में कई भाजपा विधायक भी लगातार इस मुद्दे को लेकर सवाल पूछ रहे थे। <https://www.amarujala.com/rajasthan/jaipur/rajasthan-news-central-and-state-govt-asked-for-report-regarding-ifms-3-0-beniwal-also-raised-the-issue-2024-01-31>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

10. Budget 2024 reinforces focus on infrastructure with capex raised to ₹11.11 lakh crore (cnbctv18.com) Feb 1, 2024

Continuing its focus on infrastructure development, the Interim Budget 2024 has proposed to raise capital expenditure—for the fourth consecutive year—by 11.1% to ₹11.11 lakh crore, which is 3.4% of the GDP. This is also in line with market expectations.

The infrastructure spending in the fiscal year 2024-25 is being projected at 3.4% of GDP, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said during her interim Budget speech on Thursday, February 1.

India's infrastructure industry hoped that the government would unveil a long-term plan and timeline for enhancing infrastructure in the country as part of the Interim Budget.

“Increased capital outlay on infrastructure and railways would ensure that the momentum on the capex spending and infra development continues,” said Prashant Daftary, Partner, N.A. Shah Associates.

The industry expected the government to increase its focus on safety while pushing for the timely upgrade of infrastructure in the country.

“The continued focus on capex outlay at around 3.4% of GDP will certainly help boost economic activity and serve the long-term vision of Viksit Bharat,” said Jiger Saiya, Partner & Leader, Tax & Regulatory Services, MSKA & Associates.

This year's Budget will be an Interim Budget given the general elections slated for April-May 2024. The full Budget will be presented after the elections.

In Budget 2023 last year, FM Sitharaman had allocated about ₹10 lakh crore as capital expenditure for infrastructure development for 2023-24, which was 33% higher than the year ago.

The Union Finance Minister has earlier said that “no spectacular announcements” should be expected from this budget as the full budget for FY25 will be presented after the formation of a new government. <https://www.cnbctv18.com/economy/budget-2024-reinforces-focus-on-infrastructure-with-capex-raised-to-rs-11-11-lakh-crore-18947091.htm>

11. Govt to borrow Rs 14.13 lakh cr from market in FY25 to meet revenue short fall (theweek.in) February 01, 2024

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday proposed to borrow Rs 14.13 lakh crore by issuing dated securities to meet revenue shortfall in the next financial year starting on April 1.

This is lower than last year's gross borrowing estimate of Rs 15.43 lakh crore, which was the highest ever.

The lower borrowing estimate for 2024-25 is on account of growing tax revenue and the government's resolve to meet its fiscal consolidation roadmap.

About net borrowing estimate, Sitharaman while presenting the interim Budget for 2024-25 said it would be Rs 11.75 lakh crore during the next financial year.

As a result, the government would make repayment of Rs 2,37,818 crore during the year.

"The gross and net market borrowings through dated securities during 2024-25 are estimated at Rs 14.13 and Rs 11.75 lakh crore respectively. Both will be less than that in 2023-24. Now that the private investments are happening at scale, the lower borrowings by the Central Government will facilitate larger availability of credit for the private sector," she said.

There are signs of private investment picking up in the steel and cement sector due to massive capital expenditure by the government.

Against the estimate of Rs 10 lakh crore for 2023-24, the government has earmarked Rs 11.11 lakh crore during the next year.

As per the revised estimate for FY24, the capital expenditure would be Rs 9.5 lakh crore, short by Rs 50,000 crore over the BE for the current fiscal. <https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/business/2024/02/01/del77-bud-borrowings.html>

12. Government sets FY25 fiscal deficit target at 5.1% of GDP (*livemint.com*) 1 February 2024

The government's fiscal deficit for the first nine months of the current financial year reached ₹9.82 trillion

New Delhi: In a commitment to fiscal discipline, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday announced that the fiscal deficit target for financial year 2024-25 (FY25) has been set at 5.1% of the GDP.

This is part of the government's continued efforts towards fiscal consolidation, aiming to reduce the fiscal deficit to below 4.5% by FY26, Sitharaman said while presenting the interim budget for FY25. Fiscal deficit estimate for FY24 has been revised to 5.8% from 5.9%.

Fiscal deficit is the result of government's total expenditures exceeding the revenue that it generates, excluding money from borrowings. A significant fiscal deficit can lead to a higher national debt and increased costs related to debt servicing. This can adversely affect the economy, potentially devaluing the national currency and hindering private sector investments.

As per data from the Controller General of Accounts, the government's fiscal deficit for the first nine months of the current financial year reached ₹9.82 trillion, which is 55% of the budgeted ₹17.87 trillion for the year. This figure represents a slight improvement from the previous year, where the deficit stood at ₹9.93 trillion or 59.8% of the FY23 budget estimate of ₹16.61 trillion.

Sitharaman also announced the revised estimates for FY24, with revised total receipts estimated at ₹27.56 trillion against expenditures of ₹44.90 trillion. In comparison, the initial budget estimates for FY24 projected receipts at ₹27.16 trillion and expenditures at ₹45.03 trillion.

For FY25, the budget forecasts total receipts to be ₹30.80 trillion, with expenditures planned at ₹47.66 trillion, as outlined in the finance minister's budget presentation.

Additionally, the government has allocated ₹1.3 trillion towards 50-year interest-free loans for states, maintaining the same level of support as in the previous budget.

This initiative saw participation from 16 states in FY24, including Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and West Bengal, highlighting the scheme's broad appeal across the country. <https://www.livemint.com/economy/budget-2024-government-sets-fy25-fiscal-deficit-target-at-5-1-of-gdp-11706770377453.html>

13. Budget proposes 3 major railway corridors, upgrading 40,000 trains to Vande Bharat status (*moneycontrol.com*) 01 Feb 2024

The Indian Railways has received a major push in Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Interim Budget for 2024-25, as the government plans to set up three major economic railway corridors to reduce congestion and logistics costs in India.

She also proposed that around 40,000 trains running as part of the Indian Railways will be upgraded to Vande Bharat trains.

"Three corridors, including a corridor for energy, mineral, and cement, another to enhance port connectivity corridor, and a third to decongest the high traffic density corridors will be set up," the finance minister said in her Interim Budget speech on February 1.

The projects have been identified under the PM Gati Shakti for enabling multimodal connectivity. They will improve logistics efficiency and reduce costs, Sitharaman added.

"The resultant corridors will de-congest the high traffic corridors and help in improve operations of passenger trains, resulting in safety and higher travel speed for passengers, together with dedicated freight corridors. These three economic corridor programmes will accelerate our GDP growth and reduce logistics cost," Sitharaman said. <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/budget-proposes-3-major-railway-corridors-upgrading-40000-trains-to-vande-bharat-status-12170771.html>

14. Biggest allocation for defence, lowest for agriculture (*hindustantimes.com*) Feb 01, 2024

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday promised economic reforms to drive growth in a speech on the Narendra Modi government's budget, the last before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections due by May. The Interim Budget for 2024-25 is being seen as an economic manifesto for the Bharatiya Janata Party and will give clues to the market on its plans for fiscal consolidation, borrowings and future taxation policy.

India's capital spending for 2024-25 has been raised 11 per cent to ₹11.11 lakh crore, or 3.4 per cent of GDP, Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday. She said the tripling of capex in the last four years has resulted in a multiplier effect on economic growth and employment generation.

The minister said the Indian air carriers have placed orders for 1,000 new aircraft. Follow Live Updates on Budget 2024

Sitharaman also said a new scheme will be launched to strengthen deep tech for the defence sector. Sitharaman said the government will promote public and private investment in post-harvesting agriculture activities.

She said the application of nano DAP on various crops will be expanded in agri-climatic zones.

The finance minister said three major railway corridors, including for cement, will be constructed, and 40,000 normal railway bogies will be converted to Vande Bharat standard.

As per the Interim Budget documents, the defence ministry has been given the highest allocation.

Here are allocations for specific ministries

Defence Ministry: ₹6.1 lakh crore

Ministry of road transport and highways: ₹2.78 lakh crore

Ministry of railways: ₹2.55 lakh crore

Ministry of consumer affairs, food & public distribution: ₹2.13 lakh crore

Ministry of home affairs: ₹2.03 lakh crore

Ministry of rural development: ₹1.77 lakh crore

Ministry of chemicals and fertilizers: ₹1.68 lakh crore

Ministry of communications: ₹1.37 lakh crore

Ministry of agriculture and farmer's welfare: 1.27 lakh crore

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/business/budget-2024-biggest-allocation-for-defence-lowest-for-agriculture-101706770382414.html>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/business/budget-2024-biggest-allocation-for-defence-lowest-for-agriculture-101706770382414.html>

15. Govt to establish ₹1 lakh cr corpus for long-term funding of R&D projects including deep defence technology (thehindubusinessline.com) February 01, 2024

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in her interim budget speech on Thursday that a ₹1 lakh crore corpus will be established with a 50-year interest-free loan for long-term financing research and innovation in sunrise domains which also includes deep defence technology.

Though the details of scheme allocation under different heads for ministries to take up R&D projects will emerge later, it appears to answer long-standing demand for greater enhancement of funds for innovations in core areas of defence that includes for marine and air platform engine development and manufacturing in India besides for next generation weapon system needed at a time of growing global insecurities.

According to the FM's speech in Lok Sabha, the ₹1 lakh crore corpus will provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil interest rates. This will also encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in sunrise domains, Sitharaman added.

The full-fledged budget will be presented in July post the Lok Sabha elections. "This is an encouraging budget....We are fully confident that we will achieve the target of becoming a developed nation by 2047," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on the interim budget.

For defence budget 2023-24, Centre had earmarked a capital outlay estimated at ₹12,850 crores for R&D, an increase of 7.2 per cent over ₹11,981.81 crores listed in 2022-23 (BE). The overall outlay was ₹5.9 lakh crore for the Defence Ministry which accounted for over 13 per cent of the total expenditure of the union government.

After the USA and China, as per Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India was the third largest defence spender in absolute terms in 2021. Over the years, however, the budgetary allocations have not met the expectations of the three armed forces which has to address the possibility of a two front war with inimical neighbours. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/budget/budget-2024-govt-to-establish-1-lakh-cr-corpus-for-long-term-funding-of-rd-projects-including-deep-defence-technology/article67799796.ece>

16. India's first river linking project faces hurdle as govt gets no tenders for dam (hindustantimes.com) Jan 31, 2024

The government has received no tenders to construct the Daudhan Dam and two tunnels in the Panna Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur

India's first river linking project Ken-Betwa in Bundelkhand region has faced a hurdle as there have been no takers for the tender to construct the Daudhan Dam and two tunnels in the Panna Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur, which are considered the heart of the project, said people familiar with the matter.

The National Water Development Authority (NWDA) floated a tender for the construction of Daudhan Dam and two tunnels in August 2023 with a deadline in October, but no company participated in the tender process.

According to an officer, NWDA extended the last date for filing tenders till January 18, 2024, but companies sent queries related to permission, cost and technology but showed no interest in submitting the tender. The NWDA has now extended the last date for the third time till March 5.

Officials familiar with the matter said if the companies don't go for tender, this would increase the cost of the project.

“Seeing no response and hesitation among companies for the project of about ₹5,000 crores to ₹6000 crores, the NWDA officers have decided to invite companies to discuss their problems and issues on February 2 by releasing a public notice. We want to give equal opportunities to address the queries and issues related to it so that at least three companies could participate in the tender process of the project,” said a senior NWDA official, who is working on the Ken Betwa Link Project.

Confirming this, Ken Betwa Link Project chief executive officer (CEO) Prashast Kumar Dixit said, “The companies have their own concern for the project and that's why they didn't go for the filing of the tender. We are trying to address it.”

An officer, requesting anonymity, said, “The companies are also concerned about environmental clearance as the dam is going to be constructed in the core area of the Panna Tiger Reserve.”

The question of environmental clearance was raised even on the construction of the Lower Orr Dam of the project. “The environment ministry asked to undertake a fresh environment appraisal to assess ecological losses in Lower Orr Dam project and also fined on state government and company,” said the officer.

The Daudhan Dam proposed across the Ken River is 2,031-m long, out of which 1,233-m length of the dam will be earthen and the remaining 798-m length of the dam will be of concrete.

Under the project, a penstock is proposed on the left concrete portion of the dam for taking water to the power house located at the toe of the dam. For providing irrigation water, an upper-level tunnel at the mouth of the Daudhan reservoir has been proposed.

“This tunnel takes off from the left bank of the Ken River upstream of the Daudhan Dam. Downstream of the upper level tunnel, another tunnel i.e. a lower-level tunnel takes off. Powerhouse-II having an installed capacity of 18 MW is proposed at its outlet. After generation of power, water will be taken through a canal to provide irrigation water to 1.73 lakh hectares, out of total 2.41 lakh hectares of Ken command in Madhya Pradesh,” the project report said.

The project is to be completed in two phases. In the first phase, the Daudhan Dam complex will be completed and in the second, construction of the Lower Orr Dam, Bina Complex Project, and Kotha Barrage.

Nine districts of Madhya Pradesh (Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri, Raisen) and four district of Uttar Pradesh (Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur) will be covered by the project. It will also help generate 34 MW of hydropower and irrigate 6.3 lakh hectares of land every year.

A project under the National Perspective Plan (NPP), the Ken-Betwa project is estimated to cost ₹44,605 crore. A tripartite agreement for the implementation of the project was signed among the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh and the central government on March 22, 2021. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/bhopal-news/indias-first-river-linking-project-faces-hurdle-as-govt-gets-no-tenders-for-dam-101706712445852.html>

17. Govt overhauls norms for highway project preparation, supervision contracts (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Jan 31, 2024

NEW DELHI: Two probe reports on Silkyara tunnel collapse in Uttarkashi by the central and Uttarakhand governments have pointed to preparation of “deficient” detailed project report (DPR), a trend that has become a cause of concern for the government as well.

To overcome the worrying trend of bidders quoting abnormally low prices to bag projects and getting more works than their capacity to handle, the road ministry will cap the maximum score that bidders would get even if they quote abnormally low prices and limit the number of works any company can get at any given point of time.

TOI has learnt that the road transport ministry will circulate the amended norms this week to all highway owning agencies.

Preparation of poor DPRs results in deficient project planning, delays implementation and leads to frequent change of scope, which ends up adding to costs for the government.

As per the new norms, the revised weightage will be 80% for technical and 20% for financials, which is known as quality-cum-cost based selection (QCBS). The agencies will open financial bids only when a company gets an 80% score on technical parameters. Then the average bid prices quoted by all the bidders will be worked out and any bidder quoting 25% less than the average price will get the maximum score. This will bring bidders to a level playing field.

Sources said these provisions have been incorporated considering that the finance ministry guidelines specify that no bidder can be eliminated. “Till now companies that score less in technical qualification, which takes into account the qualified manpower on their roll and their past records, end up bagging projects after quoting very low prices. This resulted in less capable players getting more projects. Now it will change,” said an official.

Similarly, there will be a cap on the number of projects a private player can get based on its capacity, including turnover and permanent key personnel. Companies will be barred from bidding for future projects, if they give wrong information. In certain cases,

the companies would have to pay back the salaries or fees they get for their key expert professionals, if the details are found to be wrong.

According to the new norms, there will be ratings of consultants as well. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/govt-overhauls-norms-for-highway-project-preparation-supervision-contracts/articleshow/107301727.cms?from=mdr>

18. Irregularities in Old Grant Bungalows at centre of probe led by Defence Estates Director (*indianexpress.com*) February 1, 2024

The Old Grant Bungalows (OGBs), the iconic architectural treasures from the British era that contribute to the allure of Pune Camp and which have evolved into highly valued real estate over the years, are currently the focus of an investigation by the Directorate of Defence Estates of the Southern Command. The investigation and ensuing actions have triggered a storm on the administrative front.

These investigations led by Saurav Ray, the Director of Defence Estates, Southern Command, have unearthed several irregularities including illegal sale of some of the properties to builders.

Top officials privy to the details of the investigations say that such dealings could not have taken place without not just the blessings but connivance of those within the system. One of the immediate fallouts of the investigation has been sealing of four OGBs in the Pune Cantonment area, which are believed to have a total value close to Rs 350 crore.

During the sealing of these properties, Ray has also ordered filing of First Information Reports (FIRs) in connection with the unauthorised sale of these four properties located in Pune Camp, sources said. These FIRs are yet to be filed by the officials concerned.

Old Grant sites are a legacy of the pre-independence land policies aimed at providing accommodations to military officers.

The pre-independence governments of Bengal, Madras and Bombay presidencies had issued various rules and regulations between the years 1789 and 1899. Under this, officers were granted licences of land sites, on which they could build houses. No right of property for the land was however granted to them.

Later, civilians were also allowed to build such houses on lands belonging to the state, but these houses were to be hired by the local military authorities.

Such lands were allowed to be transferred from one military officer to another. For structures owned by the civilians, such transfer would mandate approvals of the local authorities. The Comptroller and Auditor of General of India has in the past reported several instances of irregularities in OGBs in cantonments across India.

Pune Cantonment Board jurisdiction has close to 300 OGBs while the Khadki Cantonment Board has around 60. The investigation till now by the Defence Estates Office of Pune Circle has brought to light irregularities in connection with at least 20 properties in Pune Cantonment.

These irregularities include use of residential premises for commercial purposes, unauthorised constructions done under the garb of minor repair and in some cases unauthorised sale of these properties. The four properties that were ordered to be sealed are among these properties. Officials said that the investigation is ongoing.

Along with the sealing of four properties, Ray has written to the Inspector General of Registration (IGR) of Maharashtra seeking sensitisation of all registrars and sub-registrars that no such sale of lease and old grant properties on defence land inside Cantonment areas should be registered and such cases be referred and brought to the immediate notice of Defence Estates Officer, Pune Circle and Cantonment authorities concerned.

Officials said that it has been observed in some of the cases that occupants claim to have no successor to the property and sell it to private developers. In some other cases, occupants secure a nod from concerned authorities for minor repairs but submit a building plan to the cantonment authorities. They then sell the property to the developers and apply for the change of title to the Ministry of Defence as the procedure mandates.

Sources close to the investigation said that none of these moves are possible without the connivance of those inside the system and that regular review of the status of all these properties is the need of the hour.

As the investigation led by Ray progressed, he was given additional security cover by Pune City police following the threat assessment in the backdrop of the sealing of the four OGBs and scrutiny of other highly valued properties.

Meanwhile, in a latest development in the case, a Civil Court in Pune on Tuesday granted the interim injunction sought by a Holder of Occupancy Rights to reopen the lock and seal of an OGB on Napier Road, which was one of the four properties sealed following the investigation. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/irregularities-old-grant-bungalows-probe-defence-estates-director-9138065/>