NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. CAG Report: Flagship schemes red flagged *(tehelka.com)*

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While exposing serious procedural and financial irregularities in the performance of the government's flagship schemes, the regulator underlines a critical need for a robust oversight mechanism to safeguard public funds, and ensure effective execution of government initiatives, writes Mudit Mathur.

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has red flagged and exposed serious procedural and financial anomalies in the functioning and performance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship schemes. Financial discrepancies in key projects and welfare schemes have triggered harsh criticism from the opposition parties, and have put a question mark on the hyperbolic electoral promises of PM Modi with the people of India for providing corruption-free and transparent governance, and proper allocation of public funds.

The CAG has released 12 audit reports which were tabled in Parliament as a part of constitutional requirement under Article 151 of the constitution of India during the last phase of the noisy Monsoon Session, which was adjourned sine die last fortnight. These reports shed light on financial discrepancies and call for increased transparency and accountability in public governance.

The Constitution of India has mandated the CAG, the apex public funds auditor, to act as a watchdog and to keep strict vigil on revenue receipts and spending of public funds, and report to Parliament if any misuse or misappropriation occurs from the consolidated funds of Union and state governments.

While auditing funds utilisation of various priority sectors, it highlighted major fiscal flaws in the implementation of "Bharatmala", "Ayuashman Bharat", "UDAN" and "Swadesh Darshan Scheme" besides red flagging diversion of National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) funds meant for pension for BPL people to publicity of other schemes of the ministry. The auditor also underlined the decline in operating ratio of Railways performance besides incurring unsanctioned expenditure in 2021-22 financial year, the trend which continued despite being pointed out by the CAG earlier.

'Bharatmala Pariyojana' (BPP-I)
In its audit report on 'Implementation of Phase-I of Bharatmala Pariyojana' (or BPP-I) — conducted for the period 2017-18 to 2020-21, the Audior highlighted serious anomalies in the implementation of highway projects under Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase-I (BPP-1). The report quotes:

"Instances of irregularities in award of projects by implementing agencies were observed in clear violation of the prescribed processes of tendering, viz., successful bidder not fulfilling tender condition or bidder selected on the basis of falsified documents, award of works without there being approved detailed project reports or based on faulty detailed project report," it said.

The report also found huge overrun costs in the Dwarka Expressway project which was prioritised to decongest NH-48 between Delhi to Gurugram by developing it into a 14-lane national highway.

In October 2017, Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved a new umbrella program called Bharatmala Pariyojana for the development of 74,942 km of national highways. The primary focus of the program was on optimising efficiency of the movement of freight and people across the country. Out of above length, national highways length of 34,800 km, including the Residual National Highways Development Program (NHDP) length of 10,000 km, was approved under Phase-I of Bharatmala Pariyojana (BPP-I), for development up to September 2022, at an investment outlay of Rs 5,35,000 crore.

There are seven components under the Pariyojana viz., Economic Corridors, Inter-Corridor and Feeder Roads, National Corridors/National Corridors Efficiency Improvements Programme, Border and International Connectivity Roads, Coastal and Port Connectivity Roads, Green-field Expressways and Residual NHDP projects. The Pariyojana is implemented by Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) through its implementing agencies viz., National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), Road Wing of MoRTH and State Public Works Departments.

Dwarka Expressway

The report notes that Dwarka Expressway was initially planned by the Haryana government under its Gurgaon-Manesar Urban Construction Plan-2031. For that, Haryana acquired right of way (width of a road) of 150 metres to construct the main carriage way of 25 metres, with a 7-m-wide median and a dedicated utility corridor for trunk services.

“However, with no further progress being made by the Haryana government, this project was later approved in BPP-I by CCEA,” the report noted. For this purpose, 90 m right of way was handed over by Haryana to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) free of cost, the audit report stated.

The report highlighted, “The audit observed that up to 70-75 metre right of way was required to build a 14-lane national highway at grade. However, for no reasons on record, the project in Haryana region, where its length was 19 km, was planned with eight-lane elevated main carriageway and six lanes at grade road, when NHAI already had 90 m right of way and the same was sufficient for building 14 lanes at grade…. Due to such massive structures, this project, constructed on EPC (Engineering, Procurement, and Construction) mode, for a length of 29.06 km had sanctioned civil construction cost of Rs 7,287.29 crore i.e., Rs 250.77 crore/km as against per-km civil construction cost of Rs 18.20 crore approved by CCEA…”

MoRTH prioritised (November 2018) the construction of Dwarka Expressway by dividing it into four projects. NHAI approved (January-March 2018) the construction of these four projects with a civil cost of Rs 7,287.29 crore. The scheduled completion dates of these projects were falling between November 2020 to September 2022. These projects had achieved physical progress ranging between 60.50 per cent to 99.25 per cent as on 31 March 2023.

Dwarka Expressway was prioritised to decongest NH-48 between Delhi to Gurugram by developing it into 14 lane national highway running parallel to NH-48 at per km cost of Rs 250.77 crore as against Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved per km cost of Rs 18.20 crore for National Corridors/National Corridors Efficiency Improvements Programme, under which this project was being constructed.

As per the project's feasibility study, the average daily traffic of 3,11,041 moving on NH-48 between Delhi to Gurugram consisted of 2,88,391 passenger vehicles (i.e., 92.72 per cent). Of these 2,32,959 passenger vehicles (i.e., 80.78 per cent) were inter-city traffic only i.e., the traffic not crossing the Kherki-Daula toll on NH-48 (Delhi-Gurugram traffic only which did not cross Gurugram boundary).

While reviewing the prioritisation of Dwarka Expressway under BPP-I, the Audit observed the following:

No detailed project report (DPR)
The individual projects of Dwarka Expressway were appraised (December 2017/February 2018) by Project Appraisal & Technical Scrutiny Committee and approved (January/March 2018) by NHAI Board without any detailed project report for the project being prepared (not prepared till date) and even the final feasibility report of the project was submitted (September 2018) after approval of the project by NHAI.

The audit observed that the four projects of Dwarka Expressway were appraised and approved by Competent Authority based on a brief presentation by the concerned technical division of NHAI. Thus, Dwarka Expressway was appraised and approved without any detailed project report. Effects of non-preparation of detailed project report were manifested in following ways:

"Inspite of sufficient right of way being available with NHAI for constructing all 14 lanes of Dwarka Expressway at grade, for no reasons on record, it was being constructed with eight lane elevated road and six lane at grade road resulting in a very high per km civil cost of Rs 250.77 crore for this project";

"The planned toll rates and tolling mechanism of Dwarka Expressway might hinder the recovery of capital cost of the project and might also result in undue financial burden on commuters moving between Delhi-Gurugram (up to Kherki Daula toll plaza)";

"Inspite of heavy Delhi-Gurugram traffic, which was expected to use the six lane at grade portion of this project falling in Haryana region, this at grade portion was being constructed with sub-optimal specifications of 20 Million Standard Axles traffic; and California Bearing Ratio value of soil estimated, in feasibility study of Dwarka Expressway, was on lower side as compared to California Bearing Ratio value considered by contractor resulting in savings to the contractor in the cost of construction."

"BJP's corruption & loot is taking the nation on a Highway to Hell ! In a scathing report against Modi Govt, CAG has pointed that Bharatmala Pariyojana is being built with innumerable deficiencies, non-compliance of outcome parameters, clear violation of tender bidding process, and huge funding mismanagement," said Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge in his statement on X (formerly Twitter).

"One of the stark examples of the fraud, in this scheme, is the Dwarka Expressway. CAG has exposed that the cost of this project was originally estimated at Rs 528.8 Cr but later zoomed to Rs 7287.2 Cr — a whopping 1278% increase!! Dwarka Expressway was appraised and approved without any detailed project report," Kharge commented.

"The planned toll rates shall hinder the recovery of capital cost of the project and result in undue financial burden on commuters. Lane configurations of Dwarka-Expressway were determined without analysing the development of nearby competing infrastructure. Construction was done with suboptimal specifications," questioned Kharge, adding, "Pradhan Mantri ji, You need to look within, before you harp about corruption against your opponents, because you are overseeing it yourself!! In 2024, INDIA will make your government accountable."

Responding to a political row erupted over the CAG report which red flagged the high cost of construction of the Dwarka Expressway, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari rejected the auditor's observation that Rs 250 crore was spent per kilometre. CAG report mentioned 29.06 kilometres long Dwarka Expressway is being built at an exorbitant cost of Rs 250.77 crore per kilometre, exceeding the Rs 18.2 crore per kilometre that was sanctioned by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).

Refuting the allegations of "high cost of construction", Nitin Gadkari said that the Dwarka Expressway was not 29 kilometres-long as mentioned in the CAG report but around 230 kilometres-long, as it had tunnels included in it as well.

Gadkari said that according to this, Rs 9.5 crore was being spent per kilometre. Gadkari claimed that he told the same to the CAG officials, and they were "convinced" by the clarification. However, he said, they still went ahead with the report.

Gadkari has conveyed his displeasure with the lopsided attitude adopted by certain officials responsible for responding to queries raised by the CAG with regard to the cost of construction of the Dwarka Expressway at a high-level review meeting. The minister also directed to fix the responsibility for this lapse on the part of senior concerned officials of his ministry.

Commuters pinched for Rs 150 cr at toll plazas

The CAG report on the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways Toll Operations of National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) in Southern India has found that at five toll plazas, a total amount of Rs 132.05 crore was collected from commuters in violation of toll plaza rules.

The audit was conducted on 41 randomly selected toll plazas across the five southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Telangana which stated that due to "non-implementation of NH Fee Amendment Rules 2013 dated 16 December 2013 with respect to upgradation of existing four lane highways, NHAI continued to collect user fee in three toll plazas (namely Nathavalasa, Chalageri and

Hebbalu) during delayed period of construction though the amended rule stated that no user fee shall be levied for the delayed period.”

The report said that this resulted in the collection of user fees of Rs 124.18 crore during the period May 2020 to March 2021 in “violation of the amended toll fee rules”. The report found that at the Paranur toll plaza, the NHAI delayed reduction in user fee to 75% of fee applicable. At the Madpam toll plaza, the NHAI annually revised the user fee despite the stipulation of no revision during upgradation as per the amended Fee Rules. NHAI collected Rs 7.87 crore from road users on the two toll plazas from August 2018 to March 2021.

“Thus toll collection in these five toll plazas led to undue burden of Rs 132.05 crore on road users,” the report stated. The report also found that NHAI collected excess toll fees of Rs 22.10 crore from road users during 2017-2018 to 2020-2021 at the Paranur public-funded toll plaza.

A bridge had been constructed in 1954 and a user fee was being collected for it, again in violation of the NH Fee Second Amendment Rules 2011. Under the rules, since the bridge was constructed prior to 1956, the user fee was not to be levied.

The audit also found that delays in toll collection according to time limits prescribed by NH Fee Rules, 2008, in four stretches of public funded projects led to a loss of NHAI revenue amounting to Rs 64.60 crore.

AB-PMJAY: Howlers galore

PM-JAY is much flaunted to be the world’s largest fully government-funded health insurance scheme that was launched in September 2018 just prior to 2019 Lok Sabha elections as a major booster plank of welfare measures. The scheme aims to provide free healthcare to over 50 crore poor families. The scheme provides funding of up to Rs five lakh per family annually in cases of medical emergencies.

The CAG in its report revealed alarming facts that all is not well with the government’s flagship health insurance scheme, Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY). It has found glaring loopholes in implementation of the scheme including misappropriation of funds, fake accounts, releasing funds without proper evidence and even claims paid in the name of patients who were already dead!

In its Performance Audit of Ayushman Bharat — PMJAY, the CAG said that overall, 7,49,820 beneficiaries were linked with a single mobile number in the Beneficiary Identification System (BIS) of the scheme. Also, 4,761 registrations were made against seven Aadhar numbers and non-existent hospitals were enrolled under a public health insurance scheme.

“Data analysis of the BIS database revealed that there were large numbers of beneficiaries registered against the same or invalid mobile number. Overall, 1119 to 7,49,820 beneficiaries were linked with a single mobile number in the BIS database…,” the report states.

Besides 7,49,820 beneficiaries were linked with 9999999999, 1,39,300 beneficiaries were linked to the phone number 8888888888; and 96,046 others were linked to the number 9000000000. There were also at least 20 cell phone numbers to which between 10,001 and 50,000 beneficiaries were linked, the report revealed.

The report stated that 7.87 crore beneficiary households were registered, constituting 73% of the targeted households of 10.74 crore (November 2022). Later, the government increased the target to 12 crore. The report noted, “Mobile numbers are significant for searching records related to any beneficiary in the database, who may approach the registration desk without the ID.”

“In case of loss of e-card, identification of the beneficiary may also become difficult. This may result in denial of scheme benefits to eligible beneficiaries as well as denial of pre- and post-admission communication causing inconvenience to them.”

Interestingly, the report of the constitutional audit agency found that such cases are relatively high in Kerala, which ranks first in the NITI Aayog Health Index and other social health parameters.

The scheme offers that a patient can avail of treatment only once without an Aadhar or an Aadhar enrolment slip. They are further mandated to provide a signed declaration saying that they will produce the Aadhar before their next treatment. However, the CAG report found that 8.2 lakh patients availed of treatment for two or more times without an Aadhar or any other biometric proof for a cumulative claim settlement worth Rs1,678.68 crore.

Kerala cases

Kerala tops the list with the highest number of such cases. The State saw 2.02 lakh patients availing treatments two or more times without biometric verification between September 2018 and March 2021. Cumulatively, they were paid Rs 472.64 crore. It was followed by Chhattisgarh which saw Rs 234.86 crore in claim payments to such patients.

The report also highlighted something rather weird. Thousands of claims are made against patient names, who were shown ‘dead’ earlier. “The audit noted that patients earlier shown as ‘died’ in the system continued to avail treatment under the Scheme. Data analysis of mortality cases revealed that 88,760 patients died during treatment specified under the Scheme. A total of 2,14,923 claims shown as paid in the system, related to fresh treatment in respect of these patients [sic],” reveals the CAG report.

In 3,903 of such cases, claims amounting to Rs 6.97 crore pertaining to 3,446 patients were paid to hospitals. Strangely, in these cases too, Kerala tops the list. In the state, such claims were made in the names of 966 ‘already dead patients”. They were paid a claim amount worth Rs 2.61 crore. Madhya Pradesh comes next with 403 claims in the name of dead patients.

“The implementation of the Scheme needs improvement in light of the findings made in the report. It is expected that the compliance to the observations and recommendations made in this Report will help in improving the implementation of the Scheme,” the report added.

UDAN a non-starter

This CAG Report contains significant results of the compliance audit of Regional Connectivity Scheme – UDAN of the Ministry of Civil Aviation launched in pursuance of the provisions of the National Civil Aviation Policy 2016. The instances mentioned in the report are those which came to notice in the course of audit for the period from October 2016 to March 2021; figures relating to the period up to March 2023 have been updated, wherever necessary.

National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP), 2016 envisaged a Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) to enhance regional air connectivity through fiscal support and infrastructure development. Accordingly, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) launched (October 2016) the scheme – Regional Connectivity Scheme – UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik). The scheme aimed to promote affordability of regional air connectivity through a series of measures.

Up to UDAN-3, 52 per cent (403 out of 774 routes) of the awarded routes could not commence operations and from the 371 commenced routes, only 112 routes (30 per cent) completed the full concession period of three years. Further, out of these 112 routes, only 54 routes (i.e., 7 per cent of the awarded routes) connecting 17 RCS Airports could sustain the operations beyond the concession period of three years, as of March 2023. The scheme launched in 2016 is aimed at promoting affordability of regional air connectivity and refurbishing underserved airports.

“Further, out of these 112 routes, only 54 routes (7% of the awarded routes) connecting 17 RCS [regional connectivity scheme] airports could sustain the operations beyond the concession period of three years, as of March 2023,” the report stated.

The report also found “significant delays” in revival or development of identified RCS airports out of the budgetary support sanctioned by Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs in March 2017. For accounting of transactions of Regional Air Connectivity Fund, Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) as per laid down procedure of CAG of India was not formulated even after a lapse of more than five years. Further, the accounts of Regional Air Connectivity Fund Trust (since inception) were also not submitted for CAG audit.

“Out of the 116 airports/heliports/water aerodromes where expenditure was incurred, operations commenced at only 71 (61%) airports/heliports/water aerodromes,” the report said. “Operations could not be commenced or were discontinued at 83 airports/heliports/water aerodromes even after incurring an expenditure of Rs 1,089 crore.”

Swadesh Darshan Scheme

The Swadesh Darshan Scheme is a 100 per cent Central Sector flagship scheme launched (January 2015) by the Ministry of Tourism for the development of tourism infrastructure in the country. The Ministry identified 15 tourist circuits for development under the scheme and a total of 76 projects were sanctioned under the scheme since its inception.

The scheme was formulated for integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits. The Ministry identified 15 tourist circuits for development under the scheme, namely

Himalayan circuit, North-East circuit, Krishna circuit, Buddhist circuit, Coastal circuit, Desert circuit, Tribal circuit, Eco circuit, Wildlife circuit, Rural circuit, Spiritual circuit, Ramayana circuit, Heritage circuit, Tirthankar circuit and Sufi circuit.

"The Ministry launched the Scheme despite objections of the Planning Commission/Ministry of Finance and did not act upon the recommendation of the Standing Finance Committee to formulate an Umbrella scheme by merging the schemes having overlapping objectives. As a result, there was overlapping of scope across various schemes implemented by the Ministry.

Most of these schemes were still ongoing in 2021-22. Thus, the objective of the government to contain the proliferation and rationalisation of schemes was not achieved," CAG report said.

The Ministry of Tourism sanctioned funds for the Swadesh Darshan scheme without the cabinet approval. A performance audit of the Swadesh Darshan Scheme implemented by the Ministry of Tourism for the period from the scheme's inception in January 2015 to March 2022 revealed that while the scheme was launched with an initial outlay of Rs 500 crore, the Ministry continued to sanction projects and the amount sanctioned had exceeded Rs 4,000 crore by 2016-17.

The funds were sanctioned by the ministry "without obtaining approval of the Cabinet, which was necessary for sanctioning projects costing above Rs 1,000 crore." The report added that the scheme was implemented "without conducting any feasibility study."

The report said that the ministry identified 15 tourist circuits for development under the scheme and a total of 76 projects were sanctioned under the scheme since its inception. "Non-preparation of the feasibility report resulted in poor identification of sites and deficiencies in execution of projects, such as delay in completion of the projects and non-utilisation of funds," CAG report stated.

"As on 31 March 2022, the total expenditure incurred under the rural circuit was only Rs 30.84 crore, which constituted only 0.73% of the total expenditure incurred under the scheme." The rural circuit did not receive suitable attention from the ministry because it did not develop a formal mechanism for evaluation and approval of projects. There was a lack of "proper planning on the part of the ministry" as it did not ensure the preparation of a national or state-level plan before launching the scheme.

Promoting schemes at NSAP expense

The CAG report on the Performance Audit of the National Social Assistance Programme – Union Government (Civil), Ministry of Rural Development, has found that funds meant to publicise the scheme were diverted for publicity of other schemes by the ministry. The audit covered the period between 2017-18 to 2020-21.

The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) is meant to provide social assistance benefits to the below poverty line (BPL) households in the case of old age, disabled, widows, and the death of the primary breadwinner.

The NSAP includes five sub-schemes, of which, three are pension schemes, including the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS), and Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS). The other two sub-schemes are the National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) – a one-time assistance to the bereaved family in the event of the death of the breadwinner, and the Annapurna scheme – food security to the eligible old age persons who have remained uncovered under IGNOAPS.

The report said that funds of Rs 2.83 crore earmarked for IEC (Information, Education, and Communication) activities under NSAP were diverted for "campaigning of other schemes". The audit reported that the absence of a prescribed procedure for proactive identification of beneficiaries coupled with the lack of IEC activities resulted in delayed/non-coverage of eligible beneficiaries from the ambit of NSAP and non-achievement of the objective of universal coverage of beneficiaries.

The report said that the Ministry of Rural Development in January 2017 decided to campaign through hoardings in states and Union territories for giving due publicity to all programmes/schemes of the Ministry. "Administrative approval and financial sanction of Rs 39.15 lakh was taken (June 2017) for a publicity campaign through hoardings with a limit of 10 hoardings at each capital city of the state and UT.

Administrative approval and expenditure sanction of Rs 2.44 crore was taken (August 2017) for campaigning Gram Samriddhi, Swachh Bharat Pakhawada and publicity material of multiple schemes of the Ministry through five hoardings in each District for 19 states. "Subsequently, work orders were issued in June and September 2017 and publicity campaigns were to be undertaken in September 2017.

"The funds for the said campaign were stated to be available under National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and were approved by the competent authority to be incurred under the same head; however, the audit observed that funds were actually incurred from social security welfare-NSAP schemes," the report said.

"However, the advertisement of only PMAY-G (Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin) and DDU-GKY(Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana) schemes were mentioned in the work order and no schemes of NSAP were included in the work order. "Further, the campaigns were to be undertaken by DAVP (Directorate of Advertising & Visual Publicity) under intimation to the department; however, the payment to DAVP was made without confirmation of the execution of the work."

"Later, planned IEC activities under NSAP were not undertaken as envisaged and funds of Rs 2.83 crore were diverted for campaigning in respect of other schemes of the Ministry. Hence, IEC activities intended to create awareness among potential beneficiaries of NSAP could not be taken up even though there was earmarking of funds for IEC activities."

In addition, the report said that while the scheme is meant to include universal coverage, the report found that it was being implemented in a "demand-driven mode where benefits were provided to only those beneficiaries who applied for pensions/benefits under NSAP themselves". The report also found "idling of funds of Rs 18.78 crore".

It said that while one of the key principles of NSAP is regular monthly disbursement of pension, in eight States/UTs, funds received under NSAP were lying idle either with the states/Union territories concerned or with implementing agencies. This included Bihar, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Jammu and Kashmir, and Tripura. The report found "Rs 18.78 crore were lying idle in eight states for a period ranging from one to five years".

"The reasons for idling of funds were such as the release of funds at the fag end of the financial year, non-revalidation of funds from administrative department, duplication and non-permissible age limit of the beneficiaries," it said. The report added that this also shows lack of financial monitoring on part of the states/UTs which manifested in irregular payment of pension to the beneficiaries.

Railway spent Rs 6082 cr sans sanction

The Indian Railways' finances have slipped into a "concern zone", with the national railway operator spending Rs 107 to earn Rs 100 during 2021-22 owing to higher appropriation to fund pensions, CAG said in its report containing audit observations on matters arising from examination of Finance Accounts of Indian Railways for the year ended 31 March 2022. It focuses on the financial health of the Railways based on various parameters and contains the audit findings on the appropriation of its accounts.

While the capital expenditure of Railways has been on the rise in recent years, its financial performance has shown a decline in the "excess of earning over expenditure", or surplus, in the six years from 2016-17 to 2021-22.

The CAG report on the financial audit of the accounts of the Union government found that the Ministry of Railways had incurred unsanctioned expenditure. During the financial year (FY) 2021-22, the ministry had incurred unsanctioned expenditure of Rs 6082.77crore, encompassing 1,937 cases.

In 2021-22, Railways' finances slipped into 'concern zone' against the target of 96.15 per cent in the Budget Estimates, the Operating Ratio of Railways was 107.39 per cent in 2021-22. As compared to the Operating Ratio of 97.45 per cent during 2020-21, there was deterioration in 2021-22.

"Similar audit comments were made in the previous C&AG audit reports for the year 2018-19 to 2020-21. Thus, it is evident that no steps had been taken by the Ministry to reduce the cases of unsanctioned expenditure despite being pointed out in the previous CAG audit reports," it said.

CAG audit found inadequate generation of internal resources by Railways resulted in greater dependence on Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) and Extra Budgetary Resources (EBR). The amount of EBR was Rs 71,065.86 crore, which represented a decrease of 42.31% as compared with 2020-21.

The report also said passenger fares are cross-subsidised using profits generated on freight operations. This cross-subsidisation continues to be a concern, as railways has not been able to raise fares in the sleeper class.

According to the CAG, in FY22, the railways' loss decreased over the previous year but the entire profit of Rs 36,196 crore from freight traffic was utilised to cross-subsidise and compensate the loss on operation of passenger and other coach services.

Trend analysis of object head wise expenditure in respect of Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare revealed persistent savings of 40% to 96% of the Budget Estimate during the last five years. The report said that this indicates deficient planning at the Budget Estimate stage without taking into account previous years' trends.

All these reports collectively highlight the critical need for accountable governance, adherence to financial guidelines, and the implementation of robust oversight mechanisms to safeguard public funds and ensure the effective execution of various government initiatives.
http://tehelka.com/cag-report-flagship-schemes-red-flagged/

2. Chandrayaan-3: 'Make in India's' moment of reckoning *(fortuneindia.com)* 31 Aug 2023

Make in India' falls short on two counts: (i) well-defined policies, and strategies and (ii) post facto studies and reviews to assess the impact

India achieved a rare technological breakthrough in space science with the Chandrayaan-3 successfully landing near moon's southpole on the August 23, 2023 – a culmination of exploration that, in a way, began with the Chandrayaan-1 (which orbited the moon in 2008) and Chandrayaan-2 (which crash landed on the moon's surface in 2019).

The ISRO scientists may indeed "have taken Make in India to the Moon" but this is not an outcome of the flagship mission-mode programme launched in September 2014. The ISRO belongs to another era when the focus was on developing scientific temper and building institutions of excellence (along with IITs, IIMs and AIIMS and many others). The delink would be clear soon.

Has 'Make in India' achieved goals?

Such linkage is not surprising because many myths are associated with 'Make in India' – which need to be unraveled to make it achieve its stated goals. The first myth is that 'Make in India' is a programme with clear goals.

When it was launched on September 25, 2014, 'Make in India' was an idea with no goals, no policy frameworks and no planning or strategy. Revisit the statement issued on the occasion, "PM launches "Make in India" global initiative". It talks of pushing investment (particularly FDI), skilling and creating jobs but no roadmap, goal or strategy. Several months later, on March 18, 2015, the Ministry of Commerce and Ministry spelt out its twin goals: (I) "enhancing the share of manufacturing in GDP to 25%" and (ii) "creating 100 million jobs over a decade or so."

It was this statement which said that (a) the twin goals and (b) the "specific policy instruments" to achieve these goals were "conceptualised" under the National Manufacturing Policy "notified" on November 4, 2011 – nearly five years earlier. Those "specific policy instruments" were in "areas such as rationalisation and simplification of business regulations, financial and institutional mechanisms for technology development, incentives for SMEs, Special Focus Sectors, etc."

Revisit the 2011 National Manufacturing Policy – prepared and notified by the same Ministry of Commerce and Industry – to know why it said what. It said: "The share of manufacturing in India's GDP has stagnated at 15-16% (of the GDP) since 1980 while the share in comparable economies in Asia is much higher at 25 to 34%." It didn't give the manufacturing's job share but the Planning Commission regularly did– average of 10.5% during 2004-05 and 2009-10. This was down from 11.1% during 1999-2000 to 2004-05. The Planning Commission also said (for better comparison) the manufacturing's GVA share was 15.3% during 2004-05 and 2009-10 (down from 15.5% during 1999-2000 and 2004-05).

What is manufacturing share in GVA and employment now?

During the subsequent period covered by the 2011-12 GDP series, from FY12 to FY23, the manufacturing's GVA share is (average) 17.8% (MoSPI). In FY23, it was 17.7%.

But wait, before assuming that this is a marked improvement (over 15.3% seen between 2004-05 and 2009-10), here is a caveat.

When the 2011-12 GDP series was introduced in January 2015, it statistically raised the manufacturing's GVA share by an average of 3.86% for FY12, FY13 and FY14 – from (av) 13.9% under the 2004-05 series to (av) 17.76% under the 2011-12 series.

This happened because, for the first time, an MCA-21 database (self-populated by industry) of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) was used for the manufacturing's GVA share (and also that of services). This MCA-21 data base was exposed for 45% data flaw in 1999 by the NSSO and it remains flawed even in 2023.

Now consider manufacturing's job share.

The annual PLFS reports show its job share is (average) 11.6% during 2017-18 and 2021-22. Manufacturing jobs have been falling from 12.1% in 2017-18 to 11.6% in 2021-22 (much lower in 2019-20 and 2020-21). Since it was 10.5% during 2004-5 and 2009-10, there is a marginal improvement (to 11.6%) more than a decade later. But here too, there is a caveat.

The PLFS data shows there was no job loss due to the GST of 2017 and the pandemic lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 – as all the relevant headline indicators, the WPR, LFPR and UR (unemployment rate), progressively improved during the period of 2017-18 to 2021-22. How is that even possible? Given this, the marginal improvement in manufacturing's job share is questionable.

Besides, do you know the PLFS reports don't tell the total number of jobs in the economy or how many new jobs are created every year and in which sector? The

Planning Commission used to do that by analysing the PLFS's unit level data and other surveys and datasets. Its replacement, the NITI Aayog, doesn't.

The other measure of job creation is the payroll data, EPFO numbers.

The government cites this data. For example, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on August 15, 2023 that 1.4 million new jobs were being created every month. A few months earlier, in December 2022, he said 1.5-1.6 million jobs were being created every month. On both occasions, he cited monthly EPFO data.

Since monthly EPFO data undergoes corrections every month (due to non-elimination of duplications and other reasons), it is better to look at the annual data.

The EPFO's annual reports provide that data and show:

· In FY16 (from when it was tracked), the number of "regular contributors" to the EPFO was 37.6 million.

· It went up to 46.3 million in FY22. The FY23 report is not available.

That is, 8.7 million jobs were added in six years or 8.7% of the 100 million jobs that 'Make in India' promised in March 2015 – nowhere closer to Vaishnaw's two claims.

Arbitrary drivers of 'Make in India'

'Make in India' falls short on two counts: (i) well-defined policies, strategies and planning to push 'Make in India' and (ii) post facto studies and reviews to assess the impacts and lack of course corrections to 'Make in India' mission.

This would become clear from the five major discernible drivers of 'Make in India': (a) liberalisation of FDI to attract investment (b) ease of doing business, of which decriminalization of Companies Act of 2013 is one part (c) manufacturing incentives like the PLIs and DLIs (d) import substitution to promote domestic manufacturing and now (e) license to import manufacturing products.

Here is a brief sketch of how these drivers have played out.

FDI inflows: The DPIIT's FDI inflow factsheet up to June 2023 shows, growth in FDI inflows is consistently slowing down from 25% in FY5 to 3% in FY23 and (-) 16% in FY24 (up to June 2023). Three questions arise: Why this slowdown? What is the FDI inflow doing to manufacturing? Is FDI achieving its goals of technology transfer, marketing expertise, modern managerial techniques and export boost?

None of these questions can be answered because there are no official studies or assessments. Private studies have shown, for a long time, that more than 85% FDI inflows and outflows are through shell companies and tax havens (involving round-tripping).

Ease of Doing Business 1.0 and 2.0: India did achieve remarkable success in improving in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business ranking – it jumped from 142 in 2014 to

63 in 2019. Thereafter, the World Bank's DBI shut it down due to data manipulation allegations. Here is how this success was achieved.

In October 2017 – immediately after the twin shocks of demonetisation and GST that derailed the economy and after India's rank jumped 130 to 100 – the World Bank's Country Director in India Junaid Ahmad was questioned about this improvement. He told a national daily that its data didn't capture demonetisation and GST. He said these impacts would be reflected in next year's ranking. But the next year, in 2018, India's rank jumped 23 places to 77 and in 2019 to 63 – while India's growth slipped to 3.4% in FY20 (corresponding fiscal of 2019). What was the impact of Ease of Doing Business 1.0? Not known because there is no official study. Yet, India ventured into Ease of Doing Business 2.0 (budget 2023) – through more decriminalisation of Companies Act of 2013 and the Jan Vishwas Act of 2023 which amended 42 laws at one go a few days ago.

PLIs and DLIs: The impact of these incentives to push 'Make in India' are not known either. Many economists have questioned their efficacy and sought impact assessments before going further. But there is no sign of that happening – even when it is known that such incentives are ending up promoting assembling units (in the mobile phone sector, for example), and leading to higher imports and higher trade deficits (in the mobile phones case). The Micron's chips project in Gujarat is also an assembling project, not 'Make in India.'

Import substitution policy: This was the first step to promote 'Make in India' and is in force since 2014 but its impact has not been studied. Trade data shows, it has led to fall in exports – disabling one of the four main growth drivers.

License to import: About a month ago, the DGFT imposed ban on import of laptops, PCs and tablets and proposed a licensing regime – even when 90% of all domestic sales are imported. It could inconvenience millions of Indians to pursue education, business, leisure, travel and virtually everything else. It has been put on hold for three months.

Since the Chandrayaan-3 has already been branded as 'Make in India' here are two inevitable comparisons – to make the delink obvious.

A recent CAG revealed that 'Make in India' roads cost a bomb. It flagged two arbitrariness: "Selection of ineligible bidders, award of works without approved detailed project reports or based on faulty detailed project reports." Such arbitrariness, it said, led to the Dwarka Expressway, being built under the Bharatmala Pariyojana (a PPP project), cost Rs 250.77 crore per km – as against the CCEA approved cost of R 18.2 crore per km – 13.8 times more. No probe has been announced. And the CAG's findings have been dismissed.

The Micron's chips assembling unit in Gujarat, mentioned earlier, comes with ₹16,000 crore of public money (70% of the total project cost of $2.75 billion) by way of the DLI.

Contrast these with the Chandrayaan-3 which landed on the moon (located at a distance of 3,84,400 km). It cost the ISRO, set up in a different era of 'Make in India', ₹615 crore.

Here is a larger perspective to all this.

India's post-colonial re-industrialisation and manufacturing push began with the First Industrial Policy of 1948 (72 years ago) – assisted by the five-year plans and the Planning Commission. This was after then business tycoons expressed inability to invest and lead the re-industrialise drive through a document called "Bombay Plan of 1944" – which was authored by JRD Tata, GD Birla, Sir Ardeshir Dalal, Sri Ram, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, AD Shroff and John Mathai. India's mid-1980s' reforms and 1991's liberalisation – which pulled India out of the 'Hindu rate of growth' – were also assisted by the five-year plans and the Planning Commission.

The point of all this perspective is: It needs sound policies, strategies, planning, reviews and course corrections to achieve goals, not arbitrariness. https://www.fortuneindia.com/enterprise/chandrayaan-3-make-in-indias-moment-of-reckoning/113927

STATES NEWS ITEMS

3. CAG Report: कैग ने उत्तराखंड में आयुष्मान भारत योजना के संचालन पर उठाए सवाल, एक ही नंबर से कई मरीजों का हुआ इलाज

(abplive.com) 31 Aug 2023

CAG Audit Report: उत्तराखंड में आयुष्मान भारत-प्रधानमंत्री जन आरोग्य योजना (Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana) के तहत गड़बड़ी का खुलासा हुआ है. नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) की रिपोर्ट 2018 से लेकर मार्च 2021 तक की है. ऑडिट रिपोर्ट आने के बाद उत्तराखंड सरकार बैकफुट पर आ गई है. कैग ने आयुष्मान भारत-प्रधानमंत्री जन आरोग्य योजना के संचाल पर सवाल उठाए हैं. रिपोर्ट में खुलासा हुआ है कि आयुष्मान भारत योजना को उत्तराखंड सरकार प्रदेश की अटल आयुष्मान योजना के साथ संचालित कर रही है.

43 अस्पतालों का भौतिक सत्यापन नहीं किया गया

रिपोर्ट में बताया गया है कि 43 अस्पतालों का भौतिक सत्यापन नहीं किया गया. प्रदेश के पांच अस्पतालों में निर्धारित बेड क्षमता से अधिक मरीजों का इलाज हुआ. एक ही नंबर से कई मरीजों का इलाज दिखाया गया है. मरीजों की मौत का विवरण लिए बगैर 15 लाख 35 हजार रुपये का भुगतान किया गया. उत्तराखंड में अब तक 5,178785 आयुष्मान कार्ड बनाए जा चुके हैं . आयुष्मान भारत योजना का लाभ लेनेवाले मरीजों की संख्या 85066 पाई गई. योजना में गड़बड़ी करने वाले 53 अस्पतालों को हटाया जा चुका है और 140 करोड़ के दावे निरस्त किए गए हैं.

कैग की रिपोर्ट आने के बाद दबाव में आई सरकार

मतलब सीधे तौर पर आयुष्यमान भारत योजना से हटाए गए अस्पताल गड़बड़ी कर रहे थे. चयनित अस्पतालों ने अग्निशमन विभाग, बायोमेडिकल वेस्ट मैनेजमेंट और प्रदूषण नियंत्रण विभाग से भी अनुमति नहीं ली. आयुष्यमान भारत योजना का पंजीकरण कराने में काफी लोग अभी भी पीछे हैं. स्वास्थ्य सचिव आर राजेश कुमार का कहना है कि प्रदेश में कोरोना महामारी के दौरान योजना संचालन में गड़बड़ियां देखी गई थी. स्वास्थ्य विभाग ने अस्पतालों को चिह्नित कर अब व्यवस्था ठीक कर दी है.

सवालों के जवाब दिया जा चुके हैं. आगे दोबारा गड़बड़ी होने की संभावना नहीं है. स्वास्थ्य मंत्री धन सिंह रावत ने कहा कि आयुष्मान भारत और अटल आयुष्मान योजना में उत्तराखंड सबसे अधिक भुगतान करने वाला राज्य है. योजना का लाभ हजारों मरीजों को मिला है. कैग की रिपोर्ट का सरकार परीक्षण कर रही है. अधिकारियों को योजना संचालन का सख्ती से ध्यान रखने के निर्देश दिए गए हैं. सरकार गड़बड़ी का खुलासा होने के बाद रिपोर्ट का अध्ययन कर कर रही है. https://www.abplive.com/states/up-uk/patients-treated-from-the-same-number-in-uttarakhand-ayushman-bharat-scheme-fraud-in-cag-report-ann-2484900

4. Financial Misappropriations in BMC: 150 Summons to BMC Officers *(freepressjournal.in)* August 31, 2023

The Special Investigation Team (SIT), which was formed to probe the alleged financial misappropriations in the BMC during Covid-19 period exposed by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), has sped up their inquiry process. According to the BMC officer, SIT has sent around 150 summons to the BMC officers pertaining to inquiry and among them are 50-60 engineers. Every day around 10-12 officers, including engineers, are attending SIT office to co-operate with the probe.

BMC officers frightened: Sources

A senior officer told the FPJ that after getting summons from SIT, the BMC officers were frightened. Even highly qualified doctors are being called for the inquiry, the officer added. Officers of health, development plan (DP), solid waste management (SWM), bridges, roads improvement and IT department are being called every day for the inquiry.

Last week, SIT summoned Deputy Commissioner Ramakant Biradar, who was the head of Central Purchase Department (CPD) during the covid 19 period.

As per the High Court order, the civic body has to purchase medical-related equipment only through CPD. SIT has registered a first information report (FIR)against the buying of body bags at exorbitant prices by the BMC officers and Biradar is being called for the same case. Another officer said, There were four to five summons issued to Biradar in different cases.

According to officers, who are attending the inquiry, it is very painful for the doctors and officers to face the inquiry. They had put their lives at stake during the pandemic. Many employees died while serving the citizens.

The civic agency suppressed three waves of Covid-19. The standing committee had given powers to the BMC officers to allot work without inviting tenders because at that time no newspaper was published and distributed in houses. On September 30, 2022, Shinde directed CAG to investigate all contracts and transactions in the BMC during the pandemic. The CAG submitted a report to the government, which Fadnavis put forth in the state assembly in March this year. The report alleged irregularities worth thousands of crores in several contracts given by the civic body during the pandemic.
https://www.freepressjournal.in/mumbai/financial-misappropriations-inbmc-150-summons-tobmc-officers

5. Deadline set for CAG Audit Paras *(dailyexcelsior.com)* 01 Sep 2023

A total of 9,000 Audit Paras from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India have been addressed by the Government of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, with plans to address another 14,000 before the Winter Session of Parliament. The Chief Secretary recently discussed pending audit paras with senior officers, emphasising the need for reconciliation of the remaining 14,000. A deadline of October 31, 2023, has been set to clear Audit Paras related to the last three financial years, as highlighted in the reports of the CAG of India.

The CAG holds a vital responsibility for auditing both the government's income and expenditures as well as the public accounts of the centre and individual states. Its primary mission is to guarantee the efficient and effective utilisation of public funds while upholding transparency and accountability in the government's financial activities. The CAG conducts a range of audits, including performance audits, financial audits, and compliance audits, across various government departments and agencies. Additionally, it serves as a watchdog to ensure that the government adheres to proper procedures and guidelines when awarding contracts, making purchases, processing payments, and managing public assets. In essence, the CAG is a critical institution in the country, playing a pivotal role in enhancing transparency and accountability within the government's financial operations and ensuring that public funds are managed with responsibility and effectiveness.

The CAG audits go beyond mere reports; they serve as instruments for pinpointing areas in which the government can enhance its financial management and operational efficiency. These audits play a crucial role in bolstering accountability within the government by offering an impartial evaluation of its financial management methods. Additionally, they serve as a deterrent against fraud and corruption. Furthermore, these reports serve the vital function of guaranteeing compliance with regulations, including adherence to pertinent laws, rules, and regulations. Most importantly, they empower decision-makers within the government by furnishing them with valuable information to inform their choices.

It's of utmost importance that all government departments ensure their designated nodal officers respond to the CAG within the stipulated one-month timeframe, even if detailed explanations follow later. The AG will consider the response, and the draft audit report may be modified or resolved based on this input. Unfortunately, despite repeated directives from the highest levels of the administration, departments have failed to address these queries promptly. This lapse can result in unfavourable remarks in the final report presented to the public, creating the impression that the CAG's objections are accurate and that the departments did not adhere to prescribed procedures. This situation is a matter of grave concern and can potentially lead to the suspension or withholding of current and future grants or centralised schemes for the UT. Similarly, all data related to centralised schemes must be promptly uploaded, and any accrued interest should be deposited into the centralised pool without delay. These measures are implemented to ensure the utmost accountability and transparency in handling taxpayers' money, given that the grants as well as the interest accrued are significant.

The Chief Secretary deserves credit for recognising the critical nature of this situation and for actively pushing departments to respond to the remaining Audit Paras within the specified timeframe. Given that the number of pending paras is substantial compared to those already addressed, sincere and immediate efforts must be made to meet the deadline. Jammu and Kashmir has undergone a transformation where accountability and transparency are paramount. There's no room for complacency or last-minute rushes, as these matters are of significant concern and carry their own consequences if not addressed promptly. It's crucial to approach CAG queries with the utmost seriousness and urgency, taking them at face value, to ensure the responsible handling of these matters. https://www.dailyexcelsior.com/deadline-set-for-cag-audit-paras/

6. Display fitness certificate on vehicles with date highlighted: Haryana assembly panel *(hindustantimes.com)* Aug 31, 2023

Following a 2022 comptroller and auditor general (CAG) audit report pointing out lapses pertaining to the renewal of fitness certificate of transport vehicles, including plying of 29 buses of educational institutions in Kurukshetra and Kaithal despite expiry of their fitness certificates years ago, the committee on public accounts of the Haryana assembly has recommended that fitness certificate of transport vehicles be displayed on vehicles with highlighted valid date. The CAG had said that plying of buses without valid fitness certificates compromised the safety of schoolchildren.

The committee, which tabled its 88th report during the recent monsoon session, examined the CAG report on performance audit of the functioning of the Haryana transport department.

The CAG report said that 29 buses of educational institutions in the jurisdiction of Kurukshetra and Kaithal regional transport authorities (RTAs) were active though their fitness certificates had expired 12 to 42 months earlier. "These vehicles were being utilised by the educational institutions to ferry school and college going children. Operating these vehicles in the absence of the fitness certificate compromised the safety of school and college children," the audit said. The RTAs said that notices would be issued to the vehicle owners concerned.

Renewal of certificates

The CAG said that according to Section 56 of the Motor Vehicle Act, it is mandatory for a transport vehicle to carry a certificate of fitness for using the vehicle in public place. Checks to be exercised before issuing a fitness certificate are given under Rule 62 of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules. If the prescribed authority is satisfied that the vehicle no longer complies with the requirements of the Act, they may cancel the fitness certificate at any time with the reasons recorded in writing. On the date of such cancellation, the certificate of registration of the vehicle is deemed to be suspended till the new certificate of fitness is obtained, the CAG said.

The audit said that scrutiny of information, as available on VAHAN web platform, relating to fitness of 2,110 transport vehicles in the selected RTAs of Haryana showed that in the seven RTAs of Yamunanagar, Faridabad, Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Panchkula and Gurugram, the fitness certificates of 753 vehicles had expired between May 2015 and March 2020. "However, the owners did not turn up for the renewal of the fitness certificates of their vehicles. The money value implication due to the non-renewal of fitness certificates was ₹3.93 crore as on March 31, 2021, including fee and penalty," the audit said.

The transport department, in a written reply, said that of the ₹393 lakh, a sum of ₹3.89 lakh has been recovered, while ₹131 lakh were found not due, the audit report said.

"The operation of 29 buses of educational institutes in Kurukshetra and Kaithal even after the expiry of their fitness certificates is being examined," the transport department said in its reply. https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/panchkula-financier-denied-anticipatory-bail-in-arms-act-case-101693519252473.html

7. CAG Report: 187 करोड़ के वाटर चार्ज नहीं वसूल पाया विभाग

(haryana.indianews.in) August 31, 2023

हरियाणा में ग्रामीण और शहरी जल आपूर्ति को विभिन्न केंद्र प्रायोजित और राज्य योजनाओं के माध्यम से वित्त पोषित किया जाता है। राज्य में ग्रामीण जल आपूर्ति जन स्वास्थ्य अभियांत्रिकी विभाग के अधिकार क्षेत्र में है, जो 1.65 करोड़ ग्रामीण आबादी (2011 की जनगणना के अनुसार) की जलापूर्ति आवश्यकता को पूरा करता है। इसी कड़ी में कैग की रिपोर्ट में सामने आया है कि विभाग कई मोर्चों पर फेल रहा है और कई तरह की अनियमितताएं पाई गई हैं।

नियमानुसार ग्रामीण और शहरी क्षेत्रों में पानी की निर्धारित आपूर्ति में तो कमी पाई ही गई है, साथ में पानी की गुणवत्ता भी सवालों के घेरे में रही है। बड़े पैमाने पर सैंपल फेल हो रहे हैं। इसके अलावा पानी के टैरिफ भी नहीं वसूले गए, जिससे सरकारी खजाने को भी काफी नुकसान पहुंचा है।

हरियाणा में सामान्य श्रेणी के लाभार्थियों के लिए रू. 40 प्रति माह और अनुसूचित जाति (एससी) श्रेणी के लाभार्थियों के लिए रू.20 प्रति माह के रूप में उन गांवों, जो किसी भी नगरपालिका क्षेत्र के अंतर्गत नहीं आते हैं, में जल प्रभारों के टैरिफ की दरों को अधिसूचित किया।

आंकड़ों में सामने आया है कि कि अप्रैल 2016 से मार्च 2021 के दौरान उपभोक्ताओं से रू.263.64 करोड़ (रू.128.17 करोड़ गांव में और शहरी में 135.47 करोड़) की राशि का जल उपयोगकर्ता

प्रभार वसूल किया जाना था, जबकि जन स्वास्थ्य अभियांत्रिकी विभाग के चयनित मंडलों के संबंध में जल प्रभारों के बकाया के रूप में रू.187.34 करोड़ (ग्रामीण: रू.119.29 करोड़; शहरी: रू.68.05 करोड़) की शेष राशि छोड़ते हुए, मंडल कार्यालयों द्वारा इस अवधि के दौरान केवल रू.76.30 करोड़ ही वसूले गए। बाकी राशि लंबित रही।

1737 बस्तियों में पानी की आपूर्ति 55 लीटर प्रति व्यक्ति से कम रही
ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में पेयजल आपूर्ति के मानदंड जल जीवन मिशन (केंद्र प्रायोजित योजना) के दिशानिर्देशों के अनुसार गैर-डेजर्ट क्षेत्रों के लिए 55 लीटर प्रति व्यक्ति प्रतिदिन और डेजर्ट क्षेत्रों/नाबार्ड द्वारा वित्तपोषित परियोजनाओं के लिए 70 लीटर प्रति व्यक्ति प्रतिदिन के अनुसार तैयार किए गए हैं।

जुलाई 2022 तक ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में पानी की कमी वाली 1,737 बस्तियां (55 लीटर प्रति व्यक्ति प्रतिदिन मानदंड से नीचे) थी। इसके अलावा मार्च 2021 तक, 89 शहरों में से 9 शहरों में पानी की कमी (135 लीटर प्रति व्यक्ति प्रतिदिन मानदंड से नीचे) थी।

योजनाओं को आत्मनिर्भर बनाने में विभागीय प्रयासों का अभाव
14वें वित्त आयोग (2015-2020) के अनुसार स्थायी पेयजल आपूर्ति प्रणालियों को 'औपचारिक प्रबंधन मॉडल के अंतर्गत संचालित होने वाली प्रणालियों, जिनके पास 100 प्रतिशत घरेलू मीटर स्थापित हैं तथा जिनकी पानी की दरों और सब्सिडी से निवल राजस्व कम से कम प्रणाली के संचालन एवं रखरखाव (ओएंडएम) की लागत को पूरा करने के लिए पर्याप्त है' के रूप में परिभाषित किया गया है।

इसने दोनों ग्रामीण और शहरी घरों, वाणिज्यिक प्रतिष्ठानों और संस्थानों में व्यक्तिगत कनेक्शनों की 100 प्रतिशत मीटरिंग की भी सिफारिश की है और व्यक्तिगत कनेक्शन केवल तभी प्रदान किए जाने चाहिए जब चालू पानी के मीटर स्थापित हों। जन स्वास्थ्य अभियांत्रिकी विभाग में जानकारी अनुसार कई कमी पाई गई। इसमें सामने आया कि विभाग ने मीटर कनेक्शन लगाने के लिए कोई कदम नहीं उठाया बल्कि विभाग का ध्यान मीटर कनेक्शन के स्थान पर घरेलू कनेक्शन उपलब्ध कराने पर है।

इसके अलावा लेखापरीक्षा ने ग्रामीण और शहरी जल आपूर्ति योजनाओं से उत्पन्न प्राप्तियों की तुलना में संचालन एवं रखरखाव व्यय के डेटा (विभाग की वेबसाइट से) का विश्लेषण किया और राजस्व संग्रह, ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों के लिए कुल रखरखाव व्यय का केवल एक प्रतिशत और शहरी क्षेत्र के मामले में, 2016-17 से 2020-21 की अवधि के लिए रखरखाव व्यय का कुल 15 प्रतिशत था।

राज्य के हिस्से का करीब 20 करोड़ पांच महीने बाद जारी किया
2017-18 में विभाग द्वारा राष्ट्रीय ग्रामीण पेयजल कार्यक्रम के अंतर्गत राशि मांग (रू. 26.06 करोड़ का केंद्रीय अंश और राज्य के अंश के रूप में 19.74 करोड़) वित्त विभाग, हरियाणा के पास भेजी गई थी (अप्रैल 2017)।

केंद्रीय अंश के रूप में 26.06 करोड़ का लेटर ऑफ क्रेडिट (एलओसी) वित्त विभाग द्वारा जारी (19 मई 2017) किया गया था, लेकिन राज्य का संबंधित अंश जारी नहीं किया गया था। 19.74 करोड़ का उक्त राज्य का अंश वित्त विभाग, हरियाणा द्वारा अक्टूबर 2017 में जारी किया गया था। निर्देशों के अनुसार केंद्रीय अंश प्राप्त होने के 15 दिनों के भीतर राज्य का अंश कार्यान्वयन एजेंसी को जारी किया जाना था।

शिकायतों के निपटान में भी देरी
जन स्वास्थ्य अभियांत्रिकी विभाग और हरियाणा शहरी विकास प्राधिकरण विभाग ने नागरिकों को जल आपूर्ति से संबंधित शिकायत दर्ज कराने के लिए टोल फ्री नंबर जारी किया था। इसको लेकर पाया

गया कि जन स्वास्थ्य अभियांत्रिकी विभाग द्वारा 24 तथा 72 घंटों के मध्य 20,451 शिकायतों (13 प्रतिशत) पर कार्रवाई की गई थी, 1,12,257 शिकायतों (71 प्रतिशत) पर 72 घंटों के बाद कार्रवाई की गई थी।

विभाग इन शिकायतों के संबंध में प्रासंगिक/समर्थक अभिलेख प्रस्तुत करने में विफल रहा। अभिलेखों का रखरखाव न करने के कारण लेखापरीक्षा 2,403 अपेक्षित शिकायतों के कारणों/स्थिति का पता नहीं लगा सकी। हरियाणा शहरी विकास प्राधिकरण में, यह अवलोकित किया गया था कि 1,898 शिकायतों (58 प्रतिशत) का समाधान 24 घंटे से 72 घंटे के अंदर किया गया था और 141 शिकायतों (चार प्रतिशत) का समाधान 72 घंटे के बाद किया गया था।

यह देखा गया था कि 141 शिकायतों पर तीन दिनों के बाद ध्यान देने के लिए कोई कारण दर्ज नहीं किए गए थे। पूर्ण विवरण दर्शाने वाला डेटा ऑनलाइन पोर्टल पर उपलब्ध नहीं है। नगर निगमों में यह पाया गया कि सभी शिकायतों का समाधान 24 घंटे से 72 घंटे की समयावधि के अंदर किया गया दर्शाया गया था, परंतु शिकायतों को समाधान करने के लिए मंडल कार्यालय द्वारा लिए गए वास्तविक समय का पता लगाने के लिए कोई अभिलेख नहीं रखा गया था

पानी की गुणवत्ता और उपलब्धता भी पूरी नहीं
कैग की रिपोर्ट में ये भी सामने आया है कि घरों में सप्लाई होने वाला पानी न तो पीने लायक है और न ही ये निर्धारित मात्रा में दिया जा रहा है। इसके अलावा हरियाणा के 25 स्थानों से पानी के नमूने लिए गए।

इनमें से एक सेट को करनाल की सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य इंजीनियरिंग विभाग (पीएचईडी) की लैब में और दूसरे सेट को विश्लेषण के लिए श्री राम इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ इंडस्ट्रियल रिसर्च नई दिल्ली भेजा गया। रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक पानी की शुद्धता तय मानकों पर खरी नहीं उतरी वहीं, 32 में से 23 स्थानों पर जलापूर्ति प्रति व्यक्ति आपूर्ति से कम पाई गई है। शहरी क्षेत्र में 3.16 लाख कनेक्शनों में मीटर नहीं थे। 16 फीसदी लोगों ने माना कि एक दिन छोड़कर पानी की सप्लाई होती थी। https://haryana.indianews.in/haryana/cag-report-department-could-not-recover-water-charge-tariff-of-187-crores/

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

8. Fiscal deficit jumps 80% to Rs 6.1 lakh crore in April-July *(newindianexpress.com)* 01 September 2023

The central government's fiscal deficit in the first four months of the current financial year touched Rs 6.1 lakh crore, an 80% jump over the same period last year. Data released by the government on Thursday showed the fiscal deficit in the April-July period of the financial year has reached 34% of the full-year target of Rs 17.86 lakh crore.

The surge in the fiscal deficit is mainly on account of higher revenue and capital expenditure, and contraction in net tax collection. Capital expenditures or expenses on infrastructure and other assets show a year-on-year increase of 52% to Rs 3.2 lakh crore, while revenue expenditure increased by 15.5% to Rs 10.6 lakh crore.

Net tax revenue of the Centre contracted by 13% to Rs 5.8 lakh crore on account of frontloading of tax devolution to state governments. Tax devolved to state is 50%

higher at Rs 3.1 lakh crore as compared with the April-July period in the financial year 2022-23 (FY23).

The gross tax revenue growth also moderated in the April-July period to 2.84% at Rs 8.95 lakh crore. Corporate tax collection declined by more than 10% year-on-year to Rs 1.76 lakh crore, while personal income tax collection increased by a modest 6.4%. However, the central GST collections showed a healthy growth of 16.6% during the April-July period. However, non-tax revenues doubled during the period on the back of the budgeted dividend surplus transfer of Rs 87,400 crore from the Reserve Bank of India. https://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2023/sep/01/fiscal-deficit-jumps-80-to-rs-61-lakh-crore-in-april-july-2610623.html

9. Bridging the green finance gap in India: A status check *(economictimes.indiatimes.com)* 31 Aug 2023

India offers several compelling reasons to be considered a favourable destination for climate and environmentally conscious businesses to thrive and achieve tangible success. The country's burgeoning population, fast paced urbanisation, abundance of renewable energy and consistent regulatory support from the government contribute to the ever-increasing market size.

Unsurprisingly, the demand for sustainable infrastructure, renewable energy, and efficient transportation systems is steadily rising. Estimates worked out by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) suggest that India would spend 85.6 trillion rupees ($1.05 trillion) by 2030 to make industries compliant with climate change norms. Moreover, to achieve the target of net-zero emissions by 2070, a cumulative investment of $10 trillion would be required, as predicted by International Financial Services Centres Authority's Expert Committee on Sustainable Finance.

Despite notable strides in renewable energy production, India faces a multitude of pressing environmental challenges. A recent report suggested that India houses nine of the ten most polluted cities worldwide. The lack of accessible and affordable financing options remains a primary hurdle to addressing these challenges.

To tackle this issue, active deployment of "green finance" through financial instruments such as green bonds, green equity, carbon markets and trading can help mobilise private and public capital towards environmentally sustainable projects and initiatives under the single goal of promoting a green economic transformation towards low-carbon, sustainable and inclusive pathways. As per the Reserve Bank of India, bridging this substantial funding gap necessitates allocating 2.5 per cent of India's annual GDP to green finance.

Given the current scenario, it is incumbent upon us to critically examine the financing needs that emerge from these challenges and explore potential avenues for their resolution. Different stages of investment require varying green finance instruments depending on the project type, sector, or funding needs. Whether it is early-stage financing, project development, operations or maintenance, green finances can ensure comprehensive development of sustainable projects. Blended finance, which combines public and private capital, plays a significant role in attracting investors by offering flexibility in risk management.

These instruments not only safeguard against potential capital losses but also deliver financial and social returns. Their primary appeal lies in their ability to incentivise and mobilise private capital, particularly in emerging and frontier markets where public resources and donor funds are scarce.

Broadening the scope of green finance

An integral facet of the green finance landscape lies in comprehending the range and scope of green assets. Initiatives like the establishment of the United Nations' Green Climate Fund and the implementation of the Paris Agreement have successfully garnered financial support forclimate-focused endeavours.

In this dynamic day and age, breakthrough ideas from start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have received timely funding and much needed encouragement, demonstrating the real potential of green finance. These companies have transformed industries by developing pioneering technologies and sustainable business models. For example, Hygenco Green Energies, a green hydrogen solutions company has had a breakthrough journey in changing the way commercial customers consume hydrogen.

Similarly, companies in the sustainable agriculture space are focusing on producing high quality, consistent residue-free produce, through controlled environment agriculture.

Measures to facilitate positive outcomes

Traditional finance approaches may not align seamlessly with green finance since some conventional frameworks lack specific criteria for assessing environmental impact, hindering an accurate evaluation of green investments. Additionally, traditional models may overlook longterm benefits and externalities, leading to potential underinvestment. Moreover, the inherent risks and uncertainties surrounding green technologies pose challenges for risk assessment by traditional financial institutions.

limitations highlight the need for innovative and tailored approaches to effectively channel funds into green finance. Blended finance can help here as it plays a pivotal role in driving green investments by harmoniously blending public and private capital. This strategic integration of funding sources attracts private sector involvement, mitigates investment risks, and enables the rapid and scalable deployment of resources needed to successfully transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy.

Adaption finance V/S Mitigation finance

While mitigation finance focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adaptation finance plays a critical role in addressing the impacts and vulnerabilities already faced due to climate change. Adaptation finance supports projects aimed at preserving and restoring ecosystems, safeguarding biodiversity, and enhancing ecosystem resilience. It also plays a crucial role in ensuring economic stability by enabling investments in climateresilient infrastructure and diversifying economic sectors.

In Conclusion

The concept of green finance is finally gaining the necessary traction globally as governments, financial institutions, and businesses recognise the importance of addressing climate change and promoting sustainable development. Technology and data-led solutions present a massive opportunity here, in streamlining the sector and promoting market awareness and transparency. This works for the benefit of investors, ultimately accelerating the adoption and success of sustainable initiatives. The advent of new technologies combined with a collaborative approach by all stakeholders can be key to closing India's existing gap in green finance. https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/renewable/bridging-the-green-finance-gap-in-india-a-status-check/103255890

10. India's forests: A tale of growth, loss, and revival *(indiatoday.in)*

31 Aug 2023

Forests play a significant role in the vast mosaic of India's social, cultural, and political landscape. Over the past 15 years, India's green expanses have witnessed a dynamic interplay of growth, decline, use, and restoration.

A controversial Bill to amend the Forest (Conservation) Act — that regulates the diversion of forests for construction and mining — was earlier passed by both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha without much debate. The amendments narrow the definition of areas under the purview of the Act and have consequently worried environmentalists, conservationists, and tribal groups.

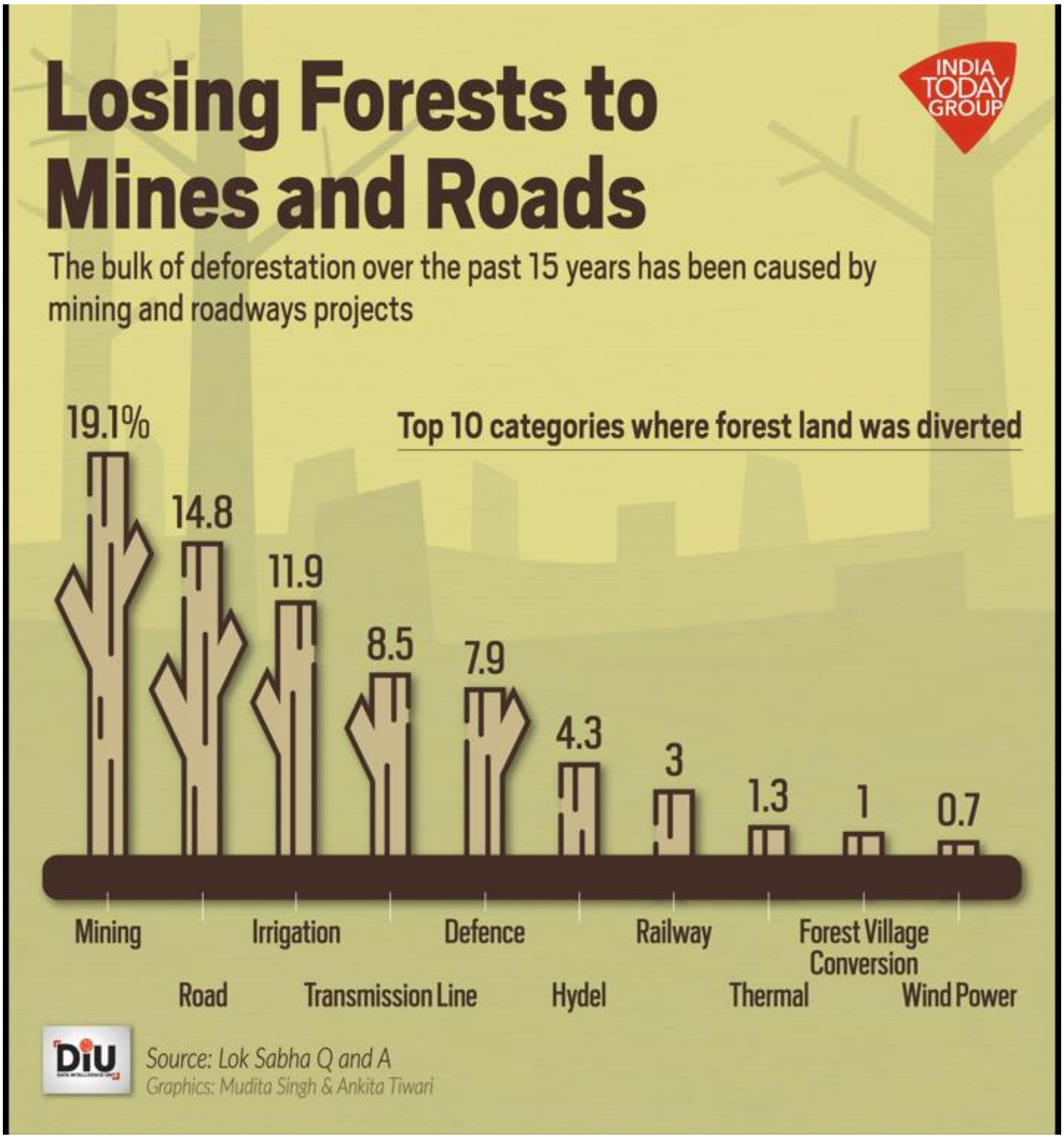
Forests play a significant role in the vast mosaic of India's social, cultural, and political landscape. They are sacred to some, essential for sustenance for many, a trove of exploitable natural resources for others, and an avenue for development projects for the powers that be. Over the past 15 years, India's green expanses have witnessed a dynamic interplay of growth, decline, use, and restoration.

Since its enactment in 1980, The Forest (Conservation) Act led to massive afforestation efforts across the country. Between 2008 and 2023, about 9.3 lakh hectares of land have been used for compensatory afforestation initiatives. While these numbers appear encouraging, there is more at play than meets the eye. Compensatory afforestation provisions do not naturally translate into the actual replacement of wooded lands. With the new measures under the Forest (Conservation) Act — and rapid and ever-growing urbanisation, development, and industrialisation — the future of India's forests remains uncertain at best.

Borrowed land

In the past 15 years, over three lakh hectares of forest land have been diverted across states and union territories for infrastructural and industrial projects.

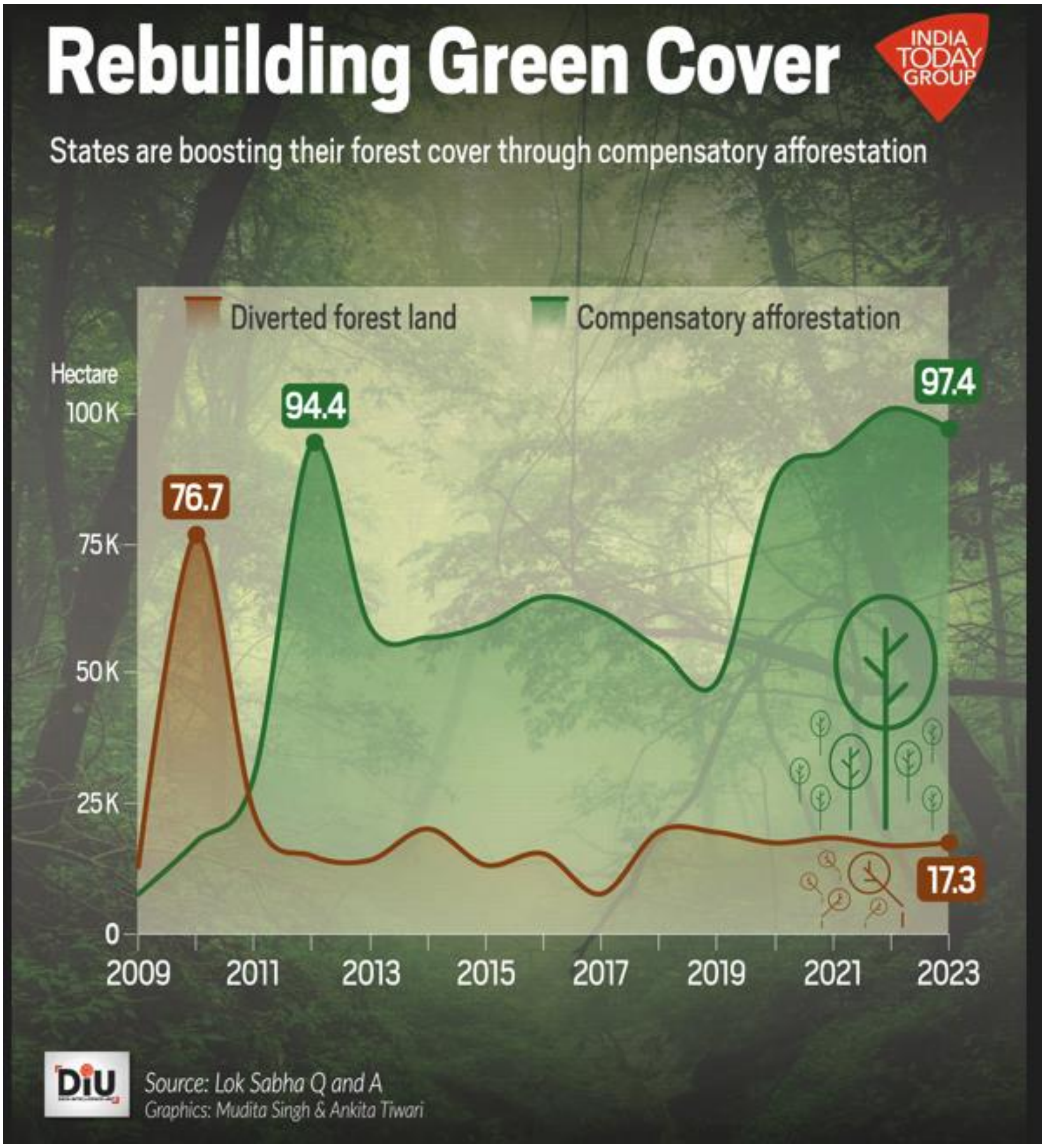
States like Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha topped the list in forest land diversion.



For example, in Punjab, more than 61 thousand hectares (20 per cent of the overall diversion) of forest land was diverted, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Odisha diverting more than 40 thousand and 30 thousand hectares of land, respectively. This wasn't just land being taken away. It was repurposed. Roads, mining projects, and irrigation facilities sprouted, marking the nation's march toward development.

Interesting patterns emerged when we delved deeper into how this diverted land was employed. We found that mining and road development consumed a significant chunk. Nearly 58 thousand hectares were utilised for mining purposes. Road construction used more than 45 thousand hectares of forest land, reflecting India's ongoing efforts to enhance its connectivity and transport infrastructure.

Green initiatives green enough?



Jharkhand topped the compensatory afforestation list by planting compensating trees on almost 1.5 lakh hectares of land. Rajasthan planted on one lakh hectares. Other states like Karnataka were a little behind, making commendable efforts to boost their forest cover. States like Punjab and Bihar have achieved or maintained a balance between forest diversion and compensatory afforestation. But on the other hand, states such as Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh face significant challenges, with substantial deficits between the areas diverted and afforestation efforts.

But planting saplings to compensate for felled trees is not the be-all and end-all. A 2022 paper in the International Forestry Review noted the "design of India's compensatory afforestation policy is not in alignment with the global best practice principles of ecological restoration." According to the paper, myriad problems surround these efforts, including weak community involvement, the selection of unsuitable sites, preference for hardy species, poor sapling survival, and weak monitoring.

In March 2021, Babul Supriyo, then Minister of State, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, responding to a Rajya Sabha question, provided the survival rates of trees planted on roadsides as provided by various states and union territories. These afforestation efforts were carried out through funds deposited in Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) account, under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016.

These rates went from as high as 91-100 per cent in Uttar Pradesh to as low as 55-60 per cent in Chhattisgarh. Supriyo added that between 2016 and 2020, the average number of trees affected due to approvals for construction/expansion/repair of roads under various schemes of Central and State governments was 5,21,912 trees per year or 933 trees per proposal.

According to a March 2023 report, an RTI reply revealed that less than half of the funds under CAMPA were utilised in the last five years. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change noted that only Rs 18,624 crore was utilised out of Rs 51,768.76 crore released under CAMPA in that period.

According to the RTI reply, in 2017-18, Rs 2,310.9 crore of the funds were utilised by states and union territories. In 2018-19, Rs 2,624.6 crore worth of funds were utilised against Rs 3,303.4 crore in 2019-20, Rs 4611.4 crore in the year 2020-21, and Rs 5,776.4 crore during 2021-22.

The big picture

Looking at the broader picture and assessing the overall forest cover, the narrative generally appears optimistic. Despite the diversions and usages, many states maintained or even increased their forest expanse. According to the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Andhra Pradesh saw its green canvas grow steadily from 2015 to 2021.

However, not all was rosy. Some regions, like Arunachal Pradesh, faced a slight dip in forest cover, reminding us of the challenges in forest conservation. India's journey from 2008 to 2021 is a lesson in balance cumulatively. India's forest cover has increased from 7,01,645.79 square kilometres in 2015 to 7,13,534.18 square kilometres in 2021.

At the same time, India’s position in global deforestation is also to be noted. According to a 2023 report, India lost 668,400 hectares of forestry between 2015-2020, ranking second globally, right after Brazil. With a difference of 284,400 hectares in forestry loss between 1990-2000 and 2015-2020, India saw the biggest increase in deforestation. “As the country with the second-largest population in the world, India has had to compensate for the increase in residents – this has come at a cost in the way of deforestation,” the report noted. https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/india-forests-a-tale-of-growth-loss-and-revival-2429324-2023-08-31

11. Road work slows despite steep targets *(livemint.com)* 31 Aug 2023

NEW DELHI: Highway construction continues to sputter in the slow lane even as the government pushes for a record target showcase progress ahead of the 2024 general elections.

According to the ministry of road transport and highways, work has been completed on just 2,670 km of highways in the first four months of the fiscal or just about 20% of a target of building 13,800 km of highways this financial year.

The award of road projects has also fallen steeply to 1,125 km from 1,975 km in the same period a year ago, indicating a thinning of the pipeline for projects that would impact construction over a longer period.

“A series of factors including extended monsoon has impacted construction in early part of this year. This is normally the case every year when, during monsoons, work on highways slows down. But there is a very large pipeline of projects and work will pick up pace in the second half of year to take construction work closer to the target," said a government official privy to the development.

The ministry did not respond to queries till press time.

As per the latest MoRTH data, highway construction slowed to a mere 420 km or 14 km per day in July. It was 2,670 km in the April-July period.

Though the numbers this year so far are marginally higher than the 2,493 km built in April-July last year, experts said maintaining pace and taking it up substantially this year would be a challenge as there’s a slowdown in both constuction and awards ahead of general elections.

According to a report from rating agency ICRA, highway awards normally slow down in the last quarter of a financial year falling just before elections, when the model code of conduct comes into force.

If this scenario plays out in FY24, constructing over 40 km of highways a day in eight months would be difficult, making the reworked target of 13,800 km for FY24 unachievable, said an official at a major consultancy asking not to be named.

However, some are still positive about the construction potential -- that despite two bad years with extremely slow beginnings the country could more than make up during the second half of the fiscal.

“Road construction is set to accelerate 25% to 12,500-13,000 km per year over the current and next fiscals on continued healthy awarding of projects and step up in execution by road construction players," said Gurpreet Chhatwal, Managing Director, CRISIL Ratings.

The pace of construction of roads bodes well for the economy, given the high multiplier effect of road development. The growth is expected to sustain over the medium term, supported by conducive policies, strong investor interest and healthy financial profiles, leading to stable credit quality of companies in the CRISIL Ratings portfolio in both highways and roads sectors.

The government has upwardly revised highway-building target for the current year as it looks to fast-track infrastructure development ahead of state and central polls in coming months.

Highway development ensuring better and faster connectivity have always got a positive connect with the voters and work there gets immediate appreciation.According to officials in the ministry of road transport and highways, government has reworked the highway construction target for FY24 to 13,800 km from 12,500 km kept earlier. This is even higher than all time high construction levels actives in FY21 when during lockdowns a record 13,327 km of highway was built at 36.51 km per day.

"We have issued instructions to construction agencies to push up the pace of road construction and achieve over 40 km of highway construction per day in remaining period of the year so that the revised target is achieved without fail," said the official quoted earlier.

Highway construction in the pre-pandemic period of FY20 spanned 10,237 km at a daily rate of 28.04 km. The pace increased during the first pandemic year (FY21), when lockdowns helped accelerate construction, resulting in a record 13,327 km of highways built at 36.51 km per day. In FY22, the rate slowed again to 10,457 km at 28.64 km per day. For FY22, the road ministry initially aimed to construct 14,600 km of highways—or 40 km per day. However, it later revised the goal to 12,000 km. The year FY23 ended with 28.3 km/day construction with overall 10,331 km of highways being built in the year.

MoRTH wants construction to reach over 40 km/day. This is exactly what highway construction agencies would be required to in the balance FY24 to achieve the annual target. https://www.livemint.com/news/india/highway-construction-struggles-to-meet-targets-ahead-of-elections-raises-concerns-for-infrastructure-development-11693503316660.html

12. Roadblocks Ahead: Issues Plague Progress of Bengaluru Satellite Town Ring Road Project *(swarajyamag.com)* September 1, 2023

The project was first conceptualised in 2017, with work on the drawing board commencing in 2018. Groundwork began in 2020, but only 60 km has been completed so far.

The project is envisaged to ease traffic congestion in Bengaluru city by providing a bypass for freight traffic.

The construction of an elevated corridor through the Bannerghatta National Park (BNP) as part of Bengaluru Satellite Town Ring Road (STRR) has been approved by the state wildlife board, chaired by Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

However, officials from the Public Works Department (PWD) estimate that it will take at least three years to complete the STRR project.

The National Highway Authority Of India (NHAI) is developing the 280 km STRR connecting 12 important towns around Bengaluru, including Dobbasapete, Doddaballapura, Devanahalli, Sulibele, Hoskote, Sarjapura, Attibele, Anekal, Tattekere, Kanakapura, Ramanagaram and Magadi.

The delay in the construction of STRR and the elevated corridor in BNP is expected to increase the project cost by a minimum of 10-15 per cent annually, excluding the cost of land acquisition.

Officials are concerned that financial constraints may further delay the project.

A senior PWD official expressed worry that the project could face a similar fate as the Peripheral Ring Road, with only a partial stretch completed and the rest stalled due to bureaucratic obstacles and land acquisition issues.

According to PWD records, the project was first conceptualised in 2017, with work on the drawing board commencing in 2018. Groundwork began in 2020, but only 60 km has been completed so far.

The greenfield project has seen the completion of work between Dobbaspet and Hoskote, extending to the Tamil Nadu side. However, the remaining sections have yet to be tendered.

The completion of the project is estimated to take three years, with the elevated corridor work expected to be finished in eight months. The typical timeline for a civil project, from tendering to execution and completion, is usually around 18 months.

Following the standard procedure, the proposal for the elevated corridor will now undergo scrutiny and approval by the National Wildlife Board. The dates and agenda for the next meeting are yet to be scheduled, reports The New Indian Express.

The project will connect six national highways and eight state highways, which will help reduce congestion in the city. It will alleviate traffic congestion within Bengaluru by providing an alternative route for trucks to bypass the city's congested areas.

Though originally proposed in 2005, the STRR greenfield expressway project gained momentum after the central government announced that the funding and execution would be undertaken under the Bharatmala Pariyojna project. The project is expected to cost Rs 17,000 crore.

While NHAI is funding 60 per cent of the project cost, the state government of Karnataka will fund the remaining corpus (mostly the cost towards land acquisition).

STRR is being built in three parallel phases and involves the construction of NH-948A and the realignment of existing NH-648 (old NH-207).

To manage the development of STRR, the Karnataka government set up a planning authority called STRR planning authority in 2016. The authority’s jurisdiction includes a planning area of 1,019 sq km. It will include 331 villages and 12 towns that will be connected.

The project is envisaged to ease traffic congestion in Bengaluru city by providing a bypass for freight traffic, so that heavy vehicles can move along the peripheries of Bengaluru without entering it.

Bengaluru has been attempting to complete several large ring road projects to improve its city-region connectivity and alleviate traffic congestion. https://swarajyamag.com/infrastructure/roadblocks-ahead-issues-plague-the-progress-of-bengaluru-satellite-town-ring-road-project

13. Irregularities alleged in land record distributions *(newindianexpress.com)* 01 September 2023

BHUBANESWAR: Members of Bhubaneswar Basti Unnayan Parishad on Thursday alleged large-scale irregularities in the selection of beneficiaries and distribution of land record certificates (LRCs) to slum dwellers under Jaga Mission.

Raising the issue, Parishad president Ranjulata Mohapatra said at least 20 per cent of the 51,000 identified beneficiaries for LRC under the Jaga mission in Bhubaneswar are outsiders and from the non-slum areas.

“There has been no transparency in the identification and shortlisting of beneficiaries. Names of many outsiders have been included in the beneficiaries’ list, while the genuine beneficiaries of many slums have been excluded,” Mohapatra said while demanding a fresh survey and a thorough investigation into it and revision of the beneficiaries’ list accordingly.

Members of the slum development association further alleged several civic officers and corporators have hugely benefited from it, while the actual beneficiaries, running from pillar to post, with their genuine grievances have been left in the lurch. In some cases, the members alleged, BMC has asked beneficiaries shortlisted to pay a hefty amount, running to over Rs 1 to Rs 2 lakh to get the LRC.

The beneficiaries were asked to deposit the amount citing that the area they have occupied exceeds the maximum area for which LRC could be issued free of cost under Jaga Mission. The members also demanded instead of LRC, the beneficiaries must be issued the actual patta (RoR). https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bhubaneswar/2023/sep/01/irregularities-alleged-in-land-record-distributions-2610639.html

14. Govt power subsidies benefit high users more, promote polluting coal-based plants: Study *(dtnext.in)* 1 Sept 2023

CHENNAI: Even as consumers complain of a steep hike in energy bills at times of high consumption, especially during the peak summer, a study on electricity subsidy ironically exposes how they are the bigger beneficiaries of the government subsidies.

The study shows that households with a bi-monthly energy consumption of higher than 500 units receive about three times the annual subsidy when compared to low-consuming households falling within the 100 units free slab-taking into account subsidy and cross-subsidy.

According to the study titled “Electricity Subsidy and a Just Energy Transition in Tamil Nadu” authored by Martin Scherfler of Auroville Consulting, households consuming over 500 units, 600 units and 700 units receive the highest annual benefits in terms of subsidy and cross-subsidy.

“The subsidy which goes to these households is in the range of over Rs 14,000. This is nearly three times as much as the subsidy of Rs 4,999 for low-consuming households with a bi-monthly consumption of 100 kWh,” the study pointed out.

The state government pays direct subsidies to Tangedco for the subsidised energy charges for the domestic, agriculture, handlooms and power looms consumers. Cross-subsidy is the mechanism under which industrial and commercial consumers pay more than the cost of supply to subsidise the low-paying residential and agricultural consumers.

All domestic consumers irrespective of their energy consumption get the first 100 units free while those consuming less than 500 units would get an additional subsidy of Rs 2.25 per unit for consumption between 101-200 units.

Out of the state government allocated subsidy of Rs 14,816 crore in 2023- 24, a share of 93 percent was allocated to agriculture and domestic consumers. The subsidy allocated for domestic consumers alone comes to Rs 7,047 crore. The average annual subsidy per domestic service connection is Rs 2,986. However, it is found that households with a bimonthly consumption between 200 units and 500 units receive the highest annual subsidy allocation of Rs 4,050 a year while those consuming up to 100 units receive Rs 2,700.

In terms of cross-subsidy, consumers with a bi-monthly energy consumption of 600 units receive the highest subsidy allocation of Rs 12,146 per year. This is five times higher than the subsidy allocated for consumers with a bi-monthly consumption of 100 units. The current crosssubsidy scheme is designed to favour households with higher consumption.

“Adding up the subsidy and cross-subsidy allocation by consumption slab we find that households which consume 500 units, 600 units and 700 units receive the highest annual benefits. The subsidy for these households is in the range of Rs 14,000. This is nearly three times as much as the subsidy for low-consuming households with a bi-monthly consumption of 100 units,” the study added.

A senior Tangedco official said that the electricity tariff was set in a way to reduce the burden on domestic consumers while the industries and commercial consumers pay higher tariffs. “There are five different slabs for the domestic consumers. The households consuming up to 600 units pay energy charges that are less than the average cost of supply. Only those consuming over 800 units will face the brunt. Those consuming high energy will pay higher charges,” the official said.

Martin Scherfler of Auroville Consulting takes a divergent look at the subsidy and points it out as a “flawed policy.” As per the research, if the subsidy of Rs 5,324 crore paid for free units supplied to domestic consumers is used to invest in solar energy generation, a solar energy plant with a capacity of 1,520 MW could be deployed. “This solar plant would have generated 2,798 million units of clean energy per year. Thus the annual generation would have contributed to 50 percent of all free energy units provided to households consuming up to 100 units and 101-200 units,” Martin Scherfler said in the research paper.

The study also points out that the major share of Tangedco’s electricity is sourced from polluting coal and lignite power plants, pushing upwards the emission intensity per unit of subsidised electricity. It added that the subsidy provided by the state government is indirectly contributing to 6.11 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions. “On the one hand, the state is committed to spending substantial public funds on climate adaptation and climate change mitigation and on the other hand there is substantial subsidy allocation that is indirectly utilised to pay polluting power generators,” it noted. https://www.dtnext.in/news/tamilnadu/govt-power-subsidies-benefit-high-users-more-promote-polluting-coal-based-plants-study-733434