

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. रेल दुर्घटनाओं को रोकने के लिए नई नीतियों को अद्यतन करने की

जसूरत (*jansatta.com*) Nov 1, 2023

रेल दुर्घटनाओं पर लगाम न लग पाने का बहुत बड़ा कारण है रेल पटरियों की जर्जर हालत, जिन पर सरपट दौड़ती रेलें कब किस जगह बड़े हादसे का शिकार हो जाएं, कहना मुश्किल है।

रेल दुर्घटनाओं पर लगाम न लग पाने का बहुत बड़ा कारण है रेल पटरियों की जर्जर हालत, जिन पर सरपट दौड़ती रेलें कब किस जगह बड़े हादसे का शिकार हो जाएं, कहना मुश्किल है। एक ओर जहां पुरानी पटरियों पर तेज रफ्तार गाड़ियां दौड़ रही हैं, वहीं देशभर में लगभग सभी स्थानों पर पटरियां अपनी क्षमता से कई गुना ज्यादा बोझ उठा रही हैं।

बीते महीने दो बड़े रेल हादसे हो गए। महीने के पहले पखवाड़े में बिहार के बक्सर में रघुनाथपुर स्टेशन पर और तीन दिन पहले आंध्र प्रदेश के विजयनगर में। इनमें सैकड़ों घायल हुए और कइयों की मौत हो गई। रेलवे को जो नुकसान हुआ, सो अलग। चिंता का विषय है कि रेल दुर्घटनाएं रोकने के लिए वर्षों से 'मिशन जीरो एक्सीडेंट' का राग अलापा जा रहा है, मगर दुर्घटनाएं रुकने का नाम नहीं ले रहीं।

2016-17 के रेल बजट में तत्कालीन रेलमंत्री ने रेल दुर्घटनाएं रोकने के लिए 'मिशन जीरो एक्सीडेंट' नामक विशेष अभियान की घोषणा की थी। उसके बाद रेल दुर्घटनाओं पर अंकुश लगाने के लिए त्वरित पटरी नवीकरण, अल्ट्रा सोनिक रेल पहचान प्रणाली तथा प्राथमिकता के आधार पर मानवरहित रेलवे क्रासिंग बनाने जैसे विभिन्न सुरक्षा उपायों पर काम शुरू किया गया था, मगर इन कामों की गति बहुत धीमी है।

रेल तंत्र की लापरवाही के चलते लगातार हो रहे रेल हादसों की फेहरिस्त बहुत लंबी है, लेकिन निरंतर होते हादसों से कोई खास सबक नहीं लिए जाते। जब भी कोई बड़ा हादसा होता है, तो सरकार और रेलवे द्वारा भविष्य में ऐसे हादसों की पुनरावृत्ति रोकने के लिए कड़े कदम उठाने का रटा-रटाया बयान सुनाई देने लगता है। फिर थोड़े ही समय बाद जब कोई रेल हादसा सामने आता है, तो रेल तंत्र के दावों की कलाई खुल जाती है।

ऐसे रेल हादसों के बाद प्रायः जांच के नाम पर कुछ रेल कर्मचारियों और अधिकारियों पर गाज गिरती है, पर समूचा रेल तंत्र उसी पुराने ढर्रे पर रेंगता रहता है। हर दुर्घटना के बाद जांच के आदेश दिए जाते और जांच के लिए उच्चस्तरीय समिति गठित की जाती है, मगर समिति की रिपोर्ट फाइलों में दबकर रह जाती है। रेल हादसों में हर बार हताहतों की चीखें समूचे रेल तंत्र को कंधों में खड़ा करती रही हैं, लेकिन उसके बावजूद रेल हादसों पर लगाम नहीं कसी जा रही।

लोकसभा में एक प्रश्न के उत्तर में सरकार द्वारा बताया गया था कि 2014 से 2023 के दौरान हर वर्ष औसतन 71 रेल दुर्घटनाएं हुईं और यह स्थिति तब है, जब सरकार द्वारा रेल सेवाओं में बेहतरी के लिए आधुनिक और तकनीकी पहलू से हर स्तर पर काम करने का दावा किया जाता रहा है। हालांकि यह बात सही है कि 2014 से पहले के दस वर्षों में हुई रेल दुर्घटनाओं के मुकाबले बाद के नौ वर्षों में रेल हादसों में कमी आई है, लेकिन फिर भी मौजूदा तस्वीर को संतोषजनक नहीं माना जा सकता। अब भी ऐसे हालात बन जाते हैं, जिनमें बालासोर जैसी हृदय विदारक रेल घटनाएं सामने आ जाती हैं। छोटे-बड़े हादसे तो प्रायः होते ही रहते हैं।

केंद्र सरकार द्वारा दी गई जानकारी के मुताबिक मानवीय विफलताओं के कारण होने वाली दुर्घटनाओं को समाप्त करने के लिए मई 2023 तक 6427 स्टेशनों पर 'सिग्नल' और 'प्वाइंट' के केंद्रीकृत परिचालन वाली 'इलेक्ट्रिकल' और 'इलेक्ट्रॉनिक इंटरलाकिंग' प्रणाली की व्यवस्था की गई है,

इसके अलावा 11043 समपार फाटकों पर 'इंटरलाकिंग' का प्रबंध कि या गया है, लेकिन करीब सवा चार महीने पहले बालासोर में तीन ट्रेनों के आपस में टकरा जाने का जो भयानक हादसा हुआ था, उसमें शुरुआती तौर पर यांत्रिक गड़बड़ियों और मानवीय त्रुटियों को ही जिम्मेदार बताया गया था।

रेल मंत्रालय के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक 2019 से पहले के साढ़े चार वर्षों में ही साढ़े तीन सौ से भी अधिक छोटे-बड़े हादसे हुए थे। रेलवे और यात्री सुरक्षा से जुड़े एक सवाल के जवाब में संसद में बताया गया था कि रेल हादसों की बढ़ी वजह रेल कर्मचारियों की नाकामी, सड़क पर चलने वाली गाड़ियां, मशीनों की खराबी और तोड़-फोड़ रही।

रेल दुर्घटनाओं पर लगाम न लग पाने का बहुत बड़ा कारण है रेल पटरियों की जर्जर हालत, जिन पर सरपट दौड़ती रेलें कब किस जगह बड़े हादसे का शिकार हो जाएं, कहना मुश्किल है। एक ओर जहां पुरानी पटरियों पर तेज रफ्तार गाड़ियां दौड़ रही हैं, वहीं देशभर में लगभग सभी स्थानों पर पटरियां अपनी क्षमता से कई गुना ज्यादा बोझ उठा रही हैं।

भारतीय रेलवे के करीब 1219 रेलखंडों में से करीब 40 फीसद पर गाड़ियों का जरूरत से ज्यादा बोझ है। एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक 247 रेलखंडों में से करीब पैसठ फीसद तो अपनी क्षमता से सौ फीसद से अधिक बोझ उठाने को मजबूर हैं और कुछ रेलखंडों में पटरियों की कुल क्षमता से 220 फीसद तक ज्यादा गाड़ियों को चलाया जाता रहा है। इस वजह से भी अनेक हादसे होते हैं।

रेल मंत्रालय को उन मूल कारणों का उपचार करना होगा, जिनके चलते ऐसे हादसे निरंतर सामने आते रहे हैं। भारतीय रेलों में प्रतिदिन सवा करोड़ से ज्यादा लोग सफर करते हैं, लेकिन यात्रियों के बढ़ते बोझ के बावजूद रेल पटरियों को उतना नहीं बढ़ाया गया, जितनी आवश्यकता थी। रेलवे की स्थायी समिति ने अपनी सुरक्षा रिपोर्ट में स्पष्ट किया है कि वर्ष 1950 से 2016 के बीच दैनिक रेल यात्रियों में जहां 1344 फीसद की वृद्धि हुई, वहीं माल ढुलाई में 1642 फीसद की बढ़ोतरी हुई, लेकिन इसके विपरीत रेल पटरियों का विस्तार महज 23 फीसद हो सका था। वर्ष 2000 से 2016 के बीच दैनिक यात्री ट्रेनों की संख्या में भी करीब 23 फीसद की बढ़ोतरी हुई।

यात्री रेलों के अलावा अधिकांश मालगाड़ियां भी पटरियों पर अपनी क्षमता से कहीं अधिक भार लिए दौड़ रही हैं। रेल नियमावली के अनुसार मौजूदा पटरियों पर 4800 से 5000 टन भार की मालगाड़ियां ही चलाई जा सकती हैं, लेकिन पिछले कई वर्षों से सभी ट्रेकों पर 5200 से 5500 टन भार के साथ मालगाड़ियां दौड़ रही हैं। कैग ने एक रिपोर्ट में 'ओवरलोडेड' मालगाड़ियों के परिचालन पर आपत्ति जताते हुए उन पर प्रतिबंध लगाने का सुझाव दिया था, मगर उन महत्वपूर्ण सुझावों को रद्दी की टोकरी में डाल दिया गया।

बहरहाल, हादसों के मद्देनजर रेलवे आधारभूत ढांचे की युद्धस्तर पर मरम्मत करने और नए तकनीकी उपकरणों का उपयोग करने के साथ-साथ ट्रेन चालकों के लिए नि यमित प्रशिक्षण और सुरक्षा के बारे में जागरूकता बढ़ाने की सख्त जरूरत है। हैरानी की बात है कि जिस 'कवच' प्रणाली को रेल दुर्घटनाएं रोकने में बेहद प्रभावी माना जा रहा है, उसे अभी तक देश के समूचे रेल नेटवर्क के महज दो फीसद हिस्से में लागू किया जा सका है।

हालांकि यह सुरक्षा प्रणाली हर प्रकार के रेल हादसों को नहीं रोक सकती, लेकिन सतर्कता के अभाव में मानवीय भूल के कारण होने वाली दुर्घटनाओं पर लगाम लगाने के लिए तीव्र गति से कवच प्रणाली का दायरा बढ़ाना अत्यंत आवश्यक है। इसके साथ ही रेल हादसों को रोकने के अन्य जरूरी प्रबंध भी करने होंगे।

रेलवे सुरक्षा के मामले में नई नीतियों को अद्यतन करने की आवश्यकता है, ताकि ऐसे हादसों को रोका और जान-माल के नुकसान को न्यूनतम किया जा सके। रेल दुर्घटनाओं के कारण जो भी हों, हों रेल यात्रा को सुरक्षित और भरोसेमंद बनाने के लिए हर छोटी से छोटी दुर्घटना के कारणों की तह तक जाना और रेल हादसों को लेकर 'जीरो टालरेंस' की नीति पर दृढ़ता से अमल करना अब समय की बड़ी मांग है।

सूचना के अधिकार के तहत सामने आई एक जानकारी के अनुसार रेल विभाग में करीब पौने तीन लाख पद रिक्त हैं, जिनमें से करीब पौने दो लाख पद तो केवल सुरक्षा श्रेणी के हैं। रेल हादसों पर लगाम लगाने और रेलों की सुरक्षा के लिए इन पदों को शीघ्रतिथी घ्न भरा जाना बेहद जरूरी है। <https://www.jansatta.com/national/need-to-update-new-policies-to-prevent-railway-accidents/3063891/>

2. Dark Web's Aadhaar leaks expose India's digital dilemma (*syllad.com*) October 31, 2023

Resecurity recently made public a sizable collection of personally identifiable information (PII) pertaining to citizens of India. This disturbing revelation has revealed that Aadhaar cards and other sensitive data are being traded on the infamous Dark Web.

Understanding Aadhaar

Aadhaar, the unique 12-digit identification number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) on behalf of the Indian government, has been at the heart of this discovery. Although the enrollment in the Aadhaar system is voluntary and it primarily serves as proof of residence in India, it has increasingly become an integral part of the lives of Indian residents.

The system, which has issued over 1.4 billion Aadhaar IDs since its inception in 2009, stands as one of the most extensive biometric ID programs globally. It includes core biometric data such as ten fingerprints and two iris scans, facilitating a range of digital services, including electronic payments, online Know Your Customer (e-KYC) verification, and compatibility with various Indian financial platforms. Additionally, Aadhaar simplifies processes like e-tax filing, bill payments, and financial asset management.

Linking Aadhaar and Voter Registration

However, the linkage of Aadhaar with voter registration has raised significant concerns. As of February 2023, approximately 60% of eligible Indian voters, amounting to a staggering 945 million people, had connected their Aadhaar cards to their voter IDs. Yet, this move has sparked debates, with critics expressing apprehension over potential disenfranchisement and privacy-related issues.

Controversies Surrounding Aadhaar

While Aadhaar has been praised for its utility, it has also faced criticism. Prior to Moody's concerns regarding the reliability of Aadhaar's biometric authentication controls, a 2022 Brookings report highlighted various issues, including an insecure ecosystem, lack of data standards, and concerns about transparency and accountability within the UIDAI. An audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India in April 2022 revealed that the UIDAI had inadequately regulated its client vendors and safeguarded their data vaults.

Dark Web Sale of Indian Data

On October 9th, an individual using the alias ‘pwn0001’ posted a thread on Breach Forums, advertising access to an astonishing 815 million “Indian Citizen Aadhaar & Passport” records. To put this into context, India’s entire population is just over 1.486 billion people. Shockingly, ‘pwn0001’ was willing to part with the entire Aadhaar and Indian passport dataset for a staggering \$80,000.

The dataset offered by ‘pwn0001’ comprises an extensive array of PII fields belonging to Indian citizens, encompassing details such as names, fathers’ names, phone numbers, passport numbers, ages, addresses, and more. Regrettably, the source of this data leak remains undisclosed.

At the same time, ‘pwn0001’ provided spreadsheets containing fragments of Aadhaar data as evidence. Resecurity’s analysts verified the authenticity of Aadhaar credentials in one of these samples through a government portal’s “Verify Aadhaar” feature.

Another Data Leak Raises Concerns

On August 30th, an individual using the alias ‘Lucius’ posted a thread on Breach Forums, publicizing a 1.8-terabyte data leak that affected an undisclosed “India internal law enforcement organization.” This leak contained an even more extensive array of PII data, including Voter IDs and driving license records. The reference to law enforcement in ‘Lucius’s’ post may be an attempt to obscure the true source of the data.

Implications of Data Leaks

The exposure of Indian PII data on the Dark Web poses a substantial risk of digital identity theft. Cybercriminals can exploit these stolen credentials for various financially motivated scams, such as online banking theft and e-tax refund frauds.

India’s Cybersecurity Landscape

Resecurity’s findings align with the growing prominence of India in the global cyber threat landscape. India has emerged as a top target for cyberattacks, ranking highly in online banking malware detection and all malware detections in the first half of 2023, according to vendor surveys.

Indian businesses have witnessed an increase in disruptive cyberattacks, with government and essential services organizations experiencing a substantial rise. Ransomware attacks have become a significant concern, and India has experienced a high incidence of such attacks in Southern Asia.

Given India’s economic growth and increasing geopolitical importance, it has become an attractive target for cyber threat actors. Geopolitical rivalries, such as India’s relationship with China and the U.S.’s efforts to strengthen ties with India, further underscore the importance of securing sensitive data.

The Ongoing Threat

Despite the growing threat landscape, many Indian citizens remain unaware that their data is being sold online. Additionally, the Indian government has been defending the reliability and security of Aadhaar data, even as data breaches continue to occur. The

turmoil in the Middle East has contributed to the increase in Aadhaar data breaches, as hackers capitalize on the chaos to profit from stolen data on the Dark Web.

Beyond Text Data

Cybercriminals are also marketing scanned IDs from breached systems, intensifying the risk of identity theft and fraud, particularly in online banking and e-commerce.

The leakage of PII data, including Aadhaar information, on the Dark Web poses a substantial risk to Indian citizens. Threat actors use this stolen information for various cyber-enabled financial crimes, emphasizing the need for increased vigilance and cybersecurity measures. <https://www.syllad.com/dark-webs-aadhaar-leaks-expose-indias-digital-dilemma/>

3. Aadhar data leak is one of the biggest breaches in the history of India (*dataconomy.com*) Oct 31, 2023

Multiple sources have confirmed that the Aadhar data leak is one of the biggest breaches in the history of India, as information of 815 million people was stolen from the Indian Council of Medical Research database.

Personal information belonging to more than 815 million citizens has allegedly been leaked from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in what experts term one of the most major data breaches in Indian history. This shocking finding, initially reported by Resecurity, an American cybersecurity and intelligence outfit, has sent shockwaves across the country's digital environment.

The purported breach, which has appeared in the internet's underbelly, implicates a possible weakness that has generated widespread worries about data security and privacy.

Aadhar data leak is a "cyber crisis"

The breach came to light due to a discovery made by Resecurity. An anonymous 'threat actor,' designated as 'pwn001,' posted on the renowned Breach Forums—a forum known as a key hub for discussing data breaches and leaks, according to the cybersecurity firm. This article supposedly allowed access to a wealth of documents about an astounding 815 million Indians, throwing doubt on the scope of the disclosed data.

While formal statements from ICMR or the government are yet to be released, reports suggest that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is poised to launch an inquiry after receiving a formal complaint from ICMR. To manage the fallout, high-ranking officials from various agencies and ministries have been mobilized. Additionally, a stringent Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been activated to mitigate the impact of this colossal breach.

Expert insights

Sanjay Kaushik, the Managing Director of Netrika Consulting, stressed the urgency for businesses to bolster their security measures, Business Standard reported. He highlighted the severity of the recent incident, where the personal data of a massive 815

million Indians was compromised, emphasizing the immediate necessity for companies to enhance their protective measures.

Resecurity's findings disclosed a distressing event on October 9, where an individual using the alias "pwn0001" advertised on a darknet crime forum, offering access to 815 million records containing information on "Indian Citizen Aadhaar and Passport." Shockingly, the entire Aadhaar and Indian passport dataset was available for \$80,000 when Resecurity engaged with the seller.

Previous breaches and systemic weakness

The Aadhaar data leak is not an isolated incident. Earlier this year, a threat actor known as "Lucius" advertised a sale of a 1.8 terabyte data leak related to an unnamed "Indian internal law enforcement organization." In April 2022, an investigation by the Comptroller and Auditor General revealed that the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) had not effectively overseen its client vendors, leaving their data vaults vulnerable, as highlighted in a Brookings report.

According to Brookings Institution research, UIDAI has issued around 1.4 billion Aadhaar cards since its inception in 2009, making it one of the world's largest biometric identification efforts. To protect data, Sanjay Kaushik underlined the critical importance of encryption, better access restrictions, and frequent security upgrades. He emphasized their critical role in developing a strong cybersecurity strategy to successfully tackle rising threats.

The accessibility of personal information on the dark web, including Aadhaar and other crucial details of Indian individuals, creates a serious danger of digital identity theft. This sort of stolen data is frequently used by malicious actors for online banking fraud, tax refund frauds, and other cyber-financial crimes. <https://dataconomy.com/2023/10/31/aadhaar-data-leak-biggest-history-india/>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

4. Punjab News: अब CAG जांच के दायरे में स्मार्ट सिटी प्रोजेक्ट्स, जालंधर पहुंची टीम; खुल सकते हैं ये राज (*jagran.com*) 01 Nov 2023

स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी के प्रोजेक्ट्स अब कैग (कंप्ट्रोलर एंड आडिट जनरल) की जांच के दायरे में आ गए हैं। कैग की चार सदस्यीय टीम जांच के लिए जालंधर पहुंच गई है और स्मार्ट सिटी ऑफिस में रिकॉर्ड की पड़ताल कर रही है। यह टीम स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी को अब तक आए फंड और इसके खर्च का हिसाब किताब देखेगी और फील्ड में जाकर प्रोजेक्ट्स की जांच भी करेगी।

स्मार्ट सिटी के कई प्रोजेक्ट पहले ही विवादों में

कैग की जांच स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी के लिए मुसीबत बन सकती है क्योंकि स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी के कई प्रोजेक्ट पहले ही विवादों में फंसे हैं। इनमें गड़बड़ियों के आरोप लगते आ रहे हैं और आगामी नगर निगम चुनाव में यह प्रोजेक्ट राजनीतिक दलों के लिए बड़ा मुद्दा रहेंगे। कैग का प्रमुख काम पैसे के लेन-देन की जांच करना होता है और यह देखा जाता है कि जो काम हुआ है उसके लिए भुगतान में कोई खामी तो नहीं है।

जालंधर में स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी के जितने भी प्रोजेक्ट पूरे हो चुके हैं और जो चल रहे हैं उनके काम को स्पॉट विजिट करके भी जांच होगी। इस जांच में बड़ी गड़बड़ियां सामने आ सकती हैं क्योंकि कुछ काम पर करोड़ों रुपए खर्च किए गए हैं लेकिन यह जमीन स्तर पर कहीं नजर नहीं आते।

जांच के लिए जालंधर पहुंची टीम

स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी के कई प्रोजेक्ट्स की विजिलेंस भी जारी जांच भी जारी है। ऐसे में कैग टीम की दस्तक स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी के प्रोजेक्ट्स के लिए एक बड़ी चुनौती बन सकती है। यह टीम सोमवार को जालंधर पहुंची है और मंगलवार को इस टीम ने स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी का रिकॉर्ड खंगालना शुरू कर दिया है।

बताया जा रहा है कि इस जांच को परफॉर्मर नाम दिया गया है और स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी को अब तक जितना भी फंड मिला है, उस फंड से हुए काम के सभी प्रोजेक्ट पर खर्च एक-एक पैसे का हिसाब देखा जाएगा।

स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी के विवादित प्रोजेक्ट

केंद्र सरकार के स्मार्ट सिटी कंपनी के प्रोजेक्ट्स विवादों में फंसे हैं, प्रोजेक्ट में सबसे बड़ा नाम एलईडी स्ट्रीट लाइट का है। एलईडी स्ट्रीट लाइट्स प्रोजेक्ट 58 करोड़ रुपए का है और इसकी क्वालिटी को लेकर लगातार सवाल उठते रहे हैं। ठेका लेने वाली कंपनी इसका रखरखाव भी नहीं कर रही है। उपकरणों को लेकर भी दावे गलत साबित हुए हैं। भुगतान में कई खामियां हैं। थर्ड पार्टी इंस्पेक्शन कंपनी, निगम हाउस की जांच टीम में गड़बड़ी साबित हुई है और विजिलेंस जांच जारी है।

-11 चौक के सुंदरीकरण पर 20 करोड़ रुपए खर्च किए जाने थे लेकिन कई आरोपों के बाद इस प्रोजेक्ट को बीच में रोक दिया गया। करीब 8.50 करोड़ रुपए इस पर खर्च किए गए हैं। यह रुपया कहां खर्च किया गया है इसका भी कुछ अता पता नहीं है। सभी चौक खराब हालत में हैं।

-स्मार्ट रोड का काम काफी खराब है। करीब 50 करोड़ रुपए के इस प्रोजेक्ट पर भी कई बार सवाल खड़े हुए हैं। अभी भी कई जगह इसका काम लंबित है। जो सड़कें बनी हैं वह किसी भी तरीके से स्मार्ट वर्क नहीं है।

-ग्रीन बेल्ट और पार्कों के विकास पर करीब 20 करोड़ रुपए खर्च किए गए हैं। फ्लाइओवरों पर वर्टिकल गार्डन, पार्कों का विकास का दावा किया गया। कई इलाकों में पार्क विकसित करने का दावा है लेकिन जमीन तौर पर हालात काफी खराब है। इनके रखरखाव और मॉनिटरिंग का भी कोई इंतजाम नहीं किया गया। <https://www.jagran.com/punjab/jalandhar-city-smart-city-projects-now-under-cag-investigation-team-reaches-jalandhar-many-secrets-may-be-revealed-23570050.html>

5. Noida स्पोर्ट्स सिटी की जांच के लिए 20 दिनों बाद भी कमेटी नहीं बनी (samacharnama.com) Nov 1, 2023

स्पोर्ट्स सिटी परियोजना में गड़बड़ी के लिए जिम्मेदार अधिकारियों पर कार्रवाई की प्रक्रिया थम गई है। लोक लेखा समिति के निर्देश के करीब 20 दिन बाद भी शासन स्तर से उच्च स्तरीय जांच समिति का गठन नहीं हो सका है। इस समिति को गड़बड़ी के लिए जिम्मेदार अधिकारियों के नाम बताने हैं।

पांच सेक्टर में लाई गई स्पोर्ट्स सिटी परियोजना के आवंटन में सीएजी ने 8643 करोड़ का घोटाला होना बताया था। प्राधिकरण के अन्य कामकाज की भी जांच सीएजी ने की, जिसमें हजारों करोड़ रुपये का घोटाला होना सामने आया। यह रिपोर्ट विधानसभा में रखी गई। इसकी अगली प्रक्रिया के तहत अब लोक लेखा समिति स्पोर्ट्स सिटी में हुई गड़बड़ियों को लेकर सुनवाई कर रही है। पिछले करीब पांच महीने में कई बार सुनवाई कर चुकी है। अंतिम सुनवाई इसी महीने 0 को हुई थी। बैठक

में लेखा समिति के अध्यक्ष ने इस मामले की जांच के लिए औद्योगिक विकास विभाग के प्रमुख सचिव अनिल सागर को शासन स्तर पर उच्च स्तरीय कमेटी गठित करने के निर्देश दिए थे.

निर्देश के तहत एक महीने के अंदर जिम्मेदार अधिकारियों को चिन्हित कर रिपोर्ट देनी थी. निर्देश दिए हुए करीब 20 दिन का समय हो चुका है लेकिन अभी तक शासन स्तर पर कोई कमेटी गठित नहीं हो सकी है. गौरतलब है कि स्पोर्ट्स सिटी के लिए ओसी-सीसी जारी करने और नक्शा पास करने पर प्राधिकरण ने रोक लगाई हुई है.

जनवरी 202 में हुई बोर्ड बैठक में प्रस्ताव पास कर यह रोक लगाई गई थी. सीसी पर रोक होने से करीब 5 हजार खरीदारों की रजिस्ट्री भी अटकी हुई है.

पूर्व में गठित की गई थी कमेटी

इस मामले की जांच के लिए शासन के निर्देश पर नोएडा प्राधिकरण के एसीईओ प्रभाष कुमार की अध्यक्षता में एक समिति गठित की गई थी. इस समिति ने चार महीने में कोई काम नहीं किया. करीब 5 दिन पहले एसीईओ प्रभाष कुमार का तबादला हो गया. सीएपी सेवानिवृत्त हो चुकी हैं और अब अतिरिक्त सेवा के तौर पर ग्रेटर नोएडा प्राधिकरण में कार्यरत हैं.

8643 करोड़ का घोटाला सामने आया था

सेक्टर-78, 79, 0, 50 और 52 में स्पोर्ट्स सिटी परियोजना 2-3 साल पहले लाई गई. इसके लिए सस्ते दामों पर बिल्डरों को जमीन दी गई. बिल्डरों ने मुनाफा कमाने के लिए आवासीय और व्यावसायिक चीजें बना दीं लेकिन खेल सुविधाएं विकसित नहीं कीं. सीएजी ने इस परियोजना को लेकर 24 आपत्ति लगाते हुए 8643 करोड़ रुपये का घोटाला होना सामने बताया था.

<https://samacharnama.com/city/noida/even-after-20-days-no-committee-has-been-formed-to/cid12600711.htm>

6. Why the Rs 1.2 lakh crore KLIS project is a bugbear for the BRS first family (indiatoday.in) Oct 31, 2023

Following the sinking of several piers at the Lakshmi barrage of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme project in Telangana on October 22, opposition parties raise allegations about construction flaws and corruption

On October 22, the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) constituted a six-person team, led by chairman Anil Jain, to find out why several pillars constructed for the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS) at the Lakshmi barrage in Telangana had sunken. This followed reports that pillars numbering 15 to 20 of the sixth to eighth blocks of the barrage had sunk the previous night. The incident also led to the temporary closure of the bridge of the barrage across the Godavari in Jayashankar Bhupalapally district, which links Telangana with Maharashtra's Gadchiroli. Such extensive damage to a barrage, especially during a non-flood time, is a first in the country.

The Lakshmi barrage, also known as the Medigadda barrage, is positioned at the beginning of the KLIS, just downstream of the confluence of the Pranahitha and Godavari rivers. This location ensures a minimum assured flow of 300 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) of water. KLIS, which some describe as the largest multi-stage lift irrigation project in the world, is designed to allow the lifting of 160 TMC of water annually, at a maximum rate of 2 TMC per day. It is far from reaching such a stage.

The Anil Jain team probe is expected to present a detailed report after engaging with all stakeholders, including officers of the state government, the agency involved in the construction of the barrage, and after a thorough field inspection. Infra major Larsen and Toubro (L&T), which built the 1.632-km-long barrage with 86 piers in 2019, has also deputed a technical team to assess the cause of the damage and rectify it.

These developments followed a letter by Union Minister for Tourism (and BJP state president for Telangana) G. Kishan Reddy, to Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat on October 22 requesting a thorough probe. This is also in keeping with the Dam Safety Act, 2021. Reddy referred to reports that all 85 gates of the barrage had been opened and that 10 TMC of stored water was being released downstream, endangering lives due to the sudden release. “KLIS has been built irresponsibly...and is a total failure,” he says, adding that chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) should take responsibility for ‘disregarding the advice of experts’ and not ensuring quality checks.

“The piers collapsing in Medigadda has put the entire KLIS in jeopardy, with doubts arising about the safety, security, stability, benefits and financial burden on Telangana as it was built by taking hefty loans,” says Reddy. He is demanding KCR accept moral responsibility, quit his post and order a judicial probe. “The Medigadda barrage is the lifeline of KLIS, and the piers sinking will adversely affect the reservoirs and other lifts across the state. Instead of ATW (any-time water) for people, it has become an ATM (any-time money) for the KCR regime.”

The state BJP chief has raised specific questions about the construction as well, for instance, asking if borehole samples were taken before the pillars were constructed to estimate how much compaction was required to ensure a stable foundation. He has also asked if studies were conducted of the river both pre- and post-monsoon, and if the responsibility for design of the barrage was given to the constructing agency or were done by the state irrigation department’s Central Design Organisation.

According to L&T, last year, the Medigadda barrage recorded a flooding high of 28.7 lakh cusecs (cubic feet per second) against design limits of 28.25 lakh cusecs. The barrage continued to operate safely and even withstood the unprecedented floods of July 2022. Sources say there is no immediate threat to the barrage.

However, capitalising on the mishap in the run-up to the Telangana assembly poll, which begins on November 30, the BJP, Congress and other opposition parties have been targeting the BRS, renewing charges of KLIS being a cash cow for the KCR family and the ruling party. “Can KCR explain how many acres are getting water from KLIS?” asks Reddy. “Only 57,000 acres have got water, including the chief minister’s farm house, though 18.25 lakh acres were supposed to be irrigated.” Recalling the submergence of the Annaram and Kannepally pump houses of the KLIS in last year’s floods, which damaged the heavy motors, he insisted that a thorough probe is imperative for public safety.

KCR’s ex-colleague and former finance minister Eatala Rajender, who is to contest against him in Gajwel, demanded the state government issue a white paper on the incident. “The BRS government projected the KLIS as an extraordinary engineering

feat and claimed it will help the farmers, but in reality, is a drain of public funds to the KCR family,” alleges Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee president A. Revanth Reddy.

Politicians and the media were not allowed to visit the barrage after the first alarm and reports of damage. While engineering staff confirmed that pier #19 of the barrage was damaged and piers #20 and #21 had also developed cracks, the state irrigation department in Hyderabad added to the confusion by suggesting sabotage was involved. Officials say they suspect the role of unknown offenders, implying that the barrage did not suffer from construction deficiencies as is being alleged by the Opposition political parties. Even as the NDSA team began its inquiry, an assistant executive engineer at Medigadda filed a complaint with the police at Mahadevpur, suggesting sabotage was involved. The FIR was filed under sections of the IPC relating to the causing of damage to public property, and Section 3 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property (PDPP) Act, 1984, that pertains to vandalism and destruction of public assets. On October 24, the Bhupalapally district police ruled out the possibility of any conspiracy or mischief and stated that prima facie, damage to the Medigadda barrage had taken place due to a structural fault. However, this was retracted hours later at the behest of irrigation officials.

After a review on October 27, the state government announced that the civil work required to repair the barrage will be completed in 45 days, and that the affected barrage gates will be replaced/ repaired a month after that. All the six piers were damaged in the seventh block of the barrage and restoration will begin after the NDSA probe is over.

Engineer-in-chief of irrigation and command area development C. Muralidhar asserts there is no structural fault in the Lakshmi barrage. “Sand could have led to the sagging of a pier. But the department received quality of sand and construction certifications,” he says, absolving his organisation of any responsibility. Irrigation officials say that unlike in the construction of dams, permeable foundations are relied on in the construction of barrages. In this, they say, the sinking of barrages does happen due to the shifting or washing away of sand. They point out that implementation agencies have faced this, in varying magnitudes, at barrages across the Ganga and at the Dowlaiswaram and Sunkesula barrages in Andhra Pradesh.

The KLIS, inaugurated in 2019, was intended to meet over two-third of the state’s agricultural, drinking and industrial water needs. Kishan Reddy says that while KCR had promised 400 TMC of water for agriculture alone, only 150 TMC was lifted and released in the past five years. The KCR government, which had laid the foundation for the project in 2016, completed the major components of KLIS involving construction of barrages and pump houses.

Targeted at irrigating around 45 lakh acres, KLIS involves three barrages, 20 lifts, 19 pump houses, 19 reservoirs with a total capacity of 145 TMC, with 43 40 MW machines pumping water through 203 km of tunnels and 1,531 km of canal. KCR, therefore, claims KLIS as his government’s major achievement since assuming office in 2014. However, others disagree. The National Green Tribunal, for example, says it was constructed without following the statutory provisions with regard to environmental

aspects. It was also funded totally by the state—the Union Government has, on several occasions, declined requests to accord KLIS ‘national project’ status and provide funds.

The construction of the KLIS was mainly funded through loans from banks and other institutional lenders. A CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General of India) report has questioned the financial viability of the project. It has pointed out that the cost to benefit ratio of KLIS is 1: 0.75 in contrast to the BRS government’s claim of 1: 1.5. By taking into account the escalated costs the ratio comes down to 1: 0.52. The total cost of irrigation per acre is about Rs 85,000 per acre per year while the net profit from the cultivation of paddy, the main crop, is computed to be Rs 40,000 an acre a year assuming two crops a year. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/why-the-rs-12-lakh-crore-klis-project-is-a-bugbear-for-the-brs-first-family-2456298-2023-10-31>

7. J&K Bank's statutory auditors removed prematurely (*economictimes.indiatimes.com*) Oct 31, 2023

The removal came in the backdrop of the auditors issuing a qualified opinion on the bank’s FY23 accounts with respect to funds raised via the employee stock purchase scheme 2023 (ESPS).

The central statutory auditors of Jammu and Kashmir Bank have been removed prematurely.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India or the CAG removed the bank’s three auditors O Aggarwal & Co, Dharam Raj & Co., and Arora Vohra & Co in September. The auditors had served two years of their three-year tenure; their term was to expire in this financial year FY24.

The removal came in the backdrop of the auditors issuing a qualified opinion on the bank’s FY23 accounts as well as for the first quarter of the current financial year FY24. This was with respect to funds raised via the employee stock purchase scheme 2023 (ESPS).

The auditors had raised red flags alleging that employees availed loans from the bank to purchase the shares, but that was in violation of the RBI’s directions.

The CAG found no objections to this statutory auditors’ report, ETCFO has learned.

In accounting parlance, a qualified opinion means that financials are fairly represented but with the exception of a certain area.

In October, J&K Bank informed the stock exchanges about the change of auditors. The bank appointed Gupta and Associates, Lunawat and Co, and JCR and Co as its new central statutory auditors.

"The intimation in this regard disseminated to the Stock Exchanges is amply clear that the appointment of new set of Statutory Central Auditors of the Bank for the FY 2023-24 has been made by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

Pertinent to mention that the Statutory Central/Branch Auditors of the J&K Bank are appointed/re-appointed by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India with the concurrence of Reserve Bank of India and the Bank has no role in the appointment/re-appointment of Statutory Central/Branch Auditors," J&K Bank said in response to the ETCFO's query.

Queries sent to CAG went unanswered till the time of the publication of this news report. The bank's previous auditors could not be reached.

It is to be noted that the new auditors did not express any conclusion or comment on the qualified opinion of the previous auditors for the latest September quarter results, but they drew attention in the emphasis of the matter section of their audit report the J&K Employee Stock Purchase Scheme 2023.

“During the Audit for the financial year ended 31st March 2023, a qualified opinion was given in the Auditor's report (Standalone) on the matter of 7 Crore shares allotted to the Employees aggregating to Rs. 274.75 Crore. The matter is under consideration with the Statutory Authorities/ Regulators and the Management is of the view that any adjustments/disclosures to the financial statements, if required, would be made in the financial statements of the Bank as and when the outcome is known,” the new auditors noted.

Anupam Sharma, Ex-Chairman, Meerut Branch of Central India Regional Council of ICAI, said, "The premature removal of the auditors is grossly unjustified. It appears that the J&K Bank found it inconvenient to have them as they had issued a qualified opinion for FY23 and June quarter. The lender has simply got them removed. And this is despite the CAG's supplementary audit finding no issues with their audit. Now, the new auditors have given a clean chit. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) must take a look at this case on an urgent basis.”

An email sent to the ICAI went unanswered till the time of the publication of this news report. <https://cfo.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/tax-legal-accounting/jk-bank-statutory-auditors-removed-prematurely/104855632>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

8. Govt's fiscal deficit rises to 39.3% of annual target in first half of FY24 (*thehindu.com*) October 31, 2023

Central government's fiscal deficit touched 39.3% of the full year target in the first half of the current financial year, slightly higher than 37.3% recorded in the year-ago period.

In actual terms, the fiscal deficit or the gap between expenditure and revenue worked out at ₹7.02 lakh crore at the end of September 2023, showed data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA).

In the Union Budget, the government projected to bring down the fiscal deficit to 5.9% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the current 2023-24 financial year.

The fiscal deficit was 6.4% of the GDP in 2022-23 against the earlier estimate of 6.71%.

The tax revenue was at ₹11.60 lakh crore or 49.8% of the annual target. During April-September 2022-23, the net tax collection was 52.3% of that year's annual Budget Estimate (BE).

Centre's total expenditure was ₹21.19 lakh crore or 47.1% of BE of 2023-24, marginally higher than 46.2% of BE 2022-23. <https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/govts-fiscal-deficit-rises-to-393-of-annual-target-in-first-half-of-fy24/article67480542.ece>

9. Robust tax, non-tax receipts boost Centre's finances (*financialexpress.com*) November 1, 2023

The Centre's fiscal deficit was within a very comfortable level at around 39.3% of the budget estimate (BE) in the first six months of the current financial year compared with 37.3% of the respective target in the year-ago period.

While net tax revenues, the largest of receipts, rose by 15%, non-tax revenues expanded by 50% thanks to higher RBI dividend. This was amidst a 10% growth in revenue expenditure, and a robust 43% annual expansion in capex.

Revenue expenditure declined by 4% to Rs 3.3 trillion in the month of September 2023, whereas capex expanded by 29% to Rs 1.2 trillion, the highest in any month in H1FY24.

“With this, 49% of the FY24 Budget Estimate for capex had been achieved, which is favourable in light of the potential slowdown closer to the Parliamentary elections,” Iera chief economist Aditi Nayar said.

Given the larger surplus receipts from the RBI and likely healthy profits of state-run entities, the Centre's total dividend receipts could exceed the budget target by around Rs 60,000 crore in FY24, according to an FE analysis.

RBI's surplus transfer to the Centre rose 188% on year to Rs 87,416 crore in FY24 (for accounting year FY23), which was very close to Rs 91,000 crore estimated from dividend receipts from the RBI, public sector banks and financial institutions (Rs 48,000 crore) and the CPSEs in FY24.

The additional non-tax revenues will likely to provide some cushion to meet any undershooting in other revenues streams including disinvestment or potential overshooting in expenses, relative to respective BE, such as on job guarantee programme (MGNREGS) and cooking gas subsidy.

Gross tax collections (before devolution) expanded by a healthy 16% on year in April-September FY24. With a 27% rise in corporation tax collections in September 2023 amidst healthy advance tax inflows, nearly 49% of the FY24 BE had been collected, which is an encouraging trend. Moreover, half the personal income tax target of FY24 BE had been achieved in H1 FY24.

While tax devolution in September 2023 was in line with the previous month, it was 25% higher than the year-ago level. To meet the FY24 BE, the Centre has to release Rs 5.66 trillion to the states in the next six months, which is nearly the same as the amount devolved in October-March in FY23 as per Icra's calculations.

The Centre's expenditure on major subsidies — food, fertiliser and fuel — rose marginally to Rs 2.06 trillion in H1 FY24 compared with Rs 1.99 trillion in the year ago period. <https://www.financialexpress.com/policy/economy-robust-tax-non-tax-receipts-boost-centres-finances-3293076/>

10. AP rail crash raises safety alarm (*thehindubusinessline.com*)

October 31, 2023

Safety first. In a year of mishaps, it is time the Railways installs the Kavach system and upgrades track infra in a big way

The recent rail tragedy — the Visakhapatnam-Rayagada Passenger ramming the rear of Visakhapatnam-Palasa Passenger near Vizianagaram with 14 people dead — calls for serious introspection by the Indian Railways (IR).

It started with the catastrophic Balasore accident in June, the worst in the last 28 years, that left 300 dead and a thousand injured. The interlocking of signals was tampered with by a manual interposition to signal Coromandel Express via main line while its route was set to an occupied loop line, resulting in a three-way collision.

There had been a series of human errors which caused the accident: (i) Erroneous signalling circuit alteration and wrong labelling in 2018 and mismatch with the completion drawing escaping detection in multiple tests since then; (ii) Improper procedure of level crossing work on the day of the accident, which compounded the circuitry problem; (iii) Failure of the station staff to react to the unusual electrical response (flickering of the indicator light on the panel), which stabilised at a wrong indication, suggesting a fault in the circuit, a fallout of (i).

What was shocking is that an error in the circuit and its labelling, with the potential to cause an accident, had existed in the system since 2018, and had gone uncorrected for so many years.

I wrote that this appeared to be an aberration as the safety record of IR had improved significantly in the last five/six years due to elimination of all unmanned level crossings and increased attention to track maintenance. Sadly, I spoke too soon!

Some measures

Nevertheless, I had suggested some measures: A quick one-time drive with IR's own safety team at each station to conduct functional checks of circuits as well as physical verification of on-site circuits with completion drawings followed by the same exercise by specially-contracted third party experts.

In the long term, deployment of AI to bring rail safety on firmer ground; massive data related to train running from station data-loggers and powerful microprocessors on rolling stock is available but cocooned in departmental silos which can be collated for

daily alerts. There doesn't seem to be any significant movement in these areas. Although Kavach would not have prevented the accident, it would have reduced the impact of the collision and therefore a strong follow-up on installation of Kavach was called for.

Spate of accidents

On October 11, five people died and 30 were injured when the Delhi-Kamakhya North East Express derailed near Buxar. An internal assessment by IR found "fault in track" as the probable cause of the derailment. This brought in focus the need to allot maintenance blocks religiously and attend to maintenance and upgrade of track infrastructure, which, in any case, is a sine quo non due to increase in traffic on IR.

On October 25, a fire broke out in four coaches of the Patalkot Express train near Agra resulting in injuries to some passengers.

Today, all relevant materials used in rail vehicles must follow the EN 45545 standard in order to achieve the highest level of safety possible in the event of a fire. IR has also adopted it but it remains mainly on paper. The floodgates are opened to all kinds of vendors and while the prototype approval may go through stringent testing, series supplies are sub-standard and incomplete or improper tests are accepted. It is doubtful that most of the furnishing materials in use would pass the stringent test regime of the EN standard and even the latest coaches would not have the required fire retardancy.

And now this Vizianagaram accident! It does appear to be a case of error on the part of the loco pilot who ignored a red signal to stop. But human error by an individual cannot absolve IR of its greater responsibility; such errors cannot be totally eliminated and that is where technology steps in; in our case, Kavach, a unique signalling system developed by IR engineers.

Hike Kavach capacities

Why is the progress of Kavach installation so slow? A case in point is the inexplicable statement by the Ministry that the efforts to expedite the deployment of Kavach were hampered by industrial capacity constraints. It is the job of IR to create capacities through a partnership based on trust if IR's safety record has to improve.

Modern trains and swanky stations have great visibility and therefore, politicians like to celebrate them. While the hype about Vande Bharat and redeveloped stations is understandable, IR would not progress merely on the shoulders of these optics.

There is a lot more to be done; to begin with, upgrade of track infrastructure, modernisation of signalling system by large-scale installation of Kavach and use of AI to collate the vast amount of train running data, used only for postmortem today in isolation, and generate meaningful alerts. For safety works, funds are not a problem, but execution remains a concern. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/ap-rail-crash-raises-safety-alarm/article67481388.ece>

11. No Logic in Privatising the Production of Vande Bharat Sleeper Train, say Trade Unions (*newslick.in*) Nov 01, 2023

When Vande Bharat is designed and already produced by PSUs at a much lower cost, what is the need to privatise it?

The Indian Railways signed pacts with two multinational companies to manufacture 200 Vande Bharat sleeper express trains. When Vande Bharat is designed and already produced by PSUs at a much lower cost, what is the need to privatise it? This was asked by the Joint Action Council (JAC) of trade unions at the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in Chennai.

The private firms will be given the existing prototype, design and drawings of the sleeper trains designed by the ICF. The private companies will be provided space for production in the PSUs along with the existing infrastructure. They will also be given resources such as electricity, gas and water.

Yet the cost of production per coach is more, showing a high rate of profit to the privates alleged ICF-JAC while condemning such brazen misuse of taxpayers' money.

The Indian Railways also privatised the maintenance work for these trains for the next 35 years. The JAC estimates a total loss of 65,510 government employment.

'PRIVATE TIE-UP NOT ACCEPTABLE'

An Italian tie-up company, Titagarh Rail Systems Ltd (TRSL), and state-owned Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) inked a contract with the Indian Railways to manufacture 80 Vande Bharat sleeper trains in ICF in Chennai. Similarly, a joint venture between the public sector company Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL) and Russian engineering company Transmashholding (TMH) will manufacture 120 trains in the Marathwada Rail Coach Factory (MRCF) in Latur.

The TRSL-BHEL will produce L1 trains at Rs 139 crore/16-coach train and the TMH-RVNL at Rs 120 crore/train. In total, 3,200 coaches will be produced.

The Vande Bharat coaches were designed by the ICF and certified by the Research Designs & Standards Organisation (RDSO) under the Ministry of Railways. The train set has already been tested successfully for 180 kmph speed.

"In the international market, its production cost was Rs 200 crore, but ICF efficiently produced it at Rs 98 crore," ICF-United Workers Union (UWU) leader Rajaraman told NewsClick.

"With increased efficiency, ICF has further reduced the cost of production to Rs 70 crore, but the government is giving it away to private players at an added cost of Rs 50 crore," he said. ICF-JAC estimated an additional cost of Rs 10,000 crore for the 80 trains to be built in the Perambur factory in Chennai.

"The present prototype of the Vande Bharat train is 85% indigenious. The rest 15%, for high-speed motors, brake control and a few others, are imported. Through more research, workshop and infrastructure facilities, we can indigenise these also, and further reduce the cost of production," he said.

"When the ICF and ICF employees are ready and capable to design new versions and to adopt and manufacture the new technology, allowing other organisations to function independently within the premises of ICF is not at all acceptable," read a statement by ICF-JAC.

ICF WORKERS PROTEST

The ICF-JAC held two rounds of protests last week. It demanded the Indian Railways to withdraw the pact signed with Titagarh. The JAC pointed out that this move is against social justice because it usurps the opportunity of dignified employment for thousands of workers.

They pointed out ICF already has "22.2% vacancy in technician category, but neither ICF nor the railway board is making efforts to fill vacancies. Similarly, there are 600 vacancies in the Helper category."

To produce a 16-car rake of Vande Bharat, ICF needs approximately 227 Group-C employees – 182 direct technicians, 27 supporting staff and 18 technical supervisors.

ICF workers observed a black day on October 25, condemning the indirect privatisation of ICF.

On October 27, more than 100 workers held a sit-in protest at the ICF general manager's office from 8 am to 1 pm.

ICF is a production unit established in 1995. It has exported train coaches to developing companies and produced profit-making coaches for domestic purposes. It is the largest coach manufacturer in the world, with a record of 70,000 coaches in 68 years.

"Irrespective of political affiliations, all trade unions have joined hands in opposing private players in Vande Bharat sleeper train production, including the RSS-affiliated Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)," said Rajaraman.

The Vande Bharat Sleeper Express would have one first-class, four second-class and 11 three-tier coaches. It will have a total carrying capacity of 830 persons. <https://www.newsclick.in/no-logic-privatising-production-vande-bharat-sleeper-train-say-trade-unions>

12. 'Desi' S-400: All about Project Kusha, India's very own long-range air defence system (*theprint.in*) Oct 31, 2023

India's very own long-range air defence system with a range of up to 350 km. That's what India's top military research organisation — the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) — is working on.

At the heart of 'Project Kusha' is the development of India's very own Long-Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (LR-SAM) that, according to reports, is comparable to Russia's S-400 Triumf air defence system. Jointly developed with Israel Aerospace Industries, Israel's major aerospace and aviation manufacturers, Kusha was greenlit by the Cabinet Committee for Security in May 2022, and accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) —

the first step toward procurement of any military equipment and hardware — by the defence ministry last month for procuring five of its squadrons for the IAF for Rs 21,700 crore.

Speaking at a press conference he held on 3 October, Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal V. R. Chaudhari spoke about challenges in the delivery of Russia's S-400. While Moscow's already delivered three systems, the delivery of two others is still pending, he said. He also listed the other "new generation weapon systems" that India planning to procure.

"Medium-Range Surface to Air Missile (MRSAM), Akash New Generation missile defence systems, Air Defence System Kusha, Ballistic Missile Systems Pralay are all the contracts we are expecting to sign sometime in the coming year," he said at the briefing.

According to a report in the Times of India Tuesday, India aims to deploy the indigenous LR-SAM system, which is capable of detecting and destroying incoming stealth fighters, aircraft, drones, cruise missiles, and precision-guided munitions at ranges up to 350 km, 2028-2029.

Here's everything you want to know about Project Kusha, the Indian military's very own Long Range Surface-to-Air Missiles.

'Reliable area air defence'

According to the Times of India report, the mobile LR-SAM, with its long-range surveillance and fire control radars would have different types of interceptor missiles designed to hit hostile targets at 150 km, 250 km, and 350 km ranges.

Meant to provide comprehensive air defence cover to strategic and tactical vulnerable areas, the system can take out "fighter-sized" targets at a range of up to 250 km and larger aircraft at 350 km, the report said.

It is also capable of "reliable area air defence" with a single-shot kill probability of not less than 80 percent for a single missile launch and not less than 90 percent for salvo launch, the report said quoting sources.

Although it has been compared favourably to the S400, there's a significant difference — in a report on 16 October, the Moscow-based news agency Sputnik said that while the latter can take down long, medium, and short-range threats, Project Kusha aims at the development of only long-range air defence.

The LR-SAM system will be also made capable of interacting with an integrated command and control system (IACCS), according to the Times of India.

The IACCS is an automated air defence command and control centre that the Indian Air Force uses for controlling and monitoring air operations.

But LR-SAM isn't the only project India is developing with Israel. India's Kalyani Strategic Systems has already entered a joint venture with Israel's Rafael Advanced

Systems Ltd for indigenous production of MRSAM, some of which have already been procured by the IAF.

The IAF has already inducted some MRSAM. <https://theprint.in/defence/desi-s-400-all-about-project-kusha-indias-very-own-long-range-air-defence-system/1826664/>

13. Staff shortage, financial dependency plague local governance (*thehindu.com*) Nov 01, 2023

Most Indian cities lack transparency and do not publish accessible civic and financial data

An annual survey of Indian cities shows that a majority of local governments are financially dependent on their State governments. They also have limited control over who to hire and how to distribute work. The report found that only Assam empowers its city governments to collect all key taxes. Except five States — Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Meghalaya, and Rajasthan — all the others have to get approval from the State before borrowing money.

The report, Annual Survey of India's City-Systems (ASICS) 2023, was published by the Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy, a non-profit institution.

Table 1 shows this asymmetry of power across four city categories — megacities (>4 million (mn) population), large cities (1-4 mn), medium cities (0.5 mn-1 mn), small cities (<0.5 mn). It shows that while megacities have more of a say over their finances, their mayors do not have a five-year tenure and are not directly elected. On the other hand, more mayors in smaller cities have a five-year tenure and are directly elected, but lack a say on the city's finances.

Limitless cities, limited power

The charts and tables were sourced from the Annual Survey of India's City-Systems (ASICS) 2023 published by Janaagraha, a Bengaluru-based non-profit



City lights: A view of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation building. ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY

Table 1 | The table shows asymmetry of mayor/council powers across various city categories

Percentages of cities...	Mega	Large	Medium	Small	Total
with a five-year mayoral tenure	38%	68%	67%	84%	83%
with a directly elected Mayor	0%	39%	33%	36%	36%
that can approve the city budget	75%	34%	40%	11%	12%
that can borrow without the prior sanction of the State	13%	16%	12%	15%	15%
that can invest without the prior sanction of the State	75%	63%	40%	42%	42%
that have complete power over their staff	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
that can levy all key taxes	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%
Average no. of functions devolved by law (number)	11	8	13	11	9
Total population (in mn)	57.84	57.88	28.93	173.9	318.5

Mega cities (>4 million population), large cities (1-4 million), medium cities (5,00,000-1 million), small cities (<5,00,000)

Table 3 | The table shows the asymmetry of financial transparency in the capital cities of India. Figures denote % of capital cities

Type of data	Mega	Large	Medium	Small	Total
Annual audited financial statement	17%	50%	29%	23%	28%
Quarterly audited financial statement	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
City budget	100%	100%	57%	38%	66%
Ward budget	17%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Internal audit	0%	0%	0%	8%	3%

Chart 2 | The chart shows the availability of civic data in capital cities

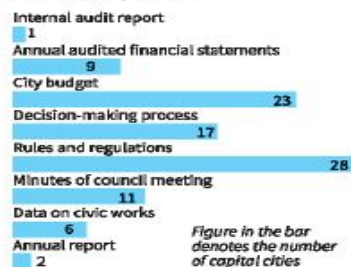


Chart 4 | The chart shows the vacancy (in %) in local governance



Chart 5 | The chart shows municipal staff per lakh population in Indian and global cities



The report also shows that mayors and councils have limited power in staff appointments and promotions. For instance, only a handful of States have empowered their city governments to appoint municipal commissioners. In fact, no city has complete power over its staff. Cities especially lack control over their senior management teams who are deputed directly by State governments, which makes it tough to initiate disciplinary proceedings against them if needed. The report says because of this, they are not able to build a “strong organisation or exact accountability” from the workers.

The report also speaks of the lack of transparency in publishing cities’ civic information which citizens can access easily. Only 11 of the 35 States/Union Territories have enacted the Public Disclosure Law that mandates publishing of key civic data. As shown in Chart 2, one capital city in India publishes its internal audit report and two publish annual reports. Eleven of them publish their minutes of meeting and 17 make available their decision making process.

More important is financial transparency, where the city has to make available its overall budget, budget for each ward, and financial statements every quarter and also annually. Data show that no city publishes a quarterly financial audited statement. As

shown in Table 3, only 28% of them disseminate their annual audited financial statements. The number goes down further to 17% if only the mega cities are considered. While bigger cities do publish their city budgets, smaller cities lag there with just 40%-65% of them publishing that information. Worryingly none of the mega, large, and medium capital cities publish their internal audit information.

Due to poor control over appointment of staff, the local governments suffer from high levels of unfilled posts. Data show that 35% of posts in India's municipal corporations are vacant. The vacancy progressively worsens with 41% posts being vacant among municipalities and 58% being vacant in town panchayats.

A comparison with other metropolises such as New York, London and Johannesburg shows that such a crippling shortage of staff is limited to Indian cities. Chart 5 shows the number of city staff per one lakh population. There are 5,906 city workers in New York and 2,936 in London for every one lakh population compared to just 317 in Bengaluru, 586 in Hyderabad, and 938 in Mumbai. Cities such as New York also been empowered to impose taxes, approve their own budget, invest and borrow without approval. [https://epaper.thehindu.com/ccidist-ws/th/th_delhi/issues/57881/OPS/G3VBV0D1F.1+G3FBV1TUB.1.html#:~:text=Due%20to%20poor%20control%20over,town%20panchayats%20\(Chart%204\).](https://epaper.thehindu.com/ccidist-ws/th/th_delhi/issues/57881/OPS/G3VBV0D1F.1+G3FBV1TUB.1.html#:~:text=Due%20to%20poor%20control%20over,town%20panchayats%20(Chart%204).)

14. 'Lethal' changes (*millenniumpost.in*) Oct 31, 2023

The proposed amendments to India's patent laws are a capitulation to Big Pharma and will undermine vital public health safeguards in the law

Nearly 20 years ago, India passed a Patents (Amendment) Act that permitted product patents on food items, chemicals and pharmaceuticals to comply with the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) regime. India's Patents (Amendment) Act, 2005, however, was unique in many ways by balancing the WTO demand on IPRs with special safeguards to protect public health. It ensured there were provisions for issuing compulsory licences to meet public health emergencies and an opportunity to anyone — individuals or patient associations, among others — to freely mount pre-grant opposition if they felt the patent application, especially for drugs, was being made on specious or shaky grounds.

These are some of the critical aspects of the law that the government is seeking to undermine in a way that some IP experts say could alter the Indian patent landscape in a significant manner. The changes have not been debated in Parliament or in any public fora. The law itself is not being amended, just the rules that govern the patent law. It is a kind of backdoor way of bringing about major changes. What the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), which deals with patent matters, has done is notify the Draft Patents (Amendment) Rules and allow a month for comments. That ended on September 25. Were any stakeholders consulted? None, except the corporate sector, it would seem. Among public health activists, campaigners for access to medicines and patient groups, there is shock and dismay.

The rationale DPIIT offers for the amendments is the need to streamline the working of the Patent Office so that applications are processed faster. The Union Minister for Commerce and Industry sets great store on increasing the number of patents and has

been consistently saying that he will amend the patent law to spur innovation and research and development. But that is all of a piece with the government's statements on the patent law since it came to power in 2014. The Minister of Commerce and Industry startled a business meeting in October of that year when she claimed that India did not have an IPR policy and that this had "really curbed us from establishing our rights in a forceful way". What was needed was a nationalist policy, she stated. This showed little understanding of how India had formulated its patent laws over the decades to meet the country's economic interests at different stages of its development. The 2005 Patents Act, in fact, had been formulated by the Manmohan Singh government, based on a draft prepared by the outgoing ministry of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and by seeking inputs from different segments of society. Singh ensured that the law would not allow patent holders a free run on the patent system by including several safeguards to protect public interests. This is the reason why rich nations, led by the US and its business organisations, particularly the pharma lobby, have kept up relentless pressure on India's policymakers, its courts and the patent system to get unique sections of the law excised or diluted to suit their interests.

The pressure appears to have finally worked. In the past couple of years, New Delhi has been whittling away at some of the critical aspects of the safeguards in the patent law by the insidious method of amending the rules, all in the name of ensuring better working of the Patent Office. One such amendment with wide ramifications relates to Form 27, which this column has flagged earlier. Form 27 is a local working requirement that needs to be filed by patent holders every year to disclose whether their patents are being worked in India and to what extent. Apparently, this was too onerous a requirement for drug majors although they are required to file similar information with the relevant authorities in their home countries. Form 27 provides vital information for Indian companies when applying for compulsory licences. The draft rule proposes to remove the need for patent holders to explain why the patent was not worked in India or to provide details of the approximate revenue earned in India through the patent. That's not all. Patent holders can file this abridged, and very likely meaningless, form just once in three years instead of annually. In essence, this amendment would also spell the death knell of compulsory licences, not that any are being issued by the government.

There are other concessions to patent applicants. They no longer have to disclose to the Patent Office information on the status of their patent applications for the same invention in other countries. The DPIIT argument is that such information would be in the public domain and that the Patent Office should be able to access it. Why bother the companies to provide such detailed information when the inundated Patent Office could spend long hours of its working days searching the databases of patent offices the world over? One wonders if the Patent Office was consulted at all in the process of formulating the new system.

But the most lethal blow is aimed at pre-grant opposition. Those challenging patent applicants will have to pay hefty dynamic fees, which was not the case earlier. Patients groups say they would be unable to fork out such sums. And it will no longer be open to everyone to file a patent challenge; it needs the approval of the Controller of Patents. Giving such discretionary powers to officials is a hallmark of this government, but in this instance, it's a violation of not just the patent law but also of several court rulings that have upheld the right of patient groups and others to file pre-grant opposition petitions. In 2006, patients scored a landmark victory against Swiss multinational

Novartis when the Chennai Patent Office rejected its patent application for an incremental improvement on its anti-cancer drug Glivec based on an opposition suit filed by the Cancer Patients' Aid Association. That is when India sent out a strong signal that patients and access to medicines mattered as much as patent protection.

It is difficult to fathom where this government's priorities lie. Recall another signal victory a few months ago when two TB patients, both women, stopped Johnson & Johnson's claim for a secondary patent on its tuberculosis drug bedaquiline with their pre-grant opposition. Following the rejection in India, the drug giant announced it would not be enforcing these patents in 134 other low- and middle-income countries. Normally, one would have expected New Delhi to celebrate such a major victory by strengthening the pre-grant opposition system. Instead, the government appears set on crippling it with restrictive new rules.

<https://www.millenniumpost.in/opinion/lethal-changes-538661>

15. How credible is the Global Hunger Report? (*dailypioneer.com*)

Nov 01, 2023

Once again India is ranked rather low in the Global Hunger Report, but how credible are the criteria and methods employed in evaluation?

Like previous years, once again a German organisation named Welt Hungerhilfe has released its 'Hunger Index' and the hunger ranking of the countries of the world based on the same, in their so-called Global Hunger Report 2023. In this ranking, India has once again been placed very low at 111th position. It is noteworthy that this year 125 countries have been included in this ranking. Last year in 2022, India was ranked 107th in the list of 121 countries and 2021, India was ranked 101st in the ranking of 116 countries.

What they mean by this hunger index is that not only, there is a huge problem of hunger prevalent in India, but the performance of other countries is far better than India. If we believe the report, the performance of countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka etc., which are dependent on food supplies from India, is much better than India. In such a situation, it is natural to raise questions on this report. Let us try to understand the reality of hunger and its indices in India.

What is Welt Hungerhilfe's Hunger Index?

There are 4 parameters to measure this Hunger Index - malnutrition, stunting in children, underweight in children, wasting (low weight for height) and child mortality (mortality rate in children under 5 years of age). The hunger index based on all these parameters is estimated. Welt Hungerhilfe says that in India this index is 28.7, which is considered very serious, whereas in Pakistan it is 26.6, due to which Pakistan is ranked at 102nd position, which is above India. Similarly, Bangladesh is ranked at 81st position with 19.0 points and Sri Lanka is ranked at 60th position with 13.3 points.

If we see the parameters and scales used in constructing this Hunger Index, there are question marks on the data on one hand and the methodology on the other. Not only the Indian government, but many other experts have summarily rejected this report.

Child Mortality

According to of Welt Hungerhilfe's methodology, child mortality has been a major determinant of the hunger index. While estimating, the hunger index for the year 2023, surprisingly the child mortality rate data of 2020-21 has been taken. The report puts India's child mortality rate at 31 per thousand.

According to the data published by the Sample Registration System of India, the child mortality rate decreased from 35 per thousand in 2019 to 32 per thousand in the year 2020. If this rate of decline in child mortality is considered, then it is expected to reach 24.4 by the year 2023. In such a situation, there is no reason why the outdated data on the child mortality rate in India should be taken at 31 per thousand, to estimate the hunger index in India in 2023. According to the latest data, the infant mortality rate in Pakistan is 55.8 per thousand and the child mortality rate is higher than that. Despite this, India is placed at 111th position in terms of hunger and Pakistan is shown at 102nd position. The reason for this is that wrong data has been used in other scales of the hunger index too.

There are some errors in the data of other international agencies as well. While figures published by the Indian government were showing the infant mortality rate at 28 per thousand in 2020, international agencies are putting it at 29.848. It is noteworthy that it's not ethical or even legitimate to use any data other than the official data, by any foreign or Indian agency. But this World Hunger Report openly says that the data reported by the governments to the United Nations don't need to only be used in this report. The rapidly improving conditions in India may not be pleasing to the organisations working with their malafide intentions.

Malnutrition

As far as data on malnutrition is concerned, Welt Hungerhilfe does not have any factual data, as the household consumption survey by the concerned official agency has not been conducted since 2011. Therefore, malnutrition figures have been prepared based on a 'Gallup Survey' with a sample of 3000 people, the methodology of which is also questionable, which shows malnutrition at 16.6 per cent. It is worth noting that in reality, based on real-time health data of more than 7 crore children, the Poshan Tracker, published that only 7.7 per cent of children in the country were malnourished in February 2023. If we talk about production and availability of food, India ranks 35th in the world in the latest global ranking (2020) of 188 countries. The continuously increasing per capita production of food grains, milk, eggs, fruits, vegetables, fish etc. confirms that India is today producing surplus food, compared to demand.

Stunting and Wasting

Till recently, data on stunting and wasting assessed by only the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) was available in the country. However, due to the small sample size, the NFHS data was often questioned. Notably, a comprehensive nutrition campaign has been launched by the Ministry of Women and Children, Government of India, to tackle the problem of malnutrition in the country. While NFHS used to draw conclusions based on a relatively small sample, Poshan Tracker is publishing figures based on real-time data from more than 7 crore children, with wasting data consistently showing that

only 7.2% of India's children were wasted, whereas Welt Hungerhilfe's Hunger Report (2023) used the wasting figure of NFHS 2019-21, that is, 18.7 per cent.

As far as stunting is concerned, experts believe that there cannot be a single standard of height for the entire country. Not only stunting but wasting depends on many factors including geography, environment and genetics, apart from nutrition. If we see, the height of Punjabi children is several inches more than the children of the North-East. The World Health Organisation has also accepted this.

Not only this, the Indian Government's Nutrition Campaign (Poshan Abhiyan) is working hard to address the problem of malnutrition in the country, and assessing the outcome periodically, recognising the same, and the World Health Organisation has also started using the data published by Poshan Tracker. Though there are many objections to the methodology of the Welt Hungerhilfe report, even if the formula used by the agency is followed, to calculate the hunger index, and if the correct data is fed i.e. child mortality rate (under 5 mortality rate) of 24.4 per thousand; if wasting and undernourishment are considered to be 7.2 per cent and 7.7 per cent respectively (assuming other age groups too have similar nutrition outcome), as per the data collected by Poshan Tracker, and if stunting figures are discarded since they are not comparable, then hunger index estimated by the author of this article, comes out to be 9.528. Accordingly, as per the formula of Welt Hungerhilfe, India's ranking in the hunger index is not 111th but 48th.

It is natural that after the report of Welt Hungerhilfe, has been published, many opposition political parties have made hunger, an issue, based on this report. In such a situation, it is clear that this agency has consistently been trying to defame India by using questionable data and methodology, which is far from the reality. Strict action should be taken against all such agencies trying to defame India. <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2023/columnists/how-credible-is-the-global-hunger-report-.html>

16. Delay pushes up ECR widening cost sevenfold (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Nov 01, 2023

CHENNAI: The cost of widening a 10.5-km stretch of East Coast Road (ECR) has gone up seven times in 17 years as the highways department has delayed land acquisition.

The original project cost of the Thiruvanniyur-Akkarai sixlane project in 2006 was ₹159 crore; now it has shot up to about ₹1,100 crore. In fact, about ₹940 crore, which is 85% of the total project cost, would now go towards land acquisition.

A decade back, the cost of land acquisition was ₹356 crore. As buildings have come up on land abutting ECR on both sides, the road expansion cost per kilometre is now ₹104.7 crore.

“It is not easy to acquire land for development projects in Thiruvanniyur as the government has to pay market rate. It is difficult to get people to give up property in Thiruvanniyur for road expansion,” said Sampath Kumar, professor, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology.

CURRENT PROGRESS					
Locality	Distance taken up (m)	Land needed for acquisition (sqm)	Land acquired so far (sqm)	Cost (In ₹Cr)	Deadline for road expansion
Thiruvanmiyur	WORK NOT TAKEN UP SO FAR				
Kottivakkam	935	8,040	7,638	18.86	Apr 2024
Palavakkam	1,150	11,445	10,758	17.43	Dec 2023
Neelankarai	6,600	8,188	6,124	134.56	Apr 2025
Injambakkam		27,887	21,474		
Sholinganallur		20,642	13,417		

“We have taken up the work in three parcels – Kottivakkam, Palavakkam and the NeelankaraiInjambakkam-Sholinganallur belt. Around 70% of the land acquisition for the expansion has been completed,” said T Elango, chief engineer of the metro wing, highways department. “The delay is because of land acquisition. Many landowners took a lot of time to accept our compensation package and document verification.”

Stretches from Injambakkam to Palavakkam have been cleared and trees cut. And stormwater drains have been laid in bits and pieces, wherever acquisition has been completed. “It is hard to complete the road expansion work in two years. We are experiencing payment issues too,” said the contract supervisor.

Even on the expanded stretch, particularly in Palavakkam and Kottivakkam, encroachments have returned in the form of parked vehicles and street vendors. “What is the use of expansion when they cannot keep encroachments at bay,” asked Jayanthi P, a resident and activist in Valmiki Nagar, Thiruvanmiyur.

Civic inconvenience caused by the delay has to be seen to be believed. Thiruvanmiyur is one of the most congested stretches, particularly between Marundeeswarar Temple and Thiruvanmiyur RTO, during peak hours. One entire lane near the bus depot has been taken over by hawkers, say activists. While cost overruns drain the exchequer and officials and engineers cite procedural and acquisitionrelated delays, residents and regular users of ECR silently suffer without pavements and without even four lanes. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/delay-pushes-up-ecr-widening-cost-sevenfold/articleshow/104875167.cms>