

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. Rs 80K crore earmarked for MNREGA, govt says ground situation sets demand (*newindianexpress.com*) Updated on: 02 Feb 2024

Though the Budget of FY24 had proposed an allocation for NREGA at Rs 60,000 crore, later it was revised to Rs 80, 000 crore.

In the interim Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, rural job scheme Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for the financial year 2024-25, has pegged at a higher budgetary allocation of Rs 86,000 crore compared to the previous year's allocation of Rs 60,000 crore.

But in actual terms, activists point out that the interim budget offers no gain for the flagship scheme as the current outlay is the same as the revised estimates for FY 2024. Though the Budget of FY24 had proposed an allocation for NREGA at Rs 60,000 crore, later it was revised to Rs 80, 000 crore.

Sitaraman said that MGNREGA distribution is not determined by trends. It is determined by the demand from the ground. "NREGA allocation is done based on the demand coming from the ground. More than me commenting on it, the CAG has commented on the way the scheme is being operated on how some states where claims have reached a stage where it needs to be verified. It raised questions critical to the spirit of the scheme," she said, adding, "The CAG has highlighted the areas in which certain governments need to make course corrections."

The Centre has stopped funding the rural scheme in West Bengal since March 9, 2022, alleging corruption in the implementation process. The state is on a warpath demanding the payment of its dues.

According to West Bengal government's figures, the Centre owes Rs 6,900 crore under the MGNREGA to the state. Activists and some opposition rules states alleges that "delayed" payments, "budget cuts" by the Centre, and "haphazard" introduction of new techniques like the Aadhaar Based Payment System and National Mobile Monitoring Service are "destroying" the scheme, which is a life line for the rural poor.

Centre's dues to west Bengal

The Centre has stopped funding the MGNREGA scheme in West Bengal since March 9, 2022, alleging corruption in the implementation process. According to West Bengal government's figures, the Centre owes Rs 6,900 crore under the MGNREGA to the state.

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Feb/02/rs-80k-crore-earmarked-for-mnrega-govt-says-ground-situation-sets-demand>

2. Interim budget mentions blue economy 2.0: What this means (*indianexpress.com*) Updated: February 2, 2024

What does the Interim Budget say about blue economy? Why is this significant for India?

The Interim Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday (February 1) stressed on environment-friendly development through the promotion of 'blue economy'.

“For promoting climate resilient activities for blue economy 2.0, a scheme for restoration and adaptation measures, and coastal aquaculture and mariculture with integrated and multi-sectoral approach will be launched,” Sitharaman said in her speech.

What is blue economy and why is it important? We explain.

What is blue economy?

While the term blue economy can simply refer to economic activities related to the sea and the coasts, it is generally understood to have an element of sustainability in it. Thus, while the European Commission defines it as “all economic activities related to oceans, seas and coasts. It covers a wide range of interlinked established and emerging sectors”; the World Bank says blue economy is the “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem.”

For a country like India, with a long coastline, diversity in terms of fish and other ocean produce, and multiple tourism opportunities, blue economy is highly significant.

What does the Interim Budget propose to do about blue economy?

As Sitharaman said, “a scheme for restoration and adaptation measures, and coastal aquaculture and mariculture with integrated and multi-sectoral approach will be launched.”

Restoration and adaptation will ensure the health of the oceans is not harmed while carrying out economic activities. While aquaculture is a broad term that refers to the farming of aquatic plants and animals, mariculture refers to rearing and harvesting marine creatures in salt water.

According to ANI, the Finance minister also announced the setting up of five integrated aquaparks, and said the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) would be stepped up to “enhance aquaculture productivity from the existing three to five tonnes per hectare; double exports to Rs 1 lakh crore; and generate 55 lakh employment opportunities in the near future.”

Does India have a blue economy policy?

The Budget document refers to blue economy 2.0. A draft policy framework on India's Blue Economy was first released in July 2022. According to PIB, the policy document contained “key recommendations on National Accounting Framework for Blue Economy and Ocean Governance, Coastal Marine Spatial Planning and Tourism Priority, Marine Fisheries, Aquaculture and Fish Processing. Manufacturing, Emerging Industries, Trade, Technology, Services and Skill Development, Logistics, Infrastructure and Shipping, Coastal and Deep-Sea Mining and Offshore Energy and Security, Strategic Dimensions and International Engagement.”

When the G20 summit was hosted in New Delhi under India's presidency, the Comptroller & Auditor General of India (CAG) chaired the Engagement Group for Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) of the member countries in June 2023. Two priorities for the SAI20 deliberations were blue economy and responsible Artificial Intelligence. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/everyday-explainers/interim-budget-blue-economy-2-0-what-this-means-9139321/>

3. Budget 2024: वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण ने खर्च के साथ खजाने का रखा पूरा ध्यान (*hindi.business-standard.com*) February 01, 2024

अंतरिम बजट पेश करने के बाद वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण अपनी टीम के साथ मीडिया के सामने आईं और उसके हरेक पहलू पर बात की। उन्होंने राजकोषीय मजबूती, पूंजीगत व्यय पर जोर तथा सरकार की आगे की नीतियों के बारे में विस्तार से बताया।

बजट का सार

अंतरिम बजट पूरी तरह जीडीपी - गवर्नेंस, डेवलपमेंट और परफॉर्मेंस की बात करता है। गवर्नेंस यानी प्रशासन की बात करें तो हमने सही मंशा और नीतियों के साथ अर्थव्यवस्था को बेहतर तरीके से संभाला है। डेवलपमेंट यानी विकास लोगों को बेहतर जिंदगी, बेहतर आय देने और भविष्य में ऊंची आकांक्षाएं रखने के लिए है। परफॉर्मेंस यानी प्रदर्शन लगातार तीन साल से 7 फीसदी वृद्धि, जी-20 में सबसे तेज बढ़ते देश, महंगाई पर लगाम, जीएसटी आदि में नजर आता है।

राजकोषीय घाटा

हम कड़ी चुनौतियों के बीच भी खजाने को मजबूत करने के लिए पारदर्शिता और सूझबूझ के साथ राजकोषीय घाटा कम कर रहे हैं। बजट की प्रक्रिया एकदम पारदर्शी हो गई है। बजट में बताया 5.8 फीसदी घाटा बजट अनुमान के 5.9 फीसदी घाटे से बेहद कम है। वित्त वर्ष 2024-25 के लिए 5.1 फीसदी राजकोषीय घाटा बताता है कि हम घाटे को 2025-26 तक खींचकर जीडीपी के 4.5 फीसदी पर लाने के अपने लक्ष्य की ओर चल रहे हैं।

दिशानिर्देशक बातें

पांच दिशानिर्देशक बातों में पहली कारगर और जरूरी प्रशासन के रूप में सामाजिक न्याय है। दूसरी बात, चार प्रमुख जाति वर्ग - गरीब, महिला, युवा और किसान हैं। तीसरी, बुनियादी ढांचे पर जोर है। चौथी तकनीक का भरपूर इस्तेमाल है। पांचवीं बात जनसंख्या वृद्धि और उसकी बुनावट से आने वाली चुनौतियों पर गहन विचार-विमर्श के लिए उच्च स्तरीय समिति बनाना है।

पूंजीगत व्यय

पूंजीगत व्यय में 11 फीसदी बढ़ोतरी कम लगती है क्योंकि पहले ही इस पर बहुत खर्च किया जा रहा है। जब सरकार पूंजीगत व्यय के जरिये खर्च करने के लिए आगे बढ़ती है तो अर्थव्यवस्था को रफ्तार मिल सकती है। जब निजी क्षेत्र ने खर्च नहीं किया तब हमने भरपूर व्यय किया। अब हमें निजी क्षेत्र भी खर्च करता दिख रहा है।

रेटिंग एजेंसियां

हम राजकोषीय मजबूती की राह पर चल ही नहीं रहे हैं बल्कि बेहतर काम कर रहे हैं। रेटिंग एजेंसियों के लिए हमारा यही संदेश है।

मनरेगा

सीएजी ने कुछ राज्यों में मनरेगा चलने के तरीके पर टिप्पणी की है और कहा है कि वहां की सरकारों के दावे परखने की जरूरत है। कार्यक्रम के पीछे की मंशा पर ही सवाल उठाए जा रहे हैं। सीएजी की रिपोर्ट बताती है कि कितना सुधार किया गया है।

पश्चिम एशिया यूरोप गलियारा हम इसे आगे ले जा रहे हैं। पश्चिम एशिया में लाल सागर का इलाका काफी अशांत चल रहा है मगर इस परियोजना का यहां से यूरोप तक के पूरे क्षेत्र पर काफी असर पड़ेगा। हम इसका हर पहलू बरकरार रखते हुए इसे आगे ले जाएंगे। <https://hindi.business-standard.com/economy/budget-2024-finance-minister-nirmala-sitharaman-took-full-care-of-the-treasury-while-spending-id-342332>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

4. CAG Report On Bengal Comes As Endorsement Of Charges Of Widespread Corruption By Trinamool Government (*swarajyamag.com*) February 1, 2024

The Bharatiya Janata Party's oft-repeated charge of massive financial misappropriation, especially involving federally-sponsored welfare schemes and projects, in Bengal has found endorsement in the latest report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

The CAG report for the 2021-2022 financial year reveals that as on March 2021, utilisation certificates (UCs) totalling to Rs 2.29 lakh crore of grants received from the Union Government had not been submitted in the state.

UCs are documents submitted by beneficiaries of grants, or welfare schemes and projects, endorsing the receipt and proper utilisation of funds.

As per the state government's own rules, UCs have to be collected from grantees within a year of disbursement of the grants by officers of the department through which the funds had been disbursed.

But, said the CAG report, 394,162 UCs for grants amounting to a whopping Rs 229,099 crore had not been submitted.

It is assumed that UCs are not submitted if the funds have not been utilised properly and have been misappropriated.

Another major financial anomaly flagged by the CAG is non-submission of detailed contingent (DC) bills even years after withdrawing funds from the state exchequer through abstract contingent (AC) bills.

Money is drawn from the state exchequer through AC bills in case of contingencies like floods, erosion, droughts and other natural disasters, or to provide relief and meet other contingency expenses for events and happenings that are unforeseen.

The state's rules stipulate that DC bills with clearer and verifiable details of the funds withdrawn through AC bills have to be submitted within a maximum period of 60 days of withdrawal of funds.

The CAG report reveals that as of March 2021, 11,321 DC bills for a total amount of Rs 3,400 crore had not been submitted.

The CAG report lamented that despite successive CAG audit reports flagging the issue of non-submission of UCs, the Bengal government has remained unconcerned.

Since the Trinamool Congress came to power in 2011, non-submission of UCs has become a chronic problem.

From 2011-2012 to 2020-2021, a total of 243,855 UCs for grants amounting to Rs 2.29 lakh crore had not been submitted.

In fact, the pendency of UCs has only been increasing.

This financial impropriety assumed chronic proportions in the period from 2018 to 2021 when the number of UCs not submitted accounted for nearly 50 per cent of the total number of pending UCs.

Significantly, this is also the period when the maximum number of financial scams were unearthed. And this lends credence to the BJP's charge that huge sums of money received from the Union Government for centrally-funded schemes and projects were misappropriated by Trinamool functionaries and state officials.

To further buttress the BJP's charge about financial anomalies and scams, the CAG report revealed that the Panchayat and Rural Development (P&RD) Department had the maximum pendency of UCs (81,950 UCs amounting to Rs 81,839 crore), followed by the School Education Department (38,117 UCs for Rs 36,850 crore), and Urban Development and Municipal Affairs department (34,837 UCs for Rs 30,693 crore).

This, again, corresponds to the BJP's charge that huge sums of federal funds meant for MGNREGA and other rural projects which the P&RD Department implements and mid-day meals and other welfare schemes administered by the School Education Department are embroiled in largescale corruption.

"We have been saying all along that hundreds of crores of Rupees given by the Union Government for schemes like MGNREGA, housing for poor, construction of roads, mid-day meals, school uniforms for poor students etc have been looted by ministers, Trinamool functionaries and government officials. The CAG report endorses our allegations," said leader of opposition and senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari.

The CAG report notes: "In the absence of UCs, it could not be ascertained whether the recipients had utilised the grants for the purposes for which these were given. This assumes greater importance as pendency in non-submission of UCs is fraught with the risk of misappropriation".

On pendency of DC bills, the report notes: "Pending DC bills reflects on accounting indiscipline by government functionaries and controlling authorities leading to risk of fraud, temporary misappropriation and embezzlement of funds".

State BJP president Sukanta Majumdar flagged this in a series of posts on X. "What the CAG report has revealed is just the tip of the iceberg. We want the CBI and ED to initiate more enquiries into misappropriation of central funds and other financial misdeeds by the Mamata Banerjee government," Majumdar told Swarajya.

The non-submission of UCs and DC bills, and various other financial anomalies, has led to the Union Government withholding disbursement of more funds to Bengal. Audits carried out independently by various Union ministries have also revealed largescale anomalies.

The Bengal government had, earlier, been forced to accept that misappropriation and misutilisation of funds for many welfare schemes and infrastructure projects had taken place.

However, the state government has doggedly refused to punish the guilty because that would amount to prosecuting a huge number of Trinamool leaders and functionaries, as well as its favoured officials.

The Union Government has, thus, withheld funds for such schemes and projects, leading to Mamata Banerjee crying foul and threatening to launch yet another agitation in protest.

This is likely to become a hot-button issue in the Lok Sabha elections a couple of months from now. The BJP is planning to use the CAG report as an effective stick to beat the Trinamool with.

<https://swarajyamag.com/west-bengal/cag-report-on-bengal-comes-as-endorsement-of-charges-of-widespread-corruption-by-trinamool-government>

5. After the High Court and Defense Ministry, CAG points towards AAP's laxity in checking illegal mining: Bajwa *(punjabnewsexpress.com)* February 01, 2024

CHANDIGARH: The Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in Punjab Vidhan Sabha, Partap Singh Bajwa on Thursday slammed the Aam Aadmi Party-led Punjab government for its failure to use technical mechanisms to keep check on the rampant illegal mining in the state.

"Even though, it was one of the main election commitments of the AAP to rein in the illegal mining in the state and earn Rs 20000 crore from the mining. However, in its two years of the regime, it could neither earn Rs 20000 crore mining nor did it end the illegal mining", Bajwa added.

Senior Congress Leader, Bajwa said that in its annual review of the working of public works divisions for the financial year 2022-23, the Comptroller Auditor General of India (CAG) said the Punjab State Sand and Gravel Mining Policy, 2018, required and the National Green Tribunal (NGT) ordered the use of geo-tagging, geo-fencing and electronic surveillance to check illegal mining, but a test check of records of in three drainage divisions showed that the technology was not used by the water resources department to detect and check illegal mining.

"Instead of squandering Punjab's exchequer on party expansion, fake publicity, air travel and pursuing bogus Delhi models, the AAP government should develop the technical know-how to rein in the widespread illegal mining. The AAP government elicited condemnations from the Punjab and Haryana High Court, and the Union

Ministry of Defense because of unchecked illegal mining in the state", Bajwa added.
<https://www.punjabnewsexpress.com/punjab/news/after-the-high-court-and-defense-ministry-cag-points-towards-aaps-laxity-in-checking-illegal-mining-bajwa-238581>

6. Menace continues unabated, ₹20k cr earnings a false promise: Bajwa (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Feb 2, 2024

Chandigarh: Partap Singh Bajwa, leader of opposition (LoP), Punjab Vidhan Sabha, on Thursday slammed AAPled Punjab government for its failure to use technical mechanisms to keep a check on rampant illegal mining in the state. "Even though it was one of the main election commitments of AAP to rein in illegal mining and earn Rs 20,000 crore from mining, in its two years of the regime, it could neither earn the amount nor end the menace," Bajwa added.

The senior Congress leader said that in its annual review of the working of public works divisions for the financial year 2022-23, the Comptroller Auditor General of India (CAG) said Punjab State Sand and Gravel Mining Policy, 2018, required and National Green Tribunal (NGT) ordered the use of geo-tagging, geo-fencing and electronic surveillance to check illegal mining, but a test check of records in three drainage divisions showed that the technology was not used by the water resources department.
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/menace-continues-unabated-20k-cr-earnings-a-false-promise-bajwa/articleshow/107341372.cms>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

7. FY'24 asset monetisation falls short of target at Rs 1.50 lakh crore (*zeebiz.com*) 2 Feb 2024

Under the National Monetisation Pipeline, the aggregate monetisation potential of the central government's brownfield infrastructure assets has been estimated at Rs 6 lakh crore over a four-year period, from FY 2022 to FY 2025.

In an interview to PTI TV, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said about Rs 1.75 lakh crore was the target for asset monetization this year and "we are going to achieve something like Rs 1.50 lakh crore through monetisation".

Pandey said monetisation is going on through infrastructure investment trust (InvITs), Toll Operate Transfer (TOT) in mining, road and power sector and is beginning to happen in the petroleum sector.

"The asset monetisation proceeds do not visibly appear in the Budget... To the extent NHAI does it and the receipts are with the government that is only reflected in the Budget," Pandey said in most cases the proceeds accrues to the enterprise and not to the government.

Asset Monetization, based on the philosophy of Creation through Monetisation, is aimed at tapping private sector investment for new infrastructure creation. It also

creates employment opportunities, thereby enabling high economic growth and integrating the rural and semi-urban areas for overall public welfare.

<https://www.zeebiz.com/economy-infra/news-fy24-asset-monetisation-falls-short-of-target-at-rs-150-lakh-crore-274854>

8. Tax buoyancy helps Centre align with its fiscal consolidation roadmap (*indianexpress.com*) Updated: February 2, 2024

Direct tax revenues have shown a sharp surge, with income tax seen overshooting the Budget estimate for this financial year by 13.5 per cent and Securities Transaction Tax (STT) revenue seen exceeding budget estimate by 15.8 per cent.

The government's aim to restrict the fiscal deficit to 5.8 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as against 5.9 per cent budgeted earlier for the financial year and the push to restrict the fiscal deficit target to below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26 rides on the back of a strong buoyancy in tax revenues.

Direct tax revenues have shown a sharp surge, with income tax seen overshooting the Budget estimate for this financial year by 13.5 per cent and Securities Transaction Tax (STT) revenue seen exceeding budget estimate by 15.8 per cent.

For the next financial year, direct tax collections, which include income tax and corporate tax, are estimated to rise 13.1 per cent to Rs 21.99 lakh crore. Direct tax revenues are estimated to grow 17.2 per cent year-on-year to Rs 19.45 lakh crore in the current financial year 2023-24.

The income tax collections in 2023-24 have shown a sharp pickup and are expected to exceed the Budget estimate by Rs 1.2 lakh crore, while corporate tax collections have been maintained at the Budget estimate level of Rs 9.23 lakh crore. With this, income tax revenues are seen exceeding corporate tax collections, even though they had been budgeted at a lower level than corporate tax revenue in the Budget estimates for 2023-24.

Securities Transaction Tax, which is levied on traded securities on bourses, is estimated to increase to Rs 32,000 crore in the revised estimates of 2023-24, an increase of 27.6 per cent from the actual revenue in 2022-23. For 2024-25, STT revenues are estimated to rise to Rs 36,000 crore.

The government's gross tax revenue is estimated to grow 11.5 per cent to Rs 38.31 lakh crore in the next financial year.

The Centre's net tax revenues are estimated to grow by nearly 12 per cent to Rs 26.02 lakh crore in 2024-25. This compares with a rise of 10.8 per cent in the revised estimates for the ongoing financial year 2023-24 over the actual revenue in 2022-23. The growth rate for tax revenues estimated for 2024-25 at nearly 12 per cent is much higher than the 10.5 per cent nominal GDP growth assumed for Budget arithmetic for 2024-25.

The strong growth in tax revenues reflects the high tax buoyancy, which works out to be 1.2 in the revised estimates for financial year 2023-24 as against 1.0 in FY23. For 2024-25, the tax buoyancy is seen at 1.1.

“Over the past few years, the government’s revenue collections, especially tax collections, have turned out to be better than budgeted. Even for FY25, the union budget is expecting the tax collections to grow 11.9 per cent YoY (FY24BE: 11.6 per cent). The budgeted tax revenue buoyancy for FY24 was 1.07x, but as per FY24 revised estimates, it came in at 1.19x. Therefore, Ind-Ra believes that the target of achieving a fiscal deficit of 5.1% of GDP in FY25, although challenging, is possible as the government over the past few years has surprisingly reported a better fiscal deficit/GDP ratio than budgeted. The conservative revenue estimates can take care of any unforeseen expenditure or slippage in disinvestments in FY25,” India Ratings and Research said in a note.

On the indirect taxes side, Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) collections are estimated to grow 13 per cent to Rs 9.18 lakh crore in 2024-25. Overall, the indirect tax collections, which include customs, excise duties and GST (including compensation cess), are expected to yield Rs 16.22 lakh crore to the government in 2024-25.

In the current financial year, the revised estimate for customs and excise duty collections have been lowered to Rs 2.19 lakh crore and Rs 3.08 lakh crore, respectively, while GST collections (including compensation cess) are estimated at the budgeted level of Rs 9.57 lakh crore.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/business/budget/tax-buoyancy-helps-centre-align-with-its-fiscal-consolidation-roadmap-9139817/>

9. Major subsidies drop a fifth in FY24; Expenditure on the sops seen to fall 8 per cent to Rs 3.8 trillion in FY25 (*financialexpress.com*) Feb 02, 2024

This is due to the softening of global prices of soil nutrients and the termination of the extra grains supplies under the National Food Securities Act (NFSA) effective December 2022.

The Union government’s total expenditure on explicit subsidies – food, fertiliser and LPG – is projected to drop 21% to Rs 4.13 trillion in the current fiscal year, from Rs 5.24 trillion in FY23. However, for 2024-25, the interim budget has made provision of Rs 3.81 trillion as subsidies, 8% lower than the revised estimate for FY24.

This is due to the softening of global prices of soil nutrients and the termination of the extra grains supplies under the National Food Securities Act (NFSA) effective December 2022. As per the revised estimate of the total spending on the three subsidies in the current fiscal is Rs 4.13 trillion, with Rs 2.12 trillion for food, and Rs 1.88 trillion for fertilisers.

The government had spent Rs 2.72 trillion on account of food subsidy in FY23 because of additional foodgrains provided under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) in addition to highly subsidised food grains supplied under NFSA during first three quarters of last fiscal.

Under PMGKAY which was subsumed with NFSA from January 2023 around 48 million tonne (MT) of foodgrains are supplied free to 800 million beneficiaries annually. The government has extended the free ration scheme for five years till end of

2028 which would cost the exchequer around Rs 11.8 trillion due to a projected increase of 7%-8% in the minimum support price (MSP) of the rice and wheat annually, and other costs.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her interim-budget (2024-25) speech said the worries about food have been eliminated through free ration (PMGKAY) for 800 million people.

“Minimum support prices for the produce of ‘Annadata’ are periodically increased appropriately and the provision of basic necessities have enhanced real income in the rural areas,” she said.

The fertiliser subsidy as per revised estimate for FY24 has been projected at Rs 1.88 trillion, a decline of 25% from a record of Rs 2.51 trillion in FY23. For the next fiscal, the subsidies towards soil nutrient is estimated at Rs 1.64 trillion.

Meanwhile, with the expansion of 7.5 million additional LPG connections to be released the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana in 3 years under the scheme, the total subsidy outgo for LPG this fiscal as per revised estimate is Rs 12,240 crore. For next fiscal, the budget has made provision of Rs 11,925 crore under LPG subsidy. <https://www.financialexpress.com/policy/economy-major-subsidies-drop-a-fifth-in-fy24-expenditure-on-the-sops-seen-to-fall-8-per-cent-to-rs-3-8-trillion-in-fy25-3382153/>

10. Govt to give up on Rs 3,500 crore-worth disputed direct tax demands: Revenue Secretary (*moneycontrol.com*) FEBRUARY 01, 2024

Petty tax disputes involving an amount of up to Rs 10,000 for five years between 2010-11 and 2014-15 will be withdrawn; more than 2 crore disputes concerning tax demands of up to Rs 25,000 will be waived.

The government has decided to drop some controversial and minor tax claims totalling Rs 3,500 crore, as mentioned by Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra during the press conference after the interim Budget. These tax demands were linked to a total of 2.1 crore demand notices entailing amounts less than Rs 25,000.

In order to reduce tax litigations and disputes, which were stuck due to inadequate data or dispute, the finance minister proposed to waive off trivial outstanding tax demands of up to Rs 25,000 for the period up to 2009-10. Additionally, outstanding disputes related to amounts up to Rs 10,000 for the years 2010-11 to 2014-15 will be waived off.

The government clarified that 2.1 crore out of 2.68 crore tax demands were valued at less than Rs 25,000, some of which were in dispute since the enactment of the Income Tax Act. These demands were linked to not just income tax, but also wealth and gift tax.

But why were these specific years selected for the waiver of the trivial demand?

“Many of them are unreconciled due to systemic issues. We shifted tax records and centralised them in 2010-11, which is why the cut-off has been taken at 2010-11. The demands prior to that were decentralised, so we are unable to reconcile them,” said Malhotra.

Out of the low-value demands involving amounts less than Rs 10,000, about 58 lakh demand entries pertain to 2009-10 and 53 lakh belong to the five-year period up to 2014-15.

Finance Minister Sitharaman mentioned in the Budget speech that 1 crore taxpayers would benefit from the move, though the number of tax demands mentioned in the press conference stands at 2.68 crore involving Rs 35 lakh crore. Out of these, only 2.1 crore are being waived off. So, high value demands will continue to be under litigation and only trivial ones will be withdrawn.

However, additional clarity on the procedure to seek withdrawal would be needed. “There are no specific proposals in the Finance Bill 2024 in this respect and it is likely that a separate circular will be issued by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) to provide the aforesaid relief,” says Suresh Surana, Founder, RSM India. <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/personal-finance/govt-to-give-up-on-rs-3500-crore-worth-disputed-direct-tax-demands-revenue-secretary-12175421.html>

11. Smart Cities in India: Budget allocation goes down by 21% to Rs 10,400 crore (*moneycontrol.com*) FEBRUARY 01, 2024

Union Budget 2024: The budget estimates for AMRUT and Smart Cities Mission in 2023-24 was even higher at Rs 16,000 crore. However, the same has now come down significantly to Rs 10,400 crore.

While Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the interim Budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 on February 1, it was noted that the budgetary allocation for the core schemes of the central government, specifically the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and the Smart Cities Mission, saw a decrease of approximately 21 percent.

The revised estimates for the same in 2023-24 was Rs 13,200 crore has now gone down to Rs 10,400 crore in the interim budget.

The budget estimates for AMRUT and Smart Cities Mission in 2023-24 was even higher at Rs 16,000 crore.

Presenting the interim union Budget 2024-25, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said states and large cities will be encouraged to take up Metro lines via the transit oriented development route. As on September 2023, 6,000 plus projects worth more than Rs 1.1 lakh crore were completed.

Overall, the Central government has picked up 100 Smart Cities where projects across diverse sectors related to mobility, energy, water, sanitation, solid waste management, vibrant public spaces, social infrastructure, smart governance, etc are being taken up.

Developers hope for more allocation in future

"India strives to transform its cities, however, despite the initial enthusiasm and substantial financial allocation, the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) has been facing challenges in achieving its objectives and that is mainly because of the magnanimous scale of the mission," said

Keval Valambhia, COO, CREDAI-MCHI, an apex body of real estate developers.

"The current focus on technology alone may prove to be insufficient to address the complex challenges of urbanisation. The McKinsey report underlines the massive capital expenditure needed for making cities livable, estimating \$1.2 trillion by 2030. We at CREDAI-MCHI are sure that the allocation will be substantially increased in near future," Valambhia added.

Meanwhile, other flagship scheme of the central government named Swachh Bharat Mission saw the budgetary allocation doubling from Rs 2,550 crore in the revised estimates of 2023-24 budget to Rs 5,000 crore in the interim budget. However, in the budgetary estimates of 2023-24 the allocation was the same at Rs 5,000 crore.

<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/real-estate/smart-cities-in-india-budget-allocation-goes-down-by-21-to-rs-10400-crore-12134981.html>

12. A roadmap to the future (*thehindubusinessline.com*) Updated February 01, 2024

An objective evaluation of the Budget would be to look at how different economic variables have been impacted by the proposals.

To begin with it should be mentioned that the Budget is not a panacea for the economic challenges of the country and is more a statement of accounts of the government projected for FY25 which includes proposals that affect different aspects of the economy to the extent possible.

Therefore there should be no extravagant expectations from this Budget. And also given that it is an interim one, care has been taken to ensure that there are no significant changes. This is a point reiterated by the Finance Minister, so there were no changes on the tax front.

Budget and growth

Does the Budget help in the growth process? Here it is important to examine both the direct and indirect impact. The direct impact can be seen in terms of the capex outlay of the government.

The government has been fairly aggressive here by spending almost 40 per cent of the total incremental outlay on investments. So while there has been a 11.1 per cent increase in capex, the share in total budget has gone up. This is expected to forge strong links with the related sectors such as steel, cement, machinery etc.

The indirect impact would be more on the reduction of logistics cost due to improved road and rail connectivity. But since direct taxes have not been touched, it means investment spurring incentive is not on the plate.

Neutral impact

The fact that the tax structure remains unchanged means that there is a neutral impact on three variables.

First is consumption, which has been the Achilles heel for the last few years starting from the lockdown phase. Typically tax cuts help to spur consumption as real disposable income rises. This impact is stronger at the lower income levels. These measures may be announced in the main Budget in July.

Next is savings. Since the government came up with the new tax system which scrapped tax-deductibles but offered lower slab rates, the focus is on reducing tax savings benefits.

Last year, the Budget withdrew the long-term capital gains benefit on debt mutual funds. So Budgets can no longer be seen as a means to increase the savings habit in the country.

Savings will have to now be looked at as income earning instruments that get taxed in the hands of the individual. This has to be accepted as the government is trying to move everyone to the new scheme.

Inflation effect

The last is inflation which can be influenced by the indirect tax structures. The GST is anyway outside the ambit of the Budget.

But the government has maintained the revenue target on excise duty for FY25 which means that there are no plans to lower the duty on petrol and diesel which will keep prices at the retail end unchanged.

While this is not inflationary, it will definitely not help to bring prices down. Hence it can be said that the Budget is quite neutral on inflation which will be driven by market forces entirely.

Is there a greater focus on improving the lives of the poor? The government has focussed on employment, housing, cash transfers for farmers and free food to the poor in the last four Budgets.

This thrust continues for FY25 too which is a good sign. The MGNREGA outlay has been kept on par with the revised figure for FY24 which was ₹86,000 crore which came in higher than the budgeted amount of ₹60,000 crore. This is a reflection of stress in the rural economy which can be addressed through this employment scheme.

The schemes for cash transfers and housing for the rural economy should continue to provide support to the farming community. This fits in with the overall ideology of the government which was spelt out in detail by the Finance Minister in her speech as this will be guiding spirit in future budgets too.

The issue of subsidies is interesting here. There has been a reduction in both fertilizers and food subsidy. The first assumes that crude oil price will remain within range of \$80/barrel. Any spike in the price will push up the cost and hence subsidy.

Here the Budget has taken a conservative view of the global energy economy. The subsidy on food subsidy is down by around ₹10,000 crore. This will mean that the government has to go slow on the MSPs which are announced every year. Food subsidy was expected to increase because a decline in 2023 kharif output would necessitate stronger support through this scheme.

These two numbers need to be watched and it is quite possible that there could be change in the main Budget depending on the evolving environment.

Is there any clear direction provided on disinvestment? This has always been the loose corner of Budgets in India. While all other revenue accounts are predictable as they are related to some aspect of the economy, in case of disinvestment, one can never be sure.

Last year the government targeted ₹61,000 crore but will end up with ₹30,000 crore. For FY25 the Budget is targetting ₹50,000 crore. This may be ambitious given that work will most likely start after the main Budget is announced.

Also the government has to take some hard calls on companies where it would like to exit either partly or fully.

The interim Budget hence shows the roadmap for future while keeping in mind both fiscal and electoral prudence.

Most of the expenditures outlined have been kept to the last year's level or increased by the same rate as the total outlay of the Budget thus keeping the wheels running with higher expenditure on capex where multiplier effects are higher.

In a true sense it is an interim Budget.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/a-roadmap-to-the-future/article67800702.ece>

13. Over 7,000 crore budgeted for education remains unspent in current fiscal year (*theprint.in*) 01 February, 2024

Spending shortfall in education attributable to key school education schemes including Samagra Shiksha, midday meal (PM Poshan) & PM SHRI.

The Union government fell short of its targeted expenditure on education in 2023-24 by Rs 7,539 crore, with the amount spent on key schemes in the school education sector such as Samagra Shiksha and midday meal remaining below the allocation made in last year's annual budget.

The shortfall in meeting the targeted expenditure in running these schemes is significant as the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports — then chaired by BJP Rajya Sabha MP Vinay P Sahasrabudhe — had in 2022 asked the government to identify the factors behind it.

These details emerged after Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the interim budget Thursday in which the government has earmarked Rs 1.25 lakh crore

for education, which is 14.47 percent more than what it managed to spend so far in this sector in the current financial year.

In 2023-24, the government had set out to spend Rs 1.16 lakh crore on education but spent Rs 1.08 lakh crore, the sector-wise details on expenditure incurred by the central government shows. A closer look at the fine print shows that this gap was essentially an outcome of funds under Samagra Shiksha, midday meal (PM Poshan) and PM SHRI remaining unspent.

For instance, Samagra Shiksha, which encompasses all major policies and programmes in school education, received a budgetary allocation of Rs 37,453 crore in 2023-24. However, the revised estimate — which captures the actual expenditure incurred under a particular head — shows that Rs 33,000 was spent to run the scheme.

In the latest budget, the government has set aside Rs 37,500 to support the scheme. It is funded by the central government and states under a 60:40 ratio like in the case of PM Poshan.

In 2023-24, Rs 10,000 crore was spent to run the scheme, as against the allocation of Rs 11,600 crore. This year, PM Poshan received budgetary support of Rs 12,467 crore. In the case of PM SHRI, Rs 4,000 crore was allotted, of which Rs 2,800 crore was spent.

Announced in September 2022, under PM SHRI Schools (PM Schools for Rising India), as many as 14,500 schools across states and Union Territories will be redeveloped by the central government to reflect the key features of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020.

The government's allocation for the University Grants Commission (UGC), which is the apex regulatory body of higher education in India, also saw a steep cut from Rs 5,360 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 2,500 crore in 2024-25.

UGC chairperson M. Jagadesh Kumar, responding to a specific query on the cut, said Thursday that the body will “continue to work in synergy with all stakeholders to ensure the efficient use of allocated funds”.

“It's important to note that several key areas have witnessed significant funding increases. We are pleased to see a rise in allocations for Central Universities, deemed universities promoted by the central government, research and innovation initiatives, the Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching, and PM-USHA (Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan), demonstrating our commitment to these crucial areas. From the financial year 2023-24, scholarships have been merged for college and university students with PM-USP Yojna,” Kumar said.

In the 2022 report, the House panel observed that Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and the Central Sector Schemes (CSeS) “form the backbone of the basic education in the country”.

“But taking note of the figures furnished by the department, it is evident that expenditure towards CSS and CSeS has not been done in a progressive manner and this

has led to underutilization of the allocations made,” the committee had said, terming the “underutilization” in such welfare schemes for students as “unacceptable”.

“The Committee recommends that there is an urgent need to put in place effective strategies for utilising the funds. Also, it would be prudent on part of the Department to chalk out alternative mechanisms if it comes to notice that the implementation and utilisation under the Scheme is lagging in any quarter so that course correction could be done,” it had added in the report. <https://theprint.in/india/education/over-7000-crore-budgeted-for-education-remains-unspent-in-current-fiscal-year/1949394/>

14. Centre proposes 1 lakh cr corpus for pvt sector R&D, but science project funds underutilised (*newindianexpress.com*) 01 Feb 2024

These schemes address the criticism that India is relying too much on low-skilled, low-value manufacturing jobs without building the capabilities to develop an innovation and research ecosystem.

CHENNAI: The union government plans to set up a corpus of Rs 1 lakh crore to finance private sector research and development, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced on Thursday in the interim budget for the 2024–25 financial year.

The corpus will provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or zero interest rates. “This will encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in these domains. We need to have programmes that combine the powers of our youth and technology,” she said in the budget speech.

A new scheme for strengthening deep-tech technologies working in the defence sector was announced. It is aimed at speeding up the indigenization drive in the defence sector, or ‘Atmanirbharta’.

The new age of technologies and data are changing the lives of people and businesses and enabling new economic opportunities, she said, adding that it will be a golden era for our tech-savvy youth.

These schemes address the criticism that India is relying too much on low-skilled, low-value manufacturing jobs without building the capabilities to develop an innovation and research ecosystem. However, outlays for major science and innovation schemes are underutilised as per revised estimates for the 2023–24 financial year (FY24).

The ‘ScienceSciencechnology Institutional and Human Capacity Building’ scheme was allocated Rs 1068 crores in the budget, and the revised estimates 24 put the outlay nearly half at Rs 500 crores. The budget estimates for the scheme in the upcoming 2024–25 fiscal year (FY25) are also lowered to Rs 900 crore. The ‘Innovation,Innovationy Development, and Deployment’ scheme outlay has been revised to Rs 200 crores for FY24 from Rs 500 crores of the budgetary estimates. For 2024–25, the scheme has been allocated Rs 537 crore.

‘Biotechnology Research and Development’ revised estimates stood at Rs 500 crore against the budgeted amount of Rs 1345 crore. For the upcoming fiscal year, it has been slashed to Rs 1100 crore. ‘National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber Physical

Systems' expenditure as per revised estimates stood at Rs 435 crores against budget estimates of Rs 580 crore. The Capacity Building and Skill Development Scheme's outlay has not fully been used in FY24. The estimation for the next year remained the same at Rs 538 crore without an increase.

The outlay for Centre's research and development projects stood at Rs 1178 crore against Rs 840 crore. The estimates for FY25 is Rs 1200 crore. The research and development outlay listed under major schemes also has slightly better figures with Rs 12943 crore in RE as against planned Rs 12850 crore.

India's expenditure of research and development as a percent of gross domestic product (R&D expenditure as % of GDP) has been steadily declining since 2008 and currently stands at 0.65 as of 2020, data by UNESCO Institute for Statistics show.

Meanwhile, allocations to the production-linked incentive (PLI) to the manufacturing sectors, including automobiles, pharmaceuticals, and electronics, have jumped significantly.

Experts such as former Reserve Bank of India governor Raghuram Rajan said India's vision of becoming a developed country by 2047 is not possible, even at a 7% GDP growth rate, and emphasised the need to spend more on education and research.
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2024/Feb/01/budget-2024-centre-proposes-1-lakh-cr-corporus-for-pvt-sector-rd-but-science-project-funds-underutilised>

15. US approves sale of 31 MQ-9B armed drones to India at an estimated cost of \$ 3.99 billion (*livemint.com*) 01 Feb 2024

This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States by helping to strengthen the US-Indian strategic relationship said a release

The US on Thursday approved the sale of 31 MQ-9B armed drones to India at an estimated cost of \$3.99 billion. The proposed mega drone deal was announced during the historic State Visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June 2023.

Under the deal, India will get 31 High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) UAVs, of which the Navy will get 15 SeaGuardian drones, while the Army and the Indian Air Force will get eight each of the land version – SkyGuardian.

"This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States by helping to strengthen the U.S.-Indian strategic relationship and to improve the security of a major defense partner which continues to be an important force for political stability, peace, and economic progress in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia region," the Defense Security Cooperation Agency said in a statement.

"The proposed sale will improve India's capability to meet current and future threats by enabling unmanned surveillance and reconnaissance patrols in sea lanes of operation. India has demonstrated a commitment to modernizing its military and will have no difficulty absorbing these articles and services into its armed forces," the statement further added.

The proposed sale of this equipment and support will not alter the basic military balance in the region.

Implementation of this proposed sale will not require the assignment of any additional US Government or contractor representatives to India.

The Government of India has requested to buy thirty-one (31) MQ-9B Sky Guardian drone; one hundred sixty-one (161) Embedded Global Positioning & Inertial Navigation Systems (EGIs); thirty-five (35) L3 Rio Grande Communications Intelligence Sensor Suites; one hundred seventy (170) AGM-114R Hellfire missiles; sixteen (16) M36E9 Hellfire Captive Air Training Missiles (CATM); three hundred ten (310) GBU-39B/B Laser Small Diameter Bombs (LSDB); and eight (8) GBU-39B/B LSDB Guided Test Vehicles (GTVs) with live fuzes. Also included are Certifiable Ground Control Stations; TPE-331-10-GD engines; M299 Hellfire missile launchers; KIV-77 cryptographic appliques and other Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) equipment; KOR-24A Small Tactical Terminals (STT); AN/SSQ-62F, AN/SSQ-53G, and AN/SSQ-36 sonobuoys; ADU-891/E Adapter Group Test Sets; Common Munitions Built-In-Test (BIT) Reprogramming Equipment (CMBRE); GBU-39B/B tactical training rounds, Weapons Load Crew Trainers, and Reliability Assessment Vehicles-Instrumented; Portable Pre-flight/Post-flight Equipment (P3E); CCM-700A encryption devices; KY-100M Narrowband/wideband terminals; KI-133 cryptographic units; AN/PYQ-10 Simple Key Loaders; Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders; ROVER 6Si and TNR2x transceivers; MR6000 ultra high frequency (UHF) and very high frequency (VHF) radios; Selex SeaSpray Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) surveillance radars; HISAR-300 Radars; SNC 4500 Auto Electronic Surveillance Measures (ESM) Systems; SAGE 750 ESM systems; Due Regard Radars (DRR); MX-20 Electro-Optical Infrared (EO-IR) Laser Target Designators (LTDs); Ku-Band SATCOM GAASI Transportable Earth Stations (GATES); C-Band Line-of-Sight (LOS) Ground Data Terminals; AN/DPX-7 IFF transponders; Compact Multi-band Data Links (CMDL); initial spare and repair parts, consumables, accessories, and repair and return support; secure communications, precision navigation, and cryptographic equipment; munitions support and support equipment; testing and integration support and equipment; classified and unclassified software delivery and support; classified and unclassified publications and technical documentation; personnel training and training equipment; transportation support; warranties; studies and surveys; U.S. Government and contractor engineering, technical, and logistics support services; and other related elements of logistics and program support. The estimated total cost is \$3.99 billion. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/us-approves-sale-of-31-mq-9b-armed-drones-to-india-at-an-estimated-cost-of-3-99-billion-11706801879634.html>

16. A year on: Announced last year, big-ticket projects that are yet to take off (*indianexpress.com*) Updated: February 2, 2024

Mumbai: Even as the civic body's budget surpassed the Rs 50,000-crore mark for the first time in its history, several projects which were announced, elemental to the city's growth, are yet to take off.

On Friday, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is all set to unveil the annual civic budget for the financial year 2024 -25. Last year, the civic body — which

is also the country's richest — had rolled out a Rs 52,619.07-crore budget, a jump of 14.52 per cent over the 2022-23 fiscal. Even as the civic body's budget surpassed the Rs 50,000-crore mark for the first time in its history, several projects which were announced, elemental to the city's growth, are yet to take off.

Road concretisation project

While announcing the budget last year, the civic body had announced its ambitious plan of making Mumbai pothole-free. The announcement was followed by a Rs 6,000-crore road concretisation project aimed at concretising 397 km of city roads within the next three years.

However, at least as of January 29, work on the concretisation project is yet to see the light of the day. According to sources, no work on the project has commenced yet.

Meanwhile, senior civic officials have said a new tender would be floated at revised rates. "Some of the eligibility criteria of selecting contractors would be revised in the next tender. The project cost may also rise keeping in mind factors like inflation," an official said.

Last year in November, the BMC had issued a notice of termination of contract to RSIL, one of the five contractors, for failing to even commence work on the project. On January 18, the BMC even told the Bombay High Court that it had also cancelled the fresh tender, worth over Rs 1,362.34 crore, which was issued on December 4 to concretise roads in the island city.

Mired with delays, the road concretisation project, announced in August 2022 — after the Eknath Shinde-Devendra Fadnavis government came to power in July 2022 — to make Mumbai's roads cement concrete and pothole-free by 2024, remains a distant reality.

14 smog towers

In a bid to curb rising pollution, in the previous budget, the BMC coined and allocated a fund of Rs 25 crore for the policy — Mumbai's 'Air Pollution Mitigation Action Plan' (APMAP), under which the civic body aimed to curb air pollution across various sectors, initiate multi-level monitoring strategy for the city as well as adapt a decentralised planning system for measures to tackle pollution.

As a part of the APMAP, the civic body was eyeing to install 14 smog towers — two towers each in the seven municipal zones of the city — with capacity to purify the air within a one-kilometre radius. According to officials, these 30-ft-high towers would be equipped to cut down the suspended pollutant materials in air by 45%.

One year on, the towers are yet to find ground with the civic body still studying the mechanism and evaluating the best way to implement the system in the city.

Speaking to The Indian Express, an official from the civic environment department said, "We are studying the suitable mechanism for implementation of the system in Mumbai. Setting up a tower requires a lot of space and finding such space in the city is one major concern. Besides, the system also generates a lot of sound. Therefore, we are still studying the best way to implement this system in Mumbai."

For the record, similar smog towers have been installed in several north Indian cities: Delhi, Gurugram, Lucknow and Chandigarh to curb air pollution levels. However, senior officials pointed out that the failure of the system in curbing pollution in Delhi has led to more extended study of the technology.

Hyper local monitoring system

Within the ambit of the APMAP policy, the BMC also announced a plan to implement the hyper local sensor-based monitoring system. However, the civic body is yet to implement the system.

According to the environment department, a team of experts at IIT-Kanpur are currently studying the feasibility of the technology in Mumbai. “The system of hyper local monitoring systems has already been implemented in Lucknow as well as other cities. Therefore, IIT-Kanpur is conducting a study to check the feasibility of the system and explore the implementation of similar systems,” said a source.

“The funding for this technology has been allocated under the overall mitigation action plan. Since we are still studying the technology, we have not floated any tenders on the same,” they added.

On the question of allocations for air pollution mitigation in this year’s budget, sources from the environment department added, “The implementation of all the technologies which had been announced in the previous year will be carried forward this year. It is unlikely that new announcements will be made this year.”

‘Pedestrian First’ policy

In a bid to declutter urban spaces and provide a better walking experience to Mumbai residents, the BMC, in its budget last year, had announced a ‘Pedestrian First’ policy, under which any road in the city with a minimum width of 9m was proposed to have pedestrian-friendly footpaths. A fund of Rs 200 crore was earmarked to make the city streets more pedestrian friendly.

Speaking during the budget presentation last year, municipal commissioner and state-appointed administrator Iqbal Singh Chahal had said the civic body would carry out a survey of all the roads with minimum width of 9m, following which footpaths will be constructed.

“The process involved removal of hawkers and shanties from the footpaths that would require giving them alternate space. However, the process has been stalled as the Town Vending Committee (TVC) was supposed to help us identify some of the non-hawking zones, which is still pending,” an official said.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/bmc-budget-today-a-year-on-announced-last-year-big-ticket-projects-that-are-yet-to-take-off-9139733/>