

## **NEWS ITEMS ON CAG /AUDIT REPORTS**

### **1. CAG flags Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY for not having whistle-blower policy (*thenewsminute.com, latestly.com, daijiworld.com*)** SEPTEMBER 03, 2023

**The report further said due to the non-adoption of the policy, the stakeholders involved in the scheme were deprived of the mechanism for complaining regarding the cases of corruption, medical and non- medical frauds, etc.**

In its performance audit report on the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has revealed that six states and one union territory (UT) had not adopted the whistle-blower policy. The audit noted that Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu had not adopted the Whistle-blower Policy, as per the CAG report on AB-PMJAY.

The report further said due to the non-adoption of the policy, the stakeholders involved in the scheme were deprived of the mechanism for complaining regarding the cases of corruption, medical and non- medical frauds, etc. "The NHA (National Health Authority) while accepting the audit observation, replied (in August 2022) that states would be pursued to constitute these committees at the earliest and necessary directions would be issued for the implementation of whistleblower policy within defined timeline," the CAG report said.

It added, "NHA issued the PMJAY whistle-blower policy as a step towards strengthening transparency and accountability in the implementation of PMJAY." The primary objective of the policy was to establish a mechanism to receive complaints relating to disclosure on any allegation of corruption, medical and non-medical fraud, etc., against any stakeholder involved with the implementation of PMJAY and to inquire or cause an inquiry into such disclosure and to provide adequate safeguards against the victimisation of the person making such a complaint, the report further said.

The AB-PMJAY provides a health cover up to Rs five lakh per family per year, for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation services. It provides cashless and paperless access to services for the beneficiaries at the point of service hospital. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had said it was examining in detail the recommendations of the CAG performance audit report on AB-PMJAY. <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/cag-flags-ayushman-bharat-pmjay-not-having-whistle-blower-policy-181858>

### **2. Ayushman Bharat PMJAY CAG Flays MP, 6 States for Not Executing Whistle-Blower Policy (*freepressjournal.in*)** September 03, 2023

Six states including Madhya Pradesh and one union territory (UT) have not adopted the whistle-blower policy under Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has revealed it in its performance audit report.

The audit noted that Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu had not adopted the whistle-blower policy.

The report further said due to the non-adoption of policy, the stakeholders involved in the scheme were deprived of mechanism for complaining cases of corruption, medical and non- medical frauds etc.

"National Health Authority while accepting the audit observation, replied (in August 2022) that states would be pursued to constitute these committees and directions would be issued for the implementation of whistle-blower policy within defined timeline," the CAG report said.

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The AB-PMJAY provides a health cover up to Rs five lakh per family per year, for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation services. It provides cashless and paperless access to services for the beneficiaries at the point of service - hospital.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had said it was examining in detail the recommendations of the CAG performance audit report on AB-PMJAY. <https://www.freepressjournal.in/bhopal/ayushman-bharat-pmjay-cag-flays-mp-6-states-for-not-executing-whistle-blower-policy>

### **3. CAG flags non-adoption of whistleblower policy by 6 states, one UT under AB-PMJAY (*socialnews.xyz*) SEPTEMBER 3, 2023**

In its performance audit report on the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has revealed that six states and one union territory (UT) had not adopted the whistleblower policy.

The audit noted that Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu had not adopted the Whistle-blower Policy, as per the CAG report on AB-PMJAY.

The report further said due to the non-adoption of the policy, the stakeholders involved in the scheme were deprived of the mechanism for complaining regarding the cases of corruption, medical and non- medical frauds, etc.

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earliest and necessary directions would be issued for the implementation of whistleblower policy within defined timeline," the CAG report said.

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The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had said it was examining in detail the recommendations of the CAG Performance audit report on AB-PMJAY. <https://www.socialnews.xyz/2023/09/03/cag-flags-non-adoption-of-whistleblower-policy-by-6-states-one-ut-under-ab-pmjay/>

#### **4. Congress attacks govt over CAG's report on Bharatmala Pariyojana** (*siasat.com*) September 03, 2023

Congress on Sunday attacked the BJP-led government over the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report on Bharatmala Pariyojana, saying that the projects were handed over to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's close friends.

"Bharatmala Pariyojana is aimed at developing 35,000 km of national highways to make freight movement across the country more efficient. Yet, the most remarkable feature of the project has been the efficiency with which costs have been inflated and projects handed over to the Prime Minister's close friends and his party's electoral bond donors, as shown in a recent CAG report covering the period 2017-21," Congress General Secretary in-charge Communications Jairam Ramesh said.

"The Union government's National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) awarded a 250 km project to four-lane the national highway between Suryapet and Khammam in Telangana to a consortium in which Adani Transport was the dominant partner with a 74 per cent work share.

"According to the CAG, Adani did not fulfil the condition of Request for Proposal regarding experience of five years building highways. Instead, the company provided an experience certificate in the name of a different company, and that too in a different sector from road- building i.e. power. Even the certificate showing that the consortium had a net worth of Rs 304 crore was in the name of a different company.

"Despite being completely unqualified to bid, Adani Transport once again benefited from Modi's gagic. NHAI declared on February 20, 2019 that Adani was qualified to

bid (without giving reasons) and awarded the project to the Adani-led consortium on March 8, 2019 at a cost of Rs 1,566 crore.

“Under the hybrid annuity model the Adani consortium received 40 per cent of the project amount as a direct cash subsidy, even though it was never actually qualified to bid. Other projects were awarded to one firm with strong BJP links and to four other firms that have been major donors to the BJP, as shown in the party’s own financial statements,” the parliamentarian said in a statement.

Ramesh also posed a volley of questions to the government in this regard.

“Is there not a quid pro quo behind the award of these projects by the Modi government-controlled NHAI? Will the BJP release its entire list of donors in the last nine years? Is there no limit to the favouritism that the PM will bestow upon his close friends, colleagues and financiers when it comes to lucrative infrastructure contracts?” the MP said.

He also asked are Indian taxpayers funds simply meant to line the pockets of the “PM and his friends.”

“The CAG, whose reports the media once used to breathlessly report, has shed light on deep seated corruption in the Modi government. As we have repeatedly demanded, only a JPC (Joint Parliamentary Committee) can unravel the full extent of the Adani mega scam in multiple sectors.”

Congress on Thursday demanded for a JPC into fresh allegations of irregularities in the Adani Group’s use of offshore funds and claimed that India’s reputation is at stake. [https://www.siasat.com/congress-attacks-govt-over-cags-report-on-bharatmala-pariyojana-2685190/#google\\_vignette](https://www.siasat.com/congress-attacks-govt-over-cags-report-on-bharatmala-pariyojana-2685190/#google_vignette)

## **5. Congress attacks Modi government over CAG report, flags omnipresent ‘Adani link’ (*telegraphindia.com*) September 04, 2023**

The Congress on Sunday asked if there was no limit to the favours the Prime Minister would bestow on his friends, flagging a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) to allege that an Adani group company had been handed a national highway project even though it was not qualified to bid for it.

“The Bharatmala Pariyojana is aimed at developing 35,000km of national highways to make freight movement across the country more efficient. Yet, the most remarkable feature of the project has been the efficiency with which costs have been inflated and projects handed over to the Prime Minister’s close friends and his party’s electoral bond donors, as shown in a recent CAG report covering the period 2017-21,” Congress communications chief Jairam Ramesh said.

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has awarded a 250km project to four-lane the national highway between Suryapet and Khammam in Telangana to a consortium in which Adani Transport is the dominant partner with a 74 per cent work share.

Ramesh said: “According to the CAG, Adani ‘did not fulfil the condition of Request for Proposal regarding experience of five years building highways. Instead, the company provided an experience certificate in the name of a different company, and that too in a different sector from road-building i.e. power. Even the certificate showing that the consortium had a net worth of Rs 304 crore was in the name of a different company!”

Ramesh continued: “Despite being completely unqualified to bid, Adani Transport once again benefited from Modi’s Magic. NHAI declared on February 20, 2019, that Adani was qualified to bid (without giving reasons) and awarded the project to the Adani-led consortium on March 8, 2019, at a cost of Rs 1,566 crore. Under the ‘hybrid annuity model’ the Adani consortium received 40 per cent of the project amount as direct cash subsidy, even though it was never actually qualified to bid.”

The Congress leader asked: “Is there no limit to the favouritism that the Prime Minister will bestow upon his close friends, colleagues and financiers when it comes to lucrative infrastructure contracts?”

Ramesh added: “Other projects were awarded to one firm with strong BJP links and to four other firms that have been major donors to the BJP, as shown in the party’s own financial statements.

“This leads to many questions: Is there not a quid pro quo behind the award of these projects by the Modi government-controlled NHAI? Will the BJP release its entire list of donors in the last nine years?... Are Indian taxpayers’ funds simply meant to line the pockets of the PM and his friends?” <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/congress-attacks-modi-government-over-cag-report-flags-omnipresent-adani-link/cid/1963570>

## **6. CAG Report: 'इंफ्रा प्रोजेक्ट्स भाजपा के करीबी दोस्तों को दिए गए', कैग रिपोर्ट को लेकर कांग्रेस का बड़ा आरोप (*amarujala.com*)**

September 03, 2023

भारत माला परियोजना से जुड़ी नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) की एक हालिया रिपोर्ट को लेकर कांग्रेस ने रविवार को केंद्र की मोदी सरकार पर निशाना साधा। पार्टी ने आरोप लगाया कि अवसंरचना से जुड़ी परियोजनाएं भारतीय जनता पार्टी (भाजपा) के करीबी मित्रों और पार्टी को चंदा देने वालों को दे दी गई।

कांग्रेस ने कहा कि केवल संयुक्त संसदीय समिति (जेपीसी) की जांच से ही सच्चाई सामने आ सकती है। कांग्रेस महासचिव (संचार) जयराम रमेश ने कहा कि ‘भारतमाला परियोजना’ का मकसद देशभर में माल ढुलाई को और अधिक प्रभावी बनाने के लिए 35 हजार किलोमीटर राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग विकसित करना है।

उन्होंने आरोप लगाया, ‘अभी तक इस परियोजना की सबसे उल्लेखनीय विशेषता वह दक्षता रही है जिसके साथ लागत को बढ़ाया गया है और परियोजनाओं को प्रधानमंत्री (नरेन्द्र मोदी) के करीबी दोस्तों और उनकी पार्टी के चुनावी बॉन्ड दाताओं को सौंप दिया गया है, जैसा कि 2017-21 की अवधि वाली हालिया सीएजी रिपोर्ट में दिखाया गया है।’

कांग्रेस नेता ने कहा कि भारतीय राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग प्राधिकरण (एनएचएआई) ने तेलंगाना में सूर्यपिट और खम्मम के बीच 250 किलोमीटर की चार-लेन परियोजना एक कंसोर्टियम को सौंपी थी, जिसमें 74 प्रतिशत कार्य हिस्सेदारी के साथ अडाणी ट्रांसपोर्ट प्रमुख भागीदार था।

उन्होंने कहा कि कैग के अनुसार अडाणी ट्रांसपोर्ट ने राजमार्ग निर्माण के पांच साल के अनुभव के संदर्भ में 'प्रस्ताव के लिए अनुरोध' की शर्त को पूरा नहीं किया है।

उन्होंने आरोप लगाया, "बोली लगाने के लिए पूरी तरह से अयोग्य होने के बावजूद अडाणी ट्रांसपोर्ट को एक बार फिर मोदी के जादू का फायदा हुआ।" उन्होंने कहा कि एनएचएआई ने 20 फरवरी, 2019 को घोषणा की कि अडाणी ट्रांसपोर्ट बोली लगाने के लिए योग्य है (बिना कारण बताए) और आठ मार्च, 2019 को 1,566 करोड़ रुपये की लागत पर परियोजना अडाणी के नेतृत्व वाले कंसोर्टियम को सौंप दी गई।

उन्होंने आरोप लगाया, "अन्य परियोजनाएं भाजपा से मजबूत संबंध रखने वाली एक कंपनी को और चार अन्य कंपनियों को प्रदान की गईं, जो भाजपा की प्रमुख चंदा दाता रही हैं, जैसा कि पार्टी के अपने वित्तीय विवरणों में दिखाया गया है।"

रमेश ने कहा कि इससे कई सवाल उठते हैं जैसे कि क्या मोदी सरकार द्वारा नियंत्रित एनएचएआई द्वारा इन परियोजनाओं को आवंटित करने के पीछे कोई लेन-देन नहीं है? क्या भाजपा पिछले नौ वर्षों के दौरान चंदा देने वालों की पूरी सूची जारी करेगी? रमेश ने आरोप लगाया कि कैग की रिपोर्ट ने मोदी सरकार में गहरे तक व्याप्त भ्रष्टाचार पर प्रकाश डाला है।  
<https://www.amarujala.com/india-news/infrastructure-projects-given-to-close-friends-of-bjp-congress-hits-out-at-cag-report-2023-09-03>

## 7. भ्रष्टाचार की परियोजनाएँ! (*tehelkahindi.com*) September 01, 2023

कैग रिपोर्ट्स में केंद्र सरकार की कई परियोजनाओं में पायी गयी गड़बड़ी भ्रष्टाचार पर तब तक रोक नहीं लग सकती, जब तक सरकार भ्रष्ट अधिकारियों पर शिकंजा नहीं कसेगी। सरकार की अनदेखी के चलते भ्रष्टाचार नहीं रुक पाते। कैग की ऑडिट रिपोर्ट में कई केंद्रीय योजनाओं में खामियाँ पायी गयी हैं। बता रहे हैं मुदित माथुर :- नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) ने प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी की महत्वाकांक्षी योजनाओं के कामकाज और प्रदर्शन में गम्भीर प्रक्रियात्मक और वित्तीय विसंगतियों को उजागर किया है। प्रमुख और कल्याणकारी योजनाओं-परियोजनाओं में वित्तीय विसंगतियों को लेकर विपक्षी दलों की ने सरकार की कड़ी आलोचना की है। विपक्षी दलों ने भ्रष्टाचार मुक्त, पारदर्शी शासन और सार्वजनिक धन के उचित आवंटन और भारत के लोगों से प्रधानमंत्री मोदी के अतिशयोक्तिपूर्ण चुनावी वादों के पीछे की वास्तविकता पर भी सवाल उठाये हैं। नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) ने 12 ऑडिट रिपोर्ट्स जारी की हैं, जिन्हें संसद के मानसून सत्र में संविधान के अनुच्छेद-151 के तहत संवैधानिक आवश्यकता के तहत संसद के रिकॉर्ड में पेश किया गया था। वित्तीय विसंगतियों पर प्रकाश डालने वाली ये रिपोर्ट्स सार्वजनिक शासन में पारदर्शिता और जवाबदेही बढ़ाने का आह्वान करती हैं। भारतीय संविधान ने सर्वोच्च सार्वजनिक निधि लेखा परीक्षक कैग को राजस्व प्राप्तियों और सार्वजनिक धन के खर्च पर कड़ी निगरानी रखने के लिए एक प्रहरी के रूप में कार्य करने के अलावा केंद्र और राज्य सरकारों की समेकित निधि से कोई दुरुपयोग या हेराफेरी होने पर संसद को रिपोर्ट करने के लिए बाध्य किया है। विभिन्न प्राथमिकता वाले क्षेत्रों के धन के उपयोग का ऑडिट करते हुए कैग ने 'भारतमाला', 'आयुष्मान भारत', 'उड़ान', 'स्वदेश दर्शन योजना', बीपीएल में आने वालों की पेंशन के लिए राष्ट्रीय सामाजिक सहायता कार्यक्रम (एनएसएपी) निधि के उपयोग और मंत्रालय की अन्य योजनाओं का प्रचार करने में प्रमुख राजकोषीय खामियों को उजागर किया। इसके अलावा 2021-22 वित्तीय वर्ष में रेलवे के प्रदर्शन के परिचालन अनुपात में गिरावट और

अस्वीकृत व्यय करने की निरंतर प्रवृत्ति का कैग ने पहले ही उल्लेख किया था। भारतमाला परियोजना 2017-18 से 2020-21 की अवधि के लिए आयोजित 'भारतमाला परियोजना के चरण-1 के कार्यान्वयन' (या बीपीपी-1) पर अपनी ऑडिट रिपोर्ट में राजमार्ग परियोजना- भारतमाला परियोजना चरण-1 (बीपीपी-1) के कार्यान्वयन में गम्भीर विसंगतियों को उजागर किया गया है। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है :- 'कार्यान्वयन एजेंसियों द्वारा परियोजनाओं के आवंटन में अनियमितताओं के अलावा निविदा की निर्धारित प्रक्रियाओं में स्पष्ट उल्लंघन पाये गये। अर्थात् कहीं सफल बोलीदाता ने निविदा शर्तों को पूरा नहीं किया, या कहीं गलत दस्तावेजों के आधार पर बोलीदाता का चयन किया गया, या अनुमोदित विस्तृत परियोजना रिपोर्ट के बिना या दोषपूर्ण विस्तृत परियोजना रिपोर्ट के आधार पर उन्हें काम सौंपा गया।' रिपोर्ट में द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे परियोजना के बजट में भारी वृद्धि का भी पता चला है, जिसे दिल्ली और गुरुग्राम के बीच एनएच-48 को 14-लेन राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग के रूप में विकसित करके जाम कम करने के उद्देश्य से प्राथमिकता दी गयी थी। दरअसल परियोजना की प्राथमिकता देश भर में माल दुलाई और लोगों की आवाजाही को अनुकूलित करने की थी। अक्टूबर, 2017 में आर्थिक मामलों की मंत्रिमंडलीय समिति (सीसीईए) ने 74,942 किलोमीटर लम्बाई के राष्ट्रीय राजमार्गों के विकास के लिए भारतमाला परियोजना नामक एक नये छत्र कार्यक्रम को मंजूरी दी थी। उपरोक्त लम्बाई में से राष्ट्रीय राजमार्गों की लम्बाई 34,800 किलोमीटर, जबकि शेष राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग विकास कार्यक्रम (एनएचडीपी) की लम्बाई 10,000 किलोमीटर है। इस भारतमाला परियोजना (बीपीपी-1) के चरण-द्व के तहत सितंबर, 2022 तक विकास के लिए 5,35,000 करोड़ रुपये के निवेश परियोजना को मंजूरी दी गयी थी। परियोजना के तहत सात घटक हैं। जैसे- आर्थिक कॉरिडोर (गलियारे), अंतर-गलियारे और फीडर सड़कें, राष्ट्रीय गलियारे / राष्ट्रीय गलियारा दक्षता सुधार कार्यक्रम, सीमाएँ और अंतरराष्ट्रीय सम्पर्क सड़कें, तटीय और बंदरगाह कनेक्टिविटी सड़कें, ग्रीन-फील्ड एक्सप्रेस-वे और शेष एनएचडीपी परियोजनाएँ। भारतमाला परियोजना का कार्यान्वयन सड़क परिवहन और राजमार्ग मंत्रालय (एमओआरटीएच) द्वारा अपनी कार्यान्वयन एजेंसियों के माध्यम से कराया जाता है। जैसे- भारतीय राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग प्राधिकरण (एनएचएआई), राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग और अवसंरचना विकास निगम लिमिटेड (एनएचआईडीसीएल), सड़क परिवहन और राजमार्ग मंत्रालय की सड़क शाखा और राज्य लोक निर्माण विभाग इत्यादि। द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे की योजना शुरू में हरियाणा सरकार ने गुडगाँव-मानेसर शहरी निर्माण योजना-2031 के तहत बनायी थी। इस परियोजना के तहत हरियाणा ने 25 मीटर के मुख्य कैरिज-वे के निर्माण के लिए 150 मीटर रास्ते का अधिकार (सड़क की चौड़ाई) का अधिग्रहण किया, जिसमें 7 मीटर चौड़ा मीडियन और ट्रंक सेवाओं के लिए एक समर्पित उपयोगी कॉरिडोर था। हालाँकि रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि हरियाणा सरकार द्वारा आगे कोई प्रगति नहीं होने के कारण इस परियोजना को बाद में सीसीईए द्वारा बीपीपी-1 में मंजूरी दे दी गयी थी।

ऑडिट रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि इस उद्देश्य के लिए हरियाणा द्वारा 90 मीटर रास्ते का अधिकार भारतीय राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग प्राधिकरण (एनएचएआई) को मुफ्त में सौंप दिया गया था। दरअसल 14 लेन के राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग के निर्माण के लिए 70-75 मीटर तक चौड़ाई (रास्ते) की आवश्यकता होती है। हालाँकि रिकॉर्ड पर किसी भी कारण के बिना 19 किलोमीटर लम्बी हरियाणा क्षेत्र की इस परियोजना को आठ-लेन एलिवेटेड मेन कैरिज-वे के साथ और ग्रेड रोड पर छः लेन के साथ योजनाबद्ध किया गया था, जबकि एनएचएआई के पास पहले से ही 90 मीटर के रास्ते का अधिकार था और यह ग्रेड में 14 लेन के निर्माण के लिए पर्याप्त था। इस तरह की विशाल संरचनाओं के कारण 29.06 किलोमीटर की लम्बाई के लिए ईपीसी (इंजीनियरिंग, खरीद और निर्माण) प्रणाली पर निर्मित इस परियोजना में अनुमोदित 18.20 करोड़ रुपये की प्रति किलोमीटर निर्माण लागत के मुकाबले 250.77 करोड़ रुपये प्रति किलोमीटर यानी 7,287.29 करोड़ रुपये की निर्माण लागत को सीसीईए द्वारा मंजूरी दी गयी थी। एमओआरटीएच ने द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे को चार परियोजनाओं में विभाजित करके (नवंबर, 2018 में) इसके निर्माण को प्राथमिकता दी। एनएचएआई ने 7,287.29 करोड़ रुपये की सिविल लागत के साथ

इन चार परियोजनाओं के निर्माण को (जनवरी-मार्च 2018 में) मंजूरी दी। इन परियोजनाओं के नवंबर, 2020 से सितंबर, 2022 के बीच पूरा करना था। इन परियोजनाओं ने 31 मार्च, 2023 तक 60.50 प्रतिशत से 99.25 प्रतिशत के बीच वास्तविक प्रगति हासिल की थी। द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे को 250.77 करोड़ रुपये की प्रति किलोमीटर लागत पर राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग-48 के समानांतर चलने वाले 14 लेन के राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग में विकसित करके दिल्ली से गुरुग्राम के बीच एनएच-48 का भार कम करने के लिए इस परियोजना का निर्माण किया जा रहा था, जबकि आर्थिक मामलों की कैबिनेट समिति (सीसीईए) ने राष्ट्रीय कॉरिडोर / राष्ट्रीय गलियारा दक्षता सुधार कार्यक्रम के लिए महज़ 18.20 करोड़ रुपये की प्रति किलोमीटर लागत को मंजूरी दी थी। परियोजना के व्यवहार्यता अध्ययन के अनुसार, दिल्ली से गुरुग्राम के बीच एनएच -48 पर चलने वाले औसतन 3,11,041 दैनिक यातायात में से 2,88,391 यानी 92.72 प्रतिशत यात्री-वाहन शामिल थे। इनमें से 2,32,959 यानी 80.78 प्रतिशत यात्री-वाहन केवल अंतर-शहर यातायात वाले थे। राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग-48 पर ( दिल्ली-गुरुग्राम यातायात, जो गुडगाँव सीमा पार नहीं करता था) खेडक्री दौला टोल को पार नहीं कर रहा है। बीपीपी-डू के तहत द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे की प्राथमिकता की समीक्षा करते समय कैग ने निम्नलिखित तथ्य पाये :- कोई विस्तृत परियोजना रिपोर्ट नहीं द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे की अलग-अलग परियोजनाओं का मूल्यांकन (दिसंबर, 2017-फरवरी, 2018) परियोजना मूल्यांकन और तकनीकी जाँच समिति द्वारा किया गया था और एनएचएआई बोर्ड द्वारा परियोजना (जनवरी-मार्च, 2018) के लिए किसी भी विस्तृत परियोजना रिपोर्ट के बिना अनुमोदित किया गया था, जो आज तक तैयार नहीं किया गया है। यहाँ तक कि एनएचएआई द्वारा परियोजना के अनुमोदन के बाद परियोजना की अंतिम व्यवहार्यता रिपोर्ट (सितंबर, 2018) प्रस्तुत की गयी थी। कैग जाँच में पाया गया कि द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे की चार परियोजनाओं का मूल्यांकन किया गया था और बिना किसी विस्तृत परियोजना रिपोर्ट के एनएचएआई के सम्बन्धित तकनीकी प्रभाग द्वारा एक संक्षिप्त प्रस्तुति के आधार पर सक्षम प्राधिकारी द्वारा अनुमोदित किया गया था। विस्तृत परियोजना रिपोर्ट तैयार न करने के प्रभाव ये हुए कि द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे की सभी 14 लेन के निर्माण के लिए एनएचएआई के पास रिकॉर्ड पर पर्याप्त रास्ता उपलब्ध होने के बावजूद इसे बिना किसी कारण के आठ लेन एलिवेटेड रोड और ग्रेड रोड पर छः लेन के साथ बनाया जा रहा था। इस परियोजना के लिए 250.77 करोड़ रुपये प्रति किलोमीटर की सिविल लागत बहुत अधिक थी। द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे की नियोजित टोल दरें और टोलिंग तंत्र परियोजना की पूँजीगत लागत की वसूली में बाधा डाल सकते हैं। इससे दिल्ली-गुडगाँव (खेडक्री दौला टोल प्लाजा तक) के बीच जाने वाले यात्रियों पर अनुचित वित्तीय बोझ भी पड़ सकता है। आरआरटीएस एसएनबी के विकास के रूप में द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे की लेनों के बीच की दूरी प्रतिस्पर्धी बुनियादी ढाँचे के विकास का विश्लेषण किये बिना निर्धारित की गयी थी। दिल्ली से गुरुग्राम तक भारी यातायात के बावजूद इस ग्रेड भाग का निर्माण 20 मिलियन स्टैंडर्ड एक्सेल ट्रेफिक के उप-सर्वोत्तम विनिर्देशों के साथ किया जा रहा था; जिसमें हरियाणा क्षेत्र में पडने वाली इस परियोजना के ग्रेड भाग में छः लेन का उपयोग करने की उम्मीद थी। व्यवहार्यता अध्ययन में द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे की अनुमानित मिट्टी का कैलिफोर्निया अनुपात मूल्य ठेकेदार द्वारा विचार किये गये कैलिफोर्निया अनुपात मूल्य की तुलना में कम था, जिसके परिणामस्वरूप निर्माण की लागत में ठेकेदार को बचत हुई। इस गड़बड़ी को लेकर कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष मल्लिकार्जुन खडगे ने कहा- 'इस योजना में थोखाधड़ी का एक स्पष्ट उदाहरण द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे है। कैग ने इसका खुलासा किया है कि इस परियोजना की लागत मूल रूप से 528.8 करोड़ रुपये आँकी गयी थी; लेकिन यह बाद में 1,278 प्रतिशत की भारी वृद्धि के साथ 7,287.2 करोड़ रुपये तक पहुँच गयी! द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे का मूल्यांकन किया गया और बिना किसी विस्तृत परियोजना रिपोर्ट के इसे मंजूरी दी गयी। नियोजित टोल दरें परियोजना की पूँजीगत लागत की वसूली में बाधा डालेंगी और इसके परिणामस्वरूप यात्रियों पर अनुचित वित्तीय बोझ पड़ेगा। द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे के लेन-विन्यास को आस-पास के प्रतिस्पर्धी बुनियादी ढाँचे के विकास का विश्लेषण किये बिना निर्धारित किया गया था। खडगे ने कहा कि प्रधानमंत्री जी! आपको अपने

विरोधियों के खिलाफ भ्रष्टाचार का राग अलापने से पहले अपने भीतर झाँकने की ज़रूरत है; क्योंकि आप खुद इसकी देख-रेख कर रहे हैं। इसके लिए 2024 में भारत आपकी सरकार को जवाबदेह बनाएगा।' द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे के निर्माण की उच्च लागत को लेकर चिन्ता जताने वाली कैग-रिपोर्ट पर उठे राजनीतिक विवाद के जवाब में केंद्रीय सड़क परिवहन एवं राजमार्ग मंत्री नितिन गडकरी ने कैग की इस टिप्पणी को खारिज कर दिया कि इसे बनाने में 250 करोड़ रुपये प्रति किलोमीटर खर्च किये गये। निर्माण की उच्च लागत के आरोपों को खारिज करते हुए नितिन गडकरी ने कहा कि द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे 29 किलोमीटर लम्बा नहीं, बल्कि लगभग 230 किलोमीटर लम्बा है; क्योंकि इसमें सुरंगें भी शामिल हैं। इस हिसाब से प्रति किलोमीटर 9.5 करोड़ रुपये खर्च किये जा रहे हैं। गडकरी ने दावा किया कि उन्होंने कैग अधिकारियों को भी यही बताया और वह स्पष्टीकरण से आश्वस्त थे। हालाँकि उन्होंने कहा कि फिर भी वह रिपोर्ट का पूरा अध्ययन करेंगे। एक उच्च स्तरीय समीक्षा बैठक में द्वारका एक्सप्रेस-वे के निर्माण की लागत के सम्बन्ध में कैग द्वारा उठाये गये सवालों के जवाब के लिए ज़िम्मेदार कुछ अधिकारियों द्वारा अपनाये गये एकतरफ़ा रवैये पर गडकरी ने अपनी नाराज़गी व्यक्त की है। उन्होंने अपने मंत्रालय के सम्बन्धित वरिष्ठ अधिकारियों की ओर से इस चूक की ज़िम्मेदारी तय करने का भी निर्देश दिया। टोल नियमों का उल्लंघन करके वसूले करोड़ों दक्षिण भारत में भारतीय राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग प्राधिकरण (एनएचएआई) के केंद्रीय सड़क परिवहन और राजमार्ग मंत्रालय की टोल संचालन पर कैग रिपोर्ट में पाया गया है कि पाँच टोल प्लाजा में टोल-नियमों का उल्लंघन करते हुए यात्रियों से कुल 132.05 करोड़ रुपये की राशि वसूल की गयी। यह ऑडिट पाँच दक्षिणी राज्यों- आंध्र प्रदेश, कर्नाटक, तमिलनाडु, केरल और तेलंगाना में स्वतंत्र रूप से चुने गये 41 टोल प्लाजा पर किया गया था, जिसमें कहा गया था कि मौजूदा चार लेन राजमार्गों के उन्नयन के सम्बन्ध में 16 दिसंबर, 2013 के एनएच शुल्क संशोधन नियम-2013 को लागू न करके एनएचएआई ने निर्माण की देरी के कारण इस अवधि के दौरान तीन टोल प्लाजा (नाथावालसा, चलागेरी, हेब्बलू) में उपयोगकर्ताओं शुल्क वसूलना जारी रखा। हालाँकि संशोधित नियम में कहा गया है कि विलंबित अवधि के लिए कोई उपयोगकर्ता शुल्क नहीं लिया जाएगा। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि इसके परिणामस्वरूप मई, 2020 से मार्च, 2021 की अवधि के दौरान संशोधित टोल शुल्क नियमों का उल्लंघन करते हुए 124.18 करोड़ रुपये का उपयोगकर्ता शुल्क एकत्र किया गया। रिपोर्ट में पाया गया कि परनूर टोल प्लाजा पर एनएचएआई ने शुल्क को लागू शुल्क से 75 प्रतिशत तक कम करने में देरी की। मडापम टोल प्लाजा पर संशोधित शुल्क नियमों के अनुसार उन्नयन के दौरान कोई संशोधन नहीं करने की शर्त के बावजूद एनएचएआई ने सालाना उपयोगकर्ता शुल्क में संशोधन किया। एनएचएआई ने अगस्त, 2018 से मार्च, 2021 तक दो टोल प्लाजा पर सड़क उपयोगकर्ताओं से 7.87 करोड़ रुपये एकत्र किये। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि इस प्रकार इन पाँच टोल प्लाजा में टोल संग्रह से सड़क उपयोगकर्ताओं पर 132.05 करोड़ रुपये का अनुचित बोझ पड़ा। रिपोर्ट में यह भी पाया गया कि एनएचएआई ने 2017-2018 से 2020-2021 के दौरान सार्वजनिक वित्त पोषित परनूर टोल प्लाजा पर सड़क उपयोगकर्ताओं से 22.10 करोड़ रुपये का अतिरिक्त टोल शुल्क वसूला। सन् 1954 में एक पुल का निर्माण किया गया था और इसके लिए उपयोगकर्ता शुल्क एकत्र किया जा रहा था, फिर से एनएच शुल्क द्वितीय संशोधन नियम-2011 का उल्लंघन किया गया था। चूँकि नियमों के तहत पुल का निर्माण सन् 1956 से पहले किया गया था, इसलिए उपयोगकर्ता शुल्क नहीं लगाया जाना था। ऑडिट में यह भी पाया गया कि एनएच शुल्क नियम-2008 द्वारा निर्धारित समय सीमा के अनुसार सार्वजनिक वित्त पोषित परियोजनाओं के चार खंडों में टोल संग्रह में देरी से एनएचएआई को 64.60 करोड़ रुपये के राजस्व का नुकसान हुआ। स्वास्थ्य योजनाओं में गड़बड़ी पीएम-जेएवाई को दुनिया की सबसे बड़ी पूरी तरह से सरकारी वित्त पोषित स्वास्थ्य बीमा योजना माना जाता है, जिसे 2019 के लोकसभा चुनावों से ठीक पहले सितंबर, 2018 में कल्याणकारी उपायों के एक प्रमुख बूस्टर मुद्दे के रूप में लॉन्च किया गया था। इस योजना का उद्देश्य 50 करोड़ से अधिक गरीब परिवारों को मुफ्त स्वास्थ्य सेवा प्रदान करना है। इस योजना के तहत प्रति परिवार सालाना पाँच लाख रुपये तक का इलाज प्रदान किया जाता है। कैग ने भारत के संविधान के अनुच्छेद-151 के तहत भारत के राष्ट्रपति के माध्यम से संसद में पेश अपनी ऑडिट रिपोर्ट में खुलासा किया है कि सरकार की प्रमुख स्वास्थ्य बीमा योजना, आयुष्मान भारत प्रधानमंत्री जन आरोग्य योजना (एबी-पीएमजेएवाई) में सब कुछ ठीक नहीं है। इसमें योजना के कार्यान्वयन में

स्पष्ट खामियाँ पायी गयी हैं, जिसमें धन का दुरुपयोग, फ़र्ज़ी खाते, उचित सबूत के बिना धन जारी करने और यहाँ तक कि उन रोगियों के नाम पर भुगतान किये गये दावे भी शामिल हैं, जो पहले ही मर चुके हैं। आयुष्मान भारत को लेकर किये गये ऑडिट में कैग ने कहा है कि योजना की लाभार्थी पहचान प्रणाली (बीआईएस) में कुल मिलाकर 7,49,820 लाभार्थियों को एक ही मोबाइल नंबर से जोड़ा गया है। इसी तरह सात आधार नंबरों पर 4,761 पंजीकरण किये गये। गुमशुदा अस्पतालों को सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य बीमा योजना के तहत नामांकित किया गया है। बीआईएस डेटाबेस के डेटा विश्लेषण से पता चला है कि एक ही या अमान्य मोबाइल नंबर से बड़ी संख्या में लाभार्थी पंजीकृत थे। कुल मिलाकर 1,119 से 7,49,820 लाभार्थियों को बीआईएस डेटाबेस में एक ही मोबाइल नंबर से जोड़ा गया। एबी-पीएमजेएवाई के तहत कुल 7,49,820 लाभार्थी एक ही अमान्य मोबाइल नंबर 9999999999 से जुड़े थे। इसके अलावा 1,39,300 लाभार्थी एक अमान्य मोबाइल नंबर 8888888888 पर पंजीकृत थे; जबकि 96,046 लाभार्थी दूसरे अमान्य मोबाइल नंबर 9000000000 से जुड़े थे। रिपोर्ट में खुलासा किया गया है कि कम से कम 20 सेलफोन नंबर भी थे, जिनसे 10,001 से 50,000 लाभार्थी जुड़े हुए थे। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि 7.87 करोड़ लाभार्थी परिवारों को पंजीकृत किया गया था, जो 10.74 करोड़ (नवंबर 2022) के लक्षित परिवारों का 73 फ़ीसदी था। बाद में सरकार ने लक्ष्य बढ़ाकर 12 करोड़ कर दिया। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि डेटाबेस में किसी भी लाभार्थी से सम्बन्धित रिकॉर्ड खोजने के लिए मोबाइल नंबर महत्वपूर्ण हैं, जिनसे आईडी के बिना पंजीकरण डेस्क से सम्पर्क किया जा सके। ई-कार्ड खो जाने की स्थिति में लाभार्थी की पहचान करना भी मुश्किल हो सकता है। इससे पात्र लाभार्थियों को योजना के लाभों से वंचित किया जा सकता है और साथ ही प्रवेश से पहले और बाद के संचार से इनकार किया जा सकता है, जिससे उन्हें असुविधा हो सकती है।

<http://tehelkahindi.com/%E0%A4%AD%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B0%E0%A4%B7%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%9F%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%B0-%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%80-%E0%A4%AA%E0%A4%B0%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%AF%E0%A5%8B%E0%A4%9C%E0%A4%A8%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%8F%E0%A4%81/>

## 8. ‘Hot Favorite’ To Clinch India’s MRFA Deal, IAF Officials Speak on Aircraft That Could Outflank Rafale Fighters (eurasianimes.com) September 04, 2023

Dassault Rafale was a capable fighter jet with limited foreign customers until the Indian Air Force (IAF) bought 36 of these French jets. Since then, the French aircraft maker has experienced a windfall of orders and emerged as one of the world’s best-selling aircraft.

The SAAB Gripen is expecting the same turnaround of fortunes by clinching the Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) deal from the IAF with an upgraded Gripen E.

The Indian defense market has been abuzz with excitement about the impending tender for 114 MRFA for the IAF, whose fighter jet squadron strength is fast plummeting. The MRFA deal takes it forward from where the previously conceived Medium Multi Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) left after being scrapped in 2015.

The MMRCA deal was in process for nearly 15 years before the Indian government scrapped it and purchased 36 Rafales directly from the French government.

The French omni role fighter jet Rafale struggled to find a buyer for a long time. Apart from the measly order from Egypt and Qatar, Rafale’s order book had nothing to boast about.

Rafale, which means “gust of wind” in French, failed to win contracts from Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Kuwait, Singapore, and Switzerland. Its high price tag has been a significant deciding factor against it.

The Indian branch of the Swedish subsidiary SAAB, which manufactures single-engine Gripen fighter jets, has been in the ring since the IAF expressed interest in importing 114 fighter jets. Last week, it publicly offered its upgraded Gripen-E platform to the IAF in a statement published on its official account on Platform X (previously Twitter).

A post on August 28 said, “Saab will offer 114 state-of-the-art Gripen E fighters as a part of its response to the upcoming IAF RFP. With Gripen E, India will get next-generation combat air capability and world-class availability – ready to face any threat, anytime, anywhere, from any dispersed location.”

But there seems to be a delay, if not a slip, between the proverbial cup and lips. The IAF had floated the RFI in 2018 and got an enthused response from the aircraft maker worldwide for the multi-billion-dollar deal.

The French fighter jets are considered the frontrunner to win the deal, assuming they are already in use. Other aircraft in contention include Boeing’s F-15EX and F/A-18 Block III Super Hornet, Saab’s JAS-39 Gripen, and Lockheed Martin’s F-21.

“Fresh ASQRs (Air Staff Qualitative Requirements) have been created for the MRFA. So, the conclusion that Rafale will emerge the winner is not a foregone conclusion,” a senior Indian Air Force (IAF) official told the EurAsian Times. The formulation of ASQR is the most crucial stage in defense acquisition as it determines the quality, price, and competition.

The IAF’s ASQR setting capability in MMRCA has even been commented on by the Indian Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG). In 2007, the CAG’s observation was exhaustive and had a lot of technical details instead of using functional parameters. This led to situations where none of the vendors could meet the ASQRs. Further, the ASQRs were repeatedly changed during the procurement process.

“The MMRCA competition was a thoroughly conducted process. It took us years to vet every contender. For MRFA, which is just a different name for the contract, I can only expect the ‘Make in India’ could be the deciding factor,” Air Marshal (retd) M. Matheswaran told the EurAsian Times.

He was the former Deputy Chief of Integrated Defense Staff (DCIDS- Policy, Plans, and Force Development) at Integrated Defense Service (the Tri-Services Command) and was the Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO – Deputy C-in-C) of the Eastern Air Command. He worked on the MMRCA deal before it was scrapped.

#### Advantage Gripen-E

Gripen E is the most modern fighter in the competition, and together with its weaponry, including the Meteor Beyond Visual Range missile, Gripen E will give the IAF an edge against its adversaries. The latest high-performance sensors such as AESA radar,IRST

system, advanced datalinks, and AI-enabled decision support give the pilot superior situational awareness and ability to see first-act first.

The EurAsian Times had previously reported that while the Gripen-E is very appealing in terms of its advanced electronic warfare capability, integration of strong missiles, reduced-radar cross-section, and low operating cost, the jet still seems to be losing out to its competitors on two rather important fronts – political clout and economic backing.

The officials in the know of the process do not concur with the conclusion that Rafale will emerge victorious. “Other aircraft have upgraded suitably to meet IAF’s requirements, Gripen-E definitely, plus F-15E and F-21,” the official opined.

Gripen E can carry nine missiles and 16 bombs, as well as a large suite of other weapons and payloads. Along with it, the aircraft design enables easy integration of new weapon systems and stores for all missions, from air-to-air missiles to reconnaissance and heavy air-to-ground armament.

‘Make In India’ Going To Break MMRCA 2.0?

The MMRCA seems to be jinxed. The IAF had proposed in August 2000 to acquire 126 Mirage 2000 II aircraft. The proposal was discarded in 2004, and in 2007, a decision was taken to acquire 126 aircraft under MMRCA. It was later scrapped, and the IAF bought 36 Rafale aircraft through an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) with the French government.

The IAF is in the process of making a case for the purchase of the fighter jets and awaits the government’s Acceptance of Necessity (AoN). The key element experts in the MRFA touted as MMRCA 2.0, will be the Make in India component that the Indian government has been pushing hard for.

The IAF, which presently has 31 squadron strengths against the sanctioned strength of 42, has been awaiting the government’s nod for a long time. Air Marshal Narmadeshwar Tiwari, the then deputy chief of the IAF, told journalists during Aero India that the AoN is expected from the government in the next three to four months.

The green light still eludes the IAF, which needs to move swiftly and arrest its dwindling fighter squadrons by inducting 500 fighter jets. To toe the “Make in India” line of the Indian Government, the IAF preceded its proposal for 114 MRFA by expressing a desire to order 90 more Light Combat Aircraft Mk1.

“It is going to take at least 6 to 8 years after the government’s AoN. The IAF’s requirement is urgent,” the IAF official added.

Tejas-Singapore

The Indian Air Force Tejas performs at the opening ceremony of the Singapore Air Show on February 15, 2022.

Another official in the know of the things told the EurAsian Times: “The IAF needs a lot of aircraft to be recognized as a deterrence to the PLAAF (the People Liberation Army Air Force). However, they (the IAF) have not been able to convince the Indian government that the imported aircraft are required in such large numbers.”

“The whole process up to aircraft delivery will take 6 to 7 years. By then, Tejas Mk-2 may also be ready for induction. That may be the reason for the government’s indecision,” the official offered.

“F-21, F-15E, Gripen-E, Su-35 could all be contenders. But, first, the government has to agree to import fighter aircraft in the presence of LCA Mk-2 and Mk-1A,” added the official.

LCA Mk-2 is going to enhance range and endurance. The Mk-2 is 1,350mm longer, featuring canards, and can carry a payload of 6,500 kg compared to the 3,500 kilograms that LCA can carry. LCA Mk-2 will be powered by the General Electric F414-INS6 engine (earlier LCA variants used the F404).

The LCA Mk2 is expected to have a maximum speed of 1.8 Mach and a service ceiling of 50,000 feet. Heavy weapons of the class of SCALP, Crystal Maze, and Spice-2000 will also be integrated into the Mk-2.

The IAF is expected to order over 200 LCA Mk-2 fighters. <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/hot-favorite-to-clinch-indias-mrfa-deal-iaf-officials-speak-on-aircraft/>

## **STATES NEWS ITEMS**

### **9. Sundargarh District Mineral Foundation in spot over ‘excessive pay packages’ (*newindianexpress.com*) September 03, 2023**

ROURKELA: The Sundargarh District Mineral Foundation (DMF) has found itself embroiled in a fresh controversy, with allegations of irregularities and lack of transparency in its appointments coming to the fore.

Birmitrapur MLA and an ex-officio trustee member of the DMF’s trust board Shankar Oram accused DMF authorities of hiding information regarding the substantial pay packages offered to contractual employees.

“The recruitment of these contractual employees, including expert consultants, was done without consulting or obtaining approval from trustee members,” he alleged.

Oram revealed that during a board meeting on Thursday convened by Sundargarh collector and DMF chairperson and managing trustee Parag Harshad Gavli, when he and Rajgangpur MLA and trustee member, CS Rajen Ekka, inquired about the pay packages and appointment details for contractual employees, the collector evaded the questions, stating that the recruitment was carried out by an agency following norms.

Oram said the previous team of approximately 15 contractual employees had been replaced by a new team of about seven including expert consultants, with a combined monthly pay package of around Rs 50 lakh, which if correct, is excessive. “It has become a recurring practice for DMF authorities to make decisions without providing prior information to four MLAs representing mining-affected constituencies and the Member of Parliament for Sundargarh Lok Sabha,” Oram asserted.

However, Sundargarh MLA and trustee member, Kusum Tete said both the previous and current collectors had recruited contractual employees through third parties, and she was unaware of whether approval from trustee members of the DMF board was required for such appointments. She explained that, in any case, they were not provided with information about the financial aspects of these appointments.

Meanwhile, Sundargarh Lok Sabha member and former Union Minister, Jual Oram, stated that the DMF recently implemented a significant change by directly allocating funds to line departments for project implementation. He expressed concerns about past irregularities and has officially requested the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) to conduct a special audit of the Sundargarh DMF.

The DMF board of trustees

19 ex-officio members, including one MP, four MLAs, one zilla parishad Member, and 13 government officers Board includes three members elected from the Panchayati raj institutions in Koida and Hemgir blocks Specific roles, responsibilities and powers of the ex-officio trustee members are not readily available. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2023/sep/03/sundargarhdistrict-mineral-foundationin-spot-over-excessive-pay-packages-2611279.html>

#### **10. Kendrapara coast remains vulnerable (*orissapost.com*)** September 04, 2023

Kendrapara: In a bid to protect the coastlines and strengthen the saline embankments, the state Water Resources department signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) August 10 last year. A year has since passed but the state government is yet to take up any work on the project especially in Kendrapara district which has a long coastline.

The MoU aimed at the creation of climate change-resistant coastline and protection of saline embankments by 2026 was signed by Engineer-In-Chief Bijay Kumar Mishra and NIOT Director GA Ramdas in the presence of state Water Resources Minister Tukuni Sahu. The district which has a 744.37- km long saline coastline stretching from Dhamra sea mouth to Batighar is prone to natural calamities like floods, cyclonic storms and tsunami. There is an urgent need to protect the coastline which divides the hinterland from the sea. Water from the sea and rivers enter into as many as 455 villages in the district during natural calamities as the coastline is lying unprotected.

The Union Ministry of Earth Sciences has been sanctioning funds for the protection of coastlines. Moreover, an environmental protection law was formulated in 1986 for the protection of the environment in the area. The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) has also been identified thrice in 1991, 2011, and 2019 and notifications have been issued in this regard.

However, despite all the measures in place, the coastlines of Kendrapara, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, and Ganjam districts are not secured. The Comptroller and Auditor General in his report from 2015-2020 which was submitted to the President had expressed serious concern over the increasing natural calamities in the district. The

CAG had expressed displeasure that no serious concern is being shown towards the increasing frequency of natural calamities and said in its report that despite funds being spent, benefit is missing.

According to the CAG report, the coastlines have become industrial estates where industries have come up during these years.

Moreover, prawn gheries have mushroomed and human habitats have been spreading which are the other reasons behind the destruction of the coastlines. This has pushed the embankments and coastal environment under threat. The State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) handed over Rs 2.17 crore funds between 2013 and 2015 for the establishment of 19 laboratories to monitor the environment on the coastlines from Paradip to Dhamra. The SPCB is required to collect details on the changing environmental conditions on the coastlines through these laboratories.

However, it is yet to complete the work on these laboratories and consequently lagging behind in monitoring the air and water quality on the coastlines. It was claimed that 228 hectare of mangrove forest cover has been created under Rajnagar Forest Division and Puri Wildlife Division. However, only up to 35 per cent of mangrove forests were found in the area during a probe. Similarly, a geo-synthetic tube wall was constructed at an expense of Rs 33 crore at Pentha Beach in Kendrapara to check soil erosion on the coastline.

However, the wall has failed to serve any purpose as rocks and boulders have washed into the sea after tumbling out of the gabion box. The state government had even spent Rs 4.65 crore for the protection of the geo tube wall in 2018 and an additional `3.28 crore after it caught fire in August, 2019. <https://www.orissapost.com/kendrapara-coast-remains-vulnerable/>

## **11. Uttarakhand HC reserves judgment on CBI inquiry into Corbett tree felling (*hindustantimes.com*) September 02, 2023**

Uttarakhand high court on Friday reserved its judgment on the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry in the case of illegal constructions and felling of 6,000 trees in Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR).

On August 21, the high court in its order had stated that on September 1, the next date of hearing in the case, it would decide whether to refer the case to the CBI.

Abhijay Negi, counsel of petitioner Anu Pant said the division bench of chief justice Vipin Sanghi and justice Alok Kumar Verma heard the matter and reserved the judgment.

The high court is hearing two cases, one filed by Dehradun-based Pant and another in which it had taken suo motu cognisance of the media reports over illegal constructions and felling of trees in Corbett on October 27, 2021.

“I apprised the court that despite five inquiries in the matter, no action has been taken against the senior officials of the forest department under whose very noses illegal constructions and felling of 6,000 trees took place in an area which has the highest

concentration of the tigers in the world. I also informed the court that instead of taking action against the senior officials, many of them were promoted,” counsel Negi said.

Negi said the counsels representing the state government have sought more time, stating that the vigilance inquiry into the Corbett case was in its final stage and as such time should be given till the vigilance concludes its inquiry.

Uttarakhand Vigilance on Wednesday raided a college owned by former forest minister and Congress leader Harak Singh Rawat’s son Tushit Rawat in Dehradun in connection with the Corbett case.

HT had reported last month that Principal Accountant General (Audit) Uttarakhand’s report has found ‘gross financial irregularities’ worth over Rs.78 crore in which payment of over Rs.17 crore was made in CTR, Kalagarh Tiger Reserve (KTR) and Lansdowne Forest Divisions.

On two generators procured by the KTR district forest officer (DFO), the report stated that “one generator was installed at Doon Institute of Medical Science, Dehradun (a private institute run by the son of the then Forest Minister) and at Meerawati Filling Station, village Nepali Farm, Hindrawala, Rishikesh. The division had paid ₹ 15.40 lakh for procurement of the above generators”.

Negi said on January 6, 2023, the high court had also asked the chief secretary to submit all the inquiry reports in the case to the court and inform about the officials responsible for illegal constructions and felling of trees.

He added that the names of some senior officers and the then forest minister Harak Singh Rawat were not mentioned in the affidavit filed by the state government, despite his name figuring prominently in the report of the Supreme Court’s Central Empowered Committee, which has been submitted to the apex court.

In March this year, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) constituted a committee that submitted its report on Monday naming Harak Singh Rawat and eight other officers for various violations in the illegal felling of trees and illegal constructions in CTR.

In October last year, the NGT, while taking suo motu cognisance of a media report on the illegal felling of over 6,000 trees in CTR had constituted a committee to identify the violators and recommend steps for the restoration of the environment there.

On October 27, 2021, the high court while taking suo motu cognisance of media reports, had directed the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MOEFCC), principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF), Uttarakhand, chief wildlife warden Uttarakhand and CTR field director to inspect the Corbett reserve with regard to the allegations and National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) report and submit action taken report to the court.

The matter relates to a petition originally filed by Gaurav Bansal, Supreme Court advocate and wildlife activist. Bansal said that on a petition filed by him Delhi high court regarding illegal constructions, the felling of trees and the construction of

approach roads in CTR, the court on August 23, 2021, had directed NTCA to look into the issues raised in the petition.

Following the court directions, NTCA constituted a committee on September 5, 2021, which inspected CTR between September 26 to September 30 and submitted its report on October 22, 2021. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/dehradun-news/village-head-arrested-for-allegedly-raping-mentally-ill-woman-in-uttarakhand-search-on-for-two-accomplices-101693814431387.html>

## **SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING**

### **12. Off-budget borrowings are unhealthy in nature** (*dailypioneer.com*) September 02, 2023

**The Union Government wants to ‘pre-pay’ the remaining off-budget borrowings of Rs 170,000 crore over a reasonable period of time**

Off-budget borrowings or extra-budgetary resources (EBRs) - as these are called in budget parlance — are those borrowings that are raised by public sector undertakings (PSUs) and other agencies of the government such as Food Corporation of India (FCI), Housing and Urban Development Corporation (Hudco), Power Finance Corporation (PFC), NABARD etc to fund its schemes for which repayment of entire principal and interest is done from the Union Budget. The Centre had EBRs close to Rs 670,000 crore by the end of 2020-21.

If all obligations about such borrowings are met by the Union government then why does it not take these on its balance sheet (BS) instead of riding piggyback on its agencies/PSUs? The reason is by not borrowing itself and hence not reflecting on its BS, it can show a lower fiscal deficit (FD) to the extent of EBRs. This is an unhealthy practice as artificially lowering the FD, breeds complacency regarding efforts needed to maintain fiscal discipline. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India and the 15th Finance Commission had red-flagged the EBRs and had urged the Centre to come clean on these.

In the Budget for 2020-21, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman candidly acknowledged their existence and mentioned these in an annexure. But, mere mention in the budget documents is of no use unless EBRs are reflected in Union’s BS and FD captures all borrowings of the Centre including EBRs. It should also commit not to take recourse to such borrowings in future.

While presenting the revised estimate (RE) for 2020-21 and budget estimate (BE) for 2021-22, Sitharaman did precisely this. Of the Rs 670,000 crore outstanding EBRs as of March 31, 2021, it brought about Rs 500,000 crore into the BS. A big slice of this Rs 427,000 crore was the loans raised by the FCI towards food subsidy arrears from 2016-17 to 2020-21 from the National Small Saving Fund (NSSF). The balance was mainly towards fertilizer subsidy arrears. Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), around 820 million beneficiaries receive food grains, primarily wheat, rice and coarse cereals, at the heavily subsidized price of Rs 2, Rs 3 and Rs 1 per kg, respectively, which is a fraction of the cost of procurement, handling and distribution.

The task is performed by the FCI et al on behalf of the Government, which reimburses the shortfall in realization from sale vis-à-vis the cost to the former as food subsidy.

Pending its receipt, the FCI manages its costs by availing cash credit from a consortium of Banks, short-term loans (up to 90 days), ways and means advance (WMAs), etc. The costs associated with such financing including interest costs and service charges etc are also included in the food subsidy. As a normal practice, the Centre is expected to release all of the subsidy dues by the end of the relevant financial year. But, before 2020-21, this wasn't happening

The Government was invariably keeping a portion of the reimbursement amount due to the FCI pending year after year. The extant method of accounting expenses on a cash basis, i.e., when actual payments are made, enabled it to do this. This forced the FCI to borrow the "unpaid amount" from the NSSF - an undesirable and unconscionable practice. Small savings need to be deployed in avenues that generate returns, not for meeting revenue expenses. Since 2016-17, when the FCI started borrowing from the NSSF, as of March 31, 2020, it owed a staggering Rs 300,000 crore to the Fund.

Together with Rs 127,000 crore borrowed during 2020-21, this went up to Rs 427,000 crore. At the year's end, this entire amount was transferred to the books of the Centre and fully paid from the appropriation made in the RE. During 2021-22, FCI raised around Rs 61,000 crore from the banks which was paid by the Centre at the year's end.

During 2022-23, initially, the FCI had intended to raise around Rs 87,500 crore from the banks which was eventually scaled down to Rs 55,000 crore. The Centre extinguished this liability at the year's end. Unlike in the past (before 2020-21), there wasn't any need for the FCI to carry on with the load on its books. But, things could be different during the current year.

During 2023-24, as per the government's assessment, the FCI may have to borrow a whopping Rs.145,000 crore to meet its working capital requirements. This is to be expected as this year's allocation for food subsidy at Rs 197,000 crore is Rs 90,000 crore less than the RE for 2022-23 at Rs 287,000 crore. While, the cut may be due to the discontinuation of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana or PMGKAY (under it, free food was supplied to all the 820 million beneficiaries under NFSA) from January 1, 2023, two other decisions increase the subsidy requirement.

First, from January 1, 2023, the government merged the free part of PMGKAY with the regular food security scheme under NFSA, which meant that instead of Rs 2, Rs 3 and Rs 1 per kg for wheat, rice and coarse cereals beneficiaries were paying earlier, now they pay 'nil'. Second, this free food scheme (albeit under NFSA) which was to cease on December 31, 2023, will now continue till June 30, 2024, thus leading to higher payments during the last three months i.e. January 1-March 31, 2024 of the current FY.

Since fiscal calculations have been made with BE of Rs 197,000 crore against a much higher likely actual, the government won't be able to release all subsidy dues of FCI. This could lead to a repeat of what happened before 2020-21.

In fertilizers, before 2020-21, a large chunk of subsidy payments to manufacturers and importers - being the excess of the cost of supply over the low price they are asked by

the Centre to sell to farmers - were kept pending. During 2020-21, in the RE it gave Rs 67,000 crore to clear all the arrears from previous years. In the succeeding two years, it paid the entire subsidy dues from the budget. However, the scenario during 2023-24 could be different.

For the current year, BE for fertilizer subsidy is Rs 175,000 crore which is Rs 80,000 crore less than RE for 2022-23 at Rs 255,000 crore. Even though international prices of fertilizers and raw materials used in their production are significantly lower than last year, we have to keep our fingers crossed. This is all the more because Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare and Chemicals and Fertilizers Mansukh Mandaviya has indicated that around Rs 46,000 crore more would be needed over and above the BE.

The impending excesses in food and fertilizer subsidy payments from the BE could lead to slippages in the FD target. But, the government doesn't want that to happen. So, we could see a return of EBRs. As for the intent of the government to clear the remaining EBRs of Rs 170,000 crore (these are mainly the bonds issued by Hudco, Nabard etc. to raise funds for its projects for irrigation, housing etc.), this would also lead to further slippage in FD. So, the talk of extinguishing remaining EBRs is plain rhetoric. <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2023/columnists/off-budget-borrowings-are-unhealthy-in-nature.html>

### **13. Seven years on, mission to clean the Ganga remains a work in progress (*thehindu.com*) September 01, 2023**

**STPs set up to treat only 20% of sewage spewing into Ganga; NMCG hopes to increase this to 33% by 2024, 60% by 2026; Centre says it will only build capacity for 7,000 MLD; States must set up the rest**

In the seven years since the government unveiled its ambitious ₹20,000 crore National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), it has installed treatment plants capable of treating just 20% of the sewage estimated to be generated in the five major States that lie along the river. This is expected to increase to about 33% by 2024; and according to the latest projections by senior officials in the NMCG, treatment plants will be capable of treating 60% of sewage by December 2026.

These calculations are premised on sewage to the tune of 11,765 million litres per day (MLD) being generated in the five States – Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal – through which the river courses. This figure derives from a report submitted to the National Green Tribunal earlier this year. However, the NMCG plans on setting up sewage treatment plants (STPs) capable of treating about 7,000 MLD of sewage by 2026; States are expected to set up the remaining capacity, both on their own, and drawing on separate initiatives by other arms of the Union government.

“The main objective of the Namami Ganga mission is to ensure that no untreated sewage flows into the river. The estimate of 11,765 MLD is dynamic and also includes sewage that is generated within the State, but which doesn't necessarily flow into the river. It also isn't exact and is a projection based on expected population trends,” NMCG director general G. Asok Kumar told The Hindu. “Other States are also working on their own in setting up plants and we work with them. By our projections, if we are

able to set up capacity worth 7,000 MLD, it should suffice, for now, to ensure no untreated sewage flows in the main stem of the river.”

### **Picking up pace**

Projects to set up STPs and sewerage networks are at the heart of the Namami Ganga mission, and account for about 80% of the overall project outlay. As of July 2023, STPs capable of treating 2,665 MLD have actually been commissioned, and are now functional. From 2014, when the mission was first announced, to 2021, only 811 MLD of capacity was completed. In the last financial year 2022-23, however, 1,455 MLD capacity was completed.

Several plants took time to be commissioned as there were problems with land acquisition. In many instances, the Detailed Project Reports — which prescribe all the steps necessary to execute a project, and the roles of agencies, Centre, State and the private contractors — needed revision, said Mr. Kumar. “States were under the impression that building treatment plants was entirely the Centre’s responsibility. We had to work to correct that and now most of the sanctioned projects are progressing well,” he added.

So far the maximum number of plants have been set up — or upgraded in the case of older plants — in Uttarakhand (36), followed by Uttar Pradesh (35), and West Bengal (11). Though NMCG is a ₹20,000 crore mission, the government has so far given in-principle approval for projects worth ₹37,396 crore, of which only ₹14,745 crore has been released to States for infrastructure work, as of June 2023.

### **Dolphins thriving**

The river’s water quality is now within “prescribed limits of notified primary bathing water quality,” an NMCG fact-sheet, viewed by The Hindu, notes.

Mr. Kumar said that a conspicuous sign of the improvement in water quality along the Ganga was a rise in the dolphin population — both adult and juvenile — from 2,000 to about 4,000. “We are also seeing the presence of dolphins in new stretches of the river as well as in tributaries [of the Ganga]. Fishermen are also reporting the increased presence of Indian carp [a fish species] that only thrives in clean water. So we have nature’s verdict on river improvement,” he added.

The typical parameters used by the Central Pollution Control Board — such as the levels of dissolved oxygen, biochemical oxygen demand, and faecal coliform — vary widely along various stretches of the river. The NMCG is now working to develop a water quality index, on the lines of the air quality index, to be able to better communicate about river-water quality, he added. <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/seven-years-down-cleaning-the-ganga-remains-a-work-in-progress/article67259400.ece>

## **14. How indigenous LCA Tejas promises a more ‘Indian’ Air Force in the future (*indiatoday.in*) September 2, 2023**

**The IAF is out to significantly boost operational capabilities with additional LCAs, new transport planes and revival of the mid-air refuelling jet programme**

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is on full throttle to significantly boost operational capabilities. The trigger is China. The IAF has played a key role in beefing up India's defences since the Chinese incursions in eastern Ladakh in the summer of 2020. IAF transport aircraft had, then, swiftly ferried over 68,000 additional troops, along with nearly 90 tanks and over 300 infantry combat vehicles, to the Himalayan heights even as its frontline fighters carried out combat sorties to counter the Chinese military.

Now, the IAF is pushing for acquisition of an additional 90-100 indigenous LCA (Light Combat Aircraft) Tejas Mk1A jets, besides ramping up the transport fleet and enhancing capabilities to land at and take off from the newly-built advanced landing grounds along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China. In addition, the world's fourth-largest air force—both in terms of personnel and aircraft—is eyeing mid-air refuelling jets to gain strategic heft by allowing its fighter jets to stay longer in the sky.

Struggling with a depleting combat fleet, which is down to 31 squadrons (against the 42 sanctioned), the IAF does not have any fighter jet programme in the pipeline. Beyond the 36 Rafale jets from France and 83 LCA Tejas Mk1A, which will start being delivered from next February, the IAF has not been able to find any solution for its depleting fleet. Its long-pending requirement of 114 multirole fighter aircraft (MRFA) is also in limbo.

In 2018, the IAF had floated a request for information (RFI) for MRFA to procure 114 foreign fighter jets (nearly six squadrons) worth an estimated \$20 billion (Rs 1.65 lakh crore). But a deal is yet to materialise. In September 2018, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved Rs 6,500 crore in additional funds to fast-track the development of an upgraded version of the LCA—the Mk2. These are supposed to replace 16 IAF squadrons—three of the Mirage 2000, five of MiG-29, six of Jaguar and the two remaining MiG-21 Bison squadrons. This will allow the IAF to scale up to about 40 fighter squadrons by 2040.

However, since the LCA Mk2 is in design stage, the IAF has moved a statement of case before the ministry of defence (MoD) to procure 90-100 LCA Tejas Mk1A jets from the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to replace the existing MiG-21s. "Since the LCA Mk1A is a multirole jet, the IAF moved a proposal to have an additional 90-100 of them from HAL, which is already manufacturing 83 LCA Mk1A for the air force. With this, the LCA Tejas will comprise the biggest fleet of the IAF," said a senior IAF officer in know of the developments.

Over the next 15 years, then, the IAF will have 40 LCA, over 180 LCA Mk1A and at least 120 LCA Mk2. The last order for LCA Mk1A (which is an advanced version of the LCA Tejas) was for 83 aircraft, placed in February 2021, for Rs 48,000 crore.

Efforts are also on to ramp up the IAF transport fleet. Of the 56 C-295 medium-weight transport aircraft ordered by the IAF, 16 will be delivered in flyaway condition and the remaining 40 manufactured in India through a joint venture between Airbus and Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL). The total cost of the project is Rs 21,935 crore. While the 16 aircraft in flyaway condition will be delivered between September 2023 and August 2025, the first Made in India C-295 will roll out of TASL's Vadodara facility in September 2026. The remaining aircraft will be delivered by August 2031.

The C-295 will replace the Avro fleet. The IAF is also seeking an alternative to its ageing AN-32 planes. Last December, an RFI was issued for an aircraft with a load-carrying capacity of 18-27 tonnes. So far, US, South American and European firms have responded. “Three companies have expressed their interest in the programme. The IAF will shortly seek an ‘acceptance of necessity’ from MoD before floating a global tender,” said the IAF officer.

In addition, IAF is looking to revive its mid-air refuelling jet project. It has made multiple unsuccessful attempts since 2007, with the cost of acquisition always being a hurdle. A couple of years ago, the IAF had planned wet lease of Airbus A330 MRTT (multi-role tanker transport) aircraft, but such contracts allow the planes to be used for training and not actual operations. The IAF has been thrilled with the performance of Airbus mid-air refuelling planes. A330 MRTTs of the air forces of the UAE and France have allowed the Rafales purchased by the IAF to fly non-stop (almost 7,000 km) from France to India.

“While the wet lease option is still under consideration, the IAF is reviving its programme. An RFI to procure six mid-air refuelling aircraft will be floated soon,” said another IAF officer. At present, the IAF operates a fleet of six Russian Ilyushin-78 refuelling tankers, but these are facing service issues. Mid-air refuellers are seen as a sort of alternative to the depleting combat strength of the air force as they allow the existing fleet to remain in operation for a longer duration. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/how-indigenous-lca-tejas-promises-a-more-indian-air-force-in-the-future-2430127-2023-09-02>

## **15. What Government Expenditure Tells Us about Official Attitudes towards Women’s Safety (*thewire.in*) September 4, 2023**

Amidst the whole range of gender disparities in India – starting from survival after conception and birth inequality, unequal access to resources, unequal facilities, and so on – the physical victimisation of women is a problem that needs urgent attention. While comprehensive social reform which ensures access to education and healthcare, equal livelihood opportunities and equal wages is required to arrest the ever-rising incidence of violence against women, a well-thought-out prevention, protection and empowerment mechanism should also be in place to stop such incidents. The political will of the government is of utmost importance in this regard.

In the past decade, there have been a couple of government interventions aimed at preventing violence against women. It is instructive to analyse how these schemes have been prioritised by the current dispensation.

In 2013-14, the Union government set up a non-lapsable corpus ‘Nirbhaya’ for special police helplines, safety in transportation, etc.

In 2013-14, Rs 1,000 crore was allocated for the ‘Nirbhaya’ fund, which was then reduced to Rs 550 crore in 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20. It was further reduced to around Rs 500 crore in 2021-22 and 2022-23.

In addition, utilisation of the ‘Nirbhaya’ fund is also very poor. As on April 28, 2023, around Rs 12,008.5 crore has been appraised under the ‘Nirbhaya’ project, of which

only Rs 4,923 crore has been released and Rs 2,521 crore has been utilised (which is roughly around 21% of the appraised amount and 51% of the released amount).

The Union government spent Rs 160 crore on another important scheme, ‘One Stop Centre’, in 2020-21. The scheme, initially under the ‘Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women’, is now subsumed, with many other pre-existing and new schemes, under a new programme, ‘Sambal’ of ‘Mission Shakti’, which is why it no longer is possible to find out how much was allocated for the scheme separately.

‘Sambal’ subsumes ‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’, ‘One Stop Centre’, ‘Nari Adalat’, ‘Mahila Police Volunteer’, and ‘Women’s Helpline’. Of the total allocated amount of Rs 587 crore for Sambal in 2021-22, Rs 183 crore, or roughly around 31%, has been used in that particular year. As a result, the allocation for the scheme was reduced to Rs 562 crore in subsequent years.

Clearly, these programmes have not received adequate importance in terms of budgetary allocations. Additionally, the underutilisation of the funds was followed by even lower allocations in subsequent years.

Almost every day we get to hear a new story of violence against women: the viral video of sexual violence and assault in Manipur; a Delhi University student murdered with an iron rod for refusing marriage; a 17-year-old girl killed in West Bengal after being sexually assaulted, apparently while she was returning from school. Seven women wrestlers accused the Wrestling Federation of India chief and Bharatiya Janata Party MP of sexual harassment; a school teacher sexually harassed a minor student in Tamil Nadu; a man assaulted a minor while on conditional bail, after being arrested for another sexual assault case in Andhra Pradesh; trespassers barged into a Delhi University women’s college and harassed students.

The National Family Health Survey 2019 -21 shows a rise in sexual abuse in many states. According to the latest report of the National Crime Record Bureau, the rate of crime against women per lakh population, quite disturbingly, increased to 64.5 in 2021, from 56.5 in 2020. The number of female victims of ‘murder with rape/gang rape’ was 293 in 2021 in India.

Programmes like ‘Nirbhaya’ and ‘Sambal’ have the potential to improve women’s safety. However, updating a fully functional safety mechanism with enhanced outreach services is the need of the hour. It is high time that the state starts recognising its past mistakes and takes necessary remedial actions. We look forward to seeing these issues dealt with care in the coming days. <https://thewire.in/women/what-government-expenditure-tells-us-about-official-attitudes-towards-womens-safety>

## **16. One nation, one election has several merits, but it needs to be debated at length (*financialexpress.com*) September 2, 2023**

**Simultaneous polls would substantially cut the operational, logistical, administrative, and other costs.**

The announcement of the Ram Nath Kovind committee which would examine the feasibility of simultaneous parliamentary and state assembly elections in the country—

popularly phrased as ‘one nation, one election—underscores the Narendra Modi-led government’s seriousness of intent on the matter. Modi had himself endorsed this after his party won the general elections in 2019. The rationale for simultaneous elections in India is indeed a compelling one. The costs incurred by the Election Commission of India in conducting polls multiple times a year are staggering. The 2019 general elections alone set the exchequer back by Rs 10,000-12,000 crore, as per an estimate by the Centre for Media Studies, Delhi, vis-a-vis Rs 3,426 crore in 2014.

Simultaneous polls would substantially cut the operational, logistical, administrative, and other costs. This will also bring down the election spending of political parties that are often instrumental in helping candidates breach the cap on poll expenditure. The domino effect of this on black money is easy to imagine. It will also likely overcome the problem of voter fatigue and make voter turnout more meaningful—casting multiple ballots at one go would reduce the cost and time expenses of the voter in exercising her electoral rights for choosing representatives across levels of the legislature.

There are clear benefits for governance also. The Model Code of Conduct being in effect for the state and general elections means developmental work is stalled in some state or the other at different points of time in the year. It can be argued that it doesn’t apply to existing schemes and instead targets only such announcements that are likely to operate as sops to the voters, but the fact is the embargo has its own policy paralysis effect.

However, it’s also a fact that there is many a slip between what is ideal and what is implementable. To start with, simultaneous elections will need an amendment of the Constitution, since fixing a starting date would automatically mean that the terms of state and UT assemblies either need to be extended or shortened. It will also need amendments to the Representation of the Peoples Act 1951 and the Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies. Then, it will need to be ratified by at least 50% of the state/UT Assemblies, as the Law Commission of India recommended in its 2018 report on the feasibility of simultaneous elections.

Also, the impact on decentralisation and federalism—the focus of the opposition to the idea—need to be examined more thoroughly. There is a need to ensure that local issues don’t get sidelined by the dominance of the narrative at the national level. The process also needs to uphold the strength of India’s representative democracy. To illustrate, the Law Commission noted in its 2018 report that a no-confidence motion could lead to the fall of Lok Sabha/state assembly before its term ends. It recommended a constructive no-confidence vote, where the government is only removed if an alternative government can be established. However, this itself defeats the premise of a no-confidence motion which aims to establish the inability of a government to render its functions in the desired manner. The short point is that the path to ‘one nation, one election’ is quite challenging. The government must not rush into it and hold extensive discussions with stakeholders before taking such a crucial decision. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/compelling-idea-one-nation-one-election-has-several-merits-but-it-needs-to-be-debated-at-length/3230488/>

**17. ‘Smart Cities’ in Maharashtra use 94% of allocated funds**  
(*thehindubusinessline.com*) September 04, 2023

Among the ongoing initiatives in Maharashtra’s Smart Cities, there are a total of 318 projects in progress of which 245 projects (77 per cent) have already been completed

Out of the total ₹6,143.60 crore allocated for eight Smart Cities in Maharashtra, ₹5,760.55 crore (94%) have been utilised for various projects.

Among the ongoing initiatives in Maharashtra’s Smart Cities, there are a total of 318 projects in progress of which 245 projects (77 per cent) have already been completed. The remaining 73 projects are at various stages of implementation, according to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs data.

These projects encompass 24x7 water supply, smart metering, laying of utility ducts, construction of e-toilets, deployment of robotic scavengers, lake rejuvenation, etc. Aurangabad, Kalyan-Dombivali, Nagpur, Nashik, Pimpri-Chinchwad, Pune, Solapur, and Thane were chosen to be developed as Smart Cities under the Union government’s scheme.

The Smart Cities Mission was initiated by the Government of India on June 25, 2015. Through four competitive rounds held from January 2016 to June 2018, a total of 100 Smart Cities were selected for development. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/real-estate/smart-cities-in-maharashtra-use-94-of-allocated-funds/article67269207.ece>