

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

### **1. Aadhaar data bust raises fresh safety and privacy concerns** (*newindianexpress.com*) 03 November 2023

**An individual's privacy is hugely compromised with the government holding terabytes of citizens' data in Aadhaar-type caches.**

A US-based cyber security firm, Resecurity, has revealed that as many as 815 million Indians' data including Aadhaar card and passport details have been compromised and are on sale on the dark web.

The hackers, who have also broken into the Indian Council of Medical Research database, are offering Aadhaar and passport data as a package to buyers for \$80,000, Resecurity claimed. The custodian of data for millions of Aadhaar card users, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), has routinely denied any breach of privacy. But this may not stand scrutiny as the Comptroller and Auditor General's investigation in April 2022 exposed that UIDAI had not sufficiently safeguarded their data vaults; and that the leaks were largely emanating from client vendors over whom very little oversight had been exercised.

Aadhaar, one of the world's single largest caches of data about citizenship details, leaks like a sieve. In January 2018, despite all of UIDAI's claims that "Aadhaar data is fully safe and secure", a newspaper team purchased a service over WhatsApp for as little as Rs 500 to get access to a billion Aadhaar numbers. Many of these leaks were traced back to the large army of village-level operatives involved in sourcing and storing grassroots data. Nothing was learnt from the exposé. Instead of the ostrich-like stance the government adopts in the face of such disclosures, the first step to plugging the leaks is to acknowledge it is happening on a massive scale.

An individual's privacy is hugely compromised with the government holding terabytes of citizens' data in Aadhaar-type caches. But the violation of individual rights takes a major step up if the government itself becomes part of the snooping. The Pegasus affair—the suspected planting of eavesdropping malware purchased by the state from an Israeli company—remains sub-judice and unresolved. As the world goes increasingly digital, breaking into bank accounts, pilfering corporate information and skimming off people's identities have ballooned into a monster. Protection for the individual under the Information Technology Act of 2000 is thin. The government needs to step up its intervention against cybercrime and ensure individual liberty is not compromised by the snooping activity of its various arms.  
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/editorials/2023/nov/03/aadhaar-data-bust-raises-fresh-safety-and-privacy-concerns-2629475.html>

### **2. Safety at stake** (*dtnext.in*) 3 Nov 2023

**The report highlights that funding for the Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK) had fallen by a massive 79%.**

Last week, two passenger trains collided in Vizianagaram district of Andhra Pradesh, which left 14 people dead and 50 injured. The East Coast Railway said a human error

could have resulted in the mishap, explaining that overshooting of the signal by the Visakhapatnam-Rayagada passenger train might have led to the accident. Neither of the two trains had the railway's anti-collision safety system 'Kavach' installed. The episode prompted CM Jagan Mohan Reddy to seek an audit of all rail lines in the country.

The incident comes close on the heels of the Balasore train accident in June, when three trains collided in Odisha and led to the loss of 296 lives and around 1,200 injuries. The Vizianagaram incident is the third train accident since Balasore. On October 11, five passengers died and 30 were injured when the Delhi Kamakhya North East Express derailed in Buxar district of Bihar. It is troubling to note that about 55 percent of 292 train mishaps that took place between 2017-18 and 2021-22 were caused by an error of judgement on part of the staff, per data released by the Commissioner of Railway Safety. The frequent accidents point to glaring inadequacies in our railway system, compounded by government apathy.

Indian trains run on mixed tracks, i.e. both passenger as well as goods trains use the same track. Owing to this, the lines are over-utilised. The time taken to carry out routine maintenance activity has also been depleting year after year. The government has made staggering investments towards modernisation of railways, with nearly \$30 billion being pumped into semi-high-speed trains like the Vande Bharat, modern coaches and locomotives, as well as redeveloping the stations. Such projects have led to a surge in rail travel and necessitated improvements in track maintenance and enhanced signalling systems.

However, a report last year by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) found that spending on basic railways maintenance had fallen since 2017, leading to serious lapses in safety. Between 2017- 2021, there was a shortfall of 2,384 hours in the time given to maintenance of trains. The report highlights that funding for the Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK) had fallen by a massive 79%. There was also a decline in priority expenditure as a sum of Rs 13,652 cr allocated in 2017-18 came down to Rs 11,655 cr in 2019-20. On the contrary, expenditure on non priority areas had increased during these years.

Apart from this, around 4,500 km of tracks also need to be renewed annually. But, allotment of funds towards track renewal also declined in consecutive years. There was also a 63% shortage in track renewal in some zones, and the failure to renew these tracks contributed a substantial 26% to derailments. There is also the question of engaging trained manpower to keep the railways in good stead. Data presented in the Rajya Sabha in January revealed that there were 3.12 lakh nongazetted railway posts vacant in India.

Among them, 14,815 vacancies were said to be in the signal and telecommunications department, whereas 62,264 were in the traffic and transportation department. There is a need for the government and the railways to go back to the drawing board on the matter of investing in rail safety, and in the right mix of people. Failure to do so could entail disastrous consequences for passengers and the goodwill of the Indian railways in the years to come. <https://www.dtnext.in/edit/editorial-safety-at-stake-745799?infinitescroll=1>

### **3. Red flags that Railways ignores: Staff crunch, long hours, safety gaps** (*thefederal.com*) 2 Nov 2023

On April 19, two goods trains collided with each other near the Singhpur railway station in Madhya Pradesh, killing a loco driver and injuring his two associates.

On June 2, threetrains crashed into each other at Odisha's Balasore, killing over 290 people.

On June 26, a goods train rammed an empty freight train parked at Ondagram station in West Bengal's Bankura district.

On October 29, two passenger trains collided in Andhra Pradesh, killing at least 13 people.

Railway investigations into these four accidents revealed that all, barring the Odisha tragedy, were caused due to signal passing at danger (SPAD).

Following the latest crash, the railway authorities directed all the zonal headquarters to conduct a two-week safety drive from October 31, emphasising on adherence to safety norms by loco pilots and assistant loco pilots.

#### Checking ABS a must

Loco inspectors are asked to conduct random inspection during the course of the drive to see how the crew regulate the train in an automatic block signalling (ABS) system, which consists of a series of signals that divide a railway line into a series of sections, called blocks. The system controls the movement of trains between the blocks, sending automatic signals to pilots.

This system does not go on 'off' mode unless the line is clear not only up to the next stop signal but also for an adequate distance beyond it. Unless directed otherwise by special instructions, this distance shall not be less than 120 meters, if the next stop signal in advance is an automatic signal, or 180 meters, if the next stop signal in advance is a manual stop signal or semi-automatic signal.

If the signal system is in "on" mode, the driver should bring the train to a halt and wait there for one minute if it is daytime or two minutes at night. He then can proceed with great caution at a speed not exceeding 15 km per hour even if the visibility is good.

The findings of preliminary investigation into Sunday's accident concluded that the Rayagada passenger train (08504) hit the Visakhapatnam Palasa passenger train (08532) from the rear as the crew of the former ignored the signal alert. The train was running at a speed of over 40 kmph though the ABS system was in "on" mode, railway sources privy to the investigation told The Federal.

The error on the part of loco crew of the Rayagada Passenger – both of them were killed in the collision – ostensibly prompted the Railway Board to order a drive to inspect how loco crews obey safety protocols. These include calling out "all signals loudly and clearly" to each other (among loco pilot and assistant loco pilot) and keeping mobile phones at bay while driving the train.

The deeper issues

These post-accident safety drives are largely seen as knee-jerk reactions as the Railway Board continues to ignore safety issues arising out of manpower shortage flagged by various railway unions, case studies, reports of commissioner of railway safety and inter-departmental inquiry reports.

“There are around 30,000 vacancies of loco pilots (LP) and assistant loco pilots (ALP) in all zones of railways. Because of the manpower shortage, the loco crews are forced to undergo long duty hours without proper rest, making them fatigued and vulnerable to errors,” the working president of the All India Loco Running Staff Association (AILRSA), NB Dutta, told The Federal.

The fatigue-induced “micro sleep” often leads to SPAD, identified as one of the prime causes of accidents on Indian rail tracks.

Inquiries into the April 19 and June 26 accidents hinted that “microsleep” of loco crew caused the collisions. It was later found that in case of the Singpur accident, both the LP and ALP had crossed 14/15 hours of duty at a stretch when the accident occurred in the morning.

### **Long duty hours**

An analysis of duty hours of the LP of the goods train involved in the June 26 accident at Ondagram station revealed that out of 18 trips conducted within a span of 30 days, 14 trips were at night, 10 trips exceeded 10 hours and eight trips exceeded 12 hours.

In the case of the ALP of the goods train, 22 trips were made within 30 days. Of these, 17 were at night, 13 trips were more than 10 hours and eight trips were more than 12 hours. In addition, he was forced to work continuously for more than 19 hours on June 6 and more than 16 hours on June 23.

An agreement signed between the Railway Board and the pilots’ union AILRSA in 1973 had stated that running staff will not be required to work longer than 10 hours at a stretch, and that this number would be reduced by half an hour every year until the running time reached a maximum of eight hours.

This was never followed. The Railway Board further twisted the norm, notifying last month that train drivers' maximum working hours should not exceed 12 hours, except in case of operational exigencies.

More than 15 per cent of the loco pilots are forced to overshoot their duty hours in all the railway divisions because all these divisions on an average have vacancies of similar percentage, if not more, of train drivers, said railway sources.

### **Mass vacancies**

The Commissioner of Railway Safety’s (CRS) inquiry report into the Singpur incident revealed that out of the sanctioned posts of 10,143 crew in the South East Central Railway (SECR) zone in April, only 8,417 were on roll. “This 17 per cent vacancy is indicative of the all India position,” Dutta said.

When a Parliamentary Standing Committee on railway questioned the Railway Board chairman as to how it manages rail operation with that many vacancies in important safety category for long time, he replied that it was managed with leave reserve, implying that loco crews are not given sufficient leave in addition to denial of sufficient rest between two duty slots.

“There is no creation of new posts of loco pilots commensurate with the number of locomotives and increased train services,” he added.

The manpower shortage in the railways is not limited to loco pilots. As per the Railway Ministry’s own statistics, compiled till August 4, there are vacancies of 2,50,965 posts across all groups of posts.

This huge number of vacancies are left even after a total of 1,28,349 candidates have been empanelled to Group 'C' posts (excluding Level-1) and a total of 1,47,280 candidates have been empanelled to Level-1 posts as on June 30. This shortfall hampers proper maintenance and operation of safety equipment and tracks.

#### **Safety 'compromised' in fund allocation**

The railways are further compromising the safety aspects even in allocation of funds, The Federal has learnt.

A national rail safety fund or Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh was created with a corpus of ₹1 lakh-crore to be allotted in five years. The railways were to invest ₹5,000 crore from its own source and another ₹15 crore was to be provided from the government’s general budgetary support every year for five years.

This ₹20,000-crore target has not been met in any year since the inception of the fund in 2017, affecting safety works.

Citing a CAG report, the Congress had alleged earlier this year that the safety fund was misused to buy foot massagers, crockery, electrical appliances, furniture, winter jackets, computers and escalators, and to develop gardens, build toilets, pay salaries and bonuses and erect a flag. <https://thefederal.com/category/exclusive/exclusive-modi-govts-3-point-agenda-ahead-of-2024-elections-98277?infinitemscroll=1>

#### **4. तमाम उपायों के बाद भी नहीं रुक रहे ट्रेन हादसे, वादे-इरादों में क्या है कोई कमी? (abplive.com) 02 Nov 2023**

पिछले एक सप्ताह में दो ऐसे हादसे हुए हैं जिसके कारण लोगों को ट्रेन से सफर करना असुरक्षित लगने लगा है. दरअसल 29 अक्टूबर यानी रविवार को आंध्र प्रदेश के विजयनगरम जिले में दो पैसेंजर ट्रेनों में टक्कर हुई और इस हादसे में 14 लोगों की जान चली गई, वहीं 50 यात्री घायल हो गए. इस दुर्घटना के दो दिन बाद ही यानी 31 अक्टूबर को झारखंड के हजारीबाग जिला में एक बड़ा रेल हादसा हो गया. इस हादसे में 9 लोग घायल हो गए है जबकि 2 लोगों की मौत हो गई है.

इन हादसों के पीछे की वजह ह्यूमन एरर बताया जा रहा है. लेकिन ये पहली बार नहीं है जब देश में ऐसे बड़े ट्रेन हादसे हुए हैं. भारत में रेल हादसों का इतिहास काफी पुराना रहा है. साल 1999 में पश्चिम बंगाल में दो ट्रेनों की टक्कर में 285 लोगों की मौत हुई थी. वहीं साल 2010 में भी इसी

राज्य में 145 लोगों की मौत हुई, जब एक पैसेंजर ट्रेन पटरी से उतरकर एक मालगाड़ी से टकरा गई थी.

हमारे देश में यात्रा करने का सबसे बड़ा नेटवर्क ट्रेन ही है. हमें कही भी जाना हो तो सबसे पहला ख्याल ट्रेन का ही आता है. ऐसे में हर इस तरह रेलगाड़ियों के पटरी से उतरने की घटनाएं न सिर्फ डरावनी है बल्कि ऐसी घटनाएं प्रशासन की नाकामी को भी दर्शाती है.

ऐसे में इस रिपोर्ट में जानते हैं कि लगातार हो रही ट्रेन की घटनाओं को रोकने के लिए केंद्र सरकार की तरफ से अब तक क्या-क्या कदम उठाए जा चुके हैं.

### **पिछले एक दशक में कितने ट्रेन हादसे हो चुके हैं**

आंकड़ों की मानें तो साल 2014 से लेकर अब तक यानी साल 2023 तक रेलवे में 10 ट्रेन हादसे हो चुके हैं जिसमें लगभग 600 लोगों की मौत हुई हो तो वहीं 1300 से ज्यादा लोग घायल भी हुए हैं.

इन 10 रेल हादसों में से 3 एक्सिडेंट तो इसी साल हुए हैं. जिसमें से दो पिछले हफ्ते 29 और 31 अक्टूबर को और एक जून महीने में हुआ था. साल 2023 के जून के महीने में ओडिशा के बालासोर में एक भयंकर ट्रेन हादसा हुआ जो पिछले 15 सालों में हुआ सबसे भयंकर ट्रेन एक्सीडेंट था. जिसमें 291 लोगों की जान चली गई थी और 1000 से ज्यादा लोग घायल हो गए थे.

फिर उससे पहले अगस्त 2017 में उत्तरप्रदेश के मुजफ्फरनगर में कलिंग उत्तकल एक्सप्रेस दुर्घटना हुआ जिसमें 23 लोगों की मौत हुई थी.

नवंबर 2016 में कानपूर के पास इंदौर पटना एक्सप्रेस को दुर्घटना का शिकार होना पड़ा था. जिसमें 150 से ज्यादा लोगों की मौत हुई थी.

मार्च 2015 में जनता एक्सप्रेस पटरी से उतर गई थी. इस हादसे में 34 लोग मारे गए. साल 2012 को कोई कैसे भूल सकता है बीबीसी की एक रिपोर्ट की मानें इस साल 14 रेल हादसे हुए. जिसमें कई लोगों की जान चली गई थी.

साल 2010 के जुलाई महीने में पश्चिम बंगाल में उत्तर बांगा एक्सप्रेस दुर्घटना का शिकार हुई थी और इसी साल के सितंबर महीने में मध्य प्रदेश में ग्वालियर इंटरसिटी एक्सप्रेस का एक्सीडेंट हुआ था जिस रेल हादसे ने भी कई लोगों की जान ले ली थी.

### **लगातार हो रही ट्रेन दुर्घटना के पीछे क्या है कारण**

साल 2022 की एनसीआरबी की रिपोर्ट की मानें तो साल 2020 में हुए ट्रेन हादसे की तुलना में 2021 में 38.2 प्रतिशत की बढ़त हुई है. ट्रेन दुर्घटनाओं के पीछे कई बड़ी वजहें हैं जिसमें सबसे बड़ी वजह जो ज्यादातर दुर्घटनाओं के बाद सुनने को मिलती है वह है ह्यूमन एरर. जिसमें गलत सिग्नल, ज्यादा तेज गति से गाड़ी चलाना, गलतफहमी शामिल है.

इन दुर्घटनाओं की दूसरी बड़ी वजह सिग्नल विफलता (Signal Failures). सिग्नल सिस्टम का काम ट्रेन के दिशा और गति को कंट्रोल करता है इसमें तकनीकी गड़बड़ी, बिजली कटौती और ह्यूमन एरर की वजह से दिक्कत आ सकती है.

वहीं तीसरा कारण बुनियादी ढांचे की खराबी है. वैसे तो पिछले कुछ सालों में ट्रेन के इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर में काफी सुधार देखने को मिला है लेकिन अभी भी इसे और बेहतर बनाने की जरूरत है.

हालांकि कुछ महीने पहले ही रेल मंत्री अश्विनी वैष्णव ने कहा था कि भारत के ज्यादातर रेलवे ट्रैकों को अपग्रेड किया जा रहा है, ताकि उन ट्रैकों पर 100 किलोमीटर प्रति घंटे की रफ्तार वाली ट्रेनें दौड़ाई जा सके. यहां तक की भारत की रेलवे लाइनों के एक महत्वपूर्ण हिस्से को 160 किलोमीटर प्रति घंटे की रफ्तार से चलने वाली गाड़ियों के लायक बनाने का काम भी जारी है. रेल मंत्री अश्विनी वैष्णव ने साल 2022 के मई महीने में एक बयान में ट्रेनों में सुरक्षा कवच लगाने की घोषणा भी की थी.

### **क्या कहती है सरकारी रिपोर्ट**

एक सरकारी रिपोर्ट की मानें तो साल 2019-20 में जितने भी ट्रेन हादसे हुए हैं उसमें से लगभग 70 प्रतिशत दुर्घटनाओं का कारण ट्रेन का पटरी से उतरना रहा है. उससे एक साल पहले यानी 2019-20 में ये आंकड़ा 68 प्रतिशत थे. पटरी से उतरने के अलावा 14 प्रतिशत मामले में ट्रेन में आग लगी थी और 8 फीसदी हादसा टक्कर के कारण हुआ था.

इसके अलावा बीबीसी ने अपने एक रिपोर्ट में 40 रेल दुर्घटनाओं की पड़ताल की थी. इस पड़ताल में 33 पैसेंजर ट्रेनें थीं और 7 मालगाड़ियां. इनमें से 17 ट्रेनें ऐसी थी जो ट्रैक की खराबी, पटरी में टूट-फूट या धंस जाने जैसी गड़बड़ियों के कारण पटरी से उतरी थी. जबकि 9 हादसे रेलगाड़ी की इंजन, कोच या वैगन में खराबी के कारण हुए थे.

### **ट्रेन के पटरी से उतरने की घटनाओं पर CAG ने जताई चिंता**

साल 2022 में CAG यानी कंट्रोलर एंड ऑडिटर जनरल ऑफ इंडिया ने भारतीय ट्रेनों के पटरी से उतरने की घटनाओं को लेकर चिंता जताई थी. उन्होंने यह पता लगाने को कहा था कि रेल मंत्रालय द्वारा ट्रेनों के पटरी से उतरने और ट्रेनों के टकराने जैसी घटनाओं को रोकने के लिए कोई स्पष्ट कदम उठाया है या नहीं.

### **पांच साल में भारत का रेलवे बजट भी जान लीजिए**

वित्त वर्ष 2019-20 - 68,019 करोड़  
वित्त वर्ष 2020-21 - 72,216 करोड़  
वित्त वर्ष 2021-22 - 110,054 करोड़  
वित्त वर्ष 2022-23 - 140,367 करोड़  
वित्त वर्ष 2023-24 - 241, 268 करोड़

### **2022 में पटरियों की मरम्मत पर कुल खर्च भी जान लीजिए**

साल 2022 में ट्रेनों और पटरियों की मरम्मत पर कुल खर्च 1,30,73,935 रुपये किया गया. इसमें से उत्तर रेलवे के ट्रेनों और पटरियों की मरम्मत पर 1,28,69,372 रुपये खर्च किए गए. वहीं दक्षिण मध्य रेलवे के ट्रेनों और पटरियों की मरम्मत में 2,04, 563 रुपये खर्च किए गए.

### **पिछले कुछ सालों में इन दुर्घटनाओं को रोकने के लिए सरकार के कदम**

पिछले कुछ सालों में केंद्र सरकार की तरफ से रेल दुर्घटनाओं पर लगाम लगाने के लिए कई तरह के तकनीकों और अपग्रेडेशन पर काम किया गया है. इस लिस्ट में सबसे पहले आता है प्रौद्योगिकी उन्नयन (Technology Upgradation).सरकार ने ट्रेनों में बीएमबीएस बोगी माउंटेड एयर ब्रेक सिस्टम, कवच, जीपीएस आधारित फॉग पास डिवाइस जैसे कई टेक्नोलॉजी को जोड़ा है. इसके अलावा आधुनिक ट्रैक संरचना ( Modern Track Structure) का निर्माण. इसके अलावा ट्रेनों में अल्ट्रासोनिक दोष का पता लगाने वाले डिवाइस लगाए गए है जिससे ट्रेन में कोई खराबी हो तो उसका पता तुरंत लग जाता है.

### **क्या सिर्फ नए टेक्नोलॉजी को लाने से ही ट्रेन एक्सीडेंट कम हो जाएंगे?**

CAG 2022 की रिपोर्ट जिसका टाइटल डीरेलमेंट ऑफ इंडियन रेलवे था उसमें भी इन सवाल को उठाया गया है. इस रिपोर्ट में बताया गया है कि ट्रैक मैनेजमेंट सिस्टम में वेब बेस्ड एप्लीकेशन और ट्रैक सिस्टम एक्टिविटीज को ऑनलाइन मॉनिटर करने में उतना ऑपरेशनल नहीं था. तो सिर्फ नए टेक से नहीं उन तकनीकों की देखरेख करना भी एक अहम पहलू होता है जो कई बार देखने को नहीं मिलता. <https://www.abplive.com/news/india/andhra-pradesh-pryagraitrain-accidents-why-these-accident-are-not-stopping-despite-all-the-measures-abpp-2527534>

## **STATES NEWS ITEMS**

### **5. Ayushman Yojana turns from benefits to scam (groundreport.in)** 03 Nov 2023

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has flagged The Centre's ambitious Ayushman Yojana in Madhya Pradesh for serious irregularities just before the MP election 2023. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), also known as Ayushman Bharat, was launched to provide a defined benefit cover of Rs 5 lakh per family to 50 crore people, including 10.74 crore poor families from both rural and urban areas.

In addition to increasing access to quality and affordable healthcare and medication, the Union Government states that it will address the unmet needs of the population such as timely treatments, improved health outcomes, patient satisfaction, and increased productivity and efficiency through this scheme.

In August this year, Shivraj Singh Chauhan decided to expand eligibility for this scheme from 1.08 crore Madhya Pradesh families to 40 lakh additional families. Following this decision, the total number of beneficiaries under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme will reach 1.48 crore. Concurrently, officials have verified and issued Ayushman cards for over 23 crore beneficiaries to receive free treatment under the scheme in the country.

#### **MP's Ayushman Yojana Scam**

In the CAG's pan-India audit report, Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of cases of irregularities. The audit discovered that over 1.1 crore was paid to approximately 403 patients who had been declared "dead" in the database. "8,000 patients were shown to be hospitalised at multiple hospitals across the state during the same period", according to the report.



The audit names 24 state hospitals, including a government hospital, where occupancy was much higher than actual bed strength. The audit stated, “The Madhya Pradesh health authority paid the full amount for both claims as against the prescribed rate of 50% payment on the second claim.”

Many suspicious cards and information about the registration of dead people as beneficiaries have also been noticed in Madhya Pradesh.

According to the CAG report, approximately 25 hospitals in Madhya Pradesh have more beds than capacity. This means that these hospitals made claims by admitting more patients. Jawaharlal Nehru Cancer Hospital and Research Centre had 100 beds until March 20, 2023, but it was shown to have 233 patients.

The CAG report states that Madhya Pradesh has the lowest recovery rates from defaulting hospitals. In Madhya Pradesh, authorities have yet to recover up to 96 percent of fraudsters.

### **MP holds most Ayushman Yojana cards**

Under the Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Yojana, Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of Ayushman card holders. This is where the most carelessness can be found.

According to the CAG report, complaint redressal committees for Ayushman were not formed at the district level in Madhya Pradesh. The Ayushman Yojana had an information, education, and communication plan, but it was never implemented. The Ayushman Bharat scheme identifies the beneficiary using Aadhaar, and the person is verified using mandatory Aadhaar-based e-KYC. <https://groundreport.in/mp-election-2023-ayushman-yojana-turns-from-benefits-to-scam/>

## **6. SCM seeks CAG audit into MMC irregularities (*thegoan.net*)** Nov 03, 2023

Goa: The Shadow Council for Margao filed a representation before the Principal Accountant General (CAG, Goa), demanding for a detailed audit into the various financial irregularities at the Margao Municipal Council.

In its representation, the SCM has pointed out that even after exposing the wrongdoings, with evidence, it was amusing to see that there is hardly any scrutiny over the scams so as to pull up those responsible. "We often hear of audit's happening, but we hardly know whether these scams, at the cost of the public exchequer, have ever caught the attention of the auditors", SCM convenor Savio Coutinho stated, adding “upon knowing about the CAG Audit at the MMC, SCM submitted a list of nine issues, calling upon the CAG for the need of a serious review”.

The CAG was also called upon to check the assets of the Council, saying that no periodic Inventory has been ever conducted by the Council. “After a struggle, the SCM got information under RTI, that the Council is in possession of 208 mobile handsets. However the inspection of these 208 handsets was denied. It was requested that the CAG check upon this, and verify the existence of at least the 208 mobile phone sets. Resale of which could surely fetch revenue for the Council, SCM stated.

The SCM further stated that JCB had been hired by the Council for over a year without following Codal formalities. “Extensions after extensions were granted taking undue advantage of a high court matter. Bills were paid on the basis of manipulated timings, which manipulation may be difficult to prove. However if the quantum of handled waste is considered, one is set to wonder whether it was a toy JCB working, or an actual one”, the representation added.

The SCM also revealed that, while the rate agreed includes diesel costs, the Council showed undue generosity of providing diesel to the contractor.

The NGO also alleged that rigged/compromised quotation system has been adopted a couple of months ago, seeking to know how can a work involving payments of over 35 lakhs (1 year) be executed by not inviting quotations.

Saying that Sopo collection contractors over the past several years have defaulted in payment of dues to the Council, Coutinho said the bank guarantees given to the Council by many of the contractors were not encashed after default of payments. “Collectively, over Rs 50 lakhs is still outstanding and receivable from such contractors, as halfhearted efforts are made towards recovery of these dues, the representation stated.

Saying that the government has time and again issued circulars and directions to the Council, calling for the assessment of illegal and unassessed premises for tax and sanitation fees, the SCM lamented that Council very conveniently ignoring these directions.

Pointing out that advertisement fees payable by councillors and political leaders has been pending for recovery, the SCM has hoped that the team deputed to the Margao Municipal Council undertakes a fair exercise through a thorough audit in the interest of the public exchequer. Fixing responsibility through the audit should be the final goal, without which the audit may also end up into being a farce, like before, SCM concluded. <https://www.thegoan.net/goa-news/%EF%BB%BFscm-seeks-cag-audit-into-mmc-irregularities/105522.html>

## **7. Margao citizens seek CAG investigation of MMC’s alleged financial irregularities (*heraldgoa.in*) 03 Nov 2023**

MARGAO: A group of citizen activists from Margao filed a representation before Anitha Balakrishna, the Principal Accountant General (CAG, Goa), demanding a detailed audit into the various financial irregularities at the Margao Municipal Council (MMC).

The Shadow Council of Margao (SCM) outlined their concerns in the representation, emphasising that despite exposing these malpractices with substantial evidence, it appears that there has been little scrutiny of these scandals and no accountability for those responsible. SCM Convenor Savio Coutinho expressed his bewilderment at the lack of attention paid to these matters, which have implications for the public exchequer.

Upon hearing of the CAG Audit at the MMC, SCM submitted a list of nine issues, calling upon the CAG for a serious review.

The citizens alleged that an agency was appointed for door-to-door waste collection, by neither following codal formalities, nor was an agreement or MOU executed between the Council and the agency. “However, over Rs 10 lakh of payments were made to the agency every month in the absence of any MOU or contract. Instead of initiating the process of inviting tenders, illegal and haphazard extensions were given, they added.

“Private agencies were introduced primarily for segregated waste collection, however what eventually reached the Sonsoddo dumpyard was mixed waste, which could not be treated, and went for further remediation, involving additional financial burden to the tune of several crores of rupees. Till date, not a single kilogram of compost has been derived from the so-called segregated waste collected,” alleged Coutinho.

“It may also be pointed out that recyclables collected generate zero revenue for the Council, as the agencies pay their workers half the amount paid by the Council; and their workers are given the freedom to sell the recyclables and earn additional income,” Coutinho added.

SCM also stated that three BS4 Engine trucks were purchased, without following codal formalities. “Margao Municipal Council has lost Rs 37 lakh in this shoddy purchase, knowing well that these BS4 engine trucks would face a ban by the Supreme court,” he added.

In respect to the purchase of two vehicles tagged as ‘bio-rickshaws’, SCM revealed that a post-dated cheque was collected from the service provider, as guarantee. This cheque got dishonoured and till date no action is taken for the recovery of the loss of over Rs eight lakh, the activists pointed out.

“The CAG was also called upon to check upon the assets of the Council, as no periodic inventory is ever conducted by the Council. It was stated that after a great deal of hardships, which included a yearlong struggle before the State Information Commission, SCM got information under RTI, that the Council is in possession of 208 mobile handsets.

However, the inspection of these 208 handsets was denied. It was requested that the CAG check upon this and verify the existence of the 208 mobile phones, as their resale could surely fetch revenue for the Council,” SCM stated. [https://www.heraldgoa.in/Goa/Margao-citizens-seek-CAG-investigation-of-MMC%E2%80%99s-alleged-financial-irregularities/213061#google\\_vignette](https://www.heraldgoa.in/Goa/Margao-citizens-seek-CAG-investigation-of-MMC%E2%80%99s-alleged-financial-irregularities/213061#google_vignette)

## **8. Auditor of Bhubaneswar AG office under CBI scanner, caught red-handed (*kalingatv.com*) 03 Nov 2023**

**An auditor in the Accountant General office situated here in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha is under CBI scanner and has been caught red-handed on Friday.**

Bhubaneswar: An auditor in the Accountant General office situated here in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha is under CBI scanner and has been caught red-handed on Friday.

In a shocking incident an auditor working in the AG office in Bhubaneswar, identified as Santosh Panigrahi has been detained by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on the allegation of demanding and accepting bribe.

It is worth mentioning here that Panigrahi was caught red-handed by the CBI while accepting a bribe of Rs.7500/-, said reliable reports.

Furthermore according to available reports, the Auditor was caught by the CBI in front of the Regional Transport Office (RTO) in Bhubaneswar while accepting the bribe.

It is further alleged that the bribe had been demanded by the Auditor for passing medical bills worth Rs. 75,000/-, said reports. <https://kalingatv.com/state/auditor-of-bhubaneswar-ag-office-under-cbi-scanner-caught-red-handed/>

## **9. Kerala Government admits reeling under financial crunch; Court calls deceiving the people as shameful act (*organiser.org*) 03 Nov 2023**

Kerala Transport Development Finance Corporation Limited (KTDFC). KTDFC is a non-banking financial company fully owned by the Government of Kerala. It has a valid certificate of registration issued by the Reserve Bank of India under section 45-IA of the RBI Act, 1934.

Considering the petitions moved by the investors, including Lakshminath Trade Link Private Limited, Kolkata, against the non-receipt of their money back, Justice Devan Ramachandran observed that this kind of escaping from responsibility, despite giving a guarantee to the investors, is a matter of shame on the GoK's side. Lakshminath Trade Link is supposed to get more than Rs 30 lakh back. GoK maintains that the issue is to be solved by Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) and KTDFC together.

Courted wondered how GoK sheds the responsibility despite the fact that the investments were accepted under GoK guarantee. The court asked if such a situation invites the seizure of GoK's properties. How can the court say that the assets should be sold out and pay the dues? The court asked if GoK stands for the liquidation of KTDFC.

GoK's Under Secretary (Finance) submitted the affidavit on behalf of the government. HC criticised the affidavit. The court asked GoK to submit another affidavit stating that 'they do not have the responsibility to pay back the KTDFC deposits', if they think so.

There were reports in September 2023 that KTDFC was unable to pay Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Kolkata, a fixed deposit of Rs 130 crore despite the maturity deadline. Some other reports in the same month suggested that KTDFC owes Rs 490 crore to various depositors. Subsequently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) conveyed its intention to revoke KTDFC's non-banking licence. It was reportedly communicated to GoK through a special envoy. RBI's resolve spreads a shadow over Kerala Bank, thanks to its significant investments in KTDFC. It comes on top of the recent setbacks cooperative banks have suffered due to several scams in that sector. CPMrun Karuvannur Cooperative Bank is a glaring example in this context. The finance department's poor condition in ensuring timely payments has aggravated the situation.

It is to be remembered that KTDFC deposits do enjoy a state government guarantee; in other words, if KTDFC fails to fulfil its repayment obligations, the Kerala government is expected to enter the scene and cover the deposits. But, in light of the corporation's inability to honour its obligations, the credibility of the state government's guarantee faces a big question mark.

A few months ago, there was news of CAG report stating that financial mismanagement and a lack of financial discipline were the reasons for the fiscal crisis in the state. <https://organiser.org/2023/11/02/204585/bharat/kerala/kerala-government-admits-reeling-under-financial-crunch-court-calls-deceiving-the-people-as-shameful-act/>

**10. कैग ने 91.96 करोड़ की अनियमितता पकड़ी:विवि ने बिना अनुबंध के आउटसोर्स कंपनी को 12.49 करोड़ का भुगतान किया, मनमर्जी से खरीदी**  
(*bhaskar.com*) 03 Nov 2023

कैग ने डॉ. हरीसिंह गौर विश्वविद्यालय में 91 करोड़ 66 लाख 27 हजार 600 रुपए की गड़बड़ी पकड़ी है। मामला वित्तीय वर्ष 2022-23 के ऑडिट का है। नियंत्रक एवं महानिदेशक लेखा परीक्षक नई दिल्ली की शाखा ग्वालियर ने इस संबंध में भारत सरकार के केंद्रीय शिक्षा मंत्रालय के सचिव को पत्र लिखकर 20 बिंदुओं में पूरी गड़बड़ी बताई है।

<https://www.bhaskar.com/local/mp/sagar/news/cag-caught-irregularities-of-rs-9196-crore-132091893.html>

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

**11. Are Indian GST revenues really as buoyant as they appear to be?** (*livemint.com*) 02 Nov 2023

Average monthly GST collections have been exceeding pre-GST era revenue but that trend isn't seen in the mop-up as a ratio of GDP, which is indicative of lower revenue buoyancy under GST. This calls for a rationalization of GST slabs.

India's gross goods and services tax (GGST) revenue hit ₹1.72 trillion in October, the second-highest since the rollout of this indirect tax regime. The average monthly GGST collection during the first half of 2023-24 has been ₹1.65 trillion, which has become a new benchmark. This monthly revenue figure has been tracked in recent years as an indicator of economic growth.

The GST regime was rolled out in July 2017 with the aim of replacing multiple indirect taxes levied by the central and state governments, eliminating the cascading effects of taxation to help lower the tax burden on consumers, while also ensuring uniformity in the tax structure across India. A lot of water has flown since. GST has meant greater tax buoyancy for both the Centre and states, enabling the Centre's ambitious infrastructure programme and pursuit of fiscal consolidation.

Barring the pandemic years, the average monthly GGST mop-up has been on an uptrend. It surged from ₹0.90 trillion in 2017-18 to ₹0.98 trillion in 2018-19 and ₹1.02 trillion in 2019-20. In 2020-21, it dropped to ₹0.95 trillion but rebounded as soon as the

pandemic subsided and the economy regained momentum; the average monthly intake surged to ₹1.24 trillion in 2021-22 and then to ₹1.51 trillion in 2022-23.

**Revenue buoyancy:** The government claims that the GST regime has been exemplary. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that it has reduced the tax burden on consumers and increased revenue buoyancy for states and the Centre. Notably, in the first half of 2023-24, the government realized GGST of ₹9.93 trillion, which is 11.20% more than a year earlier. It is expected that this buoyancy in collections will continue through the rest of the year.

Any tax system can be assessed through tax buoyancy. According to the International Monetary Fund, the buoyancy of a tax system measures the total response of tax revenue to a change in national income and discretionary changes in tax policy over time.

Sitharaman has said that the revenue buoyancy of states has increased significantly from 0.72 in the pre-GST era to 1.22 after its rollout. In the pre-GST regime, there was low tax buoyancy, as the tax revenue growth of states was slower than growth in gross domestic product (GDP). At that time, tax revenue growth was 8.3% while GDP growth was 11.5%. On the other hand, under the GST regime, tax growth was 12.3% while GDP growth was 9.8%. So the tax revenue of states has been growing faster than GDP.

**Central GST:** From 2017-18 to 2022-23, the average collection per year of CGST was ₹6.20 trillion against the budget estimate average of ₹7.02 trillion and revised estimate average of ₹6.24 trillion. The Centre, according to the Controller General of Accounts, has mobilized ₹4.67 trillion during April-September in 2023-24. This is 48.8% of the year's budget estimate of ₹9.57 trillion ( ₹8.12 trillion CGST and ₹1.45 trillion cess). The government is confident it will surpass its budget estimate.

**Challenges and way forward:** From 2017-18 to 2022-23, while CGST collections grew 15%, GGST grew 11.7%. This means that GST growth of states would have been less than the growth in CGST. The Centre achieved its budget estimate only twice (in 2021-22 and 2022-23); however, the revised estimate was achieved thrice (2017-18, 2020-21 and 2021-22).

On the other hand, though GST is buoyant, there is a significant difference in pre-GST and GST regime revenue when stacked against GDP. Revenue from taxes subsumed under GST as a proportion of GDP in 2016-17 was 6.68%. In 2021-22, that ratio was 6.33%. Revenue collection improved slightly in 2022-23, with the ratio rising to 6.63%.

The government is losing revenue, as the revenue neutral rate (RNR) has been compromised by multiple changes in tax slabs. The Arvind Subramanian committee had recommended an RNR of 15-15.5% under GST. However, the weighted average GST rate has declined to 11.4%. According to economist Bibek Debroy, this rate must be at least 17%.

So, it can be said that even after buoyancy in GST revenue, the mop-up as a proportion of GDP in the pre-GST era was more than that in the GST era.

Thus, the government should go for a rationalization of the regime's tax slabs. Instead of five rates, there should be a three-rate structure, as we had seen earlier in the case of Central Value Added Tax (merit, standard and demerit rate) to achieve a GST-to-GDP ratio of 7% over the medium term, as mentioned in the 15th Finance Commission's report as an estimate of the potential. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/are-indian-gst-revenues-really-as-buoyant-as-they-appear-to-be-11698922991786.html>

## **12. Enforcement Directorate sniffs web of shell firms in irregularities in ration distribution system in Bengal (telegraphindia.com) Nov 03, 2023**

A web of shell companies was allegedly set up, shut down and later reopened under separate names with different sets of directors to park the proceeds of crime from the reported irregularities in the ration distribution system in Bengal with the alleged involvement of arrested minister Jyoti Priya Mallick, senior ED officers probing the money trail said.

Throughout the better part of Thursday, investigators from the central investigating agency tried piecing together the pathways of fund transfers through some of these allegedly fictitious companies while questioning Mallick in their custody and cross-checking his answers with those of his close acquaintances including Avijit Das, the minister's former personal assistant.

Besides Mallick, Das was also grilled at the ED's office in Salt Lake's CGO Complex during the day.

Investigators said that between 2006 and 2008, three companies were set up with arrested Calcutta-based businessman Bakibur Rahman as one of their directors. While in custody Bakibur reportedly admitted that over Rs 8 crore was offered as a loan to the arrested minister from these companies, sources in the central investigating agency said. The amounts were never returned and the companies wound up. The three companies had the same address on Jessore Road near Nagerbazar in Dum Dum, senior officers who are a part of the investigation, said.

"Two more Bankura-based companies were later set up and it appears that these entities were created to park the proceeds of crime," said a senior officer. "We are trying to find out the role of the minister's chartered accountant in setting up these companies."

On Thursday, a team of ED officials visited the chartered accountant's Netaji Nagar apartment in Calcutta and carried out a search. On October 26, a team had visited the apartment and later sealed it in the absence of the owner.

Allegedly, a section of rice mill owners led by Rahman offered less volume of rice to the distributors against the sanctioned quota despite the state government paying for the entire amount.

Preliminary investigations by the ED revealed that against a kilo of rice, mill owners would supply around 200 grams less to each of the distributors against a system of payment. The amount that remained undelivered was sold in the retail market at the

prevailing market rates, thereby allegedly helping a section of mill owners mint crores in the process.

### Weighing machines

Senior officials in the department of food and supplies said the state government was in the process of installing e-weighing machines at ration shops across the state.

“It will ensure that no beneficiary receives an item less than what he is entitled to according to the data stored in the ration card,” said a senior official.

“If the volume is less than what he is supposed to get, the slip won’t be generated and that data will get reflected through a central monitoring system.”

“We will start installing the e-weighing machines from December onwards across over 2,000 shops engaged in public distribution of ration,” the official added.  
<https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/enforcement-directorate-sniffs-web-of-shell-firms-in-irregularities-in-ration-distribution-system-in-bengal/cid/1977243>

### **13. S-400: India’s Shield of the Skies or a Vulnerable Fortress?** (*financialexpress.com*) Nov 03, 2023

**Indian and Russian officials are now gearing up for an upcoming meeting to discuss the final delivery schedule for the remaining two squadrons.**

The Indian Air Force has successfully operationalized three of its S-400 air defence missile squadrons, strategically positioning them along the borders with China and Pakistan. Indian and Russian officials are now gearing up for an upcoming meeting to discuss the final delivery schedule for the remaining two squadrons.

In 2018-19, India inked a significant contract worth over Rs 35,000 crore with Russia for the acquisition of five squadrons of S-400 missiles. While three squadrons have already been delivered to India, the remaining two faced delays due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Both Russian and Indian officials are now set to convene to finalise the delivery timeline for these remaining missile squadrons.

Reports from open sources have hinted at the possibility that some of the S-400 squadrons manufactured for the Indian Air Force may have been temporarily utilised by the Russian military. However, these claims lack confirmation, and India remains steadfast in its focus on obtaining its own S-400 systems.

Moreover, the Indian Defence Acquisition Council recently granted approval for the procurement of the Indian Long-Range Surface-to-Air Missile system under Project Kusha, following clearance by the Cabinet Committee on Security.

In light of these developments, one can’t help but ponder whether the S-400 missile defence system is indeed a transformative and game-changing asset for India.

India commenced the delivery of its five S-400 regiments in December 2021, initiating the initial deployments along the Indo-Pakistan border.



In the eyes of experts, the S-400's on-paper capabilities in the realm of defensive and potentially offensive anti-access and area denial are indeed formidable. This advanced system boasts effectiveness against a range of threats, including aircraft, UAVs, and both ballistic and cruise missiles. Notably, its capacity to counter cruise missiles could potentially neutralise Pakistan's nuclear deterrent.

The S-400's comprehensive coverage is achieved through a combination of missiles, encompassing a 40-kilometre range with the 9M96E, a 120-kilometre range with the 9M96E2, a 250-kilometre range with the 48N6, and an impressive 400-kilometre range with the 40N6E missiles. This versatile range of missiles equips it to safeguard extensive areas, high-value targets, and itself from various types of attacks.

Furthermore, the S-400's high mobility and ability to become operational within just five minutes of arriving at a new location make it exceptionally adaptable. This mobility allows for the system to be regularly relocated, reducing the risk of detection.

However, aerospace experts caution against both underestimating and overestimating the capabilities of the S-400. It is a powerful asset, but its effectiveness in real-world scenarios depends on various factors and operational considerations.

### **A reality check!**

The S-400 Triumf air defence system acquired by India from Russia has indeed received extravagant praise in the Indian media, with descriptions ranging from the "world's best" to a "game changer" and even a reference to the divine weapon Brahmastra from Hindu mythology. It's crucial, however, to conduct a sober and technical evaluation of the system's capabilities to avoid overestimation and undue military adventurism.

It's a common pattern in Indian media to enthusiastically celebrate each new arms import, such as the Rafale jets, Barak-8 missiles, M-777 howitzers, any given emergency procurement etc. as a panacea for defeating the enemy swiftly. The reality, as you rightly point out, is often far more complex.

A comprehensive and authoritative assessment of the S-400 system has been presented by the Swedish Defence Research Agency FOI in its 116-page report titled 'Bursting the Bubble: Russian A2/AD in the Baltic Sea Region,' which deals with anti-access/area denial strategies. The report concludes that the system's overall capabilities and its ability to counter countermeasures have been overestimated. It emphasises that the S-400 creates smaller A2/AD zones than typically assumed and identifies potential countermeasures.

The FOI highlights inherent difficulties in engaging manoeuvring targets like cruise missiles and low-flying fighter aircraft, which can significantly limit the effective range of the S-400. According to research, against such targets, the effective range could be as short as 20-35 kilometres or even less, depending on the terrain.

In addition to these limitations, the S-400 can be overwhelmed by a saturation attack of incoming missiles, and its engagement capabilities can be disrupted to some extent by

electronic warfare. Moreover, it is noted that the claimed five-minute deployment time may only be applicable to open plains and not to mountainous or jungle terrain where radar systems might need to be elevated for a broader field of view. The total deployment time could extend to 45-90 minutes.

Furthermore, the S-400 has limitations in countering hypersonic missiles due to speed and altitude constraints. It's essential to consider that the Chinese hypersonic missile DF-ZF, for instance, travels at Mach 10, which is incredibly fast.

### **With regards to China**

The S-400 air defence systems, while formidable, are not impervious to potential threats, as they could be vulnerable to spoofing. It's worth noting that India and China have both acquired the S-400, with China's People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) also operating this system. This shared familiarity with the S-400 could reduce its long-term credibility as a deterrent for India against the PLAAF.

China made history as the first foreign buyer of Russia's S-400 by placing an order for four to six regimental units back in 2014, with an estimated cost of \$3 billion. The final deliveries of these systems were completed in July 2018.

In considering the implications of China's possession of the S-400, it's important to recognize that having the same system could grant the PLAAF in-depth knowledge and insight into its workings. This familiarity could potentially enable China to develop strategies and tactics for countering the S-400's capabilities, thereby challenging India's reliance on it as a long-term deterrent against the PLAAF.

### **Can Pak take it?**

The S-400's purported offensive capabilities, which could potentially restrict an adversary's use of its own airspace, are of particular concern for Pakistan, given its geographic proximity and the extensive border it shares with India. This air defence system's reach would indeed cover a substantial portion of Pakistan's territory.

However, the effectiveness of the S-400 against ballistic or cruise missiles remains a subject of debate, contingent on several critical factors. One crucial factor is the system's effective engagement range, which hinges on various variables, including the curvature of the Earth, the characteristics of the nearby terrain, and the deployment location of the system.

An important consideration is that if the S-400 is deployed too far forward, it could be susceptible to direct targeting by potential adversaries. In this regard, experts in Pakistan point to the Fatah-1, a 150-kilometre-range guided round designed for the Chinese A-100 multiple launch rocket system. This missile system is perceived as a potential threat to the S-400, and the Fatah-1 round demonstrated its capability during successful testing in August 2021.

Additionally, experts note that effective electronic warfare measures can further diminish the S-400's effectiveness or even lead to its suppression or destruction. Pakistan has displayed its electronic warfare capabilities in the past, notably when its

Air Force executed retaliatory strikes into Indian-held territory during a military escalation in February 2019.

### **What about BrahMos?**

In the arena of modern warfare, two formidable weapons, the S-400 Triumf and the BrahMos missile, are set to clash. To comprehend the potential showdown between these powerhouses, it's vital to delve into their capabilities.

The S-400 Triumf, an advanced surface-to-air missile system, is engineered to engage a diverse array of targets, including aircraft, drones, ballistic and cruise missiles. With an astounding range of up to 400 kilometres and the ability to track and engage multiple targets simultaneously, it stands as a potent defence system.

On the opposing front, the BrahMos missile, renowned for its supersonic speed, precision, and versatility, poses a significant threat. Launchable from land, sea, and air platforms, it boasts a range of approximately 300 kilometres and can achieve speeds of Mach 2.8.

What sets the BrahMos apart is its capacity to fly at extremely low altitudes, rendering it elusive and challenging to detect and intercept. Its supersonic velocity and manoeuvrability further compound the challenge, making it a formidable adversary for air defence systems, even the likes of the S-400.

However, the S-400 is no ordinary defence system. Equipped with advanced radar technology capable of tracking low-flying targets, including cruise missiles like the BrahMos, it holds the upper hand. Additionally, the S-400 features a diverse array of interceptor missiles, each tailored to combat specific threats. Notably, its long-range missiles, such as the 40N6, possess the capability to intercept the BrahMos even at extended ranges.

In an interview with The Week, Atul Dinkar Rane, CEO and MD of BrahMos Aerospace, highlighted the inherent challenges in intercepting the BrahMos. The rapid reaction time from BrahMos launch to impact and the unique characteristics of a cruise missile make it a daunting target for surface-to-air missiles. Defending against the BrahMos is no simple task, especially given its low altitude and supersonic speed. Intercepting a supersonic cruise missile is a formidable challenge, and countering a barrage of BrahMos missiles presents an even greater hurdle, underscoring the distinctive philosophy of a cruise missile system.

### **India's LRSAM: The Ultimate Answer**

India is taking proactive steps to enhance its defence capabilities and protect itself from potential threats from neighbouring countries, particularly China and Pakistan. A homegrown successor to the Russian S-400 system is currently in development in India, known as the Long Range Surface to Air Missile (LRSAM). This new system is being developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and promises to be faster, more precise, and technologically advanced compared to the S-400.

The DRDO is diligently working on this indigenous air defence system, which is designed to engage and neutralise long-range targets. One of its key capabilities is the ability to intercept and destroy enemy fighter aircraft, ballistic missiles, and attack drones while they are airborne. The LRSAM system will consist of a three-tiered missile defence structure, with missiles tailored to engage targets at varying ranges, from surface to air. These missiles are equipped to counter adversary aircraft operating at different altitudes and distances across the sky.

Notably, the indigenous LRSAM is expected to have a range comparable to the S-400, which can engage targets up to 400 kilometres away. It will possess the capacity to intercept and destroy hostile missiles in flight, much like the S-400. This multi-layered defence system will provide India with a robust and versatile defence against approaching hostile aircraft, regardless of the distance from which they originate. This advancement reflects India's commitment to bolstering its defence capabilities and ensuring its security in the face of evolving threats.

### **The Bottom Line**

In the ever-evolving landscape of defence and security, the interplay between the S-400 and the strategic assets of India's neighbouring countries, Pakistan and China, reveals a complex dynamic. India's acquisition of the S-400, celebrated as a robust shield in its defence arsenal, offers a comprehensive response to a spectrum of aerial threats, including aircraft, drones, and various types of missiles. However, the system's efficacy depends on factors such as deployment specifics and the capabilities of potential adversaries.

India's proactive approach to bolstering its defence capabilities is exemplified by indigenous solutions like the Long Range Surface to Air Missile (LRSAM), designed to surpass the S-400 in terms of speed, precision, and advanced technology. This dynamic interplay highlights the need for a flexible and pragmatic approach to address the evolving nature of security challenges and underscores India's commitment to safeguarding its national interests and regional stability. <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-s-400-indias-shield-of-the-skies-or-a-vulnerable-fortress-3296294/>

## **14. India bolsters defence arsenal for Indian Ocean** (*republicworld.com*) Nov 03, 2023

India's procurement of 26 marine Rafale fighter aircraft is set to provide a significant strategic edge in the Indian Ocean Region. The marine variant of the Rafale is specially designed for the challenging demands of aircraft carrier operations. It includes features for high-impact landings, catapult or ramp launches, and resilience in corrosive saltwater environments.

This acquisition will notably strengthen the operational capabilities of India's prized aircraft carriers, the INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya, which currently deploy Russian Mikoyan MiG-29s.

Enhancing carrier operations to counter growing threats

India's strategic move to acquire Rafale Marines serves to counteract the increasing threat posed by China's growing interest and espionage activities in the Indian Ocean Region. The Indian Navy's Air Arm, which has been grappling with a shortage of fighter aircraft, will significantly benefit from this deal.

India's government has been actively approving major acquisitions, including submarines, drones, and air defense systems, as part of an ongoing effort to modernize the military's arsenal. This modernization is in response to the combined threat posed by China and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean Region.

#### Submarine capabilities

Inclusion of three Scorpene submarines, also from France, will play a crucial role in enhancing the Indian Navy's underwater capabilities. These submarines are part of the P75(I) program, focusing on constructing six conventional submarines equipped with advanced air-independent propulsion systems for extended underwater operations.

India's acquisition of 31 MQ-9B armed drones from the US, valued at \$3 billion, will significantly boost its military surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. This move also elevates India's prominence in the Indian Ocean Region, as China lacks high-altitude long-endurance drones in its arsenal.

#### Strengthening the fleet

The Indian Navy is further expanding its fleet with more Poseidon-8I aircraft, which are essential for enhancing maritime surveillance capabilities. These aircraft play a crucial role in ensuring maritime security and defense. India is actively working on domestically producing 97 drones for its armed forces, addressing medium altitude long-endurance requirements and further enhancing its defense capabilities. Through exercises like Malabar with QUAD peers (US, Japan, and Australia) and Varuna with France, the Indian Navy is expanding its presence and influence in the Indian Ocean Region to effectively counter the growing threat from China. <https://www.republicworld.com/defence/defence-technology/indian-navy-enhancing-countermeasures-against-china-with-jets-drones-and-submarines.news>

### **15. New clause in contracts: Punjab PWD makes it a must for firms to maintain roads for five years (*hindustantimes.com*) Nov 03, 2023**

**Punjab govt has allocated ₹1,000 crore for carpeting of 96 plan roads, which include state highways and district roads excluding link roads, this year and contracts of these are being awarded after adding a new clause**

Chandigarh: The Punjab public works department (PWD) has decided to award new road projects to contractor firms with a compulsory clause of repairing it for five years.

Earlier, the contractor firm was free after laying the road and in case of damage, the PWD used to allot repair works to another contractor by inviting tenders.

The Bhagwant Maan-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has already allocated ₹1,000 crore for carpeting of 96 plan roads, which include state highways and district roads excluding link roads, this year and contracts of these are being awarded after adding a new clause.

Hindustan Times has seen some tenders in which the contracts have been awarded to contractors with a clause of mandatory upkeep of roads for the next five years.

The tender requirements say the contractor has to repair the road for first year free of cost as a “defect liability” whereas the cost of next four years will be included in the original contract.

The clause of compulsory repair was there in link roads being developed under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) or the state highways being developed under build-operate-transfer (BOT) basis or by other means of public-private partnerships.

“We have decided to carpet roads by studying the traffic volume. Earlier, carpeting was done with a plain clause of laying bitumen mix of certain strength. Under fresh terms and conditions, the contractor will have to strengthen the crust design as well as per our requirements,” a senior PWD functionary said.

PWD officials say that adding compulsory repair clause will save department’s money and also improve the quality of roads.

“When a private contractor has to upkeep the road stretch for next five years, the firm would make better roads to save expenditure. The rate of repair work is mere 1.5% of the total project cost per year,” a senior department official said.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/new-clause-in-contracts-punjab-pwd-makes-it-a-must-for-firms-to-maintain-roads-for-five-years-101698952979227.html>