NEWS ITEMS ON CAG /AUDIT REPORTS

1. Vikrant Will Soon Be Deployed Operationally but Navy's Aircraft Carrier Dilemma to Continue *(thewire.in)* Dec 9, 2023

The air arm of the indigenous carrier only inspires 'limited confidence', according to experts. The navy also continues to grapple with securing approval for a third carrier to supplement Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya.

INS Vikrant, the Indian Navy's first indigenously designed aircraft carrier (IAC-1), is expected to be available imminently for operational deployment, some 16 months after its feverish commissioning in September 2022.

Vice Admiral M.A. Hampiholi, who heads the Southern Naval Command, told reporters in Kochi on December 3 that Vikrant would be "operationalised" by the end of January 2024, after completing its mandatory 'guarantee refit' at Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), where it was constructed. A 'guarantee refit' is akin to the first service of a newly acquired vehicle, which entails repairing, re-equipping, and re-supplying the concerned platform to certify its overall functioning and operability.

But even so, the air arm of the 40,000-tonne short-take-off barrier arrested recovery (STOBAR) power projection platform – comprising 18 Russian MiG-29K/KUB fighters, of a total of some 30 embarked aerial assets – inspired 'limited' confidence. A cross-section of veteran Indian Navy aviators and industry officials said that since their induction in 2009, the navy's entire MiG-29 fleet had proven 'inadequate' in meeting the operational requirements of forces, as they had demonstrated their inability to deliver their specified weapons payload to their stated ranges with a full fuel load, in addition to numerous other drawbacks.

Eventually, however, Vikrant is expected to operate the under-purchase 26 Dassault Rafale-M (Marine) multi-role carrier-borne fighters (MRCBF) from France, including eight twin-seat trainers. Negotiations to import these fighters for an estimated $6 billion are ongoing, and the deal for them, according to Indian Navy officials, is likely to be inked by March 2024. Thereafter, fighter deliveries are expected to commence 36 months later, with the possibility of the French Navy even 'loaning' some Rafale (M)'s to the Indian Navy in the interim to 'familiarise' it with the aircraft.

Senior Indian Navy officials have iterated that the Rafale (M)s are being inducted as an 'interim' measure and, in due course, would be supplemented, and eventually replaced, by the under-development indigenous twin-engine deck based fighter (TEDBF), also known as the light combat aircraft (Navy).

The Indian Navy is optimistic that the prototype of the TEDBF, under development by the Aeronautical Development Agency and the public sector Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, would be ready by 2026, followed by its series production 2032 onwards, but extended slippages remain endemic in all such ambitious domestic programmes.

Vikrant's air arm, which also comprises 12-odd rotary wing platforms like Russian Kamov Ka-31 early warning and control (AEW&C) helicopters and the under-induction Lockheed Martin/Sikorsky MH-60R multirole naval helicopters (MRHs), in varying numbers, will be managed by the carriers Aviation Flight Complex (AFC) supplied by Russia's Nevoske Design Bureau. The carrier air wings's situational awareness, surveillance capability and capacity to track multiple aerial and surface targets will, in turn, be supported by the EL/M-2248 MF-STAR (multi-functional digital active electronically scanned array radar) provided by Israel's IAI-Elta.

But for now, Vikrant has no alternative but to make do with MiG29K/KUBs, 45 of which were acquired by the Indian Navy between 2009 and 2017 for $2.29 billion, but only around 40 of which were presently available, following losses in accidents.

In July 2016, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) rigorously criticised the Indian Navy and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for technically accepting the MiG-29K/KUB fighters, despite them being "riddled with problems, discrepancies, and anomalies". In its damning audit, the CAG had revealed the fighters' multiple deficiencies, which included shortcomings with its airframe, its RD-33 MK engines and fly-by-wire systems; in short, the entire fighter. The report also stated that the fighters had suffered repeated engine failures, with at least 10 cases of single-engine landings. Of the 65 RD-33MK turbofan engines received from their manufacturer Klimov, the Indian Navy had rejected or withdrawn at least 40 from service due to defects, the CAG stated.

Consequently, operational availability of the MiG-29Ks between 2014 and 2016 had fluctuated from 15.93% to 37.63%, while that of the MiG-29KUB dual-seat trainers was just between 21.20% and 47.14%, the CAG disclosed. It also revealed that these technical deficiencies would considerably reduce the MIG-29K's overall service life of 6,000 hours and that even its full-mission simulator had proven "unsuitable" in training pilots for carrier operations.

Additionally, the MiG-29K/KUB fleet continued to face severe maintenance problems, as a large number needed repair after each deck landing that damaged many of the fighters' on-board components. There were also complaints from the Indian Navy regarding Russia's inability to incorporate all agreed-upon features into the MiG-29Ks.

This state of affairs had resulted from the 2014 sanctions, still in place, imposed on Russia by the US, European Union states and other international organisations for its military intervention in Crimea, all of which prevented Moscow from providing several of the MiG-29/K'KUBs components. This situation had only deteriorated over the past 22 months following additional embargoes imposed on Russia for its ongoing assault on Ukraine.

Hence, seven years after the excoriating CAG report, little had changed with respect to the MiG-29K/KUBs operational efficacy. "The inefficiency of the MiG-29k/KUBs was well known to the MoD and the IN for years, but for inexplicable reasons they failed to acquire a substitute platform to coincide with Vikrant's commissioning" said Amit Cowshish, former MoD acquisitions advisor. This avoidable lapse had adversely impacted the navy's operational timetable, he added.

No headway on Navy's third carrier

Meanwhile, the IN was continuing to grapple with securing MoD approval for a third carrier, designed and built indigenously to supplement Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya (ex-Admiral Gorshkov), the 46,000-tonne refurbished Russian Kiev-class platform commissioned into the IN in 2013. News reports, quoting senior IN officials had stated that the MoD's Defence Acquisition Council was likely to approve the construction of the proposed carrier-a follow-on to the Vikrant-at its meeting in early December. But for reasons unknown, this did not occur.

Over years, successive IN Chiefs of Staff had argued and lobbied hard for a third carrier – one for each seaboard and one in reserve – and in 2015 the MoD had even sanctioned Rs30 crore to the Directorate of Naval Design in New Delhi to begin conceptualising plans for a 65,000-tonne IAC-2, but little came of that endeavour.

Nevertheless, in recent months IN officials confirmed that due to a financial resource crunch, the force had settled on building a 40,000-tonne flattop, analogous to Vikrant, principally to ensure that CSL's skills in carrier construction, developed at great expense and over an extended period, did not dissipate. But alongside many navalists also questioned the operational efficacy of constructing another less-capable 'lightweight' carrier, which they said would be forced to operate within the engagement envelope of its enemy's shore-based missiles and air defence systems.

Retired Commander Abhijit Singh contended recently that the IN's decision to opt for a smaller carrier, which was a 'valuable' asset in peacetime activities, stemmed from diminishing financial options. Yet, policymakers ought to know, he cautioned, that a small aircraft carrier will 'not cut it in combat with a worthy adversary in the littorals. Moreover, with its two 60,000 and 80,000-tonne carriers, China was unlikely to be deterred by the presence of a 40,000-tonne Indian flat-top in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), added the analyst from the Observer Research Foundation.

The debate over the proposed IAC-2 has been long and tortuous, plagued not only by its astronomical cost, but also its overall operational efficacy in an environment of burgeoning anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capability via long-range ballistic and cruise missiles. Steadily declining domestic military budgets and vacillation by the MoD in approving the programme, too had collectively thwarted the carrier project.

Nonetheless, even within the navy, senior officers question the monetary logic of building a new carrier at the cost of inducting additional diesel-electric submarines (SSKs) – whose numbers presently equalled 16. And, of these, seven were Russian Type 877 EKM 'Kilo' class variants and four were German-origin HDW Type 209/1500 boats, all between 20 and 34 years old, with several of them due either for retirement, or in limited instances, upgrade. The remaining five SSKs were licence-built French Kalvari (Scorpene) class boats, with a sixth scheduled for commissioning in early 2024, taking thereby the total number of such boats to 17.

But these SSK numbers were seven boats less than the 24 submarines that the navy was projected to operate by 2030 in accordance with its Maritime Capability Perspective Plan (MCPP). Correspondingly, equally critical surface combatants like corvettes, mine-sweepers, destroyers and frigates were in short supply, as were naval utility helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and other assorted missiles and ordnance.

India and China's naval prowess

Aircraft carrier operations represent the apex of flexible naval power projection, and nuclear rivals China and India have placed these platforms at the centre of their maritime force development plans in their respective strategies of 'dominating' the strategic IOR. By comparison, China is relatively new to carrier operations, having had to start from scratch in the mid-1980s with neither naval aircraft, vessel, training pipeline, or operational experience to build upon.

Starting in 1985, China began by acquiring four retired carriers to analyse and study in its quest to launch such platforms for the Peoples Liberation Army Navy (PLAN): the British-built HMAS Melbourne from Australia and three ex-Soviet carriers, Minsk, Kiev and Varyag. The last named underwent an extensive refit, to emerge as the Liaoning, the PLAN's first operational carrier with 40 embarked fighters and helicopters and one which, in turn, served as a basis for China's subsequent design iterations for similar platforms. Presently, other than Varyag, the PLAN operates the follow-on Shandong and Fujian, which is being kitted out. Naval analysts anticipate China operating a total of five or six such carriers by 2030, each one an improvement on the previous platforms.

India, by contrast, began operating carriers in 1961, with INS Vikrant (ex-HMS Hercules) a 16,000-tonne Majestic-class carrier followed by INS Virat (ex-HMS Hermes), a 23,900-tonne Centaur-class platform with vertical-take-off-and-landing (VTOL) Sea Harrier fighters that were retired in early 2017. IN officials maintain that the forces 'institutional' maturity, experience, and knowledge provide it with a decisive operational edge over rival navies, including China's. The IN is also one of the world's few navies to have operated CATOBAR [catapult-assisted takeoff barrier arrested recovery], VTOL and STOBAR platforms, which not only gives it higher aviation skills but also advanced carrier tactics, techniques and procedures.

Other officers cautioned against such assertiveness, arguing that past performance was no guarantee of future success. They advised that it would be a grave error to underestimate the PLAN's ability to telescope the basics of carrier aviation within a shorter timescale, and counselled the IN to adopt a more pragmatic and rational approach to capability building, shorn of the hard-sell. https://thewire.in/security/vikrant-indian-navy-aircraft-carrier-dilemma

2. Election promises for Family X: What the bill looks like *(indianexpress.com)* Dec 9, 2023

The just concluded high-stakes election battle saw political parties making a string of promises, both in cash and kind. Post election, how do these promises play out, both for the intended beneficiary and the State?

FamilyAs they headed into a crucial election, the incumbents and the contenders in the just concluded Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana had a potent ammunition in their weaponry: welfare schemes/doles/"revdi. (Suvajit Dey)

As they headed into a crucial election, the incumbents and the contenders in the just concluded Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana had a potent ammunition in their weaponry: welfare schemes/doles/“revdi”.

While three out of these four states have seen a change of guard, the welfare schemes of the old regimes are expected to stay. In fact, given that it’s politically fraught for governments to go back on their welfare undertakings, the old schemes will only be fortified by the new ones promised by the party that came to power.

What is the financial impact of these promises on state exchequers that are already reeling under high debt burdens?

To understand the extent of the cash, direct transfers and in-kind support provided by the outgoing governments and the new ones promised by the incoming governments, The Indian Express looks at a representational family — ‘Family X’, an archetypal rural family — in each state. Each of the eight members of Family X, aged between 1 and 80 years, are beneficiaries of one or the other government schemes.

Rajasthan

The annual budget of the nine schemes of the outgoing Congress government in Rajasthan comes to around Rs 36,608 crore — more than one-third of the state’s Own Tax Revenue and Own Non-Tax Revenue (what the state generates from its own sources such as state excise duty, stamps, etc).

On an average, Family X now receives a maximum of Rs 2.53 lakh a year — both as one-time and recurring benefits (see graph). But they are only set to get more as the spending on freebies is expected to rise further as the BJP, which came to power, made a string of promises in the polls: a higher MSP (Rs 2,700 per quintal) for wheat, a savings bond of Rs 2 lakh for the girl child under Lado Protsahan Yojana. Additionally, it has also announced Rs 1,200 as direct benefit transfer to schoolchildren from economically weaker sections.

The rise in spending is significant in view of rising public debt in the state.

In 2021-22, Rajasthan’s own tax and non-tax revenue stood at Rs 1,01,350.44 crore. That year, the state’s ‘committed expenditure’, which includes expenditure it is committed to (salaries, pension, and interest payment) and subsidies, stood at Rs 1,47,854 crore. Which means, the state spent more than what it could afford to.

At the end of March 2022, Rajasthan’s public debt stood at Rs 3,53,556 crore, of which 59.36 per cent was payable by 2029. As per the CAG report, the state will have to repay Rs 44,841.10 crore of market loans and pay interest of Rs 55,375.05 crore in next three financial years i.e. up to 2024-25.

Rajasthan On an average, Family X now receives a maximum of Rs 2.53 lakh a year — both as one-time and recurring benefits.

Telangana
A rural family of eight in Telangana, Family X in this case, would, on an average, get Rs 11.71 lakh a year as cash, direct transfers and in-kind support (see graph) — the highest among the four states.

The annual allocation of the Top 5 cash transfer schemes — Dalita Bandhu Scheme, Rythu Bandhu Scheme, Kalyan Lakshmi-Shaadi Mubarak Scheme, Aasara Pensions, and Amma Odi Scheme/KCR Kit Scheme — of the outgoing BRS government in Telangana stands at Rs 1.02 lakh crore, which is almost equal to the state's own revenue (tax and non-tax). Which means that the government absolutely has no more room for additional expenditure.

But at the end of March 2022, the state's committed expenditure (salaries, pension, and interest payment) and subsidies stood at Rs 73,779 crore, which is equal to 70 per cent of the state's revenues.

In its election manifesto, the Congress, which came to power in the state, had promised many more targeted schemes – for farmers and farm labourers, for women, jobless youth and so on, all of which is expected to set the government back further.

The new government thus will have little room to manoeuvre.

Telangana's outstanding public debt stood at Rs 2,77,489 crore at the end of March 2022. The ratio of outstanding public debt to GSDP increased from 18.42 per cent in 2016-17 to 24 per cent in 2021-22. The state needs to augment its resources to meet the increasing debt repayment burden over the next seven years.

Telangana A rural family of eight in Telangana, Family X in this case, would, on an average, get Rs 11.71 lakh a year as cash, direct transfers and in-kind support — the highest among the four states.

Madhya Pradesh
Family X in Madhya Pradesh now receives a maximum of Rs 2.85 lakh a year, thanks to a dozen schemes launched over the last few years. The annual bill for these schemes stands at Rs 30,187 crore.

This is only set to go higher as the BJP, which returned to power in the state, promised a string of schemes in its manifesto — from concrete houses for women to a further subsidy on cylinders and a hike in MSP for wheat and paddy.

The amount the government spends on the existing schemes is one-tenth of the state's 2023-24 budget (BE: Rs 3.14 lakh crore), and almost a third of its revenue (tax and non-tax) of Rs 1.01 lakh crore.

The state's public debt has almost doubled in just five years, from Rs 1.38 lakh crore in 2017-18 to Rs 2.64 lakh crore in 2021-22. The state's debt as a percentage of GSDP — a comparison of what it owes to how much it produces — went up from 19 to 23 per cent during this period. Of the outstanding public debt of Rs 2,33,241.93 crore, over half (50.42 per cent) is payable by 2027-28, an immediate challenge for the new government.

Madhya Pradesh's committed expenditure (salaries, interest payments, pension payments and subsidies) has increased sharply in the last few years — from Rs 63,743 crore in 2017-18 to Rs 95,869 crore in 2021-22.

In its audit report, the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) pointed out that between 2020-21 and 2021-22, expenditure on subsidies went up by a whopping 41%.

Madhya Pradesh Family X in Madhya Pradesh now receives a maximum of Rs 2.85 lakh a year, thanks to a dozen schemes launched over the last few years.

Chhattisgarh

On an average, Family X in the state now receives up to Rs 89,000 a year as the outgoing Bhupesh Baghel government had launched a string of populist schemes — from electricity subsidies to unemployment allowances.

Over the last five years, the Chhattisgarh government's interest payment has doubled — from Rs 3,098.33 crore in 2017-18 to Rs 6,144.24 crore in 2021-22 — due to a continuous rise in public debt, which stands at Rs 82,912 crore in 2022.

The state's own tax and non-tax revenues already fall short of its committed expenditure, which at Rs 44,199.54 crore at the end of March 2022, is 108 per cent of the states's own revenues.

The squeeze is only set to get tighter as the newly elected BJP has promised several schemes and cash transfers.

For instance, it has promised the launch of Mahatari Yojna, under which all married women will get Rs 1,000, a scheme that is estimated to cost 7,500 crores per year. The party has also promised paddy procurement at Rs 3,100 per quintal for which it will have to set aside an estimated Rs 25,912 crore (if it buys the same amount of paddy as was bought this year; the BJP has promised to buy more).

The party has also promised to provide LPG cylinders to BPL families at Rs 500, a free trip to Ayodhya for Ram Lalla Darshan and so on.

But the state has to keep an eye on the calendar: it will have to pay 77.07% of the debt within the next seven years.

Chhattisgarh On an average, Family X in the state now receives up to Rs 89,000 a year as the outgoing Bhupesh Baghel government had launched a string of populist schemes — from electricity subsidies to unemployment allowances. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/election-promises-for-family-x-what-the-bill-looks-like-9060519/

STATES NEWS ITEMS

3. बिहार में गरीबों की एक और योजना में बड़ा घोटाला: CAG ने जांच में पकड़ी बड़ी गड़बड़ी, केंद्र सरकार के पैसे का हुआ बंदरबांट

(firstbihar.com) 10 Dec 2023

बिहार में एक और सरकारी योजना में बड़ा घोटाला सामने आया है. आवासविहीन गरीबों को घर देने के लिए केंद्र सरकार द्वारा चलाये जा रहे प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना में बड़े पैमाने पर गड़बड़ी पकड़ी गयी है. इस योजना की जांच में सीएजी ने बड़े पैमाने पर भ्रष्टाचार, अनियमितता, धांधली पकड़ी है. इस योजना के तहत गरीबों को घर बनाने के लिए 1 लाख 20 हजार रूपये दिये जाते हैं. बिहार सरकार ने वैसे लोगों को पैसे दे दिये जिनका कोई अस्तित्व ही नहीं है.

पूर्व उप मुख्यमंत्री और बीजेपी सांसद सुशील कुमार मोदी ने आज सीएजी की रिपोर्ट को लेकर बिहार सरकार पर तीखा हमला बोला है. सुशील मोदी ने कहा है कि केंद्र सरकार से मदद मांग रही बिहार सरकार उस पैसे का ही सही उपयोग नहीं कर पा रही है, जो उसे पहले से ही मिल रहा है. प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना का पैसे का बड़े पैमाने पर बंदरबांट कर लिया गया.

सुशील मोदी ने कहा है कि जांच टीम ने प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना में हर स्तर पर गड़बड़ी पायी है. इस जांच रिपोर्ट के बाद बिहार सरकार ने भी अनियमितता को स्वीकार किया है. अब बिहार के ग्रामीण विकास विभाग के प्रधान सचिव ने सभी उप-विकास आयुक्त को पत्र लिखकर कहा है कि मृत लोगों के नाम पर भुगतान, अयोग्य लोगों को किस्तों का भुगतान, गलत खातों में भुगतान के मामलों की तहकीकात करायी जाये. बिहार सरकार के पत्र में यह भी कहा गया है कि भारत सरकार के दिशा निर्देशों का कड़ाई से पालन किया जाए.

सुशील मोदी ने प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना में घोटाले की निगरानी जांच की मांग की है. उन्होंने कहा है कि निगरानी विभाग से बिहार के सभी जिलों में इस योजना में भ्रष्टाचार की जांच कराई जाए तथा दोषी लोगों पर कड़ी से कड़ी कार्रवाई किया जाए. उन्होंने कहा है कि केंद्र सरकार प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना के तहत देश में उत्तर प्रदेश के बाद सबसे ज्यादा पैसा बिहार सरकार को देती है. हर गरीब को घर के लिए 1 लाख 20 हजार रुपए दिए जाते हैं. इसमें 60 प्रतिशत पैसा केंद्र सरकार और बाकी पैसा राज्य सरकार देती है. https://firstbihar.com/news/bihar-me-garibo-ki-ek-aur-yojna-me-bara-ghotala-713243

4. पीएम आवास योजना (ग्रामीण) में कैग की टीम ने 10 जिलों के अंकेक्षण में भारी भ्रष्टाचार पाया: सुशील मोदी

(royalbulletin.in) 10 Dec 2023

भारतीय जनता पार्टी (भाजपा) के वरिष्ठ नेता और राज्यसभा सदस्य सुशील कुमार मोदी ने रविवार को यहां कहा कि बिहार के 10 जिलों के प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना (ग्रामीण) के अंकेक्षण में महालेखाकार बिहार ने बड़े पैमाने पर भ्रष्टाचार, अनियमितता, धांधली पाई है। योजना के लिए जो अयोग्य हैं उन्हें भी भुगतान कर दिया गया है। जो लाभार्थी अस्तित्व में भी नहीं है उन्हें भी पूर्ण भुगतान कर दिया गया है।

सुशील मोदी ने कहा कि महालेखाकार की अंकेक्षण टीम ने यह भी पाया कि मकानों के लोकेशन का अव्यवहारिक जीरो टैगिंग, गलत खाते में किस्तों का भुगतान जैसी अनियमितता के अनेक मामले पाए गए हैं। बिहार सरकार ने भी अनियमितता को स्वीकार किया है। ग्रामीण विकास विभाग के

प्रधान सचिव ने सभी उप-विकास आयुक्त को पत्र लिखकर कहा है कि मृत लोगों के नाम पर भुगतान, अयोग्य लोगों को किस्तों का भुगतान, गलत खातों में भुगतान के मामलों की तहकीकात करने का सुझाव दिया गया है। उन्होंने ने कहा कि पत्र में यह भी कहा गया है कि केंद्र सरकार के दिशा निर्देशों का कड़ाई से पालन किया जाए।

सुशील मोदी ने कहा कि भाजपा ने सरकार से मांग की है कि निगरानी से बिहार के सभी जिलों में इस योजना में भ्रष्टाचार की जांच कराई जाए तथा दोषी लोगों पर कड़ी से कड़ी कार्रवाई की जाए। उत्तर प्रदेश के बाद सर्वाधिक आवास प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना के तहत बिहार को आवंटित किए गए हैं। प्रत्येक आवास के लिए 01 लाख 20 हजार रुपये दिए जाते हैं, जिसमें 60 प्रतिशत राशि केंद्र सरकार और 40 प्रतिशत राज्य सरकार देती है।
https://royalbulletin.in/cag-team-found-huge-corruption-in-pm-awas-yojana-gramin-during-audit-of-10-districts-sushil-modi/117804

5. Benefits under PMAY-G provided to ineligible ones in state: Auditors *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* Dec 10, 2023

Patna: Providing of benefits under the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) to deceased persons, payment of instalments to those ineligible to the scheme and full assistance paid against non-existing houses have been found during an audit exercise in 10 districts of Bihar, an official said on Saturday.

Unrealistic geo-tagging of house locations and payment of instalments in wrong accounts are also among the discrepancies observed by teams of the accountant general (AG-Bihar) during the audit of the implementation of the rural housing scheme in the state.

Based on the 'performance audit' report, state Rural Development Department Secretary N Saravana Kumar has recently asked all deputy development commissioners (DDCs) and officers concerned to ensure strict adherence to the guidelines of the Centre for implementing the programme.

"Officers concerned must ensure transparency and strict adherence to the guidelines, under the 'Framework for implementation of the PMAY-G', issued by the Centre's Rural Development Ministry," he said in the letter.

According to the letter sent to DDCs, the discrepancies in the implementation of the PMAY-G are "benefits granted in the name of dead persons in certain cases in the state, irregular payment of instalments to ineligible beneficiaries, unrealistic geo-tagging, payment of instalments in wrong accounts". https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/benefits-under-pmay-g-provided-to-ineligible-ones-in-state-auditors/articleshow/105872049.cms

6. ओपीएस में 1000 करोड़ का घोटाला, वित्त विभाग के अधिकारियों ने ठिकाने लगा दी NPS की रकम *(amarujala.com)* 10 Dec 2023

Rajasthan OPS scam: कांग्रेस की सबसे बड़ी चुनावी घोषणाओं में शामिल ओपीएस में एक हजार करोड़ का घोटाला सामने आया है। नियमानुसार एनपीएस में कर्मचारियों की कटौती की राशि केंद्र सरकार के एनएसडीएल/जीपीएफ फंड में जमा करवाई जानी थी। लेकिन, वित्त विभाग के अफसरों ने इसे खर्च कर दिया।

राजस्थान में सरकार बदलने के बाद अब वित्त (मार्गोपाय) विभाग के शीर्ष अफसरों की करतूत एक-एक कर सामने आ रही है। पिछली गहलोत सरकार ने कर्मचारियों के हित को देखते हुए जो ओल्ड पेंशन स्कीम OPS) लागू की थी उसमें भी वित्त विभाग के आला अफसरों ने बड़ा झोल कर दिया। ओपीएस की घोषणा करने के बाद भी जनवरी 2022 से मार्च 2022 तक कर्मचारियों के एनपीएस अंशदान की कटौती की गई। लेकिन, इस रकम को न तो केंद्र सरकार के एनएसडीएल फंड में जमा करवाया और न ही राजस्थान में कर्मचारियों के लिए खोले गए जीपीएफ खातों में रखा गया। विभाग के अफसरों ने इस पैसे को सामान्य राजस्व मद में जमा करवाकर खर्च कर दिया। यह खुलासा सीएजी की एक रिपोर्ट के अलावा 15वीं विधानसभा के अंतिम सत्र में पूर्व नेता प्रतिपक्ष राजेंद्र राठौड़ की ओर से पूछे गए सवाल के जवाब में भी हुआ है।

कर्मचारी को भी ठग लिया
प्रदेश में ओल्ड पेंशन स्कीम लागू होने से पहले सरकार ने कर्मचारियों और उसके अनुपात में खुद का अंशदान एनएसडीएल में जमा करवाना बंद कर दिया, जबकि कर्मचारियों के वेतन से यह पैसा काटा गया था। यह रकम 641 करोड़ रुपए है। अब यह राशि न तो एनएसडीएल में जमा हुई न ही सरकार के पास लौटाने के लिए बची है।

ओपीएस पर पड़ी दोहरी मार
कर्मचारियों को ओपीएस में दोहरी मार झेलनी पड़ेगी। न सिर्फ उनके एनपीएस का पैसा बजट घोषणाओं की पूर्ति में खर्च दिया बल्कि कर्मचारियों ने एनपीएस विड्रॉल का जो पैसा सरकार को वापस लौटाया उसे भी ठिकाने लगा दिया। यह राशि 382.41 करोड़ रुपए की है।

मुफ्त योजनाओं पर रकम कर दी खर्च
दरअसल, पिछली गहलोत सरकार ने ओपीएस लागू करने के साथ यह शर्त रखी थी कि जिन लोगों को ओपीएस में पेंशन लेनी है उन्हें एनपीएस से विड्रॉ की गई राशि ब्याज के साथ सरकार को लौटानी होगी। इस राशि को जीपीएफ खातों में जमा करवाया जाना था। लेकिन, अफसरों ने इसे मुफ्त की योजनाओं पर खर्च कर दिया। अब आने वाली नई सरकार के लिए यह बड़ी चुनौती होगी कि कर्मचारियों के एक हजार करोड़ रुपए के फंड को वह कैसे वापस लौटाएगी। इसके साथ ही इस राशि को ठिकाने लगाने वाले जिम्मेदार अफसरों के खिलाफ क्या कार्रवाई होती है भी देखने वाली बात होगी। https://www.amarujala.com/rajasthan/rajasthan-ops-scam-officials-of-finance-department-embezzled-rs-1000-crore-of-nps-2023-12-10

7. Government looking at local bodies to address insufficiency of funds to pay for welfare schemes *(english.mathrubhumi.com)* 11 December 2023,

Kozhikode: As the financial crisis worsens, the government is seeking funds from local bodies to provide welfare pension and other benefits to the people. The panchayat director has sent a letter to the secretaries asking them to make the payment immediately.

Grama panchayats need to donate Rs 5 lakh, block panchayats and municipalities Rs 10 lakh, corporations and district panchayats Rs 25 lakhs on an immediate basis. The letter specifies that the funds should be transferred to the welfare pension account and the treasury details of the same must be sent to the mission head office.

The action comes in the light of the insufficient funds allocated in the state budget for the welfare and empowerment projects as part of the social security mission. The government saw a way out when the Accountant General considered borrowing from the pension board as a government debt.

'We care' payment gateway has been launched to harness this amount. At the same time, the secretaries said that such funds cannot be transferred without a joint decision of the governing bodies.

These 'donations' will not be returned to the local bodies. Earlier, panchayats could offer Rs 1-2 lakhs if they wished to do so. This is the first time that this amount has been raised significantly and enforced.

The withdrawal from the local bodies for the Nava Kerala Sadas became a political controversy. It is following this that the new order comes. As per the order, if the local bodies make the payment, Rs 75.9 crores can be amassed. https://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/government-milking-local-bodies-to-cover-up-insufficiency-of-funds-to-pay-for-welfare-schemes-1.9145791

8. Governor seeks explanation on financial emergency: Is state capable of concealing the evident crisis *(english.mathrubhumi.com)* 09 Dec 2023

Thiruvananthapuram: The Governor's move to seek an explanation on the state of financial emergency in the state has put the government in a fix. In this regard, the petition filed by 'Save University' campaign committee R.S Sasikumar and the information given to the High Court by the Chief Secretary about the financial crisis have become weapons that the Governor can mobilise against the government.

Sasikumar approached the Governor demanding that Kerala declare a state of financial emergency, given its current circumstances. Since the Governor has sought an explanation from the chief secretary, it is clear that he is considering the matter seriously.

The Governor can use Article 360 of the Constitution here. This section is intended to invoke financial emergency in case of financial instability or crisis. In the recent past, no Governors in the country have made such a move. Realising the danger this could bring, the CPM has come forward with a political defence.

Although it may be argued that certain central policies are the reason for the current economic crisis, the affidavit filed by the chief secretary in the High Court remains to be a blemish on the state. This also makes it difficult to convince the Governor that there is no need to declare a financial emergency.

The remarks made by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and the Finance Minister K.N Balagopal in the past about the severe financial crisis of the state can also turn antithetical to the state's case. The findings of the 2020-21 CAG report further illustrates the depth of the crisis.

The Chief Secretary will have a hard time finding concrete explanations for all the mounting dues pending to Supplyco, salary and pension dues to college teachers, KSRTC-KTDFC liabilities and welfare pension dues among others.

The Governor's further action can go ahead if the centre decides on a political action against the state. The opposition's reaction to this development remains to be seen.

Explaining the situation to the people is also a challenge for the left front in terms of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. https://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/governor-seeks-explanation-on-financial-emergency-can-the-state-cover-up-the-glaring-crisis-1.9140618

9. How 15 years of corruption led to the Sikkim disaster *(eastmojo.com)* Dec 10, 2023

Private developers, who got projects through either an MOU or a joint venture route, enriched themselves at the cost of the government of Sikkim

The debris has settled, the death certificates for missing persons are being made, and Chungthang, the once-picturesque town that turned into a ghost town in the early weeks of October, is limping to normalcy, whatever qualifies for normalcy in a town whose entire existence was shaken.

And in a country where we wake up everyday to browse for reasons to be outraged, the story of how India's most prosperous state was left reeling has already been forgotten. Not that it received due attention when it needed it the most.

But what must not be forgotten is that while the Sikkim disaster occurred in October, it took decades of 'planning and hard work' to bring the state to its knees. Planning, to ensure that several violations are either ignored or buried deep, and hard work so that those who were making money continued to do so for years.

Take the Sikkim Sikkim government, for example. In its internal correspondence, the Sikkim government admitted that the letter of intent (LOI) it had issued to Athena Projects Private Limited for the construction of the Teesta Stage III 1200 MW project, was the State's hydropower policy.

Before the deluge: Red flags for over a decade
The memorandum of understanding (MOU) or memorandum of agreement (MoA) signed with the special purpose vehicle (SPV) Teesta Urja Limited and the Sikkim government, was deemed as the standard agreement for other independent power producers (IPPs) with more or less same set of terms, subject to minor alterations for MOU or MoA. This was concurred by the high-powered hydro committee and endorsed by the cabinet.

The specific clause in the MOU which deals with equity subscription (4.9.1) says, "The company shall not change the constitution of the company's board without prior permission from the government." If there is a violation of this clause, the Government of Sikkim (GoS) can unilaterally terminate the agreement.

Another vital point violated from the equity subscription clause was that the IPPs were to arrange the funds for the Sikkim government share of equity of either 26% or 11%, and the amount thus arranged was to be adjusted against the revenue stream of the state's share of 12% free power as per the MOU.

In the most startling and brazen violation of this very clause, the Sikkim government had to move to court to get a restraining order against TUL for the dilution of shares to third parties without its consent, while at the same time denying the Sikkim government its share of 26% equity.

TUL finally offered the Sikkim government its share of 26% equity for which it had to borrow Rs 296 crore in July 2012 after the Sikkim government moved to the court.

TUL did not arrange the funds for the equity.

During this time, a huge amount was also pumped into private companies or independent power producers (IPPs) developing hydropower projects in Sikkim after the Central Government allowed 100 per cent FDI in the power sector through the direct route.

An in-depth analysis of these investments shows that the finances were pumped in from tax havens like Singapore and Mauritius by companies registered in these countries by Private Equity (PE) funds, venture capitalists and hedge funds.

The best case study in this connection is TeestaUrja Limited (TUL), now Sikkim Urja Limited, an SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) set up by Athena Projects Pvt Ltd for developing the 1200 MW Teesta Stage III hydropower project near Chungthang in North Sikkim.

The Singapore-based Asian GencoPvt Ltd owned by TV Vijaykumar, an erstwhile close aide of the late YSR Reddy (former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh), the late CV Balayogi (former Speaker, LokSabha, also from Andhra), Jagan Mohan Reddy (YSR's son, now CM of Andhra) and KVP Ramachandra Rao (close associate of the Reddys). Until recently, it held close to 50 per cent equity in the project.

A clique of investors, led by Morgan Stanley Infrastructure Partners, bought close to 49 per cent stake in power generation and engineering services firm Asian Genco for $425 million in 2010, the biggest private equity (PE) transaction in India in the power sector.

The group of private equity (PE) investors in Asian Genco included US-based Morgan Stanley Infrastructure Partners, Everstone Capital, General Atlantic, Goldman Sachs Investment Management and Norwest Venture Partners, among others.

Asian Genco, (which has the former power secretary of Delhi RV Shahi as a consultant) had earlier raised funds from other investors like power trading firm PTC and its finance offshoot, PTC Financial Services, besides global investors such as Tiger Global Management.

This has been a trend for many of the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) developing projects in Sikkim, (as per the MoU, the government of Sikkim owns either 26 per cent or 11 per cent equities in some of these projects).

In 2008, TUL took Rs 4,500 crore as a loan from a rural electrification corporation (REC) and a consortium of seven nationalised banks and parked the funds in Asian Genco.

Teesta Lanco hydropower projects who were awarded Teesta VI hydropower projects did the same with investments in coal mines in South Africa, Griffin mines in Australia and a coal mine and a thermal power plant in Chhattisgarh, all with the help of finances from land mortgaged in Sikkim.

After liquidation, Teesta Lanco was acquired by NHPC.

Coastal Projects Sikkim sold shares at a premium to Baring Asia Equity Group at 65 times the face value; such value addition is fully and only attributable to their ownership of the concerned hydropower project they are executing in Sikkim. Jal Power Corporation Limited executing the 120 MW Rangit IV hydropower project is a subsidiary of Coastal Projects. After reaching insolvency, the project is now taken over by NHPC.

Jal Power Corporation Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Coastal Projects Private Limited, Hyderabad. In the 75:25 debt-equity ratios of Coastal Projects in the JV, the Sikkim government has, at the rate of 26 per cent equity, Rs 50.40 crore.

Had Jal Power executed the required Shareholder Agreement (Share Subscription Agreement) and allotted the Sikkim government 26 per cent equity within 180 days of the agreement, the state government, as a minority shareholder, would have got first preference to dilute and could have decided to off-load parts of its equity at 65 times the face value.

In this way, the state government was denied its dues and gains which the private developers tactfully and wrongfully embezzled (Source: Coastal Annual Report).

Private developers, who got projects through joint venture (JV) routes, enriched themselves at the cost of the state and its people.

Likewise, the Luxembourg-based Greenko Energy Ventures Private Limited controls the shares in the 96MW Dikchu Hydropower Project, a JV between the Sikkim government and Sneha Kinetic Power Projects Private Limited (an SPV). The Sikkim government is entitled to 26 per cent equity in it. Greenko has raised $46.3 million in allotting its preference shares (Source: Greenko Annual Report).

In the remand report of Jagan Reddy, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has clearly stated that in his Sandur Power Company Limited (SPCL), the Lanco group has purchased considerable shares. Lanco was doing the Teesta Stage VI project in Sikkim, which after reaching NCLT, was acquired by NHPC.

The Singapore-based River Valley Hydro Venture owns a 75 per cent stake in Secunderabad-based AmritJal Ventures, worth Rs 300 crore. AmritJal has floated three SPVs, Gati Infrastructure, Gati Infrastructure Bhasmey and Gati Infrastructure SadaMangder for three projects in Sikkim. According to an Economic Times report (February 19, 2009), the owners of Amri Jal Ventures were not clearly known.

Mauritius-based Varuna Investments Private Limited holds 100 per cent preference shares of Singapore-based Asian Genco, owned by TV Vijay Kumar. Asian Genco owns 50.9 per cent equity of TUL, leaving 49.1 per cent equity for the consortium partners of Athena Power Projects Limited (APPL) and the Sikkim government which is supposed to hold 26 per cent equity in the JV.

The dubious silence of the former CM
In reality, the GoS under Chief Minister Pawan Chamling chose not to disturb the status quo, despite gross illegality, MoU violation and quid pro quo benefits enjoyed by the troika of politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen, not to mention huge losses to the state exchequer.

In reply to an RTI application, the private hydropower developers said that, as a private limited company, they are outside the purview of the RTI Act, 2005, and it is not applicable to them; signatories to the MoU have no rights under the implementation agreement with the company.

In many cases, the original owners are untraceable or have become minority shareholders, having sold or transferred their equity to third parties who have nothing to do with the MoU or the GoS. Indeed, this raises serious legal issues.

Teesta Urja Ltd formed its own construction company, Abir Infrastructure Pvt Ltd, for project-related works. That company belongs to Teesta Urja Ltd with the same shareholders and even shares the same address.

As per the Government of India guidelines for JV projects or projects through the MOU route, the engineering procurement contract or EPC has to be awarded through competitive bidding. In stark violation, Abir was awarded the EPC contract by MOU in 2007.

Irregularities noticed, never acted upon
The CAG reports of 2009 and the report of 2015-16 explain in detail the illegalities and arbitrary allotment of hydropower projects in Sikkim.

The Sikkim government had, in June 2004, set a target of producing 3,000 MW of additional power by the end of 2012.

A cascade of projects on the Teesta–including Teesta Stage I 320 MW, Stage II 480 MW, Stage III 1,200 MW, Stage IV 520 MW, Stage V 510 MW and Stage VI 500 MW–were conceived and sanctioned, with the approval of the CWC and the Central Electricity Authority (CEA).

The state government set up a high-power committee in June 2004 to expedite the development of hydropower projects, the CAG noted in the 2016 report. Four proposals for Teesta III–from Cosmos Electric Power Supply Limited (CEPSL), NHPC, Reliance, and Sutlej Jal Nigam Vidyut Limited (SJVNL)–were received, and the HPC had recommended the proposal of the consortium led by CEPSL proposal twice that year. The cabinet first did not accede to the recommendation in October 2004, and on the second occasion in November 2004, deferred "for reasons not on record", the CAG noted.

Norwegian state-owned power company Statkraft AS and global private equity (PE) fund Actis Llp are separately looking to acquire the Indian hydroelectric assets of Singapore’s Equis Pte. Ltd, valued at around ₹2,700 crore.

Equis-owned Hydreq owns and operates two hydroelectric plants in Sikkim, the Jorethang Loop 96 MW and the Tashiding 97 MW, both of which were awarded by MoU route to the DANS energy group. In both these projects, the Sikkim government did not have any equity but was entitled to 12% free power.

The sale of Hydreq was proposed after a group of investors led by Global Infrastructure Partners announced plans to acquire Equis Energy for $5 billion in October 2017. Equis Energy was focused on solar and wind power projects.

Equis Pte. Ltd (Equis) and Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) announced today the execution of binding documentation for the sale of 100% of Equis Energy for USD5.0 billion (including assumed liabilities of USD1.3bn) in cash to GIP and co-investors. The transaction is subject to customary regulatory approvals and is expected to close in the first quarter of 2018.

Japan’s financial services firm ORIX Corp. and Greenko Energy Holdings have concluded a deal for the investment of $980 million in Greenko. This is the single largest foreign investment transaction in India’s clean energy space. In addition, Greenko has also completed the acquisition of a 40% stake in Teesta Urja Ltd, which is setting up the 1.2 gigawatt (GW) hydropower project in North Sikkim, for $250 million.

Private preference over government agencies?

A very interesting trend seen in Sikkim, again pointing to corruption, is that many projects were awarded to independent power producers (IPPs), either in JV with the Sikkim government, or independently with no government stake, whereas state-owned NHPCs were rejected by the then Sikkim government.

Teesta Stage III itself was given to NHPC way back in 1987 as records show. The Teesta Stage IV in Dzongu, Teesta Stage V, the Teesta Stage VI and Jal power corporation Rangit IV 120 MW, are all being taken over and run by the NHPC.

This is in addition to Rangit II which NHPC was already successfully running. Interestingly, in Dzongu the 300 MW Panan hydropower project awarded to Himagiri Hydropower Projects Private Limited, also evinced interest from NHPC due to the developer facing time and cost overruns, and financial constraints. Sikkim government has 26% equity in Panan.

These projects if given to NHPC might have by now started contributing revenue to the state and power to the national grid, but the greed and corruption in the awarding of projects led to losses in cost and time overruns, ultimately, NHPC was called to salvage the projects, while the politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen enriched themselves at the expense of the public exchequer.

And all this added up to turn into the disaster we witnessed on October 4. https://www.eastmojo.com/sikkim/2023/12/10/how-15-years-of-corruption-led-to-the-sikkim-disaster/

10. Promises and financial constraints *(finnoexpert.com)* Dec 11, 2023

The new Congress government in Telangana is set to face an uphill task in fulfilling the six guarantees that the party made to the farmers, women, and youth of the State during its election campaign.

For instance, the Mahalakshmi scheme guarantees women ₹2,500 every month, gas cylinders for ₹500 (nearly half the current price), and free travel in public buses. Also, on the lines of the Kalyana Lakshmi scheme of the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government, the Mahalakshmi scheme promises ₹1 lakh each and 10 gms of gold to women from economically weaker sections for marriage.

A major guarantee is Rythu Bharosa, a farmers' investment support scheme, under which the Congress has promised ₹15,000 per acre to 58.33 lakh farmers. The BRS government had implemented the Rythu Bandhu scheme providing ₹5,000 per acre and had made a budgetary provision of a little over ₹15,000 crore for the current fiscal. Increasing the investment support by 50% would mean that the Congress government would have to spend an additional ₹7,000 crore every year towards the scheme in addition to the ₹12,000 an acre it has promised to the 30 lakh tenant farmers. The outgoing government did not consider tenant farmers while implementing Rythu Bandhu.

The difficulty in mobilising finances for the implementation of these and other schemes stems from the fact that the revenue receipts of the government are not up to expectations with only around 50% of the State's projected own tax revenue achieved at the end of seven months of the fiscal year. The borrowings/loans raised by the BRS government over the past nine and a half years had imposed an interest burden of ₹22,407 crore on the government in the current fiscal. Of this, ₹12,956 crore was paid till the end of October. This is in addition to the loans raised through corporations including Kaleshwaram Irrigation Project Corporation Limited.

The government's total revenue receipts at the end of October amounted to ₹99,775 crore, 46.07% of the ₹2.16 lakh crore projected in the budget estimates for the current year. The State's own tax revenue during the period was a little higher at ₹77,382 crore, which is 50.74% of the budget estimate of ₹1.52 lakh crore, according to the provisional data released by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). The state of finances can be gleaned from the fact that Telangana depended on instruments of financial accommodation such as the special drawing facility, ways and means advances, and overdrafts for most part of the current fiscal.

In September, for instance, the government availed itself of ₹863 crore under the special drawing facility for all the 30 days of the month and it resorted to ways and means advances amounting to ₹1,443 crore for 26 days in addition to the ₹666 crore that it raised through overdraft for 10 days.

In the budget estimates, the State had proposed to raise ₹38,234 crore through borrowings, primarily market borrowings, for the year, but the Union Finance Ministry had curtailed the borrowing limit to a little over ₹36,617 crore citing over borrowings during the previous fiscal. The Union Ministry said the limit had been fixed in line with the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission and as per the guidelines for annual borrowing ceiling. The borrowings limit has been fixed at ₹57,813 crore for the current year but it had to be cut down to ₹42,225 crore as the State had over borrowed during the preceding financial years.

This was the case during the previous fiscal, too, when the State could raise open market borrowings to the tune of ₹32,119 crore as against the projected ₹52,167 crore, according to CAG figures. The State had ended up paying interest of ₹20,952 crore as against the ₹18,911 crore projected in the budget for 2022-23, the CAG report said.

The State had to depend on sale of lands and also advance auction of liquor outlets ahead of the announcement of the schedule for the Assembly elections, which provided it some cushion for a while.

Given this background, it will be a herculean task for the new government to manage its finances. It can ill-afford to raise taxes and duties in the immediate future and the prospect of securing permissions for additional borrowings to meet its commitments also appear to be remote. https://finnoexpert.com/2023/12/11/promises-and-financial-constraints/

11. Sand Erosion and vanishing Sand Dunes *(heraldgoa.in)* Dec 11, 2023

A recent report from the 'National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management' (NCSCM) unveiled concerning findings about sand erosion in Goa. Out of 41 surveyed beaches, 22 have witnessed significant erosion, totalling 1,22,176.44 square meters. This revelation, presented in the Lok Sabha, highlights the urgency of addressing coastal challenges and underscoring the multifaceted nature that is shaping Goa's beaches. Environmentalists are particularly concerned about the destruction of sand dunes and warn of the consequences the State's coastline will face if corrective measures are not taken immediately KARSTEN MIRANDA reports

During December, Goan families residing abroad return to their homeland. The older generation among them like to share the uniqueness of Goa with their children by visiting various places that showcase what they love about the State their ancestors grew up in.

However, they face the unfortunate reality that the once-existent sand dunes on the beaches have nearly disappeared. In their youth, they would joyfully ascend the slopes of these sand dunes, engaging in playful games.

Regrettably, these cherished memories are now mere echoes, leaving their children without the opportunity to witness the sand dunes in their former glory.

Interestingly, in December, attention was drawn to the plight of Goa's beaches, which are grappling with sand erosion—a growing concern voiced by coastal communities reliant on tourism or traditional occupations. A report from the 'National Center for

Sustainable Coastal Management' (NCSCM) in Chennai revealed that 22 out of 41 beaches surveyed in Goa, have experienced significant sand erosion, totalling 1,22,176.44 square meters.

The study was tabled by the Union Minister of State (MoS) for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Ashwini Kumar Choubey in a written reply in the Lok Sabha earlier this month.

Coincidentally, the study delved into accretion, the process of coastal sediment reemerging after submersion, across certain beach stretches.

For perspective, the remaining 19 of the 41 beaches experienced both erosion and accretion simultaneously. Nonetheless, 13 beaches faced erosion exclusively, accounting for a total of 1,09,483.66 sq m.

From this, Colva leads with the highest amount of sand erosion 22,563.7 (sq m), followed by Mandrem (15,829.25 sq m); Ashvem 12,734.77 (sq m), Querim (10,403.88 sq m), Cansaulim (8,377.57 sq m), Sinquerim 8,339.79 (sq m), Betalbatim 8,310.65 sq m), Sernabatim 7,670.26 sq m), Velsao (5,670.13 sq m), Talpona (5,659.62 sq m), Canaguinim (2,360.52 sq m), Patnem 1,265.84 sq m) and Utorda (297.62 sq m).

In his reply in parliament, MoS Choubey highlighted that all affected states in India have been directed to finalize their 2019 Coastal Zone Management Plans (CZMPs) in accordance with the CRZ notification 2019. This includes mapping erosion-prone areas and developing Shoreline Management Plans for identified stretches experiencing erosion. The ministry has provided technical support for designing coastal protection measures and preparing Shoreline Management Plans in vulnerable areas.

Furthermore, the Union environment ministry has established a hazard line for the entire Indian coast, indicative of shoreline changes, including those related to sea-level rise due to climate change. This line serves as a tool for Disaster Management, aiding in the planning of adaptive and mitigation measures by coastal state agencies.

Additionally, a study by the National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR) has monitored shoreline changes for the entire Indian coastline from 1990 to 2018. The findings reveal that 33.6% of the Indian coastline is vulnerable to erosion, 26.9% is experiencing accretion, and 39.6% remains stable. The study underscores that shoreline changes result from both natural and human activities, with the receding coastline posing a threat to land, habitat, and the livelihoods of fishermen, impacting boat parking, net mending, and fishing operations.

Goa govt's response

The State government has tied up with a Netherlands-based company called Deltares, to carry out a study to evaluate the causes of erosion on Goa's beaches in relation to local wave-driven currents, storm/ cyclone erosion, and discharge at river mouths.

Furthermore, under the aegis of the State's Environment department, the Goa Coastal and Environment Management Society, will implement the ambitious project to rejuvenate the beach stretches from Majorda to Betalbatim in South Goa.

This pilot project involves the implementation of the innovative Sand Motor experiment, originally developed by Deltares.

The approach involves depositing an immense volume of sand extracted offshore along the coastline in a single operation, resulting in the creation of a strategically shaped peninsula. Over time, natural processes redistribute the sand, forming a buffer against sea level rise, storm surges and coastal flooding.

For the pan-Goa study to be carried out by Deltares, the Environment Department received a detailed proposal from the Dutch company, which will support local agencies in their studies on the local coastal morphology and their knowledge-basis for decision-making on mitigation measures.

Deltares will support the modelling of the morphological system via collaborative efforts with the aim of obtaining a quantification of the sediment transport rates.

As per the proposal, a three-day visit has been planned to the area with two Deltares employees.
"We will assess the local situation from literature and in-house data. The aim is to provide a conceptual overview of the functioning of the local morphological system, create a joint understanding of the causes of erosion, confirm the approach and perform first capacity building on the relevant coastal processes. We can check the site characteristics and meet local authorities and stakeholders. We will summarise the discussed approach and further detail this in a concise report," read the proposal.

"We will guide them with the setup of a wave model and support their coastal morphological analysis. We will provide capacity building on coastline modelling and follow this up, through email and video, for the assessment/modelling of the case study by the local agency. Depending on the capacities of the local agency, we will take up some of the technical tasks," the proposal added.

"This work will be carried out in collaboration with National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) and NCCR," former Environment Minister Nilesh Cabral had stated recently during a Goa Legislative Assembly session.

Cabral had then also stated that the Water Resources Department (WRD) has entrusted the study of Goa coast for its behaviour, erosion pediment transportation to National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) in the year 2021 underworld bank funded National Hydrology Project.

"WRD has carried out Anti-beach erosion measures have been majorly initiated at Keri-Pernem by using tetrapods, Coco-beach at Nerul, Bardez by Concrete Blocks and Khanaginim beach with stones to mitigate the coast erosion caused by vagaries of the sea waves," Cabral had stated.

Greens see Red!
Once considered pristine, Goa's coastal zone has undergone significant geological and ecological transformations, with environmentalists attributing these changes to human interference and the authorities' lackadaisical attitude. The destruction of age-old sand

dune ecosystems, once Nature's defence against ocean forces like cyclones and tsunamis, has raised concerns.

Environmental experts emphasize the vital role of sand dunes as "sand banks" maintaining the dynamic equilibrium of the beach. They point to the urgency for the government to prioritise the conservation and restoration of these dunes, crucial for protecting the expansive 105 sq km coastal area. Referring to studies by NIO and NCSCM, experts connect the deterioration of sand dunes to development and tourism activities along the coastal belts.

"Time and again, we have reiterated that the coast of Goa is under assault. Tourism and related human activities are a major cause. Several coastal areas have changed from virtual wilderness in 1970's to haphazardly developed stretches, full of concrete buildings and related structures, in the last 30 years. The Baga - Candolim coast is a classic example of frenzied development," said Dr Antonio Mascarenhas, scientist who was earlier with the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Dona Paula and the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA).

It is to be noted that the Coastal Regulation Zone, 2011 declared sand dunes as CRZ I (a) areas, which are ecologically sensitive and has ensured a restriction of development activities along the dune areas.

Mascarenhas explained that the dune environment is classified as fragile, sensitive and vulnerable due to its propensity for changes under even slight environmental stress. "Despite that, its onslaught continues with authorities being least bothered," he said.

Agnelo Barreto, member of the citizens' group, Calangute Constituency Forum (CCF), said that several roads laid perpendicular to the coast and across dune belts in Calangute have severely altered, razed, levelled and eliminated a large number of dunes He also said that for construction of various tourism facilities like toilets and parking lots, sand dunes are destroyed.

Referring to cases that have occurred in Candolim and Calangute, he asscerted that the GCZMA, which grants permissions for temporary structures, has to be more proactive in checking whether the applicant sets up temporary or permanent concrete structures. He said that there are far better ways to promote tourism while also protecting and conserving ecology.

It may be recalled that last year, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) had tabled its report titled 'Conservation of Coastal Ecosystem' in Parliament, which come down heavily on GCZMA and pointed out that despite the existence of sand dunes, it gave permissions for infrastructure development and construction of hotels and residential houses along the beach stretches vulnerable to sand dunes leading to its destruction.

Citing an example, CAG observed that the construction of four-lane National Highway 17 B from Varunapuri to Sada Junction near Baina Beach was recommended by the authority in 2015 despite observations of the site inspection team that Baina Beach contained sand dunes covered with vegetation and that it was prone to annual cycles of erosion which made it ecologically sensitive and construction will disturb the ecological stability of sensitive beach.

On another concerning note, environmentalists have also alleged that the CZMP that was approved by the State of Goa and sent to the Centre has an extensive amount of sand dunes missing from it despite the same having been verified in the ground truthing exercise that was conducted.

Judith Almeida of the Colva Civic and Consumer Forum (CCCF) for instance pointed out that this flip flop on the existence or nonexistence of sand dunes had paved the way for GCZMA to grant permissions.

She feared that in the future, it will be up to green activists to challenge the CZMP as otherwise, there could be similar cases where sand dunes across beaches in Goa will be shown as non-existent and approvals will be then granted for projects on these beaches.

Almeida also lamented that GCZMA is not attending to complaints on time leading to a piling up of pending cases.

Environmentalists want the GCZMA to follow its policy as well as directions from the National Green Tribunals regarding Beach Carrying Capacities across the coast wherein permissions cannot be given if the beach areas have exceeded its respective BCCs.

Presently, there are a series of complaints about sand dune destruction in the Salcete coastal belt, pertaining to the beaches of Sernabatim, Benaulim and Varca, for which inspections have been carried out and efforts are underway to see that these sand dunes are restored and action is taken against those who have destroyed the same. https://www.heraldgoa.in/Review/SAND-EROSION-and-vanishing-SAND-DUNES/214951

12. MADC: MADC Mum on Audit Queries: Mihan-DC; Replies Sent: VC-MD *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* Dec 09, 2023

Nagpur: Nagpur: Sraman Vasireddy, development commissioner (DC) for Mihan-SEZ, has said that Maharashtra Airport Development Company (MADC), developer of the zone, has not responded to questions raised following an audit into its working.

The comptroller and auditor general's (CAG) office had put up certain questions following an audit into MADC's affairs. The DC's office sought a response to the questions, but there has been no reply since last three months, Vasireddy told media persons on Monday.

Swati Pandey, vice-chairman-cum managing director of MADC, told TOI the questions raised by the CAG have been replied to. Even the clarifications sought by the DC office have been given, she said.

As many as 90% of the audit queries have been responded to and remaining are under process, Pandey said, adding answers to audit queries need not be routed through the DC's office and have been submitted directly.

Vasireddy said the DC office has not received any answers. Since the DC is the caretaker of the SEZ, the queries were put up before him by the CAG, he said.

The DC also said there are 19 companies in the SEZ which don't have letter of approval (LOA) at all. The LOA is a basic permission for a unit to operate in an SEZ, and avail tax benefits. Pandey said these companies which have been given provisional land allotment. The question of LOA arises only after a final allotment is made. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/madc-mum-on-audit-queries-mihan-dc-replies-sent-vc-md-nagpur/articleshow/105852800.cms

13. Will remove names of those who got enrolled in NRC by fraud: Assam CM *(hindustantimes.com)* Dec 10, 2023

Himanta Biswa Sarma was speaking on the sidelines of an event in Guwahati to mark Swahid Diwas to commemorate the deaths of over 800 people in the Assam Agitation (1979-85) against illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said that his government will try and take steps to remove names of those applicants who had enrolled in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) using fraudulent means.

The CM made these remarks while speaking on the sidelines of an event in Guwahati to mark Swahid Diwas (Martyrs Day) to commemorate the deaths of over 800 people in the Assam Agitation (1979-85) against illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh.

"We are preparing a big plan to find out details of those who entered their names in the NRC using forgery and try and remove them from the list. We have started discussing this with various experts," Sarma said without divulging details of the plan or how it will be executed.

Speaking on Clause 6 (that assured constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards for Assamese people) of the Assam Accord, which was signed in 1985, the CM said that his government has already taken steps to protect land rights of the state's indigenous population and almost 100% of all government jobs in Assam are given to local residents.

Updating of the 1951 NRC for Assam was done under directions of Supreme Court in order to detect illegal citizens who had entered the state after March 25, 1971. The final NRC list published in August 2019 had left out 1.9 million of the 33 million applicants on suspicion of their claims as Indian citizens.

The final NRC, which is yet to be notified by Registrar General of India (RGI) has been rejected as incorrect by the state's BJP-led government stating that that it had many anomalies and left out eligible persons and included illegal immigrants.

The Assam government has since approached the Supreme Court seeking a review of the entire exercise. Several local organisations in Assam have also rejected the list and have approached SC seeking review. All those petitions are pending before the apex court.

In its report released in December last year, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India had detected large scale anomalies in updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam.

The CAG recommended fixing responsibility of the former state coordinator of NRC, Prateek Hajela, and action in a time bound manner for the excess, irregular and inadmissible payment made to the vendor.
https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/will-remove-names-of-those-who-got-enrolled-in-nrc-by-fraud-assam-cm-101702218819624.html

14. Layout revised, govt panel wants work to resume on Sports City after 2 years *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* Dec 11, 2023

Noida: The public accounts committee of the UP assembly has asked Noida Authority to go through a revised layout submitted by the developer of Sports City in Sector 150 on priority and give its approval if the plan met all the requirements.

The approval of the revised report is key for constructionto resume on the project, where 10,000 homebuyers have invested.

The Noida Authority had in 2021 ordered a stay on all construction work related to the project after the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) raised objections on the earlier layout.

One of the main objections raised by CAG was the lack of 70% of contiguous land for developing sports facilities. At a meeting in Lucknow on November 22, the Noida Authority CEO, Lokesh M, informed the assembly panel that the developer – Lotus Greens – had assured the availability of 70% of continuous tracts of land in its revised plan.

While the committee members asked the Noida Authority to expedite the process of approval if Lotus complied with all the norms, a representative of CAG said he wouldn't have any objection if the report met international specifications.

The Noida Authority told the panel it was evaluating the map and would present it before its board for a discussion soon. One the board gave its nod, the revised plan would be sent to the state government for final approval.

Lotus Greens was allotted 330 acres in Sector 150 to develop Sports City in 2014-15. Unlike in other projects, 70% of the land needed to be reserved for developing sports facilities like golf courses, cricket and tennis academies. But the remaining land could be set aside for residential and commercial use to make the project economically viable.

After it was allotted the land, Lotus divided it into 24 parts and handed them over to other companies for developing housing projects. Developers Tata, Samriddhi, Eldeco, Homekraft and Godrej have already constructed their projects after getting their respective layouts approved by the Noida Authority.

The overall project, however, hit a hurdle in 2021 when CAG raised its objections, pointing out that while residential buildings were being developed, work on sports facilities had taken a backseat. It also questioned the way land was allotted and then subdivided by Lotus.

While the Authority then put a stop on all work at the project, the assembly panel started looking into the lapses pointed out by CAG. A recent inspection by the Noida Authority also found that 63% of the land – and not 70% – had been set aside for sports facilities.

Since then, at least five high-level meetings have been held on the issue. In August this year, the committee asked the Noida Authority to allow construction to resume wherever sufficient land was available. Lotus then came up with its revised layout, saying it had taken away some plots set aside for housing projects and ensured there was 70% of contiguous land in its kitty for sports facilities.

Mahboob Ali, the committee chairperson, said it was high time that a decision was taken on the project. "We are okay with the revised report. Other officials concerned have also said that there is enough land for developing sports facilities. So, the stay on construction ordered by the Noida Authority should be removed. Our intention is to ensure Sports City meets all the international standards," he added.

Apart from the Sports City in Sector 150, similar projects have been planned at four other places in Noida. The remaining three, however, are mired in legal tangles and issues over land. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/noida/layout-revised-govt-panel-urges-approval-for-sports-city-construction/articleshow/105887710.cms

15. स्पोर्ट्स सिटी के 15 हजार फ्लैट खरीदार अब भी फंसे

(amarujala.com) December 10, 2023

नोएडा। नोएडा स्पोर्ट्स सिटी के 15 हजार फ्लैट खरीदार अब भी बुरी तरह से फंसे हुए हैं। रजिस्ट्री तो दूर की बात, इसके समाधान की गाड़ी एक कदम भी आगे नहीं बढ़ पाई है। आलम यह है कि लोक लेखा समिति (पीएसी) के आदेश के बाद भी शासन स्तर पर हाईलेवल कमेटी नहीं बन पाई है, जो कि इस घोटाले की जड़ का पता लगाने के लिए गठित होनी थी। ऐसे में दोषियों की पहचान होनी अभी भी बाकी है।

दरअसल, भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक की सितंबर 2021 में नोएडा प्राधिकरण के परफॉर्मेंस ऑडिट की रिपोर्ट के आधार पर लगाई गई आपत्तियों की सुनवाई के दौरान पीएसी ने पहले चरण में स्पोर्ट्स सिटी का मुद्दा उठाया था। इसके तहत आपत्तियों पर सुनवाई आदि हुई। इसमें प्रमुख आरोप यह है कि इस परियोजना का काम पूरा नहीं हुआ और यहां 70 प्रतिशत भाग पर खेल सुविधाओं का विकास नहीं हुआ। आलम यह है कि बाकी बचे हुए 30 प्रतिशत भाग पर बिल्डरों ने इमारत खड़ी कर दी, जोकि बाद में करनी थी। आरोप यह भी है कि खेल सुविधाओं के लिए आरक्षित जमीन को भी घेरा गया और मानक की धज्जियां उड़ाई गई।

इसी कड़ी में पीएसी ने एक-एक परियोजना का सर्वे कर रिपोर्ट देने को कहा था, जिसमें यह बताना था कि अभी कितनी जमीन पर निर्माण हुआ है और कितनी जमीन बची हुई है। इनमें से कुछ परियोजनाएं नेशनल कंपनी लॉ ट्रिब्यूनल (एनसीएलटी) में भी गई हुई हैं। पूरी परियोजना में जमीन के आवंटन शुल्क पर भी सवाल खड़े हुए हैं कि इस परियोजना को स्पेशल बताकर कम रेट पर बिल्डरों को जमीन दी गई। सबसे बड़ा आरोप यह है कि जिन मुख्य बिल्डरों को जमीन दी गई, उन्होंने इस प्लॉट के टुकड़े करते हुए कई बिल्डरों को बेच दिया। यहां से यह परियोजना नाकामी का शिकार हो गई। किसी भी बिल्डर ने खेल सुविधाओं का विकास नहीं किया।

नक्शा भी गलत हुआ पास

सूत्रों के मुताबिक, स्पोर्ट्स सिटी परियोजना के कुछ हिस्से का गलत नक्शा पास किया गया है। इस वजह से परियोजना की मूल भावना आहत हुई। जब अलग-अलग बिल्डरों को टुकड़ों में जमीन दी गई तो उन्होंने इमारत बनाने के लिए नक्शा पास कराया। यहां भी उन्होंने खेल सुविधाओं का ध्यान नहीं रखा। ऐसे में परियोजना का काम नियम के तहत नहीं हो पाया।

जमीन भी हुई कम

कहीं-कहीं खेल सुविधाओं के लिए 70 प्रतिशत आरक्षित जमीन के बदले 63 और 65 प्रतिशत ही जमीन बची हुई है। ऐसे में यह नियमों का साफ उल्लंघन है। ऐसे में कमेटी को इन सभी मामलों में जांच कर दोषियों को सामने लाना था, लेकिन दोषी अभी भी पकड़ से बाहर हैं।

जब तक ओसी नहीं, तब तक रजिस्ट्री नहीं

प्राधिकरण की ओर से इस मामले में जब तक ऑक्यूपेंसी सर्टिफिकेट (ओसी) नहीं दिया जाता है तब तक फ्लैटों की रजिस्ट्री नहीं हो पाएगी। ओसी तब तक नहीं मिलेगी, जब तक स्पोर्ट्स सिटी का मसला हल नहीं हो जाता है। नियमों को ताक पर रखकर किए गए अवैध निर्माण की वजह से रजिस्ट्री संभव नहीं है। वहीं बिल्डरों को काफी पैसे भी चुकाने हैं। ऐसे में शासन की ओर से कोई फैसला होता है, तभी रजिस्ट्री संभव है।

सीएजी की 24 आपत्तियों में 8 हजार करोड़ के गड़बड़झाले का आरोप

सीएजी ने स्पोर्ट्स सिटी के 78-79, 150, 152 आदि परियोजनाओं में 24 आपत्तियां लगाई हैं। इन आपत्तियों में करीब आठ हजार करोड़ के गड़बड़झाले का आरोप है। सीएजी ने सस्ते रेट में जमीन आवंटन समेत कई बिंदुओं पर आपत्तियां लगाई हैं। फिलहाल पीएसी की सुनवाई और कमेटी की जांच के बाद सब कुछ निकलकर सामने आ जाएगा। https://www.amarujala.com/delhi-ncr/noida/15-thousand-flat-buyers-of-sports-city-are-still-stranded-noida-news-c-1-gnd1002-1194031-2023-12-10

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

16. Need a joint effort: In infrastructure, govt must mark some sectors for public funds, and tailor PPP models to lure pvt capital to others *(financialexpress.com)* December 11, 2023

The cost of servicing the debt is seen to peak at Rs 62,000 crore by FY28, before petering out.

Infrastructure financing in India is at a crossroads again. Having drawn up a plan to retire 50% of its humongous Rs 3.4 trillion debt by FY30, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) will have to keep away from the capital market for the next many years. It had ceased to borrow in large quantities since FY22, and started relying solely on the Union Budget to finance the projects. Toll revenues of about Rs 20,000 crore a year and roughly half of that generated via the leasing out of operational projects—asset monetisation through InvIT—are barely enough to service the agency's accumulated debt, let alone fund greenfield projects.

The cost of servicing the debt is seen to peak at Rs 62,000 crore by FY28, before petering out. The ministry of highways has reportedly sought a Budget outlay of around Rs 3.25 trillion for FY25, up 25% on year, and roughly 60% of it could be on the NHAI's behalf.

This staggering—and unsustainable—burden on the Budget is a reflection of the continued absence of private risk capital in the highway sector, where the public private partnership (PPP) model floundered by 2010, and contributed in large measure to the "twin balance sheet crisis" that followed. The funds constraint may have already started to show on project implementation—NHAI's project awards plunged to 310-km in April-October FY24, from 6,000-km stretches in the whole of FY23, and 6,300-km the year before. A similar resort to Budget funds is seen in the railway sector, where, too, a lid has been put on fresh borrowings by IRFC. The greater reliance on taxpayer's money for fixed asset creation in the two key infrastructure sectors is at variance with the 40% share for private capital envisaged under the Rs 111-trillion National Infra Pipeline (FY20-FY25).

The PPP mode that was first devised 1997 and rejigged multiple times since to meet the country's mammoth infrastructure challenge, has produced mixed results. It has been successful in telecom, started producing satisfactory results in airports soon, and later made headway in renewable energy and power transmission. In fact, the seaport sector too has seen great strides in harnessing private capital over the last quarter century. From under 10% two decades ago, three-fourths of cargo at India's ports are now handled at terminals owned or operated by the private sector. At the same time, PPP models for development of railway stations came a cropper.

Starting from the formation of IDFC in 1997-98, there has been several attempts by the policymakers to provide the infrastructure sector with compatible institutional finance. The latest in this series is the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development unveiled in Budget FY22, which followed the quasi sovereign wealth fund—NIIF—set up in 2015. Global patient capital and multilateral development banks are expected to reinforce these entities, and they already have begun doing so, though on a limited scale. However, patient capital would usually be interested in brownfield assets, rather than risk-prone greenfield ventures. Such capital would help unlock Budget funds for projects that might not yield direct returns. More than the dearth of finance, what impedes private capital is, however, the lack of realistic, custom-made PPP concession agreements. Dispute resolution also remains a challenge. The right policy would be to earmark the segments suitable for public investments, and maximise the scope for private capital to punt in other areas. https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/need-a-joint-effort-in-infrastructure-govt-must-mark-some-sectors-for-public-funds-and-tailor-ppp-models-to-lure-pvt-capital-to-others/3334769/

17. Defence ministry's Technology Development Fund sanctions 70 projects involving Rs 291 crore so far *(financialexpress.com)* December 11, 2023

The Technology Development Fund (TDF) scheme under the Ministry of Defence, which aims to boost MSMEs and startups' engagement in designing and development of various defence technologies indigenously, has so far sanctioned 70 projects amounting to Rs 291.25 crore to various industries. In addition, 16 defence technologies have been successfully developed/realised under the scheme, informed Ajay Bhatt, Minister of State in the Defence Ministry in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha.

Launched in 2016 and executed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) under the Make in India programme, the scheme provides grant-in-aid to industries, including MSMEs and startups along with academic and scientific institutions for the development of defence and dual-use technologies currently not available with the Indian defence industry.

Bhatt said the scheme aims to engage with the private industries especially MSMEs and startups to bring in the culture of design & development of military technology and create a bridge amongst the armed forces, research organizations, academia and qualifying/certifying agencies with private sector entities.

As of August 2023, the government has allocated Rs 260 crore under the scheme since its inception. Sharing the data in the Bhatt had informed that out of the amount allocated, Rs 64.35 crore was disbursed as a grant-in-aid to industries, FE Aspire had reported.

The scheme enables two funding mechanisms; first, the DRDO share of the project cost is paid in a maximum of five instalments in the form of reimbursement upon successful achievement of milestones by businesses. Second, advance funding of the project subject to a maximum of five milestones of the project.

Importantly, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at an event in November this year had said the government has reserved 75 per cent of the defence capital acquisition budget for purchases from local companies, which will strengthen MSMEs. The 75 per cent reservation amounts to around Rs 1 lakh crore, Singh had said inaugurating the three-day India Manufacturing Show in Bengaluru jointly organised by Laghu Udhyog Bharti & IMS Foundation.

Meanwhile, during the monsoon session of the parliament this year, Bhatt had informed the Lok Sabha that over 30,000 defence items by defence public sector units (DPSUs) and services on the Srijan portal (which lists items that can be taken up for indigenisation by the private sector) were offered to the industry including MSMEs to become partners in the indigenisation process.

The defence ministry had nearly doubled its online procurement of goods and services from MSMEs and other sellers in FY23 from the previous fiscal via the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) marketplace. The ministry had made purchases worth Rs 28,732.9 crore in FY23, up by 90.4 per cent from Rs 15,090.8 crore worth of goods and services bought in FY22, according to GeM, FE Aspire had reported. https://www.financialexpress.com/business/sme/defence-ministrys-technology-development-fund-sanctions-70-projects-involving-rs-291-crore-so-far/3335170/

18. Navy plans to get undersea chariots, made in India, for special operations *(indianexpress.com)* 10 Dec 2023

The Indian Navy is planning to acquire indigenously-made swimmer delivery vehicles — also known as underwater chariots and midget submarines — as part of efforts to modernise and strengthen the capabilities of its Marine Commandos (MARCOS) for special undersea operations.

Defence sources told The Sunday Express that these chariots, which will be able to carry a crew of at least six, will be powered by lithium-ion batteries.

The sources said there are plans to procure a few dozen chariots for the Navy after the initial prototype is cleared.

The size of these delivery vehicles will enable divers to carry bigger cylinders in the chariots – letting them stay underwater for longer hours – and thereby enhancing the overall operational range in shallow waters.

The size of the chariots will also permit carriage of additional weapons for various operations.

Defence sources said the Navy is designing the vehicles in consultation with the industry, based on which the prototype will be made.

Shallow water ops
These chariots are undersea vessels, and are used by almost all advanced navies. These come in very handy if the Navy has to operate in shallow waters, carry out surveillance or target the adversary's coastal installations, its ships in harbour.

The chariots are highly specialised platforms used by almost all advanced navies in the world. These are self-propelled vehicles which can be launched from ships or submarines, depending on their size and the roles they are to perform. In World War II, manned human torpedoes were referred to as chariots.

They can be used for a range of missions which include shallow-water surveillance, attacking the adversary's coastal installations, and even their ships in harbour.

According to a Forbes article, the Pakistan Navy has a small submarine – a fraction of the size of a regular submarine – which is in use by the SSG (N), its Special Service Group.

The chariots allow marine commandos to access areas close to the adversary's harbour – which submarines are not able to reach due to shallow waters – and aid transportation of weapons and equipment to areas of operations.

Not much information is publicly available on the swimmer delivery vehicles currently used by the Navy.

Some sources point to the use of Italian-made chariots by the Navy for several years now. Around 2012, the Ministry of Defence had asked Hindustan Shipyard Limited to build two of these submarines. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/navy-plans-to-get-undersea-chariots-made-in-india-for-special-operations-9061670/

19. Climate fund may not merit an ovation *(thestatesman.com)*
December 9, 2023

Shortly after the opening cere- mony of the 2023 United Nations climate negotiations in Dubai, delegates of nations around the world rose in a standing ovation to celebrate a long-awaited agreement to launch a loss and dam- age fund to help vulnerable countries recover from climate-related disasters.

But the applause might not yet be warranted. The deal itself leaves much undecided and has been met with criticism by climate justice advocates and front-line communities.

I teach global environmental pol- itics and climate justice and have been attending and observing these negotiations for over a decade to fol- low the demands for just climate solu- tions, including loss and damage compensation for countries that have done the least to cause climate change.

“Breakthrough” was the term often used to describe the decision at 2022’s COP27 climate conference to finally construct a loss and damage fund. Many countries rejoiced at this “long-delayed” agreement — it came 31 years after Vanuatu, a small archi- pelago in the Pacific, first proposed compensation for loss and damage for climate-caused sea level rise in earlier negotiations.

The agreement was only a frame- work, however. Most of the details were left to a transitional committee that met throughout 2023 to forward recommendations on this new fund to COP28. A United Nations report outlined at the committee’s second meeting found that funding from wealthy nations to help poorer coun- tries adapt to the ravages of climate change grew by 65 per cent from 2019 to 2020, to $US49 billion. That’s still far below the $160 billion to $340 bil- lion the U.N. estimates will be needed annually by 2030.

As the meetings went on, devel- oping nations, long wary of tradition- al financial institutions’ use of inter- est-bearing loans, which have left many low-income countries mired in debt, proposed that the fund be inde- pendent. Developed nations, however, insisted the fund be hosted under the World Bank and held up the recom- mendations until right before COP28.

While any deal on funding for cli- mate disaster damages was sure to be portrayed as a historic win, further investigation suggests that it should be welcomed with hesitation and scrutiny.

First, the fund contains no specifics on scale, financial targets or how it will be funded. Instead, the decision merely “invites” developed nations to “take the lead” in provid- ing finance and support and encour- ages commitments from other parties. It also fails to detail which countries will be eligible to receive funding and vaguely states it would be for “eco- nomic and non-economic loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events.”

So far, pledges have been under- whelming.

Calculations of early commit- ments total just over US$650 million, with Germany and the United Arab Emirates pledging $100 million and the U.K. committing $75 million. The United States, one of the largest cli- mate change contributors, pledged only $17.5 million in comparison. It’s a shockingly low starting point.

Also, any notion that this fund represents liability or compensation by developed countries — a major concern for countries with long his- tories of carbon pollution — was removed entirely. It in fact notes that loss and damage response is based on cooperation instead.

In a rare win for the developing world, funds were made available — even at subnational and community levels — to all nations, though with yet-undetermined performance indi- cators.

Additional concern has been raised about the fund's interim host – the World Bank. In fact, deciding on a host institution was one of the stick- ing points that nearly derailed earlier talks. On one side, the United States and other developed nations insisted the fund be hosted by the World Bank, which has always been led by an American and has historically spread pro-Western policies.

Developing countries, however, resisted the World Bank's involvement based on their historical experiences with its lending and structural adjustment programs and noting the bank's role for years in financing oil and gas exploration as cornerstones of development efforts.

Following a stalemate and U.S. attempts to block a consensus, a com- promise was reached to host the fund under the World Bank for four years, with guardrails to ensure its inde- pendence and impact. After this win- dow, the host structure will be reviewed, leading to either a fully independent fund or continuation under the World Bank. The concern for critics with this route is that the compromise risks ending up as a permanent hosting sit- uation.

And there are more issues, such as the fund board's composition, which only allows for national repre- sentatives, not civil society represen- tatives such as from Indigenous groups, as developing countries requested. The scope of funding that will be allowed is also still up in the air. In the fund's vague state, it opens the door for countries, as part of their loss and damage funding commit- ments, to count private loans, condi- tional import credits and even fund- ing from the fossil fuel industry at the same time the industry continues to fuel climate damage.

To date, the international climate community does not have a solid track record when it comes to climate finance promises. Each successive fund — from the Green Climate Fund that supports green projects in the developing world to the Adaptation Fund that builds climate resilience for the most vulnerable nations — has been woefully undersourced from inception. In 2021, the entire climate finance ecosystem, from national commitments to private investment, totaled $850 billion. Experts indicate that this sum needs to be closer to $4.3 trillion. That target represents 20 per cent year-over-year growth until the end of this decade – a significant ramp up from recent years. From 2011 to 2020, total climate finance grew at just 7 per cent annual- ly.

If this trend continues, not only will developing and most vulnerable countries lose faith in this process, but the very need for loss and damage funding will only grow. The new fund board is mandat- ed to hold its first meeting by 31 Janu- ary 2024.

While this early start time is laudable, droughts will continue killing crops, and storms will continue flooding homes while the new fund engages in another series of meetings to determine who will qualify, how they can apply and how and when funds will actually be dispersed. https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/climate-fund-may-not-merit-an-ovation-1503248256.html