NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. CAG audit finds irregularities in Telangana tourism projects *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* Jan 12, 2024

Hyderabad: The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) audit has unearthed several irregularities in tourism projects across Telangana, including Greater Hyderabad.

CAG's performance audit report on Swadesh Darshan Scheme, a central government programme that aims to develop and promote tourism, found that Telangana Tourism Development Corporation had furnished incorrect/inflated utilisation certificates (UCs) to the tune of 21.6 crore against the actual status of work and expenditure incurred.

In tribal circuits, works were taken up without forest clearance, resulting in wastage of funds.

Work undertaken despite legal issues

CAG had conducted a detailed audit on the heritage circuit for the development project of Qutb Shahi Heritage ParkPaigah Tombs-Hayat Bakshi Mosque-Raymond's Tomb taken up by Telangana State Tourism Development Corporation with a sanctioned cost of 97 crore of which 70 crore was released.

For the interpretation centre at Qutb Shahi Heritage Park, the ministry had in 2017 sanctioned 14 components, including entrance plaza, valued at 82.4 crore.

Telangana Waqf Board claims ownership over Qutb Shahi Heritage Park (QSHP) and the matter is sub judice since 2007. As a result, the work had to be stopped due to litigation in January 2021 after incurring an expenditure of 9 crore on the orders passed by the Telangana Waqf Tribunal, restraining any construction.

The audit observed that the site selected for execution of the component was under litigation since 2007. The state government had selected the work despite knowing about the legal issues. Thus, an amount of 9.01 crore spent on the execution of these works had become futile. Since QSHP is also on the tentative list of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites, the site offers immense potential for tourists.

Lacking clearances & action plans

In the tribal circuit, the upgradation of pathways up to a Megalithic burial site at Mallur in Mulugu district at a cost of 2.2 crore was dropped in January 2020 by the tourism ministry after the state failed to get forest clearance. However, state had incurred 1 crore expenditure on laying gravel road without ensuring forest clearance, thus making the expenditure "unfruitful".

A similar audit was done on the integrated development of Mulugu-Laknavaram-Medaram-Tadvai-Damaravai–Mallur– Bogatha waterfalls as a tribal circuit and the project was executed by the Telangana State Tourism Development Corporation with a sanctioned amount of 80 core of which 76 crore was released.

"Audit found that state government had not prepared any tourism policy or long-term action plan for promoting tourism. Without this, the project selection was not based on criteria such as prioritisation, stakeholder consultation and convergence with other schemes for livelihood and employment generation," CAG stated.

Inadmissible expenditure
In the heritage circuit, 6.2 lakh was paid towards maintenance of lawns and individual shrubs at Hayat Bakshi Mosque and Raymond's Tomb from scheme funds, which was an inadmissible expenditure and was to be borne by state government.

In the tribal circuit, 61 lakh was spent in January 2021 on repairs and renovation related to an old suspension bridge to Island-1 at Laknavaram (Mulugu) and 3.3 crore on purchase of vehicles, car hire charges of employees, which were inadmissible.

Even after 'Upgradation of the trekking path up to Megalithic burials' project was dropped by the Union ministry, state government had spent 68.7 lakh on approach road, septic tank and other works, which were inadmissible, CAG added. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/cag-audit-unearths-irregularities-in-telangana-tourism-projects/articleshow/106744933.cms

2. Just transition in petrochemicals: Dahej's industries proving to be major obstacles for climate targets *(downtoearth.org.in)* 11 January 2024

Petrochemicals, including plastics, emit large amounts of greenhouse gases during the process of manufacture — from start till end

The lives of people in many areas of Gujarat have become difficult due to petrochemical industries. At the same time, climate goals are being impacted due to pollution caused by these industries. This is the second part of the series.

The black dust and ash of coal is everywhere in the port of Dahej near Bharuch in Gujarat. Roads, houses, shops, clothes, utensils; people in the chemicals and petrochemicals hub even complain of fine coal particles in their very breath.

Lakhigam is situated on the Gulf of Khambhat coast. The fishing settlement had a population of 5,000 inhabitants, according to the Census of 2011.

The village's lands were acquired by the state government for the development of the Dahej Special Economic Zone. A huge terminal of the Adani Petronet (Dahej) Port Pvt Ltd was built on the village beach in 2003.

Solid raw materials like coal, gypsum, steel, polypropylene and propylene are transported from here at a fast pace. A conveyor system has been installed here to handle coal in bulk, at a very fast evacuation rate of 4,200 million tonnes per hour.

Paradise turned hell
Ajay Gohil, former deputy head of Lakhigam village and a social activist, told this reporter, "Dust flies in the entire village when coal and gypsum are transported here. It

has a direct impact on our health. We drink water and eat food laced with coal dust. Our spit and sneeze also produce coal dust. Our paradise-like village has become hell."

Elderly fishermen from the village started going to another part of the sea to catch fish. The women here usually got cleaning work in the companies. Many men took up daily wage activities. Youth got an opportunity to avail jobs by training at Industrial Training Institutes or ITIs. One member of each family that gave up its land for industries, got a job.

The residents of Lakhigam said those who got permanent jobs, migrated to other areas of Bharuch district. Those who stayed back, have found temporary work and are forced to live in an extremely polluted environment.

Some of the one-room pucca houses built with corporate social responsibility funds have "Adani" nameplates. Inside one such house that this reporter visited, Shankarbhai Rathod sat on a chair as his wife Shankutla Devi handled household chores.

Shankar worked as a labourer in the Adani Petronet Company for more than five years. About one-and-a-half months ago, he had a paralysis attack and has been unable to walk since.

"I missed work when I fell ill and there was no help from the company for treatment. We don't have health insurance. I was a daily wage labourer," he added.

Shakuntala, who was taking care of her ailing husband, also lost her job. "If I go to work, who will give him food and medicines? Who will take him to the washroom?" she asked.

Subsequently, whatever little money she used to make earlier by working at the factory has also stopped coming in.

The Adani Group's 9.8-km-long conveyor belt passing through Lakhigam is a symbol of industrial development. But its noise is unbearable for the villagers.

Pradip Gohil, a resident, complained, "About two months ago, I realised that I could not hear anything with my left ear. Instead, there was an intermittent buzzing sound. I am receiving medical treatment. The noise of this conveyor belt, which runs day and night, must be affecting others like me. They would not even be aware."

The conveyor belt passes right behind the village primary school. Pradip showed it to this reporter. "Children are not able to study because of the noise. People here are suffering from diseases like skin, respiratory illness and even cancer."

Dr Dhrumil Vaidya, posted at the Dahej primary health centre (PHC), and Taruna Parmar, a health worker attached to the PHC, also confirmed the locals' complaint. Vaidya said locals were showing increased incidence of cough and cold, lung disease as well as skin-related diseases because of the pollution.

Despite these difficult conditions, the residents of Dahej do not want these industrial units to move out of here. Lakshmanbhai Ahir, the sarpanch (village head) of Dahej village, said, “We have got livelihood due to the coming of these industries. But these companies have forgotten the policy and rules of the government and indulge in a lot of pollution-causing activities to increase their profits. We went to the National Green Tribunal. But nothing happened. We have made a compromise with the status quo.”

These complaints of the local community were also confirmed by the CAG report tabled in Parliament in August 2022. The investigation found that necessary measures were not taken to protect locals and the ecosystem.

The port of Dahej is built on tidal flats, which makes it rich in terms of biodiversity. It used to serve as a spawning and breeding ground for many species of fish and migratory birds, respectively. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report related to the port had expressed the possibility of the quality of seawater being affected due to reasons such as oil spills during operations. Despite this, measures towards rectification were not taken.

Exponential growth

Platforms like ONGC, GAIL, GCPTCL Liquid Chemical Terminal, LNG Petronet Gas Terminal, Reliance Liquid Fuel Jetty, Birla Copper Bulk Cargo Jetty are present along with Adani in the Dahej maritime zone.

Industrial units produce a variety of chemicals and fertilisers including ethylene, propylene, polyethylene, polypropylene, benzene and butadiene.

Plastics and fertilisers are the two largest products. They are used in vehicles, digital devices and even food products. The exponential growth of plastics around the world has also overtaken products like steel, aluminum and cement.

India’s total major petrochemicals installed production capacity stood at 50.44 Million Metric Tonnes Per Annum (MMTPA) and production at 42.15 MMTPA in 2020-21. Polymer production was 12.14 MMTPA. Plastics are hydrocarbon-based polymers derived from crude oil and natural gas.

The demand for chemical and petrochemical products in India is expected to nearly triple and reach $1 trillion by 2040. At present, its market in the country is $190 billion. India is the world’s sixth-largest and Asia’s fourth-largest chemical producer. The country is expected to contribute to more than 10 per cent growth globally in petrochemicals.

“We always look at the advantages of petrochemical industries in terms of gross domestic product,” said Gopal Krishna, an environmental activist and a member of the Toxic Watch Alliance. “But we do not care about the damage caused to the environment and biodiversity, the impact on traditional livelihoods and human health. If you consider the whole picture, you will realise that it is a mostly loss-making transaction.”

He further said: “The petrochemical enterprises, which have been identified by the Central Pollution Control Board as heavily polluting industries, are included in the Red category. Should we just leave it at that? Just transition demands a change in these enterprises and adoption of environment-friendly processes.”

Plastic pollution and Net Zero

Petrochemicals, including plastics, emit large amounts of greenhouse gases (GHG) during the process to manufacture them. This can be a major obstacle in achieving the goal of keeping global temperature rise below 1.5°C. Globally, plastic production at current rates would lead to 1.34 gigatonnes of GHG emissions annually by 2030. This will be equivalent to more than 295 coal-fired power plants of 500 MW.

The petrochemicals industry has been identified as a "blind spot" in global energy discussions. The sector is not getting the necessary attention to reduce the crisis of climate change.

Preeti Mahesh, chief programme coordinator at Toxics Link, an organisation working on plastic pollution, said, "In India, discourse centres only around the disposal of plastic waste and the communities that are engaged in such disposal. There is no talk about the pollution caused during its manufacture and the communities affected. We are not even talking about limiting its production."

The proposal to create an international legally binding, global plastics treaty was unanimously endorsed by 175 countries at the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) on March 2 2022, in order to curb plastic pollution.

An important step in this direction is believed to be the Zero Draft brought in September 2023. Two important meetings are scheduled in 2024 to finalise it.

The treaty aims to end plastic pollution by 2040. This includes not just plastic waste, but encompasses the entire plastic life cycle. "Be it Gulf countries or India, they don't want to discuss reducing plastic production right now. They are ready to take action only on plastic waste," said Mahesh.

Waiting for just transition

About 2 million people are directly employed in the Indian chemicals and petrochemicals sector. It is growing at more than six per cent annually. Apart from this, millions of people living around industrial areas manufacturing petrochemicals indirectly depend on them for livelihood.

"India has no concrete plan to move away from petrochemicals, although our government has a temporary and limited strategy to limit single-use plastics to some extent," said Soumya Dutta, a member of the advisory board at the United Nations' Climate Technology Centre and Network.

"From large corporate houses in petrochemical production to small moulding units, vendors, and recyclers, this industry provides employment and profits to a large number of people. Almost every area of our lives is associated with plastic. Despite the huge environmental damage from petrochemical industries, it is difficult to stop these in the next few decades," added Soumya.

According to a report by World Resources Institute, meeting global climate goals will require moving away from the petrochemicals sector. Developing countries need a 'just transition' to protect workers and communities dependent on the sector. This can lead to significant environmental, social, and economic benefits. But these will be important challenges for developing countries.

The binding document on ending plastic pollution also calls for framing necessary policies and mechanisms to provide skill training and livelihood opportunities to the community dependent on it.

Usmangani Sherasia, an environmental activist from Gujarat, said, "If petrochemical companies withdraw, fish in the sea and crops in the fields will return." An even larger population is tied to employment generated by fishing and farming. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/environment/just-transition-in-petrochemicals-dahej-s-industries-proving-to-be-major-obstacles-for-climate-targets-93832

3. Kaleshwaram project redesigning raised costs by 400%: CAG report *(siasat.com)* Updated: 11 January 2024

The CAG in its report held that the BRS government gave the contractors an undue benefit of Rs 25,188.43 crore

Hyderabad: The cost of Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS), a multi-purpose irrigation project on the Godavari river, which was established and re-engineered under former chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao rule, has increased by 400 percent as compared to its initial estimate, said a report published by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) stated.

Aimed at increasing the area under irrigation by 50 percent, the cost of the project also skyrocketed from Rs 38,000 crore to Rs 1.5 lakh crore, so far as. However, several pending works are yet to be completed.

The CAG report revealed that substantial amounts of the increased project cost were pocketed by the contractors, more particularly Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited.

In terms of contract management of the Kaleshwaram project, the CAG in its report held that the BRS government gave the contractors an undue benefit of Rs 25,188.43 crore.

A CAG report published two years ago clearly stated that the re-engineered Kaleshwaram project was "economically unviable and ab-initio."

The government projected an annual energy requirement of 13,558 million units for lifting 180 TMC ft of water and brazenly, the cost of power was worked out at Rs 3 per unit, against the actual rate of Rs 6.4, at which discoms have been supplying to lift irrigation schemes in the state.

The CAG pointed out that the projected energy cost is Rs 4,148 crore against the actual cost of Rs 9,400 crore.

The CAG report also stated that the initial interest burden was estimated at 10 percent of Rs 81,000 crore ie; the cost of the project, at Rs 8,191 crore per annum adding that with a jump in costs the interest burden would also escalate to Rs 15,000 crore.

The CAG also observed that the BRS government went ahead with re-engineering without exploring alternative ways to make the best use of the old B.R. Ambedkar Pranahita-Chevella Sujala Sravanti (PCSS) launched by erstwhile Andhra Pradesh chief minister Dr Y S Rajashekar Reddy-led government in the undivided state.

Comparing the new scheme with the one proposed by YS Rajashekar Reddy, covering only 16.4 lakh acres, the CAG stated that the new scheme would cater to 24.96 lakh acres, however, would increase the project cost by more than Rs 1.2 lakh crore.

The report also alleged that, in the case of the now-sinking Medigadda Barrage, consultants were only given a span of four months by the Telangana government to come up with detailed estimates of the project, while soil testing itself would only take up to a year. https://www.siasat.com/redesigning-of-kaleshwaram-increased-costs-by-400-cag-report-2954163/

4. रीइंजीनियरिंग ने परियोजना लागत को चौगुना कर दिया *(jantaserishta.com)* Jan 11, 2024

हैदराबाद: पूर्व मुख्यमंत्री के.चंद्रशेखर राव द्वारा प्राणहिता और कालेश्वरम में प्राणहिता-चेवेल्ला परियोजना की बहुप्रचारित री-इंजीनियरिंग से कमांड क्षेत्र (सिंचित कृषि भूमि की सीमा) को 50 प्रतिशत तक बढ़ाने में मदद मिल सकती है, लेकिन परियोजना की लागत कम हो गई है वर्तमान में उपलब्ध जानकारी के अनुसार, 400 प्रतिशत बढ़कर 38,000 करोड़ रुपये से 1.5 लाख करोड़ रुपये हो गया है और लंबित कार्यों को पूरा करने के लिए यह राशि और भी बढ़ जाएगी।

कलेश्वरम लिफ्ट सिंचाई योजना (केएलआईएस) की नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (सीएजी) की जांच से यह बात बिना किसी संदेह के स्थापित हो गई कि बढ़ी हुई परियोजना लागत की पर्याप्त मात्रा ठेकेदारों, विशेष रूप से मेघा इंजीनियरिंग एंड इंफ्रास्ट्रक्चर लिमिटेड, ने कांग्रेस और भारतीय जनता को भरोसा दिलाते हुए अपनी जेब में डाल ली। पार्टी का ठेकेदारों और बीआरएस के शीर्ष अधिकारियों के बीच सांठगांठ का आरोप।

कैग ने दो साल पहले राज्य सरकार को सौंपी अपनी मसौदा प्रदर्शन रिपोर्ट में कहा, "ऑडिट विश्लेषण से पता चला कि पुन: इंजीनियर की गई कालेश्वरम परियोजना आर्थिक रूप से अव्यवहार्य और शुरुआत से ही अव्यवहारिक थी।"

जबकि पिछली सरकार ने 1.51 लाभ-लागत अनुपात (बीसीआर) का अनुमान लगाया था, सीएजी ने खुलासा किया कि वास्तव में, यह 0.51 से कम होगा।

बीआरएस सरकार ने वैधानिक मंजूरी, साथ ही वित्तीय संस्थानों से ऋण प्राप्त करने के लिए बीसीआर तैयार किया। उदाहरण के लिए, सरकार ने उद्योगों को पानी की बिक्री से हर साल 3,805 करोड़ रुपये कमाने का अनुमान लगाया था और इसे साकार करने के लिए, हैदराबाद मेट्रो जल आपूर्ति और सीवरेज बोर्ड को वर्तमान औद्योगिक टैरिफ को 19 गुना तक बढ़ाना पड़ा।

इसमें 20 जलाशयों में फैले 3.5 लाख हेक्टेयर क्षेत्र में मछली पालन से मछलीपालन से हर साल 1,750 करोड़ रुपये का राजस्व दिखाया गया, लेकिन वास्तव में, फैलाव क्षेत्र 30,823 हेक्टेयर से अधिक नहीं होगा और राजस्व सिर्फ 154 करोड़ रुपये होगा।

सीएजी के अनुसार, सरकार ने वार्षिक लागत को कम दर्शाया और वार्षिक लाभ के मूल्य को बढ़ा-चढ़ाकर बताया। सरकार ने 180 टीएमसी फीट पानी उठाने के लिए 13,558 मिलियन यूनिट की वार्षिक ऊर्जा आवश्यकता का अनुमान लगाया और बेशर्मी से, बिजली की लागत 3 रुपये प्रति यूनिट पर गणना की गई, जबकि वास्तविक लागत 6.4 रुपये थी, जिस पर डिस्कॉम आपूर्ति कर रहे थे। राज्य में लिफ्ट सिंचाई योजनाएं।

सीएजी ने बताया, "परिणामस्वरूप, अनुमानित ऊर्जा लागत 9,400 करोड़ रुपये की वास्तविक लागत के मुकाबले 4,148 करोड़ रुपये है।"

इसी तरह, ब्याज का बोझ प्रति वर्ष 8,191 करोड़ रुपये आंका गया था, जो कि 81,000 करोड़ रुपये की परियोजना लागत का 10 प्रतिशत है, लेकिन लागत 1.50 लाख करोड़ रुपये तक बढ़ने के साथ, ब्याज का बोझ बढ़कर 15,000 करोड़ रुपये हो जाएगा। सीएजी ने कहा.

सीएजी ने यह भी पाया कि बीआरएस सरकार पुराने बी.आर. का सर्वोत्तम उपयोग करने के वैकल्पिक तरीकों की खोज किए बिना पुन: इंजीनियरिंग के साथ आगे बढ़ी। अम्बेडकर प्राणहिता-चेवेल्ला सुजला श्रावंती (पीसीएसएस) का शुभारंभ डॉ. वाई.एस. द्वारा किया गया। अविभाजित राज्य में राजशेखर रेड्डी के नेतृत्व वाली सरकार। सरकार ने अनुमान तैयार करने में भी अनुचित जल्दबाजी दिखाई, जिस पर संबंधित एजेंसियां मिट्टी और अन्य अनिवार्य परीक्षण करने के बाद पहुंचेंगी।

हाल ही में डूबे मेडीगड्डा बैराज के लिए, सलाहकार को विस्तृत अनुमान तैयार करने के लिए केवल चार महीने का समय दिया गया था, विशेषज्ञों का कहना था कि अकेले मिट्टी परीक्षण में एक वर्ष से अधिक समय लगेगा।

पिछली सरकार ने इसमें कमी के कारण पीसीएसएस को फिर से इंजीनियर करने का दावा किया था और कमांड क्षेत्र को बढ़ाने के लिए कालेश्वरम के साथ आई थी और पानी की बेहतर उपलब्धता को देखते हुए भंडारण बिंदु को तुम्मिदिहेट्टी से मेडिगड्डा में स्थानांतरित करने का बचाव किया था। यदि तुम्मीदिहेट्टी में पूर्ण जलाशय स्तर (एफआरएल) को 152 फीट पर बनाए रखा गया था, तो इसके 5,247 एकड़ के जलमग्न होने पर महाराष्ट्र की आपत्ति भी दिखाई गई, जो कि पुन: इंजीनियरिंग के कारणों में से एक है। लेकिन री-इंजीनियरिंग के बाद यह महाराष्ट्र में केवल 511 एकड़ के जलमग्न क्षेत्र को कम कर सकता है।

इसके अलावा, बीआरएस सरकार ने बचाव किया कि मेडीगड्डा में पानी की उपलब्धता 284 टीएमसी फीट होगी, जिसमें से 195 टीएमसी फीट का उपयोग केएलआईएस के तहत किया जाएगा। हालांकि, कैग ने कहा कि सरकार को री-इंजीनियरिंग में जल्दबाजी करने के बजाय पुरानी योजना के तहत पानी की वास्तविक उपलब्धता का पता लगाना चाहिए था। इसमें कहा गया है कि पुरानी योजना 16.4 लाख एकड़ और नई 24.96 लाख एकड़ जमीन को पूरा करती, लेकिन परियोजना लागत 1.2 लाख करोड़ रुपये से अधिक बढ़ गई।

सीएजी ने मार्च 2015 की सीडब्ल्यूसी रिपोर्ट का भी हवाला दिया, जिसमें स्पष्ट रूप से कहा गया था कि पुरानी योजना में 65 प्रतिशत वर्षों के लिए 192 टीएमसी फीट या अधिक उपलब्ध था और इसके साथ आगे बढ़ने से 1.2 लाख करोड़ रुपये की पूंजी लागत बचाई जा सकती थी। और हर साल 2,000 करोड़ रुपये की आवर्ती लागत।

मेडीगड्डा के डूबने से यह बिना किसी संदेह के साबित हो गया है कि तीन बैराजों के नीचे की मिट्टी की स्थिति और उनके जल्दबाजी में किए गए निर्माण से पूरे पुनर्निर्मित केएलआईएस को खतरा हो सकता है, जिससे अब तक खर्च किए गए 1.5 लाख करोड़ रुपये की उपयोगिता पर गंभीर चिंताएं पैदा हो सकती हैं। https://jantaserishta.com/telangana/re-engineering-quadrupled-the-project-cost-1032773

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

5. GST intelligence unit detected over Rs 1.98 lakh crore worth tax evasion cases, ITC fraud totaling Rs 21,078 crore in 2023: FinMin

(zeebiz.com) Jan 11, 2024

The ministry said in a statement, "DGGI has achieved an increase in detection of cases of evasion and voluntary payments. In 2023, DGGI detected 6,323 cases involving evasion of duty of Rs 1,98,324 crore with a voluntary payment of Rs 28,362 crore. 140 masterminds involved in GST evasion were arrested."

The GST intelligence unit uncovered tax evasion of more than Rs 1.98 lakh crore last year and arrested 140 masterminds involved in looting the exchequer, the Ministry of Finance said in a statement on Thursday. The Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) discovered major GST evasion in a variety of sectors in 2023, including online gambling, casinos, insurance, and secondment (import of labour services), it added.

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This is a huge improvement over 2022, when 4,273 cases were discovered, resulting in duty of Rs 90,499 crore, voluntary payment of Rs 22,459 crore, and 97 arrests.

The amount of duty evasion detected by DGGI increased by 119 per cent year on year, while voluntary payments increased by 26 per cent, according to the ministry.

In terms of detecting bogus Input Tax Credit (ITC) claims, the ministry stated that DGGI has launched a specific campaign against ITC fraudsters in order to stop the government revenue leakage.

As a result, there were 2,335 cases of ITC fraud totaling Rs 21,078 crore, with a voluntary payment of Rs 2,642 crore.

According to the report, 116 masterminds were apprehended in order to combat the threat of fraudulent invoicing.This is a huge improvement over 2022, when 1,646 cases were found, totaling Rs 14,471 crore, with a voluntary payment of Rs 1,604 crore made. A total of 82 masterminds were apprehended.

"During the year 2023, DGGI, which is the premier investigating agency for GST matters, continued its relentless pursuit to check evasion of GST across the country... Non-compliance in these sectors not only pose a threat to the fiscal stability but also involve potential social, financial as well as economic security implications," the ministry added. https://www.zeebiz.com/personal-finance/income-tax/news-gst-intelligence-unit-detected-over-rs-198-lakh-crore-worth-tax-evasion-cases-itc-fraud-totaling-rs-21078-crore-in-2023-finmin-271866

6. Net direct tax mop-up hits Rs 14.7 lakh crore *(newindianexpress.com)* 12 January 2024

The country's net direct tax collections surged to Rs 14.7 lakh crore by January 10, achieving over four-fifths of the year's target and registering a growth of 19.4% compared to the same period in 2022-23.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) on Thursday reported that provisional direct tax collections continue to show robust expansion, with gross revenue reaching Rs 17.18 lakh crore, a 16.77% increase. As per the tax department, this surge has been mainly driven by 26.11% rise in personal income tax (PIT) inflows, while corporate income tax (CIT) collections exhibited a comparatively modest growth rate of 8.32%. Following adjustments for refunds, net growth in CIT stood at 12.37%, while PIT collections have soared 27.26% (PIT only). Net of refunds, PIT and Securities Transaction Tax receipts have also seen a substantial increase of 27.22%.

Net direct tax kitty expanded by Rs 1 lakh crore since December 17 when it had surpassed Rs 13.7 lakh crore, reflecting a growth rate of 20.66% during that period. In an official statement, it stated, "Direct Tax collection, net of refunds, stands at Rs 14.70 lakh crore, which is 19.41% higher than the net collections for the corresponding period of last year. https://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2024/jan/12/net-direct-tax-mop-up-hits-rs-147-lakh-crore-2650289.html

7. Arresting meaningless financial tax litigation by public sector units *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* January 11, 2024

It is no public secret that India Courts are choked with pending cases and many of these cases are of a financial nature involving tax interpretations and tax demands between the taxing authority and the assessee who is asked to pay the tax – which gets disputed.

This dispute rises from Tribunals and Appellate Tribunals to High Courts and Supreme Court. One possible way to reduce the litigation and pendency of cases in Courts and improving Tax Revenue flows is to distinguish the way tax demands are managed between public sector units and private sector units.

We need to understand what is a public sector unit (whether a Central Government or state government majority owned business unit). We need to understand that when a public sector unit litigates against a tax demand – it is one limb of the body litigating against another limb of the same body. The body is the Government (whether Central or state) and the assessee is a unit largely owned (PSU) by Central or state government. What purpose is served by one litigating against the other? It is tax money not flowing from one pocket to the other.

Sadly, in this intended and disputed movement of money from one pocket to the other, there are costs incurred in between – valuable Court time, lawyers' fees, advisors and tax professionals billings and delays in coming to a judgement (repeated adjournments) resulting in loss of Time value of money and understanding present value of money. In India, we have not adequately understood the Value of Time and benefits of early litigation disposal.

If as the theory goes a public sector unit is finally owned by Indians, then tax ligation between Government/s and PSUs is meaningless because as explained earlier, there is reduction in amount of value realized because other claimants are coming in within the same body.

This part of the PSU tax demand litigation (which is largely a meaningless exercise), needs to be managed in a different manner:

-Any type of tax demand on a PSU unit cannot be contested unless 80% of the demand amount is deposited with the exchequer albeit 'under protest'. This would involve payment for existing matters in pending litigation from the past. In my view concerned Ministries will object against unreasonable demands which will assist business in India;

-It is the responsibility of the Central Government to create a structure of appeal and redressal separate from Courts, with the support of state governments. The manning of these structures would need to be discussed and studied, but is not that difficult since we have many competent people to be called on. These would have the same sanctity as Court pronouncements for the PSU units. In fact, Court rulings would be quoted here and Rulings here would be quoted in Courts. Effectively, you would have an identical structure like Courts but the existing Courts would be freed for other litigation matters;

-It is assumed that the Order issued under Para 2 above would not directly confront an earlier HC and SC Order. Arguments before this new established authority would bring in earlier judicial judgements being quoted. One hopes enough maturity is shown by both authorities to respect each other orders. The Judiciary must appreciate that their workload is being reduced for faster litigation. There is no point in getting into turf battles, although that can be a danger;

-In case there are conflicting Orders at different states levels – there has to be a Committee of either State or Central Secretaries depending on who is the tax authority of – the Ministry the PSU reports to, the central or state law ministry and the central or state Finance Ministry. They have to thrash out matters within a given time horizon. This would be immensely helpful to Business in India since in several sectors PSUs and private sector are competing head to head.

It is the opinion of many that the reason for PSU tax litigation is an effort to buy time, so that the event does not reflect on the tenure of the PSU CMD or Minister concerned. This is not helping anyone. The 80% demand payment should act as a deterrent.

However, there is the other side of the coin. If the demand is not sustained, then the Revenue has to give back the unjustified tax collected with interest that is 4.00%+ more than the interest that is paid on small savings schemes, for the period the amount was held.

It is my view that the Secretaries body under Para 4 above has an important Role to play. They can effectively inform the state or Central Finance Ministries that the demands are over pitched and not justified on merits. The return of tax collected with the penal 4.00%+ interest should work. Also, since we have PSUs and private units in the same business line, a PSU judgement would apply to the private business also.

Some way should be found that PSU litigation resolution rubs off on private business tax litigation also. That way, a lot of judicial time is saved and Justice is delivered faster – the impact of which can only be positive for India. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/spreading-light/arresting-meaningless-financial-tax-litigation-by-public-sector-units/

8. The GST story – many hits, few misses *(moneycontrol.com)*

JANUARY 11, 2024

The GST law addressed the issue of tax burden by providing a seamless credit and uniform structure. The simplified tax structure under GST has reduced the compliance burden and facilitated a more business-friendly environment. There are a few creases but they can be ironed out in due course

The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India on July 1, 2017, marked a significant milestone in the country's economic history. GST replaced a plethora of central and state taxes, aiming to streamline the taxation system to foster economic growth. This reform has left a remarkable impact on the Indian taxation sector, leading to an era of improved efficiency, transparency and simplicity in business operations. Introduction of GST could be said to have given impetus towards the vibrancy of the Indian economy.

In the pre-GST regime, the indirect tax structure in India was fragmented. Each state had its own VAT laws to impose taxes on supply of commodities, while the central government imposed taxes on manufacture of goods and provision of services. The levying of taxes at different stages of supply chain led to a cascading effect, resulting in tax burden for consumers. The GST law addressed this issue by providing a seamless credit and uniform tax structure. The simplified tax structure under GST has reduced the compliance burden and facilitated a more business-friendly environment. Elimination of border checkposts has resulted in faster movement of goods across state borders, in line with the government vision of "One Nation, One Tax".

Surge in GST Collection

Under the GST regime, 47 lakh taxpayers transitioned from service tax, VAT, and Central Excise frameworks. Currently, there are 1.4 crore registered taxpayers under GST law. Initially, the government's average monthly GST collection ranged from Rs 0.8 to 1.2 lakh crore. However, in fiscal year 2023-24, this average monthly GST collection has surged to Rs. 1.66 lakh crore. This data highlights the substantial growth in both taxpayer numbers and GST revenue since the implementation of GST.

In the era of 'Digital India,' technological advancements have played a crucial role in streamlining GST. GST portal features such as auto population of purchase data in recipient GSTINs, integration of e-invoices with GST returns and generation of e-invoices/e-way bills have significantly contributed to the efficiency of the GST system. Additionally, processes such as e-filing of refunds, online appeals have further enhanced the overall functionality of GST.

Notably, the establishment of GST tribunals is a matter that needs attention. However, there are complexities around their formation. During the 52nd GST Council meeting in October 2023, recommendations were proposed to address the appointment of lawyers as judicial members. It was anticipated that the proposed amendment Bill will be presented during the winter session of Parliament in December 2023.

GST On Gaming

In the gaming sector, there has been a continuing debate on categorisation of games as either 'games of chance' or 'games of skill'. Subsequently, at the 51st GST Council meeting, it was decided to impose a 28% GST on all online games; but the government provided relief to players by clarifying that the GST levy would only apply to the initial deposit amount (real money) and not on the value of each bet from the winning amount.

Over the last few months, taxpayers have received multiple GST notices for the financial year 2017-18 and 2018-19, addressing alleged shortfalls in GST payment, the reversal of input tax credit, or the recovery of erroneous refunds. Notices have also been issued on matters involving the interpretation of legal provisions, rulings by the Supreme Court, High Courts, and Advance Ruling Authorities, among others.

Amendment to GST Law

In October 2023, the GST Council made specific recommendations to facilitate trade, including the introduction of an amnesty scheme for filing appeals, issuance of clarifications regarding guarantees on loans provided by directors in their personal capacities and by related persons, and the prospective amendment in the GST law to make the input service distributor (ISD) mechanism mandatory for the distribution of input tax credit (ITC) on common services.

There is anticipation that the government will introduce measures to establish more flexible tax-free enclaves within Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Additionally, there is also expectation of clarity on the taxability of virtual digital assets (VDA) and discussions on the applicability of GST on Employee Stock Option Plans (ESOPs). Furthermore, it is anticipated that an amnesty scheme under Customs law may be announced. The digitalisation of the Customs litigation processes is also likely to be a part of the Budget discussions.

Following the winter session in December 2023, the government will gear up for a two-week "Interim Budget Session" of Parliament before the Lok Sabha elections in 2024. The anticipated changes are likely to be dispersed across the interim and final budgets of 2024. Substantial alterations in the GST law are not expected as many are regularly addressed by the GST Council. However, there could be announcements under Customs with a view to promote manufacturing in India. https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/opinion/the-gst-story-many-hits-few-misses-12034471.html

9. Think, then build: Infrastructure projects cost a lot more because planners keep repeating simple mistakes

(timesofindia.indiatimes.com) January 12, 2024

India can never have enough infrastructure development as it tries to upgrade the quality of life and catch up with more advanced economies. Advanced or not, no country is blessed with unlimited resources. It makes getting more bang for the buck essential if we are to compress our catch-up timelines. What we see is anything but that. Let's take a look at three common goof ups.

Inattention to detail | Bengaluru-Mysuru expressway is one of GOI's showpiece projects. Less than a year after it was formally opened, planners are back at the drawing board. Almost 10% of the original project cost will be incurred to streamline multiple entry and exit points on the expressway. Since the towns along the road have long existed, the initial carelessness is cutting into scarce resources.

Ignoring relevant factors | Chardham highway project represents an improvement of five existing national highways. The upgrade was too clever by half. As GOI told Parliament, it broke down the project into 53 "independent" sections. It helped bypass environmental scrutiny, but the Himalayas are not made up of autonomous ecosystems. Consequently, accidents recur and costs keep rising.

In the same league are urban infrastructure projects that are designed as if extreme rainfall events are unheard of. Central Delhi's makeover got a reality check last year when an underpass had to remain closed for a few days after a bout of flooding.

Not my problem | Another feature common to urban infrastructure projects is to consider them as standalone issues. For example, Chennai's elevated railway line is almost three decades old. It's a largely wasted effort as planners simply overlooked the need for last-mile connectivity. It was somebody else's problem.

Set right these flaws and see the difference. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-editorials/think-then-build-infrastructure-projects-cost-a-lot-more-because-planners-keep-repeating-simple-mistakes/

10. Indian Army Seeks Thermal Night Vision Sight for Armoured Vehicles to Navigate Diverse Terrains *(republicworld.com)* 12 Jan 2024

The MoD issued a RFI for 2500 TI-based DNS systems, aligning with Indian-IDDM, designed for diverse terrains, temperature extremes, and integration efficiency.

New Delhi: The Defence Ministry has issued a Request for Information (RFI) for the procurement of approximately 2500 Thermal Imager (TI)-based Driver Night Sight (DNS) systems intended for use on BMP-2/2K, Armoured Ambulance Tracked (AAT), and Carrier Mortar Tracked (CMT) vehicles. The focus is on enhancing their night vision capabilities as part of the Army's border plans to modernise its existing 'Vintage' platforms to current standards.

3 Key Things About MoD's Procurement Plan

-The Defence Ministry has issued a Request for Information (RFI) for the procurement of approximately 2500 Thermal Imager (TI)-based Driver Night Sight (DNS) systems.

-The TI-based DNS systems are expected to operate in diverse terrain conditions, including plain and desert landscapes, high-altitude mountainous terrains, and island territories.

-MoD via the RFI aims identify potential Indian vendors capable of supplying the TI-based DNS within one year of the contract award, at an approximate rate of 500 units per year.

Alignment with Indian-IDDM
According to the RFI, this move by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) aligns with the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP-2020), which underlines 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' programs through its Indian-IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed, and Manufactured) program for designing and developing Defence Platforms within India. The procurement of these TI-based DNS systems is in line with the government's strategic focus on indigenous manufacturing and self-reliance.

The Ministry aims to finalise the Specific Qualitative Requirements (SQRs), determine the procurement category, and identify potential Indian vendors capable of supplying the TI-based DNS within one year of the contract award, at an approximate rate of 500 units per year.

Meeting Stringent Standards: Terrain Diversity, Temperature Extremes, and Integration Efficiency

- Operational requirements and terrain conditions: The TI-based DNS systems are expected to operate in diverse terrain conditions, including plain and desert landscapes along the Western Borders, high-altitude mountainous terrains (up to 5000 metres altitude) along the Northern Borders, and island territories like Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep. These systems should be operational day and night, with the ability to withstand common weather conditions such as dust, rain, and snow.

- Temperature and environmental considerations: To ensure adaptability in extreme conditions, the TI-based DNS should be operational in a wide range of temperature conditions, from a minimum operating temperature of minus 30° Celsius to a maximum operating temperature of plus 55° Celsius. Additionally, the equipment should function effectively in relative humidity ranging from 0 to 100 percent. Games India News Lok Sabha Elections Defence World Economy

- Key technical parameters: The design concept emphasises a form-fit sight that can be easily integrated into the hull of BMP-2/2K, AAT, and CMT vehicles without requiring modifications. The preferred technical parameters, detailed, ensure optimal performance and compatibility with the designated platforms. An Indian BMP-2 APC with older thermal imaging kit. | Image: X

According to the RFI, vendors are encouraged to categorise the project according to the provisions of Chapter-II of DAP-2020, providing justifications for their preferred categorization. This RFI is crucial to augment the capabilities of India's armoured vehicles, addressing the critical need for advanced night vision technology.The army is also procuring light vehicles in a ‘4X4’ configuration with a weight ranging from 700 to 900 kgs. However, the quantity or the number of the procurement hasn't yet been clarified yet. https://www.republicworld.com/defence/indian-army-seeks-thermal-night-vision-sight-for-armoured-vehicles-to-navigate-diverse-terrains-mod-procurement-plans/

11. Bright 2024 outlook despite headwinds *(thehindubusinessline.com)* Updated - January 11, 2024

Given the global situation, India performed well in 2023. The fundamentals are good now, except for minor demand and external account issues

The global macro backdrop in 2023 was less hostile for India than thought at the start of the year with global growth better than envisaged and the decline in India's exports not as sharp as feared. Commodity costs were contained improving India's terms of trade. Tighter global monetary conditions did not spill as much into India as manifested in narrowing bonds spreads (vis-à-vis the US) and surge in FII inflow.

Domestically, despite the sharp moderation in nominal growth (8.6 per cent in H1 FY24 vs. 16 per cent in FY23 and 18 per cent in FY22), overall tax buoyancy stayed heathy helping the Centre to largely execute its ambitious capex. The real surprise came in the strength of growth in the state government capex. India's real GDP grew by 7.7 per cent in H1 FY24, driven more by investment than consumption on demand side, and by a stronger growth in manufacturing over services on supply side.

Statistical nuances aside, a strong bank credit growth, GST collection, electricity generation, cement production and steel production are an indication that supply side economy is good. Government infrastructure thrust coupled with ongoing manufacturing sector and real estate recovery in India kept supply side of the economy robust.

Looking ahead, if the general expectation of a 'modest' slowdown in developed countries hold true, India's real growth could be a respectable 6-6.5 per cent in FY25. Outlook on exports is still cautious but unlike earlier, India's business sector confidence remains unscathed by global headwinds this time around.

Corporate capex spurt
Corporate capex (as gauged from NSE 500 companies) has likely grown in low double digit in FY24 on a base of +20 per cent growth in the last two years. Capacity utilisation for most sectors warrants continued positivity in corporate capex. Government capex growth can moderate now given the strong commitments to fiscal consolidation and limited ability to rev-up tax buoyancy any further.

Healthy balance sheets have meant that the financial sector is able to grow again. RBI's macro-prudential measures to stem personal loan could lead to moderation in bank credit. Even though we are optimistic regarding private capex, a strong cash flow within corporates implies a reduced need to borrow and invest. We expect 11-12 per cent bank credit growth for FY25.

Consumption demand hasn't been exciting post Covid, as gauged from volume growth in FMCG, demand for white goods and other retail segments in recent quarters. Auto just bottomed out in 2023 but still lacks peaks of 2018-19. That said, the urban economy was relatively more resilient.

Also, there is always an underlying thesis of changing wallet share, rising penetration and rising middle income in India, which creates a strong demand for few sectors. Airlines, leisure, hospitals, jewellery, e-commerce, and electronics appear to be few such winners in current times. It does appear that consumption-oriented sectors have the weakest topline compared to other segments of demand.

The key to assessing the direction of consumption demand in 2024 is getting a sense of likely cash flow to the households and consumer sentiment. At the margin, we are incrementally more positive on rural India over urban India.

India has seen a considerable upward adjustment to food prices post-Covid offering a high base. There are multiple products like milk, pulses, vegetables, and spices which could see some moderation in inflationary pressures. Likely moderation in global growth should keep crude oil under $90 per barrel and lead to muted fuel inflation and transportation cost in India (but for risk to electricity prices). Goods inflation will likely be contained (~4 per cent) and Services inflation has been fairly range bound at 4-5 per cent in India.

Rate stance

If the current expectations of a softening of headline CPI closer to 4 per cent materialise we could probably see a shift in stance towards neutral with tolerance of additional system liquidity towards the second half of CY24. Expectations around policy easing in India need to be tempered currently, even as the Fed embarks on a rate easing cycle sometime in CY24.

External account backdrop looks benign in FY25, and CAD could stay under 2 per cent of GDP.

Manufacturing sector recovery is keeping non-oil non-gold import elevated.

India's net services receipts from external activities had grown at an 18 per cent CAGR since Covid and funded 55-60 per cent of trade deficit in last three years vs 33 per cent a decade ago.

A meteoric rise in receipts from other business services (perhaps capturing the GCC inflow) has been fundamental to double digit growth in net receipts.

Despite the likely bond index related healthy FPI inflow overall balance of payment surplus looks modest in FY25. Fresh FDI flows is moderating, and repatriation of past FDI inflows has surged.

An expectation of supported growth alongside disinflation in FY25 rests on two critical assumptions of contained commodity costs and soft landing. India's balance sheets are healthy and ready for growth but remains susceptible to global growth-inflation dynamics and consequent monetary and liquidity trajectory. https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/bright-2024-outlook-despite-headwinds/article67731363.ece

12. Net zero funding gap at $10 trn: FM Nirmala Sitharaman *(bizzbuzz.news)* January 11, 2024

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the GIFT City should develop a platform for trading 'green credits' and also build a diverse fintech laboratory to help India become a $30 trillion economy by 2047.

She said "the GIFT City, poised to be the gateway for financial and investment hub," is designed to provide advantages to India's entrepreneurs in accessing global finance.

"The much-awaited direct listing of stock in GIFT IFSC was announced earlier. We are going through the process in a systematic manner and I'm confident that it will happen at the earliest. With that Indian companies should be able to access global funds easily being listed in India," she said addressing the seminar 'GIFT City-An Aspiration of Modern India'.
https://www.bizzbuzz.news/economy/net-zero-funding-gap-at-10-trn-fm-nirmala-sitharaman-1281240

13. IBC has been unfairly criticised *(thehindubusinessline.com)* Updated - January 11, 2024

Are recovery rates under IBC, 2016, the sole benchmark of its success? Too many parameters have been overlooked

It is often seen that any discussion around the success or failure of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC) at a macro level either largely hinges on the rate of recovery for the financial institutions and the banks or eventually boils down to that. Various relevant aspects and parameters seem to be entirely overlooked.

IBC, 2016 is one legislation for which the data is readily available and accessible for everyone to pass their respective verdicts. In effect, what happens is that the regulator established under this law, namely the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), systematically publishes quarterly newsletters from time to time where all relevant data in terms of the number of companies for which resolution plans have been approved, liquidations ordered, initiation of the corporate insolvency resolution processes (CIRP), recovery percentages, timelines to complete the process of resolution and liquidation and a lot more such data points are transparently made available.

Now, to begin with, one has to, in all fairness, first check if such detailed data points were even available for previous legislation such as SARFAESI Act, 2002, RDDB Act 1993, SICA 1985, the winding up regime under the Companies Act, 1956, or for that matter, even for a brief while under the Companies Act, 2013 and more. If one were to actually scratch down to the ground level, finding data in such a structured format for any of these laws would be next to impossible.

Before criticising that IBC seems to have failed because the targeted timelines of resolution of 330 days and liquidation of one year don't seem to be met, one also needs to see the timelines taken in the legal proceedings under the above-mentioned laws. From whatever little data is available, research reports indicate timelines ranging between 2.5 years on average under the SARFAESI Act to about 20 years under the winding-up regime and cases before the civil courts. It was only the failure of all these legislation that ultimately led the present government to come up with a gritty law which has shown results.

The notorious 1980s

It is imperative for the critics of today and the generation at large to know the gaps that were misused during the period when the Board of Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) was set up with the noble intention of rehabilitating sick companies under SICA. The standard operating procedure of promoters in the early 1980s was to first obtain exorbitant loans, thanks to indiscriminate lending practices by financial institutions lacking corporate governance and accountability norms, indulge in ambitious expansions and use funds for purposes other than what they were sanctioned for, try evergreening of loans and, finally, when financial distress starts showing up, just register with the BIFR to enjoy the moratorium against all recovery proceedings under Section 22 of SICA.

While it is true that the average time taken today, as per IBC data of September 30, 2023, wherein 808 CIRPs have yielded resolution plans, is about 541 days (after excluding the time which the NCLTs itself have excluded) for the conclusion of the process. Similarly, out of 2,249 CIRPs that ended up in liquidation, it took an average of about 472 days to conclude from the liquidation commencement date (LCD).

Further, about 597 liquidation procedures were closed by submission of final reports, and these took an average of about 536 days from the very LCD. On another note, voluntary liquidation procedures were completed and closed by submission of final reports within 408 days from the LCD.

While theoretically these timelines don’t seem to match what the legislature has intended for the implementation of the resolution or liquidation procedures, it would be unfair to criticise the law without even having a base comparison of what was the time taken in any similar procedures under earlier regimes.

The Recovery Percentage

While data indicates that, on an average, creditors have realised about 32 per cent of the admitted claims of ₹9.92-lakh crore under this law, if one were to compare it against the liquidation value of the assets involved in the companies that have run the process, they seem to have recovered about 168 per cent of the liquidation value from resolved cases.

To be more specific, as of September 30, creditors have successfully recovered ₹3.16-lakh crore through resolution plans passed on about 808 companies against a fair value of ₹2.92-lakh crore and against the liquidation value of these companies being ₹1.87-lakh crore — which takes us back to the origin of the problem discussed earlier.

Have we ever assessed or asked ourselves a fair question: What led to the situation? Why are the liquidation values so low and the total creditor claims so high? Is the judicial system responsible for this mismatch, or should there be some soul-searching in the banking system under the previous regime? Is it fair to expect the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) to clean up the mess, which is not just deep but also extremely convoluted in many ways, that too in record time-frames without ever questioning as to how did we land up in this situation?

Unfortunately, we are in a situation where we seem to be criticising the team of doctors who are doing their best to salvage a set of patients who have landed up in dire health situations as a result of multiple factors. Of course, quite a few of them are genuinely sick corporate patients; but at the same time, many are a result of indiscriminate lending, overvaluation of assets, lack of due diligence. Isn't it easiest to just blame the team of doctors? https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/ibc-has-been-unfairly-criticised/article67731471.ece

14. ₹810cr NMC plan to rid Pora River of pollution in 2 yrs *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* Jan 12, 2024

Nagpur: In a new year gift to almost 8.50 lakh population of south Nagpur, Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) on Thursday floated tenders for executing Pora river pollution abatement project of ₹810 crore under the central government's Amrut 2.0 Mission.

"The face of Pora River, which is the one of the main rivers in the city, will change in the next two years under the project," said municipal commissioner Abhijeet Chaudhari. NMC has already started the campaign to clean the river.

Though the detailed project report is for ₹957 crore, as per technical approval given by chief engineer, Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran, NMC has divided the project into five packages for total cost of ₹810.28 crore.

"Sewerage works are to be carried out in areas in southwest Nagpur where the Pora river flows. Under the project, new sewer lines will be laid in Laxmi Nagar, Hanuman Nagar, Dhantoli zones and in some parts of Nehru Nagar zone, while Hudkeshwar and Narsala will be covered under south sewerage zone," said superintending engineer, public health engineering (PHE) department Shweta Banerjee.

Under the sewage disposal project, 417km new sewer line will be laid — 253 km in the above-mentioned four zones and 164 km in Hudkeshwar-Narsala. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/810cr-nmc-plan-to-rid-pora-river-of-pollution-in-2-yrs/articleshow/106745102.cms

15. Kerala: 40 per cent of govt offices say 'no' to K-FON, seek free access *(newindianexpress.com)* 12th January 2024

K-FON obtained a National Long Distance (NLD) licence last week. The NLD licence authorises the licensee to provide NLD service.

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Eight months after its launch, the state government's much-hyped K-FON (Kerala Fibre Optical Network) seems to have 'lost connect' with a section of government offices. In what could be a major setback to the project, around 40% of the government offices that were enlisted as users have refused to continue with the project.

They have switched off their ONTs (modem), stating they would accept the K-FON connection only if it is given free of charge. At the time of its inauguration last June, K-FON had proposed to give connections to 30,000 offices in the state. Currently, it is available in 19,800 government offices. Of these, 11,800 offices use the connection while the remaining are reluctant to use the service, according to sources.

K-FON provided free connections to government offices in the first four months of its launch. However, it started issuing bills from the fifth month. When K-FON officers approach the offices with consumption bills, several of them refuse to pay, citing they were already paying other operators such as BSNL, Airtel, and Asianet, for their existing connections.

Sources said a total of 8,000 government offices in various districts demanded free connection when field officers of K-FON visited them to resolve the technical issues it faced initially. “When we approached these offices, they told us that they were paying for private broadband operators. The officers said that they are ready to use the K-FON connection if it is given free of cost. We were ready to upgrade our plans. Unfortunately, many of these government officers are non-cooperative with K-FON,” an officer said. The state secretariat and district collectorates are exceptions to this as they continue to use K-FON connections.

When K-FON was launched, all government offices were asked to use it as the primary network, and others including BSNL as the second connection.

So, many government offices still have connections of BSNL and other private Internet service providers. That is why a section of government offices are not ready to pay the bills or switch off the modems, the source said.

Chief secy has promised to settle K-FON issue: MD

K-FON MD Santhosh Babu told TNIE that he has communicated the issue to the state government. “I discussed the matter with Chief Secretary V Venu last week. He has promised to resolve the issue,” Babu said. According to him, K-FON has an annual maintenance cost of `342 crore. “To meet the cost, we had to mobilise funds from various sources. We are also in the process of availing working capital loans. KIIFB is providing financial support. But it will not be sufficient to meet the cost. So we need to get revenue to meet the maintenance costs through monthly bills. K-FON has a massive network. So we will be in a no-profit-no-loss situation even after fully meeting the annual maintenance cost,” he said.

K-FON obtained a National Long Distance (NLD) licence last week. The NLD licence authorises the licensee to provide NLD service. It means that the company can provide telecommunication services over a long-distance network. Babu pointed out that K-FON is trying to provide an average of 3,000 connections per day.

He said K-FON connections are yet to be provided to around 5,000 government offices that are functioning on either side of the national highways due to the ongoing construction of NH 66 across the state. Unlike other private broadband optical fibre connections, K-FON cables are being laid overhead. So far, 1,700 domestic K-FON free connections have been given across the state.

https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2024/jan/12/kerala-40-per-centof-govt-offices-say-no-to-k-fon-seek-free-access-2650153.html

16. 2 years on, civic body starts public EV charging stations

(timesofindia.indiatimes.com) Updated: Jan 12, 2024

PUNE: The civic administration started public e-vehicle charging stations on Friday, almost two years after the announcement.

As many as 21 stations would be available to charge twoand four-wheelers. Car owners would have to pay Rs13 to Rs 19 per unit to charge their vehicles.

"The civic body will get revenue from these stations. Based on response, we may revise the rate, which will be higher at locations with more demand," said Shrinivas Kandul, head of Pune Municipal Corporation's (PMC) electrical department.

The PMC said it would earn 50% of the total revenue and the firm, which was going to operate and maintain the units, would get the remaining 50%. The official said inauguration of the units had been delayed due to nonavailability of space and technical snag.

Meanwhile, citizens group Sajag Nagrik Manch objected to the charging rates being imposed by the PMC and said it was high. "The difference between minimum and maximum rates is high. The rates at other charging stations are around Rs13.25 per unit. The PMC is charging Rs19, which is very high. The administration should reconsider the rates," said Vivek Velankar of the Manch.

The location of the charging stations include PMC building, Savarkar Bhavan, Balgandharva auditorium, Yashwantrao Chavan auditorium, Ganesh Kala Krida Manch, Balasaheb Thackeray art gallery (Swargate), ward offices of Bibwewadi, Ghole Road, Tilak Road, Skechers showroom (JM Road), McDonald's (JM Road), Lemon salon (FC Road), Kushal Wall Street parking (FC Road), Art Station (FC Road), Millennium Plaza (FC Road), Peshwe Park, Mandai Aryan Parking, Gultekdi, Navaloba (Shukrawar Peth), Padmavati pumping station, Pandit Bhimsen Joshi auditorium (Aundh) and Sanjay Gandhi hospital (Yerawada). https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/2-years-on-civic-body-starts-public-ev-charging-stations/articleshow/106744080.cms