

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG /AUDIT REPORTS

1. NAAC stalls grading of 30 institutes after baffling jumps (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Jan 15, 2024

MUMBAI: The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has put on hold grading process for around 30 institutes in the country that saw inexplicable jump in grades between two accreditation cycles, separated by five years. NAAC has reviewed their assessment and declared the results of some of them. The review has led to reduction in grades for six colleges, indicating that their marking during the earlier assessment was inflated.

In March 2023, NAAC was pulled up by the Comptroller and Auditor General for glaring "discrepancies" in its assessment process, pointing to the poor standards that NAAC follows.

1 in 3 accredited varsities in India graded A by NAAC

NAAC director Ganesan Kannabiran said several higher education institutes (HEIs) were reviewed via re-DVV or revisit. "About 30 HEIs had grade jumps, with two of them in the west seeing five jumps (B to A++ and C to A+) in just two cycles," he added.

While DVV refers to data validation and verification, as per revisit, a new team is sent to campuses to validate the scores awarded by the earlier team.

In 2023, TOI had carried a series of articles on grade inflation in institutes across India. After TOI published the articles, NAAC acknowledged the problem of "inflated" grades and set up a committee to understand how scores of so many Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) were pumped up.

"It is generally expected that HEIs are likely to improve their performance over two consecutive cycles. However, if the increase is significant, the standing committee recommends a re-DVV or revisit in order to ensure correctness of the assessment," professor Anil Sahasrabudhe, chairman of NAAC's executive committee, said.

"Initially, an internal team reviews the assessment and offers inputs to the standing committee to make a final decision. In such cases, the assessments are being carried out by a different partner or a peer-team as per the requirement." After the grade inflation, of India's accredited universities, 140, or one in three, have A grade, once a venerable position to reach. A closer look reveals that of these, 42 sit on the pole position with an impressive A++. Also, eight of them, largely private and deemed varsities, have been accorded higher scores by this assessment body than Indian Institute of Science which according to the NIRF ranking is the numero uno campus of the nation.
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/naac-stalls-grading-of-30-institutes-after-baffling-jumps/articleshow/106846034.cms?from=mdr>

2. 1 in 3 accredited varsities in India graded A by NAAC (timesofindia.indiatimes.com) Jan 15, 2024

Mumbai: A massive rise in the grades of around 30 institutes between two accreditation cycles has led to NAAC assessing the colleges again through re-DVV or revisit. DVV refers to data validation and verification, which is part of the standard operating procedure to check if the numbers submitted by an institute are accurate. And re-visit, probably a first in NAAC, assigns a fresh team of academicians to visit campuses and validate scores awarded by an earlier team.

After TOI published a series of articles in 2023, NAAC acknowledged the problem of “inflated” grades and set up a committee to understand how scores of so many higher education institutions (HEIs) were being pumped up.

“It is generally expected that HEIs are likely to improve their performance over two consecutive cycles. However, if the increase is significant, the standing committee recommends a re-DVV or revisit in order to ensure correctness of the assessment,” professor Anil Sahasrabudhe, chairman of NAAC’s executive committee, said. “Initially, an internal team reviews the assessment and offers inputs to the standing committee to make a final decision. In such cases, the assessments are being carried out by a different partner or a peer-team as per the requirement,” he said.

In March 2023, the assessment body was pulled up by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) for glaring “discrepancies” in its assessment process, pointing to the poor standards that NAAC follows.

After the grade inflation, of India’s accredited universities, 140, or one in three, have A grade, once a venerable position to reach. A closer look reveals that of these, 42 sit on the pole position with an impressive A++. Also, eight of them, largely private and deemed varsities, have been accorded higher scores by NAAC than the Indian Institute of Science which, according to the NIRF ranking, is the numero uno campus in the country. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/1-in-3-accredited-varsities-in-india-graded-a-by-naac-hemali/articleshow/106848672.cms>

3. Celebrating the Resilience of Indian Democracy and the Role of CAG of India (legalserviceindia.com) By Himanshu5 | 14 Jan 2024

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the visionary architect of the Indian Constitution, envisaged a democratic framework founded on justice, accountability, and transparency. His wisdom, as encapsulated in his statements, has found profound resonance in the context of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India.

As we celebrate Audit Diwas, a day dedicated to acknowledging the remarkable contributions of the CAG, we delve into the essence of Ambedkar's thoughts to illuminate the indomitable spirit of accountability and the pivotal role played by the CAG in safeguarding the nation's fiscal integrity.

In a world marked by political upheaval and uncertainty, India's democracy stands as a testament to the enduring power of collective determination and resilience. For over

seven decades, the nation has weathered storms and navigated through challenges, emerging stronger and more vibrant each time.

At the heart of this remarkable journey is the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, an institution that epitomizes accountability, transparency, and the unwavering commitment to the democratic ideals that have shaped the nation. This essay explores the profound significance of India's resilient democracy and delves into the pivotal role played by the CAG in safeguarding its integrity and progress.

Resilience: A Historical Perspective: India's democratic journey has been an awe-inspiring narrative of courage, sacrifice, and determination. From the struggle for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi to the formation of the world's largest democracy, the nation's resilience has been on display throughout its history. The ability to adapt, evolve, and overcome challenges has not only sustained the democratic spirit but has also provided a beacon of hope for other nations grappling with similar aspirations.

The CAG's Independence: A Pillar of Democracy: Dr. Ambedkar's words, "The CAG ought to have far greater independence than the judiciary itself," echo through time, underscoring the paramount significance of an independent and impartial CAG. The CAG's role as a guardian of financial prudence and a sentinel of accountability is enshrined in this sentiment. Independence empowers the CAG to scrutinize government actions without fear or favor, thereby upholding the democratic values that are the bedrock of our nation.

Democracy's Pillars: Accountability and Transparency: At the heart of a robust democracy lies the principle of accountability, and the CAG embodies this principle through its role as an independent and impartial watchdog. The CAG ensures that the government's fiscal decisions and actions are aligned with the public's interests. Its audits, reports, and recommendations shine a light on the functioning of the government, fostering transparency and empowering citizens to hold their representatives accountable.

Challenges Faced by the CAG:

Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI): Integrate data analytics and AI tools to process and analyze vast amounts of financial data. This will enable the CAG to identify patterns, anomalies, and potential risks in real time.

Blockchain Technology: Implement blockchain to enhance the transparency and immutability of financial transactions. This technology could provide a tamper-proof audit trail, ensuring the integrity of government operations.

Digital Auditing Platforms: Develop digital platforms that allow government agencies to upload financial data directly. This can streamline the auditing process, reduce errors, and enhance real-time monitoring

Machine Learning for Risk Assessment: Utilize machine learning algorithms to predict areas of potential financial mismanagement, enabling the CAG to prioritize its audit efforts effectively.

Interactive Dashboards for Transparency: Create user-friendly dashboards that present audit findings and recommendations in an easily understandable format for citizens. This promotes greater public awareness and engagement.

Collaboration with Tech Experts: Collaborate with technology experts and startups to co-create innovative solutions tailored to the CAG's needs. This fosters a culture of innovation and ensures that the latest technologies are leveraged effectively.

Complexity of Transactions: The modern financial landscape is marked by intricate and dynamic transactions, making it challenging for traditional auditing methods to keep up.

Real-time Monitoring: Timely identification of irregularities is essential. However, traditional audit processes often lag behind real-time operations.

Voluminous Data: The sheer volume of data generated by government operations requires efficient tools to analyze and extract meaningful insights.

Adapting to Digital Governance: As governments embrace digital transformation, the CAG needs to adapt its audit methods to effectively assess the digital realm.

Ensuring Follow-up Action: While audits may uncover discrepancies, ensuring follow-up action remains a challenge, leading to a gap in accountability.

Audit Diwas: Celebrating Accountability and Transparency: Audit Diwas, a day dedicated to commemorating the CAG's invaluable contributions, embodies the essence of Dr. Ambedkar's ideals. It serves as a reminder that transparency, accountability, and the pursuit of justice are not mere abstract concepts but living principles that guide our democracy. On this occasion, we reflect on the CAG's unwavering commitment to upholding the nation's fiscal integrity and its crucial role in fortifying democratic institutions.

Leveraging Modern Technology for Transparency:

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"The CAG is probably the most important officer in the Constitution of India," Dr. Ambedkar's profound assertion reverberates with the weight of truth. The CAG's audits serve as a beacon of transparency, enabling citizens to hold their government accountable for its financial decisions and actions. By meticulously examining financial transactions, the CAG ensures adherence to established norms, preventing fiscal mismanagement and abuse of power. In doing so, the CAG contributes to the overall health of the nation's economy and reinforces the rule of law.

Strengthening Democratic Institutions: The CAG's role extends beyond financial oversight; it bolsters the pillars of democracy by ensuring that institutions function efficiently and ethically. Through its audits of various government bodies, the CAG fosters a culture of continuous improvement, leading to enhanced governance, responsiveness, and public service delivery.

Empowering Citizens Through Information: Dr. Ambedkar's vision extended beyond governance; it encompassed the empowerment of citizens. The CAG, by transforming complex financial matters into accessible information, bridges the gap between the government and the people. In this way, the CAG fosters informed citizen participation, enabling them to make responsible decisions, engage meaningfully with the democratic process, and actively contribute to the nation's progress.

Challenges and the Path Forward: While we celebrate the achievements of the CAG on Audit Diwas, we must also recognize the challenges that lie ahead. In an era of rapid technological advancement and evolving governance structures, the CAG must adapt to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness. Embracing digital transformations, enhancing real-time auditing capabilities, and proactive engagement will further amplify the CAG's impact in safeguarding our democracy.

Audit Diwas stands as a testament to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's wisdom and the enduring legacy of his vision for a just and accountable nation. As we commemorate this day, we honor the remarkable contributions of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, an institution that embodies the ideals of transparency, accountability, and the relentless pursuit of justice. Dr. Ambedkar's words continue to guide us, reminding us that the

CAG's independence and integrity remain pivotal to upholding the democratic spirit that defines our great nation.

India's democratic journey, marked by resilience, inclusivity, and the pursuit of justice, has been a source of inspiration for nations around the globe. At the heart of this journey, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India stands as a formidable guardian of democracy, championing transparency, accountability, and the rule of law.

In an era where the very essence of democracy is often tested, the CAG's unwavering commitment serves as a beacon of hope, guiding India towards a brighter and more equitable future. As we celebrate the remarkable resilience of Indian democracy and the indispensable role of the CAG, let us reaffirm our collective responsibility to uphold the principles that have made India a shining example of democratic fortitude. <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-14783-celebrating-the-resilience-of-indian-democracy-and-the-role-of-cag-of-india.html>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

4. CAG Uncovers Irregularities in Developing Qutub Shahi Tombs, Tribal Belts in Telangana (*news18.com*) JANUARY 12, 2024

In a recently released report on Swadesh Darshan Scheme, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has unearthed several financial irregularities in tourism projects in Telangana. The agency found that the state had submitted inflated Utilisation Certificates of Rs 21.67 crores against the actual work done in the projects.

The report found misutilisation of funds, absence of proper clearances and misguided decisions made in developing the Tribal Circuit in Telangana and Heritage Circuit in Hyderabad.

TRIBAL CIRCUIT

In the tribal circuit, destinations were selected without feasibility or field survey. All sites that were proposed in Tribal Circuit were under reserve forest area and hence required permission from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change before undertaking any work. The state government could not execute 17 components at Damaravai, Bogatha, Tadvai and Mallur due to lack of land availability or forest clearances.

As against 30 water fleet which cost Rs 6.14 crore, only seven fleet worth Rs 1.13 crore were delivered at Laknavaram, and the remaining 23 worth Rs 5.01 crore were delivered at locations other than the designated ones.

During physical verification of the site at Mulugu, of the six sanctioned gazebo, only three were found at the site. Interestingly, one gazebo was found at the camp office of the District Collector of Mulugu.

The guidelines say that any excess expenditure was to be borne by the state government. However, the Implementing Agency had spent an amount of Rs 34.30 lakh in excess of sanctioned amount without obtaining the approval of MoT. Similarly, expenditure of

Rs 61.01 lakh for repairs and renovation of the old suspension bridge at Laknavaram and payment of Rs 3.35 crore was made on items other than the approved items.

HERITAGE CIRCUIT

The Circuit includes four heritage sites – Qutub Shahi Heritage Park, Paigah Tombs, Hayat Bakshi Begum Mosque and Raymond’s Tomb – in Hyderabad.

In 2017, the ministry sanctioned 14 components valued at Rs 82.43 crore at Qutub Shahi Heritage Park (QSHP), among which construction of Entrance Plaza and Interpretation Centre were some of the important ones. A total of Rs 40.03 crore had been sanctioned for these two buildings. QSHP was on the tentative list of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites. However, work had to be stopped in 2021 after incurring expenditure of Rs 9.01 crore, on the orders passed by the Telangana Waqf Tribunal. <https://www.news18.com/india/cag-unearths-irregularities-in-developing-qutub-shahi-tombs-tribal-belts-in-telangana-8737577.html>

5. CAG Unearths Financial Irregularities in Developing Tribal Belts, Heritage Circuits in Telangana (*english.jagran.com*) 12 Jan 2024

The agency discovered that, in contrast to the actual work completed on the projects, the state had filed inflated Utilisation Certificates totaling Rs 21.67 crores. The report discovered financial mismanagement, improper clearances, and poor choices in the creation of the Hyderabad Heritage Circuit and Telangana Tribal Circuit.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) uncovered multiple financial irregularities in Telangana tourism projects in a recently released report on the Swadesh Darshan Scheme. The agency discovered that, in contrast to the actual work completed on the projects, the state had filed inflated Utilisation Certificates totaling Rs 21.67 crores.

The report discovered financial mismanagement, improper clearances, and poor choices in the creation of the Hyderabad Heritage Circuit and Telangana Tribal Circuit.

Tribal Belts

Destinations were chosen for the tribal circuit without regard to field research or viability. Since all of the suggested locations in the Tribal Circuit were within reserve forests, approval from the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change was necessary before any work could be done. In Damaravai, Bogatha, Tadvai, and Mallur, the state government was unable to carry out 17 components because there was insufficient land available or forest clearances.

Out of the thirty water fleets that were purchased for Rs 6.14 crore, only seven fleets valued at Rs 1.13 crore were delivered to Laknavaram, while the remaining twenty-three fleets valued at Rs 5.01 crore were delivered to locations other than those that were specified.

The guidelines say that any excess expenditure was to be borne by the state government. Nevertheless, the Implementing Agency had exceeded the sanctioned amount by Rs 34.30 lakh without getting MoT approval. Similarly, Rs 3.35 crore was paid for items other than those that were approved, and Rs 61.01 lakh was spent on renovating and repairing the old suspension bridge at Laknavaram.

<https://english.jagran.com/tehangana/cag-unearts-financial-irregularities-in-developing-tribal-belts-heritage-circuits-in-tehangana-10126810>

6. CAG audit flags gross irregularities in Telangana tourism projects (*siasat.com*) Updated: January 12, 2024

Hyderabad: The Comptroller and Auditor General of India's (CAG) Audit has flagged irregularities in several tourism projects launched by the Telangana government previously.

A study of Swadesh Darshan Scheme, a Central government programme to promote and develop tourism, has highlighted that Telangana Tourism Development Corporation had arrayed incorrect utilization certificates (UCs) to the tune of Rs 21.6 crore against the real and accurate status of expenditure and work incurred. Moreover, in the tribal circuits, works were taken up without forest clearance, resulting in the wastage of funds.

The CAG has also conducted a keen audit on the heritage circuit for the Qutub Shahi Heritage Park, Paigah Tombs, Hayat Bakshi Mosque, and Raymond's Tomb development project taken up by Telangana State Tourism Development Corporation with a cost of Rs 97 crore, of which Rs 70 crore were already released.

The work on Qutub Shahi Heritage Park stopped after the Telangana Waqf Board claimed ownership over it, and the matter went to sub-judice in 2007. Due to the litigation, work stopped in January 2021 after the state bore an expenditure of Rs 9 crore on the order of the Telangana Waqf Tribunal, stopping any kind of construction.

The audit further observed that the site had been under litigation since 2007, and yet the government selected it despite being aware of the legal restriction. Hence, an amount of Rs 9.01 crore used for the execution of the works got wasted. The Qutub Shahi Heritage Park offers great potential for tourists as it is on the tentative list of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites.

Moreover, Rs 6.2 lakh was paid for the maintenance of and shrubs of Raymond's Tomb and Hayat Bakshi Mosque from the scheme funds. It was again an inadmissible expenditure and was supported by the state government.

For the tribal circuit, Rs 61 lakh was spent on the repairs and renovation of the old suspension bridge to Island-1 at Laknavaram (Mugulu) and Rs 3.3 crore on employees' car hire charges and the purchase of vehicles, which were again disallowed.

<https://www.siasat.com/cag-audit-flags-gross-irregularities-in-tehangana-tourism-projects-2955056/>

7. Kaleswaram Project under Scrutiny (*indiaherald.com*) 14 January 2024

The kaleswaram project, deemed prestigious by former telangana chief minister KCR and the BRS party, has been a focal point in political discussions and electoral campaigns. However, the recent assessment by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) paints a different picture, indicating that the celebrated project offers no substantial benefits.

The CAG delved into the government's policies and scrutinized the kaleswaram project over the two quarters of the current financial year, presenting a comprehensive 32-page report. Key points highlighted by the CAG include the meager income from the project, amounting to just 52 paise, with an additional 8 paise considered a loss to the government.

The report challenges the previous government's imaginative construction of the project, emphasizing that these were mere assumptions rather than factual details. Discrepancies were also identified in the government's claims of annual project management expenses, with the actual expenditure reported at Rs. 28,270 crores, significantly lower than the stated Rs.14,351 crores.

The CAG questioned the electricity cost for the project, revealing a significant variance between the reported Rs.10,374 crore and the government's reduced estimate of Rs. 4,148 crores. Additionally, the projected income of Rs. 21,682 crores was contested, with the CAG estimating a more conservative figure of Rs. 14,709 crores.

The report expressed concern over the substantial debt incurred for Kaleswaram's construction, amounting to Rs. 87,449 crores, with an additional interest payment of Rs. 54,174 crores, potentially becoming a financial trap for the state government. Moreover, the CAG disputed the government's claim of providing one lakh acres under the project, revealing that only 40,288 acres were actually made available. <https://www.indiaherald.com/Breaking/Read/994668197/Kaleswaram-Project-Under-Scrutiny>

8. Karnataka: How a govt hospital is giving corporate ones a run for their money (*theweek.in*) Updated: January 14, 2024

The Bannerghatta Road in Bengaluru is known for not just multinational tech giants and malls, but also for big corporate hospitals. A swanky building nestled in a vast plot of lush gardens in Jayanagar is very likely to be mistaken for a private hospital, but the Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research is a government-run autonomous institute, the largest centre for heart care in southeast Asia.

As you step inside, there is a serpentine queue in the waiting lounge, but the admission desk and the billing counter do not seem like a barrier to access treatment. At least 80 per cent of the patients are treated free as they are covered under government health insurance schemes or by the hospital's corpus fund. Known popularly as Jayadeva hospital (named after the family deity of the land donor), this research centre with 1,150 beds, located on a sprawling 13-acre campus, is a major landmark in the IT city. With

campuses in Mysuru and Kalaburagi as well, Jayadeva now has around 2,000 beds exclusively for heart care.

According to the latest reports, Jayadeva had 6.55 lakh outpatients and 68,902 admissions last year. It performed 5,500 open heart surgeries and 3.78 lakh echocardiograms—the highest in the world. The success story of the public heart institute began with a doctor’s dream of scaling up a government hospital into a “five-star” hospital. Dr C.N. Manjunath, 66, is the man behind the dream, transforming Jayadeva into one of Asia’s leading cardiology centres. Manjunath graduated from Mysore Medical College, did his post graduation from Bangalore Medical College and doctorate of medicine in cardiology from Kasturba Medical College, Manipal. He joined Jayadeva in 1989 and was elevated to the post of director in 2006.

“It was not just about physical infrastructure like the building and equipment, but about nurturing talent and developing a culture of hard work and discipline,” said Manjunath, who was awarded the Padma Shri in 2007. “We mean every word of our three slogans: ‘Treatment first, payment next’, ‘Life is more important than the file’ and ‘Humanity is priority’.”

Jayadeva employs 120 cardiologists, 48 cardiothoracic surgeons, 40 cardiac anaesthetists and six vascular surgeons who run its 18 cath labs and 17 operation theatres. The hospital sees 1,500 to 1,700 walk-in patients every day and 80 per cent of them are below poverty line. ‘The poor families with no BPL cards or [those who] have lost the cards should still get treatment. But the rule book says the card is a must. I raised the issue in the governing council way back in 2007 and sought to authorise the director to identify the poor for free treatment. My eyeball assessment has only grown stronger as I see poverty and helplessness in their eyes before I see their ailing heart,” said Manjunath.

He still remembers the case of an elderly man who needed a pacemaker. “His son had borrowed Rs78,000 for the procedure and they had no BPL card,” said Manjunath. “When he learnt that the pacemaker would cost more than what he had, he decided to take his father back to the village. We absorbed the cost and performed the surgery as we had a corpus fund to fall back on.”

When he took over as director, Manjunath had a plan to build a corpus fund. He requested his employees for a day’s salary before requesting help from government organisations and NGOs. He also asked his staff to withdraw all cases against the hospital on salary and service issues. The hospital then put in place an incentive system to enhance employee productivity.

An audit by the accountant general lauded the hospital for being a great model for internal finance management and resource mobilisation despite a 37 per cent deficit in grants allocation by the government. “Ayushman Bharat and Arogya Karnataka insurance schemes are benefiting the poor. But they do not cover many procedures and the rates are not scientifically revised from time to time. The entire patient load falls on the government hospitals,” said Manjunath. He managed to raise a corpus of Rs150 crore to provide free treatment to the poor, who could not be covered under the government health insurance schemes.

The 400-bed hospital in Mysuru (started in August 2018), the 350-bed Infosys Foundation block (November 2021) and the upcoming 350-bed hospital complex on the new Jayadeva campus at Kalaburagi have helped the hospital achieve a rare feat—a staggering 2,000-bed dedicated facility for heart care.

On December 24, 2018, Infosys founder and chairman emeritus N.R. Narayana Murthy visited the hospital and said he was impressed with the hygiene and the quality of service. But he noticed the long queue at the outpatient department and also found that the wards were full. A day later, Manjunath got a call from Infosys Foundation chairperson Sudha Murty. “She told me that she wanted to build a 200-bed facility on the existing campus. But after her team of architects and engineers inspected the hospital complex, she called in to say that they decided to build a 350-bed hospital block. In November 2021, the Infosys wing became fully functional with two cardiac cath labs, two operation theatres, 100 ICCU (intensive coronary care unit) beds and 250 general [beds],” said Manjunath.

The Kalaburagi hospital serves Kalyana Karnataka, among the most backward regions in the state. Before Jayadeva opened its facility there, patients had to travel more than 700km to Bengaluru or to neighbouring states to receive cardiac care. When the new hospital came up in Kalaburagi, the first task was to recruit and train people to help them adapt to Jayadeva’s patient-centric work culture. “We selected 110 new recruits from Kalaburagi for the posts of nurses, technicians and doctors. Some recruits asked me whether the working hours were only till 1pm, which was the practice in the Kalyana Karnataka region, owing to the extreme heat in the afternoon. I inducted them in our Bengaluru main hospital three months in advance and drove them back to Kalaburagi on a bus on the day of the inauguration. In Bengaluru, they had first-hand experience of working in a hospital where the constant flow of patients can be overwhelming and exhausting. But the team realised the importance of the organisation in serving the needy,” said Manjunath.

The Cardiac Rehabilitation Centre (CRC) was set up in 2019 in collaboration with the Needy Heart Foundation and the Bangalore Indiranagar Rotary Trust, to help cardiac patients make lifestyle modifications. “Often, we see patients living in fear after suffering a heart attack. They feel depressed and anxious over not being able to go back to their routines. The CRC team visits the ward before the patients are discharged and counsels them on healthy lifestyle, diet, exercise and medicines,” said Dr S.P. Shankar Sira, who heads the CRC.

The newer additions to the growing list of specialisations in the institute are paediatric cardiology, vascular surgery and electrophysiology. Dr K.S. Ravindranath, professor of cardiology and chief academic officer, said, “We are now treating the highest number of rheumatic heart disease patients in South Asia. Doctors from western countries come to us for observership.” NABH (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers) accreditation is a rare honour for a public hospital and Manjunath took it up as a challenge to upgrade Jayadeva on par with corporate hospitals, making it patient-centric, competitive and with world-class service. In 2015, Jayadeva became the first public heart institute to get NABH accreditation.

“For private hospitals, accreditation might work like a marketing tool. But we are already handling a huge patient load and would like uniformity in care and focus on the

standards and compliance which help us streamline the system. It brings everyone in the hierarchy on the same page and builds accountability to safeguard our trust and credibility,” said Ramesh Shivanna, quality coordinator of the hospital.

Attrition or brain-drain can cripple health care institutions. But Jayadeva has been fortunate to have low attrition rates, despite the lure of corporate hospital jobs. Dr Karthik Raghuram, who did his DM in cardiology from Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram, joined Jayadeva two years ago, opting for a government hospital as it offered a great learning experience. “It makes you feel good to serve the poor who might not have health insurance. Our equipment, imaging technology, valves, balloons or procedures are comparable to that of world-class hospitals,” said Karthik, who sees around hundred patients a day.

Dr Seetharama Bhat, senior consultant and professor of cardiac surgery, said the best part of working at Jayadeva was that doctors enjoyed a free hand to decide the course of treatment without worrying about the cost, the case-sheet and the reimbursement procedures. “Dr Manjunath has consistently raised funds to treat the poor and most donors are still with us only because of the rapport and respect they have for him,” said Bhat.

Till date, Manjunath has performed around 55,000 cardiac interventions. He innovated a new technique of balloon mitral valvuloplasty (an intervention to open up a thickened heart valve) which is now called ‘Manjunath’s technique’. The left atrial thrombus classification is done according to a scheme proposed by Manjunath, called ‘Manjunath classification’. He has trained cardiologists from the US, France, the UK, China and Vietnam in valvuloplasty procedures.

“Dr Manjunath’s zeal to teach, his simplicity, his respect for other points of view and his ability to take everyone along make him a leader,” said Ravindranath, who took Manjunath on board as a syndicate member when he was vice chancellor of the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Bengaluru.

Manjunath has defied the myth that clinicians do not make good administrators. He got the idea of building a “five-star” hospital after visiting the University of Alabama Medical School. But he gratefully acknowledges the loving nudge he got at home to do better each day from his wife Anusuya, daughter of former prime minister H.D. Deve Gowda. “She constantly reminds me that my profession is my first wife and she, the second.” But lakhs of cardiac patients will thank the couple for their selfless service. <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/specials/2024/01/13/how-a-govt-hospital-is-giving-corporate-ones-a-run-for-their-money.html>

9. Public interest or Publicity interest?', asks HC on Satheesan's plea against KFON project (*onmanorama.com*) 15 January 2024

Kochi: The Kerala High Court on Monday questioned the intention of opposition leader V D Satheesan in moving a public interest litigation (PIL) over the alleged corruption in the KFON project. The court asked what was the public interest in the petition about a project launched in 2019. In his plea, Satheesan demanded a CBI probe into the alleged corruption in issuing the tender of the KFON project. “

The tender was issued in 2019. Why are you approaching the court in 2024 for it? It should be examined whether the petitioner has public interest or publicity interests,” said the HC. The court also sought the defendant's opinion in considering the plea after receiving the CAG report on the project.

Responding to this, the defendant's lawyer argued that the CAG report would be submitted before the court along with other evidence.

In his plea, VD Satheesan alleged that benamis, or proxies, of those who control the government got the tenders for their gains. “A company which is close to someone in power obtained the tender. This company had given the contract works and monetary gains of the project to another company,” the opposition leader claimed. <https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2024/01/15/kerala-high-court-on-vd-satheesan-plea-against-kfon-project.html>

10. Delayed Payments Plague Raj Employees: Pending Dues from Surrendered Leaves to Gratuity (*en.themooknayak.com*) 13 Jan 2024

Udaipur- In Rajasthan, there's a significant issue affecting thousand of employees of the education department especially teachers. They are waiting for their pending payments, including arrears, GPF, surrendered leave, and gratuity. This delay has resulted in a substantial amount of money, running into crores, being stuck at the state level for some four months now. Unfortunately, this bureaucratic holdup is causing real problems for these teachers. The money they are waiting for is essential for various needs like education, marriages, and family medical treatments.

"A significant scam related to the payment system in the previous government is suspected, prompting the Rajasthan Teachers Association, to submit a memorandum to the state government. We demand a high-level investigation to clarify the situation and authorize the treasury office to promptly approve all pending financial matters," Siyaram Sharma, the State Administrative President of the Organization told The Mooknayak. " We possess names of hundreds of teachers and employees who applied for loans for their children's marriages. Although the bills have been approved by the treasury, the funds have not been transferred to their accounts yet" he further added.

Concerns about a financial scam during the previous Ashok Gehlot led government have arisen , reportedly due to the Finance Department taking over the payment process from the treasury office over the last year. Officers in the Finance Department seem to be acting arbitrarily, allege the office bearers of the Rajasthan Teachers Union (SiyaRam).

An anonymous treasury officer confirmed the existence of many pending payments, including surrender leave. The bills have been verified from their end, but the actual payment needs to be executed by the Finance Department.

Sharing insights on the issue, Arun Vyas, the State Educational Cell Co-Secretary of the organization, told The Mooknayak that allegedly officers of the Finance Department now have the control over the annual payment system of Rs 2 lakh crore. All 56 treasuries of Rajasthan have been brought under control through e-sealing software.

Earlier all the payments were made after approval by treasury but presently despite the approval of bills at district level, payments have been pending for four months.

Vyas said that when the delegation from the Teachers' Union went to Jaipur in connection with the pending payments, they were informed about the situation informally , " We don't have any written order to support our claims but we were told by the sources that everything is being carried out on behalf of the directives from the CMO".

Vyas also said that the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) have reportedly sought an objection report on the Finance Department's takeover of the payment system.

The State General Secretary of the organization, Naveen Sharma, highlighted the troubles faced by employees due to changes in the payment system. Payments, including surrender leave, dedicated leave, RGHS-related payments, commutation payments, and gratuity payments, have been delayed for months. Payments for September are still pending.

Violation of Treasury Rules and CAG Objections

The Finance Department is alleged to have taken control of the treasury by introducing e-sealing software, which goes against the treasury rules. Initially designed for revenue collection in Rajasthan, the e-Treasury system is now being used for making payments. Finance Department officials facilitated payments from RBI through e-Treasury using a single certificate, bypassing treasury-wise DSC and relying solely on SFTP server certificates.

The teachers union highlighted that e-Kuber only accepts SFTP server certificates and not treasury-wise DSC. The absence of communication regarding these procedural changes raises concerns, and calls for an investigation by RBI have been made.

As per Government Treasury Rules, only the treasury of the respective district is authorized to make payments. The Finance Department's unauthorized intervention and subsequent alterations in the payment system demands high level probe, the teachers said.

The Teachers' Union also claim that pensioners' benefits worth Rs 2,500 crore have been withheld. Payments, ranging from surrender leave to gratuity, GPF, and surrender leave of employees, are pending for several months. The situation demands urgent attention and thorough investigation to bring transparency and accountability to the financial processes. https://en.themooknayak.com/education/delayed-payments-plague-raj-employees-pending-dues-from-surrendered-leaves-to-gratuity#google_vignette

11. 383 incomplete projects since 2003: NPRAAF asks govt to complete them (*morungexpress.com*) 12 January 2024

DIMAPUR: he Nagaland Public Rights Awareness and Action Forum (NPRAAF) has appealed to the Government of Nagaland to complete 383 projects in the state immediately. A press release from the NPRAAF said that there are 383

incomplete/ongoing projects for which Rs 1,380.04 crore has been spent by 36 departments since the year 2003.

Citing data from the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), the NPRAFF said that out of 36 defaulting departments, the major defaulting departments are PWD (roads and bridges) - Rs 258.85 crore against 15 projects; PWD (housing) - 235.56 crore against 35 projects; Police Engineering project - Rs 177.75 crore for 48 projects; Urban Development - Rs 96.77 crore for 26 projects; Geology & Mining - Rs 48.95 crore for 4 projects; Veterinary and Animal husbandry - Rs 19.3 crore for 62 project; and Civil Administration works - Rs 15.33 crore against 179 incomplete projects.

The forum stated that as per the CAG report, from 2003- 11, there were 63 incomplete projects for which Rs 722.61 crore has been spent with cost over-run amounting to Rs 156.61 crore.

The breakup of this spending was revealed by the NPRAAF as follows: 2011 -12 (Rs 67.96 crore spent for 19 incomplete projects); 2012-13 (Rs 132.86 crore for 39 ongoing projects with cost over-run of Rs 25.84 crore); 2013-14 (Rs 53.55 crore for 134 projects); 2014-15 (Rs 23.98 crore for 59 projects); 2015-16 (Rs 96.18 crore for 21 projects); 2016-17 (Rs 11.98 crore for 10 projects); 2017-18 (Rs 67.48 crore for 34 projects); 2018-19 (Rs 42.78 crore for 9 projects); and 2019-20 (Rs 5.28 crore for 4 projects).

“The Nagaland Government has spent over 1,300 crore on 416 projects which are incomplete for over 2 decades. The people of Nagaland must be aware of its rights and responsibilities as a responsible citizen and raise voice wherever necessary instead of remaining mute in the face of corruption,” the forum stated.

The NPRAAF said that despite sanction of funds from the Central Government, the projects are “still left incomplete.” “Some of the projects are 20 years long since colossal amount was sanctioned but the government is turning blind eye and continues to remain oblivious,” it stated. <https://morungexpress.com/383-incomplete-projects-since-2003-npraaf-asks-govt-to-complete-them>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

12. Agri Ministry Didn't Utilise Its Increased Budget, Surrendered Rs 1 Trillion in Last 5 Years: Report (*thewire.in*) 15 Jan 2024

In the last financial year, the Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare surrendered around Rs 21,000 crore out of its annual allocation of Rs 1.24 trillion, 'The Indian Express' reported.

The agriculture ministry in India has not fully utilised its increased budget, surrendering over Rs 1 lakh crore in the last five years, the Indian Express reported, citing a report by the ministry.

The report, titled ‘Accounts at a Glance for the Year 2022-2023’, reveals that the Department of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare surrendered Rs 21,005.13 crore out of its annual allocation of Rs 1.24 lakh crore during the last financial year (April 2022-March 2023). This is almost four times the amount surrendered by the department during the previous year 2021-22, which was Rs 5,152.6 crore of its 1.23 lakh crore allocation, the newspaper reported.

The department surrendered Rs 23,824.53 crore in 2020-21, Rs 34,517.7 crore in 2019-20, and Rs 21,043.75 crore in 2018-19.

The Standing Committee on Agriculture has urged the government to avoid this practice, pointing out that fund surrender is mainly due to less requirement in specific components. The report also notes a marginal reduction in the ministry’s total allocation for the current financial year, possibly reflecting the non-utilisation of funds.

The Department of Agricultural Research and Education, which also comes under the ministry, has surrendered Rs 9 lakh of its total allocation of Rs 8,658.91 crore in 2022-23, Rs 1.81 crore in 2021-22, Rs 600 crore in 2020-21, Rs 232.62 crore in 2019-20 and Rs 7.9 crore in 2018-2019, the daily reported.

With the introduction of the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi in the fiscal year 2018-19, the collective budget of the two departments under the Agriculture Ministry witnessed an increase from Rs 54,000 crore (constituting 2.3% of the Centre’s total budget of Rs 24.42 lakh crore) in 2018-19 to Rs 1.32 lakh crore (equivalent to 3.5% of the total Rs 39.44 lakh crore in 2022-23).

The scheme has been allocated an annual budget ranging from Rs 20,000 crore to Rs 75,000 crore over the last five years. However, for the current financial year 2023-24, the government has slightly reduced the ministry’s total allocation to Rs 1.25 lakh crore from the previous year’s Rs 1.32 lakh crore, potentially due to the non-utilisation of funds. <https://thewire.in/government/agri-ministry-didnt-utilise-its-increased-budget-surrendered-rs-1-trillion-in-last-5-years-report>

13. The revenue glass—half empty or half full (*cnbctv18.com*) Jan 14, 2024

Policymakers should constantly strive to achieve a rate wherein the taxpayer concludes it makes better sense to comply than take the risk of evading, writes the former Chairman of Indirect Taxes and Customs.

The revenue from the Goods & Services Tax (GST) continues to post impressive growth figures—₹1,64,882 crore was the gross revenue collection for December 2023.

This was a 12% year-on-year growth; the April to December revenue for 2023 being ₹14.97 lakh crore as against ₹13.40 lakh crore in the same period the previous year. The average monthly gross GST collection was ₹1.66 lakh crore in the first nine months of 2023-24.

The robust GST performance did seem to rub off on direct taxes—or given the close cooperation between the Central Board of Indirect Taxes (CBIC) and the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT)—it could be the other way around.

The gross direct taxes collection touched ₹17.18 lakh crore for FY24 up to January 10, 2024. This was a 16.77% YoY growth. Net Corporate Income Tax grew by 12.37% and net personal income tax by 27.26%. This would suggest a better exchange of data between the two Boards leading to better compliance.

And just as one was celebrating this excellent all-round performance from both CBIC and CBDT comes the press release of the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI). The DGGI has in 2023 detected 6,323 cases involving evasion of duty of ₹.1,98,324 crore representing a 119% (YoY) increase in the detection of cases.

As the press release states, the ‘DGGI unveiled significant GST evasion in diverse sectors like online gaming, casinos, insurance sector, secondment (import of manpower services), fake input tax credit (ITC) among others’. There was also a voluntary payment of ₹28.362 crore; 140 ‘masterminds’ were said to have been arrested.

Yet another press release reveals that special drives were launched by the DGGI and the State/UT undertakings across the country on the issue of non-existent/bogus registrations and issuance of fake invoices without any underlying supply of goods and services.

This drive resulted in the detection of 29,273 bogus firms involved in suspected evasion of ITC of around ₹12,036 crore. The data reveals that the most ITC fraud cases were detected in Maharashtra, followed by Rajasthan, Delhi, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. Thus, despite increased technology, data analytics, and risk management technology, it would appear evasion continues unabated.

The CBDT has in, another press release spoken of 8.18 lakh crore Income Tax Returns (ITR) having been filed in 2023-24 up to December 31, 2023. This is 9% more than the ITR’s filed for assessment year 2022-23.

At first glance, this is most impressive. But as the Finance Minister has in a reply to a question in the Lok Sabha mentioned, only 1-2% of the Indian population pays income tax and declares earnings above the non-taxable income.

This was the year 2018-19. Of course, the total population includes a large chunk not liable to pay any income tax, for instance, those below the age of 18 years and those whose income is less than ₹5 lakh. However, the fact remains that only a miniscule percent of the population pays income tax.

As Prof. Arun Kumar points out in an interesting analysis of the ITRs—nearly 68% of the persons who filed returns paid nil tax; then there were several persons who paid TDS but did not file a return. Effectively he points out only 0.68% of the population paid income tax—out of these 0.016% declared an income above ₹1 crore and had a share of 38.6% of the taxable income.

The two Boards have undoubtedly been doing a valiant job in curbing evasion as the detections reveal. Further, steps have been taken to rationalise the tax structure, simplify processes and simplify compliance. There has been a relentless focus on technology, digitisation, data analytics, and the sharing of information across agencies—all these have undoubtedly been showing results.

However, juxtaposing the various data elements *ibid*, it is evident that there is a serious tax gap in the country or to put it more bluntly, there are far too many persons evading taxes. It is well accepted that what is detected is but a small percentage of what is evaded; and not all of what is detected stands the test of adjudication and appeal.

We are simply not collecting all that we should be getting. India's tax to GDP ratio which represents the tax revenue concerning the GDP (gross domestic product) is low. The Government's ability to finance its expenditure is determined by this; a higher ratio indicates a wider fiscal coverage, more revenue, and less dependence on borrowings. India's tax-to-GDP ratio according to the Union Budget estimates for FY23, was estimated to be 10.7%; the OECD average is in the mid-30s. Obviously, there is a lot of catching up to do.

What then needs to be done? Enforcement can check evasion but never completely stop it; ultimately policy interventions are the answer. Simplification of processes which make it easier to comply should be a regular exercise.

While it is difficult to arrive at an ideal rate of taxation, policymakers should constantly strive to achieve a rate wherein the taxpayer concludes it makes better sense to comply than take the risk of evading. Close interaction with the industry, the ordinary taxpayer and enforcement agencies is a must to understand ground realities.

Technology should constantly be sharpened, and risk parameters built to detect abnormalities and throw red flags. The Boards should invest in recruiting data analytical experts to work closely with the department. There is a serious trust deficit between the taxpayer and the departments—this is a bridge which needs to be crossed one step at a time.

The field formations are key in this process and can make or break the best of policies. So constant training and sensitising the field formations is a must. Far too much time and energy is wasted in litigation—the amnesty schemes which effectively punish the honest taxpayer are never a good option. As the receipt budget shows, too much 'revenue' is blocked in litigation. The departments should ensure they seek to collect only what is due.

The citizens need to be aware of the ill effects of evasion—loss of revenue for the government which can otherwise be used in development and social projects, loss of jobs, generation of black money which can be used for nefarious anti-national purposes; they need to be encouraged to pay their taxes and participate in nation building. The PM's very influential Mann Ki Baat can be an effective vehicle to drive home this message.

All this and much more has to be done if we are to reach our ambitious targets of becoming a \$5 trillion economy in five years or achieving \$2 trillion in exports by 2030.

<https://www.cnbc18.com/economy/the-revenue-glass-half-empty-or-half-full-18793981.htm>

14. India could be the third-largest economy soon, but what about GDP per head? (*livemint.com*) 13 Jan 2024

Unless India can achieve double-digit growth for a decade or more, GDP per capita will remain low, not only relative to those of larger economies but to those of middle-income countries as well.

India will become the third largest economy in FY28, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said at the recent Vibrant Gujarat summit. This is the view of the International Monetary Fund as well, and is a good thing, but it won't by itself bring major improvements to the quality of life of the average Indian.

Unless India can achieve double-digit growth for a decade or more, GDP per capita will remain low, not just relative to that of larger economies, but to those of middle-income countries as well.

Here are the growth rates the IMF forecasts for the US, China, Japan and India for the next five years.

Based on the World Economic Outlook's projections for 2024 GDP and the growth rates above, the GDP of these economies, in billions of current US dollars, would be as follows.

Here are the World Bank's projections of population size for these countries in 2028.

This translates to the following GDP per capita in current US dollars:

If the US grows 1% in 2028, it will add \$303 billion to global output. India would have to grow nearly 6% to add a similar quantity. To equal the increase in output achieved by 1% growth in China in 2028, India would have to grow by more than 4%.

India's current GDP per capita is 4% of the average American's, less than 10% of average Japanese citizen's, and 23% of the average Chinese citizen's.

As a low-income country, it is easier for India to grow quickly than it is for larger economies. This does not mean that India's growth performance is to be deplored.

But the simple fact is that for economic growth to raise the incomes of citizens, growth will have to accelerate to double digits and stay there for a decade or more, as China's did during its high-growth years.

<https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/india-could-be-the-third-largest-economy-soon-but-what-about-gdp-per-head-11705052273827.html>

15. BSF to Procure More Made-in-India Trichy Assault Rifles Along with Bayonets (*republicworld.com*) January 15, 2024

New Delhi: The Border Security Force (BSF) is gearing up to equip its personnel with the Trichy Assault Rifle (TAR), an indigenously developed firearm, according to an official statement. The procurement is set at a limited quantity, with the BSF acquiring 125 rifles along with bayonets and other accessory items.

TAR: Firepower Tailored for Specialised Needs of Paramilitary

The primary objective behind this move is to set an example for other wings of the Armed Forces and Paramilitary, encouraging them to follow suit and procure more indigenous arms. The initiative aims to strengthen India's self-sufficiency in defence capabilities.

“Ordnance Factory, Trichirappallin developed and manufactured TAR Down folding butt version to meet the customer requirement as some of the CAPF units, State Police and RPF required the Down folding butt version for quick and easy movement of personnel in guard and patrolling duty”, said Officials in a prior statement.

Trichy Assault Rifle: Counter-Terror Operations with Cutting-Edge Firepower

The TAR, chambered in 7.62x39mm, has a lightweight modular design, making it well-suited for counter-insurgency and counter-terror operations.

Its gas-operated mechanism, machined mono-block receiver body, and fibre-reinforced polymer magazine with steel inserts contribute to its effectiveness in the field.

The rifle operates in both single-shot and burst modes, with the latter capable of destroying targets at a range of up to 500m. The TAR's overall destructive range extends to 1350m.

A customised version featuring a single-round firing mode is designed specifically for police forces engaged in patrolling duties within urban areas. The TAR-Down folding butt has an overall length of 900mm in the butt-open condition and 650mm in the butt-folding condition.

The rifle's versatility is further increased with the option to fit a 40x46mm UBGL GP-25, GP30, and M6, catering to various operational requirements. Additionally, the inclusion of Tritium-filled sources for night firing and a Picatinny rail for mounting optical sights underlines the rifle's adaptability to diverse scenarios.

Paramilitary and Police Forces with Trichy Assault Rifle (TAR) in Active Service

In 2020, the Ordnance Factory of Tiruchirappalli (OFT) delivered the initial batch of 500 Trichy Assault Rifles (TAR) to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), fulfilling a total order of 6,167 assault rifles.

The procurement followed rigorous field trials, including evaluation sessions at the CRPF Academy in Kadarapur, Haryana, in November 2017. Testing focused on the TAR's functionality, accuracy, and reliability, with 15,000 rounds fired without a single stoppage, affirming the weapon's dependability.

OFT has further supplied over 10,000 rifles to Chhattisgarh police and various central armed reserve police forces, including the ITBP, BSF, and CISF. Shirish Khare, OFT's General Manager had proudly acclaimed the Trichy Assault Rifle as their most significant success in the past 12-13 years of weapons development.

With a focus on promoting indigenous weaponry, the adoption of the TAR by the BSF signifies an important step in fortifying the nation's Paramilitary security apparatus. This move aligns with broader initiatives to reduce dependence on foreign arms, fostering self-sufficiency in defence production. <https://www.republicworld.com/defence/indian-armed-forces/bsf-to-procure-125-made-in-india-trichy-assault-rifles-along-with-bayonets/>

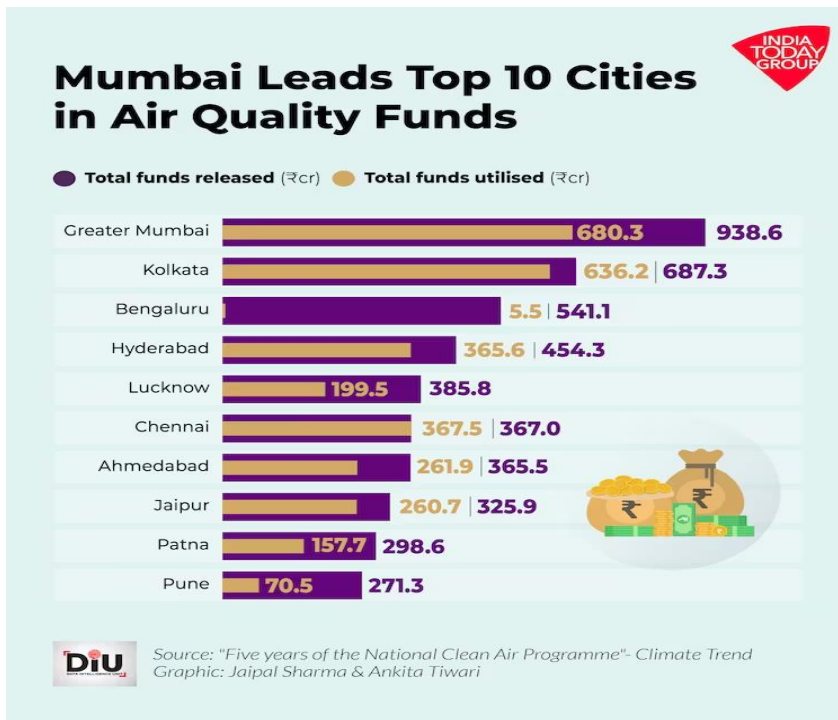
16. Are NCAP funds being used properly to combat pollution?
(*indiatoday.in*) UPDATED: Jan 13, 2024

As the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) completes five years, two pivotal questions loom. One, has the Rs 9,631.23 crore it has disbursed so far been used effectively? Two, has there been a tangible improvement in air quality in the 131 cities it funded?

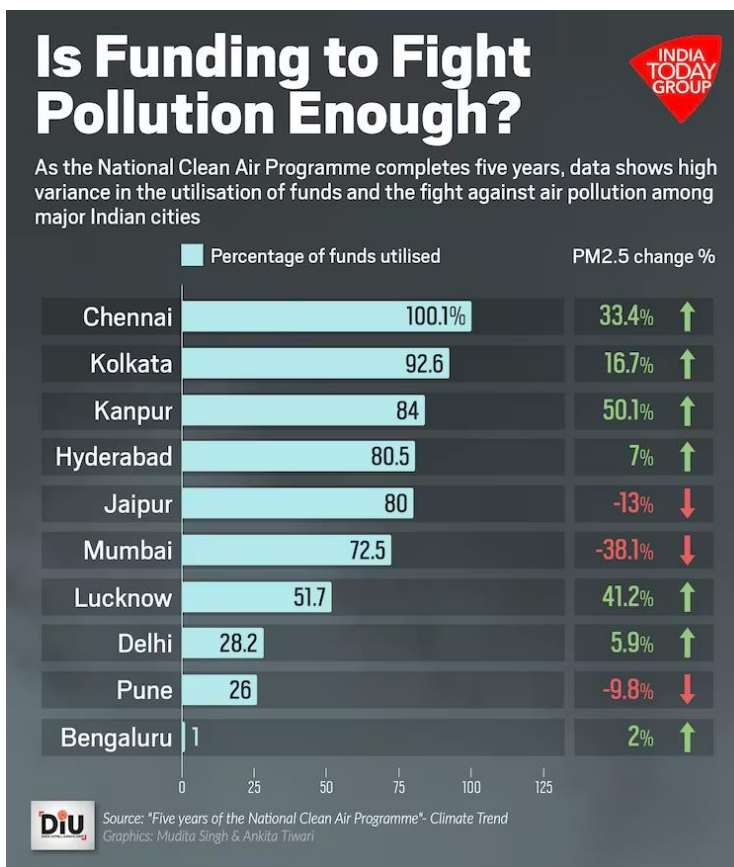
As the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) completes five years, two pivotal questions loom. One, has the Rs 9,631.23 crore it has disbursed so far been used effectively? Two, has there been a tangible improvement in air quality in the 131 cities it funded?

An analysis of the “Five Years of the National Clean Air Programme” report published by Respirer Living Sciences, a climate-tech startup, and Climate Trends, an environmental consulting group, provides some answers. So far, of the Rs 9,631.23 crore, only 60.47 per cent or Rs 5,835.03 crore have been utilised.

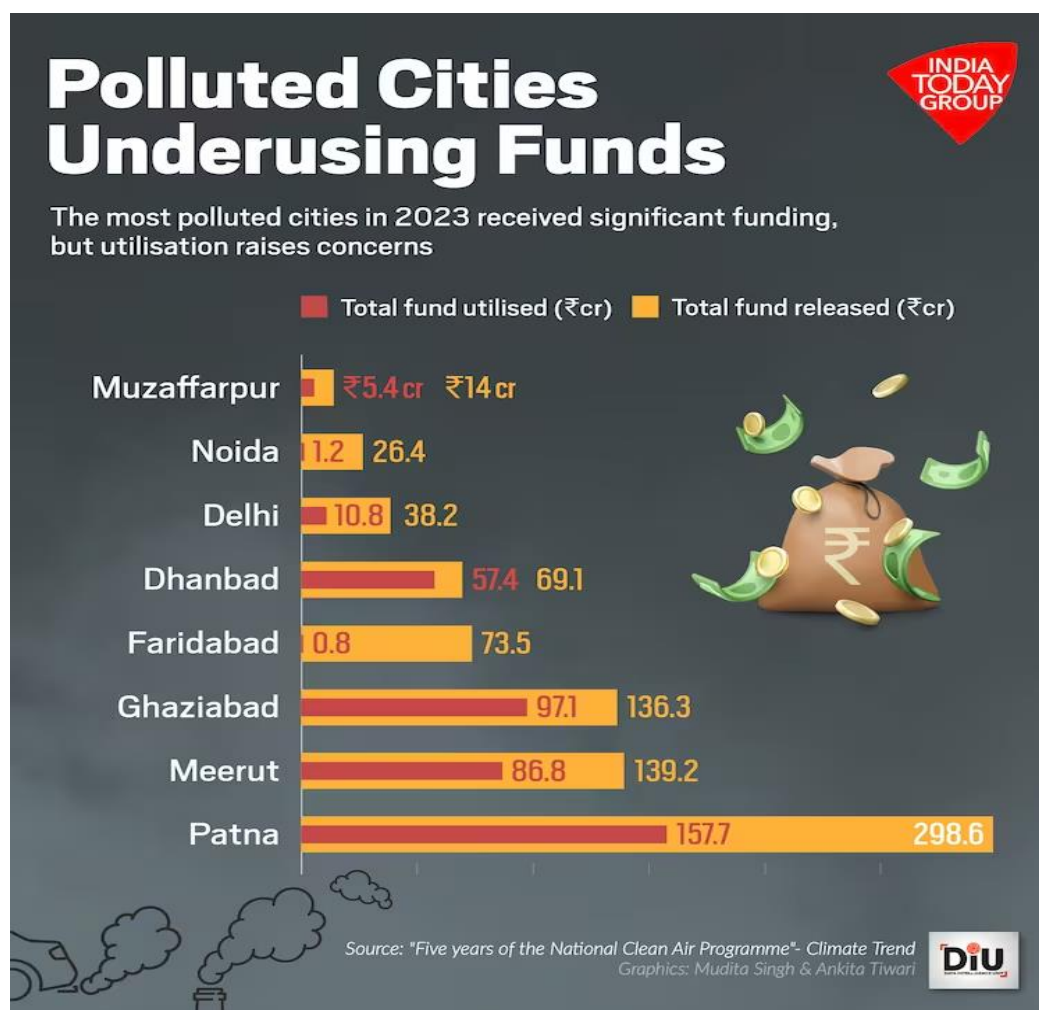
Of 131 cities, Greater Mumbai has been allocated the most funds — Rs 938.59 crore. However, 72.48 per cent of that fund has reportedly been used. According to the report, PM2.5 concentration in Mumbai went up by 38.1 per cent since 2019. Its PM10 levels went up by 36.9 per cent in the same period.



Kolkata received Rs 687.25 crore in funds and used 92.57 per cent of it. Notably, it achieved only a 16.9 per cent reduction in PM2.5 levels from 2019 to 2023 but reduced PM10 levels by 13.5 per cent.



Bengaluru, despite receiving 541.10 crore rupees, used only 1.01 per cent of it. Despite this, it saw a two per cent drop in PM2.5 levels and a more than 11 per cent drop in PM10 levels. On the other end, Jaipur, despite receiving funding of Rs 325.85 crore and utilising 80 per cent of it saw a troubling 13 per cent rise in both PM2.5 and PM10 levels. Both Bengaluru and Jaipur illustrate albeit differently, that it's not just funding that matters but how it's being allocated.



Of the most polluted cities in this list, Delhi, which remained at the top, was allocated 38.2 crore and it used 28.2 per cent of the funds to reduce PM 2.5 levels by 5.9 per cent from 2019 to 2023. Patna, ranking second in pollution severity, received Rs 298.6 crore and it also comes in the top 10 list for getting the highest amount of funds. However, while using 52.8 per cent of that, it achieved a 25.2 per cent reduction in PM2.5 levels. Meerut, with an allocation of Rs 139.2 crore, used 62.4 per cent of the funds and achieved a 42 per cent reduction in PM2.5. <https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/are-ncap-funds-being-used-properly-to-combat-pollution-2488177-2024-01-13>

17. Kochi corp lapsed 50 crore fund in 2022-23: Audit report
(timesofindia.indiatimes.com) Jan 14, 2024

Kochi: As Kochi residents navigate pothole-riddled, deteriorating roads, the city corporation stands accused of underutilizing allocated funds. A local fund audit report

for the 2022-23 fiscal reveals that over Rs 8 crore (out of a total Rs 25 crore) of the road maintenance fund went unused and lapsed. This apathy extends beyond road maintenance, as of the Rs 20.07 crore allotted for nonroad maintenance in 2022-23, the corporation utilized a mere 0.19%, with Rs 20 crore lapsing.

C P Ajith Kumar, who filed a complaint before the high court in 2008 pleading for action on road maintenance in Kochi, attributes the fund underutilization to the authorities' attitude.

“A few years ago, the high court disposed of my petition following the authorities implementing some of the demands in my petition, like ensuring performance guarantees for road works. However, the court order also clarified that the petitioner can again approach it if the authorities fail to maintain roads properly. I have subsequently filed another petition, and the case is still pending,” said Ajith Kumar .

The audit report raises further concerns about the corporation's budgeting practices. While the budgeted revenue for the fiscal was pegged at Rs 972 crore, the actual revenue fell short at just Rs 467 crore. Similarly, the actual expenditure of Rs 485 crore was significantly lower than the budgeted Rs 911 crore.

M G Aristotle, secretary of the UDF parliamentary party in the Kochi corporation, criticized the corporation's budgeting process. “The corporation authorities are preparing budgets and including projects in the annual plan in an unrealistic manner. They know they won't be able to implement many of the projects, yet they include them in the annual plan and budget just for show-off,” he stated.

One of the reasons for funds getting lapsed is the attempt of the authorities to implement projects just before the end of each fiscal. “The authorities should start work on the projects from the start of a fiscal. Even while Rs 20 crore for non-road maintenance is being lapsed, repair or renovation of many canals, drains, buildings etc remain pending,” said Beley Menon, architect and urban designer.

Kochi corporation got a central finance commission grant of Rs 28 crore in 2020-21. But the civic body could utilize only Rs 6 crore. The government renewed the allocation of Rs 22 crore, the remaining amount, during 2022-23. But it couldn't be utilized due to the lackadaisical attitude of the corporation.

Auditors blamed the corporation for not implementing a comprehensive project to treat waste in the city. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/kochi-corporation-underutilizes-50-crore-fund-audit-report/articleshow/106827253.cms>

18. Nearly 49% students in MCD schools didn't get financial benefits under welfare schemes from 2016-17 to 2022-23: Audit report (*economictimes.indiatimes.com*) Jan 14, 2024

As many as 48.74 per cent of students in MCD schools were deprived of financial benefits under various schemes from 2016-17 to 2022-2023 session, an audit report of the municipal body's Department of Education, shows. According to the audit report dated November 11, 2023, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's Education Department

failed to provide the financial benefits under different schemes of the government of NCT Delhi to nearly 3,83,203 students due to non-opening of bank accounts required for the disbursement of funds.

The audit was done by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's Office of Chief Auditor - a statutory body that is responsible for conducting monthly examinations and audits of municipal accounts and reports to the Standing Committee.

An official of the Auditor's office, on condition of anonymity, confirmed the findings of the audit report.

Calls and texts to MCD Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti and Mayor Shelly Oberoi for a response on the audit report went unanswered.

The MCD in 2016-17 decided to transfer all benefits/funds directly to the student's bank account through direct benefit transfer (DBT) in view of different bank accounts operating for the transfer of these funds and the time consumed for maintaining records by teachers.

Under the move, cash subsidy for uniforms, school bags, scholarships, and stationery among other benefits was provided only through the bank accounts of students to avoid malpractice and misappropriation of funds.

Earlier these welfare funds were given to the headmaster of the school through ADE/DDE for distribution in cash to students enrolled in MCD schools.

The audit report observed that till November 2023, the 100 per cent target of preparing the Adhaar Card mandatory for opening bank accounts was not achieved by the Education Department of the Municipal Corporation due to which many students could not get financial aid.

According to the report, of the total 7,86,205 students in MCD schools, only 4,03,003 students had bank accounts till November 2023.

Furthermore, 1,36,599 students did not get their bank accounts opened despite having an Adhaar card.

"Lack of proper mechanism and inconsistency to monitor/ reconciliation of database of account holders vis-a-vis the enrolled students, they were being deprived of financial assistance released by the Department under various schemes," the audit report observed, stating that the non-disbursement of the policy amount is a violation of Right to Education Act 2009.

It had asked the MCD to start the process of opening bank accounts at the beginning of the financial year 2023-2024 in April and set a deadline of June 30.

The audit report also asked the corporation to issue guidelines to all schools to open bank accounts at the headquarters level in advance and suggested signing MOUs with banks to ease the implementation of the process.

There was no clarity by the MCD on whether the set target has been achieved. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/nearly-49-students-in-mcd-schools-didnt-get-financial-benefits-under-welfare-schemes-from-2016-17-to-2022-23-audit-report/articleshow/106837656.cms?from=mdr>

19. Six Delhi govt hospitals under ACB radar for ‘irregularities’ (*newindianexpress.com*) 13 Jan 2024

The deputy secretary complained about the matter to the ACB and an FIR was registered on January 5.

Purchase committees of six city government-run hospitals are under the scanner of the Vigilance department for the alleged procurement of substandard medical supplies and disposable items which were used in treatment of the patients, officials said.

The members of the committees, in hospitals where irregularities have been revealed, will be questioned over their involvement in the procurement of the supplies that were unable to meet the prescribed quality standards, including implements like cotton bandages, infusion sets, latex gloves, and other disposable items, the officials added.

Officials said these committees are headed by Medical Superintendent/ Medical Director and comprise doctors, store officers, Nursing Superintendents, among others. “We will inquire with them to find out the scope of irregularities which may have been done to benefit some manufacturers. It’s a case of corruption,” a senior official said.

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has already filed an FIR in the case, invoking section 7A (offence relating to public servant being bribed for doing public duty improperly) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, Section 120 B (criminal conspiracy) of the IPC and Section 18 of the Drugs and Cosmetic Act (dealing with prohibition of manufacture and sale of certain drugs and cosmetics), against 13 manufacturing companies and recommended to black-list them.

The six hospitals where irregularities in procurement of medical supplies were found include Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital, Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, Lok Nayak Hospital, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital, Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital and Janakpuri Super Speciality Hospital.

According to the FIR, the health department formed a team in August 2023 to monitor activities in hospitals. Samples of cotton bandages and infusion sets collected from a hospital failed the quality tests at government-authorised laboratories. This prompted the department to widen its probe where it found similar irregularities in six hospitals.

The deputy secretary complained about the matter to the ACB and an FIR was registered on January 5. The FIR details stated that rolled bandage, absorbent cotton, and infusion sets were found to be ‘substandard’ at the Lok Nayak Hospital, Latex examination gloves also failed the quality test. At the DDU Hospital, four surgical equipments were found unqualified according to prescribed standards. The FIR alleged that manufacturers used plastic wires in place of Indian Standard (IS) certified cotton

threads in the manufacture of the implements supplied to these hospitals.
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/delhi/2024/Jan/13/six-delhi-govt-hospitals-under-acb-radar-for-irregularities-2650623.html>

20. Oppn leader alleges irregularities in ₹8K cr ambulance tender (*hindustantimes.com*) Jan 13, 2024

Maharashtra leader of Opposition Vijay Wadettiwar, on Saturday, alleged serious irregularities in the ambulance tender process of the state health department. He said, the tender has allegedly been floated violating norms and should be scrapped by the government.

The Joint Director of Health Services (procurement cell), Mumbai, floated the tender for ambulance service on January 4, 2024, on (PPP-DBFOT hybrid model). The duration of the bid closed at 2pm on Saturday (January 13) and the bid will open on Monday. The tender period is for ten years and it will cost around ₹8,000 crores for ten years. The ambulances will be deployed for the Maharashtra Emergency Medical Services (MEMS) Project-2024.

Wadettiwar, alleged, there are serious irregularities in the tender process floated for 10 years for 108 ambulance services of the state.

“The tender was issued with a notice period of seven days which is not as per the norms. The amount is unnecessarily augmented and even if any experts check it won’t cost more than ₹4,000 crores. No tender for providing an ambulance can be for more than three years. However, the minister of the health department floated the tender by threatening the transfer of an IAS officer,” he alleged.

He, further, said the issue would be raised with the chief minister and two deputy chief ministers of Maharashtra to cancel the tender.

“This is a move to siphon public money worth ₹4,000 crores and allot the tender to their close relatives,” he alleged.

Vijay Kumbhar, vice-president of state Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and activist, who tweeted about the issue on Friday, said, the tender issued was not as per the norms and the protocol was not followed.

“The ambulance tender was earlier issued in September and was scrapped. Later, the same tender has been floated by making few changes in it,” he said.

Kumbhar, alleged, as per the norms a pre-bid meeting should be done but it was not done by the health department.

“The short period of seven days is not possible and such a short period cannot be given for tender bid. The tender was not made public and only published on the website of the health department. The process has been done by considering some selective parties,” he said.

Despite repeated attempts, health minister, Tanaji Sawant, was unavailable for comment. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/pune-news/oppn-leader-alleges-irregularities-in-8k-cr-ambulance-tender-101705164856328.html>

21. Local bodies lax in utilising fund allocations for waste management in Kerala (*newindianexpress.com*) 15 Jan 2024

Unavailability of land, local protests against waste management projects cited as reasons

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Waste management is one of the serious issues being faced by the state. The annual budgetary allocations from the state and Centre for waste management projects are aplenty but when it comes to utilization, the performance of local bodies across the state is below par.

To address the worsening waste crisis and make Kerala a garbage-free state, the Local Self Government Department has launched the Malinya Muktham Nava Keralam campaign. Even after months of its launch, the utilization of funds for waste management projects by local bodies continues to remain poor.

The unavailability of land and stiff local protests against waste management projects are some of the reasons being highlighted by the local bodies for the poor utilization.

A large share of funds allocated in the budget and Swachh Bharat Mission remains unspent as local bodies are found to perform poorly in executing waste management projects in the state. Of the total Rs 2,993 crore allocated for waste management projects in the budget, the local bodies could spend only Rs 142 crore.

Meanwhile, of the total of Rs 129 crore sanctioned under the Swachh Bharat Mission, the local bodies could utilize only 35.26 percent. With the Malinya Muktham Nava Keralam campaign which aims at making Kerala a garbage-free state going on in full swing, the LSGD is making interventions to utilise allocated funds before March end.

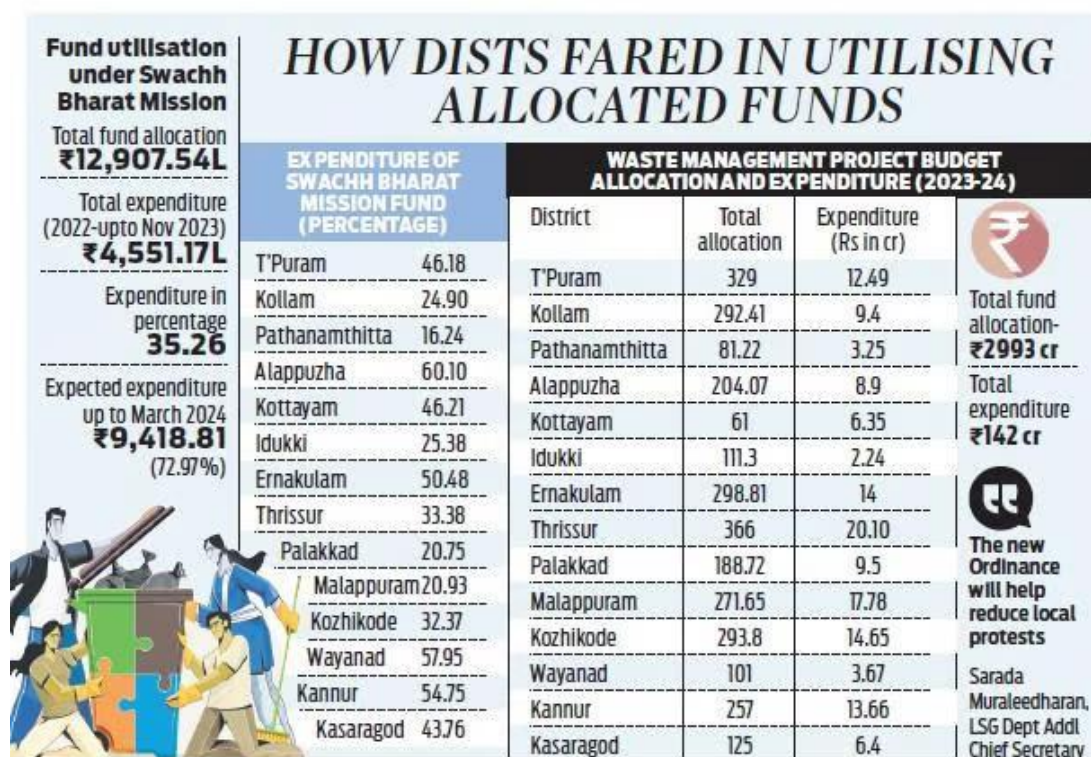
The total solid waste generation in Kerala is estimated at 3.70 million tonnes annually, of which 2.17 million tonnes (59 per cent) are contributed by Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

LSGD Department Additional Chief Secretary Sarada Muraleedharan told TNIE that resistance from local people is a major hurdle preventing the local bodies from utilising funds relating to waste management. “When it comes to new constructions, there is a lot of resistance.

Without identifying suitable land, the local bodies cannot go ahead with waste management projects. We have asked local bodies to prioritise feasible projects and are following up with technical sanctions. We have constituted district-level committees monitored by the LSGD chief engineer to expedite the clearances. Also, we are offering all kinds of technical support to help the local bodies finalise the projects,” said Sarada Muraleedharan.

She said that fund crunch is also one of the reasons that led to poor utilisation. “The projects are getting readied and it takes time to finalise the DPRs of these projects and soon all of these projects will take off and by March-end many of these projects will be automatically closed,” she added.

She also added that the new Ordinance will help reduce local protests. “The new ordinance envisages a lot of privileges for the people residing close to waste projects. The entire area will develop,” she added.



<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2024/Jan/13/local-bodies-lax-in-utilising-fund-allocations-for-waste-management-in-kerala-2650496.html>