

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. Govt. has not recovered huge loans since 1977: CAG report (*thehindu.com*) February 13, 2024

The State government has not recovered outstanding loans of ₹10,389.78 crore given to its eight departments and undertakings, which included borrowings since 1977, said the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) report.

The CAG report on Finance Accounts for the 2022-23 fiscal was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday.

“In respect of old loans amounting to ₹10,389.78 crore involving eight departments (21 loanee entities), recoveries of principal have not been effected during the past several years, which includes loans pending since the year 1977,” the CAG said.

The 21 loanee entities, most of them State-owned undertakings, have arrears of ₹15,856 crore, which includes principal of ₹9,380 crore.

Oldest pending loan

The oldest arrears are from 1977 pertaining to loans given to the BWSSB and Karnataka State Seeds Corporation Ltd., the Electro Mobile India Ltd., and Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation.

Further, the terms and conditions of repayment of loans have not been settled for the 28 statutory bodies or other entities loans amounting to ₹1,462.01 crore as on March 31, 2023.

Borrowing profile

It said in recent years, the borrowing profile of the State has shown an increasing trend towards more reliance on open market borrowings. The outstanding market borrowings of the year (2022-23) worked out to 62.92% of the gross public debt and other liabilities. The government has raised market loans of ₹36,000 crore. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/govt-has-not-recovered-huge-loans-since-1977-cag-report/article67841759.ece>

2. Karnataka govt not recovered old loans amounting to over ₹10,000 cr: CAG (*hindustantimes.com*) Feb 14, 2024

The Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) has found that the Karnataka government has not recovered old loans amounting to over ₹10,000 crore given to various entities, including a number of its own departments or undertakings.

It said there are some loans pending since 1977. The CAG report on Finance Accounts 2022-23 was tabled in the Assembly on Tuesday.

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According to the CAG report, the 21 loanee entities have arrears of ₹15,856 crore, which includes principal of ₹9,380 crore.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/bengaluru-news/karnataka-cm-siddaramaiah-promotes-affixing-portrait-of-basavanna-in-all-govt-offices-101707890897125.html>

3. Pending since 1977, Karnataka yet to recover old loans worth over ₹10,000 crore: CAG (*thesouthfirst.com*) Feb 14, 2024

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According to the CAG report, the 21 loanee entities have arrears of ₹15,856 crore, which includes principal of ₹9,380 crore.

The oldest arrears are from 1977, given to Bangalore Water Supply and Sewage Board (BWSSB) and Karnataka State Seeds Corporation Ltd.

<https://thesouthfirst.com/karnataka/pending-since-1977-karnataka-yet-to-recover-old-loans-worth-over-%E2%82%B910000-crore-cag/>

4. K'taka govt sitting on loan arrears worth over Rs 10,000 crore from 1977, says CAG (*deccanherald.com*) 13 February 2024

According to the CAG report, the 21 loanee entities, most of them state-owned undertakings, have arrears of Rs 15,856 crore, which includes principal of Rs 9,380 crore.

Bengaluru: Karnataka has not recovered loans amounting to over Rs 10,000 crore given to its own departments and undertakings, which includes borrowings that go as far back as 1977, the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) has found.

The CAG report on Finance Accounts for the 2022-23 fiscal was tabled in the Assembly on Tuesday.

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According to the CAG report, the 21 loanee entities, most of them state-owned undertakings, have arrears of Rs 15,856 crore, which includes principal of Rs 9,380 crore.

The oldest arrears are from 1977 pertaining to loans given to the BWSSB and Karnataka State Seeds Corporation Ltd. The Electro Mobile India Ltd (Rs 3.63 crore) and Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (Rs 5.24 crore) have arrears from 1981.

Unspent balances

The CAG noted that there were 85 personal deposit (PD) accounts with an unspent balance of Rs 29,509.54 crore that were not closed as required under Article 286A of the Karnataka Financial Code.

In 2022-23, the CAG said Rs 32,201.44 crore was transferred to PD accounts. This included Rs 23,122.88 crore opened in June 2022 in the name of the managing director, Karnataka Mining Environment Restoration Corporation. While Rs 6,797.51 crore was withdrawn, there was an unspent balance of Rs 29,509.54 crore.

Similarly, the CAG found an unspent balance of Rs 12,925.31 crore in the bank accounts of single nodal agencies (SNA) pertaining to various centrally-sponsored schemes.

Guarantee Redemption Fund

In 2022-23, the state government came up with a 'Guarantee Redemption Fund Scheme' as per RBI guidelines. The government is required to make an initial contribution of a minimum 1 per cent of the outstanding guarantees provided for loans and 0.50 per cent every year thereafter. "During 2022- 23, the state government had for the very first time transferred Rs 314 crore...and the entire amount has been invested in Government of India securities through RBI," the CAG said. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/karnataka/ktaka-govt-sitting-on-loan-arrears-worth-over-rs-10000-crore-from-1977-says-cag-2892772>

5. Karnataka govt not recovered old loans amounting to over Rs 10,000 cr: CAG (english.varthabharati.in) 14 Feb 2024

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The oldest arrears are from 1977, given to Bangalore Water Supply and Sewage Board (BWSSB) and Karnataka State Seeds Corporation Ltd.

<https://english.varthabharati.in/karnataka/karnataka-govt-not-recovered-old-loans-amounting-to-over-rs-10000-cr-cag>

6. 28 state-run entities owe govt Rs 10k crore (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Feb 13, 2024

BENGALURU: Even while concerns swirl over the govt's financial health, a report reveals that 28 state-run boards, corporations and other firms owe the govt a staggering Rs 10,390 crore and some of these loans have been outstanding for the past 45 years.

Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) stands at the top of the list of debtors with dues of Rs 8,094 crore outstanding.

The loan goes way back to 1977. Karnataka Urban Water Supply and Drainage Board (KUWSDB), with an outstanding amount of Rs 1,576 crore since 1986, is a distant second.

These loans were extended between 1977 and 2007 and the bulk remain unpaid, a report by Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) states.

Besides KUWSDB and BWSSB, Karnataka Housing Board, Bangalore Development Authority, Hutti Gold Mines, Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Ltd, and Karnataka Mysore Tobacco Company Ltd all owe the govt money.

The total principal due stands at Rs 9,380 crore, although many entities have been making regular interest payments. So far, these entities have paid back Rs 5,466 crore, mostly in interest.

For example, the principal amount of BWSSB's loan, initiated in 1977, ballooned to Rs 7,085 crore and Rs 5,059 crore interest. Despite repaying Rs 4,049 crore in interest, the board still owes the govt a hefty Rs 8,094 crore as of March 31, 2023.

There is also the preposterous case of Karnataka State Seeds Corporation Ltd which borrowed Rs 1.4 crore in 1977. Although it repaid a staggering Rs 7.3 crore in interest, the principal remains unpaid.

The CAG report also flags a separate issue concerning the single nodal agency (SNA) for central govt schemes in Karnataka. Despite transferring central and state shares amounting to Rs 12,069 crore and Rs 11,463 crore, respectively, a significant sum of Rs 13,925 crore remained unspent in SNA bank accounts as of March 31, 2023.

The report highlights discrepancies in expenditure figures, emphasising the need for transparent financial management practices within govt agencies.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/28-state-run-entities-owe-govt-rs-10k-crore/articleshow/107669513.cms>

7. Karnataka: कर्नाटक सरकार ने 10,000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक के पुराने कर्ज नहीं वसूले, कैग की रिपोर्ट में खुलासा (amarujala.com) 14 Feb 2024

कर्नाटक सरकार एक तरफ राज्य को धन आवंटन में कथित लापरवाही को लेकर केंद्र के खिलाफ प्रदर्शन कर रही है। वहीं, दूसरी तरफ पुराने कर्ज वसूल नहीं रही है। नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) ने बताया कि राज्य सरकार ने विभिन्न संस्थाओं को दिए गए 10,000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक के पुराने कर्जों की वसूली नहीं की है।

सन् 1977 से ही लंबित पड़े कर्ज कैग ने मंगलवार को कर्नाटक विधानसभा में वित्त लेखा 2022-23 पर आई एक रिपोर्ट पेश की। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया, पुराने कर्जों में से कुछ सन् 1977 से ही लंबित पड़े हुए हैं। इनमें से कई कर्ज राज्य सरकार के ही विभागों एवं उपक्रमों से संबंधित हैं।

कई वर्षों से नहीं हुई वसूली कैग ने कहा, 'राज्य सरकार के आठ विभागों से जुड़े 10,389.78 करोड़ रुपये के पुराने ऋणों के संबंध में मूलधन की भी वसूली पिछले कई वर्षों में नहीं हुई है। इनमें वर्ष 1977 से लंबित ऋण भी शामिल हैं।'

21 कर्जदार संस्थाओं पर बकाया इस रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक, 21 कर्जदार संस्थाओं पर 15,856 करोड़ रुपये का बकाया है, जिसमें 9,380 करोड़ रुपये का मूलधन भी शामिल है। सबसे पुराना बकाया कर्ज सन् 1977 का है, जो बंगलूरु जल आपूर्ति एवं सीवेज बोर्ड और कर्नाटक राज्य बीज निगम लिमिटेड को दिया गया था। <https://www.amarujala.com/india-news/cag-claim-karnataka-govt-not-recovered-old-loans-amounting-to-over-rs-10-000-cr-2024-02-14>

8. कर्नाटक सरकार ने 10,000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक के पुराने कर्ज नहीं वसूले: कैग (hindi.theprint.in) 13 February, 2024

नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) ने कहा है कि कर्नाटक सरकार ने विभिन्न संस्थाओं को दिए गए 10,000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक के पुराने कर्जों की वसूली नहीं की है।

वित्त लेखा 2022-23 पर आई कैग की रिपोर्ट कहती है कि पुराने कर्जों में से कुछ 1977 से ही लंबित पड़े हुए हैं। इनमें से कई कर्ज राज्य सरकार के ही विभागों एवं उपक्रमों से संबंधित हैं।

कैग की यह रिपोर्ट मंगलवार को कर्नाटक विधानसभा में पेश की गई।

कैग ने कहा, 'राज्य सरकार के आठ विभागों से जुड़े 10,389.78 करोड़ रुपये के पुराने ऋणों के संबंध में मूलधन की भी वसूली पिछले कई वर्षों में नहीं हुई है। इनमें वर्ष 1977 से लंबित ऋण भी शामिल हैं।'

इस रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक, 21 कर्जदार संस्थाओं पर 15,856 करोड़ रुपये का बकाया है, जिसमें 9,380 करोड़ रुपये का मूलधन भी शामिल है।

सबसे पुराना बकाया कर्ज 1977 का है जो बेंगलुरु जल आपूर्ति एवं सीवेज बोर्ड और कर्नाटक राज्य बीज निगम लिमिटेड को दिया गया था।

<https://hindi.theprint.in/india/economy/karnataka-government-did-not-recover-old-loans-worth-more-than-rs-10000-crore-cag/662549/>

9. कर्ज वसूलना भूली राज्य सरकार, बांटे थे 10,000 करोड़, 21 कर्जदारों पर अब 15,856 करोड़ बकाया, खुली पुरानी फाइलें (hindi.news18.com)

February 14, 2024

बेंगलुरु. नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (CAG) ने कहा है कि कर्नाटक सरकार ने विभिन्न संस्थाओं को दिए गए 10,000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक के पुराने कर्जों की वसूली नहीं की है. वित्त लेखा 2022-23 पर आई कैग की रिपोर्ट कहती है कि पुराने कर्जों में से कुछ 1977 से ही लंबित पड़े हुए हैं. इनमें से कई कर्ज राज्य सरकार के ही विभागों एवं उपक्रमों से संबंधित हैं. कैग की यह रिपोर्ट मंगलवार को कर्नाटक विधानसभा में पेश की गई.

कैग ने कहा, 'राज्य सरकार के 8 विभागों से जुड़े 10,389.78 करोड़ रुपये के पुराने ऋणों के संबंध में मूलधन की भी वसूली पिछले कई वर्षों में नहीं हुई है. इनमें वर्ष 1977 से लंबित ऋण भी शामिल हैं.'

21 संस्थाओं को दिया था उधार

इस रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक, 21 कर्जदार संस्थाओं पर 15,856 करोड़ रुपये का बकाया है, जिसमें 9,380 करोड़ रुपये का मूलधन भी शामिल है. सबसे पुराना बकाया कर्ज 1977 का है जो बेंगलुरु जल आपूर्ति एवं सीवेज बोर्ड और कर्नाटक राज्य बीज निगम लिमिटेड को दिया गया था.

<https://hindi.news18.com/news/business/karnataka-government-not-recover-old-loans-worth-more-than-rs-10000-crore-cag-report-8068190.html>

10. कर्नाटक सरकार ने पुराने कर्ज की वसूली नहीं की- CAG: रिपोर्ट में 10 हजार करोड़ रुपए की बात, साल 1977 का केस भी पेंडिंग (bhaskar.com)

14 Feb 2024

कर्नाटक सरकार ने विभिन्न संस्थाओं को दिए गए 10 हजार करोड़ रुपए से अधिक के पुराने कर्ज की वसूली नहीं की है। मंगलवार (13 फरवरी) को CAG की 2022-23 फाइनेंस रिपोर्ट में विधानसभा में पेश की गई, जिसमें इसका खुलासा हुआ।

रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि कर्ज के कुछ मामले साल 1977 से पेंडिंग हैं। 21 संस्थाओं पर 15856 करोड़ रुपए का बकाया है, जिसमें 9380 करोड़ रुपए का मूलधन भी शामिल है।

सबसे पुराना बकाया 1977 का है, जो बैंगलोर जल आपूर्ति और सीवेज बोर्ड (BWSSB) और कर्नाटक राज्य बीज निगम लिमिटेड को दिया गया है।

<https://www.bhaskar.com/national/news/karnataka-government-10-thousand-crore-old-loans-cag-132584719.html>

11. कैग की रिपोर्ट में खुलासा: कर्नाटक सरकार ने 10,000 करोड़ के पुराने कर्ज नहीं वसूले (agniban.com) Feb 14, 2024

कर्नाटक सरकार एक तरफ राज्य को धन आवंटन में कथित लापरवाही को लेकर केंद्र के खिलाफ प्रदर्शन कर रही है। वहीं, दूसरी तरफ पुराने कर्ज वसूल नहीं रही है। नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक

(CAG) ने बताया कि राज्य सरकार ने विभिन्न संस्थाओं को दिए गए 10,000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक के पुराने कर्जों की वसूली नहीं की है।

सन् 1977 से ही लंबित पड़े कर्ज

कैग ने मंगलवार को कर्नाटक विधानसभा में वित्त लेखा 2022-23 पर आई एक रिपोर्ट पेश की। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया, पुराने कर्जों में से कुछ सन् 1977 से ही लंबित पड़े हुए हैं। इनमें से कई कर्ज राज्य सरकार के ही विभागों एवं उपक्रमों से संबंधित हैं।

कई वर्षों से नहीं हुई वसूली

कैग ने कहा, 'राज्य सरकार के आठ विभागों से जुड़े 10,389.78 करोड़ रुपये के पुराने ऋणों के संबंध में मूलधन की भी वसूली पिछले कई वर्षों में नहीं हुई है। इनमें वर्ष 1977 से लंबित ऋण भी शामिल हैं।'

21 कर्जदार संस्थाओं पर बकाया

इस रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक, 21 कर्जदार संस्थाओं पर 15,856 करोड़ रुपये का बकाया है, जिसमें 9,380 करोड़ रुपये का मूलधन भी शामिल है। सबसे पुराना बकाया कर्ज सन् 1977 का है, जो बंगलूरू जल आपूर्ति एवं सीवेज बोर्ड और कर्नाटक राज्य बीज निगम लिमिटेड को दिया गया था।

<https://www.agniban.com/cag-report-reveals-karnataka-government-did-not-recover-old-loans-worth-rs-10000-crore/>

12. नोएडा प्राधिकरण के कामकाज की सीएजी जांच फिर शुरू (jantaserishta.com) 14 Feb 2024

नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (सीएजी) ने नोएडा प्राधिकरण से जुड़े कामकाज की जांच एक बार फिर शुरू कर दी है। इस बार 2023 से 2024 तक की फाइलों को खंगालना शुरू किया है। सीएजी की टीम के आने से प्राधिकरण दफ्तर में एक बार फिर हलचल तेज हो गई।

नोएडा प्राधिकरण के अधिकारियों ने बताया कि जांच करने के लिए सीएजी की तीन सदस्यीय टीम आई है। टीम को प्राधिकरण में एक कमरा अलॉट किया गया है। इस जांच को कंप्लायंस ऑडिट का नाम दिया गया है। इसमें प्राधिकरण की तरफ से विभिन्न काम के लिए जारी किए गए टेंडर और परियोजना की लागत समेत अन्य बिंदुओं पर जांच होगी। अब टीम एक-एक कर विभागों की फाइलों को मंगाकर जांच करेगी।

अधिकारियों ने अनुमान जताया कि एक साल के कामकाज की जांच करने में कम से कम तीन से चार महीने का समय लगेगा। इसके बाद वह आपत्तियों का ब्योरा तैयार कर प्राधिकरण अधिकारियों को सौंपेगी। प्राधिकरण की तरफ से आपत्तियों का जवाब देने के बाद प्रक्रिया आगे बढ़ेगी। गौरतलब है कि यूपी में विधानसभा चुनाव के प्रचार के दौरान प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने गाजियाबाद में आयोजित एक जनसभा में कहा था कि अगर यूपी में भाजपा सरकार आती है तो प्राधिकरण में बीते सालों में हुई गड़बड़ियों की जांच सीएजी से कराई जाएगी।

राज्य में सत्ता में भाजपा सरकार आ गई। उसी साल सीएजी ने वर्ष 2017 में पहली बार प्राधिकरण में जांच के लिए कदम रखा था। प्रदेश सरकार के निर्देश पर पहले चरण में वर्ष 2004-5 से लेकर वर्ष 2017-18 तक के कामकाज की जांच की गई। इसको परफार्मेंस ऑडिट का नाम दिया गया था। इसमें प्राधिकरण की तरफ से तैयार किए नियमों के अंतर्गत जांच की गई थी। इस दौरान 200 से अधिक आपत्तियां लगाते हुए करीब 400 पन्नों की रिपोर्ट तैयार की थी। सीएजी को 30 हजार करोड़

रुपये की गड़बड़ी मिली थी. इसकी लोक लेखा समिति सुनवाई कर रही है.
<https://jantaserishta.com/delhi-ncr/cag-investigation-into-functioning-of-noida-authority-resumed-1269624>

13. Chhattisgarh Government's Capital Expenditure Sees 12.35 Pc Boost in Fiscal Year 2022-23 (*latestly.com, aninews.in*) Feb 13, 2024

According to a press release, spearheaded by the Principal Accountant General (A&E) under the aegis of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, these accounts encapsulate the fiscal trajectory and budgetary disbursements of the state government.

Chhattisgarh: The Annual Accounts of the Government of Chhattisgarh for the fiscal year 2022-23 have been prepared in accordance with the constitutional mandates and legal frameworks, showcasing a comprehensive overview of the state's financial performance and expenditure allocation with 12.35 per cent boost in capital expenditure.

According to a press release, spearheaded by the Principal Accountant General (A&E) under the aegis of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, these accounts encapsulate the fiscal trajectory and budgetary disbursements of the state government.

In the fiscal year under review, the gross budget provision for expenditure stood at Rs 1,24,049.19 crore, with actual gross expenditure totaling Rs 1,10,413.01 crore.

There was a net saving of Rs 13,636.18 crore (12.35 per cent) in expenditure, alongside short recoveries of Rs 470.39 crore.

The Finance Accounts and Appropriation Accounts, integral components of the annual financial audit, shed light on the state's fiscal health and expenditure management.

The budget provisions and actual expenditure delineate the allocation and utilization of funds across various heads. Tax revenue witnessed a surge, reaching Rs 65,480.57 crore, attributing to heightened allocations and increased state's own tax revenue.

Additionally, grants-in-aid from the Central Government surged to Rs 13,148.33 crore, reflecting enhanced financial support and inter-governmental cooperation.

The capital expenditure for the fiscal year amounted to Rs 13,320.30 crore, indicating substantial investments in infrastructure and developmental projects.

Moreover, a revenue surplus of Rs 8,592.11 crore, constituting 1.88 per cent of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), underscored prudent fiscal management and revenue generation initiatives.

Despite economic challenges, the state successfully contained the fiscal deficit within the stipulated targets, standing at Rs 4,691.22 crore (1.03 per cent of GSDP).

However, public debt witnessed a marginal increase of 1.25 per cent, reaching Rs 83,950.79 crore, necessitating strategic debt management measures for sustained financial stability.

The investment landscape of the state government, characterized by substantial investments in power companies (Rs 6,641.90 crore) and strategic sectors, underscores its commitment to fostering economic growth and industrial development, read the press release.

Additionally, direct transfers of funds to implementing agencies (Rs 14,636.44 crore) exemplify efficient fund allocation and execution mechanisms.

While the financial accounts reflect commendable achievements and prudent fiscal management, challenges such as excess disbursements and unutilized supplementary grants warrant strategic rectification measures and enhanced oversight mechanisms.

Regularization of excess disbursements and optimal utilization of grants are imperative to ensure fiscal discipline and resource optimization.

The meticulous preparation and presentation of the finance accounts and appropriation accounts underscore the government's commitment to transparency, accountability, and fiscal prudence.

Moving forward, leveraging the insights garnered from the financial audit, the state government is poised to embark on a trajectory of sustainable economic growth, inclusive development, and fiscal resilience. <https://www.latestly.com/agency-news/business-news-chhattisgarh-governments-capital-expenditure-sees-12-35-pc-boost-in-fiscal-year-2022-23-5757812.html>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

14. 400 Smart Cities Mission Projects Worth Rs 22,814 Crore Miss Deadline: Parliamentary Committee (*thewire.in*) 14 Feb 2024

Madurai in Tamil Nadu only city amongst 100 to have met the deadline. Severe problems, including its definition continue to haunt the Modi campaign promise of "100 Smart Cities" with projects set to even miss the new deadline of June 2024, as per officials.

In its report on the Smart Cities Mission presented in the Lok Sabha last week, the committee said the ministry had informed it that 400 projects worth Rs 22,814 crore had already missed their deadline of December 2023.

The Indian Express reports that the committee, chaired by Janata Dal (United) MP Rajiv Ranjan Singh, was "told by Housing and Urban Affairs Secretary Manoj Joshi that the ministry did not want to extend the mission further." Among reasons cited by the ministry for the delays were difficulties in resettlement of local population as well as some legal issues such as land procurement. Frequent transfers of smart cities' CEOs were also cited and the "delay in projects that require convergence with other government ministries or agencies".

The Smart City Mission report put out by the Union government in 2015, despite "100 Smart Cities" being a prominent part of the campaign promise, ducks the very definition of a smart city.

It writes, "...[T]here is no universally accepted definition of a Smart City. It means different things to different people. The conceptualisation of Smart City, therefore, varies from city to city and country to country, depending on the level of development, willingness to change and reform, resources and aspirations of the city residents. A Smart City would have a different connotation in India than, say, Europe. Even in India, there is no one way of defining a Smart City."

Later it says, "the objective is to promote cities that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of 'Smart' Solutions."

The parliamentary committee reports that "Progress of work is from 80% to 100% in 57 cities amongst which Madurai is the only Smart City which has completed 100% of smart city projects by December 2023. However, progress of work is 50% or below 50% in 14 cities."

The outlay in the Smart Cities' proposal has fallen from Rs 7,634 crore to Rs 7,535 crore in the revised budget last year, of 2023-24, The 2024-25 vote on account outlay has seen a major drop, to just Rs 2,236 crore.

The parliamentary panel has recommended the "appointment of dedicated CEOs with a minimum fixed tenure along with a clear and strong governance structure for the Special Purpose Vehicles or SPVs that also includes representation from the city administration, local self-government, experts in urban development and concerned stakeholders".

Apart from problems with relevant appointments of those expected to steer the project, The Financial Express writes, "poor judgement in project selection" was also a reason weak coordination between the ministry of housing and urban affairs (MOHUA) and state governments, and the lack of private sector participation, among others.

The Hindustan Times in January had reported "an official aware of the matter" saying that "as many as 400 projects being undertaken by about ten cities under the Centre's flagship Smart Cities Mission are unlikely to meet the extended deadline of June 2024."

"The Smart City Mission is a transformative idea and needs smart governments to execute it. The ministry has allowed misconceptions to grow and it should have paid more attention to leadership development and stakeholder participation," Jagan Shah, CEO, The Infravision Foundation, is quoted by the Financial Express as saying.

The newspaper points out that between 2015 and 2018, 100 smart cities were selected and then given a timeline of five years to complete the projects between 2019 and 2023.

There are about 7,991 projects commissioned under the Smart City Mission or SCM.

The delay has happened despite Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs allowing cities to drop or replace the challenging projects with new ones that can be executed in time.

After 2019, “several projects were shelved because of the financial, regulatory and technological hurdles in addition to the changes in citizens’ priorities during the course of the project execution.”

Out of 100 cities, nearly 50% smart cities have not implemented any projects under the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model. The total funding from PPP stands Rs 210,794 crore, for 207 projects, which adds up to just over one-fourth of the original plan, according to The Financial Express.

<https://thewire.in/urban/smart-cities-mission-22814-crore-miss-deadline>

15. Just 3% of MNREGA job seekers received unemployment benefits, shows central panel report (*downtoearth.org.in*) 13 Feb 2024

Department of Rural Development replies will look into the issue, state government’s responsibility to pay interest accrued on unpaid allowances

If a labourer does not find work within 15 days of looking for work, he is entitled to unemployment benefits under the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). However, statistics show that in the last five years, 7,124 workers were found to be eligible for unemployment benefits, but only 258 received them. That means that only about 3 per cent of the workers received unemployment benefits in the last five years.

The figures were revealed in a report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj. On February 8, 2024, the Ministry of Rural Development (Department of Rural Development) tabled its 37th report on “Rural Employment through MGNREGA — An Insight on Wage Rates and Other Matters Related Thereto” in the House.

According to Section 7(1) of MGNREGA, 2005, “If a person applying for employment under the scheme is not employed within fifteen days, he shall be entitled to a daily unemployment allowance,” the report stated. This allowance shall be one-fourth of the wage rate for the first 30 days of the financial year and half of the wage rate for the remainder.

According to paragraph 6 of the Act’s Section 7, the state government can determine the procedure for payment of unemployment allowance. State governments may also make necessary budgetary provisions for the payment of unemployment allowances.

The Standing Committee’s report provides state / Union territory-specific information on beneficiaries eligible for unemployment allowance and beneficiaries who received unemployment allowance under MGNREGA for the last five fiscal years — 2018-19 to the current fiscal year 2023-24 (up to November 21, 2023).

Karnataka had the highest number of workers eligible for unemployment benefits in the last five years, the figures showed. While 2,467 workers were found to be eligible for unemployment benefits, not a single one received them, the report showed.

Rajasthan ranked second, with 1,831 workers eligible for unemployment benefits over a five-year period. However, just nine received it.

No state promptly distributed unemployment benefits. In terms of large states, 773 workers in Bihar were found to be eligible for unemployment benefits, but none received them. Similarly, none of the 389 eligible in West Bengal or 139 in Jharkhand received an allowance. In Uttar Pradesh, 173 out of 598 workers were granted unemployment benefits.

As state governments are responsible for providing unemployment allowance based on their economic capacity, they must make the necessary budgetary provisions for it, the panel report said.

The report stated that it was necessary to provide unemployment allowance to those who are not given employment. The committee, therefore, recommended that the Central Rural Development Department ensure all possible measures in coordination with the states and UTs concerned. This ensures that state governments fulfil their statutory obligations to provide unemployment benefits to MGNREGA beneficiaries.

On the question of non-payment of unemployment allowance, the secretary of the Department of Rural Development (DoRD) told the Parliamentary committee the department will look into the issue of non-payment of unemployment allowance and compensation for delayed wages.

The MGNREGA also states that if wages are not paid within 15 days of the closure of the muster roll, the worker is entitled to compensation for delay at a rate of 0.05 per cent of the unpaid wages. If there is another delay after the sixteenth day of the closure of muster roll, this compensation must be paid daily. The panel asked the DoRD for information about this as well.

The committee was informed that from the financial year 2018-19 until November 21, 2024, a total of Rs 13,24,67,394 was sanctioned for compensation for late payment in all states, but only Rs 9,96,39,298 was paid. That means Rs 3,28,28,096 is still due. The DoRD secretary's response also clarified the Centre's stand — it is the responsibility of the state government to pay the interest, the panel was told.

It is worth noting that MGNREGA is a demand-based wage employment scheme that provides at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to each family per fiscal year in order to improve the livelihood security of families in rural areas of the country. It provides livelihood security, which means that rural households have alternative sources of income when better employment opportunities are unavailable.

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/governance/just-3-of-mnrega-job-seekers-received-unemployment-benefits-shows-central-panel-report-94429>

16. Defence ministry signs Rs 2,269-crore deal with Bharat Electronics Limited to procure 11 Shakti warfare systems (*zeebiz.com*) 13 Feb 2024

The defence ministry on Tuesday signed a Rs 2,269-crore contract with state-owned Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) to purchase 11 Shakti warfare systems and associated equipment.

The electronic warfare system will be installed onboard the Indian Navy's frontline warships, officials said.

They said that the Shakti systems are capable of accurately intercepting electronic emissions and implementing countermeasures in a dense electromagnetic environment.

The ministry said in a statement: "The Ministry of Defence has signed a contract with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Hyderabad on February 13 for procurement of 11 Shakti Electronic Warfare Systems along with associated equipment/accessories for Indian Navy under Buy (Indian-IDD) category at a total cost of Rs 2,269.54."

"The project will generate employment of two-and-a-half lakh man-days over a period of four years with participation of more than 155 industry partners including MSMEs, thus furthering the vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'," the ministry added.

The Shakti EW system is indigenously designed, developed and manufactured, and will be installed on-board capital warships of Indian Navy.

The statement informed that the project will generate employment of two and half lakh man-days over a period of four years with participation of more than 155 industry partners including MSMEs, thus furthering the vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

<https://www.zeebiz.com/india/news-defence-ministry-signs-rs-2269-crore-deal-with-bharat-electronics-limited-to-procure-11-shakti-warfare-systems-276368>

17. Indian Army to get 155mm/52 Calibre Towed Gun Systems (*financialexpress.com*) February 13, 2024

According to AoN the desired range of the gun is more than 40 km in all terrains and the minimum range in High Angle (in mountainous terrain and High-Altitude Areas) as 5 kms.

As part of its Field Artillery Rationalisation Plan, the Indian Army is set to procure 400 of 155mm/52 calibre Towed Gun Systems (TGS). The guns will be procured under Buy (Indian-IDD) from Indian vendors.

Defence Acquisition Council, under the chairmanship of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday, accorded approval for Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) in the previous meeting for these guns.

According to AoN the desired range of the gun is more than 40 km in all terrains and the minimum range in High Angle (in mountainous terrain and High-Altitude Areas) as 5 kms. The system should have a maximum weight of 15 tonnes. The maximum firing range of the system should be more than 40 km, and the gun must fire all in-service 155 mm ammunition.

The Ministry of Defence is actively seeking information from Indian vendors interested in receiving the Request for Proposal (RfP) by March 8, 2024. This step follows the Indian Army's issuance of a request for information (RFI) in December 2022 regarding the acquisition of 155 mm/52 calibre Towed Gun Systems (TGS) to bolster defences along India's northern and western borders.

The RFI specifies essential requirements for the TGS, including integration with a Global Positioning System (GPS), an inertial navigation-based sight system for precise location determination, and a fire-control system (FCS) capable of providing optical sight for day and night operations.

Initiated in the 1990s, the Indian Army's ongoing Field Artillery Rationalisation Plan aims to enhance the service's firepower. Under this plan, the Army intends to procure 1,580 155 mm/52 calibre TGS, 814 mounted gun systems, 100 self-propelled howitzers (SPHs), and 145 lightweight howitzers.

Recent efforts by the Indian Army to bolster its firepower include plans to procure 400 howitzers from Indian manufacturers for Rs 6500 Crore. This move underscores the commitment to supporting local industry and modernizing weaponry.

Who could be possible vendors?

Dhanush is already being used by the Indian Army and it weighs below the 15-ton limit mentioned in the AoN; Kalyani Bharat-52 — this gun according to information in the public domain weighs around 13 tons, making it a strong contender; Kalyani Ultra-Light Howitzer (ULH) is lighter in weight.

The focus is on acquiring 155 mm X 52 calibre Towed Gun Systems, designed to be lighter and more adaptable for operations in high-altitude regions such as mountainous terrain.

Furthermore, the Army is exploring the acquisition of 307 Advanced Towed Artillery Gun Systems (ATAGS) to strengthen border defences. These ATAGS, having successfully completed testing phases, are nearing potential procurement.

According to sources within the defence establishment, the Towed Gun Systems (TGS) currently under consideration are expected to offer advancements surpassing those developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), signalling a significant leap forward in artillery capabilities.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-indian-army-to-get-155mm52-calibre-towed-gun-systems-3393028/>

18. Kaleshwaram project will cost a bomb to wrap up: Top babus (*thehansindia.com*) 14 Feb 2024

Medigadda: Officials of the irrigation department said on Tuesday that the Kaleshwaram project will cost around Rs 2.5 lakh crore until it gets completed. An amount of Rs 25,000 crore would be required annually for maintenance works.

They maintain the project was also not constructed as per standards.

Engineer-in-Chief Sudhakar Reddy and Vigilance DG Rajiv Ratan made a presentation on the project. They gave an insight into the project, giving details such as how it was first aimed to divert 160 tmcft from Pranahita to Sripada Yellampally.

The officials informed that the total expenditure on the project so far was Rs 94,000 crore. The total area irrigated was 98,570 acres.

Intervening, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said the BRS chief created confusion by saying that one crore acres were irrigated. The power bills will be around Rs 10,500 crore annually, he said. "Till today, KCR spoke lies on the project, which was constructed and damaged. Annaram and Sundilla were also having seepage issues," the CM said.

Sudhakar Reddy said that on October 21, 2023, a pillar got sunk in the eighth block of the 85-pillared Medigadda project. He said, as per the Dam Safety Authority, the piers had sunk due to constrained planning, design, quality control operation, maintenance, and also because of construction deficiencies.

The official said experts found defects in the construction on February 29, 2020; the completion certificate was given on March 15, 2021. He also said the premature inauguration of the project was done.

According to the official, so far the project envisaged lifting 180 tmcft every year, but during the last five years, the total water lifted was only 160 tmcft.

During the last five years, the highest water lifted was 61 tmcft during the initial years.

The official said the project design and drawings need to be examined, along with the results of geotechnical and geological investigations. All piers and rafts need to be surveyed. <https://www.thehansindia.com/tehrangana/kaleshwaram-project-will-cost-a-bomb-to-wrap-up-top-babus-858513>

19. Jodhpur AIIMS utilises just Rs 91 lakh out of Rs 3 crore central funds (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Feb 14, 2024

JAIPUR: All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), is a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for rare diseases, but the utilisation of funds for the treatment of such patients is not very encouraging. A lot of rare diseases patients are demanding help from the Centre as the yearly cost of treatment is in lakhs and the families cannot afford it, but, under utilisation of funds by the CoE is a concern.

In a reply in the Parliament, the Centre has provided information that out of Rs 3 crore, just Rs 91.17 lakh was utilised from the financial assistance released by the Centre in 2023-24 so far, while Rs 2.08 crore is the available balance for continuing treatment in the hospital.

The reply stated, "Rare disease patients, who are amenable to treatment, are enrolled with CoEs. As per the data maintained by 12 CoEs, there are 2,420 patients enrolled as on date."

The Union health ministry had declared AIIMS, Jodhpur, as centre of excellence for rare diseases in 2022 under National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD) 2021. It is the first such centre in the state. The CoEs are developed with an aim to help patients who require treatment costing lakhs of rupees annually to cure their rare diseases.

“This eye-opening data, which was not available in the public domain to date, shows the gross underutilisation of funds by most CoEs. While over Rs 100 crore has been disbursed by the ministry of health since 2021, hardly 49% of that money has been used for its designated purpose,” said Manjit Singh, founder and president, Lysosomal Storage Disorder Support Society (LSDSS).
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jodhpur/jodhpurs-aiims-utilizes-just-911-out-of-3cr-central-funds/articleshow/107675726.cms>

20. ₹1.25-crore stamp scam surfaces in Meerut (*hindustantimes.com*)
Feb 13, 2024

The scam was exposed after a sub-registrar office found a few stamps of value ₹25,000 suspicious and a case was registered in Sept last year on the direction of district magistrate

MEERUT Officials busted a stamp scam in the district and recovered more than 500 stamps valued at ₹25,000 that were fraudulently used in registry causing a revenue loss of ₹1.25 crore to the state exchequer. Proper investigation of past three years’ stamps of value ₹5,000 and above could expose a bigger scam in the state, said officials.

The scam was exposed after a sub-registrar office found a few stamps of value ₹25,000 suspicious and a case was registered at the Civil Lines police station in September last year on the direction of district magistrate Deepak Meena.

Assistant inspector general (stamps) Gyanendra Kumar said that the matter was immediately reported to IG (stamps) in Lucknow who directed all sub-registrar offices across UP to examine stamps of value ₹5000 and above of previous three years.

Kumar said all six sub-registrar offices in the district were directed to carry out the checking, and in the past six months, more than 500 stamps valued at ₹25,000 were found fraudulently used for registry.

The fake stamps were used by a single deed writer of Meerut and most of these were used in the office of two sub-registrars. Senior officials of the department didn’t deny the possibility of connivance of staff in it.

An official in the treasury explained that the stamps depot is in Kanpur and lot of stamps were received from there while many stamps of particular serial numbers were sent to treasuries of other districts of the division.

The fraudulently used stamps were of three types - stamps with particular serial numbers allotted in 2013 were used in registries of 2023 with changed name, date and other details on back side of the stamps. Secondly, stamps allotted to treasuries of other districts were used in Meerut and in the third category, stamps of a particular serial number never came to Meerut treasury but were used in Meerut.

District magistrate Deepak Meena held a meeting with AIG Kumar and chief treasury officer on January 1 and directed them for thorough checking of stamps and register cases against the wrongdoers.

Kumar, however, admitted that registering cases against 500 people was a Herculean task as his sub-registrar waited three days to get FIR registered in two cases in September. “The FIR was lodged only after the intervention of district magistrate,” he said, adding that no investigation was carried out in the case in the past five months.

Sub-registrar offices were now sending notices of “short stamp duty” to those in whose registry these fake stamps were used and directing them to deposit the required amount. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/lucknow-news/rs-1-25-crore-stamp-scam-surfaces-in-meerut-101707845341478.html>