

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

1. **Demystifying the CAG** (*thehindubusinessline.com*) BY PARVEEN MEHTA | November 13, 2023

## **Enhancing governance and accountability**

As the air turns balmy, and the festive season is ushered in, there is an upcoming annual celebration marked across the country, and yet not so well known — Audit Diwas on November 16, commemorating appointment of the first Auditor General of India in 1860. With adoption of the Constitution of India, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) evolved into the cornerstone of public financial accountability.

Heading the Supreme Audit Institution of India (SAI India), CAG is mandated by the Constitution to audit accounts of the Union and State Governments and their entities. Committed to promoting accountability, transparency and good governance, CAG provides independent assurance to the stakeholders, the Legislature, Executive and public, that public funds are used efficiently and for intended purposes.

SAI India is spread over 137 field offices and conducts audit of all receipts and expenditures of government.

CAG conducts three types of audit. Financial audits help maintain accuracy in government financial systems. Compliance audits sustain regularity and propriety in government. Performance audits are holistic assessment of economy, efficiency and effectiveness of programmes.

## **The process**

CAG's audits are carried out as per Auditing Standards of the CAG, which are in accordance with International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions. CAG's audit process entails Audit Planning based on risk analysis. An in-house Centre for Data Management and Analytics analyses national level data, and of audited entities, using advanced tools and statistical methods, to identify potential high risk areas.

Next is conducting the audit, where audit teams review functioning of the audited entity, gather audit evidence through documents, physical inspection, questionnaires etc.

Audit increasingly reaches out to stakeholders for getting different perspectives. To start with, entry conference with the audited entity is held; and to wrap up, an exit conference.

The hallmark of CAG's audit reports is professionalism in identifying deviations and making recommendations to the executive. This necessitates SAI India being a knowledge driven organisation, with a robust capacity development infrastructure of 15 institutions with domain specialisations.

Since April 2023, SAI India has transited to 100 per cent digital auditing processes, utilising an enterprise-wide audit process and knowledge management IT System.

Audit increasingly uses Geographic Information System, drone visualisation, geotagging and machine learning. For instance, remote sensing technology was used in audit of storm water management in Bengaluru. Drones were employed to detect illegal sand mining in Tamil Nadu. Google Earth imagery was used in audit of Coastal Ecosystems. These reports are available on [www.cag.gov.in](http://www.cag.gov.in).

CAG spearheaded preparing the Compendium of Asset Accounts on Mineral and Energy Resources in States 2020-21. As Chair of SAI20 under India's G20 Presidency, SAI India focussed attention on audit of the Blue Economy.

In the international arena, SAI India contributes to India's soft power — steering knowledge sharing among Supreme Audit Institutions, auditing UN agencies, leading in multilateral fora, and nurturing bilateral ties. CAG's current international audit portfolio includes WHO, FAO, ILO, Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and International Atomic Energy Agency.

CAG is member of UN Panel of External Auditors since 1993 and was its Chair for four years.

The ultimate goal of audit is to provide value to stakeholders. Impact of audit is realised when executive responds through policy changes, design improvements, mid-course corrections, etc. These, directly and tangibly underscore the core principle of SAI India — to uphold good governance and responsible stewardship of public funds. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/demystifying-the-cag/article67529660.ece>

## 2. **The soldier-state covenant** (*tribuneindia.com*) Lt Gen DS hooda (ret'd) | Nov 14, 2023

### **Let us not falter in our duty to those who have never hesitated in performing theirs**

In the ancient treatise Arthashastra, legendary Indian philosopher and strategist Kautilya emphasised the importance of a ruler's duty to protect and support his warriors. He asserted that the strength of a kingdom lay as much in the valour of its soldiers as in the justice and care provided by its rulers. In contemporary times, as India grapples with evolving security challenges and the complexities of military engagement, Kautilya's words echo with renewed significance.

Rulings given by the Armed Forces Tribunal in favour of soldiers, particularly on pension matters, are routinely contested.

This relationship between the soldier and the state has many facets. Laws, statutes and military codes define the legal relationship between soldiers and the state. In democracies, these often derive from the Constitution or foundational laws that outline the military's role, the rights of service members and the civilian control of the military.

Soldiers are instruments of state policy and strategy. The state is responsible for employing its military judiciously and avoiding unnecessary conflict, ensuring that the

sacrifices asked of soldiers are for just and strategic purposes that serve the nation's interests.

A good balance in civil-military relations ensures that the military remains subordinate to civilian authority while retaining its professionalism. Military culture, traditions and the soldier's identity within the broader national context also shape the soldier-state relationship. The state must respect and understand the unique culture and ethos of the military.

At the heart of the relationship between the soldier and the state is the social contract, where members of the military accept 'unlimited liability' in return for the state's promise of fair and equitable treatment, care for their physical and mental health, and ensuring their well-being during and after their service.

In his book *The Profession of Arms*, Gen Sir John Winthrop Hackett, an Australian-born British officer, elaborates on the concept of 'unlimited liability'. According to Hackett, soldiers, by virtue of their role, accept a unique contract with their nation that involves the possibility of having to make the ultimate sacrifice. A soldier's commitment could require laying down one's life because of the duty to obey lawful orders — which could include orders that lead to almost certain death. This notion is foundational to military ethics and understanding the military service as a profession. The fundamental nature of soldiering is not in the readiness to kill (although this, too, is important to achieve victory) but in the willingness to suffer and die.

For Hackett and others who share his views, this concept is integral to the moral and ethical dimensions of military service. It also underpins the special relationship between the military and society, where the state assumes significant responsibility towards those who agree to this level of sacrifice. The concept of unlimited liability shapes not only the military ethos but also places obligations on the state that must be honoured in its dealings with military personnel. This mutual obligation is known as the 'Military Covenant', and it requires the state to treat its service members with honour and dignity and to provide for them and their families, particularly if they are wounded or killed in the service of their country.

Not many countries have a formally documented 'Military Covenant', and it may not be legally binding, but this interplay has sustained the bond between the soldier and the state for centuries. A soldier's service in the military may be temporary, but that does not diminish the state's obligations; it underscores them. That is why the state provides pension, healthcare, disability benefits, etc. to ensure a dignified existence after service in return for sacrifices rendered.

Since Independence, the military has been almost continuously engaged in combating external and internal threats. The morale, motivation and professionalism in the Indian military have been sustained by the respect and support that it has received from the state. In this context, it is somewhat distressing to hear disparaging comments on the cost of pensions and claims that there is some kind of a racket running on disability pension cases. In September, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) rolled out 'Entitlement Rules for Casualty Pension and Disability Compensation Awards to Armed Forces Personnel, 2023', tightening the conditions for the grant of disability pension.

In March, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) asked the MoD to carry out an analysis of the reasons for disability among soldiers on the back of its finding that 36-40% of the officers and 16-18% of the personnel below officer rank (PBOR) who retire every year are drawing disability pension. The CAG also flagged concerns about disability pension being awarded on account of lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

The CAG's findings should not be considered unusual. Officers retire at a much later age than PBOR and serve for more extended periods in the extremely harsh conditions along our borders that impact their health. As far as total numbers are concerned, officers constitute less than 5% of the military and taken as a whole, going by CAG data, perhaps 18-20% of those retiring each year are granted disability pension. Again, this is not extraordinary. The US has a projected veteran population of about 18.6 million. Of these, 5.6 million (30%) are in receipt of disability pension, a tax-free compensation.

I do not intend to go into the merits or otherwise of the new disability rules as this is a matter for legal experts, based on various court rulings on the subject. There is also no contesting the fact that any misuse must be curbed. There is, however, concern that some actions could convey an impression that the state is shying away from its obligation.

Rulings given by the Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) in favour of soldiers, particularly on matters of pension, are routinely contested. A recent letter by the Adjutant General's branch has asked the legal cells of all Army commands to file writ petitions in the jurisdictional high court against various AFT judgments.

In the final analysis, the covenant between a soldier and the state is not merely a financial transaction but a moral imperative. Let us not falter in our duty to those who have never hesitated in performing theirs.  
<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/the-soldier-state-covenant-562113>

## **STATES NEWS ITEMS**

### **3. Central govt demands PMAY name and logo to be displayed on 'Life' houses (*english.mathrubhumi.com*) Updated: Nov 14, 2023**

Thiruvananthapuram: Centre has placed a hurdle on 'Life' housing projects similar to the Vizhinjam port project. As the subsidy allocated under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is also a part of the Life Mission project, the centre has instructed PMAY's logo and name be displayed on houses thus built.

In addition to this, the Accountant General Accountant (AG) has written to the government seeking details of the expenditure and loans of the 'Life' scheme. Meanwhile, the Kerala government is worried that 'Life's' loan will also be included in the public debt. Government sources told 'Mathrubhumi' that the central government's intervention is creating a crisis for 'Life' projects.

Kerala spends Rs 4 lakh per house on the 'Life' scheme. Of this, PMAY allocates Rs 72,000 in rural areas and Rs 1.5 lakh in urban areas. The officials of the local department pointed out that the policy is to carry out the project in such a manner that no one recognizes the fact that the house was built on government assistance.

Therefore, 'Life' homes do not carry any logo or name of the state government. For this very reason, the state is of the opinion that centres name and logo also cannot be included. But as per the central directive, if there is no PMAY logo, the central share will be disabled.

It was two months ago that the AG unusually demanded the details and guidelines of the 'Life' project. This was similar to the AG's intervention in KIIFB and the pension company. The finance department suspects that this may be a move to include the PMAY funds to the public debt amount. If this happens, the 'Life' project will be in trouble. <https://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/payment-for-praises-central-govt-demands-pmay-name-and-logo-to-be-displayed-on-life-houses-1.9071349>

#### **4. LDF govt's extravagance responsible for Kerala's financial crisis: Centre (*nagalandpost.com*) Updated: Nov 14, 2023**

The central government on Monday alleged that the "extravagance and lavishness" of the ruling Left administration in Kerala were responsible for the state's financial crisis and not any policies of the Centre. Union Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs V Muraleedharan asked whether Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan "was a fool or playing a fool to mislead the public on the issue".

Muraleedharan also claimed that the CM and state Finance Minister K N Balagopal always cited different figures of the funds not given by the Centre. "You are the Chief Minister of Kerala. Either you should not be a fool or you should not play the fool to mislead the public. Both are wrong.

"The Kerala CM should be aware of the laws of the country. He should also be aware of the financial situation of the state," the MoS contended.

His response comes a day after Balagopal alleged discrimination by the Centre towards Kerala and other opposition-ruled states in financial matters and said that the state will explore legal remedies against the same.

Balagopal, speaking to reporters in Kollam on Sunday, had said that the BJP-ruled Centre was being "hugely discriminatory" towards opposition-ruled states, including Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, in financial matters.

"Of them, the most discrimination is being faced by Kerala. We are exploring legal remedies against this action of the Centre," he had said. Hitting back at the Left government, Muraleedharan claimed that various allocations and grants, including the Centre's share in welfare pensions, that Kerala was to get from the central government have already been given.

He also questioned why the state did not request for the next installment of the welfare pension if it was in a financial crisis.

At the same time, the MoS also alleged that some grants like around Rs 750 crore from the UGC as part of salary reforms, were not given due to the mismanagement of the state administration. He claimed that in some cases the request for grant or funds were not sent on time or not sent at all due to non-adherence to the mandatory guidelines.

An amount of Rs 1,925 crore as special assistance to capital investment was not given to the state as it has not yet submitted the mandatory compliance reports, Muraleedharan said.

Furthermore, the state has failed to collect taxes of over Rs 7,000 crore according to a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, he claimed.

Balagopal had claimed that tax collection was being carried out effectively in the state. Muraleedharan said that every time someone questions the alleged extravagance and lavish spending of the state government and the holding of Keraleeyam celebrations at huge expenditure, the Left regime blames the Centre's policies for the same.

“If the state ends its extravagance and carries out proper financial management, Kerala's financial situation would improve.

“Instead, if they think they can go to Delhi and sit in dharna and fool the people of Kerala that way, then they should know that the people of the state will not suffer this conduct for long,” the MoS contended.

On Friday, November 10, the LDF announced that it was going to hold an agitation in New Delhi in January next year, to highlight the challenges faced by the state on the financial front due to what the CPI(M)-led alliance alleges as the Centre's negligence.

LDF Convenor E P Jayarajan had said that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, along with his cabinet colleagues, Left MLAs, MPs, and other leaders, would participate in the protest.

This move is seen as shoring up the LDF's political narrative against the BJP-led NDA in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls. <https://nagalandpost.com/index.php/ldf-govts-extravagance-responsible-for-keralas-financial-crisis-centre/>

## **5. Delhi HC seeks reply on plea for CAG audit of schools** (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Updated: Nov 14, 2023

NEW DELHI: Delhi High Court recently sought the stand of Delhi government on a public interest litigation seeking audit of accounts of all unaided private schools by the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG). It also sought the stand of the CAG as well as all unaided private schools in the capital over the matter.

A bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Manmohan issued notices on a petition by Jan Seva Welfare Society.

The petitioner argued that unaided private schools cannot be permitted to increase their fees until their accounts are audited by the CAG and examined by the directorate of education (DoE).

However, the Delhi government opposed the petition and pointed out there was no legal requirement to get the accounts of unaided private schools mandatorily audited by the CAG. The government counsel said the law mandates the schools that have the autonomy to fix the fees can tender their statement of accounts for audit to the DoE and added that regular scrutiny is conducted by auditors empanelled with CAG.

The court too voiced its reservations over burdening the CAG with the additional task of auditing over a thousand unaided private schools.

The CAG on its part said special auditors could be appointed for this purpose as right to education is an important right.

In its plea, the petitioner submitted that according to an RTI response, no unaided schools have been audited by the CAG in Delhi after 2010 and the DoE has also not examined their book of accounts, while their fees have been enhanced without any application of mind.

The matter will be heard next in January. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/hc-seeks-reply-on-plea-for-cag-audit-of-schools/articleshow/105196972.cms>

## 6. मध्य प्रदेश: आदिवासियों से दूर सरकारी योजनाएं, कहीं गरीबी तो कहीं अति कुपोषण की चपेट में लोग (*hindi.newslaundry.com*) Nov 13, 2023

15 साल राज के बाद साल 2018 में कांग्रेस मध्य प्रदेश में सरकार बनाने में कामयाब हुई थी. हालांकि, कुछ विधायकों की खरीद फरोख्त के बाद 15 महीने बाद भाजपा फिर से सत्ता में आ गई. अगर 15 महीने का वह शासन हटा दें तो करीब 18 साल से भाजपा अपनी योजनाओं और विकास कार्यों को लेकर जनता के बीच है. वहीं, कांग्रेस ने वचन पत्र जारी कर जनता से सैकड़ों वादे किए हैं. दोनों ही पार्टियों के केंद्र में यहां आदिवासी हैं. इसकी वजह है कि प्रदेश की आबादी में आदिवासियों की संख्या 21 प्रतिशत है. लिहाजा इन्हें लुभाने के लिए हर तरह के दावे और वादे किए जा रहे हैं.

आदिवासियों के मुद्दों और उनके लिए चलाई गई सरकारी योजनाओं की जमीनी पड़ताल के लिए न्यूज़लॉन्ड्री और द मूकनायक की टीम ने आदिवासी बाहुल्य इलाकों- श्योपुर, अलीराजपुर, अनूपपुर और बालाघाट जिलों का दौरा किया.

### श्योपुर जिला

आदिवासी मध्य प्रदेश में स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा और रोजगार जैसे मुद्दों पर कहां खड़े हैं. क्या 18 साल तक शासन में रहने वाली भाजपा और 15 महीने शासन में रहने वाली कांग्रेस आदिवासियों तक पहुंच पाई? इन सवालों का जवाब ढूंढने हम सबसे पहले श्योपुर पहुंचे. यह जिला देश की विशेष पिछड़ी

जनजाति (पीवीटीजीएस) सहरिया बाहुल्य है. यहां तीन ब्लॉक और दो विधानसभा क्षेत्र हैं. श्योपुर सीट से कांग्रेस के बाबू जंडेल विधायक हैं और जिले की दूसरी विधानसभा सीट विजयपुर से सीताराम आदिवासी बीजेपी के विधायक हैं. सरकार के हजार दावों से इतर श्योपुर की जमीनी हकीकत एकदम अलग है. श्योपुर जिले को 'भारत का इथोपिया' कहा जाता है. यहां आज भी कुपोषण सबसे बड़ी समस्या है. इस मामले में महिला एवं बाल विकास विभाग के अधिकारी कागजी आंकड़ेबाजी में जिले से कुपोषण का ग्राफ बेहद कम होने का दावा कर रहे हैं लेकिन हकीकत यह है कि कुपोषण के ग्राफ में कमी नहीं आई है.

श्योपुर के कराहल और विजयपुर में 150 से ज्यादा सहरिया आदिवासी बाहुल्य गांव हैं. करीब आधा दर्जन गांवों का दौरा करने पर हमने पाया कि लगभग हर गांव में कुपोषित बच्चे थे. यहां हमें कई गंभीर कुपोषित बच्चे भी मिले, जिन्हें जिला मुख्यालय के पोषण पुनर्वास केंद्र (एनआरसी) में भर्ती कराया गया था.

### **कुपोषण नहीं छोड़ रहा पीछा**

कूनो नेशनल पार्क से सटे टिकटोली, मोरावन आदि दर्जनों गांवों की स्थिति भयावह है. झोपड़ीनुमा कच्ची मिट्टी के घर सहरिया समुदाय की गरीबी को बयान करते हैं. रोजगार के साधन नहीं होने के कारण बहुत से लोग यहां के सीमावर्ती राज्य राजस्थान में मजदूरी के लिए पलायन कर जाते हैं. महीनों बाद वापस जब घर लौटते हैं तभी इन परिवारों को भरपेट खाना नसीब होता है. लोगों में जागरूकता की कमी और सरकार योजनाओं पर अमल में नाकामी के कारण यहां कुपोषण पर पूरी तरह काबू नहीं पाया जा सका.

कराहल ब्लॉक के जेतवाड़ा गांव में सरतीजो का परिवार रहता है. परिवार में दो बेटे, उनकी बहू और बच्चे हैं. बेटे फिलहाल मजदूरी के लिए गांव से बाहर गए हैं. ऐसे में घर की देखरेख की जिम्मेदारी सरतीजो पर है. सरतीजो के बड़े बेटे की पत्नी मचली ने तीन साल पहले जुड़वा बच्चों को जन्म दिया था. जन्म के बाद से ही दोनों बच्चे कुपोषित रहे. बच्चों की हालात बेहद गंभीर होने पर उन्हें पोषण पुनर्वास केंद्र में भर्ती कराया गया. अब दोनों बच्चे स्वस्थ हैं.

सरतीजो ने बताया कि उनके परिवार से कुपोषण पीछा नहीं छोड़ रहा. पहले दो बच्चे कमजोर हो गए थे. जिन्हें 15 दिन अस्पताल में भर्ती रखना पड़ा था, अब छोटे बेटे की बच्ची कुपोषण की शिकार होकर कमजोर हो गई है.

आंगनबाड़ी कार्यकर्ता बैजंती गुर्जर कहती हैं, "गांव में हर महीने कुपोषित बच्चे मिलते हैं. फिलहाल एक बच्ची कुपोषित है जिसको हम एनआरसी श्योपुर में भर्ती कराएंगे."

श्योपुर जिला चिकित्सालय के पोषण पुनर्वास केंद्र (एनआरसी) केंद्र में हमने पाया कि कुल 12 कुपोषित बच्चे भर्ती थे. इसके अलावा कुछ बच्चे कुपोषण के चलते अन्य बीमारियों की चपेट में आ गए थे, उन्हें अस्पताल के आईसीयू में भर्ती कराया गया था.

एनआरसी प्रभारी डॉ. मंगल ने हमें बताया, "ज्यादातर बच्चे जन्म के बाद से ही कुपोषित हो जाते हैं. धीरे-धीरे इसके लक्षण सामने आते हैं. बच्चों का हाथ-पैर पतला होना, खाने के बाद पेट फूलना, स्किन से जुड़ी समस्याएं होना, ये सभी कुपोषण के लक्षण हैं."



वह आगे कहते हैं, “बच्चों की लंबाई नहीं बढ़ना भी कुपोषण के लक्षणों में से एक है. शुरुआत में आंगनबाड़ी द्वारा इनका उपचार किया जाता है. जब स्थिति गंभीर होती है, तब उन्हें उपचार के लिए एनआरसी में भर्ती कराया जाता है.”

मालूम हो कि मध्य प्रदेश महिला बाल विकास विभाग प्रदेश के प्रति बच्चे के पोषण पर आठ रुपए का खर्च कर रहा है. इसमें 0 से 6 साल तक के बच्चे शामिल हैं. श्योपुर जिले में 0-6 साल तक बच्चों की लगभग संख्या 88 हजार है. महिला बाल विकास विभाग 0-3 साल तक के बच्चों के लिए 650 ग्राम का पोषण आहार पैकेट सप्ताह में प्रति मंगलवार को वितरित करता है. वहीं, 3-6 साल के बच्चों को आंगनवाड़ियों में ही दलिया, खिचड़ी, बेसन का हलवा और पोषण आहार का पैकेट दिया जाता है.

### **अलग-अलग योजनाओं के जरिए खर्च**

चाइल्ड बजट वर्ष 2022-23 की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक, महिला बाल विकास विभाग को पूरक पोषण आहार कार्यक्रम के अंतर्गत वित्तीय वर्ष 2022-23 में 73,06,088 रुपए के बजट का प्रावधान किया गया. इस योजना से 22 लाख बच्चे लाभान्वित हुए हैं. वहीं, वर्ष 2021-22 में यह राशि 71,98,886 रुपए थी यानी पिछले वित्तीय वर्ष के मुताबिक वर्ष 2023 में बजट की राशि को बढ़ाया गया.

मुख्यमंत्री सुपोषण योजना के अंतर्गत आंगनवाड़ियों द्वारा 0-5 वर्ष के बच्चों को कुपोषण और एनिमिया से मुक्त कराने एवं 15-49 वर्ष तक की महिलाओं को एनिमिया मुक्ति अभियान के अंतर्गत गर्म भोजन, दलिया, मूंगफली, लड्डू, अंडा, चिक्की आदि उपलब्ध कराने के लिए वित्तीय वर्ष 2022-23 में 61 लाख रुपए बजट का प्रावधान किया गया. इस योजना के तहत, 4,33,000 महिलाओं को लाभ मिला.

श्योपुर जिले के आदिवासी इलाकों में कुपोषण के चलते पिछले पांच सालों में कई बच्चों की जान भी गई है. इनमें कुछ ऐसे हैं जो सरकारी आंकड़ों में दर्ज नहीं हो पाए.

महिला एवं बाल विकास विभाग के आंकड़ों के अनुसार श्योपुर जिले में 823 बच्चे कुपोषित और 243 गंभीर कुपोषित मिले थे. यह आंकड़ा वर्ष 2022 का है. वर्तमान में भी श्योपुर ग्रामीण से लगातार कुपोषित बच्चे मिल रहे हैं.

### **पोषण आहार अनुदान योजना की राशि नदारद**

सरकार ने कुपोषण से मुक्ति के लिए पोषण आहार अनुदान योजना की शुरुआत की थी. इस योजना के अंतर्गत अति पिछड़ी जनजातियों से संबंधित वर्ग को एक हजार रुपए प्रति महीने की सहायता राशि दी जाती थी लेकिन पिछले सात महीनों से यह राशि खातों में नहीं पहुंची.

पोषण आहार अनुदान योजना का सच जानने के लिए हम जिले के वर्धा और कलारना गांव पहुंचे. यहां हमारी मुलाकात कुछ महिलाओं से हुई जो बहुत गुस्से में थीं. पोषण अनुदान की राशि के बारे में पूछते ही उनका गुस्सा फूट पड़ा. आदिवासी महिलाओं का कहना है कि पिछले सात महीनों से वे बैंक के चक्कर लगा रहीं हैं लेकिन खाते में पैसे नहीं पहुंचे.

गांव में रहने वाली आहुति ने बताया कि पिछले सात महीनों से उनके खाते में पोषण आहार अनुदान की राशि नहीं पहुंची है. इसके लिए वह कई बार बैंक गईं लेकिन खाते में पैसे नहीं पहुंचे.

गांव की ही अनारदा कहती हैं कि वह योजना की राशि को लेकर कलेक्टर कार्यालय गई थीं लेकिन अधिकारी इंतजार करने की बात कह कर मामले को टालते गए. अनारदा और आहुति आदिवासी हैं.

मध्य प्रदेश आदिम जाति कल्याण विभाग के आयुक्त संजीव सिंह से जब हमने आदिवासी इलाकों की इस समस्या पर बात की तो उन्होंने कहा, “विभाग अनुसूचित जनजाति वर्ग के लोगों के कल्याण के लिए निरंतर काम कर रहा है. यदि प्रदेश के किसी जिले में कोई समस्या है तो आप हमारे विभाग को भेजें, हम जांच कराकर कार्रवाई करेंगे.

श्योपुर में आदिवासी उत्थान के लिए काम कर रही संस्था एकता परिषद के सदस्य जय सिंह जादौन ने बताया कि पोषण आहार की राशि आदिवासी महिलाओं के खातों में नहीं भेजे जाने से आने वाले समय में कुपोषण के मामले बढ़ सकते हैं.

प्रदेश सरकार ने अगस्त 2023 तक आहार अनुदान योजना के अंतर्गत 1.81 लाख महिलाओं पर दिसम्बर 2017 से अब तक 1391 करोड़ रुपए से ज्यादा की राशि खर्च की है. इस योजना में विशेष पिछड़ी जनजाति समुदाय में भारिया, बैगा, सहरिया शामिल हैं. यह योजना 23 दिसंबर, 2017 को शुरू की गई थी.

वहीं, विधानसभा क्षेत्र के विकास के लिए प्रति वर्ष विधायकों को विधायक निधि प्रदान की जाती है. श्योपुर के विजयपुर विधानसभा के विधायक सीताराम आदिवासी को अप्रैल 2023 में 2.50 करोड़ रुपए विधायक निधि मिली थी. यह राशि विधायक द्वारा विभिन्न प्रस्तावों के तहत खर्च कर दी गई.

इस पर विधायक सीताराम आदिवासी बताते हैं कि वह अपनी विधायक निधि की पूरी राशि क्षेत्र के विकास में खर्च कर चुके हैं. लेकिन उन्होंने यह नहीं बताया कि विशेष रूप से कुपोषण या स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं पर कितना खर्च किया.

### **मध्य प्रदेश में पोषण आहार घोटाला**

मध्य प्रदेश में वर्ष 2022 में पोषण आहार में घोटाले का मामला सामने आया था. पोषण आहार में गड़बड़ी के आरोप लगे थे. इस मामले की गंभीरता तब सामने आई जब कैग की एक रिपोर्ट में इस गड़बड़ी का जिक्र आया. दरअसल, पोषण आहार को लोगों तक पहुंचाने की जिम्मेदारी जिन निजी कंपनियों को दी गई थी, उन्होंने सिर्फ कागजों में इसकी खानापूर्ति कर दी.

कैग रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक भोपाल, छिंदवाड़ा, धार झाबुआ, रीवा, सागर, सतना, शिवपुरी और श्योपुर जिलों में करीब 97 हजार मीट्रिक टन पोषण आहार के स्टॉक की सूचना दी गई लेकिन उसमें से सिर्फ 87 हजार मीट्रिक टन पोषण आहार का ही वितरण हुआ. करीब 10 हजार टन आहार में गड़बड़ी हुई. हेराफेरी कर कागजों में बंटे इस आहार की कीमत करीब 62 करोड़ रुपए बताई गई थी. इस घोटाले की व्यापकता का अंदाजा इस बात से लगता है कि शिवपुरी जिले के दो विकासखंडों- खनियाधाना और कोलारस- में सिर्फ आठ महीने के भीतर पांच करोड़ रुपए के आहार के भुगतान की अनुमति दे दी गई, लेकिन जांच करने पर स्टॉक के रजिस्टर तक नहीं मिले.

### **एमपी के सबसे गरीब जिले में क्या बदला!**

श्योपुर जिले की कुपोषण स्थिति को समझने के बाद हम अलीराजपुर पहुंचे. वर्ष 2021 में आई नीति आयोग की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक अलीराजपुर भारत का सबसे गरीबी वाला जिला है. आयोग ने ‘मल्टी डायमेंशनल पावर्टी इंडेक्स’ यानी ‘बहुआयामी गरीबी सूचकांक’ में यह बात साझा की. यह रिपोर्ट वर्ष 2019 और 2020 के बीच हुए ‘राष्ट्रीय परिवार स्वास्थ्य सर्वेक्षण’ के आंकड़ों के आधार पर तैयार की गई थी.

अलीराजपुर से करीब 30 किलोमीटर की दूरी तय करने के बाद हम ककराना गांव के नर्मदा नदी के तट पर पहुंचे. यहां कुछ मोटर बोट और सामान्य कश्तियां किनारे पर लगी हुई थीं. नदी के उस पार कई गांव हैं, जैसे पेरियातर, झंडाना, सुगट, बेरखेड़ी, नदिसिरखड़ी, आंजनबारा, डूबखेड़ा, बड़ा आम्बा, जल सिंधी, सिलकदा, रोलीगांव. ये गांव, उत्तरी या पूर्वी भारत जैसे गांवों की तरह नहीं हैं जहां कई मकान एक साथ होते हैं. इन गांवों में नर्मदा के किनारे छोटे-छोटे टापूओं पर घर बने हैं.

हम नदी के दूसरी तरफ झंडाना होते हुए ककराना गांव पहुंचे. नदी के आस-पास छोटे पहाड़ (टापू) बने हुए हैं. इन्हें गांव के लोग फलिया कहते हैं. हर एक फलिया पर 2 से 6 मकान हैं. ऐसे ही नर्मदा के किनारे इन गांव में सैकड़ों घर बने हुए हैं.

हम नदी के किनारे गांव की फलिया पर पहुंचे. यहां हमें ललिता और उनका परिवार मिला. ललिता अपने पति सुरेश और उसके भाई, की पत्नी एवं चार बच्चों सहित एक छोटी सी झोपड़ी के बने घर में रहती हैं. इनके घर में रोजाना उपयोग के लिए 2-4 बर्तन ही हैं. सुरेश और उसका भाई मजदूरी करके अपने परिवार का पालन कर रहे हैं. मजदूरी इतनी कम है कि इन्हें अपने परिवार चलाने में परेशानी आ रही है.

ललिता ने बताया, “हमें कोई सरकारी मदद नहीं मिल रही. नदी में आई बाढ़ के कारण खेती की जमीन डूब गई, नाव भी डूब गई. ईश्वर से हर दिन प्रार्थना करती हूं कि कोई बीमार न पड़े. नहीं तो उन्हें अस्पताल कैसे ले जाऊंगी...!! इलाज कराने के लिए पैसे ही नहीं हैं.”

अलीराजपुर जिला आदिवासी बाहुल्य क्षेत्र है. जिसकी कुल आबादी 7 लाख 28 हजार है. यहां की साक्षरता दर 36 प्रतिशत है, यहां अति निर्धन लोग 71 प्रतिशत जबकि ग्रामीण आबादी 92 प्रतिशत है. यहां 90 प्रतिशत से अधिक जनजातीय समुदाय के लोग रहते हैं.

सरकार की योजनाओं का कितना लाभ इन लोगों तक पहुंचा है यह जानने के लिए हमने अलीराजपुर के कलेक्टर डॉ. अभय अरविंद बेडेकर से बात की. इस दौरान हमने उन्हें नर्मदा किनारे, झंडाना, ककराना सहित अन्य गांव के लोगों की समस्याओं के बारे में भी बताया.

वे कहते हैं, “प्रशासन उनकी परेशानियों को दूर करने के लिए काम कर रहा है. प्रशासन के लोग समय-समय पर जाते हैं. कुछ आदिवासियों को अन्य जगह जमीनों के पट्टे भी दिए गए हैं.”

हालांकि, उन्होंने राज्य में आचार संहिता लागू होने का हवाला देते हुए किसी भी आंकड़े को हमसे साझा करने से मना कर दिया.

### **आजादी के बाद से गांव में नहीं आई बिजली**

अलीराजपुर के बाद हम प्रदेश के एक और आदिवासी बाहुल्य जिले अनूपपुर की पुष्पराजगढ़ विधानसभा पहुंचे. राजधानी भोपाल से यह जिला करीब 600 किलोमीटर की दूरी पर स्थित है.

अनूपपुर में जनजातीय समुदाय की अति पिछड़ी जाति बैगा समाज के लोग रहते हैं. सबसे पहले हम ग्राम पंचायत बोधा के अंतर्गत गढ़ीदादर गांव में पहुंचे. आदिवासी बाहुल्य इस गांव की आबादी 900 के करीब है. लेकिन इस गांव में देश की आजादी के बाद से अब तक बिजली नहीं पहुंची. गांव के लोग इस बार चुनाव का बहिष्कार कर चुके हैं. उनका कहना है कि जब तक गांव में बिजली नहीं आती तब तक वह लोग मतदान नहीं करेंगे.

गांव की इंद्रवती कहती हैं कि सात साल पहले सुरेंद्र सिंह से उनका विवाह हुआ था. जब वह विदा होकर अपने सुसराल पहुंची तो यहां बिजली नहीं थी. उन्हें बताया गया कि कुछ दिनों बाद बिजली आएगी लेकिन अब तक भी बिजली नहीं पहुंची.

मालूम हो कि मध्य प्रदेश ऊर्जा विभाग का साल 2021-22 का बजट 17 हजार 908 करोड़ रुपए था. जिसे 30 प्रतिशत बढ़ाकर वर्ष 2022-23 के लिए 23 हजार 255 करोड़ रुपए कर दिया. बावजूद प्रदेश के कई गांवों में बिजली नहीं पहुंच पाई.

### **पानी और सड़क के लिए समुदाय का संघर्ष**

वहीं, हम पुष्पराजगढ़ के बैगानटोला गांव में पहुंचे. यह गांव सड़क से करीब पांच किलोमीटर की दूरी पर स्थित है और यहां तक जाने के लिए कोई पक्की सड़क नहीं है.

यहां के सरपंच दादूराम आदिवासी के साथ हम पैदल ही एक संकरे से रास्ते से गांव की ओर रवाना हुए. यहां की आबादी करीब 200 लोगों की है. जो दो अलग-अलग टोला बना कर रह रहे हैं. गांव के लोग खेती करते हैं. इसके अलावा कुछ लोग मजदूरी करने गांव से बाहर भी जाते हैं.

गांव के लोगों ने बताया, “यह भूमि वन विभाग के अंतर्गत आती है. हमारे पूर्वज यहीं रहा करते थे. इसलिए हम भी यहीं रह रहे हैं. वन विभाग की भूमि होने के कारण पटवारी, तसीलदार या अन्य कोई अधिकारी कभी इस गांव में नहीं आए.”

पांच किलोमीटर का संकरा और पथरीला पैदल रास्ता चलकर जाना कठिन है. शायद इसलिए इस गांव में आजतक कोई अधिकारी नहीं पहुंचा. गांव की शामली देवी ने बताया कि सिर्फ सरपंच और पंचायत सचिव नीचे के गांव से महीने में एक बार आते हैं.

गांव में शासकीय योजनाओं का लाभ तो दूर की बात है. यह लोग मूलभूत सुविधाओं के लिए लड़ रहे हैं. गांव में पानी की समस्या है. यहां झिरिया (छोटे-छोटे गड्ढे) खोद कर पेय जल लिया जा रहा है. गांव के लोगों द्वारा पहाड़ पर छोटे-छोटे गड्ढे खोदे जाते हैं. इन्हें बड़े-छोटे पत्थरों की मदद से चारों ओर से बांध दिया जाता है. करीब 7-8 फिट गहरे खोदे गए गड्ढे रात में पहाड़ों से रिसने वाले प्राकृतिक पानी से भर जाते हैं. इसी पानी का इस्तेमाल गांव के लोग करते हैं. झिरिया के बगल में एक छोटी खंती बनाते हैं. जिसमें अतिरिक्त बचे हुए पानी को स्टोर किया जाता है. यह पानी पालतू मवेशियों के पीने के लिए और खेती के लिए उपयोग किया जाता है.

गांव के सरपंच दादूराम पनाडिया ने बताया, “गांव के लोग दूषित पानी पी रहे हैं. इस कारण वह बीमार हो जाते हैं. कई लोगों की मौत सिर्फ इसलिए हो जाती है कि हम रोगी को अस्पताल लेकर नहीं जा पा रहे. जंगल और पहाड़ों के बीच बसे बैगानटोला में न सड़क है, न बजली और न ही पानी की समुचित व्यवस्था. यहां के लोग इन आवश्यक मूलभूत सुविधा से पूरी तरह वंचित हैं.”

मालूम हो कि भारत सरकार के वर्ष 2022 के बजट में शुद्ध नल का पानी उपलब्ध कराने के लिए हर घर, नल से जल कार्यक्रम के तहत अतिरिक्त 3.8 करोड़ घरों को कवर करने के लिए 60,000 करोड़ रुपए के आवंटन की घोषणा की थी. जल शक्ति मंत्रालय के तहत पेयजल और स्वच्छता विभाग 2022-23 के बजट में योजना के लिए आवंटित 60,000 करोड़ रुपए में से जनवरी 2023 तक लगभग 60 प्रतिशत खर्च हो चुका है.

### **शिक्षा से दूर हैं ग्रामवासी**

बैगानटोला के लोग शिक्षा से दूर हैं। हालांकि, समुदाय की अगुवाई करने वाले यहां के सरपंच दादूराम पट्टे-लिखे हैं। दादूराम ने कहा वह सड़क किनारे गांव में रहते हैं। जिसके कारण उनका स्कूल जाना आसान था लेकिन बैगानटोला के लोग शिक्षा से नहीं जुड़ पा रहे। जिसका कारण गांव से सड़क तक का खराब रास्ता है। गांव में एक प्राथमिक स्कूल है, जिसमें कई-कई दिन शिक्षक नहीं आते, जिससे स्कूल लगभग बंद रहता है। इसके अलावा माध्यमिक स्कूल के लिए बच्चों को ग्राम गुट्टीपारा जाना पड़ता है। जहां रोजाना बच्चों का पहुंचना कठिन है।

इधर, राज्य सरकार शिक्षा को सुदृढ़ करने के लिए उपाय किए जाने का दावा करती है। स्कूल शिक्षा विभाग के लिए वर्ष 2022-23 में कुल 27 हजार 792 करोड़ रुपए का प्रावधान प्रस्तावित किया गया है। बजट में सरकारी प्राथमिक पाठशालाओं की स्थापना हेतु 10345 करोड़ का प्रावधान किया गया। वहीं माध्यमिक शालाओं के लिए 6212 करोड़ का प्रावधान किया गया।

सरपंच दादूराम ने कहा, “आदिवासियों के लिए संचालित पोषण आहार अनुदान, टंट्या मामा आर्थिक ऋण योजना और संबल योजना या अन्य आर्थिक रूप से पिछड़ेपन को दूर करने के लिए संचालित सरकारी योजनाओं का लाभ समुदाय को नहीं मिल रहा है”। उन्होंने कहा कि कई बार पंचायत की ओर से रास्ता बनाने को लेकर प्रस्ताव दिया लेकिन कोई कार्रवाई नहीं होती।

अनूपपुर जिले की पुष्पराजगढ़ विधानसभा सीट से कांग्रेस पार्टी के विधायक फुन्देलाल मार्को ने कहा, “क्षेत्र बहुत पिछड़ा हुआ है। सिर्फ विधायक निधि की राशि से विकास हो पाना संभव नहीं है। मौजूदा भाजपा सरकार का ध्यान आदिवासियों की समस्याओं की बजाय उनके वोट पर है।”

### **बालाघाट के हालात**

अनूपपुर के बाद हम बालाघाट जिले में पहुंचे। यह जिला गोंड आदिवासी बाहुल्य है। मध्य प्रदेश सरकार अनुसूचित जाति/जनजाति युवाओं को रोजगार से जोड़ने के लिए कई तरह की योजनाओं का संचालन कर रही है। जिसके लिए करोड़ों रुपए अनुदान राशि बजट स्वीकृत की गई है। लेकिन इन योजनाओं का लाभ यहां धरातल पर नहीं पहुंच रहा।

मध्य प्रदेश आदिवासी वित्त विकास निगम तीन ऋण योजनाओं का संचालन कर रही है। जिसमें एक लाख से दो करोड़ रुपए तक के लोन में अनुदान दिए जाने का प्रावधान है। लेकिन योजना के लक्ष्य में लोन से लेकर आवंटन तक किए गए मामलों में बहुत अंतर है।

बालाघाट से करीब 20 किलोमीटर दूर पीपरटोला गांव है। यहां बाबा सियो की चाय नाश्ते की दुकान है। वे पहले मजदूरी करते थे। जब मजदूरी मिलना कम हुई तो उन्होंने गांव के कुछ लोगों से पैसा उधार लेकर दुकान खोल ली। हालांकि, दुकान में इतना मुनाफा नहीं है कि वह अपने परिवार की जरूरतों को पूरा कर पाएं। बाबा सियो के परिवार में उनकी पत्नी दो बच्चे और माता-पिता हैं।

बाबा सियो की पत्नी लक्ष्मी सियो भी दुकान में काम कर पति का हाथ बंटाती हैं। वे कहती हैं, “दुकान की आय से घर का खर्च भी ठीक से नहीं चल पाता है। लेकिन इसके अलावा हमारे पास और कोई साधन नहीं है।”

बाबा सियो ने कहा कि उन्हें सरकार की ऋण योजना की कोई जानकारी नहीं है। अगर सरकार की ऋण योजना के तहत उन्हें ऋण मिलेगा तो वह अपनी दुकान को बढ़ाएंगे।

### **सरकार की ऋण योजना के आंकड़े**

अनुसूचित जनजाति वर्ग के युवाओं को रोजगार से जोड़ने के लिए राज्य सरकार के आदिवासी वित्त विकास निगम के द्वारा तीन योजनाओं का संचालन किया जाता है। लेकिन हमारी पड़ताल में इन योजनाओं की जानकारी आदिवासी युवाओं को नहीं है। आवेदन करने के बाद भी योजनाओं का लाभ कम ही आवेदकों को मिल पा रहा है।

टंट्या मामा आर्थिक कल्याण योजना के तहत अनुसूचित जनजाति के युवाओं को सेवा व्यवसाय हेतु 10 हजार से 1 लाख रुपए तक का ऋण दिया जाता है। योजना में वित्तीय वर्ष 2022-23 में लक्ष्य 10,000 का रखा गया था। जिसमें कुल आवेदन 8533 प्राप्त हुए जिसमें सिर्फ 1715 आवेदन स्वीकृत हो पाए। इसी योजना के अंतर्गत वित्तीय वर्ष 2023-24 में लक्ष्य 10,000 आवेदन का तय किया गया, जिसमें 4632 आवेदन प्राप्त हुए और सिर्फ 185 लोगों का लोन स्वीकृत हुआ।

भगवान बिरसा मुंडा स्वरोजगार योजना के अंतर्गत 1 लाख से 50 लाख तक सेवा व रोजगार के लिए आदिवासी युवाओं को लोन दिया जाता है। योजना में वित्तीय वर्ष 2022-23 में लक्ष्य 10,000 का रखा था, लेकिन आवेदन 8323 के मिले और 1299 को लोन स्वीकृत हुआ। वित्तीय वर्ष 2023-24 में लक्ष्य 10,000 का तय किया, जिसमें 4523 आवेदन निगम को प्राप्त हुए लेकिन सिर्फ 265 को ही लाभ मिल पाया।

प्रदेश सरकार अनुसूचित जाति वर्ग के युवाओं के लिए भी चार योजनाओं के तहत लोन देती है। वहीं एसटी वर्ग के लिए तीन योजनाएं संचालित की जा रही हैं। अनुसूचित जनजाति को टंट्या मामा आर्थिक कल्याण योजना, भगवान बिरसा मुंडा स्वरोजगार योजना और मुख्यमंत्री अनुसूचित जनजाति विशेष परियोजना वित्त पोषण योजना के तहत एक लाख से दो करोड़ रुपये तक की योजनाएं संचालित की जा रही हैं।

### **प्रदेश के इन तीन क्षेत्र में रहते हैं आदिवासी**

मध्य प्रदेश की कुल आबादी 7.2 करोड़ है। इस आबादी में करीब 21 प्रतिशत आदिवासियों की संख्या है। इस लिहाज से मध्य प्रदेश को देश का आदिवासी राज्य कहा जाए तो भी कोई अतिशयोक्ति नहीं होगी। मध्य प्रदेश में देश की कुल आदिवासी आबादी का 14.70 प्रतिशत (वर्ष 2011 की जनगणना) यहां निवास करती है। देश की जनजातीय आबादी 10.4 करोड़ है और मध्य प्रदेश की 1.53 करोड़ है जबकि, प्रदेश में 89 आदिवासी बाहुल्य ब्लॉक हैं।

प्रदेश के मध्य क्षेत्र में नर्मदापुरम, बैतूल, छिंदवाड़ा, सिवनी, बालाघाट, मंडला, डिंडौरी, रायसेन आदि जिले हैं। इनमें गौंड, बैगा, कोल, कोरकू परधान, भारिया और मुरिया निवास करते हैं।

प्रदेश के पश्चिम क्षेत्र में झाबुआ, आलीराजपुर, धार, खरगोन, बड़वानी और रतलाम जिलों से यह क्षेत्र पहचाना जाता है। इसमें भील, भिलाला, परितबा, बारेला और तड़नी आदिवासी रहते हैं।

तीसरा चंबल क्षेत्र है जिसमें श्योपुर, शिवपुरी, भिंड, मुरैना, गुना, दतिया, ग्वालियर जिलों में सहरिया जनजाति निवास करती है।

हम प्रदेश के तीनों हिस्सों के आदिवासी इलाकों में पहुंचे जहां सरकार के दावे से जमीनी हकीकत अलग नजर आई। जनजाति समाज के विकास के लिए सरकार ने रोजगार के लिए ऋण योजना, शिक्षा सहित अन्य योजनाओं के लिए अरबों रुपयों के बजट का प्रावधान किया है। जिसमें स्वास्थ्य,

शिक्षा और रोजगार के साथ जरूरी मूलभूत सुविधाएं शामिल हैं। इन इलाकों के विधायक भी लगभग पूरी निधि खर्च करते हैं, इसके बावजूद जमीनी स्तर पर विकास नहीं दिखाई देता।

गोंडवाना गणतंत्र पार्टी युवा मोर्चा के राष्ट्रीय अध्यक्ष अनिल सिंह धुर्वे ने कहा, “आजादी के इतने वर्षों के बाद करोड़ों अरबों रूपए खर्च के बाद भी यदि इन क्षेत्रों में आम नागरिकों के सामाजिक आर्थिक जीवन में कोई भी बड़े बदलाव नहीं आए हैं। कोई भी नेता जन सेवा के लिए काम नहीं कर रहा है। सभी अपने-अपने घर भरने में लगे हुए हैं।”

वे आगे कहते हैं, “अभी तक पूंजीपतियों के हित में नीतियां बनाकर आम नागरिकों के जीवन को बर्बाद करने में लगी हुई हैं। अतः सर्वांगीण विकास हेतु पूंजीपति मानसिकता वाले नेतृत्व को सत्ता से दूर कर जनहितैषी नेतृत्व को सत्ता सौंपना आज की आवश्यकता है।”

समाजसेवी तिरुमाल प्रेम शाह मरावी कहते हैं, “नागरिकों के कल्याण की तुलना में अब सरकारें पूंजीपति वर्ग के प्रति ज्यादा जिम्मेदार नजर आती हैं ताकि उन्हें लाभ मिल सके। अमीर और अमीर बनते जाएं, गरीब और गरीब बनते जाएं, यही हमारे क्षेत्रों में हो रहा है।”

मध्य प्रदेश आदिम जाति कल्याण विभाग के आयुक्त संजीव सिंह से जब हमने आदिवासी इलाकों में ग्राउंड जीरो पर दिखाई पड़ने वाली विभिन्न समस्याओं के बारे में बातचीत की तो उन्होंने जांच कर कराकर कार्रवाई की बात कही। <https://hindi.newslandry.com/2023/11/13/madhya-pradesh-elections-government-schemes-tribals-people-poverty>

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

### **7. 417 infra projects show cost overruns of Rs 4.77 lakh cr in Sept: Report (economictimes.indiatimes.com) Nov 14, 2023**

As many as 417 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, have been hit by cost overruns of more than Rs 4.77 lakh crore in September this year, an official report said. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,763 projects, 417 reported cost overruns and as many as 842 projects were delayed.

"Total original cost of implementation of the 1,763 projects was Rs 24,86,402.70 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 29,64,345.13 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,77,942.43 crore (19.22 per cent of original cost)," the ministry's latest report for September 2023 said.

According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till September 2023 is Rs 15,44,600.67 crore, which is 52.11 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.

However, it stated that the number of delayed projects decreased to 617, if delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion.

Further, it stated that for 298 projects neither the year of commissioning nor the tentative gestation period has been reported.

Out of the 842 delayed projects, 194 have overall delays in the range of 1- 12 months, 190 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 323 projects for 25- 60 months and 123 projects have been delayed for more than 60 months.

The average time overrun in these 842 delayed projects is 36.94 months.

Reasons for time overruns as reported by various project implementing agencies include delay in land acquisition, delay in obtaining forest and environment clearances, and lack of infrastructure support and linkages.

Delay in tie-up for project financing, finalisation of detailed engineering, change in scope, tendering, ordering and equipment supply, and law and order problems were among the other reasons.

The report also cited state-wise lockdowns due to COVID-19 (imposed in 2020 and 2021) as a reason for the delay in implementation of these projects.

It has also been observed that project executing agencies are not reporting revised cost estimates and commissioning schedules for many projects, which suggests that time/cost overrun figures are underreported, it added.  
<https://infra.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/urban-infrastructure/417-infra-projects-show-cost-overruns-of-rs-4-77-lakh-cr-in-sept-report/105197393>

## **8. Government think tank proposes end of GST exemption due to unequal benefits** (*telegraphindia.com*) November 14, 2023

**A study by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) argues for bringing all goods and services under the tax regime as the rich are getting more benefits contrary to the belief that tax exemptions benefit the lower strata of consumers**

A leading government think tank has proposed the end of GST exemption even as the empowered rate-setting panel remains headless for nearly six months.

A study by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) argues for bringing all goods and services under the tax regime as the rich are getting more benefits contrary to the belief that tax exemptions benefit the lower strata of consumers.

Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) chairman Sanjay Agarwal last week said: “Industry should introspect if it wants a simpler GST structure. Complications arise when they seek exemption on two out of five items because ITC (input tax credit) in such cases would not be allowed on the exempted items. That would disrupt the whole ITC chain.”

At present, the regime gives tax exemption to several essential and basic goods and services — such as foodgrains, fruits, vegetables, meat, hospitals, diagnostic tests, education and public transport.



The working paper by the NIPFP — "Distributional Impact of Indian GST" — argues that exemptions on goods and services tax are delivering more benefits to households with higher monthly expenditure than the lower strata of consumers. The NIPFP (National Institute of Public Finance and Policy) is an autonomous research institute under the finance ministry. Second, it found that the exempted items account for only around 20 per cent of a low-income household's monthly expenditure, and hence, bringing them under the tax net is unlikely to pinch consumers' pockets.

Right now, there are nine tax slabs in GST: (exempted), very low (exempt to 5 per cent), low (5 per cent), lower middle (5-12 per cent), middle (12-18 per cent), upper middle (18 per cent), upper (28 per cent), high (higher than 28 per cent), and lastly out-of-GST.

The study authored by Sacchidananda Mukherjee said it considered 123 major groups of items of households' consumption during 2021-22 to determine the distributional impact of taxes and exemptions.

At the lowest income households — or 5 per cent of the households from the bottom when the households are arranged — according to personal consumption expenditure, they spent around Rs 934 per person per month in 2021-22 on consumption, according to CMIE's Consumer Pyramids Household Survey. In contrast, the top 5 per cent spent Rs 5,945 per person per month, the survey said.

According to the analysis made by the working paper, the lowest income household spent around 20 per cent of their money on GST-exempt items such as foodgrains, vegetables, fruits, public transport and so on. In contrast, this low-income group spends around 35 per cent of their money on items that are taxed at 5 per cent GST. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/business/government-think-tank-proposes-end-of-gst-exemption-due-to-unequal-benefits/cid/1979638>

## 9. **Languishing share of GST revenue in GSDP** (*indianexpress.com*)

November 14, 2023

**States continue to have a high level of committed expenditure, and persistent revenue deficit. Increase in non-merit subsidies, reversal of pension reforms, and poor financial conditions of state-owned discoms are some of the key challenges for state finances, the report said.**

Even as state revenue receipts have returned to the pre-pandemic level, Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections of states as a percentage of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) remain below pre-GST levels, as per a recent report 'State of State Finances' by PRS Legislative Research. With the GST compensation grants having ended in June 2022, there has been an adverse impact on some states, it said, adding that increasing the level of GST revenue may require rationalisation in tax slabs.

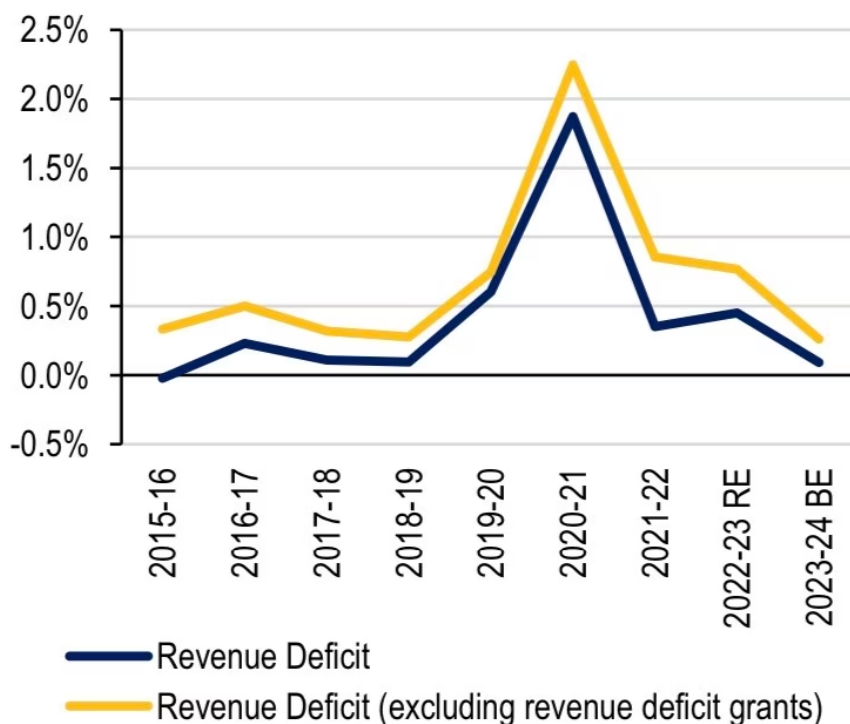
States continue to have a high level of committed expenditure, and persistent revenue deficit. Increase in non-merit subsidies, reversal of pension reforms, and poor financial conditions of state-owned discoms are some of the key challenges for state finances, the report said.

Key findings:

1. State GST (SGST) accounts for over 40% of states' own tax revenue but SGST to GSDP ratio continues to be lower than pre-pandemic level. SGST revenue is also lower than the level of guaranteed revenue for five years.

\* In pre-GST period, revenues from taxes subsumed under GST was around 3% of GSDP for 27 states/UTs. In 2018-19, the first full year of GST, this ratio was 2.7%, and it has stayed below 3% in subsequent years.

**Figure 1: States' aggregate revenue deficit (as % of GDP)**



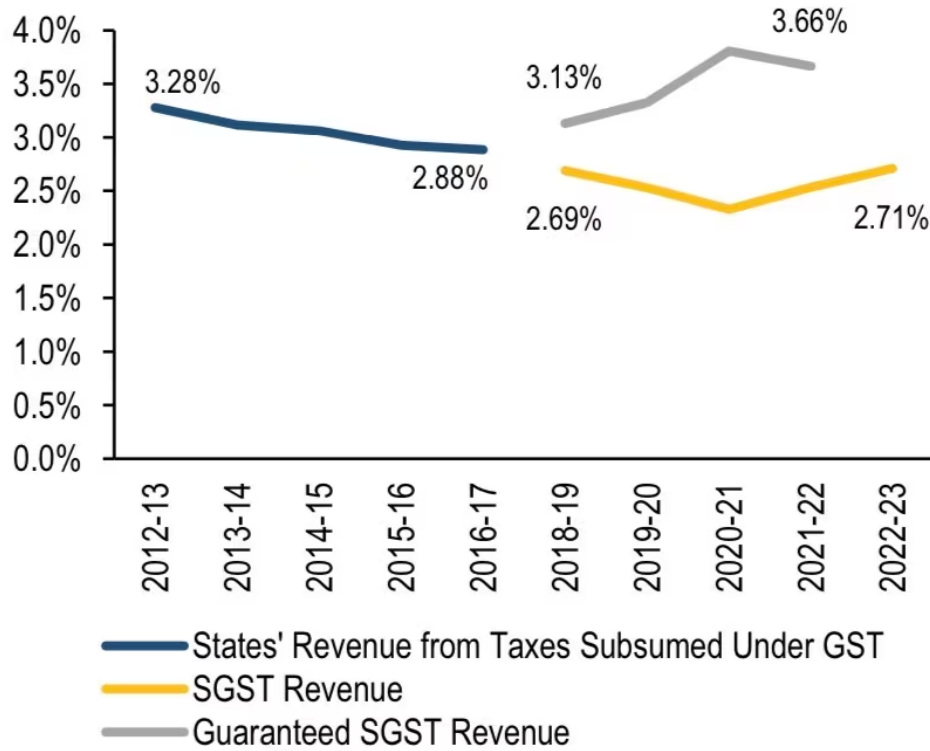
Note: Negative revenue deficit indicates a surplus.

Sources: RBI; State Budget Documents; MoSPI; PRS.

2. Post-June 2022, states more reliant on GST compensation, such as Puducherry, Punjab, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, and Uttarakhand, are likely to be the most affected. Pudu cherry, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh have budgeted a revenue deficit in 2023-24 (FY24).

3. In FY24, 11 states have budgeted a revenue deficit—gap between revenue expenditure and receipts. Of these, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab, and West Bengal did so after accounting for revenue deficit grants.

**Figure 3: States' tax to GSDP ratio in pre and post GST periods (in %)**



Note: The chart excludes Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, and Haryana as pre-GST revenue is not available and Jammu and Kashmir as the state was bifurcated into two UTs in 2019. It excludes 2017-18 as GST was introduced for part of the year.

Sources: CAG, State Budget Documents; MoSPI; PRS.

\* If revenue grants, as recommended by the 15th Finance Commission, were not provided, six more states, including Assam, Nagaland, and Uttarakhand, would have been in revenue deficit in FY24.

4. Over the past several years, states have spent around 8-9% of their revenue receipts on subsidies, with a significant portion on power subsidy. Concerns have been raised over rising subsidies for non-merit goods in several states over potential constraints in availability of fiscal space for capital expenditure. <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/economy/languishing-share-of-gst-revenue-in-gsd-9025502/>

**10. A half measure: PMGKAY will bolster poor Families' food security, but does little for nutritional security** (*financialexpress.com*) November 14, 2023

**Quite like its name, the programme too has evolved over the years. From the identification of beneficiaries to the price at which the rations are sold (referred to as the central issue price or CIP)—all have undergone changes since the 1940s.**

During his recent campaign rallies in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, prime minister Narendra Modi declared an extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) for five more years. The provision related to free rations under PMGKAY was to lapse in December 2023. It is a welcome step, particularly for families still grappling with economic distress. But can rice and wheat comprise healthy diets for individuals? And does 67% of the population continue to be under duress, needing support from free rations?

### **The PMGKAY**

The Public Distribution System (PDS) of the 1940s became targeted PDS (TPDS) in 1997, and then with further changes, became the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013. In January 2023, NFSA became PMGKAY.

India runs the world's largest food-based welfare programme in the world. Via its commitment to deliver at least 60 million tonnes (mt) of rations (mainly rice and wheat) annually to 813 million identified beneficiaries, India's PDS/NFSA/PMGKAY becomes a mammoth to maintain and manage. As per National Statistics Office (NSO), the average Indian consumes about 10 kg cereals per month. Under the PMGKAY, the government provides 5 kg, or half of the individual's monthly cereal needs, for free.

### **Selling price of rations under PMGKAY**

Quite like its name, the programme too has evolved over the years. From the identification of beneficiaries to the price at which the rations are sold (referred to as the central issue price or CIP)—all have undergone changes since the 1940s. In 2013, under NFSA, the CIP for rice, wheat, and coarse cereals was set at Rs 3, Rs 2, and Rs 1 per kg respectively. These CIPs were reduced to zero in January 2023 for a year. During the rallies last week in poll-bound Chhattisgarh and MP, PM Modi extended these "zero CIPs" for another five years, i.e., till December 2028.

For a PMGKAY beneficiary household, zero CIPs or free rations saves them about Rs 50-105 per household per month. This implies an annual saving of about Rs 600-1,260 per family. For poor families, this support matters. As per the recently released Bihar caste survey report, one in every three families in Bihar live on around ₹200 per day. Also, with rice and wheat inflation reaching double-digits since the last year, a surety of free food can give relief to many households in the country.

### **Focus on nutrition**

As per the recently released FAO's State of Food Security and Nutrition in the world 2023, about 74% of Indians or one in three cannot afford healthy diets in India, as shown in the accompanying graphic. But can access to free rice and wheat provide nutrition to economically vulnerable Indians?

In a recently-conducted survey of PMGKAY beneficiaries by Arcus Policy Research, where a state has become an accidental pioneer in DBT cash whereby it is giving an unconditional cash transfer together with the free rations under PMGKAY, it was found, inter alia, that the cash received by these beneficiaries was used to buy better

rice and pay for diversified meals including eggs, meat, and also for meeting expenditures on education and health.

As Indian states differ in their levels of nutritional-deprivation and economic strength, a one-fit all solution of a food-based welfare system cannot be the way forward. In states like Punjab for instance—it feeds the entire country—instead of distributing rice and wheat, can the Centre consider offering cash in lieu of grains? Then, in others like Bihar, with huge economic disparities, the government may consider strengthening its PMGKAY system with an openness to review once the state strengthens economically.

### **Way forward**

In 2013, when the NFSA was passed, there was a provision to revise the CIP upwards in three years. Not surprising for many, no upward revision happened in the CIP despite sharp increases in the economic costs of handling the grains. Contrarily, the prices have been reduced to zero now. Any upward revision in CIPs, though desirable on economic front, may not be a likely political outcome—at least in the close future. In that case, the Centre would do well to at least rethink the PMGKAY coverage of the 67% of the population.

We see the Indian economy showing resilience among global crises by sustaining its fast growth trajectory. But has the growth resulted in upliftment of the bottom of the pyramid? In absence of any data about the Indian consumers (the last NSO data released is for year 2011-12), policy changes can be tricky. We all await the official data on consumption and the overall Census results to know the level of deprivation in the country. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/a-half-measure-pmgkay-will-bolster-poor-families-food-security-but-does-little-for-nutritional-security/3306281/>

## **11. Centre considering to offload 5-10% stake in some public sector banks: Report (*businesstoday.in*) November 14, 2023**

The Centre is considering to divest 5 to 10 per cent stake in public sector lenders following a sharp rally in share prices of public sector banks (PSBs) of late. A report in the Economic Times said that a detailed roadmap is expected soon.

The Centre owns 80 per cent in six state-run banks, Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank, Punjab & Sind Bank, Bank of Maharashtra, Central Bank of India and Uco Bank.

The stake sale can be conducted through the offer-for-sale route for lenders that are not inclined toward a rights issue, sources quoted in the report.

In case banks need capital, then a follow-on public offer can be explored, and the government will divest some stake and the lender will issue fresh equity in the same proportion, the source told ET.

"Banks will be submitting their capital-raising plans, and based on those assessments, a roadmap may be drawn up for each lender," the official told ET, adding that the stake sale timing will depend on the market conditions. It might happen next fiscal year.

In the last one year, the Nifty PSU Bank index has yielded 34 per cent against a 6.9 per cent rise in the Nifty Private Bank Index in comparison to the benchmark Nifty 50's 6.4 per cent in the same period.

The government is already divesting its stakes in IDBI Bank, which is now categorised as a private-sector lender.

## Q2 results

For the September quarter 2023-24 (Q2FY24), Bank of India reported a standalone net profit of Rs 1,458 crore, which is almost higher by 52 per cent as against Rs 960 crore recorded in the year-ago period.

The public sector lender's net interest income (NII) stood at Rs 5,740 crore in Q2FY24, improving by 13 per cent as against Rs 5,083 crore reported in the same quarter of the previous fiscal.

State-owned Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) has announced a profit of 71.8 per cent at Rs 919 crore year on year (Y-o-Y) at the end of the July-September quarter (Q2) for the financial year 2023-24 (FY24) in its consolidated results.

In Q2 FY23, the bank recorded a profit of Rs 4,317 crore. The total income for this quarter also went up 32.8 per cent Y-o-Y at Rs 5,735 crore from Rs 4,317 crore.

Gross non-performing assets (NPA) are down to 2.19 per cent in Q2FY24.

State-owned UCO Bank reported a 20 per cent decline in its net profit to Rs 402 crore in Q2 FY24. The bank had reported a net profit of Rs 505 crore in the corresponding quarter a year ago.

Total income of the Kolkata-headquartered lender during the July-September period rose to Rs 5,866 crore from Rs 4,965 crore in the year-ago period, UCO Bank said in a regulatory filing.

Public sector lender Indian Overseas Bank reported a growth of 25 per cent in net profit at Rs 625 crore, compared to Rs 501 crore in the corresponding period last year. The bank's net interest income (NII) rose 22 per cent at Rs 1,114 crore for the quarter ended September 2023 vis-a-vis Rs 1,135 crore in the year-ago period.

The bank's gross non-performing assets (GNPA) declined to 4.74 per cent from 8.53 per cent in the same quarter of the previous fiscal due to an improved asset quality.

Public-sector bank Punjab & Sind Bank (PSB) reported a 31.7 per cent fall in net profit to Rs 189.9 crore for the July-September quarter of FY24, as against Rs 278.1 crore last year. The bank's gross non-performing assets (GNPAs) declined to 6.23 per cent from 9.67 per cent in the September quarter of the previous fiscal. Net non-performing assets (NNPAs) fell to 1.88 per cent from 2.24 per cent.

Total income of the bank during the July-September period rose Rs 2,674 crore against Rs 2,120 crore in the corresponding period of FY23.

State-owned Central Bank of India reported a massive 90 per cent rise in its net profit to Rs 605.4 crore for the September quarter of FY23-24, against Rs 318.2 crore in Q2 FY22-23. During the quarter, Central Bank of India's total income rose to Rs 8,412 crore from Rs 7,065 crore a year ago, the bank said in a regulatory filing.

Its gross non performing asset (NPA) improved to 4.62 per cent in the quarter under review. Earlier the government lender had reported NPA at 9.67 per cent in September FY22-23. <https://www.businesstoday.in/industry/banks/story/centre-considering-to-offload-5-10-stake-in-some-public-sector-banks-report-405640-2023-11-14>

**12. A bond of secrecy (*indianexpress.com*)** Written by Ashok Lavasa | Updated: November 14, 2023

Almost everything in favour of and against the disclosure (or non-disclosure) of funding received via electoral bonds is in the public domain, save the identity of the giver and the receiver, and their bond.

The introduction of the bond as an instrument of political funding per se cannot be questioned but not making the information public has been questioned as being antithetical to the principle of transparency and against the Right to Information (RTI) Act. That political parties have themselves steadfastly resisted being brought into the ambit of the RTI Act despite feeble attempts by statutory bodies, speaks volumes about their commitment. But why should the State seem to collude with political parties in this obfuscation by granting income tax exemption? The Election Commission of India too had consistently argued against electoral bonds till it decided not to oppose the matter for reasons that remain as mysterious as the instrument.

Even in past hearings, the Supreme Court (SC) raised inconvenient questions and appeared to be seeing the point made by the petitioners questioning the merit and intent of this opaque instrument. Instead of sealing the fate of the bond, it ordered the envelopes containing vital information to be sealed. The Court refrained from staying or delegitimising electoral bonds leaving everyone wondering if yet another opportunity to pronounce on a matter of “great pith and moment” was lost in the absence of “the native hue of resolution”.

What the SC does this time is a subject of much anticipation. Will it look into the record of requests for anonymity from potential donors and validate it? Will it see if tax exemption without full disclosure is fair public policy? Can such tax-exempt money be kept forever by the recipient, without spending?

There is merit in the argument that an electoral bond is an authorised instrument that serves as an alternative to cash, but the logic of secrecy is confounding even if there is evidence that such a demand was made. It is baffling that the state should reward secret transactions with tax relief, both for the donor and the beneficiary. Do the tax laws permit tax exemption without disclosing full details of the recipient tax-exempt organisation or the donor claiming tax relief? Further, the general principle of granting tax exemption to any organisation receiving donations is that funds received are utilised for the stated purpose. For example, an organisation set up for assisting the orthopedically challenged would have to show that the “use of proceeds” has been made



to fulfil the objectives for which it was established. Similarly, if a political party receives tax-exempt electoral bonds, should it be allowed to retain that amount indefinitely? It must be obliged to spend that amount substantially for election purposes in a given period or lose the benefit of exemption. This would curb the tendency of political parties to become recipients of tax-exempt funds without utilising them.

Redressing this would require a specific provision in the relevant laws by which party accounts are subject to periodic proprietary audits and parties are made to incur tax liability for unutilised funds. This would align the provisions pertaining to political donations with those that apply to tax-exempt donations for other purposes.

Such a reform in tax laws would have to be accompanied by another stipulation specifying limits to expenditure incurred by a political party during an election. There have been suggestions in the past relating to this, including the EC proposing a specific limit. For example, if the limit on candidate expense for a parliament election is, say, Rs 95 lakh, the political party fielding the candidate may be allowed to spend no more than, say 50 per cent, of the expenditure reflected by the candidate in his accounts submitted to EC. This would automatically limit party expenditure during elections. Thus, if a party were to field a hundred candidates during Lok Sabha elections, it would be able to legitimately spend no more than Rs 42.5 crore for campaigning from party funds assuming that all the candidates of that party utilise the entire expenditure ceiling.

If the proposed periodic audit by a CAG-appointed firm conducted every five years were to show that the party has been unable to spend the tax-exempt income it received for the declared purpose, it should be liable to pay income tax on the unutilised portion along with interest. Tax exemption should be treated as a form of state subsidy to political parties and subject to the same principle of utilisation of subsidy as is the case in other schemes funded by the exchequer. No tax exemption should be allowed on electoral bonds if the details are not fully disclosed. If the donor and a political party want to have a bond of anonymous munificence, such contributions and incomes must be fully taxed. When income tax laws insist on full and honest disclosure, why should the electoral bond incentivise secrecy?

This secret “bond” also begs a counterintuitive question: Why is it that in India, people prefer to contribute to the cause of democracy in secret? There are countries in which people proudly and openly claim to provide donations to political parties (like the Political Action Committees in the US), which are vital instruments of a democratic system. After all, democracy is as worthy a cause as climate change, environment protection or looking after the homeless and infirm and an honest citizen would be happy to be associated with such a cause. Isn't that the principle behind making such contributions eligible for tax exemption? Why are we as a society such that those who fund it want to conceal their contribution and why does our political system support this? Let society introspect while the SC ruminates. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/former-election-commissioner-ashok-lavasa-on-electoral-bonds-democracy-paid-for-in-darkness-9025492/>



### **13. Russia, India sign deal on supply, production of Igla air defence systems** (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Nov 14, 2023

NEW DELHI: Russia has signed an agreement with India to supply its Igla hand-held anti-aircraft missile to the country.

According to the pact, Russia will also allow domestic production of the Igla anti-aircraft missile system in India, Reuters reported quoting news agency TASS.

Despite India's efforts to cut down dependence on arms import, Russia remains its biggest weapons supplier.

From 2016-2021, Russia accounted for over 50% of India's arms imports.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/russia-india-sign-deal-on-supply-production-of-igla-air-defence-systems/articleshow/105204650.cms?from=mdr>

### **14. How India Is Shifting Its Nuclear Power Plans into High Gear** (*thewire.in*) Nov 14, 2023

**The country needs to decarbonise. Its renewables face charges of intermittency. Is nuclear the answer?**

On December 14 last year, Union minister of state for Atomic Energy and Space Jitendra Singh made an announcement with far-reaching consequences.

In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, Singh said the Bharatiya Janata Party-led NDA government will commission 20 new nuclear reactors by 2031. With that, he said, India's installed nuclear capacity will treble from the current 7,480 megawatt (MW) to 22,480 MW

Ten of these reactors – like the 500 MW Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam and the two 1,000 MW reactors at Kudankulam – are already under construction. In addition, the government has granted “administrative and financial sanctions” for building 10 more nuclear plants with 700 MW Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors at Gorakhpur (Haryana), Kaiga (Karnataka), Chutka (Madhya Pradesh) and Mahi Banswara (Rajasthan).

That is just the start. Another clutch of reactors have secured in-principle approvals. Once all these projects are up, the number of India's nuclear reactors will rise from the current 22 to well above 50.

That is not all. The NDA government is also bullish on SMRs, typically below 300 MW in capacity, and wants to use them for both power generation and to decarbonise industry. National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) is thinking of retro-fitting small modular reactors (SMRs) into decommissioned coal plants. In August, speaking at a conclave on green hydrogen and net zero, senior NITI Aayog official V.K. Saraswat said industrial units too should use SMRs to produce hydrogen.

Some of the projected numbers are mind-boggling. The installed capacity of coal-fired plants in India stands around 220 gigawatt (GW). “[Of this 220 GW], 20 GW is already off the grid and gradually others will also be coming in the line,” A.K. Nayak, head (Nuclear Control and Program Wing) at the Department of Atomic Energy said last December at a conference organised by India Nuclear Business Platform, a nuclear power advocacy firm owned by a Singapore-based consultancy called Industry Platform.

These, he said, can be refitted with SMRs. “There is a big opportunity for SMRs in a span of 2-3 decades... For interested companies like NTPC and others it is a business opportunity of 220 GW.”

Going by such projections, SMRs might play a bigger role in India than large reactors.

The case for nuclear

A curious silence has accompanied most of these plans. Barring the odd media report outlining the government’s plans for nuclear power and op-eds in favour of SMRs, there has not been enough critical discussion around this proposed nuclear buildup.

Can nuclear energy help India step away from coal? Has the industry resolved its old problems with cost- and time-overruns? What about public safety? Given the world continues to innovate in renewables, should India go for 100% renewables or push to add nuclear capacity as well?

On the energy front, the country is stuck between a rock and a hard place. In 2022-23, its power demand stood at 1,503 billion units (BUs). This demand was met through an installed power generation capacity of 415.4 GW, with 236.68 GW coming from coal, lignite and gas. Renewables – hydel, solar, bio-energy, wind and pumped storage – accounted for 171.8 GW.

As India decarbonises, not only will most of these thermal units be wound down, the country will also see additional demand for electricity as other users of hydrocarbons – like factories and vehicles – electrify as well. By 2030, India’s Central Electricity Authority expects the country’s electricity demand to touch 2,279 BU. By 2050, says Energy Monitor, power demand might touch 5,921 BUs. At this point, the country might need as much as 4,000 GW of installed capacity – almost a 10-fold jump from today.

That is where a massive constraint asserts itself. India’s potential RE capacity – between hydel, solar and wind – is currently estimated at no more than 1,000 GW.

It gets worse. The country cannot build to full potential capacity – building 145,000 MW of dams will extract its own social and ecological costs. As will unfettered expansion of solar parks and wind farms. India can reduce total future power demand – by slashing transmission and distribution losses or by providing Indians lower per capita power than the global average by embracing greater energy efficiency – but there will still be a shortfall.

One morning in April, seeking to understand all this better, CarbonCopy met nuclear scientist Ravi Grover at his office in Mumbai’s Bhabha Atomic Research Centre. Given

the size of its population, he said in that chat, India will have to use all the energy options with her.

That morning, Grover outlined another reason why India needs nuclear power. In the past, power supply was constant (thanks to thermal power plants) while demand waxed and waned. “Balance between supply and demand was usually maintained through load-shedding,” he told CarbonCopy.

That is changing now, he said. As the share of renewables in India’s energy mix rises, both supply and demand will become variable. The country’s electricity system will need additional investments – pumped storage, battery storage, electrolyzers, what have you – to balance demand and supply.

Delivering what Grover describes in *Current Science* as “firm power”, nuclear power can also help address intermittency. “If India wants 200 GW of renewable power, then we should try to have 20-40 GW of nuclear as well,” he told CarbonCopy. “That is what the world is doing. The UK will be 25% nuclear by the middle of this century. France is adding eight to 14 new reactors. India, too, needs to add three to four times as much nuclear capacity. What we have is not enough.”

There is, however, one big problem.

Broken promises

This is not the first time India has mapped out a large buildup of nuclear capacity.

In the past, too, variably citing military security, energy security and looming energy shortages, India’s nuclear establishment has pushed for rapid expansion of the country’s nuclear power capacity.

In 1954, Homi Bhabha, the founder of India’s nuclear programme, said India would have 8,000 MW of nuclear capacity by 1980. In 1960, the country was told it would have 43,500 MW by 2000. In 1984, a decade after the 1974 nuclear test, the country was promised 10,000 MW by 2000. The actual installed capacity was about 600 MW in 1980 and 2,720 MW in 2000.

In 1999, India’s nuclear establishment said the country would have 20,000 MW by 2020. In the early 2000s, the DAE (Department of Atomic Energy) upped that target to 275 GW by 2052 – and then to 470 GW after the US-India nuclear deal. India missed those targets as well. Today, the country’s installed nuclear capacity stands at 7,480 MW.

A clutch of factors are responsible for this under-delivery. Some are global. India’s nuclear tests left the country struggling to source technology and nuclear fuels. In more recent years, the Nuclear Liability Act has dissuaded foreign nuclear suppliers from entering the market.

Others are local. As physicist M.V. Ramana wrote in *The Power of Promise*, his 2012 book on India’s nuclear power aspirations, lack of scale has been a problem. “The problem was not that the industry lacked the technological base needed to carry out the

fabrication [of the reactors], but that the few orders that it received from the DAE did not make it economical for companies to do so.”

Land acquisition has been another bugbear. Design changes during construction are yet another. In all, as Ramana wrote, India’s nuclear plants have been plagued by cost- and time-overruns, and performed worse than envisaged.

This is where things get interesting.

Stepping around past glitches

To ensure the latest nuclear buildup doesn’t meet the fate of its predecessors, the BJP-led NDA government has made two changes.

First, Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL) has been told to jointly develop nuclear plants with firms like NTPC. The rationale? Not only can NTPC raise funds more easily than NPCIL, by pooling their strengths in project management and nuclear plant design, NPCIL and NTPC can set up nuclear plants faster. This point was made at the India Nuclear Business Platform conference last December.

“Earlier NPCIL was executing one or two projects at a time, but now with capacity getting ramped up substantially, the plan is that NPCIL along with NTPC will be running at least 10 nuclear projects at a time,” said R. Sharan, director (projects), NPCIL.

Second, seeking to obviate risks like time/cost overruns and the difficulty of land acquisition, the NDA is bullish on SMRs.

In tandem, it is also getting easier for India to source nuclear technology from outside. As nuclear energy tries to regain ground lost to renewables, a bevy of large reactor makers and SMR manufacturers are competing to crack markets like India. Anyone trying to understand the role of nuclear in India’s emerging energy mix has to engage with these shifts in policy.

Two questions, therefore, arise. Both the NPCIL-NTPC alliance and SMRs are untested experiments. Can they deliver? Further, the competitive landscape for nuclear power is changing. It no longer competes with coal and gas. Instead, billions are being spent to boost efficiency of existing renewable technologies like solar panels, wind turbines, rechargeable batteries and develop newer sources of renewable power like electrolyzers. Countries are also experimenting with technologies like pumped storage and grid management to create 100% renewable grids.

So can SMRs—and NTPC—carve out a perch for nuclear power in India?  
<https://thewire.in/energy/how-india-is-shifting-its-nuclear-power-plans-into-high-gear>

## 15. **White lies beneath** (*bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com*) Nov 14, 2023

Bangalore: The ‘poor quality’ of white-topped roads in the city stands exposed once again.

The city has witnessed tarred or blacktopped roads caving in due to hollow layers beneath.

However, it was believed that white-topped roads were stronger, thanks to the strong concrete reinforcement at the bottom. However, a white-topped road caved in recently.

After the road near Adugodi signal caved in, upon inspection the authorities were surprised to find the concrete road was hollow, to a depth of two feet. The road was laid a couple of years ago.

Ramesh Kumar, a resident of the area, said: “I was surprised by the poor quality of the white-topping. We used to think white-topped roads were of good quality and embedded with steel and concrete. However, when we looked at this stretch of the road, it was completely hollow and looked like there was a tunnel inside. Barricades were placed to prevent anyone from falling into it; now the portion has been fixed. However, this has once again raised questions about why crores of rupees are being spent to build poor quality roads.”

As the blacktopped roads transformed into craters, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) assured motorists that numerous major roads would be converted to either white-topped roads or cement roads. The promise was longer life and an end to pothole-ridden journeys.

Now, many of these concrete and white-topped roads are succumbing to potholes.

Not only are the white-topped roads problematic, but even the black-topped ones offer no respite. Earlier, a netizen posted an image of a road near SLS Gurukul, K Channasandra, depicting an individual using bare hands to remove the asphalt. This aimed to highlight the substandard quality of work, illustrating that no special equipment was needed, as even bare hands proved sufficient to expose the poorly laid asphalt.

Meanwhile, a committee set up to investigate the quality of projects undertaken within BBMP limits exposed the poor quality of works. After scrutinising works conducted in the city from 2019 to 2022, the committee identified 72 projects, including 15 road works, of substandard quality. The committee’s findings revealed that the expenditure of Rs 2,000 crore on these projects was unsatisfactory and marked by irregularities.

Earlier, professor CNR Rao Circle underpass road was concretised and the road had deteriorated. Then, the road near Shantinagar bus stand underwent concretisation with hopes that the ‘world-class’ road would last at least a decade if not more. However, the potholes on this stretch too raised concerns about the future of concrete and white-topped roads.

The BBMP had proposed white-topping of selected roads in Bengaluru city as part of the Special Infrastructure Projects Grants. It cost Rs 75 lakh to Rs 1 crore to asphalt a kilometre of bitumen road. However, the investment for a kilometre of white-topped/concrete road is Rs 10 crore.

BBMP claims the commonly found blacktopped roads in the city have an expected lifespan of five years. Arterial roads maintained by BBMP needed maintenance/relaying due to wear and tear from heavy traffic during peak hours. Drainage concerns during the rainy season affecting the pavement's structural life contributed to the decision to implement white-topping.

“BBMP claims that white-topped roads are expected to last up to 15-20 years. But, anything can happen in Namma Bengaluru. Many residents had reservations about white-topped roads.

They opposed road concretisation, fearing reduced rainwater absorption. However, observing the current condition of these concrete and white-topped roads, it's evident that the money has gone down the drain. When roads were being upgraded for white-topping, traffic was disrupted for over a fortnight. Despite all the trouble, if the road turns bad, then who will take responsibility?” asked Naveen Krishna, a techie.

Traffic expert MN Sreehari said: “Technically, cement and white-topped roads have a longer life than bitumen roads. White-topped roads will have relatively lesser thickness as they are laid above the blacktopped road.

It may not have been properly cured... Thickness issues at joints could be a contributing factor — MN Sreehari, traffic expert

However, cement roads have higher thickness. Joints are necessary in white-topped roads for expansion. Unlike cement roads, joints cannot be a weakness in white-topped roads.

However, in cement roads, corners and edges can be weak spots and wear out over time.

Multiple reasons could lead to the wearing out of a white-topped road. It may not have been properly cured, and there should be due diligence and proper execution of works at every stage from design to road laying, curing, and inspection. Thickness issues at joints could also be a contributing factor.”

<https://bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com/bangalore/cover-story/white-lies-beneath/articleshow/105191950.cms>