NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. Doordarshan wasted Rs 38.5 cr with unused transponder, blocked spectrum: CAG *(newslaundry.com)* 14 Feb, 2024

The auditor noted the channel's 'unfruitful expenditure' between May 2012 and April 2019.

Doordarshan wasted Rs 38.5 crore between May 2012 and April 2019 by hiring a transponder which was never used to air the channels the state broadcaster Prasar Bharati intended to, according to the Comptroller General of India's audit report.

Doordarshan's example was just one of the many cases of wasteful spending by autonomous institutes mentioned in the report released last week.

On page 45, the report states that Doordarshan had hired a new transponder on lease at the cost of Rs 5.5 crore per annum for telecasting free to air channels and upgraded its infrastructure facilities.

"However, even after lapse of more than six years after hiring the transponder and three years after upgradation, it could not utilise these facilities as no channel was being aired through this transponder," it noted.

The report noted that DD could not utilise the additional transponder resulting in blockage of spectrum which could have been allocated to some other user and generated revenue. "After the upgradation, the capacity of the existing five transponders was enhanced to 80 channels and the remaining 17 channels were to be telecast through the sixth transponder, which had the capacity of telecasting 24 channels."

Detailing the channel's plan, the report observed that DD had started its direct to home, or DTH service, DD Free Dish, in December 2004. "Initially, the service was started with a bouquet of 39 TV channels and 12 radio channels. Nineteen DD channels and 20 private channels were placed on DTH platform free of cost on first come-first-serve basis. By 2011, DD was airing 59 channels. Prasar Bharati, with an aim to enhance the capacity of DTH platform from existing 59 channels to 97 channels, sanctioned (October 2010) Rs 75.43 crore to Doordarshan under the Eleventh Plan Scheme-DTH of DD. Accordingly, DD was required to upgrade its DTH platform by procuring equipment , obtain licence from wireless planning and coordination, and hire a new sixth transponder from M/s Antrix Corporation Limited1 (ACL) in addition to its existing five transponders."

The report said that DD then approached ACL for a transponder in August 2010, which was allocated in May 2012.

"An Additional transponder which was to be allotted in 2013-14 by Department of Space was provided before time in 2012 and was accepted by Prasar Bharati without assessing the impact of early allocation of transponder which may result in change in planning and execution," it said. "Even after lapse of more than six years after hiring of the transponder and more than three years of the upgradation of infrastructural facilities, not a single channel was being telecasted through this sixth transponder. Therefore, the expenditure of Rs 38.5 crore incurred on payment of lease charges for the unutilised transponder was rendered unfruitful."

The report also said that DD could not anticipate non availability of MPEG-4 compliant DTH STBs in the market as no survey was conducted at the planning stage by DD. "DD acquired an additional transponder even though it did not have any plan in place to utilise its capabilities and incurred a recurring liability. Moreover, it converted one transponder from MPEG-4 to MPEG-2 so that channels could be viewed through MPEG-2 compliant STBs, which defeated the purpose of acquiring an additional transponder." https://www.newslaundry.com/2024/02/14/doordarshan-wasted-rs-385-cr-with-unused-transponder-blocked-spectrum-cag

STATES NEWS ITEMS

2. CAG says Kaleshwaram project cost likely to exceed ₹1.47 lakh crore as against ₹81,911 crore projected *(thehindu.com)* 15 Feb 2024

CAG terms the project ab-initio economically unviable

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has said that the project cost of Kaleshwaram project is likely to exceed ₹1.47 lakh crore as against the ₹81,911 crore projected to the Central Water Commission and the capital cost of irrigation works out to ₹6.42 lakh an acre.

The project cost was understated in the Detailed Project Report (DPR) due to preparation of estimates at old price levels and non-inclusion of provision for price escalation. This, coupled with subsequent changes made in the project works, resulted in the cost of works increasing from ₹63,352 crore to ₹1.02 lakh crore.

This was on account of likely cost of works relating to land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement, interest during construction and others which are yet to be entrusted, the CAG said in the performance audit report on Kaleshwaram project tabled in the Telangana Legislative Assembly on Thursday.

The CAG outlined the reasons that led to re-design of Pranahita Chevella Sujala Sravanthi (PCSS) into Dr. B.R. Ambedkar PCSS and the Kaleshwaram projects. During re-engineering, the Kaleshwaram and PCSS projects together were estimated to cost ₹85,651 crore as against the project cost of earlier PCSS project. While the combined project cost increased by 122% due to re-engineering, the targeted command area increased by only 52.22%.

Even after initial re-engineering, further additions and changes were made in the scope of the project works taking the present likely cost of the project to ₹1.47 lakh crore while there was no further increase in the envisaged benefits. The combined project cost of the two projects (PCSS and Kaleshwaram) stood at ₹1.51 lakh crore. This might increase further as the DPR of Pranahita project was not prepared (by March 2022) and its cost was yet to be worked out. Moreover, due to re-engineering of PCSS project and changes made in the works, certain portions of works already executed had become redundant resulting in a loss of ₹767.78 crore.

The CAG said the Irrigation department entrusted the preparation of DPR for Kaleshwaram project to Water and Power Consultants (WAPCOS) despite several deficiencies in the earlier works of the WAPCOS in the preparation of DPR for Pranahita Chevella project which led to its re-engineering.

"As was done in the case of the PCSS project, the department showed undue haste in award of works of Kaleshwaram project also. The department awarded 17 works costing ₹25,049.99 crore relating to the project even before approval of the DPR by CWC in 2018," the CAG said. After the approval of DPR, changes were made in the project works. In the DPR submitted to the CWC, water for the project was proposed to be lifted from Godavari at the rate of two TMC per day. "The pumping capacity was later increased to 3 TMC per day involving an additional ₹28,151 crore though not warranted," the report said.

The benefit cost ratio of the project was inflated by overstating the value of project benefits and understating the annual costs. The agriculture benefits were calculated on the assumption that one TMC of water would irrigate 17,688 acres of the command ayacut. Data of other projects in the State showed that one TMC of water could serve an average of only 10,000 acres.

"Thus, there is a significant risk that the 169 TMC of water allocated for irrigation under the project will not be sufficient for Kharif season and there is a high risk that no water will be left for irrigation in Rabi season," the CAG said. Even with the understated project cost of ₹81,911 crore, the benefit cost ratio worked out to 0.75 (as against 1.51 projected) indicating that the project was ab-initio economically unviable. "This means every rupee spent on the project would yield only 52 paise," the CAG said. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/telangana/cag-says-kaleshwaram-project-cost-likely-to-exceed-147-lakh-crore-as-against-81911-crore-projected/article67848290.ece

3. CAG flags soaring costs, planning flaws in Telangana's Kaleshwaram Project *(newindianexpress.com)* February 15, 2024

The CAG pointed out that the funds allocated to 2BHK housing scheme, launched in 2015, were diverted to other schemes.

HYDERABAD: The cost of the BRS government's prestigious Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS) is now likely to exceed Rs 1.47 lakh crore as against the previous estimated cost of Rs 81,000 crore, said the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

The 'Performance audit on Kaleshwaram Project' was tabled in the Telangana Legislative Assembly on Thursday.

The CAG found that the State government has not accorded administrative approval of the project as a whole and instead it has issued separate approvals i.e. as many as 73 administrative approvals aggregating to Rs 1.1 lakh crore.

There are no orders from the government about the funding pattern for the project.

Out of the total expenditure of Rs 86,788.06 crore incurred on the project (March 2022), an expenditure of Rs 55,807.86 crore (i.e., 64.3 per cent) was met from the off-budget borrowings (OBBs) raised by Kaleshwaram Irrigation Project Corporation Limited.

The CAG report said that the Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) of the project was inflated. Even with the estimated project cost of Rs 81 thousand crore, BCR works out to 0.75.

Considering the latest likely project cost (Rs 1,47,427.41 crore), the BCR worksout to 0.52.

This means that every rupee spent on the project would yield only 52 paise. It indicates that the project was, ab initio, economically unviable.

The peak energy demand, when all the pumps are operated, is more than the average daily energy availed in the entire state (2021-22).

The other findings in the CAG report on Kaleshwaram are:

* Providing power tolift irrigation schemes will pose a challenge to the State. The absence of a comprehensive plan duly spelling out the sources of funds fora project of this scale, which will have a long term impact on the finances of the state, is an indication of improper planning.

* Against targeted new CA of 18.26 lakh acres, the works entrusted so far (March2022) included development of distributary network for only 14.83 lakh acres.The actual command area created so far was 40,000 acres only (March 2022). The Department showed undue haste in award of works. Seventeen works costing Rs 25 thousand crore were awarded even before approval of the DPR.

* In the DPR, water for the project was proposed to be lifted from River Godavariat the rate of 2 TMC per day. The pumping capacity was later increased to 3TMC per day involving an additional cost of ₹28,151 crore. * Due to re-engineering of the PCSS Project and changes made in the project, certain portions of works already executed had become redundant, resulting in a loss of Rs 750 crore.

*Out of the 56 project works, only 12 works were completed, 40 works wereongoing while 4 works have not even commenced, as of March 2022. Lands required for the distributary network, etc., are yet to be fully identified.

* The possibility of undue benefit of at least Rs 2,600 crore to the contractors for supply and commissioning of pumps, motors etc., cannot be ruled out. Further,post tender inclusion of price adjustment clause resulted in an avoidable payment of Rs 1,000 crore.

BURDEN ON EXCHEQUER: The government's decision to waive off thewater charges for the welfare of the public, the subsidy amount would be paid to the concerned Department.

The reply confirms the audit observation that the revenue from drinking water supply from the project would be less than that projected in the DPRand when subsidy is paid to compensate this, there would be an additional cost to the public exchequer.

2BHK HOUSES: The CAG pointed out that the funds allocated to 2BHK housing scheme, launched in 2015, were diverted to other schemes.

"The financial management of the scheme had shortfalls. Loan amounts drawn were kept idle/parked for some time, funds were diverted to other schemes/institutions and Telangana State Housing Corporation Limited (TSHCL) had to repay other loans not related to the 2BHK Housing Scheme," the CAG said.

In Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Area, out of one lakh houses sanctioned in GHMC, construction of 48,178 (48 per cent) houses were completed and 45,735 houses were in progress while 6,087 houses were stopped/yet to be taken up.

Construction of houses by the end of six years (2020-21) was only 48,178 which was less than 50 per cent of the envisaged target of one lakh. Ninety-six per cent of the completed houses (46,442) remained unoccupied for a period ranging from less than 6 to more than 36 months, as the state government failed to identify beneficiaries for the scheme rendering the expenditure of Rs 3,983.68 crore incurred on these houses so far wasteful. Thus, the objective of providing two-bedroom houses to the poor as envisaged could not be achieved, even after four years.

Sheep rearing: The Audit found serious irregularities including suspected fraud/doubtful transactions involving financial implications of ₹253.93 crore. These included paymentsmade on manipulated transport invoices (₹68.23 crores) for transportation of sheep and invoices containing fake/passenger/non-goods vehicles (₹27.20 crore); cases where more than two sheep units were shown as transported in small goods vehicles and tractors(₹17.06 crore) and more than six sheep units were shown as transported in heavy goods vehicles (₹46.03 crores); assigning of duplicate ear tags to multiple sheep (₹92.69 crores),etc. https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/telangana/2024/Feb/15/cag-flags-soaring-costs-planning-flaws-in-telanganas-kaleshwaram-project

4. CAG says Kaleshwaram project will require ₹10,374 crore towards energy charges every year *(thehindu.com)* February 15, 2024

The project will require 8,459 MW, 46.82% of installed capacity after completion, says CAG

The much-publicised Kaleshwaram project will require 8,459.1 MW power working out to 46.82% of the total installed capacity available in Telangana.

The project would require a total of 14,344 million units of energy every year after completion. The peak energy demand when all the pumps are likely to be operated simultaneously during the pumping season works out to 203.02 MU per day. “This is more than the daily average energy availed in the entire State in 2021-22,” the Comptroller and Auditor General of India said.

The annual recurring cost on electricity charges was understated by adopting a lower rate of ₹3 a unit whereas the prevailing tariff for lift irrigation schemes was ₹6.4 a unit. As the State was presently purchasing/importing nearly 60% of energy from external sources, providing power to various lift irrigation projects, including Kaleshwaram, would be a challenge to the State, the CAG said in the performance audit report of Kaleshwaram project tabled in the Telangana Legislative Assembly on Thursday.

The CAG said the project would require ₹10,374 crore towards energy charges every year. In addition, there would also be annual operation and maintenance cost of ₹272.7 crore. Thus, the commitment on the annual operational costs of the project would be ₹10,647 crore per year working out to ₹46,364 an acre.

In addition, there would be depreciation on project works which worked out to ₹2,760 crore a year. The report said the project cost was estimated at Rs. 81,911 crore but the State Government had not accorded administrative approval for the project as a whole. Instead, the Government had been issuing separate approvals for individual works on piece meal manner.

“As of March 2022, as many as 73 administrative approvals aggregating to ₹1.1 lakh crore were given. There were no orders from the Government about the funding pattern for the project,” the report said. Out of the total expenditure ₹86,788 crore incurred on the project as of March 2022, an expenditure of ₹55,807 crore (64.3%) was met from the off budget borrowings raised by the KIPCL. Out of the total expenditure incurred after re-engineering, as high as 72.82% was met from off budget borrowings and only 27.18% was met through budgetary allocations.

The CAG said the DPR however stated that there were no proposals for water levy at present and hence, the revenue from water charges could be taken as nil. The revenues from supply of industrial drinking water and fisheries would also be negligible and thus the entire operational cost of the project should be borne by the Government/Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Corporation Limited.

The KIPCL did not had any sources of revenue and the burden of repayment of the loan and interest was likely to fall on the State budget. The KIPCL had been paying interest of loans and principal from the funds released by the Government in the form of loans/equity. Loans amounting to ₹1,690 crore were diverted/transferred to Government leading to additional interest burden of ₹587.65 crore.

The CAG referred to Komaravelli Mallanna Sagar as the largest reservoir in the project constructed with a huge capacity of 50 tmcft. A preliminary study by the National Geophysical Research Institute revealed that there was a deep seated vertical fault in the proposed location of the reservoir. “However, the department went ahead and constructed the reservoir with a total expenditure of Rs. 6,126.8 crore without conducting detailed seismic studies.

On the contract management, the CAG said the department provided a total amount of ₹17,653 crore towards the cost of pumps, motors and auxiliary equipment in the estimates of these works without assessing the market rates. “Audit verified the actual cost at which the contractors procured the equipment in four works and found that amounts (₹ 7,212 crore) provided for this equipment in the estimates was higher by

₹5,525.75 crore than their actual cost (₹1,686.59 crore). https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/telangana/cag-says-kaleshwaram-project-will-require-10374-crore-towards-energy-charges-every-year/article67848389.ece

5. Kaleshwaram cost to exceed Rs 1.4 lakh cr, likely corruption of Rs 2600 cr: CAG *(thenewsminute.com)* 15 Feb 2024

The CAG report on Kaleshwaram stated that the possibility of undue benefit of at least ₹2,684.73 crore to contractors working on the project cannot be ruled out.

A new report released by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) on Friday, February 15, has revealed that the cost of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project is likely to exceed Rs 1.4 lakh crore (1,47,427.41) as against Rs 81,911 crores, the cost projected to the Central Water Commission (CWC). The Kaleshwaram project, a flagship project of the previous Telangana government led by the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), has been mired in controversy and has been credited as a major reason for the BRS' loss in the state Assembly elections held in November 2023.

The CAG report also stated that out of the total expenditure of ₹86,788.06 crore incurred on the project as on March 2022, 64.3%, ie ₹55,807.86 crore was met from the off-budget borrowings raised by the Kaleshwaram Irrigation Project Corporation Limited (KIPCL). KIPCL is a special purpose vehicle (SPV) set up by the BRS government to handle finances related to Kaleshwaram.

"The possibility of undue benefit of at least ₹2,684.73 crore to the contractors for supply and commissioning of pumps, motors etc., cannot be ruled out," the report stated.

The Kaleshwaram project became a major talking point after six piers of the Medigadda (Lakshmi) barrage, one of the three main barrages of KLIP, sank on October 28, 2023. While BRS has defended the now six-year-old project, the Opposition, the Congress and the BJP, flayed the government and said the sinking of piers is proof of shoddy management. The Telangana Congress in its election manifesto also promised a judicial inquiry into alleged irregularities and corruption surrounding the construction of the project and since coming to power has been heavily critical of it.

In an earlier CAG report published in March 2021, it was noted that out of the total loans guaranteed by the then state government, 65% pertained to two SPVs: the Telangana Drinking Water Supply Corporation for implementation of Mission Bhagiratha and the KIPCL for implementation of Kaleshwaram Project. The 2021 report also noted that many of the institutions did not have revenue resources to repay the loans provided by the government. This because projects including the Kaleshwaram one would hardly generate any revenue as water for irrigation was provided at nominal rates.

The current report also says that the Telangana government has not accorded administrative approval of the project as a whole and instead it issued 73 separate approvals, the amount for which aggregates to ₹1,10,248.48 crore. "There are no

orders from the Government about the funding pattern for the project," the report noted further adding that the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) of the project was inflated.

".......every rupee spent on the project would yield only 52 paise. It clearly indicates that the project was, ab-initio, economically unviable," the report read, adding that Kaleshwaram was "improperly planned". The CAG further noted that ₹25,049.99 crore were awarded for 17 works even before approval of the Detailed Project Report (DPR). "Out of the 56 project works, only 12 works were completed, 40 works were ongoing while 4 works have not even commenced, as of March 2022," it noted.

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has stated that it was 'utterly negligent' of the previous government for spending over Rs 1 lakh crore without a Detailed Project Report (DPR) in place, adding that a Vigilance report on Medigadda will be tabled in the Assembly. https://www.thenewsminute.com/news/supreme-court-strikes-down-electoral-bond-scheme-calls-it-unconstitutional

6. CAG Report Exposed The Facts On The Kaleshwaram Project *(indtoday.com)* Feb 15, 2024

The Telangana government has tabled the Controller and Auditor General (CAG) Report in the Assembly. CAG has prepared a report on the Kaleswaram project. The CAG said in its report that the estimated cost has been increased to Rs. 1,06,000 crores while Rs. 63,352 crores were shown in the Detailed Project Report (DPR)

Till the current construction, there is a commitment of 14 lakh acres. Rs. 1,47,427 crores will be spent till the completion of this project. It has been revealed that the annual costs of the project are low. According to the CAG report, an estimated income of Rs. 1019 crores was obtained from the sale of Kaleshwaram water. Huge loans were taken for the project.

The agreement has been made to raise Rs. 87 thousand crores from 15 banks. The government is more dependent on non-budgetary loans. It is said that it has delayed paying the loans. It has been revealed in the report that Rs. 700 crore to Rs. 14,500 crore will be spent every year for the maintenance of the project. The CAG report said that Kaleshwaram will be completed in 2036 if the debt continues.

The CAG report on the Panchayat Raj department is that the "Grants have been diverted. Funds were misappropriated. dues could not be collected. Paid high bills for some work. The records were not submitted on time. "CAG said in the report. https://indtoday.com/cag-report-exposed-the-facts-on-the-kaleshwaram-project/

7. Telangana govt. tables CAG report on Kaleshwaram project *(thehansindia.com)* 15 Feb 2024

The CAG report tabled by the Telangana government in the assembly highlighted several key points. Firstly, it mentioned that no proper study was conducted on the Kaleswaram project and stated that the project has not address the flood problem in Maharashtra.

Furthermore, the report revealed that the Telangana government had redesigned the Pranahita-Chevella project, originally undertaken in the united state, into two separate projects: Kaleshwaram and Pranahita and opined that this redesign led to a significant increase in the estimated cost, from 35,000 crores to 85,650 crores.

However, despite the cost of the projects increasing by 122 percent, the allocation of funds only increased by 52 percent, according to the CAG. The report also highlighted that additional changes were made to the project even after re-engineering, resulting in the cost of Kaleswaram rising to 47,427 crores, including interest.

The CAG further noted that due to the changes in the project works, some of the works have become futile, resulting in a loss of Rs. 767 crores.

https://www.thehansindia.com/telangana/telangana-govt-tables-cag-report-on-kaleshwaram-project-858690

8. Kerala missed its fiscal deficit target in 2021-22 financial year: CAG report *(aninews.in, devdiscourse.com)* Feb 15, 2024

Kerala did not achieve its fiscal deficit target fixed in its Medium Term Fiscal Plan or the Kerala Fiscal Responsibility Act during 2021-22, an audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (C&AG) revealed on Thursday.

The fiscal deficit to state GDP ratio, which was to be anchored at 4 per cent as per the Kerala Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2022, came in at 5.10 per cent during 2021-22.

The difference between total revenue and total expenditure of the government is termed as fiscal deficit.It is an indication of the total borrowings that may be needed by the government.

The target for revenue deficit was zero. However, it increased by 14.36 per cent in 2021-22 as compared to 2020-21 and stood at 29,539.27 crore, the audit report put out by principal accountant general (audit) said.

The overall debt as a percentage of GSDP increased from 37.85 per cent in 2020-2021 to 38.01 per cent in2021-22.

Moving on to revenue resources, the revenue receipts of the State increased from 83,020.14 crore in 2017-18 to 116,640.24 crore in 2021-22, recording a growth of 40.50 per cent during the last five years.

The State's own tax revenue, increased from 46,459.61 crore in 2017-18 to 58,340.52 crore in 2021-22.

However, as a percentage of revenue receipts, State's own tax revenue decreased from 55.96 per cent in 2017-18 to 50.02 per cent 2021-22, indicating poor collection of tax revenue during the pandemic period.

Revenue Expenditure of the State increased from 99,948.35 crore in 2017-18 to 1,46,179.51 crore in 2021-22 recording a growth of 46.26 per cent during the five-year period.

Revenue expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure ranged between 88.88 and 91.88 per cent during the period showing predominance of revenue expenditure in total expenditure.

Interest payments consumed 19.98 per cent of revenue receipts during 2021-22 and is a matter of concern for the State Government, the audit report noted. https://www.aninews.in/news/business/business/kerala-missed-its-fiscal-deficit-target-in-2021-22-financial-year-cag-report20240215151233/

9. CAG slams Kerala govt, says borrowing through KIIFB has increased state's liability *(newsable.asianetnews.com)* Feb 15, 2024

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report stated that the state's borrowing through KIIFB has increased the liability of the Kerala government.

Thiruvananthapuram: A report tabled by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in the Assembly has criticised the state-owned Kerala Industrial Infrastructure Fund Board (KIIFB). The report stated that the state's borrowing through KIIFB has increased the liability of the government. It rejected the state's claim that KIIFB loan is not a liability to the government.

The CAG report mentioned about KIIFB borrowings for the financial year 2021-22.

The CAG report stated that Rs 11206.49 crore arrears of the pension company is also an additional liability of the government. KIIFB has no revenue of its own and it will not be able to get away with paying off the debt from the revenues through the budget. Government responsibilities were diminished by unreported extra-budgetary borrowing, says the report. The CAG report also said that the financial resources were made beyond the control of the legislature.

The state's debt is increasing, according to the CAG report. When the revenue income increased by 19.49 per cent, the revenue expenditure also increased. There is criticism in the report that 19.98 percent of the revenue income is used to pay interest.

The CAG report states that there were significant anomalies in the distribution of land as well. The undeserving received the land. There was no charge for the market price. The allotted land was even used for commercial purposes. The government has suffered significant financial losses as a result of late lease and rent extensions. To stop the unauthorised selling of leasehold land, nothing was done. There was no implementation of the idea to make lease registration mandatory. The CAG report further claims that a loss of Rs 29 crore resulted from the waiver of rent for two clubs in the capital.
https://newsable.asianetnews.com/kerala-news/cag-slams-kerala-govt-says-borrowing-through-kiifb-has-increased-state-s-liability-anr-s8vzaj

10. CAG report cites unfit vehicles as cause of accidents in Kerala *(onmanorama.com)* Feb 14, 2024

Thiruvananthapuram: The key trigger for the increasing number of road accidents in Kerala is the presence of vehicles which are not fit enough to ply on roads, reads a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General in the state.

As per the report, vehicles that were unfit to ply on roads were involved in 3,097 accidents that took place in the last six years. Out of this, transport vehicles that did not have a fitness certificate were found in 1089 cases while private vehicles whose registration was not renewed were involved in 2008 cases.

The study also revealed that 229 vehicles got renewed fitness certificates days after the accidents.

Section 39 of the Motor Vehicles Act, of 1988 has banned vehicles without registration from plying on the roads.

Only vehicles with fitness certificates are given registration. New vehicles should obtain a fitness certificate once every two years and vehicles that are more than eight years old should get the same every year, as per norms.

The registration period for private vehicles is 15 years. After that, it should be renewed every five years. Every year, 40,000 new vehicles hit the roads in Kerala. Statistics obtained from the Vahan website (https://vahan.parivahan.gov.in/vahan/vahan/ui/login/login.xhtml) showed that 1.72 crore vehicles are registered in Kerala. https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2024/02/14/road-accidents-in-kerala-unfit-vehicle-involved-says-cag-report.html

11. Delhi Jal Board audit: CAG report 'flags irregularities' in advertising, accounts *(indianexpress.com)* 15 Feb 2024

The report, which has been shared with the Delhi government, but is yet to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly, is learnt to have pointed out instances of the utility understating its expenditure, hence losses.

Alleged discrepancies and irregularities in the accounts of the Delhi Jal Board in 2017-18 have been flagged in the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) report, government sources told The Indian Express.

The report, which has been shared with the Delhi government, but is yet to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly, is learnt to have pointed out instances of the utility understating its expenditure, hence losses.

One instance of this was the discrepancy noticed between the data given by the revenue section, and the accounts in the outstanding dues against bulk and retail water. The report, it is learnt, states that while the revenue section listed the dues as around Rs

9,000 crore, this figure was around Rs 2,800 crore in accounts — a gap of over Rs 6,000 crore.

The Delhi government did not comment on the matter. After its finance department had raised concerns about mismanagement of funds in the water utility, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had, in December last year, ordered a CAG audit for the last 15 years.

The request, however, was turned down by the L-G, VK Saxena, who said that the CAG report for 2017-18 should first be tabled in the assembly.

Officials said that the report also talks about the current accounts, and mentions that there was a difference of over Rs 1,000 crore between the balance as per the bank records and the financial statement. "Both these figures are in overdraft. The report states that this discrepancy could be pointing to fraud or misappropriation of funds," the official added.

Delhi's flagship scheme of providing free water up to 20 kilolitres to each household per month also finds mention in the report, sources said.

"While DJB received compensation grants of around Rs 425 crore, for subsidy, records state that an amount to Rs 400 crore was provided but this does not reflect in the Income and Expenditure Account. The reasons for this have also not been disclosed," said an official.

Another alleged irregularity in accounts flagged in the report, it is learnt, is regarding expenditure on advertisements.

"While the expenditure under this head is stated to be around Rs 12 crore, the report states that files or records related to this expenditure were available only for around Rs 3 crore. Even out of this amount, around half was for between 2015 and 2016," the official stated.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government had said in December that it would take action against any erring officers if irregularities are proved. Water Minister Atishi had said that as allegations of irregularities were made, an audit since 2008 was being sought by the Chief Minister.

"As the opposition is raising some allegations of financial irregularities and mismanagement in the DJB, the CM has ordered a CAG audit of the Board's accounts from 2008 till date to bring out the truth… The Delhi government will take strict action against all those involved if any discrepancy comes out… The finance department has raised concerns regarding financial mismanagement but has not pointed out specific instances or errant officials. This makes the audit essential," she had said at a press conference. https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/irregularities-in-djb-flagged-in-cag-report-9162258/

12. दिल्ली जल बोर्ड ऑडिट: पैसे का दुरुपयोग, खातों मे गड़बड़ी; कैग को क्या-क्या मिला *(livehindustan.com)* 15 Feb 2024

नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) की रिपोर्ट 2017-18 में दिल्ली जल बोर्ड के खातों में कथित अनियमितताओं को उजागर किया गया है। इस रिपोर्ट को दिल्ली सरकार के साथ शेयर किया गया है, लेकिन अभी तक विधान सभा में पेश नहीं किया। माना जा रहा है कि इसमें बोर्ड ने अपने खर्च को कम करके दिखाया है, जिससे काफी नुकसान हुआ है।

इसे राजस्व सेक्शन द्वारा दिए गए आंकड़ों एवं थोक और खुदरा पानी के बकाया के खातों में विसंगति से समझा जा सकता है। ऐसा पता चला है कि रिपोर्ट में जहां राजस्व सेक्सन ने बकाए को लगभग 9,000 करोड़ रुपये के रूप में लिस्ट किया है, वहीं बोर्ड के खातों में यह आंकड़ा लगभग 2,800 करोड़ रुपये है- यानी इसमें 6,000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक का अंतर है।

इंडियन एक्सप्रेस की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, दिल्ली सरकार ने इस मामले पर कोई टिप्पणी नहीं की है। वित्त विभाग द्वारा जल उपयोगिता में पैसे के मिसमैनेजमेंट को लेकर चिंता जताए जानेके बाद, मुख्यमंत्री अरविंद केजरीवाल ने पिछले साल दिसंबर में पिछले 15 सालों के कैग ऑडिट का आदेश दिया था। हालांकि, उनके अनुरोध को एलजी वीके सक्सेना ने खारिज कर दिया, जिन्होंने कहा कि 2017-18 की रिपोर्ट को पहले विधानसभा में पेश किया जाना चाहिए।

अधिकारियों ने कहा कि रिपोर्ट में करेंट (चालू) खातों के बारे में भी बात की गई हैऔर उल्लेख किया है कि बैंक रिकॉर्ड और वित्तीय विवरण के अनुसार शेष राशि के बीच 1,000 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक का अंतर है। अधिकारी ने कहा, 'ये दोनों आंकड़े ओवरड्राफ्ट में हैं। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि यह विसंगति धोखाधड़ी या धन के दुरुपयोग की ओर इशारा करती है।' सूत्रों ने कहा कि हर महीने हर घर को 20 किलो लीटर तक मुफ्त पानी उपलब्ध कराने की दिल्ली की प्रमुख योजना का भी रिपोर्ट मेंजिक्र किया गया है।

एक अधिकारी ने कहा, 'डीजेबी को जहां सब्सिडी के तौर पर लगभग 425 करोड़ रुपये का मुआवजा अनुदान प्राप्त हुआ। वहीं रिकॉर्ड बताते हैं कि 400 करोड़ रुपये की राशि दी गई थी। लेकिन यह आय और व्यय खाते में नहीं दिखती। इसके कारणों का खुलासा नहीं किया गया है।' सूत्रों से पता चला है कि रिपोर्ट में एक और कथित अनियमितता विज्ञापनों पर हुए खर्च को लेकर बताई गई है।
https://www.livehindustan.com/ncr/story-delhi-jal-board-cag-report-found-irregularities-in-accounts-advertising-lg-9327673.html

13. GoN misused Rs 19.56 cr worth subsidised kerosene oil: NPRAAF alleges *(nagalandpage.com)* 14 Feb 2024

The Nagaland Public Rights Awareness and Action Forum (NPRAAF) has alleged that the Nagaland Government misused Rs 19.56 crore worth subsidised kerosene oil violating Central Government's directives by diverting Superior Kerosene Oil (SKO) to the open market instead of distributing it to the targeted beneficiaries under the Public Distribution System (PDS).

Citing the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2022, NPRAAF said the State Government diverted subsidised SKO valued at Rs 19.56 crore or 6113.19 kilo litres (KL) to the open market.

"This misconduct was detected after a thorough examination of both Central and State data", it said citing the CAG Report.

According to NPRAAF, the distribution of SKO under the PDS is regulated by the Union Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoPNG), which allocates SKO to States and Union Territories (UTs) quarterly. It is mandatory for States to lift their entire allocation within the given quarter, with no carry-forward permitted except in cases of emergencies like natural disasters.

"The CAG's investigation of records from the Food and Civil supplies

(F&CS) Directorate, Dimapur, in August 2021 revealed that MoPNG had allocated 17,892 KL of SKO to the State during 2019-21. However, the Department reported lifting only 13,752 KL of SKO from IOCL during the same period", it said.

"Upon cross-checking the Department's lifting data with data from the Indian Petroleum & Natural Gas Statistics (2019-21) as well as IOCL's data in July 2022, it was discovered that the State Government had actually lifted 17,367 KL (97.07%) of SKO, resulting in a shortfall of 525 KL during 2019-21. The Department was found to have understated the SKO lifted from IOCL by 3615 KL (17,367 KL – 13,752 KL)", NPRAAF said, adding further investigation revealed that the State Government had allocated 4,974 KL of SKO to 51 individuals/distributors, with no available records for the remaining quantity (1139.19 KL).

"When these discrepancies were brought to light, the Government acknowledged in September 2022 that it had lifted 17,367 KL of SKO, and out of the 12,276 KL allotted for ration cardholders, 11,253.81 KL was lifted, with utilisation certificates furnished for 11,233.79 KL. It was also revealed that 4,974 KL was allocated to individuals", it alleged.

Taking strong view of the matter, the NPRAAF demanded the State Government to initiate departmental inquiry and fix responsibility against officials responsibly at the earliest. It warned to initiate its own course of action to give a logical conclusion to the issue if the State Government turns a blind eye considering it as normal development.
https://nagalandpage.com/gon-misused-rs-19-56-cr-worth-subsidised-kerosene-oil-npraaf-alleges/

14. NPRAAF Demands Accountability for Diversion of Superior Kerosene Oil in Nagaland's PDS *(bnnbreaking.com)* 14 Feb 2024

The Nagaland Public Rights Awareness and Action Forum (NPRAAF) has demanded an inquiry into the diversion of Superior Kerosene Oil (SKO) in the Public Distribution System (PDS), amounting to INR 19.56 crore. The forum seeks accountability and warns of further action if the issue is ignored.

Nagaland Public Rights Awareness and Action Forum (NPRAAF) sounds the alarm on rampant corruption, demanding accountability for diversion of Superior Kerosene Oil (SKO) in the Public Distribution System (PDS).

Raising the Red Flag
In a bold move, the Nagaland Public Rights Awareness and Action Forum (NPRAAF) has called upon the Nagaland State Government to investigate alleged corruption within the Public Distribution System (PDS), specifically regarding the diversion of Superior Kerosene Oil (SKO) intended for its beneficiaries. The forum's demand follows a damning report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), which reveals the diversion of INR 19.56 crore worth of SKO to the open market.

A Trail of Diversion
According to the CAG's report on 'Social, Economic, General, and Revenue Sectors' for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, the State Government violated the Centre's directives by diverting 6113.19 kilo liters (KL) of subsidized SKO meant for distribution to targeted PDS beneficiaries to the open market. This blatant disregard for the intended use of the SKO has left many questioning the motives behind such actions and the implications for those in need.

Demand for Accountability
The NPRAAF has taken a strong stance, demanding a departmental inquiry to hold officials accountable for the diversion. In their call to action, they have warned of taking their own course if the State Government ignores the issue. The forum's determination to seek justice and protect the rights of PDS beneficiaries has sparked a wave of support from the public, who are eager to see those responsible held accountable for their actions.

As the Nagaland Public Rights Awareness and Action Forum continues its fight against corruption, the Nagaland State Government faces a critical decision. Will they address the diversion of Superior Kerosene Oil and take action against those responsible, or will they allow this injustice to continue? The people of Nagaland eagerly await their response.

Keywords: Nagaland Public Rights Awareness and Action Forum (NPRAAF), Superior Kerosene Oil (SKO), Public Distribution System (PDS), Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), diversion, corruption, accountability. https://bnnbreaking.com/politics/npraaf-demands-accountability-for-diversion-of-superior-kerosene-oil-in-nagalands-pds

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

15. Supreme Court strikes down electoral bonds scheme: ‘unconstitutional’, ‘arbitrary and violative of Article 14’ *(indianexpress.com)* FEBRUARY 15, 2024

The Supreme Court on Thursday held the changes made in the law to introduce the electoral bonds scheme as unconstitutional, in a unanimous verdict on a batch of pleas challenging the legal validity of the Centre’s scheme which allowed for anonymous funding to political parties.

A five-judge Constitution Bench presided by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud also directed that “the issuing bank shall herewith stop the issuance of electoral bonds” and asked the State Bank of India (SBI) to "submit details of the electoral bonds purchased since the interim order of the court dated April 12, 2019, till date to the Election Commission of India (ECI)".

The bench said, "Section 29(c)(1) of the Representation of People Act, 1951, as amended by Section 137 of the Finance Act 2017, Section 182(3) of the Companies Act as amended by Section 154 of the Finance Act, 2017, and Section 13A(b) as amended by the Finance Act of 2017 are violative of Article 19(1)(a) and hence unconstitutional".

The bench, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B R Gavai, J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said, "The deletion of the proviso to Section 182(1) of the Companies Act, permitting unlimited corporate funding to political parties is arbitrary and violative of Article 14".

'Company has a much graver influence'

Giving reasons, it said that the "ability of a company to influence the election process through political contribution is much higher when compared to that of an individual".

"A company has a much graver influence on the political process, both in terms of the quantum of money contributed to political parties and the purpose of making such contributions. Contributions made by individuals have a degree of support or affiliation to a political association. However, contributions made by companies are purely business transactions made with the intent of securing benefits in return. The amendment to Section 182 is manifestly arbitrary for treating political contributions by companies and individuals alike".

The apex court said, "Companies before the amendment to Section 182 could only contribute a certain percentage of the net aggregate profits. The provision classified between loss-making companies and profit-making companies for the purpose of political contribution and for good reason.. the underlying principle of this distinction was that it is more plausible that law-making companies will contribute to political parties with a quid pro and not for the purpose of income tax benefits".

"The provision as amended by the Finance Act of 2017 does not recognise that the harm of contributions by loss-making companies in the form of quid pro quo is much higher. Thus the amendment…is manifestly arbitrary for not making a distinction between profit-making and loss-making companies for the purposes of political contribution".

The court pointed out, "The purpose of Section 182 is to curb corruption and electoral financing. For instance, the purpose of banning a government company from contributing is to prevent such companies from entering the political fray by making contributions to political parties. Amendment to Section 182 by permitting unlimited corporate contributions authorises unrestrained influence of companies in the electoral process. This is violative of the principle of free and fair elections and political equality captured in the value of one person, one vote."

Details of electoral bonds

The court also directed SBI to submit the details of political parties which have received contributions through election bonds since the interim order dated April 12, 2019, to date to the Election Commission. The details should include the date of purchase of each electoral bond, the name of the purchaser of the bond, and the denomination of the electoral bond purchased, said the court.

SBI must disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties which shall include the date of engagement and the denomination of the electoral bonds", the court said. The court added, "SBI shall submit the above information to the ECI within three weeks from the date of this judgement that is by March 6, 2024".

The court asked ECI to publish the information shared by the SBI on its official website within one week of receiving the information, that is by March 13, 2024. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/supreme-court-electoral-bonds-9162593/

16. India needs Rs 30-lakh-cr investment to meet 2030 green power target *(moneycontrol.com)* FEBRUARY 15, 2024

India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), or its self-defined climate pledges under the Paris Agreement, for 2030 would require Rs 30 lakh crore of investments, said Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA) Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) Pradip Kumar.

The investment is required in manufacturing and capacity build-up for solar power, electrolysers, wind and battery space, power transmission, green hydrogen, hydro power and waste-to-energy sectors, he said at an international webinar organised by the World Bank on February 15.

According to India's NDC goals, the country pledges to reduce emissions intensity of its GDP by 45 percent by 2030, from 2005 level and achieve about 50 percent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030.

Kumar also pointed out that the rooftop solar scheme launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi would elevate the rooftop solar sector to unprecedented heights in the country. "This visionary project, backed by an investment exceeding Rs 75,000 crore, aims to solarise one crore households by providing up to 300 units of free electricity every month," he said.

"The scheme will not only provide substantial benefits, but also foster awareness about renewable energy among the people at large, contributing to India's ambitious goal of achieving Net-Zero emissions by 2070 and Energy Independence by 2047," he added.

The IREDA head said India's energy demand would increase significantly due to the ambitious plans of the government for the country and maximum energy demand would be met through renewable sources.

"Approximately 90 percent of this demand is expected to be met through renewable sources. Until sufficient energy storage for renewable energy is achieved, thermal energy will also be developed alongside," Kumar said.

He hailed the government for taking a host of initiatives in the renewable space that have helped India become a role model for renewable energy development worldwide.
https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/india-needs-rs-30-lakh-cr-investment-to-meet-2030-green-power-target-12278191.html

17. Pandemic speed bump still haunts infra projects even as gears shift *(businessinsider.in)* 15 Feb 2024

-As many as 848 of India's top 1,820 infrastructure projects or 46.6% are facing delays, says government data.

-On an average, the overall delay across these projects is 36.59 months, says IPDM data.

-Road and transport sector has the highest share of delayed projects, with railways coming in second.

As many as 848 of India's top 1,820 infrastructure projects are facing delays, says data by Infrastructure and Project Monitoring Division (IPMD) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Even as 46.6% of infra projects are facing delays as of January 2024, there has been a significant improvement since the beginning of FY24. As of March 2023, the ratio of delayed projects to total projects was much higher at 56.7%.

While the data shows that more projects are progressing at a faster rate now than they did last year, there is much to catch up to. Before the pandemic, the ratio of delayed projects was at 32.6%.

"The above analysis shows that while time delays in infrastructure projects have declined relative to March 2023, it still remains high when compared with the pre-pandemic period. This suggests that some of the effects of the pandemic still linger on," said Aditi Gupta, economist at Bank of Baroda (BoB).

On the bright side, 618 projects are on schedule and 56 projects are ahead of schedule, says BoB data. The IPMD monitors the progress of high value infrastructure projects that cost over ₹150 crore.

In the slow lane: Road sector has most delays

Road transport and highways sector has the highest share in the total number of delayed projects. Half of the delayed projects are in the transport sector, but it also has a high number of projects, at 1,021.

Railways comes a distant second with 12.4% share in delayed projects, but the extent of their delays range from 3 months going as high as 255 months. In the case of road projects, the range of delays is anywhere between 1 month and 131 months.

As many as 32% of projects are showing delays between 25-60 months. A total of 123 projects are experiencing a delay of more than 60 months. The overall delay in the 848 projects is 36.59 months on an average.

SECTOR	TOTAL PROJECTS UNDER MONITORING	DELAYED PROJECTS AS % OF TOTAL DELAYED PROJECTS	RANGE OF TIME OVERRUNS (IN MONTHS)
Road transport and highways	1,021	53.1%	1-131
Railways	250	12.4	3-255
Petroleum	157	10.7	1-143
Coal	124	5.7	12-156
Power	98	7%	1-193
Others	170	11.2%	-

Source: Infrastructure and Project Monitoring Division, MOSPI, Bank of Baroda Research

A significant number of projects are also showing cost overruns. The cost of the 1,820 projects under monitoring stands at ₹30.7 lakh crore. That's 18.7% above the original cost which was ₹25.9 lakh crore.

"Interestingly, there has been a significant reduction in cost overruns of infrastructure projects since March 2023, when the cost overrun stood at 22%. Even when compared with the pre-pandemic period (19.4% in January 2020), the cost overrun is lower," said Bank of Baroda.

The period just after the pandemic saw the highest cost overrun. The phase of reopening along with the Russia-Ukraine war led to a sharp increase in input prices in this period. "With a correction in the global commodity prices, the cost overrun is also trending lower," said Gupta.

The Indian government has increased its capital expenditure outlay by 11.1% in the 2024 Interim Budget. A year before, it had increased its capex expenditure outlay by 37.4 % in 2023-24 to ₹10 lakh crore. https://www.businessinsider.in/business/news/pandemic-speed-bump-still-haunts-infra-projects-even-as-gears-shift/articleshow/107713024.cms

18. Indian Navy & Coast Guard to Receive 463 Advanced Remote-Controlled Guns worth Rs 1,752 Cr *(republicworld.com)* February 14, 2024

The Ministry of Defence signed a contract worth Rs. 1752.13 crores on Wednesday with Advanced Weapon Equipment India (AWEIL) for producing and supplying 463 guns to the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard, according to reports.

This acquisition of 12.7 mm Stabilised Remote Control Guns (SRCG) will have over 85 percent of parts made in India, as per the MoD.

"The SRCG will enhance the capability of the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard to accurately engage small targets that pose a threat to ships in an asymmetric environment, both by day and night," the MoD's official statement read.

Additionally, it will provide opportunities to over 125 Indian vendors and government defence companies for the next 5 years, aligning with the government's vision of Aatmanirbharta in Defence. https://www.republicworld.com/defence/defence-technology/indian-navy-coast-guard-to-receive-463-advanced-remote-controlled-guns-worth-rs-1752-cr/

19. AI: Maximising benefits, minimising risks *(thehindubusinessline.com)* 14 Feb 2024

India must carefully navigate its AI future with trust

From farmlands to corporate offices to hospitals and beyond, AI is taking India by storm. In Telangana, for example, over 7,000 chilli farmers are using customised AI-based weather and crop advisories to optimise their agricultural yield. Even the quality of their produce is tested and certified through AI algorithms, to help them price their products better.

Meanwhile, in fields like education and medicine, AI has the potential to personalise the care and attention given to each individual. Imagine the implications of that in a country as large as India with people with different biochemistries, diets, and medical needs, as well as different academic interests and learning speeds.

Till now, a one-size-fits-all approach may have been the only practical option in medicine and education. After all, we have just one doctor for every 854 patients, and one teacher for every 24 students. But with AI, doctors could potentially customise treatments to each patient's unique medical and lifestyle profile. Teachers could tweak educational curricula and objectives to suit each student's learning needs.

The possibilities are tremendous. But so are the risks.

Mindful AI adoption

AI is still so nascent that we're just beginning to understand the dangers it could unleash. What if a car's AI-powered steering system malfunctioned on a busy road? Or, an AI algorithm recommended the wrong drug to a patient? Or, an AI sensor that maintains crop temperature and soil moisture was hit by a cyberattack?

With the sheer volumes of data AI is ingesting, the technology could eventually start thinking, creating and acting on its own. And that would send us down a slippery slope.

Being vigilant is key. In Salesforce's latest iteration of generative AI snapshot research — titled 'The Promises and Pitfalls of Generative AI at Work' — the data revealed that global workers are forging ahead using generative AI, regardless of their company protocols. The study indicates that 84 per cent of Indian workers would consider inflating their generative AI skills to secure an opportunity.

Also, 53 per cent of Indian workers say their company does not have clearly defined policies for using generative AI at work. We don't want to give away all our power to AI, or become so reliant on the technology that we're no longer using our minds. The goal should always be to stay one step ahead — to be smarter than the AI.

Where do we start?

Today's deep learning and generative AI models can process far more data than ever — a lot of it unstructured. What's more, AI models have become a lot easier to query. The more data we feed them, the more they learn, and the more powerful they get.

Going by current trends, AI will soon find its way into everything — from doling out loans, to deciding whom to hire at a business, to even predicting who's more likely to commit a crime.

Diversity in Data

Given how life-changing these decisions can be, it's imperative that the AI models we use are foolproof. And that starts with ensuring that the data used to train AI isn't biased, false, unsecured, toxic, or incomplete.

But who gets to decide if the data is good or bad? We all bring biases to the table which, if unchecked, can be reflected in the algorithms we write. A skin-cancer detection algorithm that's been trained primarily on lighter-skinned individuals may not accurately detect cancer in darker skins. An AI recruitment tool that's been taught that most people in a particular job are men, may only favour male applicants.

Hence, the need for a diversity of perspectives — both in the data that's fed into the AI algorithms, and in the teams of people who work on them. This is especially important in India with its diverse cultures, cuisines, religions, and landscapes. If we aren't accounting for all that diversity in the data we use to train AI, then we're only going to exacerbate the inequities that exist.

Take language, for instance. India has 22 official languages and many more indigenous ones. But most of them aren't adequately represented in AI models due to the lack of training data.

Non-profit start-ups like Karya are looking to change that by engaging native language speakers to create voice and text datasets that can then be used to build more linguistic-inclusive AI models. In the process, Karya's workers, who hail from some of the poorest and most marginalised communities, have the chance to earn a supplementary income. They even receive royalties when the data they create is resold.

Stories like these demonstrate that an ethical and inclusive AI industry is indeed possible and within reach.

Humans in front, centre
AI has many potential uses. But let's remember that its ultimate purpose is to assist humans — make us more efficient, augment our intelligence — not replace human supervision altogether.

Let's also not underestimate the value of the human touch. We're all social beings who rely on each other to survive and thrive. When Covid-19 took away that sense of connection with its lockdowns and social distancing, the psychological fall-out was huge. So, even as we use AI to automate more tasks, let's not do that at the cost of human interactions — be it with our customers or our colleagues. AI should actually free us up for more human engagement, not less.

Generative AI hallucinations are a concern, but not necessarily a deal breaker. Design and work with this new technology, but keep your eyes wide open about the potential for mistakes. When you've used your sources of truth and questioned the work, you can go into your business dealings with more confidence.

Regulation will also be key in strengthening AI trust and accountability. So too will global collaboration.

AI isn't limited by geographic boundaries. It can impact everyone everywhere. Only when countries work together to share their resources and knowledge, can we truly unlock the potential of AI, while keeping its risks in check, and building a positive digital future for all. https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/ai-maximising-benefits-minimising-risks/article67846236.ece

20. Tapi riverfront project on paper, cost doubles in eight years *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* Feb 15, 2024

Surat: Rising cost of Tapi riverfront project to almost double as compared to the estimated cost eight years ago, is likely to become a major challenge in realization of the project.

For the 33km-long river path from Kathor near Kamrej to Rundh Bhatha barrage, the project cost is estimated to total Rs 7,882 crore which was Rs 3,900 crore eight years ago when the project was proposed.

Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) has put up the proposal for approval in the standing committee meeting on Thursday. Following nod, the project will be sent for approval from the state government.

According to the fresh estimates, the project is to be executed in two phases. In the first phase of Rs 6,713 crore, the riverfront infrastructure will be developed; while the second phase storm drainage outlet and natural storm outlet are to be diverted at the cost of Rs 1,169 crore.

It was proposed for Rs 1,991 crore loan from World Bank as per the previous cost estimates. But following the revised estimates it is proposed to get a Rs 5,290 crore loan from the World Bank. "The cost has increased due to rising prices of material and project execution. The proposal is yet to get approved by the state government and pass through the process," said a SMC official.

Sources in the SMC informed, that if the civic body receives government grants then the loan amount will reduce. There are possibilities that the project may get divided in more phases to distribute the cost, sources claimed.

Currently, the SMC is developing the Dumas seaface project for recreational activity and leisure at a cost of Rs 174 crore for the first phase. The project got delayed for over 10 years since it was proposed. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/surat/tapi-riverfront-project-cost-doubles-in-8-years/articleshow/107706945.cms