

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

1. **CAG could have done better** (*thehindubusinessline.com*) BY GOVIND BHATTACHARJEE | November 14, 2023

## **Disturbing questions. The CAG has been in the news for the wrong reasons, such as fewer reports being put out**

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) is one of the most important institutions of the country to ensure public accountability of the executive. As the CAG's work necessarily involves pointing out the irregularities, inefficiencies, leakages and corruption in our public financial management system, relations between the governments and the CAG are generally adversarial.

CAG reports are known for their political neutrality, robustness of examination and objectivity of conclusions. They carry such high credibility with the public, that reports critical of the government generate widespread media and public attention and carry the potential to damage or destroy the government's political capital — CAG reports on the Commonwealth Games, 2G, coal and other scams are still alive in public memory. In general, therefore, governments have reason to be wary about CAG reports.

### **Appointment of CAG**

The only other time the institution attracts media attention is at the time of appointment of the Comptroller and Auditor General. No other constitutional authority has such an arbitrary and opaque procedure for appointment, where the government of the day has the sole prerogative of appointing the CAG, without any prescribed qualifications or established norms.

Every government likes to appoint a person who it considers will be minimally harmful to its image, though most CAGs have worked independently, with integrity and without fear or favour.

However, of late, the CAG has been in the news for a lot of wrong reasons, like allegedly holding up or delaying completed reports, tweaking approved audit plans, suspending filed audits midway which is done only in unusual situations like the pandemic, and even transferring officers who have reportedly been involved with auditing sensitive government schemes.

The issues have created doubts in public minds because of the possible electoral repercussions of a critical report on the 2024 elections. The truths of these allegations are unverified, but statements put forward by the CAG's office have been less than convincing. The number of reports submitted by the CAG to Parliament has steeply declined over the years, though some of these reports did bring out serious irregularities in the running of certain infrastructure projects as well as centrally sponsored schemes.

The Government usually replies to the CAG's observations before they are finalised in a report, as the CAG does not take part in public debates on the contents of his reports; they are self-explanatory and complete with all evidences.

But in a departure from established conventions, public authorities are now calling the CAG reports erroneous before the media, and in a queer instance, a Union ministry has rebutted a published news report on CAG's observations on government accounts, giving elaborate point-wise replies to each observation to the newspaper which should rather have been furnished to the CAG in the first place. These trends that seriously undermine the institution of the CAG are ominous for a democracy, to say the least. One particular point especially demands an answer.

Like all the previous governments, the present government has also launched a series of ambitious centrally sponsored schemes (CSSs).

These schemes have always been controversial because of their potential to promote the electoral prospects of the ruling party, and they have been done so with brazenness by earlier governments as well.

Governments are perfectly within their rights to improve the condition of vulnerable sections through well-delivered social welfare schemes. But there are schemes on which huge expenditure has been made over the years while there is a strong perception of sub-optimality in the attainment of their objectives.

### **Opportunity cost**

Expenditure has an opportunity cost, and money doled out to buy votes can otherwise create much more useful productive capacity in the economy.

A developing country trying to make up for the lost decades need to allocate expenditure carefully to optimise growth objectives, and economic rationality cannot be made completely subservient to political rationality. This is where the CAG's role becomes important, because only he can independently and objectively evaluate the outcome of schemes and provide feedback to the government.

And in this, the CAG seems to be particularly lacking. CSSs account for more than a tenth of the Budget, and in the current fiscal, about 76 per cent of the total CSS budget of ₹4.76-lakh crore has been allocated only to seven schemes: MGNREGA, PMAY, PMJJM, NEM, NHM, PMKisan and PMGSY. Except PMAY, reports of which are available till 2022, and PMKisan, which are understood to be underway, none else has been audited by the CAG beyond FY 2018. One glaring omission is the MGNREGA that was launched to alleviate rural poverty and simultaneously create durable rural assets.

The last time the CAG had audited it was in 2013, when it was found to have served neither cause. Yet governments have kept on pouring money into this scheme, and more than ₹6-lakh crore has so far been spent on it. CAG's audit plans are supposed to reflect audit risk, and one wonders why a scheme with such huge expenditure (₹60,000 crore in the current Budget) has been left out of audit for over a decade, despite it being found flawed in the past.

Unless the CAG comes out with cogent explanations, doubts about the credibility and impartiality of the institution will continue to linger in public minds. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/cag-could-have-done-better/article67533089.ece>

## **2. Russia's mighty military-industrial empire in decline** (tribuneindia.com) 15 Nov 2023

### **The move away from Russian materiel, plagued by low serviceability and crippling maintenance issues, has gathered momentum.**

THE Indian military's aerial asset profile has in recent years been steadily edging away from Russian fixed-wing combat, transport and surveillance aircraft and assorted rotary-wing platforms to their Western equivalents. Military officers and defence analysts say that this signifies a subtle but veritable 'NATO-isation' of the services' airborne asset profile as India has edged strategically closer to the US and its European Union, Japanese and Australian allies.

The move away from Russian materiel and platforms, plagued by low serviceability and crippling maintenance issues, has gathered momentum over the past 21 months following the US-led sanctions on Moscow for invading Ukraine. These embargoes have adversely impacted Russia's defence-industrial complex, leading to India's further disillusionment with Moscow as neither a reliable and timely kit provider nor a sustained one.

Rosonboronexport, Russia's monopolistic joint stock arms export body, obliquely admitted as much recently when it expressed its inability to continue defence equipment deliveries to its many clients, including India, as it needed to ensure uninterrupted supplies to its own military, presumably to execute its deadlocked offensive in Ukraine.

In its October 19 press note, Rosonboronexport admitted to facing 'pressing challenges' and offered potential clients alternative formats centred on technology partnerships. Indian defence planners rightly interpreted this to mean the 'precipitous decline' of Russia's once mighty military-industrial empire, which, almost singlehandedly, had armed India over five decades. A cross-section of serving and veteran Indian Air Force and Navy fighter and helicopter pilots concurred that the 'golden era' of Soviet, and later Russian, aircraft that began with the induction of MiG-21FL 'Fishbed' combat aircraft in 1963 was ending.

In hindsight, such an outcome was inevitable as Delhi's materiel imports from Russia between 2017 and 2022 had reduced from 62 per cent to 45 per cent, according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. This downturn had grown amid sanctions on Russia as deliveries of equipment to India were interminably delayed, as were spares and technical support for in-service materiel.

A catalogue of India's latest aerial military acquisitions is instructive. The IAF recently procured 36 Dassault Rafale fighters from France in addition to a host of US-origin transport and attack and heavy-lift helicopters. These included 11 Boeing C-17 Globemaster III and 12 Lockheed Martin C-130J-30 air lifters to supplement and eventually replace the IAF's fleet of legacy Soviet-era Antonov An-32s and Ilyshin-76s. Also underway is the induction of 56 C-295MW medium-lift transport aircraft from Airbus Defence and Space to replace the IAF's aged Avro-748M fleet; 16 C-295s are being acquired in a flyaway condition, while 40 are being built at a recently inaugurated facility in Gujarat via a transfer of technology.

In early 2019, the IAF began replacing its dwindling fleet of 8-10 Russian Mil Mi-25/35 attack helicopters with 22 Boeing AH-64E Apache equivalents that were acquired alongside 15 Ch-47F Chinook heavy-lift rotary aircraft. Both models were acquired after besting comparable Russian platforms in user trials.

Notably, India had more or less terminated the 2014-15 \$1.2-billion tender for 200 Russian Kamov Ka-226T 'Hoodlum' light utility helicopters, of which 135 were intended for the Army Aviation Corps and 65 for the IAF. Conversely, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) was on the cusp of signing two 'landmark' deals with the US to locally manufacture General Electric GE-414 jet engines and acquire 31 MQ-9B 'Predator' unmanned aerial vehicles for all three services.

The Navy had also turned its back on MiG-29K/KUB deck-based fighters for INS Vikrant, its newly commissioned aircraft carrier, as these had proven operationally inefficient and problematic since their induction into service 2009 onwards. The Navy is in advanced negotiations with Dassault to acquire 26 Rafale (Marine) fighters.

The Navy had procured 45 MiG-29/KUBs between 2004 and 2010 for \$2.29 billion, but presently, it operates around 40, almost half of which are believed to be in reserve because of their dismal performance and inability to deliver their declared weapons payload to their stated range with a full fuel load. An excoriating Comptroller and Auditor General's audit had revealed that the MiG-29 K fighters' operational availability between 2014 and 2016 oscillated between a paltry 15.93 per cent and 37.63 per cent, whilst that of twin-seat MiG-29KUB trainers fluctuated between an equally dismal 21.2 per cent and 47.14 per cent.

The Navy also recently retired its Ilyushin IL-38 Sea Dragon long-range maritime patrol aircraft as it already had two non-Russian substitutes in service: 12 Boeing P-8I Neptune anti-submarine warfare long-range maritime multi-mission platforms and 26 German-origin turboprop Dornier Do-228, licence-built by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, while another 12 such examples are on order.

Even the Army is scheduled to begin inducting in early 2024 six Apaches it had signed up to acquire in 2020 for around \$500 million.

Nevertheless, Moscow derives some pecuniary comfort from the reality that some 60 per cent of India's in-service materiel, including fixed and rotary-wing aircraft, are of Russian origin and heavily dependent upon it for spares and sundry technical support. The foremost of these are the IAF's twin-engine Sukhoi Su-30MKI 'Flanker-H' multi-role fighters and around 65 retrofitted MiG-29UPG air-superiority platforms, which together presently constitute the bulk of the IAF's combat squadrons. In September, the MoD had approved the acquisition of 12 HAL-built Su-30MKIs as replacements for an equal number lost in accidents since their induction 2002 onwards.

But suggestively, the IAF had opted to 'sidestep' Russia in upgrading 84 of these Su-30MKIs to 'Super Sukhoi' standards and opted to execute the retrofit indigenously. Alongside, the IAF had also exhibited 'disinterest' in evaluating Russia's offer of MiG-35 'Fulcrum' and Su-35 'Flanker-E' fighters for its proposed tender to acquire 114 multi-role fighter aircraft (MRFA). Both Russian offers are believed to have evoked

little or no enthusiasm at Air Headquarters, portending the end of an epoch monopolised by Soviet and Russian combat aircraft.  
<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/russias-mighty-military-industrial-empire-in-decline-562345>

## **STATES NEWS ITEMS**

### **3. सीएजी की स्थापना दिवस पर मनेगा ऑडिट सप्ताह** (*udaipurkiran.in, livevns.news*) 14 Nov 2023

सीएजी की स्थापना दिवस (16 नवम्बर) के उपलक्ष्य में भारतीय लेखा परीक्षा एवं लेखा विभाग 16 से 23 नवम्बर तक ऑडिट सप्ताह मनायेगा. इसमें Prayagraj स्थित सभी सीएजी के अधीनस्थ कार्यालयों के कर्मचारियों, अधिकारियों तथा उनके परिवारों के लिए विभिन्न कार्यक्रम आयोजित किये जायेंगे.

यह जानकारी प्रधान महालेखाकार (लेखा परीक्षा प्रथम) उत्तर प्रदेश, Prayagraj के Media प्रभारी राजेश कुमार तिवारी ने दी है. उन्होंने बताया कि नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (सीएजी) भारतीय लोकतंत्र का एक महत्वपूर्ण प्रहरी है, जो भ्रष्टाचार के विरुद्ध भारत की लड़ाई में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाता है. इसका गठन 16 नवम्बर 1860 को हुआ था. 163 वर्षों के लम्बे इतिहास के साथ सीएजी 1860 के दशक से निर्दिष्ट अधिदेश का निर्वहन कर रही है. सीएजी एक संवैधानिक संस्था है, जो यह सुनिश्चित करती है कि सार्वजनिक धन का प्रभावपूर्ण तरीके और कुशलता से उपभोग किया जा रहा है एवं सरकारी विभाग वित्तीय नियमों एवं विनियमों का पालन कर रहे हैं.

मीडिया प्रभारी ने बताया कि सीएजी सभी विभागों के व्यय और प्राप्तियों दोनों की लेखा परीक्षा करता है. लेखा परीक्षा के उपरांत सीएजी विधायिका में अपना प्रतिवेदन प्रस्तुत करता है जिस पर विधायिका की लोक लेखा समिति द्वारा विचार किया जाता है. विचारोपरांत लोक लेखा समिति द्वारा विधायिका को एक रिपोर्ट प्रस्तुत किया जाता है एवं उस पर आवश्यक कार्रवाई होती है.

अंत में तिवारी ने बताया कि प्रतियोगिता के अंतर्गत रंगोली, अंतर कार्यालय प्रश्नोत्तरी प्रतियोगिता, बच्चों के लिये चित्रकला प्रतियोगिता, अन्तर कार्यालय स्पोर्ट्स मीट (क्रिकेट प्रतियोगिता), स्थानीय निकायों के लिए योजनाएं, स्वच्छता अभियान और व्यापक जागरूकता के लिए चयनित सार्वजनिक स्थान पर सफाई अभियान, संगम पर कम्बल वितरण, ऑनलाइन निबंध प्रतियोगिता एवं सांस्कृतिक कार्यक्रम आयोजित किया जायेगा. <https://udaipurkiran.in/hindi/audit-week-will-be-celebrated-on-the-foundation-day-of-cag/>

### **4. 15 नवंबर तक ट्रैफिक मैनेजमेंट इन ट्राईसिटी पर भेजे निबंध, 20 को जारी होगा रिजल्ट** (*bhaskar.com*) 15 Nov, 2023

चंडीगढ़। यूटी के ऑडिट डिपार्टमेंट की ओर से 16 नवंबर को ऑडिट दिवस पर ऑनलाइन निबंध कंपीटीशन कराया जाएगा। इसमें सभी हायर एजुकेशन इंस्टीट्यूट्स के स्टूडेंट्स पार्टिसिपेट कर सकते हैं। 25 साल से कम आयु वर्ग के स्टूडेंट्स ट्रैफिक मैनेजमेंट इन ट्राईसिटी विषय पर एक हजार शब्दों में लिख कर निबंध भेज सकते हैं। निबंध हिंदी और इंग्लिश किसी भी भाषा में लिखा जा सकता है। [pdacchandigarh@cag.gov.in](mailto:pdacchandigarh@cag.gov.in) पर स्टूडेंट्स अपनी पासपोर्ट साइज फोटोग्राफ, दसवीं के सर्टिफिकेट व अन्य सभी डॉक्यूमेंट्स के साथ निबंध भेज सकते हैं। रिजल्ट 20 नवंबर को घोषित किए जाएंगे। <https://www.bhaskar.com/local/chandigarh/news/send-essay-on-traffic-management-in-tricity-by-15th-november-result-will-be-released-on-20th-132145346.html>

**5. ‘No govt help’: Disquiet in MP’s tribal areas amid dwindling beneficiaries, persistent malnutrition (*newslaundry.com*) 14 Nov, 2023**

**Parties have promises for the tribal voter, but what has changed for the community? A reality check from four districts.**

The tribals of Madhya Pradesh seem to find a voice in every assembly election campaign with a host of poll promises, 47 ST constituencies, a decisive tribal voter in many general segments, and tribal communities forming 21 percent of the state’s population.

This time too, the Congress and BJP are competing to garner tribal support ahead of elections on November 17 – though the BJP’s outreach to the community had started much earlier due to its poor performance in tribal segments in the previous assembly election.

But while new schemes are promised, what’s been the status of other welfare programmes aimed at tribals across Madhya Pradesh? What of their education, nutrition, employment and forest rights? The Mooknayak decided to do a reality check by visiting four districts with a substantial tribal population in the state, where the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government has been in power for 18 years, interrupted once by the 15-month tenure of the Kamal Nath government.

**In the former ‘Ethiopia of India’**

The Sahariya community, listed among the country’s particularly vulnerable tribal groups, forms the majority of the tribal population in Sheopur district, which not so long ago was termed by some as the “Ethiopia of India” due acute malnutrition. Even as officials from the state’s women and child development department point to a dip in malnutrition figures, locals say the problem persists in at least one member of each family in several villages.

But several schemes are in place across the state and in the district, whose two assembly segments Sheopur and Vijaypur are represented by Congress’s Babu Jandel and BJP’s Sitaram Adivasi, respectively.

The state’s WCD department was allotted Rs 73,06,088 for the supplemental nutrition assistance programme aimed at 22 lakh children in financial year 2022–23. This budget had seen an increase of over Rs 1 crore from the previous year. The Chief Minister Suposhan Yojana to provide meals, porridge, peanuts, laddoos, eggs, chikkis, etc. saw a budgetary allocation of Rs 61 lakh for 4,33,000 women and their children until the age of five years in 2022-23. This scheme was aimed at tackling malnutrition and anemia.

The WCD department claimed there were 923 malnourished and 243 severely malnourished children in Sheopur in 2022, but locals told us the actual figure could be much higher. There were malnourished children in nearly each of the five villages we visited, and a few of the severely malnourished children had been receiving care at the Sheopur district hospital’s Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre – the NRC treats those

children whose symptoms have turned too acute to be managed by the anganwadi system.

As part of the anganwadi system, the WCD department spends around Rs 8 per day on every child aged six and below. It distributes a 650 gram nutrition-rich food packet every Tuesday for children aged until three years while porridge, khichdi, besan halwa and nutritious food packets are given out each day at the anganwadis for children between three and six years of age.

Additionally, the Chouhan government had started the Aahar Anudan Yojana in 2017 to eradicate malnutrition by transferring Rs 1,000 per month to each family from extremely backward tribes. But this amount, several families alleged, had not been transferred for the last few months – the state government claims to have transferred a total of Rs 1,391 crore since the scheme’s inception.

Ahuti, a resident of Wardha village, claimed she had not received the amount despite visiting the bank several times, while Anarda from Kalarna village said she was told by officials in the district headquarter to wait longer for the amount. Both the villages are part of the Vijaypur assembly segment.

Jai Singh Jadaun of the tribal welfare outfit Ekta Parishad said the alleged delay in payments could exacerbate the problem of malnutrition in several areas.

However, Sanjeev Singh, the commissioner of Madhya Pradesh’s Tribal Welfare Department, denied such claims. “If there is any problem in any district of the state, you tell our department about it. We will investigate it and take action.”

Meanwhile, in Tiktole, Morawan and other villages in the vicinity of the Kuno National Park, many tribals living in clay houses wait for their family members, who migrate to bordering Rajasthan for manual labour, to return home with earnings every few months.

In Jetwada village of Vijaypur, Sartijo has been trying to look after her two daughters-in-law and grandchildren while waiting for her two sons who have left home to look for work. Months after the NRC helped her elder son’s twins regain health, now her younger son’s daughter is malnourished.

“Malnourished children are found each month in the village. A girl child is now malnourished and we will admit her to the Sheopur NRC soon,” said anganwadi activist Baijanti Gurjar.

Sheopur NRC in-charge Dr Mangal said, “Most of the children (in the district) are malnourished at birth. The symptoms appear gradually, such as the thinning of children’s arms and legs, the protrusion of their belly, skin-related problems...stunted height is also a symptom. They are treated by the anganwadi at the start. When their condition is critical they are admitted to the NRC.”

At the NRC at the district hospital, 12 malnourished children are receiving treatment while a few others have been shifted to the ICU.

Asked about his MLA development fund, BJP MLA Sitaram Adivasi did not specify how much of it was spent to improve health indicators in his constituency.

Additionally, a CAG report had last year pointed to an irregularity in the distribution of 10,000 metric tonnes of food packets – costing around Rs 62 crore – distributed as part of the state’s supplementary nutrition scheme. Of this, food worth Rs 5 crore had been approved for distribution within eight months in two Sheopur blocks, but the probe did not find this in the stock register.

### **The change in ‘poorest’ district**

After Sheopur, we landed in Alirajpur, which was deemed the worst across India on the ‘Multidimensional Poverty Index’ released by Niti Aayog in 2021. The literacy rate was at 36 percent, the percentage of extremely poor families at 71, and around 90 percent of the population were tribal in the district, according to the Aayog’s data.

About 30 kilometres from the district headquarters, there are several villages splattered across many small islands in the Narmada, with each such island, or faliya, housing anywhere between two and six families.

In a faliya part of the Kakrana village, Lalita, who lives with her husband and her brother’s family in a small hut, says that she has only around three utensils in the house and the men folk are finding it difficult to be breadwinners due to a lack of jobs and the sinking of the family’s boat and farmland in floods this year.

“We are not getting any governmental help. Our farmland sank due to a flood, so did our boat. I pray to god each day so that no one falls sick. How will I take them to the hospital? There is no money for treatment.”

Asked about issues faced by such families along the Narmada, Alirajpur Collector Abhay Arvind Bedekar said, “The administration is working towards alleviating their problems. People from the administration go there from time to time. Some Adivasis have been given leases for land elsewhere.” He refused to share more details citing the Model Code of Conduct.

### **‘No power’**

After Alirajpur, we went to Gadhidadar village in Bodha gram panchayat part of the Pushpraj constituency in Anuppur. Poor families from the Baiga tribal community form the majority of Gadhidadar, which has a population of around 900.

But without electricity since Independence, villagers have decided to boycott the elections this time. Despite a 30 percent increase in the budget of the state’s power department in the previous financial year, several tribal homes are still without power in Pushpraj, represented by Congress MLA Fundelal Marko, who claims the MLA fund is inadequate to tackle development challenges in the area.

Meanwhile, in Baigantola village in the constituency, far from welfare schemes, locals lack even basic amenities and claim that no official has visited them in many years. This reporter walked a five-kilometre narrow path leading to the village with sarpanch Daduram Panadiya. “Baigantola has no road, no electricity and no appropriate



arrangement for water. People here are completely deprived of these fundamental facilities,” said Panadiya.

The village has a population of around 200 which is primarily engaged in agriculture, but water is a problem, with villagers relying on water trickling down from a hill to fill up eight-foot-deep pits. They have dug up a furrow near this pit to store excess water, which is used for irrigation.

But Daduram Panadiya said this water is polluted and villagers, when they fall sick, are often unable to receive timely treatment due to lack of accessible road infrastructure.

The lack of accessible roads also impacts education, with children from Baigantola finding it difficult to walk the rough road to Guttipara village for secondary school.

Sarpanch Daduram said the benefits of welfare schemes are difficult to reach Baigantola due to the lack of a road and that the panchayat had sent many letters demanding the same to the state government.

It's not like there are no government schemes in place to tackle such issues. It is for such villages that the Narendra Modi government had launched the 'Har Ghar, Nal se Jal' scheme for tap water, earmarking around Rs 60,000 crore in last year's budget with an eye on nearly 3.8 crore families. However, this is yet to reach Baigantola. Just like the Chouhan government's allocation of Rs 10,345 crore for primary schools – there was a defunct primary school building in the village.

### **The dwindling beneficiaries**

In Balaghat district, where the majority of the tribal population is Gond, Baba Siyo has given up manual labour to take a small loan and run a tea stall in Pipartola village. But the profit isn't enough for the family of six. Baba Siyo's wife Lakshmi Siyo, who helps with the shop, said “we do not have any other means”.

But other means exist. The Madhya Pradesh Tribal Economic Welfare Commission, for example, is operating three loan schemes with amounts ranging from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 2 crore, but many, including Baba Siyo, are unaware of such programmes.

It's not just the lack of information. Not everyone who seeks benefits under such schemes gets them.

For example, only 185 applications have been approved of the total 4,632 that have been received in this financial year for the Tantiya Mama Arthik Kalyan Yojana, which seeks to give loans ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 1 lakh to tribal youths. Only 1,715 applications of the total 8,533 last year were accepted.

Similarly, the Bhagwan Birsa Munda Swarozgar Yojana, which gives out loans ranging from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 50 lakh for self-employment, granted help to only 1,299 individuals of the total 8,323 who applied last year, according to government figures.

Similar trends were seen under the Mukhyamantri Anusuchit Janjati Vishesh Pariyojana and the Vitt Poshan Yojana for youths from ST communities.

Anil Singh Dhurve, the president of the Gondwana Ganatantra Party Yuva Morcha, said there has been no major change in tribal regions despite crores of expenditure over decades after Independence. “[The government] is still busy making policies to benefit capitalists...power should be taken away...and given to pro-people leaders for holistic development.”

Tirumal Prem Shah Marawi, a social activist, said that governments “seem to be more responsible towards” the rich. “The rich get richer, the poor get poorer. This is what is happening in our region.” <https://www.newslaundry.com/2023/11/14/no-govt-help-disquiet-in-mps-tribal-areas-amid-dwindling-beneficiaries-persistent-malnutrition>

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

### **6. Food subsidy to exceed Budget Estimate by Rs 18,000-cr for current financial year (*financialexpress.com*) November 15, 2023**

**The enhanced food subsidy will be reflected in the revised estimate that will be presented in the Budget on February 1.**

The Centre’s food subsidy bill will likely exceed the Budget Estimate (BE) by Rs 18,000 crore to Rs 2.14 trillion for the current financial year, largely due to sharp increases in the minimum support prices (MSP) for key crops, sources told FE.

However, the hike in food subsidy will unlikely affect the Centre’s aim of containing the fiscal deficit at 5.9% of GDP despite the expected shortfall in disinvestment receipts thanks to healthy tax and non-tax revenues, the sources said.

“MSP hike is quite large and that will reflect in procurement cost,” an official said. The enhanced food subsidy will be reflected in the revised estimate that will be presented in the Budget on February 1.

For all key rabi and kharif crops, the MSP increases this year have been the highest since 2018-19 when a new policy of 50% profits over computed cost of production was adopted for the price setting.

The MSP of wheat, the key rabi crop, has been raised by 7.05% to Rs 2,275/quintal for the 2024-25 marketing season (April-June), the sharpest increase since 2014-15. The MSP for paddy, the key kharif crop, was fixed at Rs 2,183/quintal, up 7% on the year.

Elevated MSPs, backed by robust procurement, could potentially boost rural income and purchasing power.

The government’s announcement to extend the free grains under NFSA for five more years, however, would not cost any significant additional amount in the current financial year. The government had factored in the impact of free food grains for the first nine months in the budget. The impact of the balance three months (Q4FY24) would be absorbed from savings under the scheme in the first nine months as many states have not fully lifted their quota of grains, sources said.

The supply of free grains in addition to PDS grains was initially launched for the April-June period of FY21 after Covid broke out; it was later extended till December FY23. While discontinuing the extra free grains scheme, which almost tripled the annual food subsidy bill between FY21 and FY23, the Centre waived the nominal Rs 2/3 per kg charged for wheat/rice under PDS for 2023. Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently announced the extension of free grains under PDS for another five years to insulate the poor from inflation.

The total subsidy outgo in H1FY24 stood at Rs 2.06 trillion, the highest half-yearly amount seen in the last four financial years and 3.5% higher compared to the corresponding period last year. While food subsidy release was lower by 18% in H1Y24, outgo towards fertiliser and petroleum subsidies increased by 34.8% and 18.5%, respectively which kept the subsidy bill elevated.

### Food Subsidy (Rs/trillion)

FY20	1.08
FY21	5.41*
FY22	2.89
FY23	2.73
FY24^	2.14 (likely)

\*Spike due to clearing of past dues

^Moderation due to ending of Covid-induced additional free grains scheme; BE was Rs 1.93 trillion <https://www.financialexpress.com/policy/economy-food-subsidy-to-exceed-budget-estimate-by-rs-18000-cr-for-current-financial-year-3307028/>

## 7. Has free ration become a political compulsion?

(*dailypioneer.com*) November 15, 2023

Under ‘open-ended’ procurement, Govt buys from farmers unlimited quantities at MSP. Apart from high stocks, this adds to the food subsidy bill substantially

Addressing a poll rally in Chhattisgarh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced an extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) free ration scheme for another five years. Launched in April 2020 to deal with the situation triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, PMGKAY provided 5 kg of rice or wheat per person per month for “free” to 820 million, as well as 1 kg of pulses per family per month to people covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). Run for three months initially, the scheme got six extensions till December 31, 2022.

On December 23, 2022, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Minister Piyush Goyal announced the merger of the free part of PMGKAY with the regular food security schemes under NFSA. The 'merger' requires explanation. Under the NFSA, the Centre directs the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and other state agencies to procure food from the farmers at MSP and organize its distribution to around 820 million people through a network of fair price shops (FPS) at the subsidized price (issue price) of Rs 2/3/1 per kg for wheat, rice, and coarse cereals. There are two types of beneficiaries.

As part of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), the poorest of the poor households get 35 kg of food grains per family. For a family of five, it comes to 7 kg per person each month. The number of families under AAY is 24 million, and persons getting 7 kg cereals per month @ Rs 2/3/1 per kg are 120 million. The rest 700 million get five kg per person a month at the same price.

The excess of MSP paid to farmers and handling and distribution costs (HDC) over the issue price is reimbursed to the FCI et al as a subsidy from the Union Budget. Call it regular food subsidy. In addition, under PMGKAY, all 820 million beneficiaries under the NFSA got 5 kg of cereals per month for free. On December 23, 2022, Goyal announced the withdrawal of PMGKAY while making supplies under regular NFSA free for a year from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023. Modi has extended this arrangement for five years. During the election season, Modi's announcement was a political masterstroke. Nothing else could have carried a greater appeal to voters than the promise of free food to 820 million or nearly 59 per cent of the population that too for five years. But, it comes at a cost.

Against Rs 2/3/1 per kg for wheat, rice, and coarse cereals paid earlier, now, the beneficiaries would get these for free. The extra spend on food subsidy would be Rs 2 per kg per person if she takes her ration as wheat (Rs 3 per kg per person if it is rice). This will translate to additional outgo in the range of Rs 10,000 - 15,000 crore per annum (Rs 50,000 – 75,000 crore over five years) depending on which cereal or a combination thereof, the beneficiary opts for. It may be argued that in a total annual food subsidy budget of around Rs 200,000 crore, this is a small 5 - 7.5 per cent and by some tweaking of expenditure and revenue receipts in other heads, the government could avoid any slippage from the desired fiscal trajectory. This is a myopic thought.

It distracts attention from the overarching goal of 'rationalising and pruning subsidies to which the then Finance Minister (FM), Arun Jaitley under Modi had vowed in 2015-16. Even today, the NITI Aayog – Union government's think tank - is studying the effectiveness of the food subsidy scheme and examining 'whether, and how, the Scheme can be rationalised or closed'.

In sync with this goal, it is possible for the government to take credible steps to reduce food subsidies without compromising its commitments to the welfare of the poor. For instance, the current issue price of Rs 2/3/1 per kg was specified in the NFSA legislation. The law enacted in 2013 froze these rates for three years. Since 2016, there has been no legal bar on increasing the price. Yet, it remains where it was a decade ago despite a substantial increase in MSP as well as HDC. A hike in the issue price by Rs 1 per kg would yield an annual savings of over Rs 5,000 crore. Second, the existing number of beneficiaries under NFSA at 59 per cent of the country's population is far in

excess of the people who actually deserve a subsidy. Even as per the Shanta Kumar Committee (2015), the people eligible for subsidised food shouldn't be more than 40 per cent of the population. The excess of 19 per cent comes to 266 million. By deleting these persons from the beneficiaries list, the government can save about Rs 40,000 crore (25 (27-2)x5x12x266; where 27 is the cost of supplying wheat).

Third, other than AAY families and persons, the rest can pay more than Rs 2/3/1 per kg. Deduct 266 million (those who shouldn't be eligible for subsidy) from 700 million, this number comes to 434 million. The Shanta Kumar Committee wanted them should pay at least 50 per cent of the MSP or Rs 10.5 (current MSP is Rs 21).

This could yield savings of about Rs 22,000 crore [8.5(10.5-2)x5x12x434]. Fourth, the ridiculously low price at which food is available in the supply chain is an open invitation to dubious operators to siphon off and sell in the open market raking in a moolah. This can be prevented if only the government disbands the existing system and gives subsidies to the beneficiaries under DBT.

Under DBT, the state agencies need not buy, store and deliver food to the beneficiary; instead the latter buys from the market paying the full price, say, Rs 27 per kg of wheat. Of this, Rs 25 comes from the Centre as a subsidy and Rs 2 from her pocket as per the extant NFSA regime. Now, under Modi's prescription of making it free, the entire Rs 27 would come from the Centre. When subsidized food doesn't enter the supply chain, diversion and misuse is completely ruled out. With DBT in place, it is much easier for the Govt to deny subsidies to undeserving persons. It will also save on costs currently incurred on handling of grains by the agencies. Besides, all consumers will benefit from increased supplies and competition in the market.

Currently, the Govt is using state agencies not just to meet food requirements under NFSA but also to extend price support to farmers. Under what has come to be known as 'open-ended' procurement, it buys from farmers unlimited quantities at MSP. Apart from facing a nightmare due to high stocks and high carrying costs, this has added to the food subsidy bill. With the switchover to DBT, the government needs to get out of this price support business.

The only viable way to support farmers is to give them the freedom to sell their produce, open up the market and give them multiple choices to sell. This will require the resurrection of the three farm laws Modi was forced to junk in November 2021 following agitation by farmers from Punjab and Haryana. Sadly, all reforms are held hostage to the politics of populism. Giving food free, continuing with subsidies to the undeserving and open-ended purchases from farmers at MSP are all manifestations of populism. If Modi dares to tinker with any of these, he risks losing at the hustings. So, the status quo continues. <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2023/columnists/has-free-ration-become-a-political-compulsion-.html#:~:text=Sadly%2C%20all%20reforms%20are%20held,So%2C%20the%20status%20quo%20continues.>

**8. A daunting fiscal challenge! Centre poised to meet FY24 fiscal target, but would face tougher choices in medium term**  
(*financialexpress.com*) November 15, 2023

**Even if the nominal GDP rate turns out to be slightly lower than the projected 10.7%, the fiscal deficit could still be contained at the budgeted level of 5.9% or thereabouts.**

Going by the first-half numbers, the Centre's key fiscal targets for the current financial year are unlikely to go amiss. What has helped is the stronger-than-budgeted tax and non-tax revenues, and a revenue expenditure budget that was modest ab initio. The fiscal position could come under grave threat, only in the worst-case scenario—a bad combination of a flare-up in crude prices, a much tighter global situation, and a sharp slowing of domestic consumption and services activity. Such a dangerous mix is an odd chance, though the growth would slow in H2 for statistical and structural reasons. Despite the Middle East turmoil, latest forecasts don't suggest a big oil price spike in the short term. A shortfall in disinvestment receipts is likely to be offset by higher other inflows. Extra demands under certain expenditure heads like MGNREGS and LPG subsidy could be met through savings on other fronts, and adept cash management. Even if the nominal GDP rate turns out to be slightly lower than the projected 10.7%, the fiscal deficit could still be contained at the budgeted level of 5.9% or thereabouts.

However, this must not delude oneself to think that the medium-term trajectory, too, is easy to traverse. The mismatch between the economy's capacity to churn out revenues for the government and the latter's ability for pump-priming is widening. The dire prospect of a vicious cycle can't just be wished away. Of course, the Centre has quite creditably improved the quality of spending after the pandemic even while being on a sharp and prompt consolidation drive. From just 0.13 in FY21, the ratio of Centre's capex to revenue expenditure rose to 0.3 in H1FY24.

A substantial part of this capex surge, however, is attributable to the rising share of the Union Budget in overall public capex (Centre, states and CPSEs). Capex by state governments was 158% of the Centre's in FY19, but slipped to 77% in FY23. While the Centre's budget capex rose 25% on year in FY23, and is estimated to grow another 35% in the current fiscal, the aggregate public capex grew just 10% in FY23. Clearly, public funds available for boosting capital formation in the economy are diminished for now. The Centre too would require to slow the pace of capex growth in the coming years to follow the fiscal road map.

For sure, efficiency in resource mobilisation by the government has risen in recent years, which primarily explains the sharp reduction in the Centre's fiscal deficit from a bloated 9.2% in FY21 (which helped slash public debt by close to 7 percentage points to 81% in the two years to FY23). States too toed the same fiscal line, although with less alacrity, but the latest flurry of freebies threatens to be a spoiler. For the Centre, to lower the fiscal deficit further to the targetted 4.5% by FY26 to the FRBM level of 3%, would be a daunting task. Rather than the deficit number, the target must be a debt level of 60%. This goal entails non-government investors to shed their reluctance and take the plunge. The stakes are high for India to get an even larger share of global foreign direct investment flows and rapidly adjust to the incessantly changing global supply

chains. Another spate of reforms is urgently required to bolster the economy's growth capacity and take it to 7-8% from under 6% now, while keeping the informal and jobs-intensive areas in focus. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/a-daunting-fiscal-challenge-centre-poised-to-meet-fy24-fiscal-target-but-would-face-tougher-choices-in-medium-term/3307127/>

## 9. **Glaring dichotomy** (*millenniumpost.in*) NOVEMBER 14, 2023

**India's growth march is starkly contrasted by rising unemployment — resulting from dismal private consumption, slump in manufacturing, dismantling of the informal sector etc.**

Amid claims of becoming an economic powerhouse, India is facing a serious unemployment problem, as the unemployment rate increased to its highest level in over two years, in October. The overall unemployment rate rose to 10.05 per cent in October, up from 7.09 per cent in September, marking the highest rate since May 2021. Rural unemployment jumped to 10.82 per cent from 6.2 per cent while the urban rate eased slightly to 8.44 per cent. In 2014, unemployment rate was 5.44 per cent, which rose to 8 per cent in 2020. As per a report by Forbes, in 2022, India's unemployment rate was 7.33 per cent, and in October 2023, it has crossed 10 per cent.

According to the chief executive of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) Ltd, despite growth, India's workforce has remained stagnant, a little over 400 million in the past five years, and only 40 per cent of people aged 15 years and above offer themselves for work. The rest 60 per cent are dependents. The quality of jobs in India is very low.

The unemployment status of the young (15-24 years) job seekers is grimmer. Citing the ILO Modelled Estimates and Projections Database, the World Bank has reported that youth (per cent of total labour force aged 15-24) unemployment in India was alarmingly high at 23.2 per cent in 2022. The world average in that year was 15.6 per cent. In 2013, this rate was 21.5 per cent, which then climbed to 26.4 per cent in 2018. In 2020, it rose steeply to 30.9 per cent, and in 2022, eased to 23.2 per cent, which is higher than the 2013 figure. The corresponding figures of Bangladesh (12.9 per cent), China (13.2 per cent), Malaysia (11.7 per cent), and Pakistan (11.3 per cent) are much lower, reports Scroll.

### **Informal sector crushed**

Three major structural changes in the Indian economy — demonetisation (November 2016), introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (July 2017), and the COVID-19-induced lockdown (March 2020) — have crushed the informal sector of the Indian economy, where more than 80 per cent of the workforce is engaged. For a cash-intensive unorganised sector, an unplanned demonetisation led to a loss of at least 95 lakh jobs between January to April 2017. Only a few months after the announcement of demonetisation, employment rates had fallen to 42 per cent.

Quoting economic analysts, Reuters reports that more and more job-seekers, especially the young, are looking for low-paid casual work or falling back on unreliable self-employment, even though the broader Indian economy is seen growing at a world-beating 6.5 per cent in the financial year ending in March 2024. In 2022-23, the Indian

economy grew a stronger-than-expected 7.2 per cent, boosted by the government's capital investment. But private consumption, which forms 60 per cent of India's GDP, grew between 2-3 per cent in the second half of the year, as pent-up spending and base effects faded. "Unemployment is only the tip of the iceberg. What remains hidden beneath is the serious crisis of underemployment and disguised unemployment," Reuters quoted Radhicka Kapoor, fellow at economic research agency ICRIER.

Explaining this paradox of simultaneous increase in growth and unemployment, economist Kaushik Basu commented: "India's GDP is growing well but it's all going to the top. We must correct this. World Inequality Report 2022 shows India has 'one of the most extreme increases in income & wealth inequality observed in the world.' Inequality is back to where it was 'under British colonial rule'".

### **FDI in Low-tech industry**

In a recent interview, Infosys founder NR Narayana Murthy suggested offering whatever incentive is required to attract foreign investment for the creation of employment for rural and urban poor in low-tech manufacturing. However, it is not clear why Indian investors are not interested to invest. The possible reason could be the low level of productivity of Indian labourers.

To offset this low productivity and remain competitive in the international market, the captain of the India Inc has suggested Indian youth to be more disciplined and work 70 hours a week, though ILO's Convention No 1 (1919), which entered into force on 13 June 1921, had limited the hours of work in industrial undertakings to eight in the day and 48 in the week. Commenting on this suggestion, economist Biswajit Dhar has reminded that the level of productivity of a country depends on the strength of its innovation system, which is very weak, as revealed in the India Innovation Index 2021, produced by NITI Aayog. It shows that India's gross expenditure on research and development as a percentage of GDP was 0.65 per cent in 2018, one of the lowest in the world. In 2020-21 the figure dipped further to 0.64 per cent. In 2012-13, India's private sector's share in the country's R&D was 45 per cent, which declined to 41 per cent in 2020-21. In that year, the private sector's share was 79 per cent in Japan and Korea. In China the corresponding figure was 77 per cent.

The much-hyped Make in India programme, launched in 2016, has failed to boost manufacturing. Rather than rising to 25 per cent, the share of manufacturing in the overall economy plunged to 14 per cent in 2020-21 from 17 per cent in 2015-16. Quoting a study by Ashoka University's Centre for Economic Data and Analysis, BQ Prime reported that rather than adding 100 million manufacturing jobs, India lost 24 million jobs between 2016-17 and 2020-21, out of which 11 million jobs had already been lost before the pandemic.

### **Export of low skilled labour**

As the demand for white-collar knowledge workers is declining, dot.compradors are currently aiming at the export of low-skilled labourers who are plenty in supply. Moreover, demand for such workers is also rising in a few countries. It is reported that over the past 12 months, 96,917 Indians were caught entering the US illegally. This is shocking and an all-time high.



It is also reported that the Israeli construction industry has asked the government to allow companies to recruit 1 lakh Indian workers to replace the 90,000 Palestinians whose work permits had been cancelled since a war on Gaza began. Media reports suggest that as India and Taiwan seek to strengthen relations to counter China's threat, the two nations will sign an employment mobility agreement by next month. Taiwan is planning to hire over 1,00,000 Indians to work in factories, farms and hospitals, reports Firstpost.

The plea to the youths by the captain of India Inc to work 70 hours a week may be analysed from the above developments that have created an opportunity for exporting low-skilled jobless youths of India to risky war zones for employment. <https://www.millenniumpost.in/opinion/glaring-dichotomy-540337?infinitemscroll=1>

## **10. India's Fresh Nuclear Push May Be Different – But Questions Surround It (*thewire.in*) NOVEMBER 15, 2023**

### **NPCIL is forming joint ventures, Niti Aayog is keen on Small and Modular Reactors. Why is India so bullish about an untested technology?**

India's new nuclear push differs from its predecessors.

This time around, the country is not solely banking on its atomic establishment to erect an array of nuclear power plants. As the first part of this series

showed, that approach resulted in cost- and time-overruns, and yielded an outcome where India missed every single deadline to boost its nuclear capacity.

In a bid to avoid that fate, India's new nuclear push stands on two new pillars. First, Nuclear Power Corporation of India will set up reactors in partnership with other state-owned companies like National Thermal Power Corporation. Second, the country is very bullish about Small and Modular Reactors (SMRs). These, goes the thinking, will be cheaper and faster to construct.

These claims – that NPCIL's joint ventures or JVs will result in a faster rollout, and that SMRs will be competitive against rival forms of energy – have not received the broader scrutiny they deserve.

The JV, first.

#### **Can Ashvini deliver?**

The JV between NPCIL and NTPC named Ashvini is neither new nor unique.

It dates back to February 2016 when the NDA government amended the Atomic Energy Act to enable NPCIL to form JVs with other PSUs for setting up nuclear power plants.

The idea here is that JV partners bring their investible surplus to the alliance, while NPCIL brings in nuclear know-how. The controlling stake – in what are 51:49 arrangements – would be with NPCIL.

Between then and now, NPCIL has formed JVs with NTPC, Indian Oil Corporation, and Nalco. “JVs were also mooted with Hindustan Aluminium and Indian Railways, but those have stayed at a MoU level,” Shah Nawaz Ahmad, who oversees India for the World Nuclear Association, said.

Of these, the JV with NTPC seems to have made the most headway. NTPC, which will need to replace its coal fleet with cleaner alternatives, wants to install 2 GW of nuclear energy by 2032; 4.2 GW by 2035; and 20 GW by 2050. SMRs are a part of its strategy. It wants to limit its JV with NPCIL to large reactors – and form a separate JV (where it is the majority partner) to build SMRs with private partners. According to media reports, it has assembled a 15-member team in Mumbai to drive its nuclear ambitions. Beneath these announcements lie a mass of unknowns – like the JV’s capacity to resolve the problems that have hamstrung nuclear power till now.

While NTPC can raise funds more easily than NPCIL, as physicist MV Ramana writes in *The Power of Promise*, India’s atomic establishment has never really struggled for cash. It has always been well-capitalised.

What about competitiveness against rival forms of energy? Unlike coal-based power plants, nuclear power has little or no running costs. Unlike solar, whose installation cost now stands at Rs 3 crore to Rs 5 crore per megawatt but panels start leaching efficiency after 15 or so years, nuclear plants have a much longer life. A better comparison is with hydel and pumped storage projects (PSPs). They, too, have high upfront costs, can be used for base load generation as well as grid balancing, and have low running costs – dams more so than pumped storage.

This is where things get interesting. At NPCIL, the cost of a nuclear power plant today ranges between Rs 12 crore-Rs 15 crore/MW. Imported reactors cost more. At Mithi Virdi, for instance, the cost per MW for Westinghouse reactors has touched Rs 40 crore.

While the cost/MW for dams and PSPs (Rs 7 crore-Rs 8 crore/MW) is lower than that of nuclear, their costs/unit are similar – Rs 6/unit for a new dam; between Rs 5/unit and Rs 9/unit for a PSP, which incurs costs while pumping water back to the higher reservoir; and around Rs 7/unit for a reactor costing between Rs 15-20 crore/MW.

“Nuclear... remains the dispatchable low-carbon technology with the lowest expected costs in 2025,” says the IEA. “Only large hydro reservoirs can provide a similar contribution at comparable costs but remain highly dependent on the natural endowments of individual countries.”

Land acquisition is one bugbear – but that applies to hydel and PSPs as well.

Technical glitches, however, are a bigger risk. “India has had hardly any standardisation of nuclear plants thus far and without standardisation nuclear cannot compete,” a senior official familiar with the government’s clean energy plans told CarbonCopy on the condition of anonymity. The country has variously imported reactors from countries like France, Russia and the USA. “That is what NTPC is trying to do now—develop standardised designs,” he continues. “India has valuable experience with the standardisation of coal boilers which greatly sped up projects. That is how the idea of Ashvini came about.”

These thoughts echo those of former environment minister Jairam Ramesh who said in an interview recently, “India should have standardised on its own design of a heavy water reactor. It should not depend on imported reactors. Two standard 700 MW reactors are coming up in Kakrapar and more elsewhere. India should standardise on those reactors. We should build on those reactors.

And so, the current expansion hinges on India’s 700 MW Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor. At Kakrapar, where this reactor was rolled out, it posted time-overruns on account of its “First Of a Kind” Systems and delays in procuring critical equipment.

At this time, it’s unclear if the NTPC-NPCIL alliance has ironed out these glitches. CarbonCopy contacted both NTPC and NPCIL for interviews. They did not respond. Subsequently, questions were emailed to both companies. This article will be updated when they respond.

Turn to SMRs and similar questions intensify.

### **SMRs: An idea whose time has come?**

For some time now – especially once renewables’ prices began to drop – the nuclear industry has been trying to boost its own competitiveness. In the past, trying to bring down its costs, nuclear plants have bet on scale, spreading costs over a larger power output. With SMRs, the industry is heading the other way. Instead of building one large reactor, SMR makers want to mass-produce smaller reactors, and to use that scale to drive costs down. Modularity – where complete reactors are shipped out – is also expected to cut installation time and costs.

“If you take a large reactor like Kudankulam, on-site construction cost will be as much as 30-40% of the eventual cost,” said Vinod Sahni, a former director of the Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced Technology at BARC. With SMRs, says manufacturers, installation time will drop from five or more years to less than two. The NDA echoes these claims. SMRs, it says, will yield significant savings in cost and construction time and fast-track nuclear power generation.

These claims by SMR makers have been challenged by others – including the nuclear establishment itself. Can mass production drive down reactor prices? The answer to that question lies in a thicket of deeper questions. In any manufacturing process, raw material costs account for a large chunk of costs. Efficiencies result from factors like cheaper sourcing of inputs by placing large orders; spreading the cost of the assembly plant, R&D, etc, over a larger output; and so on. And so, how many reactors will an assembly line need to produce to score meaningful savings on manufacturing costs? In a paper about the competitiveness of nuclear power, Ramana estimated the cost/MW of SMRs will match that of large reactors only after anywhere between 700 and 60,000 reactors have been manufactured.

Given that anywhere between 40 and 70 SMRs are in development across the world, how many reactors can each assembly line expect to manufacture each year? During installation, SMRs face the same risk as large reactors—of cost and time-overruns. Once installed, they produce the same externalities as large reactors (like accidents and radioactive waste disposal) and, ergo, have similar system costs as large reactors

(boilers, turbines, safety systems, staff). All these costs, however, have to be recovered from lower power output. That will add to the cost per unit.

On the whole, SMRs might be much costlier than large reactors. In his talk at the India Nuclear Business Platform, A.K. Nayak, head (Nuclear Control and Program Wing) at the Department of Atomic Energy, pegged the “ballpark” cost of erecting an SMR at “Rs 200 million/MW” – or Rs 20 crore/MW.

Their running cost might be higher as well. “Given their smaller size, SMRs have a greater surface area,” said Grover. “Which means greater neutron leakage and therefore, more spent fuel.” This point has been made elsewhere as well. “A recent study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences concluded that SMRs would create up to 30 times more radioactive waste per unit of electricity than conventional reactors”, reported Energy Monitor.

What about cost per unit? As IEEFA reported earlier this year, “NuScale’s first power plant... increased its initial estimated electricity cost from 5.8 cents per kWh to 8.9 cents per kWh. That increase [a jump from Rs 7.25/unit to Rs 10.3/unit] would have been even higher if not for \$4 billion in federal tax subsidies and a \$30/MWh subsidy,” added the Australian energy think-tank.

At ₹10.3/unit (or more), SMRs will be more expensive than pumped storage – which can also address intermittency and ensure grid stability. “I am not sure SMRs are a fruitful LT investment,” said author Prabir Purkayastha. “But pumped storage is. You can use it to cycle up and down. You can create these in small areas. They can do daily balancing as well as long-term balancing.”

For all these reasons, India’s nuclear community is not convinced. “Nowhere in the world have SMRs been used,” academic R. Rajaraman said in April. “We are yet to see a proof of concept. It’s all ambitious talk and exaggerated claims.”

These numbers – coupled with the absence of commercial models in the market and reluctance within the nuclear establishment—raise a large question. Support for SMR comes from elsewhere in the government. “In the DAE (Department of Atomic Energy) and Niti Aayog, some see SMRs as an opportunity,” Grover said. “They think SMRs can be deployed quickly and economically.”

As this article was being finalised, news came too that NuScale had terminated its agreement with Utah. “NuScale’s Utah plant was expected to be the first SMR to win a license from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission for construction,” reported Reuters. Concerns about uncompetitiveness were a major reason.

The question writes itself. Why is India so bullish about an untested technology?

### **A question of risk**

At this time, the world is seeing as many as 70 SMR models under development.

“NuScale is creating a small reactor by downsizing an existing reactor,” said Ahmad. “Others are innovating new designs. In the next three to four years, an array of SMRs will be offered as the first of a kind. These will range from micro (200 to 500 kw) to

small (below 300 MW).” (India has its own small reactor. This is the 300 MW AHWR300-LEU. Developed by BARC, it runs on thorium and plutonium. It, however, is not modular).

Most SMR makers are eyeing developing countries which need to decarbonise but don't have enough solar, wind and hydel potential to quit coal. Take NuScale. It hopes to build SMRs in Romania, Kazakhstan, Poland and Ukraine.

And India. As Nayak said at his conference: India has to retrofit 220 GW of thermal capacity. “With a ballpark figure of 200 Mn INR/ MW, business has a potential of INR 44 Trillion (USD 550 Billion) over the next 20 years,” he said. Add industrial demand for SMRs and that number will swell further.

One outcome is lobbying. At this time, a bevy of foreign SMR manufacturers – chiefly Westinghouse, Holtec, NuScale, Rosatom — are eyeing India. Hardwired into their lobbying is the worry that India might relax vital safeguards and invest billions in an uncompetitive source of electricity.

Unlike thermal power plants (TPP), SMRs cannot be installed in seismic zones. This means NTPC's TPPs around Delhi, for instance, cannot be retro-fitted. Also, nuclear reactors are required to have an exclusion zone—a 1.6 km radius—around them. Most thermal power projects, however, have towns and villages pressing up against their walls. In other words, to install SMRs, NTPC will have to either acquire land for a safety zone around power plants being retro-fitted or the government will have to do away with this stipulation.

The government is also soft-peddalling the civil liability issue. “That has been pushed to the backburner,” said the senior government official. “It is a part of the law but it is not at the centre of these discussions. It will not be a deal breaker.”

The questions write themselves. Should nuclear or renewables and pumped storage take the base-load? How much nuclear power should India build? Should it focus on large reactors or SMRs?

These are vital queries. To set up 10,000 MW of SMR capacity, India will need to spend Rs 200,000 crore. For this sum, it could set up 16,000 MW of large reactors. Or, at Rs 7.5 crore/MW, 25,000 MW of pumped storage capacity. Alternately, should the country invest in smarter grids?

### **The bigger question**

Modern grid operators, wrote Ramana recently, are trying to create 100% renewable grids by addressing intermittency without falling back on “baseload” generation.

“The first and foremost is energy efficiency, which reduces demand, especially during periods of peak use.... A second option is demand flexibility... wherein utilities compensate electricity customers that lower their use when asked – often automatically and imperceptibly – helping balance supply and demand.”

One recent study found, he writes, that “the U.S. has 200 gigawatts of cost-effective load flexibility potential that could be realised by 2030 if effective demand response is

actively pursued.” Before embarking on the nuclear buildup, India needs to ascertain the equivalent number for itself – and then see how much additional base load it needs. The costs of not doing so are stranded nuclear plants – or expensive power for users.

Instead of having those conversations, however, India is rushing to embrace SMRs. Not only does all this draw the country’s ill-fated adventure with Enron to mind, it also highlights a larger flaw in India’s response to climate change. As journalist Joydeep Gupta had commented in a recent article for ThirdPole, secrecy pervades South Asian countries’ responses to climate change.

In the case of nuclear, India is embarking on an expensive buildup – even thinking of retooling safety norms – without much of a discussion on viability, alternatives and attendant costs. <https://thewire.in/energy/nptc-nuclear-power-corporation-npcil-smr>

## **11. Global emissions predicted to drop just 2% by 2030, shows UN report (*business-standard.com*) NOVEMBER 14, 2023**

Global emissions are predicted to drop just 2 per cent below the 2019 levels by 2030, as compared to a 43 per cent reduction needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, according to a new report by the United Nations.

The report comes ahead of the 28th UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, where countries are expected to push for stronger climate action to limit warming to 1.5 degrees.

According to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a body of top climate scientists, greenhouse gas emissions need to be cut by 43 per cent by 2030, compared to the 2019 levels. This is critical to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of this century and avoid the worst impacts of climate change, including more frequent and severe droughts, heatwaves and rainfall.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) analysed the Nationally Determined Contributions of 195 parties to the Paris Agreement, including 20 new or updated NDCs submitted up until September 25.

In line with the findings of last year's analysis, the new report shows that while emissions are no longer increasing after 2030, compared to the 2019 levels, they are still not demonstrating the rapid downward trend science says is necessary this decade.

If the latest available NDCs are implemented, current commitments will increase emissions by about 8.8 per cent, compared to the 2010 levels. This is a marginal improvement over last year's assessment, which found countries were on a path to increase emissions by 10.6 per cent by 2030, compared to 2010 levels.

The report showed global emissions are projected to be 2 per cent below the 2019 levels by 2030, highlighting that peaking of global emissions will occur within this decade.

In order to achieve peaking of emissions before 2030, the report says, "The conditional elements of the NDCs need to be implemented, which depends mostly on access to enhanced financial resources, technology transfer and technical cooperation, and

capacity-building support as well as the availability of market-based mechanisms." "Today's synthesis report of national climate plans underscores the need for us to act with greater ambition and urgency to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement there is simply no time left for delays," COP28 President Designate Sultan Al Jaber said.

"COP28 must be a historic turning point in this critical decade for parties to seize the moment of the Global Stocktake to commit to raise their ambition and to unite, act and deliver outcomes that keep 1.5 C within reach, while leaving no one behind," he said.

"Today's report shows that governments combined are taking baby steps to avert the climate crisis. And it shows why governments must make bold strides forward at COP28 in Dubai to get on track," said UN Climate Change Executive-Secretary Simon Stiell.

"This means COP28 must be a clear turning point. Governments must not only agree on what stronger climate actions will be taken but also start showing exactly how to deliver them," he said.

Stiell said the conclusion of the first global stocktake at COP28 is where nations can regain momentum to scale up their efforts across all areas and get on track with meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.

The Global Stocktake is a two-year UN review process to evaluate collective global progress in meeting the Paris Agreement's goals. Initiated in Glasgow in 2021, the first-ever GST will conclude at the annual climate talks in Dubai in December.

The stocktake is intended to inform the next round of climate action plans under the Paris Agreement (known as NDCs) to be put forward by 2025, paving the way for accelerated action.

"The Global Stocktake report released by UN Climate Change this year clearly shows where progress is too slow. But it also lays out the vast array of tools and solutions put forward by countries. Billions of people expect to see their governments pick up this toolbox and put it to work," Stiell said. [https://www.business-standard.com/world-news/global-emissions-predicted-to-drop-just-2-by-2030-shows-un-report-123111401014\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/world-news/global-emissions-predicted-to-drop-just-2-by-2030-shows-un-report-123111401014_1.html)

## **12. India's Super Sukhoi upgrade is an emblem of our geopolitical neutrality (*livemint.com*) Nov 14, 2023**

**The fighter aircraft project involves an eclectic blend of technologies fused into a Russian platform. It speaks of India's defence sovereignty.**

For aviation enthusiasts, the Cold War was perhaps the most interesting time to be alive, given the myriad fourth-generation aircraft being launched in quick succession. The American and Soviet obsession to outdo each other added to the excitement. Rival fighter pilots would be enticed to defect with their flying machines to study rival technologies. Until the fall of the iron curtain, Western and Soviet aircraft types were

distinct, thanks to that secrecy. Since neither side knew the true potential of the other's fighter platform, peace prevailed on the principle of uncertainty.

Geopolitical neutrality has made India an exception to that rule of technological separation. While India has long operated fighter aircraft of Soviet origin, our fighter eco-system has always had an eclectic mix of platforms (including French and British). The emphasis has been on acquiring the best, with care taken to overcome the non-interoperability of diverse platforms. India's recent decision to upgrade its Russian SU30 MKI fleet to 'Super Sukhoi' status, boasting a variety of global technologies, reveals the country's determination to retain sovereign control of its air defence hardware.

After the Soviet Union's disintegration, its successor state Russia eventually took New Delhi's relations with Moscow forward, giving India access to Russian aircraft advancements. The SU30 fighter is a combination of the SU27 platform and SU37 tech-demo prototype, making it the most advanced 4+ generation fighter in its category. Platform exclusivity, however, remained a contentious issue at the time of its acquisition.

Under the Vajpayee government, India's foreign policy began taking an 'island approach'; i.e., moving towards and away from big powers as and when necessary. This led to a paradigm shift in defence procurement. India began to explore interoperability and expanded its parts bin to include inputs from countries like Israel and France. We could now rework Russian equipment with the world's best available technologies. By the time India began assembly of the SU30 MK-I (Indian prototype) in 2004, this platform had adopted Israeli avionics and self-protection jammers as well as French navigation systems, and attained compatibility with British retractable refuelling probes.

India stood out for the sacrilegious act of fusing a Russian aircraft with Western technologies, but this is how a path was set for Indian SU30s to evolve into a hybrid weapon boasting of the best of both worlds. We have also fused it with homegrown components.

India's ₹60,000 crore plan to upgrade the SU30 MKI fleet into lethal 4++ generation aircraft can be considered a facet of New Delhi's current policy bent and objectives. While the 'Super Sukhoi' will include an array of domestic technologies, two aspects of it are especially revelatory. The induction of the Virupaksha AESA radar system, a gallium nitride derivative of India's indigenous Uttam radar, followed by planned upgrades to AL31FP aero-engines are cases in point here.

The Virupaksha upgrade can be a game-changer because it will widen vastly the choice of compatible weapons for SU30s. In its current guise, the SU30 MKI uses the Russian Bars Leopard radar system, which is incompatible with Western weapon systems. This makes interoperability of SU30 with other Indian fighter platforms difficult, primarily because Western suppliers are unwilling to share their weapon codes for integration with a Russian platform.



This status quo, however, was shattered on 27 February 2019, when an air skirmish with Pakistan's Air Force demonstrated the need for longer range Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missile systems, which were not available at the time.

This led to the realization that reliable systems such as the European Meteor and US AIM-120 could easily be integrated with Indian-origin radar and jammers, irrespective of platform origin.

Once completed successfully, the Virupaksha's integration will transform our Super Sukhois into possibly the only Russian aircraft that can carry weapon systems of European and American origin, along with those from Russia.

The second important upgrade here pertains to engines, which India's Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE) hopes to enhance indigenously. While the AL31FPs may receive minor upgrades based on GTRE's learnings from technology transfer agreements with France, the future could involve much more dramatic changes.

India plans to fly its Super Sukhois until 2050, and given that the current crop of AL31s are already 20 years old on average, a complete replacement will be necessitated sooner than later.

Since India is not interested in the Russian offer of the more powerful AL41s, it is possible that Super Sukhois might carry a derivative of Indian made French or American aero-engines in the not-so-distant future. These upgrades would make our fleet of Super Sukhois a true manifestation of Indian foreign policy, which is to stay unaffiliated with any geopolitical bloc.

It is to the country's credit that the Super Sukhoi can potentially blur the traditional lines that have been held sacrosanct in modern aviation history. If India manages to pull this upgrade off along expected lines, this fighter-jet platform could serve as an emblem of the country's approach to the rest of the world, which is to be uninhibited and cooperative with other countries, while also being agnostic on geopolitics. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/indias-super-sukhoi-upgrade-is-an-emblem-of-our-geopolitical-neutrality-11699962740225.html>

### **13. Since 2014, How Modi Government Has Doubled Down on Tribal Development and Welfare (*news18.com*) NOVEMBER 15, 2023**

Tribal, which constitute 9% of India's population, has been a focal point of Narendra Modi government. The Centre has rolled out a scheme that will target the particularly vulnerable tribal groups in the remotest parts of India. The principle of 'Antyodaya' is delivering welfare and taking developmental schemes to the last person in the farthest line.

The PM-PVTG scheme, with a cost of Rs 24,000 crore, will provide vulnerable tribal families and habitations with basic facilities such as road and telecom connectivity, electricity, safe housing, clean drinking water and sanitation, improved access to education, health and nutrition and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Particularly, Vulnerable Tribal Groups or PVTG are those that depend on hunting for food, have pre-agriculture level technologies, zero or negative population growth, and extremely low levels of literacy. There are 75 PVTGs recognised in India.

The PM-PVTG scheme will make targeted interventions to ensure that all PVTG habitations have access to these basic services, thereby resulting in the uplift of lakhs of tribal people.

PVTGs are “particularly vulnerable” tribal groups which are scarce and live in mostly inaccessible parts of the country. They are mostly, if not completely shut out from the modern world.

### **WHAT IS PM-PVTG MISSION?**

The department of telecommunications under the ministry of communications will provide mobile connectivity to 3,000 PVTG villages that do not have any mobile network or 4G network.

The power ministry has been roped in to set up mini-grids in villages to electrify all households in PVTG habitations. Where the setting up of such grids is not possible, the government will provide households with solar power facilities.

In order to promote education among PVTG children, the government plans to set up hostels near existing residential schools.

To ensure that PVTG communities have basic healthcare facilities in their villages, at least 10 medical vans will be deployed in all such habitations.

Initially, the financial outlay for the scheme was pegged at Rs 15,000 crore in this year’s budget. However, the outlay has now been increased to Rs 24,000 crore – a significant escalation based on the inputs received from PVTG villages and habitations all across the country over the past six months.

Nine ministries have been roped in for the implementation of the scheme, who will coordinate with each other to ensure that 11 interventions – like the PM-Gram Sadak Yojana, PM-Gramin Awas Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission, and others reach PVTG villages as soon as possible.

### **TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT TAKES CENTRE STAGE**

Since coming to power, the Modi government has taken a number of initiatives to develop tribal human resources with a special focus on education, health, and livelihood generation. In 2013-14, the number of Eklavya Model Residential Schools for tribal students stood at about 119. Today, 401 such schools are running across the country, and the number of students in them has gone up from 34,365 in 2013-14 to 1,13,275 in 2023-24.

In 2019, the government decided to establish Eklavya Model Residential Schools in every block with 50% or more Scheduled Tribes population and at least 20,000 tribal persons.

Work is also being done to develop over 36,000 villages across the country with at least 50% tribal population and 500 STs as model tribal villages under the Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojna. In terms of land rights, the government has distributed 21.99 lakh individual titles and 1.08 lakh community titles so far under the Forest Rights Act.

Meanwhile, the tribal affairs ministry's budget has seen a three-time increase since 2014. The allocated budget for 2023-24 stands at Rs 12,461 crore. Similarly, the Scheduled Tribe Component Funds of various ministries and departments have witnessed a five-fold increase, with the allocation rising from Rs 24,598 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 1,19,509 crore this year.

Other measures that are having a far-reaching impact on tribals' lives include the Modi government's decision to increase government assistance from just about 10 forest crops to 90 now and approving the establish of 150 medical colleges in tribal areas.




Tribals are today being reached out to. Perhaps, the biggest indicator of that is the election of a tribal woman, Droupadi Murmu, as the President of India, making her the country's first citizen and the supreme commander of the Indian armed forces. <https://www.news18.com/india/since-2014-how-modi-government-has-doubled-down-on-tribal-development-and-welfare-8662953.html>

#### **14. Railways' revenue set to cross 1.5 lakh crore on freight push** (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) UPDATED: Nov 15, 2023

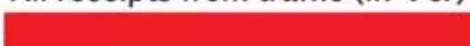


NEW DELHI: Railways' revenue is set to cross Rs 1.5 lakh crore on Wednesday, a day after earnings from freight hit the Rs 1 lakh crore mark.

While overall revenues climbed 6.5% during the fiscal so far, they are short of the annual growth target of over 9% for 2023-24. Railway officials are, however, confident the annual target will be met as goods loading will rise postrains as economic activity remains buoyant.

## FINANCES ON TRACK

(#Data till Oct 14)	2022-23#	2023-24#	% increase
Freight revenue (in ₹ cr)	95,000	1,00,000	 <b>5.3</b>
Freight loading (in MT)	907	940.4	 <b>3.7</b>
Passenger & other revenue (in ₹ cr)	NA	49,833	NA
<b>Total revenue (In ₹ cr)</b>	<b>1,40,680</b>	<b>1,49,833</b>	 <b>6.5</b>

Revenue for full year		% increase
All receipts from traffic (in ₹ cr)		
2022-23	 2,42,693	 <b>9.2</b>
2023-24*	 2,65,000	

\* Budget estimates; Source: Indian Railways

Passenger revenue touched Rs 43,101 crore during the financial year up to October 13.

Reserved passengers helped the railways generate 7% higher earnings of Rs 31,875 crore, although there was a 4.7% decrease in the number of passengers to 47.4 crore. This indicated that the revenue per passenger has gone up with the introduction of trains such as Vande Bharat.

Earnings from the unreserved category went up 3.8% to Rs 11,326 crore, while traffic rose 12% to 366 crore.

In volume terms, freight loading went up 3.7% to 940 MT during the fiscal up to October 14, data sourced from railways showed. Revenue from coal, which is a mainstay, has seen a 3.3% increase to nearly Rs 51,000 crore, while loading has gone up by 5.5% to 463 million tonnes. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/railways-revenue-set-to-cross-1-5-lakh-crore-on-freight-push/articleshow/105217819.cms?from=mdr>

### 15. 'Rs 850 crore scam': Minister Atishi recommends removal of Delhi's top bureaucrats (*indiatoday.in*) UPDATED: Nov 14, 2023

**In her report, Atishi alleged the involvement of the Chief Secretary in enhancing the compensation award for a land parcel, which was acquired for the Dwarka Expressway, in order to provide illicit profits to a company linked to his son.**

Delhi Vigilance Minister Atishi, on Tuesday, recommended the immediate removal of Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar and another senior bureaucrat, Ashwani Kumar, to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in connection with an alleged land scam.

In her report, Atishi alleged the involvement of the Chief Secretary in enhancing the compensation for a piece of land in Bamnoli village, acquired by the National

Highways Authority of India (NHAI) for the Dwarka Expressway, in order to provide illicit profits to a company linked to his son, Karan Chauhan.

The preliminary report, which runs into 670 pages, stated that the "connections and the chronology give the appearance of complicity" of Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar with District Magistrate (South West) Hemant Kumar and landowners in the land acquisition on the Dwarka Expressway.

According to sources, the report also unveils a conspiracy by senior officers of Delhi's Vigilance Department, including Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar, to undervalue the scale of the scam as Rs 312 crore when the actual compensation award would have resulted in an illicit gain of Rs 850 crore to the beneficiaries.

Atishi stated in her report that it was obvious that Naresh Kumar's son had business connections with the landowners who were benefiting. The events since Naresh Kumar became Chief Secretary suggest that he might have used his power to increase compensation for the beneficiaries linked to his son's business.

The report also alleges that Divisional Commissioner Ashwani Kumar repeatedly refused to provide files on this matter, which appeared suspicious and raised questions about his complicity.

In her report, Atishi urged that files related to this matter be seized from them, to prevent any "tampering or destruction of evidence". The Delhi minister also recommended disciplinary proceedings against Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar and Divisional Commissioner Ashwani Kumar.

She has also asked the report to be sent to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) so that the agency has a complete review of the facts discovered to add to the existing CBI inquiry.

"The investigations in the present matter have given rise to a reasonable suspicion that the Chief Secretary may have unduly favored other companies in which his son is a director, or may have used his power and influence on other persons to accrue unlawful benefits to other companies in which his son is a director. However, this issue is being investigated and will be covered in another report and placed before the Chief Minister," the Vigilance Minister added.

#### **DIVISIONAL COMMISSIONER DEFENDS NARESH KUMAR**

Senior IAS officer and Divisional Commissioner Ashwani Kumar came to the rescue of Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar and asserted that the allegations levelled against the bureaucrat were "baseless" and part of "dirty politics".

Addressing a press conference, Ashwani Kumar said a lot of "rumours and lies" are being spread to tarnish the image of the Chief Secretary.

"The complaint is a part of dirty politics and an attempt at mud-slinging as there is no direct link between the land owners and the chief secretary. There is talk of his (chief secretary) tenure being extended and this is an attempt to tarnish his image. All the

allegations against him are baseless, defamatory and insinuating," Ashwani Kumar said.

Ashwini Kumar, while speaking to reporters, also explained that the Chief Secretary has been exposing irregularities in various ministries of the Delhi government for an extended period and his character assassination was a consequence of these endeavors to uncover the truth.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/cities/delhi/story/delhi-chief-secretary-naresh-kumar-rs-850-crore-scam-atishi-recommends-removal-bureaucrats-2462743-2023-11-14>

## **16. Telangana: Over 50% percent of minority welfare funds unused, reveals RTI (*siasat.com*)** 14 November 2023

Hyderabad: An RTI query has revealed Telangana government's underutilisation of the budget allocated for minority welfare, and shows that less than 50% of the funds are being spent.

The RTI filed by activist Kareem Ansari revealed that, as of 2023, the budget allocated for the maintenance of tuition fees amounted to Rs 70.80 crore, with only Rs 11.7 crore spent so far.

Similarly, the budget for the reimbursement of tuition fees stood at Rs 236 crore, of which only Rs 111 crore have been utilised.

For overseas scholarships, the government allocated Rs 118 crore, of which Rs 54.717 crore have been spent. The pre-matric scholarship received a budget of Rs 1.7 crore, though expenditure details were not disclosed. The Shadi Mubarak scheme had Rs 450 crore allocated, and only Rs 207.7 crore were spent.

Moreover, Rs 121.92 crore was allocated to Telangana Minorities Residential Educational Institutions Society DIET charges, but only Rs 12.05 crore has been spent.

In response to this revelation, activist Kareem Ansari has called for increased transparency and effective utilisation of allocated funds to ensure the welfare of minority communities.

The data presented raises questions about the efficiency of the government in implementing schemes aimed at benefiting minorities, urging authorities to address the underutilisation issue promptly. <https://www.siasat.com/telangana-over-50-percent-of-minority-welfare-funds-unused-reveals-rti-2871530/>