

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG /AUDIT REPORTS

- 1. CAG bags Rajbhasha Kirti Puraskar for ‘outstanding implementation’ of Official Language Policy** (*aninews.in, thenewsmill.com, bignewsnetwork.com, latestly.com, devdiscourse.com*) Sep 15, 2023

The office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has been conferred ‘Rajbhasha Kirti Puraskar’ by the Home Ministry for “outstanding implementation” of Official Language Policy.

The award was presented by Minister of State for Home Ajay Kumar Mishra to the Director General (Rajbhasha) of the CAG office in Pune on Friday, a release said.

“The award has been conferred for outstanding implementation of Official Language Policy in the Ministry/Department category with more than 300 personnel for the year 2022-23,” it said.

Director General Bhawani Shankar received the “first” award on behalf of CAG office.

Home Ministry’s Rajbhasha Vibhag congratulated the CAG office working under the guidance of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India GC Murmu for “outstanding work in Hindi” and for securing the first position.

The CAG had formed a committee for the better implementation of ‘rajbhasha policies’ last year in ‘Hindi Pakhwada 2022’.

In order to create awareness about official work through Hindi and to accelerate the use of the language, ‘Hindi Pakhwada 2023 (/topic/hindipakhwada-2023) is being organized in the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India from September 14 to September 29.

According to Article 343 of the Constitution, the official language of the Union is Hindi and the script is Devanagari and necessary directions have been given in Article 351 for the development of Hindi language. <https://aninews.in/news/national/general-news/cag-bags-rajbhasha-kirti-puraskar-for-outstanding-implementation-of-official-language-policy20230915161930/>

- 2. CAG bags Rajbhasha Kirti Puraskar for outstanding work in Hindi** (*devdiscourse.com, newsdrum.in, ptinews.com*) September 15, 2023

The CAG office has been conferred with the highest award "Rajbhasha Kirti Puraskar" by the Ministry of Home Affairs for the best implementation of the Rajbhasha Policy.

The award was presented by State Home Minister Ajay Kumar Mishra to Bhawani Shankar, Director General (Rajbhasha) of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) office in Pune, (Maharashtra) on Friday, a CAG statement said.

"The award has been conferred for outstanding implementation of Official Language Policy in the Ministry/Department category with more than 300 personnel for the year 2022-23," it added.

Rajbhasha Vibhag, under the Home Ministry, congratulated the CAG office working under the supervision and guidance of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India GC Murmu for their outstanding work in Hindi and for securing the first position. The CAG formed a committee for the better implementation of Rajbhasha policies last year in 'Hindi Pakhwada 2022'.

To create awareness about official work through the Hindi language and to accelerate the usage of Hindi, "Hindi Pakhwada 2023" is being organised in the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India from September 14 to September 29, 2023, the release said. <https://www.devdiscourse.com/article/law-order/2594821-cag-bags-rajbhasha-kirti-puraskar-for-outstanding-work-in-hindi>

3. हिंदी को बढ़ावा देने के लिए CAG को मिला Rajbhasha Kirti पुरस्कार (*dainiksaveratimes.com*) September 16, 2023

नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) कार्यालय को राजभाषा नीति के सर्वश्रेष्ठ क्रियान्वयन के लिए केंद्रीय गृह मंत्रालय ने राजभाषा कीर्ति पुरस्कार से सम्मानित किया है। कैग ने कहा कि केंद्रीय गृह राज्यमंत्री अजय कुमार मिश्रा ने शुक्रवार को हिंदी दिवस के मौके पर महाराष्ट्र के पुणे में कैग कार्यालय के महानिदेशक भवानी शंकर को पुरस्कार प्रदान किया।

बयान के अनुसार, यह पुरस्कार वर्ष 2022-23 के लिए 300 से अधिक कर्मियों वाले मंत्रालय/विभाग श्रेणी में राजभाषा नीति के उत्कृष्ट कार्यान्वयन के लिए प्रदान किया गया है। कैग ने पिछले साल 'हिंदी पखवाड़ा 2022' में राजभाषा नीतियों के बेहतर कार्यान्वयन के लिए एक समिति का गठन किया था। <https://dainiksaveratimes.com/bussiness/cag-gets-rajbhasha-kirti-award-for-promoting-hindi/>

4. हिंदी को बढ़ावा देने के लिए कैग को मिला राजभाषा कीर्ति पुरस्कार (*ibc24.in*, *hindi.theprint.in*, *hindi.dynamitenews.com*, *bhasha.ptinews.com*) September 15, 2023

नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) कार्यालय को राजभाषा नीति के सर्वश्रेष्ठ क्रियान्वयन के लिए केंद्रीय गृह मंत्रालय ने राजभाषा कीर्ति पुरस्कार से सम्मानित किया है।

कैग ने शुक्रवार को एक बयान में कहा कि केंद्रीय गृह राज्यमंत्री अजय कुमार मिश्रा ने शुक्रवार को हिंदी दिवस के मौके पर महाराष्ट्र के पुणे में कैग कार्यालय के महानिदेशक भवानी शंकर को पुरस्कार प्रदान किया।

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कैग ने पिछले साल ‘हिंदी पखवाड़ा 2022’ में राजभाषा नीतियों के बेहतर कार्यान्वयन के लिए एक समिति का गठन किया था।

बयान के अनुसार, हिंदी भाषा में सरकारी कामकाज करने के प्रति जागरूकता लाने तथा हिंदी के प्रयोग में तेजी लाने के उद्देश्य से कैग कार्यालय में 14 सितम्बर से 29 सितम्बर तक ‘हिंदी पखवाड़ा 2023’ का आयोजन किया जा रहा है।
<https://www.ibc24.in/business/cag-receives-rajbhasha-kirti-award-for-promoting-hindi-1736766.html>

5. Glare on central government’s accounts over ‘cash diversion’ to unknown repositories (*telegraphindia.com*) September 18, 2023

A 27-page chapter titled ‘Quality of Accounts and Financial Reporting Practices’ in the CAG’s report number 21 of 2023 shines a light on accounting shenanigans that will leave any private conglomerate and its auditors aghast at the sheer audacity of the sharp practices in central govt accounts

There is something rotten in the central government’s accounts — and the situation has been allowed to fester for a very long time with no real attempt to sort out the mess.

Last month, the auditor of the Centre’s accounts — the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) — came out with a report that revealed just how the Narendra Modi government and its accountants have carved out nooks that serve as secret repositories of public money.

The money has been diverted from some well-funded programmes and Parliament-approved cash troves for purposes that the government refuses to reveal even as it continues to cock a snook at the CAG, which has made several caustic comments about the government’s bookkeeping practices in earlier reports.

A 27-page chapter titled “Quality of Accounts and Financial Reporting Practices” in the CAG’s report number 21 of 2023 — pertaining to the central government’s accounts for the financial year 2021-22 — shines a light on accounting shenanigans that will leave any private conglomerate and its auditors aghast at the sheer audacity of the sharp practices in central government accounts.

THE KEY CONCERNS

Some of the issues raised by the CAG

- External debt in 2021-22 calculated at Rs 4.39 lakh crore at a historical rate of exchange. At the current exchange rate, it would have ballooned to Rs 6.58 lakh crore. Therefore, external debt undervalued by Rs 2.19 lakh crore
 - Liabilities for small savings and provident fund understated by Rs 21,560 crore
 - Public funds parked in current accounts of banks in violation of rules
 - Levies and cesses not used for the purposes for which they were created
 - Stack of 258 footnotes
- appended to accounts, which do not give a “complete picture of the finances of the Union government”
 - At least 15 instances where there is a mismatch between the government’s statement on equity holding in public sector units and the information provided in the annual reports and financial statements of these companies
 - 67 cases of adverse balances; 45 of these have not been resolved even after 5 years. Typically, an adverse balance arises when a ministry spends more under a head than it is authorised to.

Levies and cesses collected by the Centre — which it is not obligated to share with the states — lie idle or are spirited away to other causes, violating the terms under which the cesses were supposed to be collected in the first place.

A cess is an additional tax levied by the government for a specific purpose and initially flows into the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI).

There are numerous instances of improper accounting, funds being parked outside the government’s accounts, and the payment obligations of the Centre being deliberately suppressed to show lower liability or hidden in a forest of footnotes.

The government does not know — or does not feel obliged to reveal — how much it actually invested in the equity of state-owned companies and collected by way of dividends from them in the documents that it has presented to the CAG.

THE DISCREPANCY

SMALL SAVINGS LIABILITIES	In Rs crore
Investment of NSSF in special state government securities	3,90,929.97
Accumulated NSSF deficit	41,143.50
Post Office Insurance Fund	1,05,362.82
Investment in govt undertakings	85,570.00
Total	623,006.29
What was reported in the summary statement	6,01,445.58
Discrepancy	21,560.71

There is also a startling mismatch between the number of equity shares that the government holds in state-owned enterprises as revealed in the Union government's financial accounts statement presented to the CAG and the annual accounts presented by the very same entities, many of which are listed on the stock markets.

The report reveals how one ministry shoves out another when they sup at the same cash trove that they are expected to share on a proportionate basis.

It is important to remember that the government follows a cash-based accounting system which means a transaction is recognised only when cash is paid or received — quite unlike the accrual-based system that private companies follow where income recognition happens quickly. The 12th Finance Commission had recommended that the government switch to the accrual-based system, which the government has committed to adopting.

The cash-based system has its own infirmities but that still doesn't explain the heightened level of deception in the government's accounts.

Chartered accountants approached by this newspaper have been loath to comment on the way the government maintains its books or captures details of its investment in state-owned companies.

One former president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) said on condition of anonymity: "The CAG has the power to seek a supplementary audit under section 143(6)(a) of the Companies Act and its comments, including any critical observations, can be laid before Parliament along with the annual report of the (public sector) company. The Opposition may then take up the matter and seek a government response," he said.

The smokescreen

The fudge in the government's accounts starts with the external debt which was calculated at Rs 4.39 lakh crore at a historical rate of exchange — which runs contrary to the definition spelt out in the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act of 2003.

The FRBM Act spells out clear objectives for fiscal austerity. Under its provisions, the government is mandated to cap fiscal deficit at 3 per cent of the GDP by the end of March 2021. It must also try to limit the general government debt (i.e. Centre plus states) at 60 per cent of the GDP. Within that ceiling, the central government debt must not top 40 per cent of the GDP by March 31, 2025.

No government till date has come close to the fiscal deficit target, which is expected to be capped this year at 5.9 per cent. In 2021-22, it came in at 6.7 per cent.

The CAG says if the government had stuck to the FRBM definition and valued external debt at the current exchange rate, it would have ballooned to Rs 6.58 lakh crore. This meant that external debt was undervalued by Rs 2.19 lakh crore in the government's accounts for financial 2021-22.

MISMATCH IN EQUITY SHARE AND PERCENTAGE OF HOLDINGS: GLARING INSTANCES

Name of entity	As per govt's statement*		As per entity's annual accounts	
	No. of Equity shares	Percentage of Holding	No. of Equity shares	Percentage of Holding
Engineers India Ltd	9,01,01,648	NA	28,84,58,584	NA
National Thermal Power Corporation	399,67,26,967	NA	495,53,46,251	NA
PowerGrid Corporation of India**	268,58,72,408	NA	358,11,63,210	NA
General Insurance Corporation	75,25,00,000	NA	150,50,00,000	NA
New India Assurance Company Ltd	30,40,00,000	76	140,80,00,000	85.44
Industrial Development Bank of India	505,70,00,000	52.71	488,98,71,903	45.48
Tata Communications	7,44,46,885	26.12	0	0

*As indicated in the Union Government Finance Accounts (UGFA)

**Failed to take into account the shares issued as part of the 1:3 bonus

The CAG has also rapped the government for not presenting “an appropriate picture of (its) public account liabilities” — and drew attention to the fact that in its summary of its debt position, it showed liabilities at Rs 6.01 lakh crore when the figure actually amounted to Rs 6.23 lakh crore.

This hocus-pocus meant an understatement of its small savings liabilities by Rs 21,560 crore.

Hidden troves

There is one inflexible rule in government accounting: you cannot park public funds outside government accounts.

There are three funds in which government receipts are parked and from where disbursements go out: the Consolidated Fund of India which houses all its revenues, loans and receipts arising from loan recoveries. There is a small contingency fund that deals with unforeseen expenditure from certain exigencies with the current corpus limited to Rs 30,000 crore. Finally, there is the public account where the government holds money in trust. These are funds that do not actually belong to the government like provident funds and small savings collections.

But the department of space — which falls within the Prime Minister's bailiwick — did the unthinkable. It parked a sum of Rs 154.94 crore in 16 current accounts with banks.

When the CAG raised the issue with the department of space, it said it would close all these accounts immediately. The CAG wasn't satisfied since it had raised the issue in the previous year as well. In September 2021, the department of space sought post facto approval from the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) — the government's bookkeeper — to operate these bank accounts.

These accounts were being used by Isro to make customs duty payments and credit receipts from the sale of scrap. In November 2021, the department said it would close these accounts when it was able to make customs payments through NEFT/RTGS — the inter-bank settlement systems that enable instantaneous transfer of money. But these accounts were not closed despite these promises.

Irregularities showed up in the department of telecom as well. In 1999, the government had created a universal service obligation fund (USOF) which would incentivise telecom operators to provide services to people in rural and remote areas at affordable and reasonable prices even though it was uneconomic to do so.

Telecom operators pay a revenue share licence fee of 8 per cent of their adjusted gross revenue to the government. Of this, 5 per cent goes to the USOF and 3 per cent to the general exchequer.

The CAG found that the government had collected Rs 10,376 crore from the telecom levy but transferred only Rs 8,300 crore to the USOF. Where did the rest go? The government wouldn't tell.

“There was short transfer of the universal access levy (UAL)... to the USO Fund amounting to Rs 2,076 crore. This amount was retained in the Consolidated Fund of India and was available for use for purposes other than for which it was levied,” the report said.

The budget division of the department of economic affairs argued with the government's auditor and said the “purpose of such funds is... to ensure utilisation for

the earmarked purpose over a period of years, but not necessarily, within each financial year”.

The CAG didn't agree with this view. “Keeping funds idle in Public Account without productive application is not desirable”, the CAG said, contending that the short transfer was not in accordance with the provisions of the act under which the levy was imposed.

It went on to assert: “The provision of the (Telecom) Act shall prevail over the accounting procedure.”

In 2021-22, the government collected a sum of Rs 52,732 crore through the health and education cess slapped on individual and corporate taxpayers. Sixty per cent of this fund — or Rs 31,788 crore — was transferred to the Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh, a non-lapsable fund meant to promote elementary education.

The rest was supposed to go to the Madhyamik and Uccharat Shiksha Kosh (MUSK) and the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN).

MUSK was cleared by the Union cabinet in July 2017 and the PMSSN in March 2021. Neither was in operation at the end of March 2022.

In May this year, the finance ministry told the CAG that these funds would be operationalised in 2022-23. It is still not clear whether they are up and running.

The report also reveals how the ministry of drinking water and sanitation (MoDWS) cornered the proceeds from the Rashtriya Swachhata Kosh, which was created out of the proceeds from the 0.5 per cent Swachh Bharat cess imposed in November 2015.

The MoDWS is supposed to share the funds from the Kosh on an 80:20 basis with the ministry of housing and urban affairs (MoHUA). In 2015-17, the Kosh had Rs 12,400 crore. The MoDWS cleaned out the fund. The MoHUA incurred an expenditure of Rs 159.42 crore on the Swachh Bharat Mission. But since the fund had been cleaned out, it ended up with an adverse balance in its books. The MoHUA wanted the adverse balance reversed to the water and sanitation ministry but its pleas were not heeded.

In May this year, the MoDWS said it would “adopt” the adverse balance of the housing and urban affairs ministry. It isn't clear whether the reversal of the sum has occurred.

Referring to the brouhaha over the cess pools, N.R. Bhanumurthy, vice-chancellor of the Bangalore-based Dr BR Ambedkar School of Economics University, said: “The cesses are created for a limited purpose and time-frame, and not for perpetuity. Unfortunately, that has not been the case in our country. This has also been pointed out by various Finance Commissions in their reports. The cess, so collected, should be parked in separate heads and used for that purpose alone. Otherwise, it negates the very purpose for which the cess was imposed.”

Accounting trick

The government and the CAG have been at loggerheads over the persistent use of what is known as Minor Head 800.

This has served as the government's hidey-hole for all kinds of transactions that it cannot adequately explain or label.

Theoretically, the rubric used to describe this minor head is "other receipts and other expenditure". It is broad enough to cover a wide range of transactions that are not routine or properly pigeonholed.

In its report on government accounts for 2019-20, the CAG had bluntly said: "Repeated use of Minor Head 800 results in opaqueness in accounts and, hence, needs to be curtailed."

It complained in that report that despite repeated suggestions for a comprehensive review of the structure of government accounts, the government had chosen not to address this issue.

Two years later, the CAG has noted that the problems with Minor Head 800 persist.

In its latest report, the government auditor said 60 per cent of the expenditure under nine major heads ranging from medical and public health to land reforms, and flood control, was lumped under the ubiquitous Minor Head 800.

The total expenditure under these nine major heads amounted to 78,878.54 crore. Of this 60.41 per cent, or Rs 47,651.96 crore, was treated as "other expenditure" under Minor Head 800.

The government also uses a stack of footnotes to its accounts which, the CAG claims, do "not disclose the complete picture of the finances of the Union government".

In 2021-22, the government used 258 footnotes. Two years before this, in 2019-20, it had used 254.

"Some of the footnotes are crucial in nature and need a significant disclosure rather than through a footnote," the CAG said, adding that it had raised this concern in previous years as well.

It has been stonewalled every single time. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/glare-on-central-governments-accounts-over-cash-diversion-to-unknown-repositories/cid/1967035>

6. Addressing PMJAY's fallibilities: How could such a closely monitored scheme like the PMJAY suffer from deficiencies highlighted by the CAG? (*financialexpress.com*) September 16, 2023

In a country where more than 80% of the population is deprived of public health care, a quarter of the population cannot afford medical treatment without taking loans, and 17% of people spend up to 10% of their budget on healthcare due to limited access to public health facilities, any scheme promising to provide free healthcare to people in poverty is a boon.

So is the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY). It was introduced in 2018 to cover healthcare expenses up to Rs 5 lakh per family to 40% of the country's poorest 12 crore families, or 55 crore individuals. It covers the costs of hospitalisation, procedures, and medicines. It also covers pre- and post-hospitalisation treatments without any out-of-pocket expenses by any member of the registered beneficiary families.

PMJAY has already been implemented across all states and union territories barring Delhi, Odisha, Telangana, and West Bengal. By November 2022, 7.87 Crore families were registered under the scheme against the targeted 10.74 crore.

PMJAY has all the technological supports that are espoused to make the system transparent and foolproof: Beneficiaries are identified and registered by the Beneficiary Identification System (BIS); hospitals and healthcare providers are empanelled through Hospital Management Module (HEM), and expenses are booked through the Transaction Management System (TMS). It is implemented and managed by the National Health Agency (NHA), State Health Agencies (SHAs) and District Implementation Units (DIU). National and State Anti-Fraud Units (NAFU and SAFUs) have also been set up to eliminate possibilities of errors and fraud. So, it is confounding that the performance audit of the first three years of the scheme by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) would report so many deficiencies.

Nearly a million beneficiary families were registered using the same or invalid mobile numbers. This could deny them access to healthcare if they lose their identity card. Beneficiaries are supposed to be identified based on the Match Confidence Score (MCS) generated by BIS. It is perplexing that 47.09% of the registered beneficiaries had zero or invalid scores. All the more puzzling is that 40.65% of those denied registrations had MCS between 51- 100.

The audit reports note that healthcare providers filed 2.15 lakh claims for treating patients who had been declared dead during earlier treatments. It is a surprise that claims worth `6.97 crore were processed, accepted, and paid. A good number of claims were also filed for patients who were discharged even before the date of their hospitalisation.

PMJAY requires Aadhaar verification of the beneficiaries. Patients without the Aadhaar card may access healthcare in the first instance on the condition that they must have their Aadhaar card when they come for subsequent treatment. According to the audit report, claims worth Rs 7,322.33 crore were paid off on account of 56.56 lakh patients, of which only 5.46 lakh were authenticated by their Aadhaar.

A third of the empanelled hospitals did not meet the minimum eligibility requirements; many lacked the necessary facilities, instruments, healthcare professionals and doctors. Quite a few submitted reimbursement claims for treating patients even after their empanelment was cancelled. Seven State Health Authorities (SHAs) reappropriated their allocations from one budget head to another, while 20 could not utilise their budget.

The NAFU referred 33.11 lakh cases to the SAFUs for investigation. Surprisingly, 40.81% were found to be fraudulent. Considering that only 17.56% have been absolved of fraud, the numbers and proportion may rise as a large number of cases are still under investigation or waiting for their turn to be taken up. Nearly 184 hospitals across 13 states/UTs were fined Rs 17.28 crore, of which only Rs 4.96 crore could be recovered. Data on penalties and recoveries were simply unavailable in as many as 15 states.

These discrepancies and deficiencies aside, the number of beneficiaries accessing healthcare under the scheme is highly skewed. As of November 2022, a quick analysis of the data reveals that 3.98 crore claims worth `48,486 crore were paid off. Nearly 90% of these payments were usurped by 12 states. Most of these states are reckoned as relatively more developed. Maharashtra and Karnataka, for example, expropriated 13.22% and 10.27% of the total outgo. UP and Bihar, on the other hand, could get no more than 3.54% and 0.95%. These deficiencies relate to the initial three years of the scheme, but they hint at more than teething troubles and call for immediate corrective action.

PMJAY was closely monitored using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) tools. It was supposed to be free of any loopholes. Ubiquitously, technology helps, but only to an extent. It is invariably found faulting in preventing the propensity and ingenuity of the vested interest.

RSBY was found wanting in the speed of implementation. PMJAY was implemented rather rapidly. Too speedy an implementation of any scheme often compromises caution. This must make us beware of the popular adage *savdhani hati, durghatna ghati* (accidents happen when one is not paying attention).

These findings must also make us reflect on why such publicly funded schemes implemented by private players often suffer from such fallibilities. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/addressing-pmjays-fallibilities-how-could-such-a-closely-monitored-scheme-like-the-pmjay-suffer-from-deficiencies-highlighted-by-the-cag/3245201/>

7. Artisanal fishers wary of coastal aquaculture regulation amendments that legalise past violations (*india.mongabay.com*)

September 15, 2023

-The Coastal Aquaculture Amendment Act 2023 decriminalises violation of certain regulations by aquaculture farms. This would encourage further violations, artisan fishers fear.

-Shrimp has emerged as one of India's major foreign exchange earners from among the agriculture sector, but it has also been blamed for increasing ground and surface water salinity, sea water pollution and usurping of common land.

-Shrimp aquaculture farms have frequently faced allegations of destroying the environment and hauled up by green tribunals, but the new law's retrospective effect would regularise past violations, fishers' organisations allege.

“Trawling-Project Bhai Bhai, Ek dori-te fansi chai”

(Trawling and shrimp culture are brothers and both need to be hanged with the same rope)

The Bengali couplet has been a popular protest slogan since the 1990s among small and marginal fishers of East Midnapore district in West Bengal, the word ‘project’ referring to shrimp/prawn aquaculture farms. Now, the fishers feel the government has dealt them a final blow, with the passing of the Coastal Aquaculture Authority Amendment Act, 2023.

“The fishers of coastal West Bengal have been demanding the end of shrimp aquaculture. We have been organising protests and submitting deputations with the administration against rampant violations of regulations. Now, the new law has not only regularised all illegal shrimp farms but has taken away the legal provisions to act against them,” said Debasis Shyamal, president of Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum, an organisation of artisanal fishers.

The Amendment Act was passed by the parliament in the second week of August. It declared coastal aquaculture as “permitted activity under the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification... issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986,” decriminalised violations of coastal zone management regulations by aquaculture activities, and also provided for regularisation of all unauthorised aquaculture farms by making the Act retrospectively effective from December 16, 2005.

“The might of the shrimp aquaculture industry had already cornered small scale fishers,” said Shyamal. “We feel really frustrated and hopeless.”

A history of policy dilution for aquaculture

Concerns over unregulated coastal aquaculture, primarily shrimp, is not new. Artisanal fishers across India have protested it for years, from the Chilika lake region in Odisha in the 1990s to the recent agitations in Tamil Nadu.

Even though the government claims that the Amendment Act “enables lakhs of small marginal aquaculture farmers to avoid possible need for obtaining CRZ clearances from multiple agencies,” organisations of small and marginal farmers feel otherwise.

“It is one of the most grotesque onslaughts by the united force of political power and capital on the coastal environment as well as on the livelihoods of millions of small-scale fish workers and farmers,” alleged Pradip Chatterjee, national convener of National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF).

“Across India’s coastline, small and marginal fishers are nearly absent in shrimp aquaculture. It is the moneyed and land-owning sections of the society who are involved in it,” he said. “Shrimp earns the government foreign exchange and that’s why the interests of the small-scale fishers have been sacrificed.”

Activist believe that the interests of small scale fishermen have been sacrificed for the profits of the shrimp industry. Photo by Timothy A. Gonsalves/Wikimedia Commons

Activist believe that the interests of small scale fishermen have been sacrificed for the profits of the shrimp industry. Photo by Timothy A. Gonsalves/Wikimedia Commons

A research paper published earlier this year made similar observations. It said that “aquaculture farmers are relatively influential in political and economic capital” and that the growth of shrimp farms in the region resulted in a decline in area under paddy cultivation, pollution of fishing grounds and contamination of drinking water.

“Our findings suggest the need for policymakers to take a more critical look at brackish water aquaculture and the possible irreversible costs that they might have on coastal lands and rural livelihoods,” the paper said.

According to Chatterjee, nearly 10 million small and marginal fishers are directly engaged in marine fishing and nearly the same number of people have secondary engagement. The government’s Handbook on Fisheries Statistics: 2022, however, put the number of marine fishers at about five million, which Chatterjee claims to be underreporting.

Leaders of different small and marginal fishworkers’ associations in India alleged that the supreme court’s 1996 judgment, which disallowed the setting up of shrimp culture farms in areas prohibited under the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification of 1991, was diluted by the Coastal Aquaculture Authority Act of 2005, whose provisions were subsequently further diluted by the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notifications of 2011 and 2019 and their amendments.

According to Chatterjee, nearly 10 million small and marginal fishers are directly engaged in marine fishing and nearly the same number of people have secondary engagement. Photo from Pxhere

“The planned destruction of coastal artisanal fishery by pushing shrimp aquaculture harder and harder has come full circle now,” said R.V. Kumaravelu of the National Fishworkers’ Forum based in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu.

According to him, the districts of Nagapattinam and Mayiladuthurai have at least 1,890 shrimp farms, about half of which function in violation of existing regulations. Such practice will now become more widespread as the government has removed the option for criminal proceedings, he apprehends.

The amendment removed imprisonment for a period of up to three years and imposed, in the government’s words, “only a penalty in line with principle of decriminalising civil transgression.”

Old concerns growing bigger

This decriminalisation of aquaculture activities happened less than a year following a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, which highlighted that “competing demand for land for agriculture and prawn farming” were threatening the mangroves along the coast of Odisha, the illegal effluent discharge from aquaculture farms in Andhra Pradesh were polluting the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (CWLS), and coastal aquaculture units in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh were found in violation.

It also pointed out that the National Coastal Zone Management Authority (NCZMA), the apex agency for coastal regulation, “was effectively not involved in monitoring and discussion of action on CRZ violations, which was one of the responsibilities assigned to it.”

NCZMA did not supervise the activities of the state units (SCZMA) regarding monitoring and follow up of violations, it noted, and warned that the “lack of monitoring and enforcement actions would result in providing ineffective deterrence for the destruction of coastal ecology.”

After passing the Amendment Act, the government declares that its intention is “to promote ease of doing business in coastal aquaculture by fine-tuning some of the operational procedures of Coastal Aquaculture Authority.” It hopes the sector is now “poised to take (the) next big leap in form of diversification of species and area expansion.”

Coastal aquaculture, particularly shrimp farming, is the most vibrant food producing sector in India, earning high foreign exchange. According to India’s Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), frozen shrimp is the largest exported item, both in terms of quantity and value during the last decade. India exported 6.52 lakh MT (metric ton) of frozen shrimp worth \$ 4,889.12 million during 2019-20 and it constituted 50.58% in quantity and 73.21% in terms of total USD earnings from sea food export.

About 1.2 million families are estimated to be dependent on this sector directly and indirectly. Altogether, 39,705 shrimp farms with total farm area of 61,044.89 hectares (water spread area of 41,624.70 hectares) were registered with the government till May 2020.

However, a 2018 paper pointed out that “the variation between the actual area under shrimp aquaculture and the Coastal Aquaculture Authority approved area indicates that the larger extent of shrimp farm operates without approval.”

Impact on artisanal fishers

While the shrimp farming industry has wholeheartedly welcomed the new legislation and thanked the government, artisanal fishers have been left a worried lot.

According to Debashis Paul of the Andhra Pradesh-based Democratic Traditional Fisher’s and Fish Workers Forum (DTFWF), shrimp farms grab common land used by artisanal fishers, decrease fish production by polluting sea, river and creek waters with the discharge of untreated effluents, and increase salinity in ground and surface water in their vicinity.

He pointed out that while some recent orders by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) gave them some hope, the new legislation has nullified all such court or tribunal orders for destroying illegal farms.

“No enforcement shall be made by any court of any decree or order or direction relating to removal or closure of any coastal aquaculture activity or demolition of any structure

connected therewith... as if the provisions of sub-section (1), and the amendments made in sub-section (8) of section 13 had been in force at all material times,” says the Act.

Artisinal fisher worry that the proliferation of shrimp farms will decrease fish production by polluting sea, river and creek waters with the discharge of untreated effluents, and increase salinity in ground and surface water in their vicinity. Photo by Aswin Krishna Poyil/Wikimedia Commons

This amendment is crucial because in a September 29, 2022 order the NGT held that the CAA Act made any activity without registration a punishable offence and that the sub-section 8 of its Section 13 “prohibits aquaculture within 200 m. from HTL and in creeks, rivers and backwaters within the CRZ area.” It is based on this interpretation of the section that the NGT decided that hatcheries “cannot be allowed to be located” within 200 metres from the High Tide Line (HTL) or in Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)-I areas. They can be located beyond 200 m. in CRZ-III areas “with prior permission.”

“Any hatchery within 200 m. of HTL which is ‘No Development Zone’ or in CRZ-I areas would be illegal and to be demolished immediately,” the NGT ruled in the context of Tamil Nadu, asking the CAA to initiate prosecution against them and assess the compensation to be imposed on them as per past violations.

Now, the amended Act has categorically clarified that such past orders are invalidated. <https://india.mongabay.com/2023/09/artisanal-fishers-wary-of-coastal-aquaculture-regulation-amendments-that-legalise-past-violations/>

8. Devas-Antrix deal was cancelled to protect ‘highest echelons’ of UPA II govt: Former ISRO chairman Madhavan Nair *(indianexpress.com)* September 18, 2023

A move by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) II government in February 2011 to cancel a satellite deal between Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)’s Antrix Corporation and the space startup Devas Multimedia — which resulted in an international arbitration tribunal ordering Antrix Corp to pay \$1.2 billion in compensation and interest to the startup — was done to protect the “highest echelons of government,” former ISRO chairman G Madhavan Nair has indicated in his autobiography.

Rocketing through the Skies, the English ‘re-narration’ of the former ISRO chairman’s Malayalam 2017 autobiography Agniparikshakal was released last month. The book recounts the struggles and efforts that went into Nair’s ascent from a village in Kerala to the post of the ISRO chairman.

It dwells on his contributions to rocket science at the ISRO, the first Indian moon mission Chandrayaan-1 in 2008 – which happened while he was the ISRO chairman – and the ignominy of allegations of wrongdoing in the Devas Multimedia deal that were brought after his retirement in 2009 and the cancellation of the 2005 Antrix-Devas deal in 2011.

The Devas-Antrix deal signed in 2005 for the ISRO to build and launch two satellites for Devas Multimedia was annulled in 2011 by the UPA II government under then prime minister Manmohan Singh in the light of allegations in the media that it involved “sweetheart deal” that caused more notional loss to the national exchequer than the Rs 1.76 lakh crore 2G scam, involving UPA II coalition partners the DMK, which emerged at the same time.

Nair, who is among ISRO officials and Devas executives accused of corruption in the Devas deal in a CBI chargesheet filed in 2016, has wondered whether he would be able to prove his innocence in his lifetime in a chapter titled ‘A sordid drama: the Devas scam’.

“I wonder if I will be able to prove my innocence within my lifespan. But my conscience is clear – I have not done anything wrong or indulged in any corrupt practices,” he has stated in his book. “It is only as the fallout of some ill-informed and perhaps corrupt persons trying to hide their wrongdoings that I am being victimised,” he has stated.

The 2005 satellite deal was annulled after the UPA II government cited the requirement of space spectrum allotted to the startup Devas Multimedia for defence and security purposes. “It is understood from private conversations that the action taken was mainly to protect the highest echelons of government,” Nair has stated in his book.

According to the book, the emergence of the allegations of corruption in the 2005 Antrix-Devas satellite deal resulted in then PM Singh’s office attempting to shield him from accusations since the space department fell under his purview.

As per the book, Nair was informed about the emergence of allegations of corruption in the Devas deal while he was in the middle of a meeting of the failure analysis committee for the GSLV rocket’s indigenous cryogenic rocket stage in May 2010.

“In the middle of the meeting, I was interrupted and asked to call the PMO urgently. Dr Manmohan Singh came on the line and asked me about reports in the media alleging that the Department of Space (DOS) had caused a loss to the government of Rs 2.8 (lakh) crore through short selling of spectrum to a private company called Devas. He directed me to immediately give a detailed report about the facts of the matter, which I submitted within a few hours. I also sought and obtained a personal appointment with him,” Nair has written.

Nair says he rushed to Delhi two days after the allegations emerged and spent almost an hour with the prime minister. “I explained at length about the agreement with Devas, the difference in spectrum usage in space and on the ground, the technical and financial aspects of the project and how there was absolutely no financial loss to the government,” he has stated.

“At the end of the meeting, the prime minister also directed me to meet two senior bureaucrats at the PMO, namely the principal secretary and the NSA. I did so immediately. I had known them both personally and officially for a long time and the meeting was friendly. But I felt that some of the questions asked were like that of an investigating agency,” the former ISRO chairman stated.

“But strangely, they advised that I should not speak to the media and go public with the facts. They were afraid it would look like a war between two Malayalees or two Nairs,” he said. According to Nair, Dr K Radhakrishnan, who had succeeded him, had not projected the Devas deal in a good light, resulting in the casting of aspersions.

“Later, I came to know that the authorities had projected that the agreement was established by violating rules and procedures and that it was a case of corruption. God knows from where they got such information,” Nair has stated.

Since the whole issue happened in the backdrop of the 2G scam – where the DoT in 2005 adopted the policy of “first come first served” for allocating spectrum, leading to the alleged collusion among politicians and bureaucrats to sell spectrum licenses at low prices, the Devas-Antrix deal was also viewed in the same light after the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India raised a query on the losses in the Devas deal.

The trigger point for the allegations of corruption in the Devas deal “was an audit query raised in 2010 to the DOS by the CAG on the spectrum valuation in the Devas agreement. The query highlighted that the DOS had caused a presumptive loss of Rs 2.8 lakh crore on account of the deal with Devas by short-selling the spectrum,” Nair has indicated.

“Since the DOS was directly under the prime minister, some people saw this as an opportunity to corner him,” he has written.

“The PMO immediately formed a shield around the prime minister to save his image,” Nair adds.

In June 2010, then ISRO chairman Dr Radhakrishnan and then additional secretary G Balachandran told the Space Commission that the Devas deal involved a violation of procedures.

“It is understood from private documents that they claimed that there had been numerous violations of procedure while establishing the agreement and hence it needed to be annulled,” the former scientist said.

The manner in which the deal was cancelled, citing the need for spectrum for defence purposes rather than citing defaults by Devas despite advice to blame Devas for the cancellation of the deal and other actions “gave rise to the doubt whether the cancellation was stage-managed to benefit Devas” the former ISRO chairman has stated.

“Normally, the government would have inquired into this matter that has brought such a heavy financial burden to the country. But no such action has been taken so far,” he says.

The CBI probe of the deal where he is currently accused is based on the wrong notion “that the action of Antrix and DOS helped Devas make an undue gain of Rs 575 crore by selling shares in the international market”, according to Nair.

Devas brought in the Rs 575 crore as foreign equity as per the prevalent government norm and the FIPB approval was given based on the Internet Protocol television services license issued by the DOT to Devas, the former ISRO chairman has argued.

“It is surprising that the Pratyush Sinha panel concluded that the so-called undue gain by Devas is caused by an ‘act of omission and commission; by Antrix and DOS officials that included four scientists and four IAS officers and recommended action under service rules or pension rules. Later actions, including the CBI inquiry, were based on this wrong decision,” he says in the book.

“However, without following any rules and procedures, the DOS meted out punishment only to the scientists, including me, by debarring them from government jobs while no action was taken against the IAS officers,” he has stated.

“This is a clear case of high-handed action taking law into the hands, targeting a few of us, and the intention was to harm the reputation of scientists who had spoken against the wrong decisions of the UPA II government,” Nair states.

“It seems that the CBI inquiry was initiated to apparently protect the persons responsible for bringing the hefty ICC award upon ISRO. As part of the inquiry, an FIR was filed against Antrix and the DOS officials as well as executives of Devas on alleged irregularities in the Devas Antrix agreement,” the former ISRO chairman has noted. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/bangalore/devas-antrix-deal-cancelled-protect-upa-former-isro-chairman-madhavan-nair-8943462/>

9. Auditors should embrace technology; contribute to nation building: FM (*deccanherald.com*) September 16, 2023

Observing that the next 25 years are "critical" for India to achieve developed nation status, Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday appealed to auditors to embrace technology and educate smaller companies to grow.

The Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister remarked that the country has progressed at many levels in the last 20-25 years and even the World Bank report has said India has achieved in the last decade what it could not achieve in 60 years.

"I am talking to veterans of this profession. You are one of the oldest registered bodies. I would think my meeting with you all is not just only to celebrate the 90 years, but also to say this profession has to take newer responsibilities," she said at the 90th anniversary celebrations of The Society of Auditors.

Sitharaman pointed out that the practices of chartered accountants were going through a lot of change, globally and said even some of the audience gathered at the venue had already started to feel the change in their profession.

"I commend the way in which technology has come into play and many of you are happily adapting to it and that is why even the examinations of chartered accountants is going to be of a different format from next July," she said.

Sitharaman said that in the next 25 years India will have a "narrow window" to become a developed nation and "every one of us has to play a very important role in not only focusing on your profession but looking at ways to better serve the nation".

Recalling that lawyers left their profession to join the Freedom movement, she said, "Today nobody expects you to leave your profession but serving the country and its goals will have to be a part of your identity and also part of your business model."

Emphasising that everyone should have a greater sense of 'kartavya' (duty), Sitharaman said, "Everyone is duty-bound to face the challenge which was in front of the country to bring back its past glory of reaching developed nation status."

Referring to freedom fighters who lost their houses, jobs to take part in the freedom movement before 1947, the finance minister said such a necessity does not arise today.

"Today one does not need to lose his house nor job...By continuing our profession we can ably contribute to the growth of the nation. For example, you can advise your clients that if you allot your investments in this area you will be able to get good income, that will also yield good revenues to the country. By giving these kinds of instructions, you will be able to contribute to the growth of the nation," she said.

Sitharaman who spoke in a mix of Tamil and English in her 40-minute speech said, auditors should also inform the government where it was losing money by informing the authorities concerned.

You do not need to tell the name of the company nor the individual involved in it. It may put your life in danger also. But you can inform the government authorities that there is tax evasion happening," she said.

"Since I am in Tamil Nadu, I will explain in detail. If I am able to get one tip about a tax evasion undertaken by one company, I have to travel wherever the company has a presence. It is like a spider web. We have to travel wherever the company has a presence. It may be in Arakkonam, or Kanniyakumari or even in Dubai," she said.

Sitharaman rebuked the opposition parties' contention that the Enforcement Directorate was used to conduct searches in a company which was involved in tax evasion.

"With Artificial Intelligence, myself and officials concerned will be held accountable by the CAG if the Finance Ministry does not take any action against a company which was involved in tax evasion."

Sitharaman noted with the use of AI it is possible today to get the information about the tax evasion made by a company.

Sitharaman also cautioned that if an individual does not contribute to the growth of the country in the next 25 years, it is like a popular saying that, "You missed the bus" and the country would go back to its earlier days.

She stressed that it was the right time to make India a prosperous nation by 2047, so that the future generations can reap the benefits.

To add to her point, Sitharaman said today the country has got good income tax professionals who can offer their suggestions to the government "which listens to them".

"We have got a government which listens. Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) does not differentiate and stresses that a nation can grow only if all the states grow. Even if one state falls back, it will slow down the progress," she said.

Urging the auditors present at the venue to upgrade their skills, Sitharaman said technology driven changes are dominating Chartered Accountancy and one must have greater knowledge in using 'deep-tech' and 'data mining'."

"All these are going to help you (auditors) in understanding the health of a company. So there is no way even if you are experienced with 30-35 years, today that legacy should be strengthened with technology that is so required. Even if you do not need it, your company will need it," she said. "

The point again that I am driving at you is you have well matured organisations which should now meet the challenges of the century," she said.

Auditors and chartered accountants should think how they can reach out to small and medium clients, she said.

"They (small and medium clients) do not have the capacity to benefit from technology. You should tell them how to access it. For example the ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce) is a mobile application that allows you to sell their goods anywhere in the world. He may be from a small company or may be a jeweller. He can sell his product through ONDC," she said.

Sitharaman before concluding her speech said, "This (next) 25 years are very critical and if these kinds of efforts (from auditors) are received from every state, India can become a developed nation. It will be good for the future generations. We should use this opportunity." <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/auditors-should-embrace-technology-contribute-to-nation-building-fm-2689399>

10. CAG ने दी अधूरी कामयाबी की रिपोर्ट तो मंत्री SCINDIA बोले- UDAN ने चार 'बच्चों' को जन्म दिया है (*jansatta.com*) Sep 15, 2023

नागर विमानन मंत्री ज्योतिरादित्य सिंधिया ने कहा, "उड़ान योजना का पूरे देश में विकासशील, प्रगतिशील और जनहितैषी प्रभाव रहा है। एक करोड़ 31 लाख ऐसे लोग, जो हवाई यात्रा का सपना नहीं देख सकते थे, आज वह 'उड़ान' की वजह से सफर कर पा रहे हैं।

मोदी सरकार (Modi Government) में दो वर्षों से भी अधिक समय से नागर विमानन मंत्रालय संभाल रहे ज्योतिरादित्य सिंधिया (Jyotiraditya Scindia) ने उड़ान (उड़े देश का आम नागरिक - UDAN) योजना के बारे में नियंत्रक एवं महालेखापरीक्षक (CAG) की ऑडिट रिपोर्ट पर अपना पक्ष रखा है।

जनसत्ता.कॉम के संपादक विजय कुमार झा (Vijay KumarJha) से बातचीत में सिंधिया ने सीएजी की रिपोर्ट से लेकर महंगी हुई हवाई यात्रा तक पर अपनी सफाई दी।

पहले जानिए सीएजी ने 'उड़ान' की ऑडिट रिपोर्ट में क्या पाया
सीएजी की रिपोर्ट बताती है कि 'उड़ान योजना' के तहत जितने रूट प्रस्तावि त थे, उनमें से 50 प्रतिशत पर ही काम हो पाया। सरकार ने उड़ान योजना के तहत कुल 774 रूट्स चुने थे। इनमें से 403 रूट्स पर उड़ान कभी शुरू ही नहीं हुई।

जिन 371 रूट पर संचालन शुरू हुआ, उनमें से सिर्फ 112 रूट ही 3 साल तक सर्वाइव कर पाए। शेष पहले ही बंद हो गए। मार्च 2023 तक 174 मार्ग परिचालन में हैं। यानी आवंटित कुल मार्गों (774) में से मात्र 22.48 ही परिचालन में हैं।

ज्योतिरादित्य सिंधियाया ने सीएजी की रिपोर्ट पर क्या कहा
विजय कुमार झा के सवाल के जवाब में सिंधिया ने कहा, "अगर मैं आपके सामने एक ग्लास पानी रख दूँ। आप कहोगे यह तीन चौथाई भरा हुआ है लेकिन एक चौथाई खाली है। यह आपके दृष्टिकोण पर निर्भर करता है। उड़ान योजना का पूरे देश में विकासशील, प्रगतिशील और जनहितैषी प्रभाव रहा है। एक करोड़ 31 लाख लोग, जो कई देशों की आबादी के बराबर है, इतने लोग जो हवाई यात्रा का सपना नहीं दे सकते थे, आज वह उड़ान की वजह से सफर कर पा रहे हैं।

उड़ान योजना की तारीफ करते हुए सिंधिया आगे कहते हैं, "ऐसे हवाई अड्डे जो दूसरे विश्वयुद्ध के बाद से बंद हो गए थे, वो उड़ान योजना के तहत खुल गए हैं। ऐसे एयरपोर्ट्स हैं- ओडिशा का झारसुगुड़ा एयरपोर्ट, असम का रूपसी एयरपोर्ट, अजमेर का किशनगढ़ एयरपोर्ट, बिहार का दरभंगा एयरपोर्ट। इन हवाई अड्डों से पांच-पांच लाख यात्री प्रति वर्ष यात्रा कर रहे हैं।

" सिंधिया कहते हैं कि उड़ाना योजना ने चार बच्चों को जन्म दिया है। उन्होंनेनेहों नेकहा, "उड़ान योजना ने चार नए बच्चों को जन्म दिया है। इस योजना ने चार नए रीजनल एयरलाइंस को जन्म दिया है- इंडिया वन एयर, फ्लाई बिग, फ्लाई 91 और स्टार एयर। वहीं पूरे देश में नैरो बॉडी एयरक्राफ्ट में अकासा एयरलाइंस ऐसा है, जिसने दो प्लेन से शुरुआत की और महज 12 महीनों में 20 प्लेन तक पहुंच चुकी है।"

घटी है यात्रियों की संख्या- CAG

रीजनल कनेक्टिविटी स्कीम 'उड़ान' के रूट्स पर यात्रा करने वालों की संख्या घटी है। 2021-22 में आरसीएस मार्गों पर 32,99,861 यात्रियों ने सफर किया था। 2022-23 में यह संख्या घटकर 24,97,361 हो गई। साल-दर-साल यात्रियों की संख्या नीचे टेबल में देखें

वर्ष	उड़ान रूट्स पर यात्रियों की संख्या
2017-18	2,63,166
2018-19	12,40,896
2019-20	29,91,337
2020-21	14,98,066
2021-22	32,99,861
2022-23	24,97,361

यात्रियों की संख्या क्यों घटी?

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय ने सीएजी को यात्रियों की संख्या घटने का कारण बताया था, "वर्ष 2020- 21 और 2022-23 को छोड़कर सभी वर्षों में यात्रियों की संख्या में वृद्धि हो रही थी, वर्ष 2020- 21 में कोविड के कारण और वर्ष 2022-23 में एक एयरलाइन (टर्बो मेघा एयरवेज) के 42 परिचालन मार्गों के परिचालन बंद होने के कारण, आरसीएस मार्गों पर यात्रियों की संख्या में गिरावट आई।

मंत्रालय ने यह भी कहा कि विमानन क्षेत्र कोविड- 19 महामारी के बुरे समय से उभर रहा और एयरलाइनों को हवाई परिचालन को फिर से शुरू करने के लिए कड़ी मेहनत करनी पड़ रही है। इस योजना ने एयरलाइनों को देश भर में अप्रचालित और अल्पप्रचालित हवाई अड्डों से परिचालन शुरू करने का अवसर दिया है।

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय ने स्वीकार किया कि हवाई अड्डों की पहचान प्रक्रिया में सुधार हो सकता है। हवाई अड्डों की सामाजिक-आर्थिक स्थितियों और एयरलाइनों द्वारा प्रस्तावित उनके कमान क्षेत्र के मूल्यांकन के आधार पर, ऐसे स्थानों का चयन करने के बाद अंतिम रूप देने के लिए एक तंत्र विकसित किया जा सकता है।

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय के उत्तर को इस तथ्य के संदर्भ में देखा जाना चाहिए कि तीन साल की अवधि पूरी करने वाले 112 मार्गों में से 58 मार्गों पर रियायत अवधि पूरी होने के बाद परिचालन बंद कर दिया गया था। नतीजतन, आरसीएस हवाई अड्डों के विकास/उन्नयन के लिए सार्वजनिक धन खर्च करने बाद भी निरंतरता हासिल नहीं की जा सकी।

हवाई यात्रा महंगी होने पर क्या बोले सिंधिया?

सिंधिया से यह भी पूछा गया कि पहले लोग 2500 रुपये में हवाई यात्रा कर पा रहे थे लेकिन अब फिर वो दौरे आ रहा है, जब हवाई यात्रा के लिए कम से कम 4500 रुपये खर्च करना पड़ रहा है। सरकार इस चुनौती से कैसे निपटने वाली है?

जवाब में नागरिक उड्डयन मंत्री ज्योतिरादित्य सिंधिया ने तर्क दिया, "सिविल एविएशन एक सिकलिकल (चक्रीय) इंडस्ट्री है। ऐसा भारत ही नहीं अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर है। इस इंडस्ट्री में हाई सीजन आता है, फिर लो सीजन आता है। दशहरा से जनवरी तक हाई सीजन रहता है। फरवरी से अप्रैल तक लो सीजन रहता है। फिर मई में बच्चों की छुट्टियां शुरू होती हैं और हाई सीजन दोबारा शुरू हो जाता है। यह वर्षा ऋतु से पहले तक चलता है। जुलाई से सितंबर तक एक बार फिर लो सीजन रहता है। यह चलता रहता है। हवाई यात्रा की डिमांड उसकी कीमत को प्रभावित करता है। हाई सीजन में डिमांड बढ़ती है, तो टिकट की कीमत बढ़ती है। जब लो सीजन में डिमांड घटती है, तो टिकट की कीमत भी घट जाती है। 15-20 साल पहले भारत में दिल्ली-बॉम्बे के टिकट के लिए 15-20 हजार रुपये देने पड़ते थे। अब तीन-चार हजार रुपये में दिल्ली से मुंबई जा सकते हैं।"

<https://www.jansatta.com/jansatta-special/exclusive-civil-aviation-minister-jyotiraditya-scindia-reply-cag-report-udan/3006112/>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

11. Meagre funds allocated for protection of wildlife sanctuaries in Gujarat: CAG (*indianexpress.com*) September 16, 2023

The funds released for protection, conservation, and management of protected areas between 2016-21 ranged between 11 to 21 per cent of the total funds released to the forest department, stated the country's top audit watchdog in its report titled 'Performance Audit of Protection, Conservation, and Management of Wildlife Sanctuaries in Gujarat.'

Highlighting a lack of "state-specific forest policy" in Gujarat, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in a report tabled in the state legislature Saturday, stated that funds allocated for protection, conservation, and management of protected areas in the state were "meagre".

The funds released for protection, conservation, and management of protected areas between 2016-21 ranged between 11 to 21 per cent of the total funds released to the forest department, stated the country's top audit watchdog in its report titled 'Performance Audit of Protection, Conservation, and Management of Wildlife Sanctuaries in Gujarat.'

"Despite the MoEF prescribing wildlife as a priority sector, the allocation of funds by state government to the Forest and Environment Department continued to be meagre," the Auditor observed. Against a budget provision of Rs 6,748 crore, the government released Rs 6,120 crore to the office of PCCF (Principal Chief Conservator of Forest) and HOFF (Head of the Forest Force) between 2016 and 2021. Out of this, an expenditure of Rs 6,005 crore was incurred on various schemes and activities which included Rs 823 crore on protection, conservation, and management of protected areas. "This amounted to only 13.71 percent of the total expenditure incurred by PCCF and HOFF," the audit report pointed out.

The CAG also came down heavily on the state government for not preparing a state-specific forest policy. Even after 15 years since the National Forest Commission recommended all states to have their own forest policy and after the CAG pointed this out in 2009, "Gujarat has not prepared its Forest policy," the report stated.

"Further the department has not established a mechanism... for ensuring implementation of provisions of National Forest Policy and National Wildlife Plan... Declaration of Critical Wildlife Habitats in the sanctuaries was not done even after a lapse of 14 years of implementation of the Forest Rights Act. There were delays in preparation of management plans and sanctuaries were being managed on ad-hoc basis," the CAG stated.

There are 28 Protected Areas (PAs) in Gujarat which comprise four national parks, one conservation reserve, and 23 wildlife sanctuaries. The total area under PAs is 17,099 square kilometre, of which 4,640 square kilometre or 27.5 per cent is forest land and the remaining belongs to non-forest ecosystems which mainly consist of the Kutch Desert Sanctuary. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/meagre-funds-protection-wildlife-sanctuaries-gujarat-cag-8942646/>

12. Over 18,400 cases of illegal logging in Gujarat forests between 2016 and 2021: CAG (*geotvnews.com*) September 16, 2023

Referring to 18,469 cases of illegal tree felling in Gujarat between 2016 and 2021, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in a report submitted to the state legislature on Saturday said that illegal tree felling was prevalent in six sloth bear reserves in the state. also.

Poor functioning of checkpoints, insufficient trained human resources, and insufficient availability of weapons, vehicles and necessary functional communication equipment have led to illegal logging in the six reserves of Balaram Ambaji, Jessore, Jambuguda, Ratanmahal, Sholpaneshwar and Poorna. This was stated by the country's top audit

watchdog in its report titled ‘Performance Audit of Protection, Conservation and Management of Wildlife Sanctuaries in Gujarat’.

The report stated that against the 48 checkpoints proposed in these six shelters, only 18 were established and of these, only 12 were found operational. Similar gaps have been observed in the human resources protecting sloth bear reserves.

In the six reserves, the vacancy rate for front-line staff – guards and foresters – ranged from 22 to 42 percent. The highest vacancy for frontline staff was at Sholpaneshwar where only 57 people were appointed against a restricted strength of 98 people. Likewise, the vacancy rate in Ratanmahal was 39 per cent.

“The vacancy in frontline staff has affected the protection function which was evident from illegal logging, cultivation in the sanctuary area and non-operational checkpoints,” the CAG said, adding that cases of illegal logging were observed in Jambugoda and Poorna. Refuge.

“The audit noted the presence of felled tree trunks, marks on the trunks and trunks of trees burned to conceal the illegal felling of trees within the Jambugoda sanctuary,” the CAG said. The auditor also noted that there was a “significant disparity” in the availability of weapons among forest officials in these reserves. It stated that the per capita share of available weapons ranges between 40-77 percent.

During the period 2016-2021, there were 110 attacks on forest officials. “Providing qualified forest personnel with adequate and operational firearms will act as a deterrent against such incidents of assaults, illegal logging, poaching, etc.,” she added.

The auditor also noted gaps in the training of forest officials. “The jungle personnel were trained on 0.22 rifle (at the Gujarat Police Academy in Karai, Gandhinagar), although the rifles they used were 0.12 rifle,” she added.

The CAG also highlighted non-functional radio communication systems with forest staff. It found that 41 percent of the walkie-talkies in the Balaram Ambaji sanctuary were out of order. “The vehicles used by forest personnel in Jambugoda and Ratanmahal reserves were not equipped with wireless communication facilities...Lack of smooth communication between officials and personnel deployed on the front lines to report any incident or call up standby force was detrimental to conservation and conservation activities.” The report stated that. <https://geotvnews.com/over-18400-cases-of-illegal-logging-in-gujarat-forests-between-2016-and-2021-cag-gandhinagar-news-geotv-news/>

13. CAG report pulls up Gujarat forest dept for shortcomings, ignoring ISRO report on 12 potential wildlife corridors (*moneycontrol.com, theprint.in*) September 16, 2023

The Gujarat forest department did not take cognizance of the findings of a scientific study conducted by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) with a recommendation on habitat improvement in potential wildlife corridors in the state, the

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) said in a report tabled in the Assembly on Saturday.

The CAG's 'Performance Audit of Protection, Conservation and Management of Wildlife Sanctuaries in Gujarat' said ISRO had identified 12 wildlife corridors in its study in 2014 and 2017 and shared it with the forest department with a recommendation on habitat improvement in the potential corridors. The forest department neither conducted any study itself to identify the precise corridors nor took cognizance of the findings of the ISRO study, it said.

The corridors thus identified were not included fully in the notified eco-sensitive zones of Balaram Ambaji and Jessore sanctuaries, the report added. Gujarat does not have a state-specific forest policy and the concerned department has not yet established a mechanism for ensuring implementation of the National Forest Policy and National Wildlife Action Plan, the CAG report noted.

A forest policy provides a strategy for conservation with a focus on preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilisation, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment, it said. The state has not yet declared critical wildlife habitats (CWHs) in sanctuaries even after 14 years of implementation of the Forest Rights Act, and some activities envisaged under Gujarat Bear Conservation and Welfare Action Plan were yet to be completed, it further pointed out.

Sanctuaries in the state were being managed on an ad-hoc basis and plans lacked uniformity in terms of mid-term evaluation, etc, it said. "The audit notices that even after 15 years since the report of the National Forest Commission, and after being pointed out by the CAG, Gujarat has not prepared its forest policy till (November 2022)," it said.

The National Forest Policy was not being properly implemented in the state, the report said. It also called for the state eco-tourism policy to be updated and modified as per the extant policy of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Regarding bear conservation, it said while Gujarat has five protected areas of sloth bear, the available habitats face pressure in the form of livestock grazing, tourism and developmental activities like road construction and expansion, mining, etc. The government did not utilise the reports of the Wildlife Institute of India during preparation and execution of the management plans of respective sanctuaries, it further said.

The linkage between funds allocated and activities envisaged under the management plan was missing, as per the report. It also highlighted "deficiencies" in the demarcation of sanctuaries and said such records were not maintained properly and inspections were not adequate for avoiding encroachment of sanctuary areas.

"Despite the provisions of the Forest Rights Act, which stipulates that no fresh land could be brought under use (including cultivation) after 2005, fresh areas were being cleared for cultivation," it noted. In the absence of a systematic approach for timely preparation of the zonal master plan (ZMP), it remained incomplete in respect of five sanctuaries even after lapse of 12 months to 94 months since the stipulated dates of

their formation, the CAG report said.
<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/uncategorized/cag-report-pulls-up-gujarat-forest-dept-for-shortcomings-ignoring-isro-report-on-12-potential-wildlife-corridors-11380831.html>

14. CAG ने ISRO की रिपोर्ट का संज्ञान नहीं लेने पर गुजरात

सरकार पर उठाए सवाल (*navodayatimes.in*) September 17, 2023

भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) ने शनिवार को गुजरात विधानसभा में सदन के पटल पर रखी गई एक रिपोर्ट में कहा है कि राज्य के वन विभाग ने भारतीय अंतरिक्ष अनुसंधान संगठन (इसरो) द्वारा किए गए वैज्ञानिक अध्ययन के निष्कर्षों पर संज्ञान नहीं लिया, जिसमें प्रदेश में संभावित वन्यजीव गलियारों में अधिवास की स्थितियों में सुधार करने की सिफारिश की गयी है।

कैग की 'गुजरात में वन्यजीव अभयारण्य की सुरक्षा, संरक्षण और प्रबंधन की समीक्षा' रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि इसरो ने 2014 और 2017 में किए अपने अध्ययन में 12 वन्यजीव गलियारों की पहचान की थी तथा संभावित गलियारों में वन्यजीवों के अधिवास की स्थितियों में सुधार पर सिफारिश के साथ इसे वन विभाग के साथ साझा किया था। उसने कहा कि वन विभाग ने सटीक गलियारों की पहचान करने के लिए न तो खुद कोई अध्ययन किया और न ही इसरो के अध्ययन के निष्कर्षों पर संज्ञान लिया।

इसमें कहा गया है, "ऑडिट में पाया गया है कि राष्ट्रीय वन आयोग की रिपोर्ट आने के 15 साल और कैग द्वारा उल्लेख किए जाने के बाद भी गुजरात ने अभी तक (नवंबर 2022) अपनी वन नीति तैयार नहीं की है।" रिपोर्ट में यह भी कहा गया है कि राज्य में राष्ट्रीय वन नीति को उपयुक्त तरीके से लागू नहीं किया जा रहा है। <https://www.navodayatimes.in/news/khabre/comptroller-auditor-general-india-questions-gujarat-government-not-taking-cognizance-isro-report/226255/>

15. सीएजी रिपोर्ट: गुजरात के जंगलों में इन पांच वर्षों में अवैध रूप से 18 हजार से ज्यादा पेड़ कटे

(*patrika.com*) September 16, 2023

गुजरात के जंगलों में वर्ष 2016-21 के दौरान अवैध रूप से पेड़ काटने के 18469 मामले सामने आए। यह खुलासा नियंत्रक व महालेखा परीक्षक (सीएजी) की ओर से राज्य विधानसभा के मानसून सत्र के चौथे व अंतिम दिन पेश की गई रिपोर्ट में हुआ। पेड़ों की अवैध कटाई राज्य के छह स्लॉथ भालू अभयारण्य में भी की गई। इनमें बालाराम अंबाजी अभयारण्य, जेसोर, जांबुघोड़ा, रतनमहल, शूलपाणेश्वर व पूर्णा अभयारण्य शामिल हैं।

गुजरात के वन्यजीव अभयारण्यों में रक्षण, संरक्षण व प्रबंधन के परफॉर्मैन्स ऑडिट में यह बात कही गई है। इसमें कहा गया है कि चेक पोस्ट की कमजोर कार्रवाई, अपर्याप्त प्रशिक्षित मानव संसाधन के साथ-साथ उचित हथियार, वाहनों और संचार उपकरणों की कम उपलब्धता भी इन छह अभयारण्यों में पेड़ों की अवैध कटाई के कारणों में शामिल हैं। इन छह अभयारण्यों में स्वीकृत 48 चेक पोस्ट की जगह सिर्फ 18 चेक पोस्ट हैं जिनमें से सिर्फ 12 ही कार्यरत हैं। इसी तरह की स्थिति भालू अभयारण्यों में सुरक्षा करने वाले मानव संसाधन की है। बीट गार्ड व फोरेस्टर के 22 से 42 फीसद पद रिक्त हैं। शूलपाणेश्वर में सबसे ज्यादा रिक्त पद हैं जहां पर फ्रंटलाइन स्टाफ के 98 स्वीकृत पदों की संख्या के मुकाबले सिर्फ 57 लोग कार्यरत हैं। यही स्थिति रतनमल की है जहां पर 39 फीसदी पद रिक्त हैं। फ्रंटलाइन स्टाफ के नहीं होने से संरक्षण प्रभावित होता है जो अवैध रूप से पेड़ों की कटाई से

पता चलता है। वन कर्मियों के पास हथियारों की भी कमी है। प्रति स्टाफ इसकी अनुपलब्धता 40 से 77 फीसदी तक है।

वनकर्मियों पर हमले की 110 घटनाएं

उधर यह भी बताया गया है कि इन पांच वर्षों के दौरान वन कर्मियों पर हमले की 110 घटनाएं घटीं। वनकर्मियों को उचित हथियारों से लैस करने से पेड़ों की अवैध कटाई, उन पर हमले व शिकार जैसी घटनाओं को रोकने में निवारक सिद्ध हो सकते हैं। सीएजी रिपोर्ट में वनकर्मियों के ट्रेनिंग में भी कमी को दर्शाया गया है। इन वनकर्मियों को 0.22 राइफल से प्रशिक्षित किया गया जबकि उन्हें 0.12 बोर की राइफल उपयोग करना होता है। <https://www.patrika.com/ahmedabad-news/18000-cases-of-illegal-tree-cutting-in-gujarat-forest-in-5-years-cag-8491292/>

16. Gujarat: कैग ने इसरो रिपोर्ट की अनदेखी के लिए गुजरात वन विभाग को फटकारा, जानें पूरा मामला (*amarujala.com*) September 16, 2023

नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) ने खामियों और भारतीय अंतरिक्ष अनुसंधान संगठन (इसरो) की ओर से किए गए वैज्ञानिक अध्ययन के निष्कर्षों का संज्ञान नहीं लेने के लिए गुजरात के वन विभाग को फटकार लगाई है। इसरो ने राज्य में संभावित वन्यजीव गलियारों में जंगली जानवरों के रहने वाले स्थानों को लेकर सुधार की सिफारिश की थी। यह रिपोर्ट शनिवार को राज्य विधानसभा के पटल पर रखी गई।

गुजरात में वन्यजीव अभयारण्यों की सुरक्षा, संरक्षण और प्रबंधन का निष्पादन लेखा परीक्षा शीर्षक वाली कैग की इस रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि इसरो ने 2014 से 2017 के दौरान किए गए अपने अध्ययन में राज्य में 12 वन्यजीव गलियारों की पहचान की थी। संगठन ने इन गलियारों में वन्यजीवों के रहने लायक सुविधाएं विकसित करने की सिफारिश के साथ अपनी रिपोर्ट वन विभाग के साथ भी साझा की थी।

रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि वन विभाग ने न तो इसरो के अध्ययन का ही संज्ञान लिया और न ही अपनी तरफ से ही संभावित गलियारों की पहचान के लिए कोई अध्ययन किया। इसके चलते पहचाने गए गलियारे बलराम अंबाजी और जेसोर अभयारण्यों के लिए अधिसूचित पर्यावरण के दृष्टिकोण से संवेदनशील क्षेत्रों में पूरी तरह से शामिल नहीं किए गए। <https://www.amarujala.com/india-news/gujarat-forest-dept-ignored-isro-report-on-12-potential-wildlife-corridors-says-cag-2023-09-16>

17. Over 18,400 cases of illegal tree-cutting in Gujarat's forests between 2016-21: CAG (*indianexpress.com*) September 16, 2023

Weak working of check-posts, insufficient trained human resources, and inadequate availability of necessary arms, vehicles, and functional communication equipment led to the illegal felling of trees in six sanctuaries.

Pointing to 18,469 cases of illicit cutting of trees in Gujarat between 2016-21, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in a report tabled in the state legislature Saturday said illegal cutting of trees was prevalent in six sloth bear sanctuaries in the state as well.

Weak working of check-posts, insufficient trained human resources, and inadequate availability of necessary arms, vehicles, and functional communication equipment led to the illegal felling of trees in the six sanctuaries of Balaram Ambaji, Jessore, Jambughoda, Ratanmahal, Shoolpaneshwar, and Purna, stated the country's top audit watchdog in its report titled 'Performance Audit of Protection, Conservation, and Management of Wildlife Sanctuaries in Gujarat'.

Against the proposed 48 check posts in these six sanctuaries, only 18 were established and of these, only 12 were found operational, the report stated. Similar gaps were noticed in human resources protecting the sloth bear sanctuaries.

In the six sanctuaries, the vacancies in frontline cadre – beat guard and forester – ranged between 22 to 42 per cent. The highest vacancy of frontline staff was in Shoolpaneshwar where only 57 people were appointed against a sanctioned strength of 98 people. Similarly, the vacancy in Ratanmahal stood at a high 39 per cent.

“The vacancy in frontline staff affected the protection function which was evident from illegal cutting of trees, cultivation in the Sanctuary area and non-operational check posts,” the CAG stated, adding that instances of illegal felling of trees were noticed in Jambughoda and Purna sanctuaries.

“Audit observed stumps of cut trees, are marks on tree trunk and stumps burnt to hide illicit cutting of trees inside Jambughoda Sanctuary,” the CAG further stated. The auditor also noted a ‘wide disparity’ in the availability of arms with forest officials in these sanctuaries. It stated that the per head availability of arms ranged between 40-77 per cent.

During 2016-21, there were 110 assaults on forest officials. “Equipping eligible forest personnel with adequate and operational firearms would act as a deterrent against such incidents of assaults and illegal cutting of trees, poaching, etc,” it added.

The Auditor also noticed gaps in the training of the forest officials. “The forest personnel were trained on 0.22 rifle (at Gujarat Police Academy at Karai, Gandhinagar), though the rifles being used by them were 0.12 bore rifles,” it added.

The CAG also highlighted the non-functional wireless communication systems with forest personnel. It found that 41 per cent of walkie-talkies in Balaram Ambaji sanctuary were non-functional. “Vehicles used by forest personnel in Jambughoda and Ratanmahal sanctuaries did not have facility of wireless communication... Lack of seamless communication between officials and personnel posted in frontline duty for reporting any incident or call back-up force was detrimental for preservation and Conservation activities,” the report stated.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/gandhinagar/cag-18400-cases-illegal-tree-cutting-gujarats-forests-2016-21-8942602/>

18. What a waste: CAG report highlights lapses in Thiruvananthapuram corporation's waste management programmes (*newindianexpress.com*) September 16, 2023

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: An audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has revealed serious deficiencies as well as wastage of money in the waste management programmes implemented by the Thiruvananthapuram corporation.

The much-highlighted Thumboormuzhi model of management and decentralised waste treatment plants are ailing due to lack of maintenance and carelessness of officers, said the CAG report, "Waste Management in Urban Local Bodies" that was tabled in the assembly on Thursday.

Bio-composter kitchen units

The corporation, as part of decentralised waste management, purchased and distributed 46,492 bio-composter kitchen bin units among households. A total of 46,492 bins each costing Rs 1,800, were distributed between 2016-17 and 2020-21. They included 15,833 bins that were distributed in the first phase and 30,659 bins that were distributed in the second. The total expenditure incurred was Rs 5.96 crore, with a committed liability of Rs 8.37 crore.

The Thiruvananthapuram corporation's records showed that 14,505 households, which is 31.2 per cent of the total beneficiaries, were using the bio-composter kitchen bins as of October 2021. However, the CAG audit report said the numbers were fudged. The assumption had been made on the fact that the corporation supplied only an average of 3,627 bags of inoculum, which is a biological material used for inoculation, to households every month in 2020-21.

It was also found that the private agencies that had been entrusted with the collection of non-biodegradable waste from households were also collecting biodegradable waste from the houses. This indicated that the households were not utilising the bio-composter kitchen bins. The CAG report blamed the unauthorised collection of biodegradable waste from households, the irregular supply of inoculum and the lack of monitoring by the Thiruvananthapuram corporation for the non-utilisation of nearly 70% of the bins distributed. The unproductive expenditure was Rs 3.35 crore, as per the report.

Aerobic bins (Thumboormuzhi units)

The Thumboormuzhi model waste management units, which had been launched with much fanfare by the previous government, also failed to live up to expectations, said the CAG report.

Thumboormuzhi is a type of aerobic bin composting unit that converts biodegradable waste into compost using inoculum. Inoculum is essential for bacterial growth and composting. Under this technique, equal layers of biodegradable waste and dry leaves are placed with the help of a wooden frame and inoculum is sprayed on top.

The process of composting takes place over a period of 90 days. The report said the corporation employed two persons per location for the fixed bin units and one person

per location for the portable units. Around 350 to 396 workers were deployed to run the units, while an additional 252 to 298 workers were employed. This was done even though the actual requirement was just 98 workers. Due to this, the wasted expenditure was Rs 41.28 lakh per month.

What made matters worse was the fact that despite the deployment of excess personnel, only 73 per cent of units were found to be functional at the time of the CAG audit. As many as 53 workers who were recruited for the management of the bins were assigned other duties at the main office of the corporation and its two circle offices. The workers were unnecessarily deployed in 13 locations where the bins were defunct, the CAG report highlighted.

Biogas plants

According to the CAG audit report, several biogas plants installed by the Thiruvananthapuram corporation at public markets were found to be defunct. The corporation had installed 10 community-level biogas plants each having the capacity of one to two tonnes per day during the period between 2011-12 and 2015-16. The local body spent a total of Rs 19.5 lakh for the maintenance of five community-level biogas plants and Rs 11.31 lakh towards the AMC for five plants during 2019-20 and 2020-21. However, eight out of the 10 biogas plants were not functioning during October 2021, the audit period, the CAG report said..

In the Manacaud market, which is a dedicated market for bananas, the plant remained underutilised as only a small amount of bio-waste was produced there. In the Vallakkadavu market, plastic waste was fed into the biogas plant resulting in its closure. The audit observed that the non-engagement of dedicated personnel or the absence of regular awarding of AMC for management of the biogas plants resulted in the closing down of the plants.

WHAT WENT WRONG

Bio-composter kitchen bins

46,492 Bio-composter kitchen bin units distributed by the corporation

Rs 1,800 is the cost of a single unit

30,659 bins in the second phase

Rs 3.35 crore Unproductive expenditure

15,833 bins distributed in the first phase

31.2% of beneficiaries using bins now

Thumboormuzhi model

-Thumboormuzhi model failed to keep up with the expectations

-It is a type of aerobic bin composting unit for converting biodegradable waste into compost using inoculum

-Corporation employed two persons per location for fixed bin units and one person per for portable units

350-396 workers were deployed to run the units whereas the actual requirement was 98 workers

Wasted expenditure was Rs 41.28 lakh per month
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/thiruvananthapuram/2023/sep/16/what-a-wastecag-report-highlights-lapses-in-thiruvananthapuram-corporations-waste-management-program-2615258.html>

19. CAG flags lapses in waste management in three urban bodies in Alappuzha (*thehindu.com*) September 17, 2023

A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has flagged gaps in the management of solid waste as well as special waste, including, bio-medical and e-waste, in urban bodies in the district.

The Report of the CAG on Waste Management in Urban Local Bodies was tabled in the Assembly last week after test-checking 22 civic bodies in the State including Alappuzha, Kayamkulam and Mavelikara municipalities. The CAG rapped the Government Medical College, Alappuzha for lapses in the management of biomedical waste.

It noted that Alappuzha and Kayamkulam municipalities had disposed of mixed waste as rejects during 2020-21 through Clean Kerala Company to Kerala Enviro Infrastructure for landfilling in violation of Solid Waste Management Rules 2016. Unsegregated mixed waste continued to be dumped at dumpsites in Kayamkulam and Mavelikara, the report said.

The audit found that biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste was being dumped in public places in Alappuzha and on roadsides and waterbodies in Kayamkulam and Mavelikara. The report revealed that waste from restaurants in Kayamkulam and Mavelikara was collected by unauthorised agencies and transferred to pig farms, while no system was in place for the collection and disposal of poultry waste in all three municipalities.

In Alappuzha, several Thumboormuzhi units were not functional. In Kayamkulam and Mavelikara, no action was seen taken to collect bio-medical waste generated from households. The audit said that instances of burning mixed waste had been noticed at Kayamkulam Mini Civil Station and Amabalapuzha Taluk Office. Instances of open burning of plastic waste were noticed in Alappuzha and Mavelikara.

During inspections at scrap dealer shops in Kayamkulam and Mavelikkara, the auditors found that e-waste requiring careful handling such as computer monitors, television sets and refrigerators lay scattered in the open without any environmental or health safeguards.

The report noted that surveillance cameras purchased by Kayamkulam municipality (five cameras for ₹ five lakh) and Alappuzha municipality (11 cameras for ₹ five lakh) during 2018-19 for spotting and imposing penalties for littering in public places were not working due to non-provision of electric connection/supply. The CAG called to fix the responsibility on erring officials.

The Kayamkulam municipality, according to the CAG report, included eight projects for the construction of Thumboormuzhi units in its detailed project report for solid waste management whereas these projects had already been completed in previous years. “Such instances strongly suggest that the DPRs were hastily prepared without gap analysis, possibly to avoid lapse of funds earmarked,” the report observed.

The audit found that the segregation of biomedical waste was not done properly at Government Medical College, Alappuzha and that solid waste was getting mixed with biomedical waste. At the medical college, in the absence of an effluent treatment plant, biomedical liquid waste mixed with other liquid waste was directly disposed to common drains/canals after chlorination and without any prescribed treatment procedures, polluting water bodies and endangering the health of humans/animals in the vicinity, the report noted. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/cag-flags-lapses-in-waste-management-in-three-urban-bodies-in-alappuzha/article67318933.ece>

20. CAG pulls up Excise department for ‘irregular transfer’ of foreign liquor licences (*thehindu.com*) September 16, 2023

The ‘irregular transfer’ of foreign liquor licences has again landed the Excise department in trouble with the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).

By permitting the transfer of FL-3 licences, irregular as per norms, rather than issuing fresh ones, the government lost ₹2.17 crore in revenue, the Compliance Audit Report of the CAG on the revenue sector for the year ended March 31, 2022, has found.

The report was tabled in the State Assembly in the just-concluded session.

The CAG found nine instances where the Excise Commissioner permitted the transfer of FL-3 (bar) licences for hotels, resulting in the short levy of ₹2.17 crore. Audits carried out in 2021-22 revealed that the transfer was allowed by levying ₹1 lakh and ₹2 lakh as fee.

The licence fee for FL-3 (bar) licence for hotels of three-star and above was ₹28 lakh in 2019-20 and ₹30 lakh in 2020-21. In the case of the FL-11 licence for beer/wine parlours, the fee is ₹4 lakh.

The CAG noted that the Kerala Excise Manual Volume II, says that the licences cannot be transferred from the name of one person to another. “Such transfers will help the pernicious habit of trading of licences and have to be discontinued, except for very strong reasons,” the report noted. If at all changes are required, the proper procedure is to make the holder surrender the licence and apply for a fresh one.

The CAG did not accept the government's contention that if a licensee is asked to surrender the licence, it may not be possible to issue a fresh one on account of distance restrictions pertaining to religious and educational institutions that may have come up subsequent to the grant of the original licence.

The previous CAG report on the revenue sector - for 2020-21, had cited two similar instances of 'irregular transfer'. The latest report noted that the issue persists even though the government was notified of it back then.

In a related case, the CAG report also found fault with the Government for failing to skip fines in cases where the board of directors of companies holding foreign liquor licences were reconstituted without authorisation. The government lost ₹ 1.32 crore in revenue by failing to impose the fine and collect regularisation fees, it said. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/cag-pulls-up-excise-department-for-irregular-transfer-of-foreign-liquor-licences/article67315415.ece>

21. Poor fund utilisation, inefficacy: CAG flags shortcomings in urban solid waste management in Kerala (*english.mathrubhumi.com*) September 16, 2023

Thiruvananthapuram: A Comptroller and Audit General (CAG) report detailing lapses in urban solid waste management has been published. Some of the major findings are as follows:

- The absence of a survey to estimate the amount of waste and the non-submission of a detailed plan on time led 11 local self-governing bodies (urban) to lose the union government allocated fund amounting to Rs 45.82 crore.
- There was a lapse in the segregation of plastic, biomedical, and e-waste, and also the absence of a system for collecting and disposing of construction and demolition waste.
- Brahmapuram plant that was functioning without the approval of the Pollution Control Board.

The report details the use of banned plastic bags and the deficiency in the use of shredded plastic in road construction. It also talks about the lack of coordination between organised garbage collectors and rag pickers during the 2016-21 period.

It found that only 0.48 to 1.66 percent of the 10-15 % of the developmental fund accorded to waste management was used. There also exists no system for the collection of hazardous and sanitary waste from households.

Additionally, the scientific guidelines for disposing of biomedical waste within 48 hours were not followed. Kerala Enviro Infrastructure Ltd (KEIL) which is capable of handling 60 tonnes of waste per day only delivered a mere 6.2 tonnes. CAG also instructed local bodies to ensure user fees for waste collection. <https://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/cag-reports-lapses-in-waste-management-in-kerala-central-fund-lost-1.8908889>

22. Kerala Government's never ending saga of graft: CAG finds anomaly worth Rs 4478 crore related to pension transactions
(*organiser.org*) September 16, 2023

The Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) found a difference of Rs 4,478 crore between the money received and distributed between 2018 and 2021. C&AG has stated that the Kerala government could not give any reason for the mismatch. The transaction accounts of Pension Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Cell and Pension Company during the years 2018-19, and 2019-20 do not match.

According to the accounts DBT Cell submitted before C&AG, Pension Company had paid Rs 11,088.09 crore to the Panchayat Directorate. But, the company's accounts show Rs 9,699.48 cr. The State government of Kerala has informed C&AG that the Panchayat Director and Pension Company are instructed to look into the disputed accounts. The report states that the government should make sure that the misuse of the accounts does not pave way for corruption.

Kerala Social Security Pension Limited was launched in June, 2018 under Ministry of Finance. It was formed for the distribution of Social Security Pension. It was expected to find out funds from the financial institutions, public sector undertakings and deposits for the distribution of pension.

Reports say that since 2018, every year, GoK avails more loans than necessary. In 2019-20, Company availed Rs 4049 crore more than the pension requirements. But, government explains it as a mere error. In 2018-19 the Company had borrowed Rs 1000 crore from BEVCO but do not have proper documents or explanations, hence the transactions could not be audited.

During 2018-19 to 2020-21, Rs 1,596 crore had been paid, by the Company, as interest; it was from the loan amount. The general understanding is, GoK carries the liability of the loans the Company avails for paying pension amounts. This condition was violated when the Company paid up the interests. Rs 10,848 core, of the loans for the pension payment, remains unpaid. If it is paid from the GoK's reserve funds, the government spending will go up.

The Company transacts huge amounts for the pension payments and they do not have any other registers, for these transactions, other than the passbooks. The Company auditors have reportedly mentioned that they could not ascertain the amounts of paid up pension, held up amount, status of the pension distribution, etc. due to the absence of the necessary documents. According to the C&AG, these lacunae may lead to financial irregularities and misuse; they should be solved immediately.

Another serious findings of the C&AG is the lapse in tax collection. Rs 28,258.39 crore remain uncollected. The 'top auditor' does not see it as the mere failure of the bureaucracy, but, the shortcomings of the 'system'. The arrear amount of Rs 28,258.39 constitute 24.23 per cent of the gross revenue of the state. C&AG also found that details of the arrear collection are not communicated to the Revenue Department regularly. Principal A.G. Sunilraj told the media men that there are lapses even from the side of the respective departments.

He said that the largest uncollected tax amount belongs to Goods & Service Tax department, that is, Rs 13,410.12 crore. In most cases, the confiscation is prevented by court or the government hence tax collection adversely affected. Major shortcomings of the Goods & Service Tax sector are inadequacy of the checking apparatus, lapse in utilising the information getting from Data Mining Cell and noncompliance of the union government's instructions.

Here are some of the alarming details of the tax arrears:

- Motor vehicle department: Rs 2,868.47 crore
- Electricity: Rs 3,118.50 crore
- Registration: Rs 590.86 crore
- Forest: Rs 377.07 crore
- Police: Rs 346.64 crore
- Excise: Rs 281.63 crore
- Mining & Geology: Rs 163.81 crore

C&AG has found that about 38,200 transport vehicles are sans fitness. It has caused the loss of Rs 2.98 crore. Not only that, these shorts of vehicles cause chances for accident. There are lapses in collecting taxes and service charges.

C&AG has found out lapses in changing the bar licenses also. Excise department has violated the conditions for charging the fees for changing the bar licenses from one licensee to other. It led to the loss of Rs 2.17 crore. Excise department's prior permission is required for the reconstitution of the director board of the 'indigenous foreign' liquor distilleries. Rs 300,000 is the penalty for not informing the Excise department. Twenty one companies reconstituted their boards; loss due to the uncollected penalty is Rs 1.32 crore. GoK had declared relaxation for the bar licensees during Covid lockdown period. But, there are errors in calculating the same hence the loss is Rs 33 lakhs.

The above findings are shocking and construed as disasters which could have been averted if properly managed. And, the same time, GoK is still in spending spree in extravagant style. This journal had recently carried a story regarding the helicopter hiring of GoK. The same GoK keeps on blaming the union government for all fiscal problems the state face. GoK should opt stringent fiscal restrictions in its spending and should move to efficient tax collection. Blame game is not enough. <https://organiser.org/2023/09/16/196295/bharat/kerala-governments-never-ending-saga-of-graft-cag-finds-anomaly-worth-rs-4478/>

23. Government to take follow-up actions based on CAG report, after detailed examination: Kerala Finance Minister Balagopal
(*moneycontrol.com*) September 15, 2023

Finance Minister K N Balagopal on September 15 said the government will decide on follow-up actions to be taken regarding the observations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General — after a detailed examination by assembly committees and other departments.

It is the constitutional responsibility of the Accountant General (AG) to carry out the audit of the state's finances and submit its observations, the minister said and rejected reports in certain quarters raising concerns about the government's failure to collect tax arrears, calling them baseless.

"As per the CAG report, in the financial year ended March 31, 2022, the total revenue deficit of the state is Rs 28,258.39 crore. This deficit has been carried over from departments like GST, KSEB, registration, and police for several years. Previous audit reports have clearly mentioned it," Balagopal said in a detailed statement.

The Compliance Audit Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the Revenue Sector for the year ended March 31, 2022 was tabled in the state assembly on September 14.

As per the report, for the 2020-21 financial year, Kerala's revenue deficit was Rs 21,798 crore and the same rose by Rs 6400 crore in 2021-22.

"The fact is that, unlike the previous reports, a new item has been added to the revenue deficit. That is, by calculating the accumulated interest on loans given to public sector undertakings like KSRTC, Housing Board, and Kerala Water Authority from 1970 onwards. This alone accounts for about Rs 5,980 crore," Balagopal said.

Justifying the measures taken by the government, the minister said there is a reduction of Rs 420 crore this year from last year's tax arrears that the tax department was supposed to collect.

"Usually the deficits in tax departments never come down but only increase. But this year, there is a reduction of Rs 420 crore in tax deficits compared to the tax deficits during the last financial year. This is a historical achievement," Balagopal said.

According to the CAG report, the tax deficit for 2021-22 is Rs 13,410.12 crore.

Kerala could collect about Rs 258 crore of the total amount and around Rs 987 crore was further reduced through the disposal of appeals and amnesty, the minister said.

Further, he said that Rs 12,900 crore out of the Rs 13,410 crore was assessed earlier as part of the laws that existed before the implementation of GST and Rs 5,200 crore pertained to money stuck due to different stay orders. An amount of Rs 6,300 crore is part of various revenue recoveries. Further, he said that Rs 12,900 crore out of the Rs 13,410 crore was assessed earlier as part of the laws that existed before the implementation of GST and Rs 5,200 crore pertained to money stuck due to different stay orders.

About the observations of the CAG on the social security pension issue, Balagopal said the mustering and life certificate production were temporarily stalled during COVID-19 period and some issues caused by this are now being resolved.

"We could effectively eliminate (from the list of beneficiaries) the names of deceased persons and also duplicate entries, by connecting their identity cards with Aadhaar and through mustering till August 31, 2023," Balagopal said.

<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/india/government-to-take-follow-up-actions-based-on-cag-report-after-detailed-examination-kerala-finance-minister-balagopal-11377821.html>

24. 70 slaughterhouses operating in Kerala without approval: CAG report (*english.mathrubhumi.com*) September 17, 2023

Thiruvananthapuram: A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) stated that 70 slaughterhouses in 22 municipal corporations of the state are operating without the approval of the pollution control board. On an average, around 6.12 tonne garbage is produced from these slaughterhouses.

Liquid wastes from 139 restaurants are discharged into streams and canals. No inspections were carried out to even renew the licence of the slaughterhouses, stated the report.

As many as 13 municipalities did not collect biomedical waste, in connection with palliative care activities, from households. Many places do not have sufficient facilities to dispose sanitary waste too.

According to the report, out of 143 cattle that died after eating garbage, 47 of them succumbed due to plastic ingestion. <https://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/kerala/70-slaughterhouses-operating-in-kerala-without-approval-cag-report-1.8911578>

25. In Nagaland, even dead & govt employees getting PM-Kisan Scheme benefit: CAG (*morungexpress.com*) September 16, 2023

Even dead people as well as ineligible in-services and retired government employees were registered as beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri-Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) Scheme in Nagaland, revealed the 'Performance Audit' report by the CAG.

Cross-verification of the Personal Information Management System (PIMS) and beneficiaries data revealed that that 662 out of 9,951 in-services and 82 out of 1,854 retired Government employees who were ineligible were registered as beneficiaries, it said.

As a result, Rs 1.05 crore was paid (up to September 2021) to ineligible beneficiaries, added the "Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report on Social, Economic, General and Revenue Sectors (For the year ended 31 March 2022)" tabled in the NLA on September 14.

Even dead people were getting benefits, the report highlighted, citing examination of Management Information System (MIS) reports of the scheme on September 2021.

There were 108 inactive beneficiaries due to death, out of which deaths of 86 were uploaded in the portal while the dates for the remaining 22 beneficiaries were not available, it said.

Further analysis revealed that 132 installments of Rs 2.64 lakh were credited to bank accounts of 43 beneficiaries even after their death.

The time taken by the respective offices to upload death cases in the scheme portal ranged from 25 to 868 days from the date of death of the beneficiaries, the CAG noted, and the delay resulting in credit of installments after death.

According to the report, in reply to the findings, the State Government stated (December 2021) that the matter will be verified as per the observation of Audit and necessary recovery process initiated.

Multiple beneficiaries with same bank account & mobile nos

The audit further noticed that 14 bank IFSC and Bank account numbers were linked with 28 beneficiaries, out of which 27 beneficiaries were “Active,” indicating that they could avail the financial assistance.

It was observed that 24 out of 28 received at least one installment amounting to Rs 2.78 lakh. Further, 55 bank account numbers with different IFSCs were linked with 110 beneficiaries and 109 beneficiaries were “Active.”

Incidentally, though having same bank accounts, the beneficiaries were shown to be spread over Kiphire, Peren, Tuensang, Wokha, and Zunheboto.

Analysis of beneficiary database revealed that multiple mobile numbers were provided by 8,191 beneficiaries. Multiple beneficiaries with the same mobile number is a red flag and requires further detailed verification of their eligibility, the CAG said.

Overall, Rs 2.36 crore was paid to 2,053 ineligible beneficiaries which was yet to be recovered, the report said.

Meanwhile, according to the CAG, 657 ineligible beneficiaries were detected through the involvement of other stakeholders such as destination banks and the VCs in Dimapur and Wokha.

The practices followed by Wokha and Dimapur districts in verification of eligibility of beneficiaries may be adopted in the remaining districts to weed out ineligible beneficiaries, it added.

Genuine beneficiaries ‘deprived’

Incidentally, while ineligible beneficiaries were getting benefits, some genuine applicants were rejected due to incorrect entries of unique biometric identity, bank account numbers, farmers’ names etc.

Examination of data/ reports from the portal indicated lack of appropriate input controls, the CAG said. Such invalid entries will compromise the authenticity and integrity of the database and further beneficiaries also will be unable to avail scheme benefits, it said.

Instances included 107 beneficiaries yet to receive any payment as gender value uploaded was 'Null' (it should be M/F/T); or while 401 farmers were yet to receive benefits due to wrong data entry by the State Government officials.

Benefits were discontinued after November 2019 in respect of 9,039 farmers as their names did not match with unique biometric identity and 9,734 farmers unique biometric identity were not authenticated.

The State Nodal Officers, however, did not communicate these shortcomings to the stakeholders and share the list of the rejected data to enable them to submit or update the corrected data in the portal, it added.

The government accepted the facts on December 2021 and said that more efforts will be put in to accurately capture the farmers' attributes in the PM-KISAN database. The CAG also directed the department to incorporate appropriate input control/ validation to ensure correctness of data.

Other shortcomings

The 'Performance Audit on implementation of PM-Kisan Scheme in Nagaland, covered the period from 2018-19 to 2020-21. The scheme is a central sector scheme with 100% funding by Government of India and implemented under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode.

Under the scheme, among others, eligible farmers are provided financial benefit of Rs 6,000 per annum per farmer family payable in 3 equal instalments every 4 months.

A sample comprising of 4 districts, eight blocks and 24 villages, among others, were selected based on Stratified Random Sampling for the audit in Nagaland.

According to the report, out of 3, 44,983 applications uploaded, 2,13,682 applications were accepted, while 71,196 applicants were rejected as they were either ineligible (68,684) or had furnished incomplete details (2,512).

Applications of 60,105 self-registered farmers were pending for approval by the implementing department while new registration of beneficiaries was temporarily suspended in March 2020 by the implementing department as the State had achieved the overall saturation target.

Though the State Government achieved the target, the implementation of the scheme was fraught with shortcomings, the CAG noted. Among others, beneficiary lists were prepared without any checks and balances while ownership of cultivable land of beneficiaries was not verified.

The beneficiaries also did not correlate with the Nagaland Agriculture Census 2015-16, while no landholding records were maintained at the village level, it added.

Temporary suspension of new registrations deprived 23,144 beneficiaries of the scheme benefits in 4 test-checked districts, the report said.

While Review or Monitoring Committees were not constituted, there were delays in constitution of Grievance Redressal Monitoring Committees, it said.

Recommendations

The CAG recommended that the State Government identify eligible beneficiaries and accordingly sanitise the database as per the scheme guidelines. Self-declarations and ownership of cultivable land of beneficiaries as envisaged in the Operational Guidelines should be ascertained, it said.

Besides, it called for 100% validation of bank accounts and updating the Optional Attributes such as Father's/ Husband's name, mobile number, date of birth, landholdings, etc

Conduct state-wide verification of beneficiaries by involving destination banks and VCs to weed out ineligible beneficiaries, the CAG advised.

It also urged steps to fix responsibility for non-verification of applications submitted as well as recovery of amounts unduly credited to ineligible beneficiaries.

Further, it advised strengthening the grievance redressal mechanism to ensure resolution of complaints as per the scheme guidelines and conduct social audit. <https://morungexpress.com/in-nagaland-even-dead-govt-employees-getting-pm-kisan-scheme-benefit-cag>

26. CAG detects anomalies in various govt departments (*nagalandpost.com*) September 16, 2023

Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) detected anomalies in various departments in its report on Social, Economic, General and Revenue sectors for the year ended March 31, 2022 (Report No. 2 of 2023), which was tabled on the last day of the second session of the 14th Nagaland Legislative Assembly (NLA).

DoNER schemes: A Subject Specific Compliance Audit (SSCA) of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) funded schemes under Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) and North East Special Infrastructure Development schemes (NESIDS) was done covering the projects sanctioned during 2016-17 to 2020-21.

The SSCA revealed that the estimates in the DPRs were unrealistic, indicating lack of proper planning, survey and economic appraisal before preparing these. The DPRs and concept notes were prepared without field visits to assess the actual requirements and without analysing the actual bill of quantity (BoQ) required for the project.

In all the five projects of NLCPR and NESIDS, there was delay in release of fund at various levels from the date of proposal by the implementing department to the date of release by the Finance Department, which impacted timely completion of projects. Delay in completion of transmission line resulted in idle expenditure of sub-station constructed at Rs.68.58 crore. The state government irregularly deducted departmental charges of Rs.2.85 crore, while incorrect utilisation certificates (UCs) were submitted to the Centre, which was against the scheme guidelines.

Non-inclusion of contract clause on interest bearing mobilisation advance in the terms and condition of the contract agreement led to loss of Rs 3.91 crore.

Rates of certain items were enhanced over the approved rates of DPR without obtaining approval from the competent authority, resulting in excess payment of Rs 20.09 crore to a contractor. There were also instances of excess payment of Rs. 1.73 crore by recording incorrect entries in the MB without actual execution of work.

The SLEC meetings were not held as mandated and even in the meetings held during the period, no issues related to on-going NESIDS projects were discussed. Except for one project, no inspection was conducted on the projects funded under NESIDS, the report noted.

Special Assistance funds: SSCA of funds released under “Special Assistance– Creation of Capital Assets” was carried out covering the Special Assistance (SA) funds sanctioned by the Centre from 2018-19 to 2020-21. The SSCA revealed that nine out of 14 projects remained incomplete, but were shown as complete as per the progress report.

There was non/short release of funds (Rs.57.38 crore out of Rs. 76.72 crore) to seven out of 14 departments by the state government for which fund were allocated by the Centre to complete the earmarked projects.

Altogether Rs. 38.58 crore was diverted to meet liabilities of the departments on unapproved projects other than the earmarked projects.

An amount of Rs. 5.29 crore out of Rs. 70.01 crore was utilised to meet expenditure of revenue nature instead of capital expenditure which was in contravention to the Central government’s sanction as well as financial propriety and accounting principles.

Release of fund to two implementing departments were delayed by seven to 11 months after the financial year for which it was sanctioned.

DDUGJY and Saubhagya: A performance audit on implementation of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) and Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya) was done for the period 2014-15 to 2020-21.

The audit revealed that the Department of Power, Nagaland (DoPN) completed electrification works in 793 villages (88%) under the scheme as on March 31, 2021 against the envisaged target of 900 villages.

The department could not achieve the objectives of DDUGJY/Saubhagya schemes to provide 24×7 power supply and for reduction of aggregate technical & commercial (AT&C) losses.

There was cost-overrun of Rs. 4.66 crore on re-tendering, forfeiture of additional Central grant of Rs. 11.45 crore due to delay in completion of works and extra expenditure of Rs. 2.46 crore on procurement of consumer meters.

The department incurred idle expenditure of Rs. 25.74 crore on metering of rural BPL households, Rs. 9.85 crore on metering of distribution transformers and free electricity connections provided to ineligible beneficiaries. The quality assurance inspections and monitoring were ineffective, the report stated.

Kohima Smart City: A performance audit of Kohima Smart City Mission (KSCM) carried out from 2016-17 to 2020-21 revealed that out of 61 prioritised works under Kohima Smart City development, detailed project reports (DPRs) of only 13 works were completed. Out of the completed DPRs, only eight works were completed (October 2021).

The report said the delay in implementation of works was attributable to delay in release of fund by the funding agencies and injudicious utilisation of available resources by the management.

The CAG report also noted that Kohima Smart City Development Limited (KSCDL) did not prioritise the core infrastructure elements nor prepared any feasibility report and revenue model. As a result, KSCDL failed to attract public-private partnership (PPP) and implementation of projects through convergence.

Further, it stated that improper planning in implementation of project beyond the scope and objective of SCM resulted in infructuous expenditure of Rs 70.75 lakh on procurement of water ATM and water tanker. Further, non-assessment of project feasibility of multi-utility duct before implementation resulted in infructuous expenditure of Rs 85.57 lakh.

It also pointed out that the state government did not release its share of funding, while the Centre did not release the subsequent instalments of Rs 300 crore.

PM-KISAN: A performance audit on implementation of Pradhan Mantri-Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme was carried out for the period 2018-19 to 2020-21. The audit revealed that out of 3,44,983 applications uploaded, 2,13,682 applications were accepted, while 71,196 applicants were rejected as they were either ineligible or had furnished incomplete details. The applications of 60,105 self-registered farmers were pending for approval by the implementing Department.

New registration of beneficiaries was temporarily suspended (March 2020) by the implementing department as the state had achieved the overall saturation target. Temporary suspension of new registrations deprived 23,144 beneficiaries from the scheme benefits in four test-checked districts.

The owners of cultivable land beneficiaries were not verified by the administrative officers concerned and countersigned by the deputy commissioner (DC). As the names of operational land holders/farmers were not available on records, the beneficiaries could not be correlated with the state's Agriculture Census 2015-16.

Further, no landholding records were maintained at the village level and documents to cross verify the land-ownership of PM-KISAN beneficiaries was also not available with the government.

Deficiencies in identification of beneficiaries and delay in reporting of death cases led to payment of scheme benefits to ineligible beneficiaries and multiple beneficiaries from the same family.

Incorrect bank account numbers, names, gender, unique biometric identities, etc, were captured in the PM-KISAN database, indicating lack of appropriate input controls. Inaccurate data entries resulted in rejection of records during validation and failed transactions which deprived genuine farmers from availing the scheme benefits.

While state and district-level review/monitoring committees were not constituted, there were delays in constitution of state project monitoring unit, and state and district-level grievance redressal monitoring committees.

Non conduct of social audit and lack of participation of other stakeholders in implementation of the scheme impacted timely detection of deceased and ineligible beneficiaries, rectification of incorrect records, etc. <https://nagalandpost.com/index.php/cag-detects-anomalies-in-various-govt-departments-2/>

27. CAG ने कहा, कोहिमा स्मार्ट सिटी परियोजनाओं में उचित मूल्यांकन का अभाव (*samacharnama.com*) September 15, 2023

भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (CAG) ने नागालैंड में कोहिमा स्मार्ट सिटी मिशन परियोजनाओं में कई अनियमितताओं की पहचान की है। मार्च 2022 को समाप्त होने वाली CAG रिपोर्ट प्रदर्शन ऑडिट पर आधारित थी जो राज्य की राजधानी में स्मार्ट सिटी परियोजनाओं को लागू करने की प्रभावशीलता और प्रभावकारिता का पता लगाने के लिए 2016-21 की अवधि के लिए की गई थी।

रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, कोहिमा स्मार्ट सिटी डेवलपमेंट लिमिटेड (केएससीडीएल) ने कार्यान्वित परियोजनाओं के लिए एक व्यवहार्य रिपोर्ट और राजस्व मॉडल तैयार नहीं किया और स्मार्ट सिटी दिशानिर्देशों (एससीजी) में परिकल्पना के अनुसार मुख्य बुनियादी ढांचे के तत्वों को प्राथमिकता नहीं दी गई। केएससीडीएल कोहिमा के लिए स्मार्ट सिटी मिशन (एससीएम) को लागू करने में एक विशेष प्रयोजन वाहन (एसपीवी) के रूप में कार्य करता है।

दिशानिर्देशों के अनुसार, केएससीडीएल पैन-सिटी डेवलपमेंट और एरिया बेस्ड डेवलपमेंट (एबीडी) के तहत कोहिमा नगर परिषद (केएमसी) के अंतर्गत आने वाले क्षेत्र में मिशन को लागू करता है, जिसमें तीन वार्ड नागा बाजार, डाक लेन और किट्सुबोज़ौ शामिल हैं। सीएजी रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है, "स्मार्ट सिटी मिशन के दायरे और उद्देश्य से परे परियोजनाओं के कार्यान्वयन में अनुचित योजना के परिणामस्वरूप जल एटीएम और जल टैंकर की खरीद पर 70.75 लाख रुपये का निरर्थक व्यय हुआ।"

सीएजी रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, केएससीडीएल ने एबीडी (13.60 करोड़ रुपये), पैन-सिटी (32.28 करोड़ रुपये) और कन्वर्जेंस/पीपीपी मोड (0.55 करोड़ रुपये) में जल आपूर्ति के तहत 46.63 करोड़ रुपये का अनुमान लगाया था। अभिलेखों की जांच से पता चला कि जल एटीएम और टैंकरों को निदेशक मंडल (बीओडी) द्वारा अनुमोदित नहीं किया गया था। कोहिमा चैंबर ऑफ कॉमर्स एंड इंडस्ट्रीज (केसीसीआई) को कोहिमा में जल एटीएम स्थापित करने के लिए ऑपरेटरों और स्थान की व्यवस्था

करने के लिए नामित किया गया था, इस शर्त के साथ कि एटीएम का संचालन राजस्व साझाकरण मॉडल पर होगा।

हालाँकि, CAG ने पाया कि कोई भी वाटर एटीएम चालू नहीं था। "वाटर एटीएम" और "वाटर टैंकर" परियोजना की वास्तविक आवश्यकता और व्यवहार्यता का आकलन करने के लिए कोई व्यवहार्यता रिपोर्ट तैयार नहीं की गई थी और डीपीआर के बिना खरीद की गई थी। जबकि प्रबंधन ने सीएजी को जवाब दिया था कि खरीद केएससीडीएल और बीओडी के खरीद बोर्ड की मंजूरी के साथ की गई थी, प्रतिक्रिया उचित नहीं थी।

सीएजी ने कहा कि कमजोर वित्तीय प्रबंधन रहा है जिसके परिणामस्वरूप धनराशि जारी करने में तीन से 15 महीने तक की देरी हुई और 178 करोड़ रुपये के राज्य के बराबर हिस्से की कम रिलीज हुई। यह भी पता चला कि केएससीडीएल ने तीन कंपनियों- इंटीग्रेटेड कमांड कंट्रोल सेंटर प्रोजेक्ट के लिए भारत इलेक्ट्रॉनिक्स लिमिटेड, प्रोजेक्ट मैनेजमेंट कंसल्टेंसी (पीएमसी) के लिए मेसर्स WAPCOS और वाई-फाई प्रोजेक्ट के लिए मेसर्स सिम्बियोस क्रिएशंस प्राइवेट लिमिटेड को बिना भुगतान किए भुगतान किया। आयकर पर स्रोत पर कर कटौती (टीडीएस) काटना।

केएससीडीएल ने मंत्रालय द्वारा जारी सलाह के विपरीत सरकारी विभागों/एजेंसियों को धनराशि भी हस्तांतरित की। इसके अलावा, कार्यान्वयन से पहले परियोजना की व्यवहार्यता का आकलन न करने के परिणामस्वरूप मल्टी यूटिलिटी डक्ट के निर्माण पर 85.57 लाख रुपये का व्यर्थ व्यय हुआ। इस बीच, रिकॉर्ड की जांच से सीएजी को यह भी पता चला कि ठेकेदार मेसर्स वियू अंगामी एंड संस को "न्यू मार्केट कॉलोनी, कोहिमा, नागालैंड में सामुदायिक हॉल सह कार पार्किंग का निर्माण" कार्य के लिए 163.64 लाख रुपये का भुगतान किया गया था और वह पूरा भुगतान किया गया था।

किए गए कार्यों की माप करने के बाद ठेकेदार को बनाया गया था। हालाँकि, यह पता चला कि ठेकेदार को कार्यों की 10 वस्तुओं के वास्तविक निष्पादन के बिना 11 लाख रुपये का भुगतान किया गया था, यह दर्शाता है कि "काल्पनिक प्रविष्टियाँ" की गई थीं जिसके कारण 11 लाख रुपये का अधिक भुगतान हुआ। इस संबंध में, सीएजी ने सिफारिश की कि झूठी प्रविष्टि और काम के वास्तविक निष्पादन के बिना धन जारी करने के लिए दोषी अधिकारियों पर जिम्मेदारी तय की जानी चाहिए। सीएजी ने निष्कर्ष निकाला कि केएससीडीएल ने पहचानी गई परियोजनाओं में मार्गदर्शक सिद्धांतों का उल्लंघन करते हुए मुख्य बुनियादी ढांचे के तत्वों को प्राथमिकता नहीं दी, व्यवहार्यता रिपोर्ट और राजस्व मॉडल तैयार नहीं किए। 61 प्राथमिकता वाली परियोजनाओं में से, केवल 28 डीपीआर पूरी हुईं, जिनमें से आठ परियोजनाएं 21 अक्टूबर तक पूरी हो गईं। <https://samacharnama.com/states/nagaland-news/cag-says-kohima-smart-city-projects-lack-proper-evaluation/cid12203141.htm>

28. कानपुर नगर निगम में दौड़ा 'घोटाला ट्रक': एक ही ट्रक ने 5 मिनट के अंतर पर 15 किमी. दूर पहुंचाई निर्माण सामग्री; ऑडिट में पकड़ा गया खेल (bhaskar.com) September 18, 2023

नगर निगम में ठेकेदारों का 'घोटाला ट्रक' किसी मिसाइल की तरह दौड़ रहा है। ट्रक को ठेकेदार ने ऐसा दौड़ाया कि 5 मिनट में गाड़ी से 15Km का फासला तय कर लिया। अब ये कैसे हुआ... इस सवाल का जवाब मैथ एक्सपर्ट के पास भी नहीं है।

नगर निगम के इंजीनियरिंग डिपार्टमेंट से हुए एक बिल के पेमेंट का सर्वे होने पर ऐसे ही सवाल उठ रहे हैं। इस मामले में इंजीनियरिंग विभाग के अधिकारियों की मिलीभगत से पेमेंट भी करा लिया गया। लेकिन ऑडिट में पूरा खेल पकड़ लिया गया।

पहले पूरा मामला समझिए

जोन तीन के वार्ड नंबर 82 के जरौली फेस-2 निर्माण होने थे। यहां आनंद साउथ सिटी में कृष्णा पब्लिक स्कूल से जरौली गांव होते हुए हलुआ खेड़ा नाला के पास चौरसिया पान की दुकान तक रोड, दोनों तरफ इंटरलॉकिंग और साइड पटरी बनाई जानी थी। हॉट मिक्स प्लांट से सुधार का काम स्वीकृत हुआ था।

जिसकी लागत 1.18 करोड़ रुपए थी। ठेकेदार को ये निर्माण 180 दिन में 20 दिसंबर 2022 तक पूरा किया जाना था।

ट्रक ने 5 मिनट में लगा दिए 4 चक्कर

ठेकेदार ने काम पूरा होने के बाद नगर निगम के वर्क बिल भेजा। जिसका भुगतान भी कर दिया गया। ऑडिट रिपोर्ट में पकड़ा गया कि एक ट्रक ने पांच मिनट में तीन टक्कर लगाकर इंटर लॉकिंग 15 किमी दूर पहुंचा दी।

बिल का जब सर्वे कराया गया तो धर्मकांटा की पर्ची में एक ट्रक ने एक दिन में तीन चक्कर लगाए हैं। 15 किमी. की दूरी तय करने और इंटरलॉकिंग को लोड व अनलोड करने में उसने केवल 5 से 6 मिनट का समय लिया।

ऑडिट ने इन सवालों के मांगे जवाब

-खाली वाहन की तौल के बाद उसी तिथि से उसी वाहन के भरी गाड़ी के तौल में मात्र पांच से छह मिनट कैसे संभव है? स्पष्ट करें।

-प्लांट किस स्थान पर स्थापित था और प्लांट से कार्यस्थल की दूरी कितनी है?

-प्लांट से धर्मकांटा और धर्मकाटा से कार्यस्थल की कितनी दूरी है?

-प्लांट के संचालन की लागत चुक उपलब्ध कराई जाए।

-किए गए तौल पर किसी अधिकारी द्वारा सत्यापन नहीं किया गया है कारण स्पष्ट करें।

अधिकारियों के छूटे पसीने

ऑडिट विभाग की आपत्ति के बाद चीफ इंजीनियर मनीष अवस्थी ने इस मामले में जवाब मांगा है। अब जवाब देने के लिए अधिकारी बगले झांक रहे हैं। बता दें कि इसी प्रकार का मामला कैंग ने भी कानपुर नगर निगम में पकड़ा था। 2016 में तारकोल और

गिट्टी की ढुलाई स्कूटर से दिखाई थी। <https://www.bhaskar.com/local/uttar-pradesh/kanpur/news/kanpur-nagar-nigam-kanpur-news-today-kanpur-scam-truck-ran-in-kanpur-municipal-corporation-131857298.html>

29. Tamil Nadu Sand Mining Scandals: 2013 -2023 (*thejaipurdialogues.com*) September 17, 2023

Tamil Nadu is no stranger to Sand Mining Scandals or Sand Mafia. The state renowned for its scenic landscapes and rich Sanatana Culture is grappling with a persistent problem of illegal sand mining activities. In 2013, CM Jayalalitha-ruled state, faced an inquiry into illegal sand mining. In 2023 the sand mining issue has resurfaced with the Enforcement Directorate(ED) raids in 34 places. Allegations of corruption, collusion, and the grip of a powerful sand mafia can summarize the situation of Tamil Nadu aptly. However, despite multiple controversies and investigations, culprits have eluded justice, casting a shadow over the state's sand mining industry.

Tamil Nadu's History of Illegal Sand Mining

The specter of illegal sand mining has loomed large over Tamil Nadu since the 1990s. It casts a long shadow of environmental degradation and corruption. This unlawful practice has run rampant across riverbeds, indiscriminately targeting vital waterways such as the Cauvery, Palar, Vellar, Pennaiyar, Bhavani, and more. The consequences have been devastating, wreaking havoc on the riparian ecosystem, diminishing groundwater levels, and desiccating once-thriving wells.

The nexus between illegal sand mining and political involvement is a distressing reality. Local politicians, bureaucrats, sand miners, the police, and even local governments have often been implicated in this dubious alliance. For political parties, sand mining represents a lucrative revenue stream, while the sand mafia employs financial influence to sway local opinions. Funding local political parties and infrastructure projects further entrenches the sand mafia's control and influence in Tamil Nadu.

2013 Tamil Nadu Sand Mining Scandal

In 2013, the sand mining scandal finally rocked the state of Tamil Nadu. The AIADMK administration faced severe criticism as the scandal unfolded. Shockingly, no one was held accountable despite allegations of corruption and collusion between the sand mafia and government officials. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) unearthed that the state government incurred colossal losses due to illegal sand mining. While the exact damage by illegal sand mining cannot be stated in mere rupees, the CAG report exposed rampant corruption within the industry.

Inquiries and Delays

Following the CAG's revelations, the Tamil Nadu government initiated an inquiry. However, it remained incomplete, raising suspicions of inaction.

IN 2016, THE MADRAS HIGH COURT INTERVENED, DIRECTING THE GOVERNMENT TO CONCLUDE THE INQUIRY WITHIN SIX MONTHS. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT HAS YET TO HEED THE COURT'S ORDER.

Pervasive Corruption

The 2013 sand mining scandal is just the tip of the iceberg, highlighting the widespread corruption in the industry. The sand mafia, a well-organized network, thrives on illegal sand mining and wields significant power. It pays a token amount to each household on a ration card, panchayat head, and political leader on the quiet for cooperation with their system. The mafia has deeply entrenched itself in the state's political and economic landscape.

Suspected Figures

Several individuals have been suspected of connections with the sand mafia:

-S. Ramachandran: Accused of colluding with officials, he is under investigation by the Enforcement Directorate.

-Karikalan: Accused of involvement with the sand mafia, he is also under investigation by the Enforcement Directorate.

-Dindigul Rathinam: Linked to the sand mafia and under investigation.

-P. Shanmugaraj: Official of the PWD in Tamil Nadu accused of collusion with illegal mining.

-R. Ramasubramanian: Accused of Y. Lourthu Francis's murder. Francis was trying to combat the illegal mining in the area. Ramasubramanian and his aide were sentenced to lifetime imprisonment recently.

Except for the reported murder, no one has been convicted of corruption or moral turpitude. The ED's raid and the CAG's report underline the industry's pervasive corruption and collusion.

2023 Enforcement Directorate's Investigation into Sand Mafia

In September 2023, the Enforcement Directorate conducted raids at 34 locations across Tamil Nadu. They were targeting sand mining sites, sales depots, and the offices & residences of sand mining contractors. The investigation centers on money laundering and tax evasion schemes associated with sand sales. This is the latest sand mining scandal that has engulfed Tamil Nadu.

Reform and Accountability

These ongoing sand mining scandals underscore the urgent need for reform in Tamil Nadu's sand mining industry. Moreover, the repeated actions underscore the need for transparency and accountability in the sand mining sector. Additionally, it shows the lackadaisical attitude of the state government in decisively combating illegal practices.

Currently, the outcome of the raids and ED's investigation remains uncertain. The state of Tamil Nadu and its sand mining industry stands at a crossroads. The need of the hour is to stop the ecological damage and the financial degradation of the government system. A call for reforms and to curb corruption is the need of the hour.

The unearthing of the latest sand mining scandal in Tamil Nadu heralds a pivotal moment in the state's upcoming elections. It unmask the corruption and hidden agenda of the ruling DMK in the state. It also hints at the reality, presenting an opportunity for

people of the state to reevaluate and redefine their political choices. As the investigation proceeds, Tamil Nadu's population can choose the path of reform and transparency, safeguarding its invaluable natural resources for generations to come. However, who do they trust with this responsibility is a question that remains to be seen. <https://www.thejaipurdialogues.com/society/tamil-nadu-sand-mining-scandals-2013-2023/>

30. CAG: Most of newly constructed police stations are not as per specifications (*sentinelassam.com*) September 16, 2023

GUWAHATI: The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has revealed that most of the newly constructed police stations under the MOITRI scheme are not as per their specifications.

The Assam Government's Mission of Overall Improvement of Thana for Responsive Image (MOITRI) scheme was introduced in July 2016 with the stated objective of developing physical infrastructure in 345 police stations in the state over a period of five years (2017-2022) and making them more citizen-friendly.

However, at the end of the implementation stage, a physical verification conducted by CAG at sample police stations revealed deficiencies in the provision of different amenities envisaged in the drawings and plans. The drawings of civil works showed that police station buildings should include facilities like reception rooms, a wireless and communication room, a record room, barracks, an interrogation room, an armoury room, separate rest rooms for men and women, separate toilets for women, a hygienic lock-up, a canteen with a kitchen, etc.

The audit team entrusted with the task of verification visited 31 police stations, comprising 23 completed and 8 ongoing buildings, out of 119 police stations being constructed under the scheme. However, the team found that living accommodations, including barracks with toilets, were not available in 21 of the 31 police stations.

It was also found that no canteen with a kitchen existed in any of the 31 police stations. Moreover, there were no record rooms available in 21 out of the 31 police stations visited by the team. There was no armoury room in two police stations, Khetri and Garchuk. It was, thus, apparent that the objective of the scheme was defeated as 48 of the 119 police stations taken up for implementation of the scheme during the first and second phases remained incomplete as of June 2022, even as 226 police stations still remained in the planning stage. Moreover, out of the 155 other works, including 100 barracks and 55 other infrastructure projects planned under the scheme, only 16-comprising one barrack and 15 others-were completed until June 2022. Of the remaining 139 works, 85 (45 barracks and 40 other projects) were in progress as of June 2022, while work on the remaining 54 barracks could not be started at all.

It was another matter of concern that instances of irregularities in the award of work without following the due tender process and the award of multiple works without proper assessment of the credentials or working capacity of contractors were detected. It was also noticed that there was no collection of performance security and retention

money to safeguard against future defect liability, etc., reflecting poor contract management by executing agencies.

There was also a deficiency in the budgetary control mechanism as the Assam government released scheme funds to MOITRI societies without correct utilization certificates or without assessing the actual requirement of funds.

The MOITRI scheme is very ambitious in the context that the police stations are being envisaged as people-friendly, with modern buildings having facilities like visitors rooms with drinking water and separate toilet facilities. The police stations are also to have renewable energy sources, a rainwater harvesting internet connection, etc. It remains to be seen how far the scheme can be made successful. <https://www.sentinelassam.com/topheadlines/cag-most-of-newly-constructed-police-stations-are-not-as-per-specifications-667239>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

31. India to Procure 12 Sukhoi Su-30 MKIs; Defence Ministry Approves 9 Acquisition Proposals worth Rs 45,000 Cr (*news18.com*) September 16, 2023

The Ministry of Defence on Friday approved the proposal for the procurement of 12 Sukhoi Su-30 MKIs for the Indian Air Force which would be manufactured in India by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. The project worth Rs 11,000 crore will include the aircraft and related ground systems.

According to Defence officials these Su-30 MKI would include more than 60 per cent indigenous content as per need and would be the most modern Sukhoi aircraft of the Indian Air Force.

The decision taken during the meeting of Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh approved nine capital acquisition proposals worth Rs 45,000 crore on Friday.

For the nine capital acquisition proposals, the DAC accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) and the AoN for acquiring 12 Su-30 MKI aircraft was also accorded.

These acquisitions are aimed at giving a boost to the achievement of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' as they will be made from Indian vendors under Buy (Indian-Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured (IDMM)/ Buy (Indian) category.

The DAC also accorded the AoN for acquiring Light Armoured Multipurpose Vehicle (LAMV) and Integrated Surveillance and Targeting System (ISAT-S) to strengthen protection, attack capability, mobility and increased survival rate of Mechanised Forces.

Another AoN was cleared for acquiring High Mobility Vehicle (HMV) Gun Towing Vehicles for quick militarisation and deployment of Artillery Guns and Radars.

Next approved procurement was that of the Next Generation Survey Vessels for the Indian Navy, which will further deepen its capabilities to perform Hydrographic Operations.

Few proposals of Indian Air Force were also approved and accorded by the DAC. These include Avionic upgradation of Dornier Aircraft to improve the reliability and preciseness for operations. Then the acquisition of Dhruvastra Short Range Air-to-Surface Missile was also cleared by the DAC. These missiles are a potent Indigenous Precision Guided Weapon for the indigenously built ALH Mk-IV Helicopters.

It is time to upgrade the ambitions towards indigenisation, said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. “Rather than a threshold of 50 per cent indigenous content for IDDM projects, we should aim for a minimum 60-65 per cent indigenous content.”

The Defence Minister also directed the Chief of Defence Staff, Service Chiefs, Defence Secretary and DG (Acquisition) — in consultation with the Indian Industry — to work towards increasing the minimum indigenous content threshold. <https://www.news18.com/india/india-to-procure-12-sukhoi-su-30-mkis-defence-ministry-approves-9-acquisition-proposals-worth-rs-45000-cr-8579807.html>

32. Govt plans overhaul of flagship farm-sector schemes (*financialexpress.com*) September 18, 2023

The government may announce an overhaul of its flagship schemes for the farm sector, ahead of the general election that is due by April-May next year.

With this intent, the agriculture ministry has commissioned a series of surveys of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and interest subvention scheme, to assess their impact on the farming community.

Sources said based on the results of these surveys, the government will consider restructuring of these schemes, and it is open to the idea of expanding the schemes with higher budget outlays.

As per the budget estimates for 2023-24, out of the total Rs 1.25 trillion allocated for ministry of agriculture and farmers’ welfare, Rs 95, 625 crore (76% of total budget) has been allocated for the three schemes – PM – Kisan (Rs 60,000 crore), PMFBY (Rs 13,625 crore) and interest subvention scheme (Rs 22,00 crore).

The ministry’s agro-economic research centres (AERCs) at Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, university of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh and Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat have started conducting surveys amongst the farmers who are beneficiaries under the key schemes.

“Questioners have been prepared and sampling is being conducted currently by three research centres,” an official said, adding that survey reports are expected in the next three months.

The centre at IIM, Ahmedabad is carrying out the survey amongst beneficiaries for PMFBY with a sample size of 3500. AERCs at Allahabad university and Sardar Patel University will conduct surveys for PM Kisan and interest subvention schemes respectively.

Since the launch of PM kisan in February, 2019, more than Rs 2.59 trillion have been transferred to farmers bank accounts so far. Under the direct cash transfer scheme, farmers are provided financial assistance of Rs. 6,000 annually through three four-monthly installments under the scheme.

In July, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had transferred the 14th instalments under the PM-Kisan worth Rs 17,000 crore to 85 million farmers. Of about 140 million farmer households in the country, roughly a third are tenants without land ownership, and these people are not covered under PM Kisan.

Currently, financial assistance under PM Kisan is provided to farmers with land holdings which are subject to certain exclusion criteria. It allows farmers to take care of expenses related to agriculture and well as other incidental expenses.

Under the PMFBY which is currently being implemented in 22 states and union territories, the premium to be paid by farmers is fixed at just 1.5% of the sum insured for rabi crops and 2% for kharif crops, while it is 5% for cash crops. It is optional for the farmers to opt for PMFBY and currently around 20 million farmers avail the crop insurance scheme.

Several insurance companies both the public and private sectors, are implementing crop insurance launched in 2016.

The government had launched the interest subvention scheme in 2006-7 for providing short term agricultural loans upto Rs 3 lakh at an annual interest rate of 7% for farmers engaged in agriculture and allied sectors activities including dairying, beekeeping etc. Additional 3% subvention is also provided for prompt and timely repayment of loans.

However, the scheme, under which Rs 22,000 crore has been budgeted in current fiscal, was modified last year where public sector banks, regional rural banks and cooperatives banks are provided with 1.5% interest subvention during 2022-23 to 2024-25. <https://www.financialexpress.com/policy/economy-govt-plans-overhaul-of-flagship-farm-sector-schemes-3246474/>