NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. CAG flags MoEFCC projects costing Rs 4.47 crore for procedural lapses *(downtoearth.org.in)* 21 Feb 2024

Two projects failed to take-off due to lack of monitoring and non-signing of agreements between parties

A Comptroller Auditor General (CAG) of India report has highlighted two projects that failed to materialise due to lapses in following procedures by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). The projects cost Rs 4.47 crore to the public exchequer.

The ministry spent Rs 1.04 crore on technical research for the development of polyols from plant-based non-edible oils in collaboration with Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT), Hyderabad and an industrial partner, the report found.

MoEFCC approved the two-year project in 2013 under the "Development and promotion of clean technology and waste minimisation strategies" scheme. At a total cost of Rs 2.58 crore, IICT was designated to develop the technology.

The industrial partners were expected to design and install the pilot plant on its premises and upgrade the technology.

In February 2014, the MoEFCC released Rs 31 lakh to IICT and another Rs 64 lakh to the industrial partner to begin the work.

However, the audit found that no memorandum of understanding was signed defining the responsibilities as agreed mutually between the industrial partner, the ministry and the institute. Furthermore, the bipartite agreement between the IICT and the firm was delayed and signed in November 2017.

The CAG also found that no intermediate milestones and deliverables were laid, which was an issue raised in the first meeting in 2014 and on later occasions as well. The project monitoring committee (PMC) had also highlighted the need for financial safeguards.

The audit noted that the IICT developed the technology to display know-how for two polyols, but could not demonstrate the technology in the absence of the pilot plant by the industrial partner.

As the plant was not established, the PMC then deferred the release of further payments to the industrial partner. MoEFCC, however, released the second installment amounting to Rs 20.5 lakh and Rs 40 lakh to IICT and the industrial partner in October and December 2016, respectively.

After an assessment of the pending tasks, the duration of the project was extended until October 2017. But as the industrial partners failed to install the plant, the IICT expenditure of Rs 50.94 lakh to develop the technology did not materialise for commercialisation, bringing the total expenditure to Rs 1.04 crore.

The MoEFCC said the firm was repeatedly asked between June and October 2022 to establish the plant and demonstrate the production developed by IICT, but in vain.

In January 2023, the ministry also issued an ultimatum to complete the project in 90 days, following which the industrial partner failed to do so, resulting in failing to achieve the objectives of the project.

In another such case, the MoEFCC in September 2010 approved the "Demonstration project of plasma technology for waste destruction" in Gujarat in a tie-up with a foreign partner.

The project, costing Rs 6.26 crore, was to be set up at the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC) in Ankleshwar, Gujarat. It aimed to convert hazardous waste into electricity using plasma technology.

As per the agreement, MoEFCC was to support the project with Rs 3.71 crore as grants-in-aid while the remaining amount of Rs 2.55 crore was to be spent by the industrial partner.

The Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB) was appointed as the implementing and monitoring agency, which also constituted PMC in October 2012.

The estimated timeline for the completion of the project was September 2014, but it kept on extending until June 2018.

In April 2013, the foreign partner bailed out, after which the PMC decided to rope in another foreign agency for the project. Between March 2012 and November 2016, the ministry disbursed Rs 3.34 crore against the expenditure tables for Rs 3.49 crore until August 2019.

During the audit, the CAG observed the cost of the RF torch and power supply system, crucial components of the plasma technology, were to be borne by the industry. However, after the change of foreign partner, the ministry funds of Rs 1.6 crore were used by the project proponent to pay the foreign partner, the audit revealed.

"The RF torch, delivered in March 2019, was bought at the expense of the ministry, which is evident from the show-cause notice served by MoEFCC in January 2019. Further, the torch is lying uninstalled as the foreign partner closed down their Indian office. lt is also observed that the tip of the RF torch has corroded due to lack of maintenance and needs repair," the audit observed.

It also discovered that, of the total Rs 2.55 crore spent by the project proponent until August 2019, approximately Rs 2.42 crore was allocated to building, land development, salary, transportation, electricity connections, and so on.

As per the guidelines underlined in the scheme, the expenditure on the cost of land and buildings was not approved. PMC meetings were also not conducted for five years, between April 2015 and January 2020.

A meeting held in January 2020 revealed that the plasma plant was not functioning and in September 2021, a vigilance team from GPCB found the plant was non-functional with machinery in idle condition.

During a trial run conducted in September 2022, Central Pollution Control Board and PMC members declared that the project was in poor state and failed to achieve its goals.

Further, the MoEFCC issued an ultimatum to the project proponent in January 2023 to complete the project in 90 days, but never materialised until the preparation of the report.

"Hence, due to lack of monitoring by PMC and absence of any legal agreement defining clear responsibilities with penalty provisions, the project to demonstrate the treatment of hazardous waste to produce electricity by using plasma technology could not be established," the audit noted.

The overall failure caused unnecessary expenses of Rs 3.43 crore, including the sum of Rs 1.6 crore spent on purchase of RF torch, the CAG said. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/governance/cag-flags-moefcc-projects-costing-rs-4-47-crore-for-procedural-lapses-94593

2. Centre's cess cleverness is taxing states *(deccanherald.com)* 22 Feb 2024

Article 270 of the Constitution enables the Union government to levy cess for a "specific purpose under any law made by parliament".

The 17th Lok Sabha has come to an end practically, without, as PRS Legislative Research has pointed out, an elected Deputy Speaker. Article 93 of the Constitution requires that the Lok Sabha elect a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker. The stage has also been set for the general election with papers -- White and Black -- having been released, proclaiming achievements and alleging mismanagement. Without getting into the merits of the 'White Paper-Black Paper war', let me focus on an area of concern expressed by some states about how they are denied their rightful share of taxes by the central government. Constitutional institutions such as the CAG and the RBI, too, have noted the illeffects of the phenomenon of the Centre collecting revenues by way of cess and surcharges, rather than as taxes that have to be shared with the states.

By way of background, and to put matters in perspective, while the framers of the Constitution had assigned the taxation powers to both the Centre and the states, very many of the responsibilities in the social and economic spheres were given to the states. There was thus a mismatch between resources and responsibilities. It was to address this situation that the Constitution, under Article 280, provided for a Finance Commission to be set up periodically to review and recommend the transfer of resources from the divisible pool of the Union to the states and the formulas that would govern the relative shares of states. The divisible pool is the gross tax revenue (GTR) collected, net of cess and surcharges (excluding the GST compensation cess after the GST came into effect). Thus, the more the cess and surcharges imposed and collected as a proportion of all tax revenues, the less is the amount available for the states in the divisible pool.

Article 270 of the Constitution enables the Union government to levy cess for a "specific purpose under any law made by parliament". The cess itself is levied under the specific provisions of each Act, such as, for instance, the Road & Infrastructure Fund Act or, unless specifically mentioned otherwise, when it is collected as a duty of central excise or customs. Article 271 empowers parliament to levy a surcharge on any taxes that fall within the Union government's taxing powers.

The introduction of the Goods & Services Tax (GST) in July 2017 was expected to end all other taxes and cesses with their getting subsumed in the new levy. That was the promise of GST -- 'One Nation, One Tax', if you will. Hence, in the days leading up to the roll-out of GST from July 1, 2017, the budget exercise witnessed the abolishing of certain cesses. Subsequent developments have shown, however, that they weren't going away forever.

The Centre had to resort to the GST Compensation Cess along with the advent of GST. While the need to levy this particular cess was understandable and was a necessary sweetener to bring all states on board the transformational GST train, the continuation of some other cesses and the introduction of new cesses was not.

The very next Union budget of 2018-19 saw 'Road Cess' being enlarged and rechristened to 'Road and Infrastructure Cess', and the 3 per cent 'Education Cess' being replaced by a 4 per cent 'Health and Education Cess', and also the introduction of a 'Social Welfare Surcharge'. This trend has continued and only grown. In the year immediately after the introduction of GST, Rs 1,52,677 crore was collected from various cesses – and this is in addition to the cess collected toward GST compensation for the states. A total of Rs 2,37,500 crore has been the contribution from cesses as per the revised budget for 2023-24. For 2024-25, the Union government expects to collect an even higher Rs 2,49,180 crore in the form of cesses.

The Report of the Auditor General of the accounts of the Union government -- Report No 21 of 2023 (Financial Audit) -- gives the details of cess collection as part of the total collection of revenue. A humongous 17.67 per cent (inclusive of the GST Compensation Cess) of the total gross revenue was the cess component in FY2021-22. The Report of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India (CAG) on the accounts of the Union government (No 4 of 2020) had pointed out that in respect of the Road & Infrastructure Cess, Health & Education Cess, and cess on crude oil, there was no proper framework nor any assurance that cess/levies collected would be used for the purpose for which these were collected. The CAG had observed that the Union government had withheld more than Rs 1.1 lakh crore collected through various cesses in 2018-19. The CAG also pointed out that over Rs 1.24 lakh crore collected as cess on crude oil over the last decade had not been transferred to the designated Reserve Fund. In 2019, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) noted that levying cesses and surcharges neutralises the increase in tax devolution recommended by successive Finance Commissions. While cesses were being collected for specific purposes, these purposes, however, seem to continue forever. Thus, it is estimated that the Finance

Commission formula for devolving 41per cent of the divisible pool has in reality translated into only 32 per cent of the gross tax revenue in 2024-25 as per budget estimates.

The 14th Finance Commission had disapproved of the continuing tendency to levy cesses. Similarly, the 15th Finance Commission report has commented adversely on the increase in collections under cess. The 69th Report of the Public Accounts Committee 2023-24 has made several observations in its report on 'Issues Relating to Accounting of Cess/Levies'. The Union government has simply asserted that it is not keeping cesses for itself.

The discussions and findings of reports above suggest, however, that that is not true. Cess has become for the Union government an important means of revenue collection that it can keep for itself. The recently constituted 16th Finance Commission therefore has its work cut out for it. It should strongly recommend that all cesses be stopped, or, alternatively, that the amounts so collected be made part of the devolution principle. Doing so would strengthen "cooperative federalism". https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/centre-s-cess-cleverness-is-taxing-states-2904614

STATES NEWS ITEMS

3. Money to ineligible beneficiaries, SC/STs lower in priority: CAG flags faults in rollout of PM Awas yojana in Madhya Pradesh *(indianexpress.com)* Updated: February 21, 2024

The report flagged that houses were "sanctioned twice to the same beneficiary in 64 cases. In 98 cases, one house was sanctioned to the actual beneficiary and another to his/her family members who were not identified for the scheme"

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has flagged irregularities in the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G) in Madhya Pradesh – with allegations ranging from the state government handing out Rs 15 crore in assistance to over 1,500 ineligible beneficiaries to more than 8,000 beneficiaries getting priority over more deprived beneficiaries from the SC and ST communities.

The public housing programme was introduced by the Centre in 2016 as an instrument of poverty alleviation. Its stated aim was to provide pucca houses with basic amenities to those living in kutcha and dilapidated houses in rural areas by 2022.

The CAG report, tabled in the Madhya Pradesh assembly on February 8, looks into the scheme's implementation from 2016-21, when 26,28,525 houses were sanctioned and Rs 24,723 crore was paid to beneficiaries. Of the sanctioned houses, 82.35 percent were completed, the report states.

Though the scheme mandates that households with a vehicle or fishing boat be excluded, the CAG report flagged that "2,037 beneficiaries had two/three/four wheeler before sanction of a house in the 10 audited districts".

"We further noticed that CEO, JP (janpad parishad) released PMAY-G assistance of Rs 15.66 crore to 1,555 out of 2,037 ineligible beneficiaries," the report states.

The report flagged that houses were "sanctioned twice to the same beneficiary in 64 cases. In 98 cases, one house was sanctioned to the actual beneficiary and another to his/her family members who were not identified for the scheme".

"There is no system to alert in the portal to identify duplication of beneficiaries. Duplicate beneficiaries should have been deleted instead of providing assistance twice or diversion of assistance to family members," it states.

According to guidelines, the SC, ST and minority communities are to be given priority in the beneficiary list, but the CAG, which audited 60 gram panchayats, noticed that "out of total 18,935 sanctioned cases, 8,226 beneficiaries superseded the more deprived beneficiaries in the priority list and were sanctioned house earlier than them".

The CAG report flagged delays in disbursing instalments to beneficiaries which led to a delay in constructing the homes. The amount is usually sent to the beneficiary in four instalments based on the stage of construction. The CAG report noted the "first instalment of assistance amount was released with a delay ranging between one day and four years to 53 per cent (13,18,233) beneficiaries". It noted that the funds were not released to 14 per cent (3,48,319) beneficiaries, while only 33 per cent (8,38,324) beneficiaries were provided the funds on time.

The CAG also flagged that a "PMAY-G house was sanctioned to minors in 90 cases and benefit was provided to their relatives", whose names were not in the list.

The scheme implementation and monitoring is carried out through a web-based transactional electronic service delivery platform called Awaas Soft. The CAG scrutinised the Awaas Soft data to state that "name of the beneficiaries were not mentioned in 1,246 instances" and in 950 cases, the benefit was released.

"This indicates lack of monitoring by the CEO of concerned janpad parishad and zila parishad who sanctioned the benefit despite non-availability of name of the beneficiary," the report states.

Furthermore, the framework of the scheme stipulates that "allotment of house shall be made jointly in the name of husband and wife except in the case of a widow/unmarried/separated person". The CAG noted the "CEOs of concerned ZPs violated the framework" and "allotted 12,66,815 (50.17 per cent) out of 25,24,951 houses to male beneficiaries". https://indianexpress.com/article/india/cag-flags-faults-in-rollout-of-pm-awas-yojana-in-madhya-pradesh-9173321/

4. Money to ineligible beneficiaries, no system to identify duplication: CAG report flags PMAY-G in MP *(financialexpress.com)* Updated: February 21, 2024

Introduced in 2016, the PMAY-G scheme aims to make pucca houses available to those living in dilapidated houses in rural areas.

Highlighting irregularities in the execution of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G) in Madhya Pradesh, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has alleged that the state government provided Rs 15 crore in aid to over 1,500 ineligible beneficiaries, rather than granting it to more than 8,000 beneficiaries from the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) communities, reports The Indian Express.

Introduced in 2016, the PMAY-G scheme aims to make pucca houses available to those living in dilapidated houses in rural areas.

The CAG report, presented in the Madhya Pradesh assembly on February 8, scrutinizes the implementation of the scheme from 2016 to 2021. During this period, a total of 26,28,525 houses were sanctioned under the scheme, with beneficiaries receiving Rs 24,723 crore in assistance.

The CAG report highlighted a discrepancy where 2,037 beneficiaries in the 10 audited districts were found to possess two/three/four-wheelers before the sanction of a house, despite the scheme's mandate to exclude households with such assets.

"We further noticed that CEO, JP (janpad parishad) released PMAY-G assistance of Rs 15.66 crore to 1,555 out of 2,037 ineligible beneficiaries," the report stated, as quoted by IE.

According to guidelines, the SC, ST and minority communities are to be given priority in the beneficiary list, but the CAG, which audited 60 gram panchayats, noticed that "out of total 18,935 sanctioned cases, 8,226 beneficiaries superseded the more deprived beneficiaries in the priority list and were sanctioned house earlier than them".

The CAG report revealed that the implementation and monitoring of the scheme relied on a web-based transactional electronic service delivery platform known as Awaas Soft. However, the scrutiny of Awaas Soft data highlighted certain discrepancies. Specifically, the report noted instances where the names of beneficiaries were not mentioned in 1,246 cases, yet benefits were still released in 950 of these instances.

It also flagged that there no system to alert in the portal to identify duplication of beneficiaries.https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/money-to-ineligible-beneficiaries-no-system-to-identify-duplication-cag-report-flags-pmay-g-in-mp/3401485/

5. Audit Unveils Flaws in Madhya Pradesh's PMAY-G Scheme: Ineligible Beneficiaries and Neglected Communities *(bnnbreaking.com)* 21 Feb 2024

Delve into the findings of the CAG report on Madhya Pradesh's PMAY-G scheme, revealing discrepancies in beneficiary allocation, systemic lapses, and political implications. Explore the challenges of translating policy into action and the call for comprehensive reforms.

As the morning light seeps through the dense foliage of Madhya Pradesh, it uncovers not just the natural beauty of this vast state but also the stark realities of its rural heartlands. Among these is a story of hope turned askew, born from the ambitions of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G), a scheme launched with the noble aim of eradicating kutcha houses by providing pucca homes to the impoverished. Yet, beneath this veneer of progress, discrepancies and irregularities lurk, as recently unearthed by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India.

The Findings: A Disheartening Revelation

It was supposed to be a beacon of hope for many, but the CAG's findings paint a worrying picture. Over 1,500 beneficiaries, who splurged on vehicles and other luxuries, found their way into a scheme meant for the needy, siphoning off Rs 15 crore that could have transformed lives. Even more concerning is the sidelining of over 8,000 rightful beneficiaries from the SC and ST communities, who were overlooked in favor of others less in need. This misallocation not only questions the integrity of the implementation process but also leaves a gaping wound in the heart of those it aimed to uplift. With an ambitious goal to convert all kutcha houses into pucca ones by 2022, the scheme managed to complete 82.35% of the 26,28,525 sanctioned houses. Yet, the journey to this milestone is marred by violations, including duplicate allocations and delayed fund disbursements, which inevitably stretched construction timelines thin.

Systemic Lapses: A Closer Look

The devil, as they say, is in the details. Beyond the surface-level discrepancies, the CAG report unveils systemic lapses that allowed these irregularities to flourish. At its core, the issues stem from a flawed beneficiary identification process, where even minors found their names among those slated to receive houses. Furthermore, a significant number of houses were allocated solely to male beneficiaries, starkly contravening the scheme's guidelines that advocate for gender parity. This oversight not only undermines the scheme's foundational principles but also highlights a glaring oversight in monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, which, if properly implemented, could have served as a bulwark against such transgressions.

Political Echoes and Future Pathways

In an intriguing twist, these revelations come at a time when political alliances are being forged with an eye on the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav's hint at a potential alliance with the Congress offers a glimpse into the political undercurrents that might shape future policies and reforms. This development underscores the intricate dance between governance and politics, where the outcomes of audits such as these could tip the scales in favor of comprehensive reforms or, conversely, fuel the fire of political opportunism.

The story of PMAY-G in Madhya Pradesh is a complex tapestry woven with threads of ambition, oversight, and hope. It serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges that lie in translating policy into action, where the noblest of intentions can sometimes be derailed by systemic flaws and human errors. The findings of the CAG report do not just highlight lapses; they beckon for a moment of introspection and a renewed commitment to ensuring that schemes such as PMAY-G truly reach those they are intended to serve. As the sun sets over the heartland, the path to redemption lies in acknowledging these flaws and forging a future where transparency, accountability, and inclusivity are not just ideals, but realities. https://bnnbreaking.com/politics/audit-unveils-flaws-in-madhya-pradeshs-pmay-g-scheme-ineligible-beneficiaries-and-neglected-communities

6. CAG finds irregularities in PM Awas Yojana rollout in Madhya Pradesh *(editorji.com)* Updated: Feb 21, 2024

The report also showed that the SC, ST and minority communities, which as per the guidelines should have been given priority, were overlooked. Over 8,000 beneficiaries superseded the more deprived beneficiaries in the priority list.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has flagged irregularities in the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in Madhya Pradesh.

The scheme aims to provide pucca houses to poor people in rural areas.

As per the report, financial assistance worth over ₹15 crore was distributed among more than 1,500 ineligible beneficiaries.

The report also showed that the SC, ST and minority communities, which as per the guidelines should have been given priority, were overlooked. Over 8,000 beneficiaries superseded the more deprived beneficiaries in the priority list.

In 90 cases, houses were sanctioned to minors, providing benefits to their relatives.

The CAG report was tabled in the Madhya Pradesh assembly on February 8.

It mentioned data from 2016-21, when 26,28,525 houses were sanctioned and ₹24,723 crore was paid to beneficiaries.

The report said that out of the sanctioned houses, 82.35 percent were completed. https://www.editorji.com/india-news/cag-finds-irregularities-in-pm-awas-yojana-rollout-in-madhya-pradesh-1708525085790

7. PMAY-G: अपात्र लाभार्थियों को पैसा, SC/ST को कम प्राथमिकता... CAG ने MP में खामियों को किया उजागर *(jansatta.com)* Feb 21, 2024

कैग की रिपोर्ट में लाभार्थियों को किश्तें देने में देरी की बात कही गई, जिसके कारण घर बनाने में देरी हुई।

CAG ने मध्य प्रदेश में प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना-ग्रामीण में कुछ अनियमितताएं पायी हैं। भारत के नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक ने मध्य प्रदेश में प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना- ग्रामीण (PMAY-G) के कार्यान्वयन में अनियमितताओं को रेखांकित किया है। CAG की रिपोर्ट में राज्य सरकार द्वारा 1500 से अधिक अपात्र लाभार्थियों को 15 करोड़ रुपये की सहायता देने का आरोप लगाया गया है।

आंकड़ों के मुताबिक, 8000 से अधिक लाभार्थियों को एससी और एसटी समुदायों के लाभार्थियों पर प्राथमिकता मिल रही है। 8 फरवरी को मध्य प्रदेश विधानसभा में पेश की गई CAG रिपोर्ट 2016-

21 से योजना के कार्यान्वयन की पड़ताल करती है। इस दौरान 26,28,525 घरों को मंजूरी दी गई थी और लाभार्थियों को 24,723 करोड़ रुपये का भुगतान किया गया था। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि स्वीकृत घरों में से 82.35 प्रतिशत पूरे हो चुके हैं।

अयोग्य लाभार्थियों को मिले घर बनाने के पैसे
हालांकि, इस योजना में यह अनिवार्य है कि गाड़ी रखने वाले या नाव रखने वाले परिवारों को बाहर रखा जाए लेकिन सीएजी की रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि 10 ऑडिट किए गए जिलों में घर की मंजूरी से पहले ही 2,037 लाभार्थियों के पास दो / तीन / चार पहिया वाहन थे। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है, "हमने आगे देखा कि सीईओ, जेपी (जनपद परिषद) ने 2037 अयो ग्य लाभार्थियों में से 1555 को 15.66 करोड़ रुपये की पीएमएवाई-जी सहायता जारी की।"

एक ही लाभार्थी को दो बार मकान स्वीकृत
रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि 64 मामलों में एक ही लाभार्थी को दो बार मकान स्वीकृत किए गए। 98 मामलों में एक घर वास्तविक लाभार्थी को और दूसरा उसके परिवार के सदस्यों को स्वीकृत किया गया था। कहा गया है, "लाभार्थियों के नाम के दोहराव की पहचान करने के लिए पोर्टल में अलर्ट करने की कोई व्यवस्था नहीं है। इसमें कहा गया है कि दो बार सहायता प्रदान करने या परिवार के सदस्यों को सहायता देने के बजाय डुप्लिकेट लाभार्थियों को हटा दिया जाना चाहिए था।

लाभार्थियों को किश्तें देने में देरी
कैग की रिपोर्ट में लाभार्थियों को किश्तें देने में देरी की बात कही गई, जिसके कारण घर बनाने में देरी हुई। आमतौर पर लाभार्थी को चार किस्तों में धनराशि भेजी जाती है। CAG रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि 53 फीसदी लाभार्थियों को सहायता राशि की पहली किस्त एक दिन से लेकर चार साल की देरी से जारी की गई थी। इसमें कहा गया है कि 14 प्रतिशत लाभार्थियों को धनराशि जारी नहीं की गई जबकि केवल 33 प्रतिशत लाभार्थियों को समय पर धनराशि प्रदान की गई।

गौरतलब है कि PMAY-G को केंद्र द्वा रा 2016 में गरीबी उन्मूलन के एक साधन के रूप में पेश किया गया था। इसका उद्देश्य 2022 तक ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में कच्चे और जीर्ण-शीर्ण घरों में रहने वाले लोगों को बुनियादी सुविधाओं के साथ पक्के घर उपलब्ध कराना था।

नाबालिगों को भी स्वीकृत किए गए PMAY-G के अंतर्गत घर
CAG ने यह भी बताया कि 90 मामलों में नाबालिगों को पीएमएवाई-जी घर स्वीकृत किया गया था और उनके रिश्तेदारों को लाभ प्रदान किया गया था, जिनके नाम सूची में नहीं थे। योजना का कार्यान्वयन और निगरानी आवास सॉफ्ट नामक वेब-आधारित ट्रां जेक्शनल इलेक्ट्रॉ निक सेवा वितरण प्लेटफॉर्म के माध्यम से की जाती है। कैग ने आवास सॉफ्ट डेटा की जांच की और कहा कि 1,246 मामलों में लाभार्थियों के ना म का उल्लेख नहीं किया गया था और 950 मामलों में लाभ जारी किया गया था।

रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है, "यह संबंधित जनपद परिषद और जिला परिषद के सीईओ द्वारा निगरानी की कमी को दर्शाता है, जिन्होंनेन्हों नेलाभार्थी का नाम न होने के बावजूद लाभ को मंजूरी दे दी।" इसके अलावा, योजना की रूपरेखा यह निर्धारित करती है कि विधवा / अवि वाहित / अलग हुए व्यक्ति के मामले को छोड़कर, घर का आवंटन पति और पत्नी के नाम पर संयुक्त रूप से किया जाएगा। कैग ने कहा कि संबंधित जिला परिषदों के सीईओ ने ढांचे का उल्लंघन किया और 25,24,951 घरों में से 12,66,815 (50.17 प्रतिशत) पुरुष लाभार्थियों को आवंटित कर दिए। https://www.jansatta.com/national/pmayg-money-to-ineligible-beneficiaries-cag-flags-faults-in-rollout-of-pm-awas-yojana-in-madhya-pradesh/3221914/

8. MP में एक-एक परिवार को तीन-तीन बार मिला PM आवास का लाभ, CAG रिपोर्ट में कई गड़बड़ियों के खुलासे *(prabhasakshi.com)*

Feb 21 2024

भारत के नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक ने मध्य प्रदेश में प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना ग्रामीण (पीएमएवाई-जी) के कार्यान्वयन में अनियमितताओं को चिह्नित किया है, जिसमें राज्य सरकार द्वारा 1,500 से अधिक अपात्र लाभार्थियों को 15 करोड़ रुपये की सहायता देने का आरोप लगाया गया है। 8,000 से अधिक लाभार्थियों को एससी और एसटी समुदायों के अधिक वंचित लाभार्थियों पर प्राथमिकता मिल रही है।

सार्वजनिक आवास कार्यक्रम को केंद्र द्वारा 2016 में गरीबी उन्मूलन के एक साधन के रूप में पेश किया गया था। इसका घोषित उद्देश्य 2022 तक ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में कच्चे और जीर्ण-शीर्ण घरों में रहने वाले लोगों को बुनियादी सुविधाओं के साथ पक्के घर उपलब्ध कराना था। 8 फरवरी को मध्य प्रदेश विधानसभा में पेश की गई सीएजी रिपोर्ट 2016-21 से योजना के कार्यान्वयन पर गौर करती है, जब 26,28,525 घरों को मंजूरी दी गई थी और लाभार्थियों को 24,723 करोड़ रुपये का भुगतान किया गया था। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि स्वीकृत घरों में से 82.35 प्रतिशत पूरे हो चुके हैं।

हालाँकि इस योजना में यह अनिवार्य है कि वाहन या मछली पकड़ने वाली नाव वाले परिवारों को बाहर रखा जाए, लेकिन सीएजी की रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि 10 ऑडिट किए गए जिलों में घर की मंजूरी से पहले 2,037 लाभार्थियों के पास दो / तीन / चार पहिया वाहन थे। रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि हमने आगे देखा कि सीईओ, जेपी (जनपद परिषद) ने 2,037 अयोग्य लाभार्थियों में से 1,555 को 15.66 करोड़ रुपये की पीएमएवाई-जी सहायता जारी की। https://www.prabhasakshi.com/national/one-family-in-mp-got-the-benefit-of-pm-housing-thrice-cag-report-reveals-many-irregularities

9. MP News: नाबालिगों को मिल गया PM आवास का लाभ, CAG रिपोर्ट में कई गड़बड़ियों के खुलासे *(editorji.com)* Feb 21, 2024

कम्पट्रोलर एंड ऑडिटर जनरल ऑफ इंडिया (CAG) ने मध्य प्रदेश में प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना (PM Awas Yojana) के कार्यान्वयन में अनियमितताओं को चिह्नित किया है. इस योजना का उद्देश्य ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में गरीब लोगों को पक्के घर उपलब्ध कराना है. रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक 1,500 से अधिक अयोग्य लाभार्थियों के बीच 15 करोड़ रुपये से अधिक की वित्तीय सहायता वितरित की गई.

रिपोर्ट से यह भी पता चला कि एससी, एसटी और अल्पसंख्यक समुदायों को नजरअंदाज कर दिया गया. गाइडलाइन के अनुसार इन्हें प्राथमिकता दी जानी चाहिए थी.

नाबालिगों को स्वीकृत किए गए मकान

90 मामलों में नाबालिगों को मकान स्वीकृत किए गए जिससे उनके रिश्तेदारों को लाभ मिला. सीएजी रिपोर्ट 8 फरवरी को मध्य प्रदेश विधानसभा में पेश की गई थी. इसमें 2016-21 के आंकड़ों का उल्लेख किया गया है, जब 26,28,525 घर स्वीकृत किए गए थे और लाभार्थियों को ₹24,723 करोड़ का भुगतान किया गया था. https://www.editorji.com/hindi/india-news/madhya-pradesh/madhya-pradesh-cag-finds-irregularities-in-pm-awas-yojana-rollout-1708527002665

10. CAG audit 2021-22: Revenue concerns, PSU returns hinder Karnataka's fiscal efficiency *(citizenmatters.in)* February 21, 2024

The Karnataka budget for FY 2024-25 was recently released on February 16th. To better understand the nuances of the state budget, this expert analysis breaks down the various components for citizens to assess the fiscal health of the state. It also looks at corresponding figures for the financial year 2021-22 to explain what such an assessment reveals about the state's finances.

The annual budget of the Government of India is an eagerly awaited event, almost at par with a cricket match. The eagerness and anticipation associated with the budget mainly stems from concerns regarding:

-Changes in tax rates
-Impact on the stock market
-Prices of different goods and services
-In reality, there is much more to the budget than tax rates – it has ramifications in terms of the impact on different sectors of the economy:

-Import and export
-Interest rates
-Financing cost and security exchanges
-Investments and inflation

Nuts and bolts of a state budget
The budget indicates the priorities of the government: How, where and how much money it will spend.

State Governments' budgets grab less headlines than those of the Union government, mostly due to the states' limited financial influence, decision-making and taxation authority. Nonetheless, state budgets have a big influence on issues like job possibilities, incentives for various economic sectors, ways to fight poverty, and enhancing public infrastructure inside the state.

The budget is presented to the Parliament/State legislature, as applicable, which approves it after a thorough discussion.

Components of the Karnataka budget
The Government of Karnataka releases its annual budget outlay for the coming year, which is finalised by the Office of the Accountant General (Accounts & Entitlements) Karnataka. Two categories of accounts are prepared as indicated below:

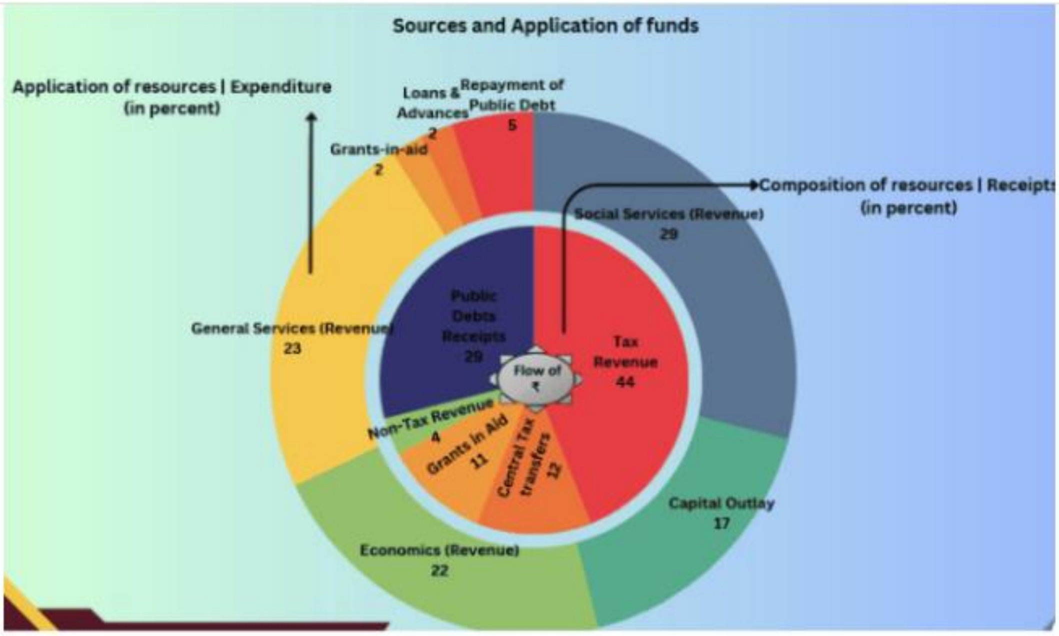
-Appropriation Accounts: Covers the expenditure aspect alone in detail. In government accounting parlance, the expenditure details are captured up to the detailed head. (Numeric Classification). It is compiled on the basis of vouchers received from every nook and corner of the state.

-Finance Accounts: Capture both expected revenue and expenses, and are prepared in two parts: summarised statements and detailed statements. However, the level of detail is not as comprehensive as Appropriation Accounts. Receipts, disbursements, loans, advances, guarantees, investment, grants in aid etc. are covered.

State Finance Audit Report (SFAR)

The State Finance Audit Report, by the Office of the Principal Accountant General (Audit 1), covers in detail trends related to revenue and spending categories of revenue and expenditure, types of deficits, returns on investment, non-submission of accounts by autonomous entities, state debt profile, etc. Additionally, it provides a summary of how well the State Government complies with financial policies, guidelines, and orders. Below is a summary of the money received and spent by the state government.

The significant aspects of the SFAR for the Financial Year 2021-22, presented to the State Legislature on July 11, 2023, are summarised below:



Sources and application of government funds. Pic: Finance Accounts, CAG

FY 2021-22	Karnataka (in crores)	National (in crores)
G(S)DP	17,21,336	2,32,14,703
G(S)DP per capita	2,78,786	1,46,087

-According to the Economic Survey of State for Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by Economic Survey of India, Karnataka, ranks fifth in terms of per-capita GDP.

-The largest contributor to GDP is the services sector, followed by the manufacturing sector.

-Karnataka was the first State to enact a Fiscal Responsibility Act (the KFRA 2002), which aims at ensuring fiscal stability, sustainability and greater transparency in fiscal operations using a medium-term fiscal framework.

-Consequently, the state has managed its finances well and exercises effective control over borrowings and spending.

-After consistently achieving a revenue surplus (net income > net expenditure) and a fiscal deficit (borrowing), well within the limit of 3% for a period of 16 years.

The state recorded a revenue deficit of Rs. 13,666 crore and a fiscal deficit of 3.84% of GDP in FY 2021-22.

This can be attributed to reduction in earnings due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The State Government has adopted best practices such as reflecting off budget borrowings, submission of utilisation certificates (a document that is used to certify that a particular loan or grant has been utilised for the purpose it was intended for) within stipulated time and containing outstanding debt (including off budget borrowings) below the norm of 25% of GSDP prescribed by KFRA.

Total expenditure

Revenue Expenditure	Capital Expenditure	Total Expenditure
2,09,428	52,083	2,61,511
80%	20%	100%

Revenue Expenditure	2017-18	2021-22
Committed expenditure on salaries, interest payments, pensions, subsidies, administrative expenses, etc	Rs. 1,07,732 crore	Rs. 1,67,354 crore
Increase		55%

A rise in committed expenditure affects the State's ability to focus on development investment. For example, the Public Works, Ports & Inland Water Transport and Irrigation Departments spent Rs 4,087 crore on 1,208 projects, some of which have been incomplete for almost nine years.

Since most of these projects are funded from borrowings, the state has to bear the burden of servicing debts and interest liability without any benefit in terms of returns. Further, the likelihood of cost overrun is very high.

-Another issue of concern on the expenditure side is the relatively lower proportion of expenditure on Health and Education, vis-à-vis aggregate expenditure as compared with other states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh etc.

-According to the Health Index published by the Niti Aayog for the year 2019-20 (Round IV), for the year 2018-19, Karnataka had a score of 57.93/100 whereas the other Southern States had scores ranging from 82.20 to 69.95.

-Karnataka's performance in the year 2019-20 actually declined by 1.37% vis-à-vis its score for the year 2018-19. There is considerable scope for improvement in the state performance in the education sector too.

-The U-DISE report (School enrolment data — Ministry of Education) for the year 2019-20 published by the Government of India indicates that, at both Secondary and Higher secondary levels, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have far higher rates of gross enrolment ratio than Karnataka.

Total revenue

Revenue Receipts	Capital Receipts	Total Receipts
1,95,762	80,774	2,76,536

While tax revenue like GST and Excise duty exhibited a healthy growth rate there are two chronic areas of concern:

-Stagnant earnings on account of non-tax revenues, which includes mineral receipts, dividends, user fees etc.

-Paltry rate of return (less than 0.25%) on a total investment Rs. 68,256.68 crore in 98 public sector undertakings

The Government needs to take measures such as revision in user charges and fees for the various services provided by the departments e.g. housing, police, transport, forestry, tourism as well as address the issue of poor returns from Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) by addressing concerns related to efficiency.

Capital receipts are composed mostly of borrowings i.e. public debt (market borrowings like LIC, NABARD, NSSF; Financial Institutions, etc.)

-Receipts of Rs. 8,0641 crore, which accounts for 99.84%
-Balance (Rs. 133 crore/0.16%) comprising recoveries of loans and advances, miscellaneous capital receipts like receipts from disinvestment etc.

The outstanding loan as on March 31, 2022 aggregated Rs. 35,329 crore and the amount recovered during the year was Rs. 127 crore. The recovery of loans and advances over the years has been unsatisfactory.

Non-implementation of important policy undertakings
Significant policy initiatives announced in the budget, such as Science and Talent search programmes, Artificial Intelligence, Research Translation Park, Tank bank for water security, soil health policy etc., were not implemented due to non-release of funds and delay in receipt of information.

Schemes for women
The Budget comprises two categories of schemes for the benefit of women:

-Category A: Women specific schemes with 100 % allocation for women, e.g. Interest subsidy for women through Karnataka State Finance Corporation

-Category B: Pro-women schemes (eg; scholarship for farmers' children) with the allocation for women being more than 30 % and less than 100 %.

Category	2017-18	2021-22
A	5,901 crore (3.03%)	5,415 crore (2.15%)
B	Rs. 82,156 crore (12.64%)	Rs.1,30,178 crore (15.47%)

While the reduction under Category A schemes is certainly worrying, the impact of the increase under Category B schemes cannot be analysed in terms of its impact on women since neither the budget nor the expenditure is tracked in a manner that isolates the impact on women.

Recommended measures for State Government implementation
The State Government needs to implement the measures recommended by Fiscal Management Review Committee (FMRC), headed by the Chief Secretary:

-Revision of user charges
-Stamp duty and registration charges
-Better monitoring of non-tax revenue
-Recovery of loans and advances
-Prioritising completion of incomplete projects etc.

CAG recommendations:

-Review of the working of State Public Sector Undertakings incurring huge losses
-Taking appropriate action for disinvestment/revival/closure

To sum up, while Karnataka is to be lauded for efficient management of its finances, it needs to pay attention to issues such as inadequate return on investment in PSUs, poor recovery of loans and advances, low levels of non-tax revenue, augmenting capital expenditure and spending on health and education in quantitative and qualitative terms. The government acknowledged the findings and accepted the recommendations. https://citizenmatters.in/karnataka-bengaluru-budget-2021-2022-audit-report-cag-fiscal-efficiency-45002

11. Haryana mulls waiving farmers' ₹125 cr pending canal water charges *(hindustantimes.com)* Feb 22, 2024

The Manohar Lal Khattar government in Haryana is likely to waive farmers' outstanding canal water irrigation charges, called "abiana", to the tune of ₹125 crore, it is learnt.

In his budget estimates for the next financial year to be presented on Friday, chief minister (CM) Khattar, who also holds the finance portfolio, is likely to formally announce waiving the outstanding abiana as well as stopping the practice of levying charges for canal water supplied for irrigation.

Sources say the finance department has given nod to the proposal mooted by the irrigation and water resources department.

"There is no history of waiving-off the outstanding abiana in Haryana. Despite this, the government has in principle decided to waive the outstanding charges. Hence, this is a significant decision that will benefit lakhs of farmers," officials of finance and irrigation and water resources department said, refusing to be identified.

The government has calculated ₹125 crore outstanding abiana from 2012-13 financial year to March 2023. It was due from the cultivators of nearly 4,000 villages.

As per official data, authorities between 2012-13 to 2022-23 assessed around 22-24 lakh hectare area during the Rabi and Kharif season for levying abiana. The outstanding amount rose from ₹72 crore in 2012-13 to ₹125 crore in 2022-23.

Between 2018-19 fiscal and 2022-23, the state government recovered around ₹222 crore abiana from farmers, while another ₹166 crore was recovered during the six-year period between 2012-13 to 2017-18.

However, every year there has been a shortfall of over ₹10 crore in the recovery. Officials say there was no provision of surcharge for non-payment of abiana.

Districts that lead with outstanding are Kaithal, Sirsa, Bhiwani, Charkhi Dadri, Jhajjar, Hisar and Nuh, with around 2,000 villages being from these districts alone.

Sources in the finance department say almost every year since 2001, the annual audit reports of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has pointed out the shortfall in recovery of water charges and that no action is taken to recover the balance as arrears.

In May 2002, the state government had decided to collect abiana through drawing and disbursing officers (DDOs) of the irrigation department instead of the revenue department. However, officials said the then government reverted to the original prescribed procedure in January 2006 over irrigation department DDOs' failure to collect the revenue.

The department collected only ₹24 crore against the due abiana of ₹193 crore during 2002-06. Thus, revenue of ₹169 crore remained unrecovered (December 2006), said officials quoting the CAG reports.

For the purpose of revenue administration, the state has been divided into six divisions and 22 districts under the charge of a divisional commissioner and deputy commissioner (DC) or collector respectively.

The DC exercises control through tehsildars, naib tehsildars and other staff in his district. And the recovery of canal irrigation water charges from farmers is made through the village lambardars (headman), who are paid lambardari fee. https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/haryana-mulls-waiving-farmers-125-cr-pending-canal-water-charges-101708553061388.html

12. Pune: Defence Estate Office Initiates Process to take back 16 Old Grant Bungalows in Cantonment Areas *(punekarnews.in)* 21 Feb 2024

Defence Estates Officer (DEO) of Pune Circle, today issued a press release about old grant bungalows (OGBs).

In the last two months, Punekar News had pointed out the violation of rules while entering into agreement to sale and construction activities at the OGBs in the Pune Cantonment.

In his press release, Jagtap stated:

For more than a month, there have been incessant, media spot-light on Old Grant Bungalows of Pune Cantt, based more on half-baked facts, and selective use of rules, to create a narrative of their misuse, with allusions, allegations etc.

Essentially, the issues raised are – –

High-value sale or agreement to sale transactions of bungalows (in a few cases of land) by Registrar, Registration & Stamps/Duties, Deptt. – Valuation running into hundreds or even thousands of crores. – Such high value will lead to higher compensation when resumed by Govt. – In a few cases, building plan Govt. sanctioned by Holder of Occupancy Rights (HOR), who has already executed sale deed or agreement to sale. – Apprehension of builders entering & making multi-storied complexes.

There are 202 OGBs/sites, in Pune Cantt & 48 in Kirkee (Khadki), under management of DEO. These are governed by GGO 179 of 1836, different land policies, as well as administrative instructions of MoD.

Land always is of the Govt, only superstructure (Building) can be transferred subject to the following conditions of GGO 179 of 1836 :-

Condition No. 3: When no objection occurs, the application is to be forwarded through the prescribed channel, by the Commanding Officer of the station, to the Quarter Master General of the Army, who, if the Commander-in-Chief approves, will submit it for the orders of Government.

Condition No. 4 All such applications are to be in the annexed form marked A.

Mutation of transfer of superstructure and occupancy rights by inheritance and will (without complications) can be approved by DEO concerned whereas the same by sale needs approval of GOI. Transfers by sale without prior approval of GOI is tantamount to violation of old grant terms which may be condoned by GOI on merits of each case as has been done in the past. Transfer, by any means, is Not alienation of land & there is no bar to transfer. In fact, there have been cases where prior or ex-post- facto permissions have been given by competent authority.

Mutation is an administrative function to correct/update the records, so as to bring occupancy holder within ambit of terms of Old Grant & also to enforce these terms. Mutation does not create title.

Transfer by sale, is done by Registrar/Sub-Registrars as per the rules of the respective State Govt. Registrar under Cantonments Act, has to intimate the DEO as & when such transaction is registered. If DEO finds any defect / lacunae, he takes up the matter with seller/purchaser to get it corrected/amended, including through registered admission deed upholding Govt. rights over land, trees etc. and Govt. right to resume the superstructure. DEO, time & again has taken up the matter with Registrar Office to seek details of said transactions continues & to do so.

Government has right to resume the OGBs, if there is requirement for Army or there is/are serious violations of terms of Grant. The discretion solely lies with Govt., based on merits of each case. Value of superstructure, in sale, is determined by Registrar, as per their norms. It, however, has no bearing, when Old Grant is resumed as Govt gives compensation, based only on construction cost of the structure, assessed by MES, the Army Engineering Deptt. So even if in sale transaction, value is very high, in resumption (taking back by Govt.), valuation is quite less (at times meagre), & is no burden on Govt. In DEO Pune Circle, 16 resumption proposals have already been initiated.

Building plans of OGBs, are approved by Cantonment Board as per their bye-laws, only after seeking report from DEO, if the terms of Grant or of the land policy have not been violated. In Old Grant, views of local Army Authority are taken & in many cases of leased properties, GOC-in-Chief approves the plan. The procedure is well laid out. At any stage, during or after the plan is approved, it can be cancelled, if such violations are detected.

As for issues highlighted:
Valuation in sale / agreement to sale transactions, is assessed by Registrar Office of State Govt & is only of superstructure, not of land. DEO office has not come across case of sale transaction of land so far. Registrar Office has been reminded & is aware.

High value sale deed has no impact when it is resumed, as compensation is assessed not on sale value but cost of superstructure assessed by MES, which is quite less.

Valuation running into hundreds or thousands of crores, is not supported by any evidence /document; it is mere presumptive.

Building plans are sanctioned only when the same are applied by recorded HOR.

In case, sale transaction takes place before that & is intimated by Registrar, action is taken to cancel the plan & stop construction, which is one case as has already been done by Cantt. Board Pune.

There is no case of builders / developers, seeking permission to make multi-storied complex in OGBs; sanction is given as per FSI / FAR, which is 0.5 for OGBs/leases under DEO management; its mere apprehension.

It is reiterated that DEO (and Cantt. Board Pune) has taken action & continues to do so, to safeguard Govt. interest in OGBs."

According to an audit report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India in 2010, Old Grant sites are a legacy of the preindependence land policies intended to provide necessary accommodation to the military officers. The preindependence Governments of Bengal, Madras and Bombay presidencies issued various rules and regulations between the years 1789 and 1899.

Under this, officers were granted licences of land sites, on which they could build houses. No right of property for the land was, however, ever granted to them. Later, civilians were also allowed to build such houses on lands belonging to the State, but these houses were to be hired by the Local Military Authority (LMAs). Such lands were allowed to be transferred from one military officer to another. For structures owned by the civilians, such transfer would have to have approvals of the local commanders. With the spread of urbanization, most of the Old Grant Bungalow (OGB) sites are now prime real estate.

There are 46,043 Old Grant sites in the country as of March 2009. The powers for conversion of the sites in to leaseholds or resumption of such OGBs are vested in the Ministry. As per the land policy laid down by the Ministry in 1995, to ensure appropriate returns by way of premium and rent, Old Grant sites which are in the nature of licences should be converted into leaseholds with Government sanction unless these were desired to be resumed. No activity like change of purpose, any subdivisions by way of construction or otherwise, construction of additional storey/storeys, addition to the existing plinth area or floor area, demolition of existing construction or putting up new construction on a vacant site in Old Grant sites could be sanctioned unless the grantee was willing to take out a lease in which case proposals were to submitted to Government for considering whether a lease be granted and if so, on what terms or whether the land or any part thereof be resumed when required for Defence purposes or any other public purpose or when the bungalows are in dilapidated condition. The person who is the holder of the licence is known as the "Holder of Occupancy Rights (HOR)".

In contravention of the Revised Land Policy of 1995 of the Ministry, in five Commands involving 29 Stations under 16 DEOs, unauthorized construction was carried out in 134 OGBs. 224 OGBs covering an area of 496.98 acres were being used unauthorizedly for educational purposes. https://www.punekarnews.in/pune-defence-estate-office-initiates-process-to-take-back-16-old-grant-bungalows-in-cantonment-areas/

13. Bus shelter design faulty, don't pay agency: Mayor to chief secretary *(timesofindia.indiatimes.com)* Updated: Feb 22, 2024

PANAJI: The design of the Smart City bus shelters is faulty and the agency behind it should not be paid, Panaji mayor Rohit Monserrate said in a letter to the chief secretary on Tuesday.

Expressing dissatisfaction and raising concern regarding the "faulty" bus shelter design and advertisement rights by Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited (IPSCDL), the Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) has written to chief secretary Puneet Kumar Goel urging him not to release any payment to agency engaged in the bus shelter work.

Monserrate also objected to the incorporation of advertisement rights in the tender document vis-a-vis the terms and conditions of the agreement that have been executed before KTCL and Primeslots Events Pvt Ltd.

The bus shelters are displaying various advertisements which is definitely not an attribute of a smart bus station. Display of such advertisement is in no way a criteria to define a bus shelter as smart bus shelter," he said.

The mayor said the function of maintenance of bus stops and regulation of advertisements were devolved to the CCP as the provisions of the Constitution of India. "

The CCP will lose out on revenue running into crores of rupees if advertising rights are handed over to the bus shelter contractor in an unlawful and unconstitutional manner and it will be a ground for major CAG inquiry against you," he said.

Monserrate said that since the CCP had a constitutional and statutory mandate to maintain bus stops within the city, no project can be undertaken without involving CCP.

"The work order of bus shelters was incidentally awarded by the IPSCDL to the same defaulting concessionaire of CCP who owes dues in crores to the CCP and this has been flagged by the CAG," he added.

Monserrate asked the chief secretary to ensure that the design of these unplanned bus shelters are rectified immediately and also to revoke advertising rights issued to the agency.

"You are requested not to release any payment of the agency unless the faulty design is rectified and all of CCP's outstanding dues, as observed in various CAG's reports, are cleared," he wrote in the letter to the chief secretary.

"Further, the advertising rights should rest with the CCP in view of the constitutional mandate. You are called upon to take necessary action in this regard without any delay failing which I shall be constrained to take further necessary steps to restore sense and sanity in this entire exercise," he said.He said that the CCP had not granted a licence to any agency to display advertisements at the bus shelters. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/bus-shelter-design-faulty-dont-pay-agency-mayor-to-chief-secy/articleshow/107896957.cms

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

14. ₹19,000-cr mega Indian Navy deal for BrahMos missiles gets Cabinet nod: Report *(hindustantimes.com)* Feb 22, 2024

In a major boost to the Indian Navy's capabilities, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has given the green light for procuring more than 200 BrahMos extended-range supersonic cruise missiles for deployment on warships, reported news agency ANI. The proposed acquisition deal – estimated at around ₹19,000 crore – was reportedly cleared in a committee meeting held on Wednesday evening.

A view of the Brahmos booth at the Singapore Airshow at Changi Exhibition Centre in Singapore February 21, 2024.(REUTERS)

The contract between BrahMos Aerospace – an Indo-Russian multinational aerospace and defence corporation – and the ministry of defence is likely to be signed in the first week of March.

BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited was formed as a joint venture between India's DRDO and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya in 1998. Initially, the ownership was divided equally between the two countries, but India has gradually increased its stake in the company headquartered in New Delhi.

The company is primarily responsible for the design, development, production, and marketing of the BrahMos missile system, one of the fastest cruise missiles in the world.

The BrahMos missile has been indigenised in a big way by the BrahMos corporation and more parts are being indigenised.

India has also started the export of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to the Philippines, two years after the two countries signed a deal worth almost $375 million.

The cabinet committee's nod for Brahmos missile acquisition comes days after the defence ministry approved a proposal to procure nine maritime surveillance aircraft for the Indian Navy and six maritime patrol aircraft for the Indian Coast Guard. The proposed acquisition involves the construction of 15 maritime patrol planes, which will be based on C-295 transport aircraft that are being manufactured in India in a joint venture between Tata Advanced Systems and Airbus.

The estimated value of these projects stands at a whopping ₹29,000 crore.

The transport aircraft would be equipped with the required radars and sensors and turned into a maritime patrol plane by the Defence Research and Development Organisation's Centre for Airborne Systems (CABS), reported ANI. https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/19000cr-mega-indian-navy-deal-for-brahmos-missiles-gets-cabinet-nod-101708576760257-amp.html

15. Road contract awards in India hit decade-low in 2023-24, significantly below target *(economictimes.indiatimes.com)* 22 Feb 2024

Awarding of road contracts has fallen to its lowest level in a decade in 2023-24 and is way behind the target for the current fiscal following a diktat from the Centre that no new liability is created under the Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase -I.

Data by the ministry of road transport and highways shows just 3481 km of road contract has been awarded till January this year as against the targeted 13,290 km for 2023-24. The average monthly road contracts awarded in this fiscal is 300 km so far.

“Revised estimate of Bharatmala is pending with the Cabinet for approval in the absence of which no new contracts are being awarded by the National Highways Authority of India,” a senior government official told ET, adding only work under the national highways original (NHO) is being done by the government as of now.

The ministry of road transport and highways has flagged the issue with the top brass asking them to expedite their decision on the proposal for approval of the revised Bharatmala Phase-l or alternate programme to help the ministry achieve its target for the year.

The government is of the view that shortfall in award this year will reflect in the progress of construction in the FY 2024-25.

Centre had in November 2023 directed the road ministry to ensure that no new works are approved and no contracts are awarded under Bharatmala under any phase till the cabinet committee on economic affairs (CCEA) approval is received.

Experts are however divided over the impact of delay in awarding road contracts.

“We are nowhere in the optimum state where we can go slow on road construction. Since the transportation sector, including roads, will drive the growth for India to be a $5 trillion economy, need for persistent awarding of contracts and construction is important in the medium-term,” Jagannarayan Padmanabhan, senior director & global head, consulting, CRISIL Market Intelligence and Analytics said.

Vinayak Chatterjee, founder & managing trustee of The Infravision Foundation, said the pace of construction may not be impacted as there is a huge backlog of projects awarded in the past. “We expect the government to make an announcement on the roadmap for NHAI after the elections and till then the existing projects will continue to be built,” he said.

"NHAI is undertaking four major structural changes and the institution needs to pause, reflect and chart a new direction for itself," he added.

Some of the structural changes being brought in by NHAI include moving away from raising debt to monetisation to fund its projects, more projects to be awarded on the revamped build-operate-transfer (BOT) mode thus roping in private players, GPS-enabled toll collection system and focussing on creation of 35,000 km of access-controlled greenfield expressways, Chatterjee added. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/roadways/road-contract-awards-in-india-hit-decade-low-in-2023-24-significantly-below-target/articleshow/107892610.cms?from=mdr

16. Agriculture credit crosses Rs 20 lakh crore till January, sharp jump from Rs 7.3 lakh crore in 2013-14 *(indianexpress.com)*

February 22, 2024

The Modi government has enhanced the institutional credit into the agriculture sector sharply in the last 10 years, with banks disbursing Rs 20.39 lakh crores during the April-January period of this fiscal as against Rs 7.3 lakh crore in the entire 2013-14, according to a senior official.

In the Budget for 2023-24 fiscal, the government set an agriculture credit target at Rs 20 lakh crore. Banks have already breached the target and the number could cross Rs 22 lakh crore this fiscal.

To ensure the availability of agriculture credit at a reduced interest rate of 7 per cent per annum to the farmers, the Union Agriculture Ministry implements an interest subvention scheme for short-term crop loans up to Rs 3 lakh. The scheme provides interest subvention of 2 per cent per annum to banks on the use of their resources.

Moreover, an additional 3 per cent incentive is given to the farmers for prompt repayment of the loan, thereby reducing the effective rate of interest to 4 per cent.

"Institutional credit for the agriculture sector has increased from Rs 7.3 lakh crore in 2013-14 to Rs 20.39 lakh crore in 2023-24 (till January 31, 2024) for 1,268.51 lakh accounts," a senior agriculture ministry official said.

During the 2022-23 fiscal, the total farm credit disbursal stood at Rs 21.55 lakh crore, surpassing the target of Rs 18.50 lakh crore kept for the same period.

The benefit of concessional institutional credit through KCC (Kisan Credit Card) at 4 per cent interest per annum has also been extended to animal husbandry and fisheries farmers for meeting their short-term working capital needs.

As on March 31 last year, there were 73,470,282 operative KCC accounts with an outstanding amount of Rs 8,85,463 crore.

That apart, the government in 2019 launched PM-KISAN scheme, under which Rs 6,000 per year is being provided to eligible farmers directly into their bank accounts in three equal installments.

The scheme was launched in February 2019, but was made effective from December 2018.

"Since 2018, Rs 2.81 lakh crores have been transferred through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to more than 11 crores beneficiaries (farmers) through various installments," the official said.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a central sector scheme to provide income support to all landholding farmers' families in the country to supplement their financial needs for procuring various inputs related to agriculture and allied activities as well as domestic needs.

To achieve the objective of doubling farmers' income, the Centre in the last 10 years has enhanced the minimum support price (MSP) of crops and also increased the procurement of wheat, paddy, oilseeds, and pulses.

On Wednesday while briefing about the Cabinet decisions, Union Information and Broadcasting Anurag Singh Thakur highlighted that the Modi government has spent Rs 18.39 lakh crore on the procurement of paddy, wheat, pulses, and oilseeds from farmers at MSP during the last 10 years.

This is more than 3 times of Rs 5.5 lakh crore spent by the Congress-led UPA government in their 10-year rule (2004-2014), Thakur said while asserting that the Modi government was committed to farmers' welfare and doubling their income. https://indianexpress.com/article/business/agriculture-credit-crosses-rs-20-lakh-crore-till-january-fy24-9175024/

17. India must leverage AI to leapfrog to the developed nation status by 2050 *(financialexpress.com)* February 22, 2024

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set the goal of reaching the status of a developed country by the nation's 100th anniversary of Independence. The mid-point of the new century, 2050 has become a highly visible marker for the ambitious goal of becoming a developed nation for many leaders of developing countries. In a stable 'flat' world, 25 years in the economic life of a country is a blip in time. Driving double digit growth to achieve developed nation status is less about radical change and more about sustained execution of current policies along with any new ones to address short term challenges.

But what if the world is very different in 2050? Will we need a new growth paradigm? Or will the paradigm developed in the 20th century and perfected by countries like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea to move rapidly from developing to developed status hold?

As these questions played in my mind, I was reminded of a quote which (paraphrased) said 'each moment in history is fleeting but some in retrospect will be seen as the beginning of a new era'. The industrial age we are living in emerged from one such moment was 300 years ago—the invention of the steam engine. This evolved over two centuries into the manufacturing-led economic growth paradigm that has shaped our world and fortunes of countries. I believe that such a 'steam-engine moment' is upon us, and it could potentially lead to a very different world in 2050, and beyond.

Let me explain. The steam engine technology developed in the 18th century was the start of an age in which we unlocked and unleashed the 'physical' potential of atoms and molecules by processing mined raw materials into finished products. Artificial intelligence, with its enormous data processing power (which will be further enhanced by quantum computers), is the key to unlock and unleash the 'information' potential of the very same atoms and molecules. It is the steam-engine moment of the 21st century that which will drive the post-industrial information age. Let's briefly understand three potentially radical (among many) implications.

First, our current growth paradigms are for a world where economic value was generated from the exploiting the existing properties of atoms by physically processing them into finished products in large labour-intensive plants. By 2050, rapid development in AI-based technologies will have the capability to decode and modify the properties of atoms to 'design' new material properties and products using technologies like robots, 3D printers, digital twins, CRISPR, etc. in small-scale, flexible, highly automated units. Second, unlike the 'physical' raw material of atom and molecules whose ownership depended on mother earth's benevolence, the raw material for 'information' is widespread. Development of the physical infrastructure as a 'tolled' public good democratised the industrial opportunity and attracted investments. Equivalent tolled highways of a regulatory regime and underlying tech-stacks will democratise the opportunity to build a host of new information processing services. Lastly, physical processing is capital-intensive. Information processing is talent-intensive and will emerge as the biggest factor cost advantage. It will call for dramatic new ways to develop it, especially as latest research in neurosciences unravel the mysteries of the brain and how humans learn.

Of course, there is a degree of speculation here, but the speed at which AI and its applications (and allied technologies) are developing has surprised even experts. If these implications were to play out, we will need a new way to think about economic growth for the world in 2050.

Developing countries like India are caught in a fundamental dilemma. On one hand, 25 years may seem too long and too uncertain a period to plan for in today's fast changing world. On the other, it is but a blip in the economic history of a country, a period of time that passes too quickly, and before you know it the future has caught up with us. The dilemma becomes real as for India@2047 vision. Even after 25 years of sustained progress post the economic reforms during which the GDP grew by eight times, the GDP per capita by 5.5 times, around 200 million people in the nation face many 'here and now' societal challenges. On the industrial front, while India built globally competitive industries like generic pharma, automotive, and ITES, we have remained a small player in the global value chains (recent schemes like PLI are still to play out fully). As a developing nation we have finite resources to deploy – how much of them should be focused on today's challenges and sustained execution of policies already underway, and how much on the future?

Without going into the politics and optics of the choice, we can draw some lessons from large global companies who continuously have to deal with such choices of balancing the demand for resources and talent across two time-scales. Without solving today's challenges, they know there is no future, neither will there be if they do not start building capabilities and launch 'pilots', giving them the 'option value' to scale up quickly as the opportunities unfold before competitors build dominant positions.

By 2050, the world will move to the post-industrial information age. The only question is not if, but how fast. India missed the opportunity to harness its full potential offered by the industrial age and has been playing catch-up ever since. The 2050 vision offers another chance. We have a good starting position with our strength in services, our world-leading tech-stacks, and allied data policies, and our historical legacy of world's great universities. How we balance and execute against two time scales of short-term challenges and longer-term opportunities of the information age will determine whether we become a developed nation before we become old. https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/catching-the-info-age-train-india-must-leverage-ai-to-leapfrog-to-the-developed-nation-status-by-2050/3401448/

18. Carbon price. Ways for India to deal with EU carbon tax *(thehindubusinessline.com)* February 21, 2024

India has an array of implicit taxes on coal and petro products to deal with EU's CBAM

EU's CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism) has taxes on imports based on carbon content, on top of other regular custom duties. Its transitional phase started on October 1, 2023, and the first reporting period ends on January 31, 2024, when the importers in the EU member states are required to register details of emissions embodied in all their imports and effective carbon price in the exporting country, by source and commodity classification, based on a detailed template provided.

A glance at this template suggests that there is a huge amount of complex information that is being solicited, such as direct and indirect emissions, from various production stages in a particular commodity imported.

There is no requirement for authentication/verification at this stage for reporting; different methodologies allowed to report emissions till the end of 2024 — EU method or an equivalent method, or until July, another method based on default reference values.

EU importers then need to buy CBAM certificates and surrender them to the tune of emissions embodied, while they can get refunded for any effective carbon price in the source country.

Strategising for CBAM
There is no time left to strategise on how to face CBAM. The stated objective of CBAM has been to avoid "carbon leakages" that happen due to the regulatory arbitrage driving EU companies to move out of the EU to countries that have less stringent carbon regulations.

While India and other countries may join hands to fight against the European Union in the WTO on the issue of CBAM, it is unlikely to deter the EU, as this is designed to be completely compliant with the WTO rules. EU's move can hurt Indian exporters, particularly of sectors like iron and steel, aluminium, electricity, hydrogen, fertilizers and cement.

Until January 1, 2025, all countries are allowed to report their equivalent carbon taxes based on their own reporting systems, but after that, only the EU methods will be accepted. In such a backdrop, it is important to establish an equivalence between taxes on fossil fuels and carbon prices.

Carbon taxes are imposed on the carbon content of fossil fuel supply and are therefore a carbon-pricing instrument. Thus, fuel taxes can be seen as implicit carbon taxes. Furthermore, fossil fuel subsidies in India are among the lowest in the world.

Despite not levying carbon taxes, India employs an array of schemes and implicit taxation mechanisms that effectively place an implicit price on carbon. Examples include Coal Cess, Perform Achieve Trade schemes, and Renewable Energy Certificates.

For instance, Goa levies a 'Green Cess' on polluting products, while the Uttarakhand has introduced an 'Eco Tax' on vehicles entering the hill station of Mussoorie. Carbon taxes are imposed on the carbon content of fossil fuel supply, thus serving as an indirect carbon-pricing instrument. At present, India ranks among the countries with the highest fuel taxes worldwide.

Coal is the most abundant fossil fuel in India, accounting for 55 per cent its energy needs. Indian industry was built upon indigenous coal. According to the Coal Ministry, commercial primary energy consumption in India has grown by about 700 per cent in the last four decades.

Rising energy demand

The current per capita commercial primary energy consumption in India is about 350 kgoe/year, which is well below that of developed countries. Driven by the rising population, a rapidly growing economy, and a need for improved quality of life, energy usage in India is increasing. Considering the limited reserves of petroleum and natural gas, eco-conservation restrictions on hydel projects, and geopolitical perceptions of nuclear power, coal will continue to dominate India's energy scenario.

It is the primary input for thermal generation and is currently under the GST. The situation is similar to the oil industry, where producers are under the GST regime, but petrol and diesel, the end-products of crude, are not and are heavily taxed by both the Central and state governments.

In 2010, the Government introduced a Clean Energy Cess on coal which was abolished and subsumed by a new cess called the Compensation Cess with the rollout of the Central Goods and Service Tax (GST). Under GST, coal (along with ovoids, briquettes, and similar solid fuels manufactured from lignite, coal, whether or not agglomerated, excluding jet, peat (including peat litter), (whether or not agglomerated) is subject to tax of ₹400 per tonne.

However, on petrol, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), or compressed natural gas (CNG) (driven motor vehicles of engine capacity not exceeding 1200cc and of length not exceeding 4000 mm), a 1 per cent GST Compensation Cess is levied. However, there has been criticism surrounding the GST Compensation Cess and how the revenue generated by the Coal Cess (pre-GST) around 2010 was later used for GST Compensation Cess. Only 18-20 per cent of the revenue from Coal Cess was used for its intended purpose.

The price per tonne of steel in India is roughly €800 ($874) (₹72,300.36) to €900 ($960) (₹79,414.58), and the tax on coal in India is roughly €5 ($5.40) (₹446.71) per tonne of coal. Given that around eight tonnes of coal are needed to produce a tonne of steel, and the carbon tax on coal amounts to roughly 60 per cent of the price per tonne of coal, this results in a roughly 5 per cent tax on the price of steel, which is similar to the rate that EU applies to its steel producers.

Currently, at their nascent stage, the Indian steel and cement industries are responsible for 10-15 per cent of emissions. While the 'SteelZero/Green Steel' initiative is in play to bring leading organisations together to accelerate the transition to a net-zero steel industry, the demand for steel is expected to quadruple in the coming years.

During the UN Climate Summit in 2021, India reiterated the need to phase down unabated coal usage instead of phasing it out. Although India is a net importer of petroleum products, it garners substantial revenues through cesses and taxes on petrol, diesel, and oil.

These taxes serve as effective policy instruments to mitigate the adverse impacts of fossil fuel consumption and encourage a transition towards cleaner energy sources. It is also important to recognise these policy instruments as effective carbon taxes, so as to face the global challenges like CBAM effectively, and to avoid a reduction in the already slipping competitive advantage of India in many sectors. https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/ways-for-india-to-deal-with-eu-carbon-tax/article67871813.ece

19. Five years on, MSME Technology Centre project yet to take off

(newindianexpress.com) 22 Feb 2024

The then Rourkela tehsildar CK Mallick had confirmed transfer of 14.45 acre land at Kantajharan for the project in May 2023.

ROURKELA: Despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on self-reliance and skill development to strengthen manufacturing, the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) appears to be in no rush to expedite the establishment of the MSME Technology Centre or Technology Hub in Rourkela.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) sanctioned 20 Technology Centres (TCs), including one for Rourkela, and 100 Extension Centres (ECs) across the country in November 2018. However, over five years later, little progress has been made, despite the finalisation of land in Kantajharan, Rourkela, and the availability of Rs 200 crore.

Sources reveal that in the past five years, the establishment of all TCs and ECs has remained stagnant, existing only in the files of the Ministry and progressing at a snail's pace.

In April 2023, the office of the Development Commissioner (DC) under the Ministry floated a Request for Proposal (RFP) to appoint a CPSE as the Nodal Agency for establishing the new TCs and ECs on a turnkey basis. The deadline for bid submission was May 8, 2023.

The central PSU IRCON International Ltd on November 8, 2023 had in writing informed the BSE and NSE about its bagging the bid to act as Nodal Agency for establishment of TC and ECs. No further information is available, sources said.

Earlier, in a letter the office of the DC-MSME on January 3, 2020 had requested the Revenue department for transfer of 20 acre of surrendered leasehold land of the Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) of SAIL in the name of the DC-MSME through the director of MSME Development Institute (MSME-DI), Cuttack for setting up the TC as 'Technology Hub' at Kantajharan.

The letter had stated sanctioning of Rs 200 crore by the Ministry including Rs 100 crore for building infrastructure and rest Rs 100 crore for procurement of testing equipment and machineries for the TC to act as Technology Hub.

The then Rourkela tehsildar CK Mallick had confirmed transfer of 14.45 acre land at Kantajharan for the project in May 2023.

Former president of the Rourkela Chamber of Commerce and Industry Subrata Patnaik lamented the delay and said the Sundargarh district and Rourkela city have strong presence MSME units, but they are mostly confined to iron products due to lack of advanced technologies for product diversity. https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2024/Feb/22/five-years-on-msme-technology-centre-project-yet-to-take-off

20. Our school infrastructure needs to be revamped to flatten its pyramid *(livemint.com)* Bibek Debroy, Sanjay Kumar & Aditya Sinha 22 Feb 2024

The base of primary education has widened in India but we still lack capacity for higher-level schooling. This results in a squeeze, with enrollment showing pyramidal attrition as children turn into teenagers. This challenge must be met.

Investing in public education systems is crucial for countries seeking to leverage their demographic dividend. South Korea's economic development, often called the 'Miracle on the Han River,' exemplifies the impact of strategic educational investments. During its rapid industrialization, the emphasis on education significantly improved literacy rates and provided the necessary skills for industrial and technological sectors.

Empirical research supports the notion that educational investment is positively correlated with economic growth. According to World Bank studies, each additional year of schooling is associated with up to a 10% increase in individual earnings, and countries prioritizing educational quality generally exhibit higher economic growth rates. Similarly, a study by Unicef found that each additional year of schooling is associated with an increase of 0.37 percentage points in GDP growth. This can rise up to 1 percentage point with improved learning outcomes.

As the demographic window narrows with time, the elderly population's proportion is set to rise, gradually diminishing the dividend. This transient nature of a demographic advantage underscores the urgency for strategic interventions to harness its potential before the contours shift towards an older demographic profile. In this context, strategic investments in education are paramount in amplifying the benefits of the demographic dividend. This is precisely what India is doing.

Data for 2023 from the Unified Digital Information on School Education (UDISE+) tracker under the Union education ministry shows that between 2014 and 2023, there were significant advancements in structural and gender parity aspects. The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR), a crucial indicator, has seen a remarkable decrease across all levels of education, signifying smaller class sizes and more individualized attention to students. There has been PTR reduction from 29 to 23 at the primary level, 26 to 18 at the upper-primary, 26 to 17 at the secondary and 38 to 26 at the higher-secondary levels, reflecting a concerted effort to improve the quality of education through increased teacher recruitment. Further, the teaching staff has attained a gender balance, with female teachers now comprising 52.3% of the workforce in 2022-23, up from 46.9% in 2014-15, thanks to the hiring of over 4.1 million new teachers, 60% of whom are female.

In conjunction with infrastructural improvements, there has been a qualitative leap in student outcomes, particularly in secondary and higher- secondary board exams. Between 2013 and 2022, the number of students within the public education system passing with 60% and above has surged, with 'pass' students in Class 10 rising from 5.8 million to nearly 9.8 million and in Class 12 from 3.6 million to over 4.3 million. There are also major gains among female students, whose pass rates rose by 72% in Class 10 sand 87% in Class 12, surpassing the improvement rates of their male counterparts.

To further harness the demographic dividend, state-level educational reforms are crucial, given education's place in the concurrent list of India's Constitution. This column series will explore key challenges facing India's public education, starting with its pyramidal structure. This structure, a by-product of well-meaning policies, mirrors the 'Delhi Cobra Effect': as the story goes, British incentives to decrease Delhi's cobra population inadvertently encouraged cobra breeding, thereby worsening the problem after the programme ended and the snakes were freed.

Similarly, the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 aimed to ensure universal access to education in the age group of 6 to 14 years. This Act, with its stipulated distance norms for primary and upper-primary schools (1km and 3km respectively), has significantly increased the number of schools that are within accessible walking distance for children. This effort led to expanded educational infrastructure, particularly at the primary and upper-primary levels, to comply with the Act's accessibility requirements, resulting in a more decentralized distribution of schools, especially in rural and remote areas. However, the Act's focus on elementary education has inadvertently led to a relative scarcity of secondary and higher secondary schools in some states. Resources have thus been disproportionately allocated for elementary schooling, often at the expense of developing secondary and higher-secondary infrastructure.

UDISE+ data reveals a stark decline in enrolments within India's public education system: from 122.5 million in primary schools, it plummets to 63.5 million in upper-primary, further dwindling to 38 million at the secondary level, with a mere 27.8 million at the higher-secondary level, illustrating a severe pyramidal attrition as educational levels advance. Further, there are 743,000 schools at the primary level, accounting for 50.7% of all schools. However, as students advance to higher educational levels, there is a sharp decline in the number of schools available, with only 150,000 schools (10.3%) at the higher-secondary level. This imbalance creates a bottleneck effect, where the capacity to accommodate students in the public education system drastically reduces as they climb higher.

The current educational bottleneck, highlighted by a mere 44% retention rate to higher-secondary levels against the National Education Policy's 100% goal, underscores the urgency for systemic reforms. This stark drop-off, indicative of potential drop-out spikes at key transition stages, necessitates a comprehensive overhaul. It must include increasing secondary and higher-secondary seats, enhancing educational access, and ensuring a smooth progression with sufficient infrastructure and teachers at the state level. Addressing this pyramidal shrinkage is crucial for us to tackle educational disparities and unlock India's human capital potential. The onus is on state governments, despite Union support via the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, to implement these critical steps. https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/our-school-infrastructure-needs-to-be-revamped-to-flatten-its-pyramid-11708515838514.html

21. MP: Sarpanch Accuses Panchayat Secretary of Embezzling ₹15L In Pipliya Mandi *(freepressjournal.in)* February 22, 2024

Sarpanch Karulal Bhil accused Pipliya Mandi gram panchayat secretary Narendra Singh Chauhan of misappropriating Rs 15 lakh intended for construction work in Dobra village. He also logged a complaint to the zila panchayat CEO.

"Secretary Chauhan withdrew funds but failed to execute the promised projects," Sarpanch Bhil stated. "He even forges my seal for his illicit activities," Bhil added.

According to Bhil, Chauhan withdrew hefty sums for Anganwadi and drain construction, yet no progress was made. He also claimed to be less educated and to just be able to sign. He is unaware of the amount that the secretary has taken out.

However, Chauhan defended himself, assuring that the construction work was imminent. "Funds have been allocated, and work will commence shortly," stated Chauhan.

The situation raises questions about the panchayat engineer's involvement, as such large sums couldn't have been spent without collusion. Sarpanch Bhil lamented his lack of oversight, claiming ignorance about the transactions made using his digital signature.

Assistant secretary Radheshyam corroborated Bhil's claims, asserting that no construction work was evident on-site. Bhil emphasised the necessity of an impartial investigation to reclaim the misappropriated funds.

As the controversy unfolds, all eyes are on Pipliya Mandi, awaiting the outcome of the impending investigation. https://www.freepressjournal.in/indore/mp-sarpanch-accuses-panchayat-secretary-of-embezzling-15l-in-pipliya-mandi