

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. ‘Several discrepancies found in Awas Yojana implementation in MP’ (*millenniumpost.in*) 22 Feb 2024

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has found major discrepancies in the implementation of the Awas Yojana scam in Madhya Pradesh, alleged Trinamool Congress (TMC).

It also slammed the Narendra Modi government at the Centre saying that “double engine equals double fraud”.

In a post on X, Trinamool Congress on Thursday said: “CAG has flagged major discrepancies in the implementation of Awas Yojana in MP: duplication of beneficiaries, aid to the ineligible and neglect of SC/ST communities.”

Trinamool also attacked the Centre saying that no central teams were sent to Madhya Pradesh despite the discrepancies in the implementation of the scheme. “Surprise, surprise, NO Central or NLM teams sent, NO ATRs demanded, and NO funds withheld. Because, like it or not, DOUBLE ENGINE equals DOUBLE FRAUD – and PM @narendramodi seems to be just fine with it!” the ruling party in Bengal further posted on X.

According to the state government sources, Centre has withheld funds for 11 lakh Awas beneficiaries and the dues under this scheme runs up to around Rs 6,600 crore.

Chief Minister Banerjee earlier had said that MGNREGA workers who haven’t received their pending wages and Awas Yojana beneficiaries who are yet to get their houses.

Banerjee on repeated occasions said that Bengal would have reaped the benefits of more welfare projects had the Centre been fair with funding for schemes like MGNREGS, Awas Yojana and others. There are several centrally sponsored schemes that the Bengal government continues funding after the Centre stopped releasing money, Banerjee had said.

Incidentally, the Centre had recently written to the Bengal government seeking an action taken report (ATR) in regard to PM Awas Yojana. The Ministry of Rural Development had written to the state Panchayat and Rural Development department seeking some clarifications on some alleged irregularities in connection with the fund distribution under Awas Yojana in some districts.

<https://www.millenniumpost.in/bengal/several-discrepancies-found-in-awas-yojana-implementation-in-mp-553171>

2. मध्य प्रदेश में पीएम आवास योजना के तहत अपात्रों को पैसा दिया, एससी/एसटी को कम प्राथमिकता: कैग (thewirehindi.com) 23 Feb 2024

मध्य प्रदेश विधानसभा में पेश की गई कैग रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, राज्य में 1,500 से अधिक अपात्र लाभार्थियों को योजना के तहत धनराशि जारी कर दी गई और एसटी/एससी और अधिक वंचित लाभार्थियों को प्राथमिकता देने के बजाय अन्य लोगों को तरजीह दी गई थी. वाहन वाले परिवारों के लिए यह सुविधा नहीं है, लेकिन ऐसे लोगों को लाभ दिए गए, जिनके पास वाहन थे.

भारत के नियंत्रक और महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) ने मध्य प्रदेश में प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना - ग्रामीण (पीएमएवाई-जी) के कार्यान्वयन में अनियमितताओं को चिह्नित किया है.

राज्य सरकार पर 1,500 से अधिक अपात्र लाभार्थियों को 15 करोड़ रुपये की सहायता देने से लेकर 8,000 से अधिक लाभार्थियों को एससी और एसटी समुदायों के अधिक वंचित लाभार्थियों पर प्राथमिकता देने के आरोप हैं.

इस जन आवास कार्यक्रम को केंद्र सरकार द्वारा साल 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.

इंडियन एक्सप्रेस की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक, 8 फरवरी को मध्य प्रदेश विधानसभा में पेश की गई कैग रिपोर्ट 2016-21 के बीच 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.

हालांकि इस योजना में यह अनिवार्य है कि वाहन या मछली पकड़ने वाली नाव वाले परिवारों को बाहर रखा जाए, लेकिन कैग 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, 'हमने आगे देखा कि सीईओ, जनपद परिषद ने 2,037 अयोग्य लाभार्थियों में से 1,555 को 15.66 करोड़ रुपये की पीएमएवाई-जी सहायता जारी की.'

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, जिनकी योजना के लिए पहचान नहीं की गई थी.

इसके अनुसार, 'लाभार्थियों के दोहराव की पहचान करने के लिए पोर्टल में अलर्ट करने की कोई व्यवस्था नहीं है. दो बार सहायता प्रदान करने या परिवार के अन्य सदस्यों को सहायता देने के बजाय डुप्लीकेट लाभार्थियों को हटा दिया जाना चाहिए था.'

दिशानिर्देशों के अनुसार, अनुसूचित जाति (एससी), अनुसूचित जनजाति (एसटी) और अल्पसंख्यक समुदायों को लाभार्थी सूची में प्राथमिकता दी जानी है, लेकिन 60 ग्राम पंचायतों का ऑडिट करने वाले कैग ने पाया कि 'कुल 18,935 स्वीकृत मामलों में से 8,226 लाभार्थियों को अधिक वंचित लाभार्थियों की जगह प्राथमिकता सूची में तरजीह दी गई और उनसे पहले उन्हें आवास स्वीकृत किया गया.'

कैग की रिपोर्ट में लाभार्थियों को किश्तें देने में देरी की बात कही गई, जिसके कारण घर बनाने में देरी हुई. निर्माण के चरण के आधार पर राशि आमतौर पर लाभार्थी को चार किस्तों में भेजी जाती है.

इसमें कहा गया है, '53 फीसदी (13,18,233) लाभार्थियों को सहायता राशि की पहली किस्त एक दिन से लेकर चार साल की देरी से जारी की गई.'

इसमें कहा गया है कि 14 प्रतिशत (3,48,319) लाभार्थियों को धनराशि जारी ही नहीं की गई, जबकि केवल 33 प्रतिशत (8,38,324) लाभार्थियों को समय पर धनराशि प्रदान की गई.

कैग ने यह भी बताया कि '90 मामलों में नाबालिगों को पीएमएवाई-जी घर स्वीकृत किए गए थे 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 ट्रांजेक्शनल इलेक्ट्रॉनिक 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 नाम का उल्लेख नहीं किया गया था और 950 मामलों में लाभ जारी कर दिया गया था.'

रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, 'यह संबंधित जनपद परिषद और जिला परिषद के सीईओ द्वारा निगरानी की कमी की ओर से इशारा करता है, जिन्होंने लाभार्थी का नाम उपलब्ध न होने के बावजूद लाभ को मंजूरी दे दी.'

इसके अलावा योजना की रूपरेखा यह निर्धारित करती है कि विधवा/अविवाहित/अलग हुए व्यक्ति के मामले को छोड़कर घर का आवंटन पति और पत्नी के नाम पर संयुक्त रूप से किया जाएगा.

कैग ने कहा, 'संबंधित जिला परिषदों के सीईओ ने इस नियम का उल्लंघन किया और 25,24,951 घरों में से 12,66,815 (50.17 प्रतिशत) पुरुष लाभार्थियों को आवंटित कर दिए.'
<https://thewirehindi.com/268952/money-given-to-ineligible-beneficiaries-under-pm-awas-yojana-in-mp-sc-st-given-less-priority-cag-report/>

3. Four Officials Held for Siphoning Rs 2.1 cr from Sheep Scheme (*deccanchronicle.com*) 23 Feb 2024

Hyderabad: The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Thursday arrested four senior officials for creating fake benami accounts and siphoning off `2.1 crore from the Sheep Rearing Development Scheme (SRDS).

The arrested officers were identified as D. Ravi, assistant director of Kamareddy Area Veterinary Hospital, M. Aditya Kesav Sai, assistant director, district veterinary and animal husbandry officer (AHO), Medchal, Pasula Raghupathi Reddy, Rangareddy district groundwater officer, and Sangu Ganesh, deputy director of adult education department.

The ACB official who did the preliminary probe said the accused colluded and conspired with private parties by creating benami accounts to divert the funds. The accused were produced in court and lodged in judicial remand.

As per government directives, a senior officer from each department is to be present to purchase sheep from other states. It was found that Raghupathi Reddy and Ganesh went to purchase sheep and committed irregularities, while Ravi and Kesav Sai colluded with the private parties to open benami accounts.

An audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) raised suspicion of fraud in SRDS implementation, which was introduced in 2017. Under the scheme, each beneficiary gets a sheep unit, comprising 20 ewes and one ram.

The total cost of each unit was ₹1.25 lakh, of which 75 per cent (₹93,750) was to be given as a subsidy and 25 per cent (₹31,250) was to be paid by the beneficiary.

Implemented by the Telangana State Sheep and Goat Development Cooperative Federation Limited (TSSGDCFL) at the state level and by the District Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Officers (DV&AHOs) at district level, sheep are purchased from neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu to avoid recycling and

increase the net sheep population in the state. The sheep breeds chosen are ‘Nellore Brown (Dora)’, ‘Nellore Jodipi (white with black spots on face)’, ‘Deccani’ and ‘Madras Red’.

From 2017-18 to September 2021, in seven districts, a total of ₹1,538.59 crore (including subsidy of ₹1,153.94 crore) was spent, with ₹1,490.38 crore (including ₹1,117.79 crore subsidy) on the purchase of sheep and ₹48.21 crore (including ₹36.15 crore subsidy) on transportation.

The CAG audit found that of 1,15,378 sheep units, transport invoices for only 98,543 units were produced, while ledgers for 16,835 sheep units — costing ₹142.69 crore — were not furnished. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/four-officials-held-for-siphoning-rs-21-cr-from-sheep-scheme-883025>

4. Four officials arrested in Telangana sheep distribution scam (*siasat.com*) 22 February 2024

Hyderabad: The anti-corruption bureau has arrested four officials for their alleged involvement in irregularities in sheep distribution scheme, a flagship initiative by the previous government. A recent CAG report indicated massive irregularities and corruption in the scheme.

The officials in custody include assistant director of the Medchal Animal Husbandry Department Aditya, underground water officer of Rangareddy district Raghupathi Reddy, deputy director of adult education Ganesh; and the assistant director of Kamareddy veterinary hospital Ravi.

Major irregularities, such as the fabrication of invoices and the duplication of ear tags, as well as the improper usage of ambulances, two-wheelers, and other vehicles for the transportation of sheep were reported.

The scheme's execution and governance measures are called into question due to the substantial sum of Rs 253.93 crore that was involved in fraudulent activities.

'126 sheep transported on a two-wheeler'

In one case, the CAG report found that an ambulance was used to transport 84 sheep in a single trip in Khammam district, while scamsters quoted in records that they transported 126 sheep in a single trip in Sangareddy district on a two-wheeler.

In another instance, they used a cab to transport 168 sheep in a single trip in Mahbubnagar district, while an auto was used in Nalgonda district to ferry 126 sheep.

The ACB is actively investigating the matter to uncover additional details.

ACB probe

The Telangana Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) launched an investigation in January into the sheep distribution scheme after allegations surfaced that some beneficiaries were deceived and that officials were involved in the scam.

Gachibowli police registered a case in December after some people filed complaints against the officials and middlemen, including two assistant directors of the animal husbandry department and two contractors.

BRS launched scheme in 2017

They were accused of being involved in a scam of Rs 2.1 crore in the sheep distribution scheme.

The Telangana State Sheep and Goat Development Cooperative Federation Limited (TSSFGDCFL), under the animal husbandry and fisheries departments, has been implementing the scheme to provide sustainable livelihood to traditional shepherd families.

It was launched by the previous BRS government in April 2017.

Under the scheme, the government provides 75 percent of the cost of a sheep, and the remaining 25 percent is borne by the beneficiary. <https://www.siasat.com/four-officials-arrested-in-telangana-sheep-distribution-scam-2981513/>

5. BRS Government Officials Pulled Wool over Sheep Scheme Corruption (*deccanchronicle.com*) 23 Feb 2024

Hyderabad: The Sheep Rearing Development Scheme introduced by the then BRS government in June 2017 was literally converted into a programme on shepherding of corruption by unscrupulous officials, whose actions were reportedly known to their political bosses who chose to look the other way.

Amidst persistent allegations of misappropriation of hundreds of crores of rupees, if not around a thousand crore, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India's recently released report made it very clear as to how, at every stage and step of the scheme, money was siphoned off turning this scheme into a conduit of unbridled corruption during the former BRS led government.

Such was the blatant abuse of power that the CAG revealed in its report some unbelievable demonstration of transportation skills –three to ten sheep units (i.e., 63 to 210 sheep) were shown to have been carried in each trip on two-wheelers.

The CAG found that not only were many sheep transportation invoices submitted to the government fake, in the case of 336 invoices, the vehicles that transported the sheep units were found to be two-wheelers (53), autorickshaws (219), passenger cars and vans (35), buses (27) and even ambulances (two).

Even more bizarre was the finding that 10 such invoices raised involved sheep transportation on fire trucks (6), water tankers (3), and also a mobile compressor vehicle.

“These could not have been used for transportation of sheep,” the CAG report said.

The CAG also found that there were serious irregularities in terms of purchase of sheep feed, a large number of fake and non-existent beneficiaries, and issuing duplicate identity tags to inflate the number of sheep that were distributed. The CAG report makes it clear that the sheep scheme of the BRS government was steeped in corruption, with lame excuses given by the then BRS government to questions raised by the CAG.

Counting sheep of 80.55 lakh ear tags with unique 12-digit number for each animal, data of 17,912 sheep contained less/more than 12 digits.

Of the remaining 80.37 lakh tags, 2,17,643 tags were used two to 34 times, resulting in a total loss of 4,55,300 original and duplicate tags.

CAG said this shows 2,37,657 sheep (4,55,300 minus 2,17,643) shown as supplied, were fake Subsidy of Rs 92.69 crore claimed to have been spent were fraudulent

Other frauds found by CAG:

Non-maintenance of beneficiary-wise files

Non-availability of transportation invoices

Payments made on invoices on improper/manipulated/fake registration numbers

Invoices showing transportation of higher number of sheep units than possible/permitted; Recycling of sheep

Non-supply of feed to the supplied sheep due to non-availability of sheep on ground

Benefits given to dead persons. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/brs-government-officials-pulled-wool-over-sheep-scheme-corruption-883030>

6. Consultant bungled design of smart bus stations: CM
(timesofindia.indiatimes.com) Updated: Feb 23, 2024

Panaji: Reacting to the allegation made by revenue minister Atanasio ‘Babush’ Monserrate that the smart bus station project is a ‘scam’, chief minister Pramod Sawant on Thursday said the stations’ flawed design is the consultant’s fault. Sawant said he has sought a detailed report from Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited (IPSCDL).

Sawant said that he has spoken to IPSCDL CEO and MD Sanjit Rodrigues.

“I have decided to hold a meeting soon with Smart City officials and resolve the matter,” Sawant said.

The CM said that the duty of the contractor is to construct and maintain smart bus stations, for which he has to get revenue.

Monserrate, the Panaji MLA and Sawant’s cabinet colleague, said on Tuesday that the substandard design of the smart bus stations in the state capital is a scam to loot people’s money.

Monserrate, in a letter to the chief minister, demanded an urgent meeting to discuss the design, the unlawful incorporation of the agreement on advertisement rights, and the deadline for the completion of IPSCDL’s works. Monserrate has written a similar letter to the chief secretary.

The bus stations cannot be termed ‘smart’ because of the substandard design, Monserrate said in the letter.

“The incorporation of the agreement of advertisement rights that has been executed before KTCL and Primeslots Events Pvt Ltd will lead to a colossal loss of revenue to the Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP),” Monserrate wrote.

The Panaji MLA said that maintenance of the bus stops and regulation of advertisements were devolved to the CCP under the provisions of the Constitution of India and the CCP Act, 2002.

“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 will be a ground for a major CAG inquiry against the authorities involved,” said Monserrate.

Since the CCP had a constitutional and statutory mandate to maintain bus stops within the city, Monserrate said, no project should be undertaken without involving the CCP. “The work order of bus shelters was incidentally awarded by IPSCDL to the same defaulting concessionaire of the CCP who owes dues in crores to the CCP. This issue has been flagged by the CAG,” he added.
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/consultant-bungled-design-of-smart-bus-stations-cm/articleshow/107923328.cms>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

7. IAF to Get High Power Radars, Close-In Weapon Systems As Cabinet Committee On Security Clears Rs 13,000 Crore Deals (*swarajyamag.com*) Feb 23, 2024

To bolster the surveillance and defense capabilities of the Indian Air Force (IAF), the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has approved deals worth around Rs 13,000 crore for new high-power radars and close-in weapon systems (CIWS) from the Indian company Larsen & Toubro.

The CCS, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has cleared the acquisition of the radars under a project worth around Rs 6,000 crore.

These systems are intended to replace and enhance the current network of radars along the borders with China and Pakistan, top government sources were quoted as saying by ANI.

The ambitious Made in India Close-in Weapon System project based on a derivative of air defence guns has also been cleared, which will provide strong protection to vital assets and points against attacks by drones and aircraft.

Additionally, a significant project to develop a Made in India Close-in Weapon System (CIWS), based on a derivative of air defence gun technology, has been approved.

This system aims to offer robust defence for vital assets against drone and aircraft threats. The project is worth around Rs 7,000 crore.

Larsen & Toubro, in collaboration with various Indian small and medium enterprises, will produce the new radars and CIWS, generating a considerable number of employment opportunities in the defence sector.

The radar procurement project has been cleared as India plans to expand and strengthen its radar coverage all along its borders with China and Pakistan.

The IAF is set to deploy a substantial number of radars in stages, focusing on fully indigenous systems in the next phase to ensure comprehensive area coverage.

The radar project has been cleared at a time when India has plans to strengthen its radar coverage all along its borders with both its northern and western adversaries.

The inception of the CIWS project dates back to a few years ago following the detection of drones near a sensitive location by security agencies, underscoring the need for a close-in weapon system to provide protection.

This project has been a collaborative effort between the Air Force and the Indian Army.
<https://swarajyamag.com/news-brief/iaf-to-get-high-power-radars-close-in-weapon-systems-as-cabinet-committee-on-security-clears-rs-13000-crore-deals>

8. Mega BrahMos missile deal among four worth Rs 35,000 crore cleared by CCS (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) 23 Feb 2024

The Cabinet Committee on Security has given the final nod to four major defence deals worth around Rs 35,000 crore to bolster combat capabilities of the armed forces, including the largest-ever contract for the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles.

The CCS on Wednesday evening cleared the almost Rs 19,500 crore contract for over 220 extended-range BrahMos missiles, with a strike range of 450-km, to arm frontline warships of the Navy, sources told TOI.

The contract will be inked in early-March.

New advanced engines for the existing MiG-29 fighters in IAF fleet, which will be manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics with Russian collaboration for about Rs 5,300 crore, was another deal to get the green-light.

The two other projects are for high-powered radars and new versions of the L-70 air defence guns, both of which will be manufactured by L&T with some foreign technology for almost Rs 5,000 crore each, the sources added.

The BrahMos missiles, which are jointly manufactured with Russia in India, fly almost three times the speed of sound at Mach 2.8, have become the “prime conventional (nonnuclear) precision-strike weapon” for the armed forces, with contracts worth over Rs 38,000 crore already inked over the years.

“The new Rs 19,500 crore contract, which is the first consolidated order for the extended-range BrahMos missiles, will add to this. Till now, upgrades of the existing 290-km range missiles were being done only when the warships came in for refits or maintenance,” a source said.

“The new missiles will be delivered over five to six years,” he added. A 800-km variant of BrahMos is also underdevelopment, as was earlier reported by TOI.

Almost 15 frontline warships are already armed with BrahMos missiles, which includes the latest destroyers like INS Visakhapatnam, INS Mormugao and INS Imphal.

All new destroyers and frigates will also have the BrahMos missiles. They include the seven 6,670-tonne stealth frigates being constructed under Project-17A at an overall cost of Rs 45,000 crore, which are slated for delivery in the 2024-2026 timeframe.

The IAF, too, is looking to arm another 20-25 Sukhoi30MKI fighters with the BrahMos after getting the first lot of 40 jets modified by HAL to carry the missile. Sukhois armed with BrahMos missiles can carry out long-range strikes against high-value targets like warships on the high seas or enemy positions, bunkers, command-andcontrol centres and the like on land. “A smaller air-launched BrahMos-NG will also be developed so that lightweight fighters can carry it,” another source said.

The Army, in turn, also plans to induct more BrahMos regiments to add to its existing four. Some of its BrahMos batteries are currently deployed in Ladakh and Arunachal

Pradesh due to the continuing almost four-year-old military confrontation with China. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/cabinet-committee-on-security-clears-brahmos-and-3-other-deals-worth-rs-35000-crore/articleshow/107923891.cms>

9. Illegal quarrying in TN's Tirunelveli causes Rs 700 crore loss to state exchequer, alleges NGO; files complaint with DVAC (*newindianexpress.com*) 23 Feb 2024

Arappor Iyakkam, an anti-corruption organisation, has alleged that illegal quarrying in Tirunelveli district and the failure to impose penalty on erring quarries have resulted in loss of over Rs 700 crore to the state exchequer.

CHENNAI: Arappor Iyakkam, an anti-corruption organisation, has alleged that illegal quarrying in Tirunelveli district and the failure to impose penalty on erring quarries have resulted in loss of over Rs 700 crore to the state exchequer. The organisation has also filed a complaint with the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, convenor Jayaram Venkatesan said in Tirunelveli district alone more than 50 stone quarries are operational. A tragic incident unfolded on May 14, 2022, during late hours at a stone quarry in Tharuvai village, in which four people lost their lives.

Subsequent investigation by a special team led by Nirmal Raj, then Director of Geology and Mining, revealed that many quarries had exceeded the permissible depth for quarrying operations and mining was done during prohibited night hours, violating environmental clearance conditions and lease agreements, Venkatesan stated.

Citing information obtained through RTI, he said, acting on this report the sub-collector of Cheranmahadevi imposed penalties totalling Rs 262 crore on 24 quarries involved in illegal activities. All quarries in Tirunelveli district were shut down on the collector's orders, he added.

According to him, in a blatant disregard for proper procedures, quarry owners affected by the closure directly appealed to then Commissioner of Geology and Mining J Jayakanthan, instead of the collector. Jayakanthan allegedly reduced the total penalty to Rs 13.8 crore, and allowed the quarries to reopen. He also extended the lease for five months to compensate for the closure period.

Recalling that Tirunelveli MP Gnanathiraviam opposed former collector Vishnu for cracking down on illegal quarrying during a press conference in June 2022, Arappor claimed that the MP had direct interests in quarrying. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2024/Feb/23/illegal-quarrying-in-tns-tirunelveli-causes-rs-700-crore-loss-to-state-exchequer-alleges-ngo-files-complaint-with-dvac>

10. Welfare vs prudence (*financialexpress.com*) February 23, 2024

Cost recovery from welfare programmes is essential to improve ailing state finances.

The debate on welfarism and freebies has attracted attention of late, especially when state government finances have recently not been in good shape. We assess here how the state governments have fared on freebies/welfarism and make suggestions on how to approach the issue.

As their core function, governments are generally expected to provide a legal framework for economic transactions. They have, however, also assumed a responsibility for welfare by producing goods and services, distributing them, redistributing income etc. Such welfarism is generally offered through the social and economic services of the state governments and specific allocations are made in their respective budgets.

There is a difference of opinion at various levels on whether many of the freebies or welfare programmes are necessary. RBI feels that the freebies are public welfare measures that are provided free of charge and which can be distinguished from public or merit goods. There can be an element of subjectivity assessing the programmes on these criteria. The political system has the final say on what type of expenditure is to be incurred and how are the resources raised for these. A welfare programme in one state can be a freebie in another. Instead of making value judgment, one can consider if the objective is to restore the health of the state finances and reduce the spread of such programmes. In such cases, it may be appropriate to look at the expenditure and revenue from social and economic services that the states provide and see how the gap can be covered. One method for doing so is recovering costs through user charges.

Some questions arise in this regard. Is allocation to such programmes optimal and does the amount go to the actually needy? Does the government have resources to undertake such welfare measures? By such allocation, does the government encourage the excess use of resources? While looking into this issue, the Eleventh Finance Commission suggested cost-based indexing of user charges. The subsequent Finance Commissions were of this view too.

We computed the recovery of user charges of the states for four five-year periods—2001-2006, 2006-2011, 2011-2016 and 2016-2022 (6 years). It was observed that the recovery rates witnessed a declining trend from 2006-07. The recovery rates from social services showed an upturn during 2012-2016. In economic services, a clear inverted U-shaped pattern was seen, which increased till 2003-04, and fell thereafter.

A clear deceleration in growth was visible in the decade 2011-22 across receipts, growth of revenue from social and economic services, and cost recovery. Meanwhile, the structure of expenditure, as indicated in the share of receipts and expenditure, did not undergo any change. On the contrary, the combined cost recovery for both social and economic services was below 10% during this period.

An overall revenue deficit could also be seen during 2001-06, followed by years of revenue surplus. From 2013-14 onwards, the states had a persistent revenue deficit. The finances of the states thus witnessed continued deterioration post 2013-2014. This had very little to do with the transfer of resources, per the Finance Commissions. From 29% in 2005, transfers now stand at 41%. There has been a sharp deceleration in revenue receipts of the states in 2012-22, especially their own revenues. On the other hand, expenditure grew at 1.5 times the revenue growth on an annual basis. If cost recovery

of 10% for social services and 30% for economic services was attempted, revenue deficit became zero in this period. The best solution is the states deciding the percentage of cost recovery for each social or economic service based on their respective political philosophies, so long as cost recovery on social and economic services are achieved to make the revenue deficit zero. The fiscal situation of the Centre was also not good post 2012-13, as revenue buoyancy remained at just 1%. As utilities and freebies are provided at the state level, we have considered the health of the State finances only.

Large interstate differences in cost recovery and per capita expenditure on social and economic services were observed. The cost recovery we talk of is only on the revenue side. The recovery rate as calculated by us would go down if we consider return on capital assets.

Cost recovery to offset revenue deficit is critical for maintaining intergenerational equity. Empirically, there has been an increase in freebies, particularly after 2013-14. Some of them are necessary to reduce specific hardships. The Finance Commission also needs to build in their devolution to encourage user charges recovery and it must incentivise the states appropriately. Normative principles in assessment of revenue and expenditure can be considered, so can the penalisation of deficit-generating tendencies amongst the states. Within these parameters, states can decide on which freebie to focus on, so long as there is sufficient cost recovery to make revenue deficit zero. This will be the first step in curbing freebies. In the second step, each freebie must have an end date. There should be a permanent institutional arrangement, like the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) in the UK, which can assess the finances of the Centre and the states continuously and see if indicators set by the Finance Commission are met every year. If their assessment reveals that the states have not adhered to the Finance Commission parameters set for them, they would reduce allocation as recommended by the Commission.

As an incentive, a certain percentage of devolution to states can also be earmarked by the Finance Commission, to be allocated based on the assessment by an OBR-like body. This would be given to the states who meet their targets of revenue deficit reduction set by the Finance Commission. As the country develops confidence in the OBR-like body, it may be also tasked to assess the likely financial condition of the states arising out of various poll promises made by major parties and disseminate such assessments through the Election Commission to the voting population.
<https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/welfare-vs-prudence/3402685/>

11. Yes, there exists an economic case for a regime of MSPs backed by law (*livemint.com*) 23 Feb 2024

It must not be viewed merely as a subsidy to farmers but also as a tool to aid in price management. A well-designed MSP system can provide income support to farmers and also serve as a complementary tool to control food inflation.

Multiple rounds of talks have failed to resolve the deadlock between agitating farmers and India's government. The sticking point remains a legal guarantee for minimum support prices (MSPs). While this is a long-standing demand, successive governments have dithered on giving legal cover to the decades-old MSP system. If governments had implemented the system as designed and understood, legal cover would not be

necessary. It only seeks to force the government to implement something that on paper has been in existence for more than five decades. Among many reasons cited by critics to reject the idea of legal backing for MSPs, the primary one is the anticipated economic cost of this exercise.

Much of this fear is imaginary, with no factual basis. Some research work, such as a study by Crisil, actually suggest the real cost to be minimal based on available data on prices and the MSPs of respective crops. While exact cost estimates are hard to arrive at, as they are likely to vary depending on production and demand, there is a case to examine the MSP system beyond the lens of its fiscal math. The system should not be viewed as only an income support programme, but an instrument of macro-economic policy. That is how it was designed, and if properly implemented, its benefits would outweigh the costs.

Much of the anger of farmers and the genesis of the MSP demand can be traced to the inefficiency of the farm sector, which needs urgent reforms. It is heavily concentrated in terms of its regional expanse, with intervention in a few surplus states and that too mostly in rice and wheat. A reformed MSP system that meaningfully applies across all 23 crops with MSPs would expand coverage across states and farmers. Most millets, pulses and oilseeds are grown by modest-level farmers in rain-fed and dry regions of the country, as they require less capital and inputs. Remunerative prices for farm produce in India's agriculturally backward states would be good from an equity perspective and also necessary to boost incomes and thus demand for non-farm goods in the economy. At a time of rural distress amid declining cultivation incomes and wages, this will help revive the rural as well as the broader economy.

But the primary goal of an MSP regime is to ensure price stability for producers and consumers. Twice in the last two decades, inflation has been driven by food prices—once from 2008 to 2012 and more recently after the pandemic. In both instances, proactive monetary measures by the central bank were only partly effective, given the structural nature of food inflation. Contrary to claims made in support of India's three abandoned farm laws, recent times have seen an over-reliance on stock limits, invocation of the Essential Commodities Act, export bans and the use of imports to augment supply. Most of these moves were not just distortive, but also ad hoc and erratic.

It is here that an MSP scheme can be helpful. An intervention when market prices are lower than MSP will allow the government to provide price support to farmers, but the farm produce procured can also be used to step up supply when prices are higher than MSP. In the long run, a well-designed MSP system is likely to serve as a complementary inflation management tool, along with monetary policy instruments. It will require the government to invest in creating marketing, storage and transportation structures, which are anyway necessary expenditures for higher value addition in agriculture. As investment in the sector has been growing at the slowest in 10 years, this is an opportunity to boost it.

Finally, a broad-based MSP system will also be crucial in fighting climate change and encouraging better natural resource management. With MSPs only available effectively for rice and wheat, it has led to a decline in the water table, and in turn rising input and energy costs. Covering edible oils, pulses and millets could encourage farmers to

diversify crops and manage weather risks better. It will also save foreign exchange, given the economy's large dependence on imports of edible oils and pulses. It will also help insulate the economy from international price transmissions in agricultural crops.

A well-designed MSP system with expanded crop and regional coverage is not just a necessity in the current circumstances, given India's rural distress, it will also aid macroeconomic management and economic growth. Evaluating the system as a subsidy to farmers misses its important role in ensuring an effective price policy in an increasingly vulnerable sector ridden with weather and price uncertainties. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/yes-there-exists-an-economic-case-for-a-regime-of-msps-backed-by-law-11708615994268.html>

12. Demand for guaranteed MSP is justified (*thehindubusinessline.com*) Updated - February 22, 2024

Experts who argue against it citing fiscal impact misrepresent the concept. Farmers need it as an insurance against uncertainty

The demands of the protesting farmers of Punjab and Haryana are multifaceted, with the primary focus being on securing a legal guarantee for minimum support prices (MSPs). Despite being a long-standing demand, there remains ambiguity regarding its precise implications. This lack of clarity has fuelled fear-mongering, with exaggerated concerns raised about the fiscal implications and potential monopolisation of agricultural trade. Similar apprehensions were raised during the implementation of the National Food Security Act and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, yet neither of these legislation resulted in government bankruptcy.

MSP serves as a straightforward mechanism aimed at ensuring price stability for essential agricultural commodities. Its primary purpose is to shield farmers from the fluctuations in prices through government interventions. It has been in existence in India for more than five decades. Why, then, are farmers asking for a legal guarantee? Are the farmers being irrational in demanding a guaranteed MSP?

It is crucial to emphasise that farmers often do not receive a fair share of the returns from the seemingly high prices at which their produce is sold. Urban consumers, particularly among higher-income groups, are often willing to pay more. This scenario perpetuates middleman profiteering at the expense of farmer welfare. Therefore, farmers in rural areas require greater protection through price-based mechanisms like MSP to mitigate these inequalities.

Conflicting views

Meanwhile, many experts caution against enshrining the MSP into law. They argue that it would essentially mean that no one could purchase crops below their MSP, potentially disrupting market dynamics and inadvertently harming farmers in the long run.

The concern revolves around the fundamental principle that prices are primarily determined by the interplay of demand and supply dynamics. During times of surplus, such as harvest seasons, prices naturally decline to balance the market. If the MSP exceeds this market-clearing price, private buyers may be unwilling to purchase the produce. Consequently, the burden falls on the government to step in as the buyer of

last resort. Failure to do so could leave farmers without buyers for their crops, exacerbating their already precarious situation. Thus, while the intention behind legalising MSP may be to safeguard farmers' interests, the practical implications could inadvertently lead to adverse outcomes, they argue.

Another concern surrounding the legalisation of MSP is the apprehension regarding the fiscal burden required to uphold such a guarantee. Large figures to the tune of ₹10-18-lakh crore have been floated. Most of these assumptions are based on a poor understanding of agricultural markets or the role of MSP in stabilising prices.

The notion that implementing a guarantee for MSP would necessitate the government to procure all agricultural produce is flawed for two primary reasons. First, not all agricultural produce is sold in the market; farmers keep some for self-consumption, seed, and livestock feed. Hence roughly only a fraction of the produce is available in the market, generally referred to as the marketable surplus. Second, even with a marketable surplus, government intervention is warranted only when the market price of a commodity drops below the MSP. However, intervention is needed only to the extent that it generates excess demand and lifts market prices, often affecting only a fraction of total market arrivals. In periods of high market prices, government intervention is unnecessary.

The way forward

MSP is not merely a government handout but rather the bare minimum necessary to safeguard the peasantry from devastation and destitution. It functions as an insurance policy against uncertainties. A guaranteed MSP offers a good opportunity to rectify the imbalances in the MSP and procurement system. The existing procurement framework is confined to specific geographical regions and is primarily focused on rice and wheat. To mitigate regional imbalances in agricultural productivity, there's a pressing need for a more diversified and expanded MSP that encompasses a wider range of crops. Such an approach would not only bridge regional disparities but also stimulate investment, expansion, and enhancement of storage management practices. Additionally, it would facilitate crop diversification, crucial for effective natural resource management.

Using an income policy on a per-hectare basis to directly transfer funds into farmers' accounts could be a more effective approach than relying solely on higher MSPs or procurement-driven policies. Improving transparency in land records can aid in accurately identifying tenants and landowners, enhancing the efficiency of this income transfer mechanism. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/demand-for-guaranteed-msp-is-justified/article67875583.ece>

13. A spectacular bridge that few use (*livemint.com*) 23 February 2024

MTHL, a new addition to Mumbai's landscape, had over 30,000 vehicles daily in its first 10 days, with toll revenue of ₹61.5 million. However, actual usage in the first month was less than 40% of its projected capacity of 70,000 vehicles daily.

As we drove to the Ro-ro ferry to cross the Mumbai harbour to Mandwa, our driver looked positively wistful. "Could have taken the MTHL," he said. Given where we were headed, it would have been a longer journey, but that didn't seem to matter to him. This did: "It's even better than the Sea Link."

That's the Bandra-Worli Sea Link he meant, apparently now the bar for other, newer bridges and highways. And that's the Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link he also meant, the 22km bridge from Sewri across the harbour to Uran. It's been open to traffic for just over a month now, and while I haven't used it, I know at least one person who has, and who wishes he can take it again. And again. "So smooth," he sighed.

Ten days after it opened, news items told us some early MTHL numbers. Starting with 28,176 on the first day and 54,977 on the second, a total of about 309,000 vehicles had already used the bridge in those 10 days, we heard. On average then, over 30,000 vehicles drove across it daily. The revenue from tolls was about ₹61.5 million, or about ₹200 per vehicle. This made sense, because the toll for traversing the whole bridge is ₹250, with smaller amounts for shorter stretches.

Sounds like a lot of cars? Sounds like there was plenty of early curiosity about this sparkling new addition to the Mumbai landscape—or seascape, rather—and that settled down to a more routine flow of vehicles? Maybe so. That's the way things usually are with sparkling new additions. When the Bandra-Worli Sea Link opened in 2009, plenty of Mumbaikars drove across for a joyride, resulting in a huge rush in those first few days. The rush subsided as the novelty wore off.

By its designers' own admission, the Sea Link was designed to transport over 100,000 cars daily. The actual number is about 32,000 daily. Less than a third of capacity.

Will something similar happen with the MTHL?

To answer that, of course, we need to wait for a while and then measure the traffic on the MTHL. By now, it has been open just over a month. Time enough to draw some conclusions. And indeed, news items popped up, 30 days on, to tell us some month-old MTHL numbers. The bridge "turned one-month-old on February 13", says one report, "and a total of [813,000] vehicles used the bridge in the past month".

Ten days, and now 30 days: you'd expect the second count of vehicles to be three times the first, or close at any rate. But three times 309,000 is 927,000. The actual count is 813,000—which gives us a daily average, for the month, of 27,100 vehicles. That's a 12% drop-off from the 10-day count, and a better than 50% drop-off from the novelty-fuelled rush of the second day.

None of this should be surprising, really. Novelty wearing off is one reason usage drops off. Another reason is the cost of the toll. ₹250 may seem reasonable for a bridge across the sea that's 22km long. But for a lot of motorists, it is nevertheless a reasonably large chunk of money, a definite deterrent to using the MTHL.

Besides, as with the Sea Link, there's another number to consider: capacity. Actual usage is one thing, but how many vehicles was it designed to carry? Put another way, what daily count was predicted for the MTHL when it was being built, and then opened?

The answer, some reports suggest, is about 70,000. Take a moment to let that sink in. Usage over the bridge's first month averaged less than 40% of its capacity—or as another report headlined it, "62% short of projection". Even on that heady second day

when curious Mumbaikars took their MTHL joyrides, the traffic on the bridge was less than 80% of its capacity.

What accounts for this? Why does usage fall so far short of capacity?

Well, you can find an explanation in those reports about a month of MTHL usage. A Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) commissioner is quoted thus: "The number of commercial vehicles is not significant and therefore the projected vehicle count has not been achieved." Indeed: of the 813,000 vehicles that first month, 797,000 were cars. According to the Commissioner, "outside vehicles [don't know] about this bridge yet". As time goes on, he said, "the count of commercial vehicles will grow as the users will become familiar with this new connectivity".

With this growth and other measures, the commissioner asserted that in 2024, "close to 40,000 vehicles (per day) are expected to use the link." Still only 57% of capacity, but consider a more subtle implication. We're at 27,100 vehicles per day today. What will it take for that average to rise to 40,000 after 11 more months? Some simple arithmetic tells us the answer: The daily count will have to average nearly 42,000 vehicles for the rest of the year.

Whether the bridge will attract that kind of traffic remains to be seen. But even that number is still, you will note, under 60% of capacity. That is, even the people who built the bridge don't expect it will attract the number of vehicles they designed it for. Not even close.

What does that say about the bridge, about design, about planning?

What does it say about priorities?

One study showed that on average, each car moving along the Sea Link carries 1.75 people. For the MTHL, let's arbitrarily raise that to three. Then the MMRDA Commissioner's figure of 40,000 vehicles per day means 120,000 people are using the MTHL every day. That seems like a lot of people.

Until you compare it with the number of commuters in the city of Mumbai. In a previous, similar, column about the Sea Link (<https://t.ly/b0Thx>), I did a back-of-the-envelope calculation about this. It showed that about 150,000 people arrive in South Mumbai by commuter train every hour during the morning rush hour. (And similar numbers leave during the evening rush hour.)

That's right, the trains ferry more people into the heart of the city in an hour than those who use the MTHL all day. And there's bus ridership, not yet accounted for.

The point of all these numbers? It's a spectacular bridge and a stellar feat of engineering, the MTHL. But let's never forget whom it was built for: the small fraction of the city's residents who drive cars. Let's also never forget who seem to be using it: a small fraction of even that small fraction of the city's residents. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/columns/a-spectacular-bridge-that-few-use-11708622879344.html>

14. Tamil Nadu initiates first-of-its-kind ₹50 crore conservation fund for endangered species (*cnbctv18.com*) Feb 22, 2024

The Tamil Nadu Government has announced the establishment of a first-of-its-kind Tamil Nadu Endangered Species Conservation Fund (TNESCF) of ₹50 crore. The fund, announced by Tamil Nadu finance minister Thangam Thennarasu, will aid in the conservation of species, particularly those native to the state. The state will also contribute a seed fund of ₹5 crore, with additional funds pooled from CSR contributions.

Supriya Sahu, the state's additional secretary of environment, climate change and forests, in an interview with CNBC-TV18, stated "We have been doing work in the conservation of lesser-known species in Tamil Nadu, including the Nilgiri Tahr, which also happens to be the state animal."

She added, "The fact remains there are many more endangered species on the verge of extinction that people aren't aware about. So, we felt we ought to set up a fund involving corporates and those outside the forest department to aid in their conservation."

Over the past two years, the Environment and Forest Department has launched several conservation initiatives for both lesser-known and endangered species. This includes the establishment of the first Dugong conservation centre in the Gulf of Mannar, two new bird sanctuaries, and two conservation centres for the slender loris in Dindigul and Karur.

The main objective of TNESCF is to aid species recovery. Sahu explained, "Activating the fund would involve studying habitats and learning the factors threatening the existence of a species. We learnt, for instance, that the slender loris, lives on specific trees. So, our conservation activity would then include enumerating these trees, and planting more of them."

The government will now work on registering the fund, either as a trust fund or a society. A governing body will then be established to decide on the conservation projects to support. Members of the public will be allowed to contribute, with contributions subject to 80G exemptions on income tax.

Sahu revealed that several corporate entities have expressed interest in contributing to the fund. She said, "Given that this is a first-of-its-kind conservation fund in India, we will prepare an SOP on how it will work. We need to also remind our supporters that species recovery is a long-drawn process and results won't come overnight."

The state's efforts are encouraged by its experience in conserving the Nilgiri Tahr, which involved conducting a baseline estimation, removing invasive species, and other scientific steps. Corporate entities interested in mobilising CSR funds towards TNESCF are welcome to contact the Tamil Nadu Environment, Climate Change and Forests Department.

Sahu concluded, "We will have a dedicated email towards the fund starting next week. Our efforts will be directed towards guiding companies and giving them all the information they need about the conservation efforts that they are aiding."

<https://www.cnbctv18.com/news/tamil-nadu-initiates-first-of-its-kind-50-crore-conservation-fund-for-endangered-species-19112631.htm>

15. SPIPA deputy director arrested for ‘clearing 18 fake proposals’ in bogus office scam (*indianexpress.com*) February 22, 2024

The arrested, identified as S. J. Pandya, was a 'signatory' in the approvals worth Rs 2.78 crore granted to 18 of the 100 project proposals sent by fake offices during his tenure as project administrator from April 2022 to March 2023, police said.

The Dahod police has arrested a deputy director of Sardar Patel Institute of Public Administration (SPIPA) from Ahmedabad for his alleged involvement in the six bogus government offices scam. This is the 14th arrest made in the case pertaining to the alleged siphoning of funds worth Rs 18.6 crore meant for the tribal sub-plan in the district.

The arrested, identified as S. J. Pandya, was a ‘signatory’ in the approvals worth Rs 2.78 crore granted to 18 of the 100 project proposals sent by fake offices during his tenure as project administrator from April 2022 to March 2023, police said.

He was arrested at 10 pm on Wednesday following “new evidence” that emerged during the ongoing investigation. Pandya had succeeded former IAS officer BD Ninama — a prime accused arrested in the case and currently in judicial custody — as the project administrator of Dahod district in April 2022, District Superintendent of Police Rajdeepsinh Zala told The Indian Express.

“Ninama had cleared 82 projects during his tenure... We filed a charge sheet, earlier this month, within the stipulated time against the 13 persons arrested previously. The charge sheet runs into 3,400-pages. However, the investigation is ongoing and we have made the first arrest after the chargesheet has been filed,” the officer added.

According to the police, Pandya was posted as the Project Administrator in Dahod until March 2023 and thereafter, joined SPIPA.

Ninama had allegedly cleared 82 proposals sent to siphon off Rs 18.6 crore from government grants between 2018 and 2023, investigations have shown. Of these, proposals to siphon off grants worth Rs 11.74 crore under tribal sub-plan schemes were sent by three of the six fake offices in 2020-21 itself. The police have also established that Ninama came in contact with co-accused Abu Bakr Saiyed first in 2016 during his posting in Chhota Udepur, where they experimented with setting up the bogus office.

Ninama has been arrested by the Chhota Udepur SIT in connection with a separate FIR lodged in the district.

In both districts, the accused ran bogus government offices with conman Sandeep Rajput posing as the executive engineer, while Abu Bakr and Ninama have been termed as the masterminds.

Similar to the charges invoked in the Chhota Udepur case against Rajput, Suthar and Saiyyed, the Dahod police has booked the accused under sections 170 (pretending to

hold any particular office as public servant and act in such assumed character), 419 (cheating by personation), 465 (forgery), 467 (forgery of a valuable security), 468 (committing forgery for the purpose of cheating), 471 (fraudulently or dishonestly using a forged document as genuine), 472 (making or possessing counterfeit seal with intent to commit forgery), 474 (possession of forged documents shown as genuine) and 120(B) (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code.

The Chhota Udepur SIT has also filed a 3,431-page charge sheet against the 11 accused arrested in the case lodged in the district. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/spipa-deputy-director-arrested-for-clearing-18-fake-proposals-in-bogus-office-scam-9176117/>

16. बिहार में खनन राजस्व संग्रह लक्ष्य का केवल 51.78 प्रतिशत हुआ हासिल, सरकार ने जताई चिंता (*bihar.punjabkesari.in*) 22 Feb, 2024

बिहार सरकार के खान एवं भूविज्ञान विभाग ने राजस्व संग्रह लक्ष्य से कम होने पर चिंता व्यक्त की है। साथ ही अधिकारियों को वित्त वर्ष समाप्त होने से पहले अपना काम ठीक से करने में विफल रहने पर सख्त अनुशासनात्मक कार्रवाई की चेतावनी दी है। बिहार में खनन राजस्व संग्रह लक्ष्य 2023-24 के लिए 3662.39 करोड़ रुपए है, जबकि 14 फरवरी 2024 तक महज 51.78 प्रतिशत यानी 1896.43 करोड़ रुपए ही हासिल हुआ है।

खान एवं भूविज्ञान विभाग के निदेशक की अध्यक्षता में हुई समीक्षा बैठक के अनुसार, बिहार ने 14 फरवरी 2024 तक खनन राजस्व संग्रह लक्ष्य का 51.78 प्रतिशत ही हासिल हुआ। नालंदा, कैमूर, गया, औरंगाबाद, नवादा, जहानाबाद, लखीसराय, जमुई, मुंगेर, किशनगंज, बांका, भागलपुर और सारण सहित कई जिलों में राजस्व संग्रह 50 प्रतिशत से भी कम है। संबंधित दस्तावेज के अनुसार, अगर इन जिलों में राजस्व संग्रह में तुरंत वृद्धि नहीं हुई तो इन जिलों के संबंधित अधिकारियों के खिलाफ सख्त अनुशासनात्मक कार्रवाई शुरू की जाएगी। अधिकारियों को यह सुनिश्चित करना होगा कि वे अपने लक्ष्य को हासिल करें। कुछ जिलों को छोड़कर अधिकतर जिलों का प्रदर्शन निम्न स्तर का रहा है।

संबंधित जिला खनन अधिकारियों (डीएमओ) को प्रयास तेज करने और माफिया द्वारा अवैध खनन (बालू), परिवहन तथा भंडारण पर भी नकेल कसने के लिए कहा गया है। मुंगेर, नालंदा, बेगूसराय, नवादा, किशनगंज, कैमूर, भागलपुर, खगड़िया, सीतामढ़ी, मुजफ्फरपुर, मोतिहारी (पूर्वी चंपारण) और औरंगाबाद में भी शुल्क तथा राजस्व संग्रह संतोषजनक नहीं है। नाम उजागर न करने की शर्त पर विभाग के एक वरिष्ठ अधिकारी ने कहा, “ पिछले कुछ वर्षों में खदानों और खनिजों से राजस्व संग्रह में काफी वृद्धि हुई है। खानों और खनिजों से कुल राजस्व संग्रह 2017-18 में 1082.72 करोड़ रुपए से अधिक तथा 2022-23 में 3000 करोड़ रुपए रहा था।” <https://bihar.punjabkesari.in/bihar/news/only-51-78-percent-of-mining-revenue-collection-target-achieved-in-bihar-1944575>