

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) implements new in-house ‘Accounts Manager Software’ for financial management (*pib.gov.in*) 22 April 2024

CSIR has set an example for all other Central autonomous institutions in the country by successfully implementing its in-house developed ‘Accounts Manager Software’ for financial management.

On 01 April 2024, CSIR generated its Annual accounts for the financial year 2023-24, well ahead of the General Financial Rules (GFR) deadline of 30 June. The Annual Accounts for the financial year 2023-24 have already been submitted to the Office of the CAG.

With an intuitive interface designed for ease of use, software users can effortlessly input, track, and manage financial data. Moreover, it generates comprehensive financial reports, balance sheets, income & expenditure statements, and other relevant analytics, empowering CSIR with actionable insights for informed decision-making. The software ensures data security through role-based access.

One of the most vital features of the CSIR software is its real-time monitoring capability, allowing users to monitor financial activities in real-time. This enables timely intervention and better decision-making.



Presentation of signed copy of Balance sheet to Ms. Gurveen Sidhu, Director General of Audit, Environment and Scientific Departments, C&AG, New Delhi

The software helps to streamline and manage financial transactions, accounting, and reporting within CSIR with unparalleled efficiency. It facilitates the handling of financial data and ensures transparency and accuracy in every process. By standardizing financial practices, improving efficiency, and enabling better financial control across CSIR labs, this software has introduced a new era of financial management that handles

a complex network of all its employees, pensioners, family pensioners, and Project staff.

The AMS software was developed by an in-house team of officers comprising Shri S.P. Singh, Sr. Dy. FA, Shri Arvind Khanna, FAO and Ms Akansha Trehan, Technical Officer. It has been implemented across CSIR Hqs & its 37 National Labs spread all over the country under the mentorship of Dr N. Kalaiselvi, DG, CSIR/Secretary, DSIR and leadership of Shri Chetan Prakash Jain, Joint Secretary & Financial Adviser, CSIR/DSIR. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2018445>

2. Calcutta High Court Constitutes Committee for Wage Claims Verification under MGNREGA Scheme (*verdictum.in*) 22 April 2024

The Calcutta High Court constituted a committee for wage claim verification under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA) Scheme.

The Court in January this year directed the setting up of a four-member team for an expeditious verification of job cards of MGNREGA on a district-wise basis in West Bengal.

The bench of Chief Justice T.S. Sivagnanam and Justice Hiranmay Bhattacharyya constituted 4 Member Team consisting of a senior officer from the Office of the Auditor and Comptroller General of India, one officer from the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, one officer from the Principal Accountant General, Audit-I, Government of West Bengal, and the Commissioner, Mahatma Gandhi NREGS, West Bengal.

A PIL was filed by the Paschim Banga Khet Majdoor Samiti in 2023 seeking the release of wages to genuine workers under the scheme in the State after the funds to West Bengal under the MGNREGA were stopped due to alleged misappropriation in the implementation of the scheme.

The Court stated that the respective Heads of Departments are at liberty to nominate the officers in respect of the first three categories and since the 4th Member was included by designation whoever occupies the position will be the 4th Member.

The Court further directed the Chief Secretary of the Government of West Bengal to nominate a Nodal Officer to coordinate the meetings of the Committee and select such officer bearing in mind the Cadre from which the four nominees to the Committee come. Adequate office arrangements shall be made to the Committee.

The Court also directed the state to ensure members' free movement throughout the State for verification and whenever the verification process commences in a particular district, the District Magistrate of the concerned district the District Administration and the Police Administration shall ensure full cooperation to the Team to undertake the verification process smoothly.

The Court directed the necessary security arrangements be made for the team on their visit to various districts.

Finally, the Court directed the filing of a report on progress of the matter.

Cause Title: Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor samiti v. Union of India

Appearance: Appellant: Adv. Purbayan Chakraborty, Adv. Kuntal Banerjee, Adv. Srijib Chakraborty, Adv. Anish Kumar Mukherjee, Adv. Suryaneel Das

Respondent: ASGI Asok Kumar Chakraborti, Adv. Kumar Jyoti Tiwari, Adv. Tirtha Pati Acharya, Adv. Arijit Majumdar, Adv. Anirban Ray, Adv. Jahar Lal De, Adv. Piyush Agarwal, Adv. Supratim Dhar, Adv. Parna Roy Chowdhary, Shrivalli Kajaria, Adv. Debojyoti Das, Adv. Dhiraj Trivedi, Adv. Ayanabha Raha, Adv. Suman Basu
<https://www.verdictum.in/court-updates/high-courts/calcutta-high-court-paschim-banga-khet-mazdoor-samiti-v-union-of-india-mgnrega-scheme-4-member-committee-to-look-verify-wage-claims-district-wise-basis-1531787>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

3. Indian welfare: Beneficiaries and benefactors must overlap more (*livemint.com*) 22 Apr 2024

We can afford a large welfare system and even a universal basic income, but the tax burden must be shared much wider. Our direct tax collections need to increase.

In the award-winning movie *Oppenheimer*, the director of the atomic bomb project is repeatedly questioned about his communist sympathies and loyalty to his country. In one telling line, he says, "I am a New Deal supporter, not a communist." He was referring to the massive welfare expansion and public-works projects undertaken by then president Franklin D. Roosevelt's government that eventually made it possible for America to come out of the Great Depression. Apart from massive support for industrial recovery, it launched the social security system to provide protection for the unemployed, youth, farmers and the elderly. This was a radical shift for an otherwise conservative America. The affluent scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer has no qualms supporting such welfare spending. The New Deal had support from all strata of American society, who did not see it as robbing Peter to pay Paul. It was the richer, tax-paying class that not only supported welfare spending, but also saw themselves as indirect beneficiaries.

What is the overlap between welfare beneficiaries and those who fund programmes in India? Let us examine.

India's economic trajectory over the past 10 years has been distinctly welfarist. The idea of a universal basic income (UBI) became big news as it was prominently discussed in a chapter of the Economic Survey of 2016-17. The then chief economic advisor, Arvind Subramanian, wrote: "[UBI] is a radical and compelling paradigm shift in thinking about both social justice and a productive economy. It could be to the twenty-first century what civil and political rights were to the twentieth." The proposed scheme had three major themes: universality, unconditionality and agency. Having agency meant that there was no constraint on how the income was to be spent by the recipient. This is in contrast to voucher-based approaches, where recipients are supposed to use welfare vouchers only on designated goods and services. UBI has not

yet been rolled out formally, but might happen soon. Pilot projects were tried in 2011-12 with some success. At present, we see welfare spending by way of free foodgrains for 800million-plus people, and other nearly 450 direct benefit programmes that reach an estimated 900 million, of which PM-Kisan, meant for farmers, alone covers 100 million people. These are direct cash transfers and mostly unconditional. The total of all such welfare spending could be in excess of 5% of GDP. It is possible that there may be duplication or redundancy in some schemes, or more efficiency can be attained with the same budget. Improvements could be made by reorienting other subsidy schemes. For instance, why not make fertilizer pricing market-oriented (currently it sells at a steep 75% discount to the cost) and transfer direct cash to poor farmers, who are the intended beneficiaries? This will incentivize producers and bring more investment into a sector that still sees massive imports. However, shifting to direct benefit transfers (DBTs) for fertilizer is easier said than done, since the land tiller is not the same as the land owner. And how to distinguish between rich and small farmers? The PM-Kisan scheme makes no such distinction. And conditionality in any case goes against the spirit of a UBI.

This column is neither about the efficacy of welfare spending nor what we can afford fiscally. Both are valid issues and can be examined separately. Here, we look at an aspect that was also highlighted in the Economic Survey of 2016-17. It pointed out that India has only 7 taxpayers for every 100 voters, and that ranks us No. 13 out of 18 of our democratic G20 peers. In a remarkable chart shown of taxpayers versus voters, India ranks 45 out of 51 countries. Countries like Norway, Sweden and Canada have nearly 100 taxpayers for every 100 voters. The Netherlands and Australia have close to 80. The US, Oppenheimer's country, has 60. But India is an outlier. Of course, this refers to income-tax payers. And it is common knowledge that consumption tax in the form of goods and services tax is paid by almost everybody. The GST, being an indirect tax, is regressive and also too high. Not surprisingly, there is hardly any talk of reforming income tax this election season. Direct taxpayers constitute a tiny minority and are electorally irrelevant. Are they proud and supportive of India's welfarism the same way as Oppenheimer? We don't know. For most voters, party manifestos promise more welfare (if not more freebies). There is no use pointing out the increase in tax filers every year. Since the exemption threshold is so high, a person pays more than zero income-tax only after earning more than ₹7 lakh, which is nearly 4 times India's per capita income. On this metric too, India is an outlier—it provides too high an exemption threshold. The flip side of this is that the effective tax rate goes from zero to the maximum incremental rate of above 42% very rapidly. The graded tax slabs of 10%, 20% and 30% should be spread over taxable income from say ₹5 lakh to ₹50 lakh. But that is not the case, and the government stands to lose big if it raises the threshold for the high marginal tax rate of 30% plus surcharge.

The original sin was making income up to ₹7 lakh tax free, which it is politically impossible to turn back. We can afford welfarism and even UBI, but not on the back of regressive and distorting indirect taxes and non-shareable cesses. It should be based on direct taxes. And there should be a greater overlap between beneficiaries and benefactors. Only then we can merge political democracy with fiscal democracy. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/indian-welfare-beneficiaries-and-benefactors-must-overlap-more-11713778240116.html>

4. As collection soars, govt must focus on widening the tax net
(*newindianexpress.com*) 23 Apr 2024

The latest direct tax collection numbers show an encouraging trend in personal income tax, which has grown 25 percent year-on-year compared to a 10.26 percent increase in corporate tax collections.

Direct tax revenues rose by an impressive 18 percent in 2023-24. A similar trend has been seen in goods and services tax, whose total collections crossed Rs 20 lakh crore for the first time, posting a 12 percent growth over the previous year. The strong direct tax and GST collections show the government has been able to plug many loopholes in the system that allowed evasion or underpayment. The government should now devise plans to widen the tax net and bring more people under it. The number of income tax payers in the country remains minuscule and this has been seen as a failure of successive governments.

The latest direct tax collection numbers show an encouraging trend in personal income tax, which has grown 25 percent year-on-year compared to a 10.26 percent increase in corporate tax collections. While one could raise a moral question over the slow growth in corporate taxes, the government and the revenue department would be satisfied with their efforts in achieving such high growth in personal income tax collection. In absolute terms, too, personal income tax (Rs 10.44 lakh crore) exceeded corporate tax collections (Rs 9.11 lakh crore) by a fair margin. Personal income taxes usually account for 17-18 percent of total tax collected in India, including by the states. In many developed countries, personal income taxes account for a more substantial chunk of the total—for example, income tax accounts for 41 percent of all taxes collected in the US. While that share may be difficult to attain soon, India should strive for higher collection through both personal income taxes and corporate taxes in the long run.

Technology, including a focus on the digital economy, has helped the tax department keep a close eye on large transactions involving individuals. Apart from that reliance, tax collected at source or TCS and tax deducted at source or TDS have also helped bring a larger number of people under the tax net. The number of individual income taxpayers—9.4 crore in assessment year 2022-23—is still too low. However, the government must not go overboard with its efforts to widen the tax net by unleashing an overzealous regime.
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/editorials/2024/Apr/22/as-collection-soars-govt-must-focus-on-widening-the-tax-net>

5. Direct tax rally is a welcome trend (*hindustantimes.com*) Apr 22, 2024

What is one to make of the ongoing bull run in direct taxes, especially in PIT?

Final direct tax collections for the financial year 2023-24 (FY24) have ended up higher than not just Budget Estimates (BE) but also the Revised Estimates (RE). The surge in direct taxes is primarily driven by a better-than-expected performance on the personal income tax (PIT) front. FY24 is the first time when PIT collections will be larger than

corporate taxes. What is one to make of the ongoing bull run in direct taxes, especially in PIT?

A more informed analysis will have to wait for all tax numbers to be released by the ministry of finance. However, some broad points can be made based on the reported provisional numbers and the RE and BE figures for FY24 and FY25, which were published in the vote-on-account presented on February 1 this year. Three things stand out. FY24 and FY25 are the only two years barring the pandemic year of FY21 when PIT collections have been higher than corporate tax. The strength in PIT collections continues despite the weak momentum of overall consumption expenditure. The share of direct tax collections has once again edged past that of indirect taxes in the Centre's gross tax revenue.

What do these things mean for the macro economy and policy at large? A growing share of direct taxes in overall tax collections and rising contribution of high-earning individuals in income taxes — data published with a lag shows that incomes at the bottom of the pyramid have not been increasing at the same rate — will make India's overall tax burden more progressive. But can they make it grow significantly faster? This is where one needs to ask whether the corporate tax rate reduction announced in 2019 has had the desired impact of boosting private investments. If not, then what can be done about it? This ought to be an important area for fiscal policy going forward. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/editorials/direct-tax-rally-is-a-welcome-trend-101713793814509.html>

6. The potential & problems for increasing India's GDP growth % (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) April 23, 2024

The Indian election circus has come to town! Every circus brings with it some Jokers and some star performers in various acts. The Indian elections 2024 have finally drawn attention to an important economic indicator – the % rate of India GDP growth.

The real change in economic thinking between the 1970s and the 2020s is the focus on GDP growth %. In the 1970s, GDP growth was hardly discussed. The focus was not on Production improvement as it was on Distributive justice. Everybody accepts that for benefits of growth to impact per capita (average GDP per individual), there is a need to improve the % rate of GDP growth. Higher output value as numerator will obviously increase per capita GDP amount . We therefore need to be mindful that GDP rankings should not be read on absolute numbers but also on per capita GDP number. Both need significant improvement in the case of India.

Many macro economists and financial pundits have opined that a 6.5 – 7.0% rate of GDP growth will not pull India out of the middle economies (which are economies stuck in some form of low growth scenario). To break out of a middle economy, we need a compounded rate of growth of 8.5 – 9.0% over almost 2 decades to get the advantage of compounding to improve Gross GDP numbers and flowing from that the per capita GDP number.

The above is the growth theory on the need to escalate the growth %. The tough part is deciding which sector of the economy has the potential to give this 2% (200 basis

points) additional thrust. 60 – 65% of the economy is services activity, the balance 35% is agriculture and industry activities. This 35% of activity is growing at 3.5 – 4.5% annually. This needs to be increased to at least 7.0% annual growth. A question that sometimes crosses the mind is whether India has given up on Agriculture and Industry for different reasons. This thinking needs to be challenged.

We need to understand that GDP % growth increase is like climbing a mountain. Initially you can pick up speed as you growth to 6.5 / 7.0% growth). However, moving from 6.5 / 7.0% growth rate to 8.5 /9.0 % growth rate becomes more laborious and difficult, because the climb gets steeper and the terrain tougher.

Aiming for a higher rate of national GDP growth comes with it's own economic and financial pressures as under:

-How is the incremental growth to be funded? Is it thru taxation or the nation taking on greater Debt on it's books (many would be familiar with the many examples of corporates wanting to grow fast thru Debt funding and the negative consequences of the same). National Accounting in many ways is similar to Business or even personal accounting;

-Which are the sectors of the Indian economy that we need to focus on to get this desired push? Growth does not happen by itself. Growth needs to be pushed;

-We also need to understand the economic and political linkages on the growth path. States of India play an important role in India economic activity and not all states are governed by the same political party that is governing at the Centre. Points of view may differ, there may be disagreements on important elements to achieve higher growth;

-Further to the above, we have to ensure that the fiscal deficit stays within a reasonable band, else the country financial ratings may get negatively impacted and inflation could sharply increase;

-All economic activity impacts multiple segments of the economy. Agriculture impacts not just food pricing and food availability but also industries where agriculture activity is either a consumer (power, water, fertilizers, chemicals) and industries in terms if food processing industry, inputs into industry output particularly in FMCG sector and processed foods sector.

We can never move from the existing 6.5 /7.0% growth to 8.5 / 9.0% growth until logistics and processes are made more efficient, less wasteful and we use our IT strength into improving economic efficiency for output generation. In fact, we need a Guidance Team made up of senior finance bureaucrats, industry representatives, farmer representatives, state government representatives and consumer interest representatives to shine the torch and show the way forward. A 12-15 member team could be broken into groups to handle multiple issues and their objective is to show the path to accelerated economic growth (GDP growth % increase). Focus on what should be done and the funding thereof.

Funding the above 200-300 basis points incremental in GDP growth, may require a serious relook at our tax structures (both direct and indirect). If we believe that less than

5% of eligible individual income tax payers can carry the burden of the entire Nation, we are living in a Dreamland. At some point individual direct tax collection will plateau (trigger could be slowdown), forcing the Nation to go for more Debt financing (with consequent disadvantages).

If we wish for the higher GDP growth rates, we need a serious relook at our Direct Tax structure for individuals. Maybe from Income Tax, we need to move to Expenditure Tax.

Indirect tax structures impact the entire economy. There is a need to bring all economic activity under GST with no exceptions else, this 2.0 – 3.0% incremental GDP growth is a pipe dream. India cannot achieve it, without changing itself significantly on tax matters. Status quo will not help matters. We will remain ‘caught in the middle’!
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/spreading-light/the-potential-problems-for-increasing-indias-gdp-growth/>

7. Poor funding, inadequate training hit Modi govt’s One Stop Centre scheme (*newslaundry.com*) 22 Apr, 2024

Nine years after they were launched, several centres are yet to be established, there is a fund crunch, and those seeking help are victim-blamed.

Nine years after the first Narendra Modi government launched One Stop Centres (OSC) to support women victims of gender-based-violence, the Union government has set up 82.01 percent of the centres promised under the scheme.

Introduced in 2015, OSCs aim to provide temporary accommodation for women who have been subjected to violence, including those under the age of 18. In addition to this, the women victims are given the required counselling and free medical and legal assistance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while launching the scheme in 2015, said that OSCs were meant to bring about a positive change in the lives of women. Though several centres have been established, a ground check shows that the existing centres and their staff suffer from inadequate funds and lack of training. Moreover, several victims of abuse who have sought help from OSCs in south India have alleged that they are meted out insensitive treatment.

According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), 833 centres were to be established by 2023-24 and 923 by 2024-2025. However, the funds to set up the centres have remained inadequate since 2015. So far, 757 centres are functional.

In Tamil Nadu, of the 48 centres approved by the Union government, 38 are operational. Among these, eight are operating from temporary buildings since the funds dispersed to construct centres were inadequate. In February 2024, while hearing a petition filed in the Madras High Court regarding the construction of OSCs in hospitals and police stations, Tamil Nadu’s Public Works Department (PWD) said that Rs 60 lakh each was received from the Union government for building the eight centres that are currently operating in temporary centres. The PWD told the court that the construction of each centre requires Rs 86.5 lakh. The HC directed the state government to coordinate with the necessary departments and complete the works before October 2024.

The delays in setting up approved OSCs is not an issue exclusive to Tamil Nadu. Similar delays have been noted in the southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka as well.

In Andhra Pradesh, only 13 of the 26 (one per district) approved centres have been set up, due to the alleged lack of funds. When Andhra Pradesh MP Vallabhaneni Balashwory questioned the delay in setting up centres, the Union Ministry for Women and Child Development (MCWD) replied, “The Ministry is regularly monitoring and reviewing the status of One Stop Centres with state/UT governments for operationalisation of such centres at the earliest.”

Meanwhile in Karnataka, only 32 centres are operational against the approved 40.

The inadequacy of funds for the OSC scheme has given rise to several issues across centres in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. They include not providing vehicles for OSC staff engaged in rescuing victims. A government source told TNM, “Vehicles are not there in several districts. The staff can hire a vehicle if they need to, but that causes delays. When they receive a distress call, these people will have to hire a vehicle, wait for it to come pick them up, and then go.” According to the source, several staff members travel by public transport to rescue victims.

OSC workers from Andhra Pradesh told TNM that their travel allowance is not paid regularly. “If it is a Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) case, we have to take the victims to hospitals, to the Child Welfare Committee, to courts, etc. By not paying us, the government is not motivating us to work,” said Shahnaz Sheikh, OSC administrator of Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore district. She added that a dedicated vehicle would also increase faith among the public.

An OSC administrator from Vizianagaram said that they rely on police vans or the 108 ambulances for rescue operations during the night. “We travel there by bus or auto during the day. We often work in tandem with child helpline personnel regarding child-related emergencies. I make sure to use 108 or the police services at night.”

The Telangana government, on the other hand, had allotted a vehicle for each OSC throughout the state to ensure quick rescue response, since the inception of the scheme.

In September 2022, the MWCD issued new guidelines, after which the monthly allocation for individual OSCs went up from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 2.35 lakh and a Single Nodal Account (SNA) was created to disburse funds upon receiving utilisation certificates. Although the SNA model was introduced with the intention of facilitating timely release of funds, the funds for Andhra’s OSCs have not been disbursed yet. This, OSC workers from Visakhapatnam said, is despite each centre’s administrators having sent multiple requests for the same.

“Our salary was credited 18 months after SNA was introduced. Electricity and internet bills were pending for more than a year. We had to request the electricity department and internet provider to not cut off the connection,” Shahnaz said.

Another OSC administrator told TNM that she paid the electricity and internet bills of the centre out of her pocket and was later reimbursed after the monthly fund was

released. “I had to run the centre by any means. Even though salaries were not credited, I paid the bills from my savings.”

She added that travel bills are also not reimbursed regularly. “The training sessions are often conducted in other cities, or even states, and we have to attend regularly. Those bills too are reimbursed only along with the salary.”

Staff at Tamil Nadu’s OSCs told TNM that there have been no issues with their salaries for close to a year. Previously, in 2023, OSC staff from across the state had said that their salaries were delayed by six months.

It may be noted that the OSC scheme is completely financed from the Nirbhaya fund, which was set up in 2013 for empowering women and ensuring their safety and security. Although the Union MCWD informed the Parliament that a total of Rs 867.74 crores have been allocated for all the OSCs located across India since 2015, the Nirbhaya dashboard said that only about Rs 798.81 crores were released and Rs 339 crores were utilised. That is, while 92.05 percent of allocated funds have been released, only 42.4 percent of released funds have been utilised.

In 2021, the government announced that it would go global with the scheme. It was proposed that 10 OSCs would be set up in nine countries – UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia (Jeddah and Riyadh), Australia, Singapore, and Canada. This was meant to assist Indian women in these countries in matters relating to marital disputes and other instances of violence. Each centre was to be set up at a cost of Rs 8.07 crore (one time) and thereafter be allocated Rs 7.53 crore per annum for a period of five years. However, this seems to have seen no progress as no funds were released according to the data available on Nirbhaya funds dashboard.

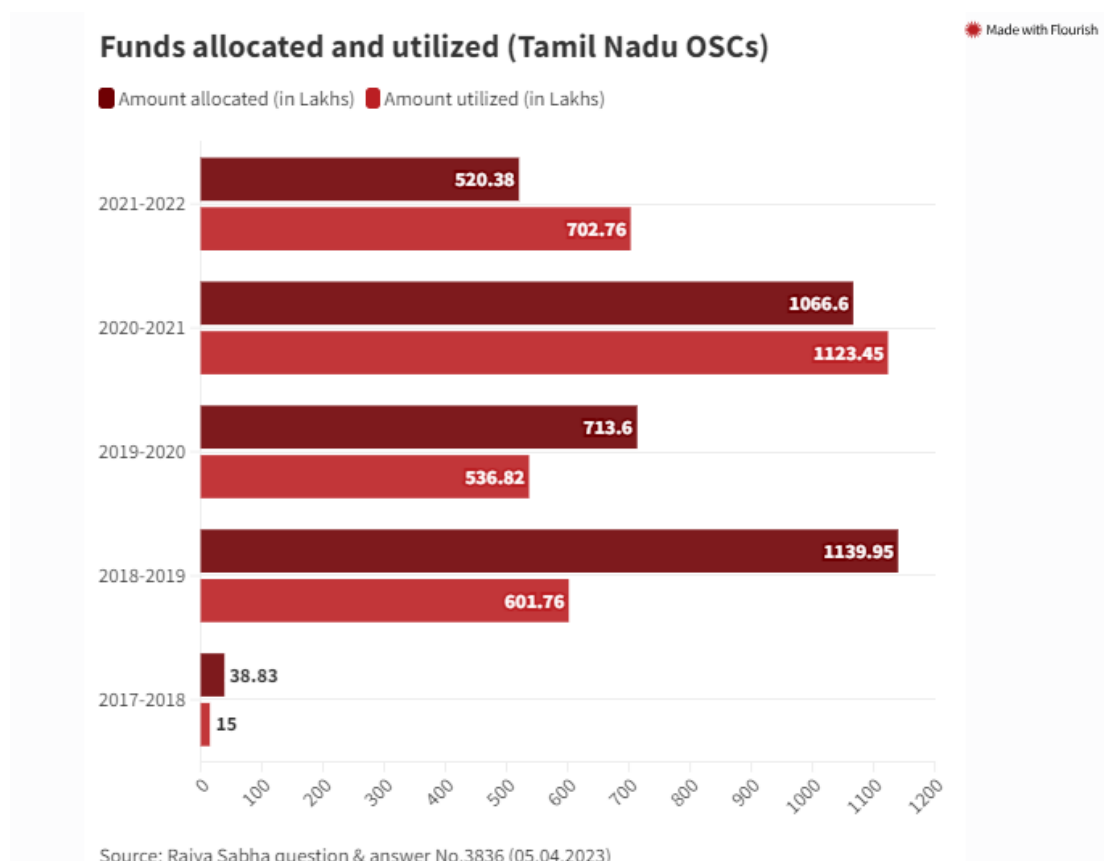
Other projects under Nirbhaya fund

OSC is, however, not the only scheme financed by the Nirbhaya fund that is suffering from poor funding. Similarly stalled was Project Abhaya that was rolled out in Andhra Pradesh in 2018. Abhaya is an internet-of-things-based system for women to share the details of the transport vehicle (autos or taxis), driver, origin and destination, the location of vehicle, etc. with a trusted person in real time. In case of any emergency, route diversion, or safety threat, a panic button can be pressed and the distress call will be taken up by the police seamlessly and the vehicle tracked on a real time basis. The fund allocation for Project Abhaya is Rs 138.49 crore for implementation by March, 2018. According to the Nirbhaya dashboard, the funds released are Rs 58.6 crore, of which Rs 7.7 crore has been utilised. That is, while 58.6% of allocated funds were released, only a mere 13.1% of released funds have been utilised.

Responding to questions in Parliament about the use of Nirbhaya funds on February 2 this year, MWCD Minister Smriti Irani stated that from the programme's launch in 2013 to 2023-2024, a total of Rs 7,212.85 crore has been allotted, of which 75% (Rs 5,448.0945 crore) has been used. She added that because of the “staggered implementation schedule” and states’ delay in filing of Statement of Expenditure (SOE) and Utilisation Certificate (UC), it is possible that more funds were utilised than was recorded.

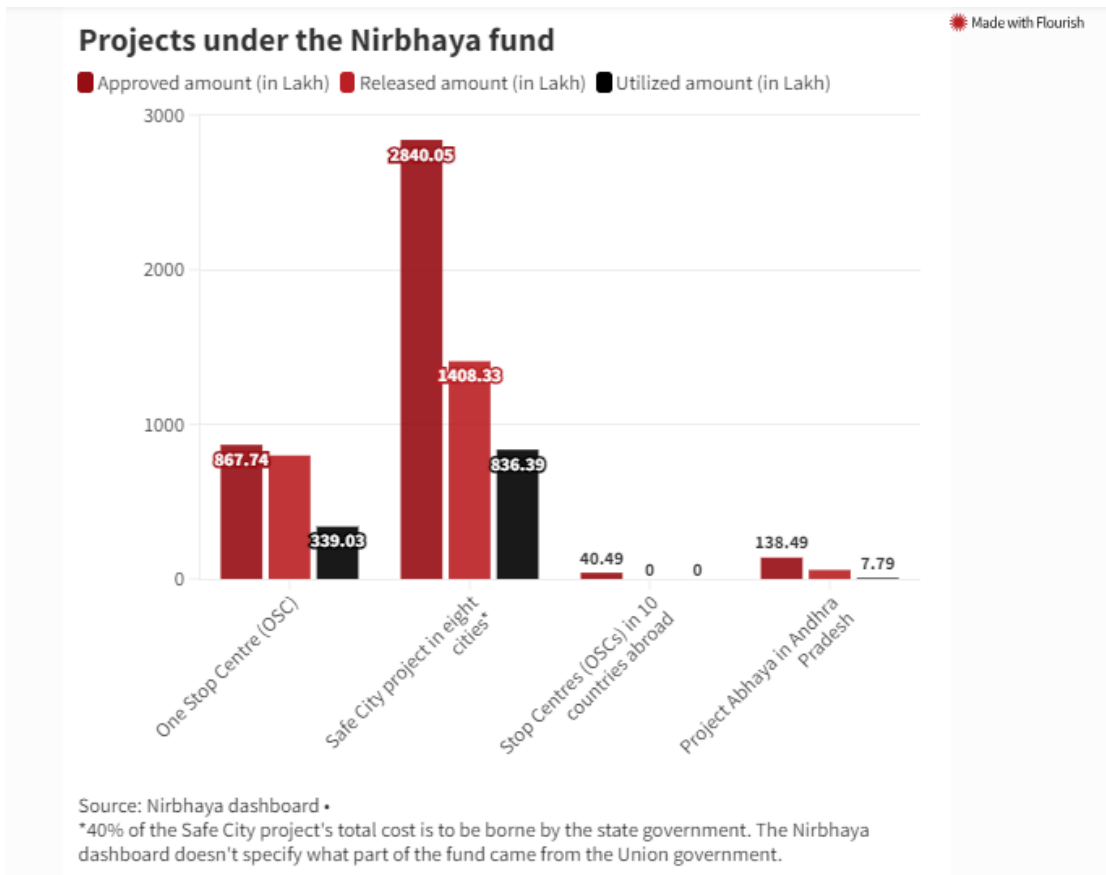
While schemes such as Abhaya and OSC lack funds, huge amounts from the Nirbhaya fund have been put towards installation of lights and CCTV cameras. One such scheme that got a substantial allocation is the Safe City Projects, which received a share of about Rs 1,400 crores. However, it was not made clear what part of this came from the Union government’s Nirbhaya fund, as 40% of the total project cost is to be borne by the state government.

For instance, in a single year in 2022, Rs 33 crores from the Nirbhaya fund was used to install lights in Tamil Nadu’s capital city Chennai to make the city safer. On the other hand, in the five years between 2017 and 2022, OSCs in the entire state of Tamil Nadu have been allocated only Rs 34.79 crore for administering services.



Reacting to this, Jayaram, the convenor of the Chennai-based anti-corruption NGO Arappor Iyakkam, said, “The government has been spending more money on product-based requirements and not on process-based requirements. For installing lights, the government will float a tender and select a service provider. From there, there is a higher chance of the officers making money. But the same is not applicable in a process-based requirement like the One Stop Centres. There, everything has to be accounted for and a utilisation certificate has to be submitted.”

Meanwhile, in Telangana, Rs 26.71 crore was allocated for CCTV installation under the three commissionerates Rachakonda, Cyberabad, and Hyderabad, as per an RTI response sought by Hyderabad based RTI activist Kareem Ansari.



Safety of OSC staff overlooked

Even though the scheme says that police vehicles, including Police Control Room (PCR) vans, can be used for rescuing victims, the police don't always aid the staff, according to OSC staff from both Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Shahnaz said, "We had once gone to rescue a woman at midnight. She was subjected to domestic violence. To reach the spot, we hired a taxi because the police refused to take us with them. They used their van and reached the spot and we were left to travel by ourselves. Our staff was scared and I had to motivate them." Shahnaz added that the OSC workers are trained to handle situations at the spot but the staff are often worried of their safety while travelling.

An OSC worker told TNM that when working on high profile cases, they have faced threats. "Sometimes, in cases related to politicians, we get threat calls. In a few cases, the victims' husbands call us and use abusive language. Still, we go ahead and do what we have to do with the support of local police."

Another government source from Tamil Nadu told TNM that OSC staff have been instructed to take the police's help only if needed. However, if the rescue operations are to be conducted at night, the police will have to accompany the staff.

There have also been cases where the staff have had to rescue victims who were mistreated by their influential families, in terms of caste, wealth, or other reasons. The staff would be unaware of their influence until they had attempted to rescue the women. "Under such circumstances, the staff, who are also all women, need some protection

even if the rescue operation is happening during the day time. This mechanism is amiss since there is no mandate for the police to accompany them for all rescue operations,” a source said.

Victim-blaming in Tamil Nadu OSCs

TNM found that several OSCs from across districts in Tamil Nadu are not sensitised to handle the kind of cases that come to them. It was also learned that the staff often resort to victim-blaming.

A victim, who was recently admitted to an OSC in Virudhunagar district after her parents physically abused her, was not allowed to speak to her friends and was forced to meet with her abusive parents, a source close to the victim said. “This was despite her having actively told the staff that she wanted to speak to her friends. In the name of counselling, the senior counsellor told her that it is natural for parents to beat her if she did something wrong and that parents are more important than friends. It didn’t feel like a feminist intervention,” the source added. The victim was eventually forced to reconcile with her family.

A person involved in similar rescue and rehabilitation efforts said, “Many OSCs in Tamil Nadu function with this protectionist attitude wherein they stand by their view of the parents being right. Such issues have been reported from OSCs even in Chennai city. Victims have been yelled at and blamed for their situation by some OSC staff.” However, they believe that such issues arise mainly because the staff are not given adequate training and resources to equip themselves.

A government source said that OSC staff are made to regularly attend awareness programmes on issues such as child marriage and bonded labour, where the laws around these social evils are highlighted. Even though the training does not contain a module on sensitivity towards victims, they said that it is always one of the take-aways.

A centre administrator from Telangana also said that through counselling offered by the OSCs, the women and their family members are made to reconcile. “We cannot tell the woman to leave her family. She has to let us know her decision after she is made aware of all the options she has. Sometimes women themselves realise and go back to their family for the sake of the children or the family’s reputation.”

They added that OSC services are being availed increasingly by women between 40-60 years. “Women are realising there is infrastructure now. They come here and take shelter at the centre.”

New guidelines causes resource crunch in Andhra Pradesh

According to the MWCD’s latest guidelines released in 2022, the number of staff per OSC was reduced from 18 to 13. However, a number of staff members had by then quit their jobs. In some districts, the government had transferred the staff to other departments or posted in newly established OSCs. The reduction in staff strength led to increased workload for those remaining.

A centre administrator from an Andhra OSC stated that shift rotation has become challenging now. "A case worker must work longer if there is a case. It was simpler when there were three paramedical staff members and three case workers because the work was 24/7. An OSC is now only allowed to have two each."

In Telangana too, where OSCs are managed by support agencies, which are in most cases NGOs, similar concerns were raised. Isidore Philip, who is the director of Divya Disha, the NGO that manages the OSC located in Hyderabad, told TNM that the new guidelines have put staff members under pressure. "Earlier, there were two psychosocial counsellors, but now, there is only one. In a city like Hyderabad, it becomes extremely difficult to manage the cases without adequate staff. The other staff members like centre administrator and paramedical staff are not compensated well. As support agencies, we are responsible to retain them and it is difficult," he said.

Philip added that due to delay in release of funds, support agencies are forced to pay the staff out of their pockets. "Sometimes the state supports us a little. Something is better than nothing at all when it comes to managing the centre. It gives us the assurance to continue the work."

When TNM visited the two OSCs located in Chennai – one in north Chennai's Tondiarpet and the other in south Chennai's Tambaram – the required number of staff members were not present. Tamil Nadu has 13 staff members in each centre, including a centre administrator, an IT administrator, and a senior counsellor, who will all work from morning to evening throughout the week, followed by six case workers, two security guards, and two multi-purpose workers who will all work on shift basis and therefore be available at the centre 24/7.

Even though TNM visited the centres in both Tondiarpet and Tambaram during morning hours, the house administrators were not available at either of the centres. At the Tambaram centre, there was no security guard and only a senior counsellor and a multipurpose worker were available. The case workers and the IT admin, all of whom should be there 24/7 on shift basis, were unavailable. At Tondiarpet, only the IT admin and a case worker were available, while the others were unavailable.

Both the centres had no inmates at the time. "On some days, we will be running in full capacity while on some others, we won't have any cases," said one of the staff from the centres.

TNM reached out to the Social Welfare officers of Chennai North and South for comment but didn't receive a response.

The person engaged in similar rescue and rehabilitation who spoke to TNM said, "There are so many well-intentioned staff at OSCs who require the support of the government, in order to carry out their responsibilities to the fullest extent. Ensuring the safety of the staff, making sure that they are paid, and equipping them with all the required resources can be the first few steps to take." <https://www.newslandry.com/2024/04/22/poor-funding-inadequate-training-hit-modi-govts-one-stop-centre-scheme>

8. India 4th highest military spender, China at \$296 billion second only to US, says SIPRI report (*theprint.in*) 22 April 2024

America spent a whopping \$916 bn, accounting for 37 percent of the total global expenditure. Russia, India & Saudi Arabia occupy next three spots.

As it growingly asserts dominance in the Indo-Pacific region and elsewhere, China upped its military spending to an estimated \$296 billion in 2023, making it the second largest spender after the US.

Beijing, in doing so, raised its military expenditure by 6 percent from 2022.

America spent a whopping \$ 916 billion, accounting for 37 percent of the total global expenditure, according to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) published Monday. The US military expenditure has seen an increase given its direct support to Ukraine on the one hand and Israel on the other.

The US and China together accounted for around half of global military spending last year.

Completing the top five were Russia, India and Saudi Arabia, which together accounted for 61 percent of the world's military spending. Fourth in the list, India's military expenditure stood at \$ 83.6 billion in 2023, accounting for 3.7 percent of global defence expenditure.

For China, the rise in expenditure indicates its preparedness for future wars or conflicts, if any were to arise. Beijing has territorial disputes with its neighbours in the South China Sea as well on land, including with India.

Russia's military spending grew by 24 percent to an estimated \$109 billion, as it remains at war with Ukraine that began in 2022.

Overall, the world military expenditure increased for the ninth consecutive year in 2023, reaching a total of \$ 2,443 billion. The 6.8 percent increase was the steepest year-on-year rise since 2009. This pushed global spending to the highest level, according to SIPRI.

The reasons recorded in the report for the rise in global military spending was attributed primarily to the ongoing war in Ukraine and escalating geopolitical tensions in Asia and Oceania and the Middle East. This, it said, resulted in Europe, Asia, Oceania and the Middle East becoming some of the highest-spending regions in the world.

India's defence spending

Military spending for India was up by 4.2 percent from 2022 and by a whopping 44 percent from 2014. According to the report, the increase was mainly a result of growing personnel and operations costs, which made up almost 80 percent of the total military budget in 2023.

A majority of India's defence spending is known to go towards pension payouts. In the Interim Union Budget 2024-25, Rs 1.41 lakh crore of the total Rs 6.21 lakh crore went towards pensions.

This aligns with the government's priority to strengthen the operational readiness of the armed forces amid ongoing tensions with China and Pakistan, it stated.

In comparison, capital outlays to fund military procurement remained relatively stable, at around 22 percent of the budget in 2023, it stated. Capital outlays are funds used to acquire or upgrade physical assets.

According to SIPRI, a total of 75 percent of these outlays went towards equipment produced domestically, which was the highest level ever and up from 68 percent in the previous year. This comes amid a thrust on indigenisation by the government. Towards this, the government has also introduced negative procurement lists that encourage procurement of certain types of arms and equipment from the Indian industry only.

"The continued shift towards domestic procurement reflects India's goal of becoming self-reliant in arms development and production," the report stated.

In its report released in March and reported by ThePrint, SIPRI stated that India remained the world's largest arms importer. <https://theprint.in/defence/india-4th-highest-military-spender-china-at-296-billion-second-only-to-us-says-sipri-report/2051914/>

9. Military Drones, the Vanguard of Warfare: Do not Stymie their Proliferation (*financialexpress.com*) By Col Ashwani Sharma (retd) | April 23, 2024

Missiles and UAVs have been used rather ingeniously in this conflict, a definite tactical improvement over the way UAVs have been used so far, presumably after lessons learned from the ongoing Russia- Ukraine conflict

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are revolutionising military tactics and the burgeoning defence drone industry in India. It reflects on the Iran-Israel conflict's demonstration of UAVs in modern warfare, highlighting their role in intelligence, tactical deception, and precision strikes. The essay also discusses the strategic implications of UAVs on India's defence capabilities and industry, addressing the balance between cost, operational readiness, and industrial growth.

The recent Iran-Israel strikes on each other's territory managed to grab the world's attention primarily for geopolitical and economic reasons and possible fallout, should the conflict engulf the entire region which is already reeling under the impact of Israel-Hamas confrontation. Stock markets nose-dived each time at the news of military strikes and commodities (including oil) prices rose in sync. On the military front, the strikes reaffirmed the impact of new technologies, mainly unmanned platforms. UAVs and missiles were the primary weapons of assault which were largely countered by new age air defence systems. Before the strikes, it is reasonable to assume that drones and

UAVs in addition to satellites would have been used to gather intelligence for selection of targets.

Missiles and UAVs have been used rather ingeniously in this conflict, a definite tactical improvement over the way UAVs have been used so far, presumably after lessons learned from the ongoing Russia- Ukraine conflict. Paired with ballistic and cruise missiles, UAVs were used to deceive and exhaust the adversary's air defences. Slow moving low priority drones flying at varying altitudes were used to lure the adversary's air defence weapon systems and exhaust them over a period of time. Once that was achieved, faster and more lethal missiles and UAVs were launched on priority targets.

What stands out starkly during this limited military operation is the absence of conventional armaments for kinetic strikes, and the variety of drones/UAVs deployed for the operations.

Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or drones and their impact on modern military tactics is profound and multifaceted, affecting various aspects of warfare.

Drones provide unparalleled real-time surveillance capabilities. Their ability to carry out precise, targeted strikes with minimal collateral damage is particularly valuable in counter-terrorism. Drones offer significant operational flexibility as they can be rapidly deployed and redirected as the tactical situation changes. UAVs can operate in environments that are otherwise inaccessible or too risky for manned missions. Cost effectiveness of drones allows militaries to deploy them in greater numbers.

In short, they are force multipliers, enhancing the effectiveness of military forces. The use of drones changes the risk calculus for military engagements by removing the immediate risk to life of pilots and soldiers.

India's military leadership recognises the immense potential the UAS have to offer in multiple roles and domains. Insights garnered from global battlefields are being continually assimilated and adapted to local conditions. Majority of acquisitions are being made according to the discrete needs of each arm and service, in alignment with their specific operational roles to enhance their operational effectiveness, whether it's armour, infantry, artillery, or even logistics units employing drones. Similarly, at various levels of field formations depending upon the financial powers delegated to commanders, drones/UAVs are being acquired to meet operational needs which are increasing by the day.

This rapid expansion in capabilities and roles has catalysed the flourishing of a vibrant defence drone industry in India which has witnessed significant growth, spurred by increasing demands and a push for indigenous manufacturing. India's strategic focus on enhancing its surveillance and combat capabilities has led to a burgeoning drone sector, characterised by a mix of start-ups and established defence contractors. Companies like Idea Forge, Newspace, TASL, DroneAcharya and Paras stand out for their contributions to tactical UAVs.

The Indian government's recent policy changes and investments indicate strong support for the drone industry. This includes the liberalisation of drone regulations and substantial funding allocations in defence budgets specifically earmarked for UAV

procurement and development. As India continues to advance its drone capabilities, the focus is not only on enhancing the technology but also on securing a place in the international market for military drones. This sector is poised to significantly impact India's defence strategy and its standing in the global defence industry. The economic impact of the drone industry is significant, creating high-tech jobs in manufacturing, software development, and system integration.

Apparently, there has been a directive from the Finance division to centralise procurement of UAVs and stop purchases by field formations and units, presumably to limit expenditure on this one category. Such a decision guided by financial considerations alone can be detrimental to the armed forces' operational readiness. In addition, it will also apply brakes on the thriving defence drone industry in India which is currently in the process of capability and capacity building. It's crucial to continue nurturing this industry, allowing for the independent capability building of military units while aligning with a unified defence policy to strengthen India's operational potential. This momentum should not be dampened.

In conclusion, the defence drone industry is not only flourishing but is also driving transformational changes in military operations worldwide. As drones become more embedded in defence strategies, their development will likely continue to evolve. This dynamic sector thus should be allowed to flourish as units and formations continue to build capability, simultaneously encouraging the Indian drone industry to bolster its capabilities.

This combined with a central unified philosophy and policy will help build operational capability as well. <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-military-drones-the-vanguard-of-warfare-do-not-stymie-their-proliferation-3465800/>

10. Why do floods & droughts simultaneously ravage India? Expert offers explanation, solutions (*downtoearth.org.in*) 22 April 2024

The primary reason for the floods is the insufficient number of waterbodies

India's Drought Early Warning System found that 21.06 per cent of the country faced a drought in 2022. This was 7.86 per cent in 2021.

At the same time, India was highly vulnerable to floods during monsoons. Of the 329 million hectares of land in the country, 46 million were prone to flooding.

Floods devastated 5.04 million hectares of crop area in this monsoon till November 25, 2021. In the last three years, 6,811 people died due to meteorological disasters. India is continuously affected by floods and its average annual loss is estimated at Rs 5,649 crore.

The primary reason for the flood is the insufficient number of waterbodies. Around 350,000 million gallons of water flow to the Yamuna daily during the monsoon. Preserving this would provide drinking water for Delhi residents for a year.

In November 2022, the amount of floodwater released to the sea in three weeks in Chennai could cater to the needs for half a year. The empirical evidence confirmed that we need to manage rainfall productively. Floodwater can be conserved and used to overcome drought and water scarcity during summer.

An estimate indicated that the national interlinking of rivers can manage floods by channelling water from flood-prone to drought-prone areas, irrigating 34 million hectares. The idea was first suggested in 1919 by Arthur Cotton, chief engineer of Madras Presidency. After independence, it was again proposed by KL Rao in 1960. In 2020, the government announced that it plans to interlink Krishna, Godavari, Cauvery and Pennar rivers with a project estimate of Rs 60,000 crore.

The government has implemented four national water policies since independence. The first National Water Policy (NWP) was implemented in September 1987 and reportedly achieved water management development. In 2002, NWP was reviewed and updated with new approaches in water management but failed to fulfil the demands of the 21st century. As a result, in 2012, an NWP was drafted to fill the gap between the 1987 and 2002 policies. This policy was put forth under the public domain to get their suggestions for drawing a holistic procedure addressing water management issues. However, the problems still persist.

From 2012 to 2023, the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti (water resources) spent Rs 2.76 lakh crore. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is almost devoted to managing water bodies in rural areas and funds allocated for the project were Rs 6.14 lakh crore for the same period.

In the past decade, the central government spent Rs 8.91 lakh crore on water management and funds allocated for related projects have increased over the period by considering water crisis.

However, the question is whether the fund allocation aligns with the growing population's demand. The per capita water availability (cubic metres / year) has declined sharply from 1951 to 2022. According to the Centre, the annual per capita water availability was 5,177 cubic metres in 1951 and 1,486 cubic metres in 2022. Water availability per capita is projected to decline to 1,367 cubic metres per capita in 2031. Therefore, the government expenditure still needs to meet the growing demand for water in India.

According to the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, per capita water consumption in urban areas is 135 litres and in rural areas is 55 litres. However, two-thirds of India's 718 districts are highly affected by water scarcity.

A growing awareness of safe drinking water has led to higher spending on bottled / packed water. As a result, 12.2 per cent of urban households depend on packed water, compared to only 2.7 per cent a decade back. Even in rural regions, the consumption of packed water increased from 0.5 in 2008 to 4 per cent in 2018.

Preserving waterbodies

America and Australia have built water storage per capita of 5,000 cubic metres, whereas India has only 200 cubic metres. To ensure safe, portable water by 2030, the

government must spend around 3.2 per cent of its GDP, according to the World Resources Institute.

It is evident from the above discussion that we need to manage water in every way possible. The country is severely affected due to floods, drought, water scarcity, encroachment and economic burden, among other things. Of this, the encroachment of water bodies is the primary reason for the severity of water crisis.

A survey of the Bangalore Urban District Administration in 2021 found that 20 per cent of the 22,810 acres covered by 837 lakes studied was encroached upon. The Government of Assam found that out of the 55,811 hectares wetlands, barring rivers, creeks and springs, 7,322 hectares of land have encroached.

In Bihar, 70 per cent of the water bodies have vanished. That is, out of the 250,000 ponds, only 100,000 currently exist. In Tamil Nadu, the Madras High Court received a petition from the state government that 47,707 acres of water bodies are under encroachment.

The Comptroller and Auditor General found that 49 per cent of all the encroachments in India were on waterbodies. Shockingly, around 1,311 acres of water bodies were encroached upon to construct government buildings.

The Standing Committee on Water Resources suggested repairing and removing encroachment of water bodies. The Central Pollution Control Board prepared 'Indicative Guidelines for Restoration of Water Bodies' and suggested removing the encroachment and blockades of waterbodies. However, there is no such removal at a broader range, and the authorities' suggestions could not have had any considerable impact.

Indigenous knowledge of India for managing water resources is community participation, which was adequate. NWP 2002 suggested a rain water harvesting structure (RWHS) programme for managing ground and surface water. Tamil Nadu was the pioneering state that introduced RWHS in residential areas, offices, companies and industries. After that, other states in India also implemented this programme.

Residents above the poverty line were directed to create RWHS. An estimate found that 1,000 litres of water can be preserved annually through RWHS for each square metre of area. A house of a 200 square metre area can maintain 200,000 litres of water annually, which translates to more than the World Health Organization norm of 750 litres per day for a household. However, few Panchayats, municipalities and corporations have implemented forsake.

Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to bring policy changes to ensure water management on a war footing. At first, the Centre must bring out the state-wise actual statistics of waterbodies from its documents since independence. The number and area (acre / hectares) of waterbodies in the country must be verified. As per the government documents, the encroached water bodies must be removed.

Second, the government must desilt and strengthen the bunds of the waterbodies. For this, the financial burden to the government is only in the first phase of clearing the

encroachment and assuring the water bodies' number / area / depth. After that, the government can give management responsibility to local administrations such as the Panchayat, municipalities and corporations.

Third, the local authorities must revamp the small channels and link them with the ponds / rivers. They must plant saplings in the bunds of the ponds and rivers, which may restrict encroachment and strengthen the bunds of water bodies.

Finally, the district collector must visit the local administration to verify the management of waterbodies, under the condition that if their work is satisfactory, the government may allocate funds for other development projects such as overhead tanks, roads, drinking water and ditches, among others. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/water/why-do-floods-droughts-simultaneously-ravage-india-expert-offers-explanation-solutions-95705>

11. Urbanization pressure: India's housing policy needs a big rethink (*livemint.com*) 22 Apr 2024

Reforms must take city-ward migration into account, enlarge urban supply and make use of rental vouchers for the needy.

Cities occupy 3% of India's land and contribute about 60% to the economy, as per a 2019 UN report. In recognition of the need for affordable and quality housing, the government launched the PM Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) in June 2015 to provide housing for all by December 2024. Around 8.2 million of nearly 11.7 million houses approved under the scheme have been completed, as per the PMAY website, as of 7 April. In contrast, 25 million houses of the 29.5 million target under the scheme's rural version, PMAY-Gramin, had been completed by November 2023. Not only is the urban version's completion rate lower, many houses constructed under it remain unoccupied.

Why explains the difference? Let us see why there appears to be low urban demand for public housing, despite the high cost of private housing in our cities. The Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs noted in 2022 that many houses under PMAY-U are not in "liveable condition," pointing to missing windows and doors, and illegal occupation by "anti-social elements." In the same year, a Comptroller and Auditor General report noted several issues related to the selection of beneficiaries under PMAY-U. In Karnataka, for example, some beneficiaries got multiple benefits while ineligible people got allotments.

Given weak purchase demand for public housing, the Centre launched a scheme under which PMAY-U houses are repaired and converted into affordable rental housing complexes for urban migrants/poor. However, this faced low demand too. What may be the reasons?

First, a housing subsidy in rural areas is used to build homes on land owned by families in their native places. The location of a residence is not decided by the government, but by individuals. Urban public housing can't offer such choice.

Second, rural homes under the scheme are standalone units, not apartment complexes as with most urban housing. In complexes, public space maintenance and shared-resource use are often subject to the ‘tragedy of commons.’ Public resources tend to get misused and suffer from poor upkeep.

Third, people may not prefer to live in neighbourhoods that do not suit their aspirations of upward mobility. Evidence from the US shows that moving to a better neighbourhood improves schooling and labour market outcomes.

Fourth, migrants from other states often stay together and form a small local community, since assimilation in the larger urban community takes time. That may discourage migrants from other states from applying for public housing rental apartments. Migrants may also find it difficult to deal with local public officials, especially in their early days, given language and cultural barriers. It is also unclear if there is proper dissemination of information on the rental housing available, the process of applying for it, and so on.

Can public policy take a new approach so that our rental housing markets work more efficiently? Without this, the expansion of Indian cities would become unsustainable.

The 2015 National Urban Rental Housing Policy mentions the provision of a fund to set up a rental voucher scheme and a pilot project in selected cities. The vouchers were meant to partially offset the cost of private housing rent incurred by the urban poor and migrants. Several countries have successfully used a housing voucher policy to help families move to locations that best meet their needs.

Little information about the Indian pilot of the rent-voucher scheme is available in the public domain. One concern may be that rents in our cities are so high that even after a rent subsidy, private housing remains largely unaffordable to the urban poor.

If that were the case, then the reason for rental housing being out of reach would be a shortfall in its supply. The supply of urban housing can be increased via two measures that the government has duly acknowledged. First, a stockpile of private accommodation can be unlocked that remains locked up because of unfavourable terms for house owners under rental laws. Second, regulations can be eased that control and thereby slow the construction of new homes in big cities.

Another issue that policymakers should discuss is whether a push for home ownership under the PMAY-Gramin lowers the incentive for labour mobility. If a family has a village home, it would make sense for the family to stay there, as it is unlikely to find rental tenants, rather than incurring a high urban rent by moving to a city. Families splitting up because of one member’s migration is not welfare-enhancing either. Since the jobs on offer are in urban and semi-urban areas, it may be worthwhile to reconsider the policy of creating housing stock in rural India and instead offer monetary support for urban housing rents.

Successfully implementing an urban rent voucher scheme, or any other such policy for urban housing, is easier said than done. But then, most major reforms are always cumbersome and met with opposition. If India is to become a prosperous nation, our cities would be at its core. It is therefore imperative to rethink the country’s urban public

housing policy once national elections are over.
<https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/urbanization-pressure-india-s-housing-policy-needs-a-big-rethink-11713778171519.html>

12. 89% Expanding Glacial Lakes in Himalayas Grew More Than Twice in 38 Years: ISRO (*ndtv.com*) 22 April 2024

The results of the ISRO analysis on glacial lakes is worrying as expanding glacial lakes due to warming can lead to cascading consequences in the lower regions, say experts

At least 89 per cent of 2,431 glacial lakes in the Himalayas that were identified in 2016-17 have notably expanded since 1984, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said in a report today.

The results of the ISRO analysis is worrying as expanding glacial lakes due to warming can lead to cascading consequences in the lower regions, say experts. Satellite data archives spanning the past three to four decades provide valuable insights into changes occurring in glaciated environments, ISRO said.

Long-term satellite imagery covering the catchments of Indian Himalayan river basins from 1984 to 2023 indicates significant changes in glacial lakes, ISRO said in the report.

The ISRO report said 601 glacial lakes, or 89 per cent, have expanded more than twice, and 10 lakes have grown between 1.5 times and double their size. Sixty-five lakes have expanded 1.5 times.

Of the 2,431 glacial lakes larger than 10 hectares, 676 have significantly expanded, and at least 130 of these lakes are in India - 65 (Indus river basin), 7 (Ganga river basin), and 58 (Brahmaputra river basin).

Elevation-based analysis shows 314 lakes are located in the 4,000 to 5,000 metres range, and 296 lakes are above 5,000 metres elevation, ISRO said in the report 'Satellite Insights: Expanding Glacial Lakes in the Indian Himalayas' released today.

The long-term changes in the Ghepang Ghat glacial lake (Indus river basin) at an elevation of 4,068 metres in Himachal Pradesh show a 178 per cent increase in size from 36.49 to 101.30 hectares between 1989 and 2022, the ISRO said. The rate of increase is about 1.96 hectares per year.

The satellite-derived long-term change analyses also provide valuable insights for understanding glacial lake dynamics, which are essential for assessing environmental impacts and developing strategies for glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) risk management and climate change adaptation in glacial environments, ISRO said.

The study faced challenges due to the inaccessible and rugged terrain, the ISRO said. Satellite remote sensing technology, however, helped as an excellent tool for inventory and monitoring due to its wide coverage and revisit capability, the space agency said.

The Himalayan mountains are often referred to as the "Third Pole" because of their extensive glaciers and snow cover, and are highly sensitive to changes in the global climate, both in terms of their physical characteristics and their societal impacts.

Research conducted worldwide has consistently shown that glaciers across the globe have been experiencing unprecedented rates of retreat and thinning since the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, ISRO said in the report.

This retreat leads to the formation of new lakes and the enlargement of existing ones in the Himalayan region. These bodies of water, created by the melting of glaciers, are known as glacial lakes and play a crucial role as freshwater sources for rivers in the Himalayan region.

However, they also pose significant risks, such as GLOFs which can have devastating consequences for communities downstream. GLOFs occur when glacial lakes release large volumes of meltwater due to the failure of natural dams, such as those made of moraine or ice, resulting in sudden and severe flooding downstream. These dam failures can be triggered by various factors, including avalanches of ice or rock, extreme weather events, and other environmental factors. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/89-expanding-glacial-lakes-in-himalayas-grew-more-than-twice-in-38-years-isro-5499623>

13. None of G7 economies on track to meet 2030 mitigation targets (*businesstoday.in*) Updated Apr 23, 2024

None of the G7 members are on track to meet their existing emission reduction targets for 2030, according to a new analysis released on Tuesday.

The analysis by Climate Analytics, a global climate science and policy institute, comes ahead of the G7 climate, energy, and environment ministers' meeting in Venaria Reale, Italy, during April 28-30.

The G7 collectively aims to achieve a 40-42 per cent emission reduction by 2030 but existing policies suggest that it will likely achieve only 19-33 per cent by the end of this decade, the analysis showed.

This is at best around half of what is needed and would lead to greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 exceeding a 1.5 degrees Celsius compatible level by around four gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Such a shortfall in ambition does not provide the leadership signal needed from the world's richest countries, making up around 38 per cent of the global economy and responsible for 21 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions in 2021, the researchers said.

The G7 economies need to slash their emissions by 58 per cent by 2030 compared to the 2019 levels to do their part to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, they said.

"These economies, who make up 38 per cent of the world's GDP, are not pulling their weight: they have both the technology and the finance to up their game. Against the backdrop of unprecedented climate extremes exacerbated by the use of fossil fuels, taking ambitious action to decarbonise and setting a deadline to move away from fossil fuels should be the bare minimum," said Neil Grant, the lead author of the analysis.

The researchers recommended that the G7 commit new and additional international climate finance, well beyond the USD 100 billion goal, and develop innovative financing instruments to accelerate the provision of accessible finance to vulnerable countries.

These economies, the analysis said, should commit to phasing out domestic coal and fossil gas power generation by 2030 and 2035, respectively, and end public financing and other support for fossil fuels abroad.

Italy and Japan, the current and preceding presidency of the G7, rank among the top five countries subsidising fossil fuel projects in the G20.

The researchers also recommended that G7 economies accelerate towards the global goal of tripling renewables and doubling energy efficiency by 2030 which, according to the International Energy Agency, is crucial to limiting average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The G7 is made up of the US, the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. Representatives from the European Union also attend its annual summits. <https://www.businesstoday.in/world/story/none-of-g7-economies-on-track-to-meet-2030-mitigation-targets-426502-2024-04-23>

14. Mandal Dam: Modi's ambitious irrigation project still hangs fire (*timesofindia.indiatimes.com*) Apr 23, 2024

Ranchi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who often takes pride in completing the projects for which he laid foundations, may find it difficult to explain to the voters this time why the multi-crore North Koel Reservoir Project, popularly known as the Mandal Dam, which he relaid the foundation just ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, is stalled. Modi is among the BJP's star campaigners for Jharkhand and voting for the Palamu Lok Sabha constituency is scheduled on May 13 along with three other parliamentary seats.

Conceptualised way back in the 70s in undivided Bihar to address the agrarian distress in the rain shadow regions of present-day Jharkhand and Bihar, the Mandal Dam is spread in Latehar and Palamu districts and is still hanging fire after talks with the displaced people could not make any headway.

Since its inception in 1972, the project suffered several delays and hurdles owing to various reasons ranging from displacement-related unrest to land acquisition issues among others.

In the early 90s, when Jharkhand was still part of Bihar, the work came to an abrupt halt after spending a huge chunk of the allocated funds because of the lack of an environmental clearance as the site falls inside the Palamu Tiger Reserve (PTR).

The Modi govt revived this project in 2019, dubbing it one of its ambitious projects in the interest of the farmers in the parched areas and got the environmental clearance. In October last year, the cabinet committee on economic affairs chaired by the PM also approved a revised cost to the tune of Rs 1,622.2 crore for the completion of the project. The revised cost included rehabilitation and resettlement amounts for the displaced people.

Work, however, has still stalled since 2019, local sources which were aware of the ground situation said. Notably, the state had suffered back-to-back years of drought (which were officially declared by the state government) owing to erratic monsoon and Palamu is considered to be among the worst-hit districts.

Ashok Kumar, the chief engineer of the Medininagar division of the state water resources department under which jurisdiction the project is located, conceded that the project is stalled despite the Centre agreeing to dole out additional compensation to the displaced families.

Talking to TOI, Kumar said the process of negotiations with the project-affected people was still on without any substantial headway. “The state govt had already paid compensation to the affected families several decades ago for the acquisition of their land. However, after the continued agitation, especially by those living in the forest areas, the Centre agreed to provide Rs 15 lakh more per family under the R&R policy from its coffers. The additional funds have been sanctioned but the distribution is yet to take place because of various reasons, including fresh demands from the locals,” he said.

According to the latest govt records, 780 families in at least eight villages in the dam submergence area need to be rehabilitated. Locals, however, have been claiming that the number of such families is over 1,000.

While the administration offered compensation payments in three instalments, the villagers are steadfast in taking a one-time payment and they are demanding land for rehabilitation. “The displaced are demanding one-time money in advance and say that they will vacate the area once the gates of the dams are ready to store water,” Kumar added.

On the other hand, Pratap Tirkey, the president of the Kutku Doob Area Sangharsh Committee, said the villagers don’t want to be tagged as anti-development but are concerned about their livelihood and future after their displacement. “Displacement has always been a problem in Jharkhand and those who suffered it often felt cheated. Since all are forest dwellers and the site falls under the reserve area, there is a provision of providing land for rehabilitation besides the compensation amount. We, too, want this project to see the light of the day but at the same time, the govt must ensure our future,” Tirkey said. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ranchi/mandal-dam-modis-ambitious-irrigation-project-still-hangs-fire/articleshow/109514832.cms>

15. Odisha: Frauds used cloned cheques to siphon off Rs 4.5 cr from Mayurbhanj district mineral foundation account
(*newindianexpress.com*) 23 Apr 2024

Since the frauds had got their mobile phone number linked with the bank account of DMF to receive OTPs and other information, it was easy for them to evade the notice of the DMF managers.

BHUBANESWAR: A bunch of inter-state frauds reportedly from neighbouring states targetted the Mayurbhanj District Mineral Foundation (DMF) fund by using cloned cheques to swindle around Rs 4.5 crore from the bank account.

The DMF account of zilla parishad is maintained with the Bank of India. Preliminary probe indicated the gang of frauds sent a fabricated letterhead of Mayurbhanj Collector with his fake signature via courier to the bank requesting to link a mobile phone number with the account of DMF. The unsuspecting bank officials linked the mobile phone number of the miscreants with the DMF account of zilla parishad, Mayurbhanj, following which Rs 4.5 crore was withdrawn on April 10 and transferred to bank accounts in Kolkata and Raipur, said sources.

EOW suspects the scamsters possibly came to know of the cheque numbers through statements of the bank account of DMF and deposited the cloned cheques accordingly. A few days later, they again attempted to withdraw Rs 5.5 crore, but this time the bank manager found it suspicious and informed police of the matter.

“When the money was not released after the second cheque was deposited, one of the gang members telephoned the manager of the bank impersonating the collector and inquired about the matter,” said police sources. The bank officials immediately lodged a complaint with Mayurbhanj police but as the matter was sensitive, its investigation was handed over to the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Crime Branch.

A team of EOW visited Baripada on April 21 and launched a probe into the matter. “Preliminary investigation suggests the gang members are based out of neighbouring Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and West Bengal,” said EOW sources.

Since the frauds had got their mobile phone number linked with the bank account of DMF to receive OTPs and other information, it was easy for them to evade the notice of the DMF managers.

However, how the gang members accessed the bank statement and details of cheque is under scrutiny and role of insiders is not ruled out since the fund concerns crores of rupees.

This is not the first time DMF funds have been swindled by depositing cloned cheques. In November last year, a fraudster allegedly swindled around ‘22 lakh from the DMF account of the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Sambalpur by depositing cloned cheques.

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2024/Apr/23/odisha-frauds-used->

16. आर्थिक विकास बनाम बढ़ती बेरोजगारी, आंकड़ों में भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था और हकी कत में हालात (*jansatta.com*) 23 April 2024

इन दिनों भारत अपनी जीडीपी दर के हिसाब से आर्थिक तरक्की के बेहतरीन सोपान पर है। पर, यह भी सच है कि लगातार अच्छी विकास दर रहने के बावजूद भारत में अब भी कई पुरानी समस्याएं जस की तस बनी हुई हैं। अब तो कई नई समस्याएं भी पैदा हो गई हैं। आर्थिक विश्लेषण में जब भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था पर रोजगार विहीन विकास का सेहरा बांधा जाता है, तो यह आम आदमी को बहुत अचंभित करता है। पर इस बात के भी कई मायने हैं। मसलन, बेरोजगारी की समस्या या रोजगार के अवसरों में वृद्धि का मुद्दा भारतीय समाज तथा भारतीय आर्थिक नीतियों में हमेशा से प्रमुख रहता है।

संयुक्त राष्ट्र की संस्था अंतरराष्ट्रीय श्रम संगठन यानी आइएलओ की भारत में रोजगार संबंधी ताजा रपट में बताया गया है कि वर्ष 2000 से लेकर अब तक भारत में कुल श्रम संख्या 17 करोड़ बढ़ी है, तो वहीं बेरोजगारों की संख्या 92 लाख से बढ़कर करीब ढाई करोड़ हो गई है। यानी पिछले तेईस वर्षों में भारत में बेरोजगारी की दर दोगुनी से अधिक हो गई है।

वर्ष 2019 के दौरान, जब कोरोना महामारी नहीं आई थी, भारत में बेरोजगारों की संख्या तकरीबन तीन करोड़ यानी 5.9 फीसद थी। फिर वर्ष 2022 में कुल बेरोजगारों की संख्या 2.29 करोड़ और बेरोजगारी दर घट कर चार फीसद पर आ गई। इससे स्पष्ट है कि भारत में बेरोजगारी एक अंतहीन समस्या बनी हुई है, बावजूद इसके कि यहां अच्छी आर्थिक विकास दर है।

इस रपट के मुताबिक भारत में इस समय अल्प-बेरोजगारी की दर बेरोजगारी की दर से अधिक है। भारत में प्रतिदिन का कार्य औसतन आठ घंटे के हिसाब से निश्चित है। पर वर्तमान समय में भारत की आबादी के एक बड़े तबके को प्रतिदिन के हिसाब से अत्यंत कम समय के लिए रोजगार उपलब्ध हो रहा है। कोई व्यक्ति पांच घंटे के लिए रोजगार कर रहा है, तो कोई तीन घंटे के लिए या कोई उससे भी कम समय के लिए।

इसके चलते ऐसे व्यक्तियों की प्रतिदिन की आय बहुत कम है, पर उन्हें रोजगार उपलब्ध है। अल्प-बेरोजगारी की दर 2012 में पुरुष और महिलाओं में एक समान 8.1 फीसद थी, जो 2019 में बढ़ कर क्रमशः 9 और 9.6 फीसद रही। हालांकि 2022 में इस दर में कमी आई और पुरुषों में यह अब 7.7 फीसद तथा महिलाओं में 7.1 फीसद दर्ज की गई है।

इस रपट के मुताबिक वर्ष 2000 से लेकर अब तक भारत में कुल श्रम संख्या का पचास से पचपन फीसद तक हिस्सा रोजगार के लिए खुद के प्रयासों पर निर्भर है, जिन्हें इस रपट में स्वरोजगार की श्रेणी में रखा गया है। आंकड़े बताते हैं कि वर्ष 2000 में इस श्रेणी में 52.5 फीसद लोग थे, तो 2022 में इनकी संख्या बढ़कर 55.8 फीसद हो गई। मगर कुल श्रम संख्या का यह भाग भारतीय समाज में रोजगार के लिए असंगठित क्षेत्र से जुड़ा हुआ है तथा इनकी श्रेणी में सड़क के किनारे रेहड़ी लगाने वाले, दूध और सब्जी बेचने वाले, किसी सोसाइटी में 'इलेक्ट्री शियन' और 'प्लंबर' का कार्य करने वाले जैसे लोग सम्मिलित हैं। मगर ये लोग आर्थिक रूप से सक्षम नहीं हैं, क्योंकि कौनों इनकी प्रतिदिन की आमदनी बहुत कम है।

इस रपट के अनुसार भारत में नियमित रोजगारों के अंतर्गत व्यक्तियों का फीसद वर्ष 2019 तक लगातार बढ़ा है, पर उसके बाद इसमें गिरावट देखी गई है। यकीनन, इसका मुख्य कारण कोरोना के दौरान हर संस्थान द्वारा कर्मचारियों की छंटनी है। आंकड़ों के मुताबिक वर्ष 2000 में भारत में कुल श्रम संख्या के 14.2 फीसद लोग नियमित रोजगार में थे, जबकि 2012 में इनका फीसद बढ़ कर 17.9 हो गया था और 2019 में यह सबसे अधिकतम 23.8 फीसद रहा, पर 2022 में इसमें काफी

गिरावट दर्ज हुई और यह 21.5 फीसद हो गया। दूसरी तरफ भारत में अस्थायी कर्मचारियों का फीसद लगातार कम होता जा रहा है। मसलन, वर्ष 2000 में यह 33 फीसद था, जो वर्ष 2022 में घट कर 22 फीसद पर दर्ज हुआ।

आइएलओ का यह विश्लेषण भारत में बेरोजगारी की विकट स्थितियों को स्पष्ट करता है, क्योंकिक्यों पचास फीसद से अधिक तबका असंगठित क्षेत्र में स्वरोजगार की श्रेणी में है और तकरीबन 25 फीसद लोग अपना जीवन यापन नियमित रोजगार के माध्यम से कर रहे हैं। यानी देश के 75 फीसद लोगों के जीवन में रोजगार तो है, लेकिन रोजगार में स्थायित्व की कमी है।

नियमित रोजगार वाले श्रमिकों की श्रेणी में तकरीबन 60 फीसद लोगों के पास किसी भी तरह का कोई लिखित अनुबंध या रोजगार की शर्तें उपलब्ध नहीं हैं। फिर, भारत में हर तरह के रोजगार, चाहे वह नियमित हो या अनियमित या स्वरोजगार की श्रेणी में, सबमें पिछले एक दशक में प्रति व्यक्ति औसत वेतन में कमी देखी गई है।

आंकड़ों के मुताबिक वर्ष 2012 में नियमित श्रमिकों का प्रतिमाह औसत वेतन 12,100 रुपए था, जो 2019 में 11,155 तथा 2022 में 10,925 पाया गया। अनियमित रोजगार की श्रेणी में तो वेतन नियमित श्रमिकों से भी बहुत कम है, पर इस वेतन में पिछले एक दशक में तुलनात्मक रूप से कुछ वृद्धि दर्ज हुई है। वर्ष 2012 में अनियमित कर्मचारियों के लिए प्रति माह औसत वेतन 3700 रुपए था जो 2022 में 4712 रुपए हो गया। वहीं असंगठित क्षेत्र में स्वरोजगार या आत्मनिर्भर श्रमिकों का वेतन प्रतिमाह 2019 में 7017 रुपए था, जो 2022 में घट कर 6840 पाया गया। यह भारत के प्रति व्यक्ति आर्थिक विकास की एक बहुत चिंताजनक तस्वीर प्रस्तुत करता है।

अंतरराष्ट्रीय श्रम संगठन की इस रपट के विभिन्न विश्लेषणों में मुख्य रूप से भारत के अस्सी फीसद से अधिक युवाओं का बेरोजगार होना तथा उनका अधिक कुशल न होना शामिल है। इन सबके इतर एक अन्य बिंदु पर भी ध्यान केंद्रित होना आवश्यक है कि भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था को नब्बे के दशक के बाद से सेवा क्षेत्र द्वारा संचालित किया जा रहा है। आज सेवा क्षेत्र भारत में तकरीबन 55 फीसद के आसपास जीडीपी में अंशदान देता है, लेकिन रोजगार में इसका अंशदान तुलनात्मक रूप से बहुत कम है। आज भी भारत की आबादी का बड़ा हिस्सा रोजगार के लिए कृषि पर ही निर्भर है।

चर्चा है कि अगर भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था पांच लाख करोड़ डालर की हो जाएगी तो बेरोजगारी आधी रह जाएगी। यह जमीनी हकीकत से बहुत दूर दिखता है। अब आर्थिक नीतियों में कृषि, विनिर्माण तथा सेवा क्षेत्र में रोजगार के मद्देनजर नए सुधारों की जरूरत है। अगर अर्थव्यवस्था में जीडीपी लगातार बढ़ती है तो आर्थिक नीतियों की जवाबदेही रोजगार तथा प्रति व्यक्ति आय बढ़ने के लिए सौ फीसद निर्धारित होनी चाहिए। अन्यथा जीडीपी का बढ़ना आर्थिक विकास के प्रति बहुत सकारात्मक रूप को एक पक्ष को स्थापित करने में विफल रहेगा।

<https://www.jansatta.com/national/economic-growth-and-rising-unemployment-indian-economy-in-figures-and-situation-in-reality/3324457/>