

NEWS ITEMS ON CAG/ AUDIT REPORTS

1. Few takers for India's wind tunnel to test hypersonic military tech (*theweek.in*) August 28, 2023

HWT is essential to meet R&D needs for designing futuristic hypersonic missiles

With Chandrayaan-3's calibrated touchdown on the lunar surface on Wednesday, India has become the fourth country— after the US, China, and Russia—to have the capability to conduct soft landings on the moon. India is also the fourth country—after the big three again—to have the home-grown capability to develop and set up Hypersonic Wind Tunnel (HWT).

However, the irony is that the HWT, built at a cost of Rs 400 crore after the initiation of the proposal by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), is finding very few users to test hypersonic technology in India.

A laboratory under the DRDO, DRDL is responsible for the design and development of state-of-the-art missile systems and technologies.

According to a CAG audit report tabled recently in Parliament, while the HWT was commissioned in October 2019, in the succeeding three years till November 2022, only a total of 500 tests have been conducted “which is a mere 33 per cent of the number of tests estimated to be conducted in the project proposal. This indicates that the number of tests was estimated on the higher side”.

The audit report added: “The number of test-runs over a period of five years was estimated to be about 2,500 (approximately 500 per annum), which included 1,000 tests for current projects, 1,000 tests for planned projects and 500 tests for research and development.”

The HWT—a pressure vacuum-driven enclosed free jet facility having nozzle exit diameter of 1 metre and will simulate Mach No 5 to 12 (Mach represents the multiplication factor to the speed of sound)—located in Hyderabad, is essential to meet research and development requirements for designing of futuristic hypersonic missiles and re-entry vehicles that require generation of extensive aerodynamic data. It has the potential of substantially reducing the cost of launching satellites which is a booming business sector for India's space effort. India has launched 431 satellites for 36 countries till July 2023.

Hypersonic technology—which enables projectiles to travel at a speed of more than Mach 5—is among the buzzwords of contemporary cutting-edge military technology with many nations across the world setting aside funds for research and development of such technology.

The challenges to hypersonics include extreme heat and pressure besides control over flight trajectories.

The HWT simulates hypersonic conditions by directing hypersonic airflows inside a large tube wherein objects reach the flying stage.

DRDL's HWT project also suffered from delays due to lack of prioritisation of critical activities as the Wind Tunnel System which should have got due priority for installation did not receive the same. "The Wind Tunnel systems (WTS), was a major system of the facility and all other subsystems were to be interfaced with the same. Hence, initiating action for creating the WTS facility first was of paramount importance," the national auditor reported. <https://www.theweek.in/news/biz-tech/2023/08/28/few-takers-for-indias-wind-tunnel-to-test-hypersonic-military-tech.html>

2. स्वदेश दर्शन योजना के तहत ग्रामीण सर्किट पर सरकार ने एक प्रतिशत से भी कम राशि खर्च की: कैग (ibc24.in) August 28, 2023

भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (कैग) ने सरकार पर ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में पर्यटन के विकास पर पर्याप्त ध्यान नहीं दिये जाने का उल्लेख करते हुए कहा है कि 'स्वदेश दर्शन योजना' के तहत मार्च, 2022 तक ग्रामीण सर्किट पर केवल 30.84 करोड़ रुपये खर्च किए गए। यह इस योजना के तहत कुल 4,239 करोड़ रुपये के व्यय का एक प्रतिशत से भी कम यानी 0.73 प्रतिशत है।

कैग की नौ अगस्त, 2023 को प्रस्तुत 'स्वदेश दर्शन योजना - पर्यटन मंत्रालय के अधीन' विषय पर प्रदर्शन आडिट रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि स्वदेश दर्शन योजना का एक अहम पहलू " विषय आधारित पर्यटन सर्किट का विकास" था । विषय आधारित इन पर्यटन सर्किटों की पहचान इन स्थलों पर पर्यटकों के आने की वर्तमान संख्या, सम्पर्क, इसकी क्षमता, महत्व जैसे कारकों के आधार पर की जानी थी।

इसी के अनुरूप मंत्रालय ने 15 विषय आधारित सर्किट में एक के रूप में 'ग्रामीण सर्किट' को चिन्हित किया जिससे ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में पर्यटन आधारभूत ढांचे के विकास किया जा सके। ऐसी उम्मीद की गई थी कि बेहतर आधारभूत ढांचे से पर्यटकों की आवाजाही बढ़ेगी और इसके चलते स्थानीय समुदाय के लिए रोजगार के बेहतर अवसर सृजित किये जा सकेंगे।

कैग ने अपने ऑडिट में पाया कि मंत्रालय ने 15 विषय/सर्किट के तहत 76 परियोजनाएं मंजूर कीं।

कैग की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, ग्रामीण सर्किट के तहत राज्य सरकार द्वारा प्रस्तावित आठ प्रस्तावों में मंत्रालय ने छह प्रस्ताव वापस लौटा दिये और केवल दो परियोजनाओं को लिया गया जिनकी लागत 125.02 करोड़ रुपये थी।

रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि 31 मार्च, 2022 तक ग्रामीण सर्किट पर केवल 30.84 करोड़ रुपये खर्च किए गए, जो इस योजना के तहत 4,239 करोड़ रुपये के कुल व्यय का केवल 0.73 प्रतिशत है।

रिपोर्ट कहती है कि उपरोक्त दो परियोजनाओं में एक 'केरल में मलानाड मालाबार कूज पर्यटन का विकास' को सितंबर, 2018 में मंजूरी दी गई थी और यह कई स्थानों पर तटीय नियमन क्षेत्र (सीआरजेड) की मंजूरी के अभाव में लंबित है।

इसमें कहा गया है कि राज्य सरकार के आग्रह पर पर्यटन मंत्रालय ने सीआरजेड मंजूरी की प्रक्रिया को तेज करने के लिए पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय से आग्रह (अगस्त, 2021) किया था। हालांकि, रिकार्ड में इस दिशा में कोई प्रगति दर्ज नहीं की गई और जारी की गई सम्पूर्ण राशि अर्थात 4.83 करोड़ रुपये खर्च नहीं की जा सकी।

रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, पर्यटन, परिवहन और संस्कृति पर विभाग संबंधी संसद की स्थायी समिति ने अपने 275वें प्रतिवेदन में सिफारिश की थी कि ग्रामीण पर्यटन को प्रोत्साहन के लिए अधिक ग्रामीण सर्किट मंजूरी किये जा सकते हैं और इसके लिए अधिक राशि दी जा सकती है।

इसमें कहा गया है कि मंत्रालय ने ग्रामीण सर्किट के तहत न तो अधिक परियोजनाएं मंजूर कीं और न ही अधिक राशि दी। इस प्रकार से मंत्रालय ने इस योजना के तहत ग्रामीण पर्यटन को कम प्राथमिकता दी।

कैग की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, स्वदेश दर्शन योजना के दिशानिर्देशों के तहत पर्यटन सर्किट का आशय एक ऐसे मार्ग से बताया गया जिसमें कम से कम तीन पर्यटन स्थान स्थित होंगे। ये पर्यटन स्थल इस प्रकार से इस मार्ग पर स्थित होंगे कि इनमें से कोई एक शहर, नगर या गांव में स्थित नहीं होगा लेकिन इनके बीच बहुत अधिक दूरी भी नहीं होगी।

रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, यह पाया गया कि पर्यटन मंत्रालय ने बिहार से प्राप्त एक प्रस्ताव 'इको सर्किट' के तहत 'बाल्मिकी बाघ अभयारण्य का विकास' को इस आधार पर वापस लौटा दिया कि यह योजना विषय आधारित पर्यटन सर्किट के विकास के लिए है और इसमें अकेले स्थल को शामिल नहीं किया जा सकता है।

इसमें कहा गया है कि मंत्रालय ने हालांकि इस मानदंड को एक समान रूप से पर्यटन सर्किट के विकास के संदर्भ में लागू नहीं किया। मंत्रालय ने पांच परियोजनाओं.. इम्फाल खोंजोम सर्किट के विकास, मंतालाई एवं सुधमहादेव पर समन्वित पर्यटन सुविधा के विकास, बोधगया में कन्वेंशन सेंटर के निर्माण, अयोध्या के विकास, चित्रकूट एवं श्रृंगवेरपुर के विकास को मंजूरी दे दी जिसके तहत तीन से कम स्थल आते हैं। <https://www.ibc24.in/business/govt-spent-less-than-1-on-rural-circuits-under-swadesh-darshan-scheme-cag-1708026.html>

3. Govt maps sustainable route to highway building: Gadkari (*livemint.com*) 29 Aug, 2023

The Union government is emphasizing sustainable construction models and practices in line with its push for infrastructure growth in the country, said Nitin Gadkari, union minister for road transport and highways. Addressing the Mint Sustainability Summit 2023 in New Delhi on 23 August, the minister said the government has been pushing for sustainable construction of roads and highways in a bid to protect the ecology, and not just for the transition to green mobility.

Outlining the achievements of the NDA government, he said that the country has added around 86,000 km to its national highway network since 2014. The minister added that currently the national highway network of India is the second largest in the world at over 1.46 lakh km, after the US.

Gadkari mentioned that the government has adopted the use of fly ash, rubberized bitumen, polymer-modified bitumen and steel slack in the construction of roads in the country. Further, as part of the Green Highway Policy 2015, he said a total of about 3.8 crore trees have been planted so far along the national highways.

"Now we are going to develop a special contractor for transplantation of trees and that is very important for protecting our ecology and environment," the minister said. The road transport minister reiterated his stand for the use of ethanol, methanol, bio-diesel and bio-CNG for mobility in his address.

In a bid to lower fatalities, he mentioned the initiative to use bamboo crash barriers along highways. "For the first time in the world, we have installed bamboo crash barriers on a 200-metre-long section on Vani-Warora (highway), in Maharashtra. It passed all the trials and tests taken by the institute in Indore." The highway connects the Chandrapur and Yavatmal districts in Maharashtra. He was of the view that the use of bamboo also offers an alternative to steel and addresses environmental concerns.

On the policy to mandate minimum use of 25% precast components in national highways, expressways and centrally sponsored infrastructure projects, he said the initiative would lead to saving of both cost and time, along with ensuring the usage of high-quality raw material.

He also outlined plans to boost infrastructure in the national capital and making the roads here dust-free. The minister said that the government has come up with a ₹65,000-crore 'Delhi Decongestion Plan', out of which work of nearly ₹25,000 crore is completed, while the rest is in progress. Further, projects worth nearly ₹6,000 crore would be taken up soon.

The plan involves a total of 16 projects, including the Dwarka Expressway, where 80% of the work is complete, he said. He also said an additional ₹1,500 crore may be provided to make roads in the national capital dust-free, and to improve the landscape and drainage systems around the road infrastructure.

The plans come against the backdrop of several instances of water logging in the national capital after heavy rains this year.

Further, amid criticism over the recent report of the comptroller and auditor general (CAG), which showed cost overrun in the construction of the Dwarka Expressway, Gadkari asserted that the project did not experience any cost overrun or corruption.

The recent CAG report created a political row after it flagged a huge cost overrun in the construction of the Dwarka Expressway. According to the report, the expressway, which spans 29.06 km, is being built at a cost of ₹250.77 crore per km, against the estimated ₹18.2 crore per km that was sanctioned by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).

Claiming that no one can blame him for corruption of even a small amount, Gadkari said if found guilty, he is ready to get punished. "We are transparent, time-bound, result-oriented, quality-conscious and corruption-free," he emphasized. <https://www.livemint.com/economy/govt-maps-sustainable-route-to-highway-building-gadkari-11693248100435.html>

STATES NEWS ITEMS

4. The destruction of Goa's sand dunes (*gomantaktimes.com*) August 28, 2023

Very recently, in the seaside village of Varca, unknown individuals destroyed a sand dune to create room for a broad road leading to the lovely beach.

Warren Alemao was right when he said that sand dunes protect populations and ecosystems from the damaging effects of storms, cyclones and tsunamis and the consequences of increasing sea levels.

Dunes act as natural barriers against coastal erosion. These dunes must be safeguarded if coastal areas are to be protected, the biodiversity is to be preserved and tourism is to be sustained.

This April, Sanjay Borkar, writing for Daiji World, informed us that there is the issue of coastal erosion in the state of Goa, and the lost sand dunes will threaten Goa's natural beauty as well as its tourism economy.

Approximately 27% of Goa's 105-kilometre-long coastline is under the threat of erosion.

Various stakeholders, environmentalists, state ministers and legislators that represent these coastal constituencies should vehemently raise concerns and urge the government to take action to prevent further erosion and the wiping out of sand dunes.

Nevertheless, we are aware that the state government has initiated both structural and non-structural measures to address the issue. Structural measures include protective structures like tetrapods, concrete blocks, and gabion walls.

Non-structural measures involve studying the causes of erosion and developing long-term remedies in consultation with organisations like the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) and the Central Water and Power Research Station (CWPRS).

However, there should be constant maintenance of the structural measures already taken and a follow-up on the study being done to find the causes and remedies to the impending issues of the coastal belt.

What must be applauded at this point is the effort of the Varca local panchayat, which immediately took steps after informing the necessary officials, including the South Goa district collector and the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) authorities, to restore a sand dune that was purposefully removed by unidentified people.

Numerous studies conducted by institutions like the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) and the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) have documented the destruction and degradation of dunes along Goa's coastline, especially in areas such as Betul to Cansaulim in South Goa and Sinqerium to Baga and Arambol in North Goa.

This may be the first instance in Goa's history where a panchayat has taken the initiative to restore a sand dune after it was destroyed due to illegal actions. This is a good example to encourage other elected representatives to give priority to the restoration of dunes.

Due to rife development, tourism-related activities and massive construction projects, Goa's coast, which was formerly renowned for its pristine beauty, has seen substantial

changes. And the impact on the delicate 6,000-year-old sand dune ecosystems has been massive.

Numerous studies conducted by institutions like the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) and the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) have documented the destruction and degradation of dunes along Goa's coastline, especially in areas such as Betul to Cansaulim in South Goa and Sinkerim to Baga and Arambol in North Goa.

The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) 2011 designated sand dunes as CRZ I (A) areas, which are ecologically sensitive zones where development is restricted. However, despite these regulations, the destruction of dunes has persisted, often due to unchecked development and inadequate enforcement of regulations.

Despite the presence of dunes, the Comptroller Auditor General (CAG) underlined in a report from last year that licences for infrastructure development, hotels and residential homes were given along sensitive beach portions.

Additionally, it made a case for stricter compliance with laws and more proactive conservation measures.

There are instances where the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) has denied the presence of sand dunes on specific beaches, contradicting earlier directives for dune restoration.

This doesn't mean that efforts aren't being made. For instance, in March this year, two illegal structures were razed by the GCZMA, a shack and a ground-plus-one concrete structure constructed in the no-development zone of the CRZ at Junaswada in Mandrem.

This raises concerns that the exclusion of dunes from approved plans may result in the approval of projects that harm these vital ecosystems.

The current predicament emphasises that priority must be given to ecological preservation over development and tourism.

To guarantee the long-term health of Goa's coastal ecology, there must be an effective enforcement of legislation and proactive initiatives to become aware of the illegal appropriation of sand from dunes and the maintenance and restoration of the dunes.

This doesn't mean that efforts aren't being made. For instance, in March this year, two illegal structures were razed by the GCZMA, a shack and a ground-plus-one concrete structure constructed in the no-development zone of the CRZ at Junaswada in Mandrem. This was a case where locals were involved in destroying the dunes.

What happens when government officials are responsible?

We need punitive measures that are equally meted out to ensure that those in power do not get away scot-free when they engage in environmentally damaging activities. Only then can we look towards restoring and preserving Goa's dunes successfully.

<https://www.gomantaktimes.com/opinion/the-destruction-of-goas-sand-dunes>

5. CAG Report: 25 samples of drinking water in Haryana found unfit containing bacteria, frogs and coliform
(*thefinancialworld.com*) August 28, 2023

A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reveals that drinking water in several places across Haryana state is contaminated with bacteria, frogs and even coliform, whereas physical and chemical parameters are beyond the permissible limits. Most of the samples were sent to the Public Health Department laboratory at Karnala and Shriram Institutes of Industrial Research New Delhi for testing. According to the CAG report, with effect from 2016 to 2021 samples of the water were detected contaminated which caused health diseases in 2901 cases, of whom as many as 14 persons were reported dead. Information also reveals that water samples were collected from eight districts in Haryana state including Fatehabad, Karnal, Kurukshetra and Panchkula in which 1382 persons consumed contaminated water suffered serious health disorders in which as many as 12 patients were reported dead.

In an audit of rural and urban water supply schemes, CAG took samples of water supply at 25 locations in the state, collected by the Public Health Engineering Department which included 13 water samples, Urban Local Bodies collected eight samples, Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran collected four samples and one set of the samples was sent to the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) laboratory at Karnal and the other set was sent to the Shri Ram Institute of Industrial Research (SRI), New Delhi for analysis. According to information, with effect from April 2016 to March 2021 the Public Health Department in the state collected a total number of 2,64,025 water samples for testing, of which 18,107 water samples (nearly 7%) were found unfit for drinking. According to information, there is no facility of physical and chemical testing of water at Kalka, Assandh, Indri and Hansi Sub-Divisional Water Testing laboratories.

It was observed that at 12 locations out of the selected 25 locations, chlorination was not detected in the water samples. At 11 locations chlorination was found to be more than the prescribed limit and at two locations, chlorination was found within the permissible limit. However, at the Shriram Research Laboratory, chlorination was found slightly above the permissible limit in two samples and in the rest of the 23 samples, chlorination was not detected at all. The report said at all 25 locations, it was observed that no record related to the dosing of the chlorination was maintained.

According to CAG report, Service Reservoirs were in use and at three locations the cleaning status was not satisfactory, there was formation of algae and frogs inside these reservoirs which were found uncovered. There was growth of Sarkanda in few water tanks and the CAG even produced photographs to prove the fact. At most of the locations of the bacteriological analysis of the samples, the presence of coliform confirmed that water was not potable, said CAG that the presence of coliform was detected in 19 samples out of 25 samples as per the report submitted by PHED laboratory. Whereas the Shriram Research Laboratory detected five samples having the presence of coliform. <https://www.thefinancialworld.com/cag-report-25-samples-of-drinking-water-in-haryana-found-unfit-containing-bacteria-frogs-and-coliform/>

6. Mizoram government incurs Rs 4.88 crore wasteful expenditure due to negligence: CAG report (*indiatodayne.in*) August 29, 2023

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has slammed the Mizoram government for incurring an "avoidable" expenditure of Rs 4.88 crore on formation cutting of the Darlak-Sihthiang road in Mamit district due to "negligence".

The CAG report tabled in the assembly by Chief Minister Zoramthanga in the recently concluded session said that the construction of the Darlak-Sihthiang road was undertaken under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) despite the village being already connected.

It said that Sihthiang was connected by an 11-km long Chuhvel-Sihthiang paved road, which is an all-weather road since December 2020.

While the construction of the Chuhvel-Sihthiang paved road was being taken up in May 2016, an agreement was signed in August 2019 between Mizoram Rural Road Development Agency of the state Public Works department and contractors for the construction of the Darlak-Sihthiang road at a cost of Rs 52.81 crore and the project was scheduled to be completed by June 2020.

"The Detailed Project Report (DPR) for construction of Darlak-Sihthiang road indicated that Sihthiang village, with a population of 495 was unconnected from any part of Mamit district and the length of the proposed Darlak-Sihthiang road was 35.61 km and the estimated project cost was Rs 58.32 crore," the audit report said.

The contractor started the work in February 2020 and completed the formation cutting of 7.3 km in June 2021. However, the work was put on hold since July 2021 due to the non-availability of Forest clearance and the department proposed dropping of the project to the Ministry in July 2022, it said.

Out of the contract value of Rs 52.81 crore, the PWD incurred expenditure of Rs 4.88 crore till April 2022.

Meanwhile, a test check of records of the Executive Engineer, Kawrthah Division of the state PWD showed that Sihthiang village was connected by an 11 km Chuhvel-Sihthiang paved road constructed under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) with an estimated cost of Rs 9.59 crore.

This work was executed by two contractors – M/s North East Consultancy Services (NECS) for construction of culverts and protection walls at a cost of Rs. 0.93 crore starting from May 13, 2016, and V. Malsawmdawngliana for the construction of flexible pavement at a cost of Rs 7.77 crore starting from June 23, 2016 – totalling Rs 8.70 crore and was completed in December 2020.

The CAG report pointed out that the expenditure of Rs. 4.88 crore on formation cutting of this road was "wasteful as the project was proposed to be dropped".

The state government admitted (August 2022) that since Sihthiang village has been connected through NABARD loan, the project under PMGSY was proposed for

dropping to the Ministry of Rural Development in July 2022, the audit report said. <https://www.indiatodayne.in/mizoram/story/mizoram-government-incurs-rs-488-crore-wasteful-expenditure-due-to-negligence-cag-report-669190-2023-08-29>

7. मिजोरम सरकार ने लापरवाही के कारण 4.88 करोड़ रुपये का फिजूलखर्च किया : CAG (*business-standard.com*) August 28, 2023

भारत के नियंत्रक एवं महालेखा परीक्षक (CAG) ने “लापरवाही” के चलते मामित जिले में दर्लक-सिहथियांग सड़क निर्माण पर 4.88 करोड़ रुपये का “फिजूल” खर्च करने के लिए मिजोरम सरकार की आलोचना की है। CAG की रिपोर्ट हाल में संपन्न हुए विधानसभा सत्र में मुख्यमंत्री जोरामथंगा ने पेश की थी, जिसमें कहा गया है कि दर्लक-सिहथियांग सड़क का निर्माण प्रधानमंत्री ग्राम सड़क योजना (PMGSY) के तहत किया जा रहा था जबकि इस गांव में पहले से ही संपर्क सुविधाएं मौजूद हैं।

परियोजना जून 2020 तक पूरी होनी थी

CAG की रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि सिहथियांग 11 किलोमीटर लंबी चुहवेल-सिहथियांग पक्की सड़क से जुड़ा है जो दिसंबर 2020 के बाद से हर मौसम में संपर्क का माध्यम रही है। चुहवेल-सिहथियांग पक्की सड़क का निर्माण कार्य मई 2016 में शुरू हुआ था जबकि 52.81 करोड़ रुपये की लागत से दर्लक-सिहथियांग सड़क के निर्माण के लिए मिजोरम ग्रामीण सड़क विकास एजेंसी और सरकारी लोक निर्माण विभाग ने अगस्त 2019 में एक समझौते पर हस्ताक्षर किये थे। यह परियोजना जून 2020 तक पूरा होने वाली थी।

सिहथियांग गांव का मामित जिले से संपर्क ही नहीं

ऑडिट रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, “दर्लक-सिहथियांग सड़क के निर्माण के लिए विस्तृत परियोजना रिपोर्ट (DPR) से संकेत मिलता है कि 495 लोगों की आबादी वाला सिहथियांग गांव का मामित जिले के किसी हिस्से से संपर्क नहीं है, वहीं प्रस्तावित दर्लक-सिहथियांग सड़क की लंबाई 35.61 किलोमीटर है और परियोजना पर 58.32 करोड़ रुपये की लागत आएगी।” ठेकेदार ने फरवरी 2020 में निर्माण कार्य शुरू किया और जून 2021 में 7.3 किलोमीटर का निर्माण पूरा किया।

4.88 करोड़ रुपये का खर्च “फिजूलखर्च”

रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि वन विभाग से मंजूरी नहीं मिलने के कारण जुलाई 2021 से निर्माण कार्य रुका हुआ है और विभाग ने मंत्रालय को परियोजना रद्द करने का प्रस्ताव दिया है। 52.81 करोड़ रुपये के खर्च में से पीडब्ल्यूडी ने अप्रैल 2022 तक 4.88 करोड़ रुपये खर्च कर दिए।

राज्य लोक निर्माण विभाग के कावर्था संभाग के कार्यकारी अभियंता के रिकॉर्ड की जांच से पता चला कि सिहथियांग गांव राष्ट्रीय कृषि और ग्रामीण विकास बैंक (नाबार्ड) के ग्रामीण बुनियादी ढांचा विकास निधि (आरआईडीएफ) के तहत निर्मित 11 किलोमीटर लंबी चुहवेल-सिहथियांग पक्की सड़क से जुड़ा था, जिस पर अनुमानित लागत 9.59 करोड़ रुपये आई थी। कैग की रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि सड़क का खाका बनाने में 4.88 करोड़ रुपये का खर्च “फिजूलखर्च” था क्योंकि परियोजना को रद्द करने का प्रस्ताव दिया गया है। <https://hindi.business-standard.com/elections-chunav/mizoram-government-wasted-rs-4-88-crore-due-to-negligence-cag>

8. खनन पर कैग की रिपोर्ट में हुए सैकड़ों करोड़ रुपये के अवैध खनन के खुलासे। (awaaz24x7.com) 28 Aug, 2023

खनन पर कैग की रिपोर्ट में हुए सैकड़ों करोड़ रुपये के अवैध खनन के खुलासे, अवैध खनन वालों से पांच गुना वसूली के प्रस्ताव पर धामी कैबिनेट का उप समिति का गठन का निर्णय और विधानसभा अध्यक्ष ऋतु खंडूरी का मालन नदी पर पुल गिरने पर खनन माफिया पर आरोप यह सब साबित कर रहा है कि आज सरकार खनन माफिया के चुंगल में है और सरकार व सत्ताधारी दल के नेताओं का वरदहस्त खनन माफिया के ऊपर है, यह आरोप आज एआईसीसी सदस्य व उत्तराखंड प्रदेश कांग्रेस कमेटी के वरिष्ठ उपाध्यक्ष सूर्यकांत धस्माना ने प्रदेश कांग्रेस मुख्यालय राजीव भवन में आयोजित पत्रकार वार्ता में लगाये। उन्होंने राज्य सरकार पर हमला बोलते हुए कहा कि कायदे में तो सरकार को कैग की रिपोर्ट आते ही इस बात की उच्च स्तरीय जांच कराई जानी चाहिए थी कि कैसे सैंतीस हजार फर्जी नम्बरों के वाहनों में अवैध रूप से खनन का लदान व ढुलान करवाया गया और किन लोगों ने यह काम करवाया और कैसे यह अवैध खनन सामग्री सरकारी कामों में इस्तेमाल की गई और फिर दोषी ठेकेदारों, अफसरों पर कार्यवाही होनी चाहिए थी लेकिन क्योंकि इस सब को सरकार के तत्कालीन मुख्यमंत्री मंत्रीगणों व सत्ताधारी दल के विधायकों व बड़े नेताओं का संरक्षण प्राप्त था इसलिए कोई जांच नहीं की गई और अब हद तो यह हो गयी कि उक्त चोरी को केवल जुर्माना वसूल कर सारे मामले को ही रफा दफा करने के लिए बाकायदा मुख्यमंत्री की अध्यक्षता में कैबिनेट यह निर्णय ले रही है कि कितना जुर्माना वसूल किया जाय उसके लिए उप समिति बना कर निर्णय लिया जाएगा। धस्माना ने कहा कि इससे बड़ा चोरी और ऊपर से सीना जोरी का उदाहरण देश में नहीं मिल सकता। धस्माना ने कहा कि कैग की रिपोर्ट में 2017-18 से शुरू हुए इस गोरख धंधे को 2021 तक कि रिपोर्ट में सैकड़ों करोड़ के खनन राजस्व की चोरी का खुलासा करते हुए बताया है कि किस प्रकार फर्जी नम्बरों की गाड़ियां खनन लदान व ढुलान में दर्शायी गयी हैं जिएं कई गाड़ियों के नम्बर तो ई रिक्शा, स्कूटर, एम्बुलेंस व टैक्सियों के निकले। श्री धस्माना ने आरोप लगाया कि यह घोटाला आज भी राज्य भर में बदस्तूर जारी है और इसका सबसे बड़ा प्रमाण पुलों के सेफ्टी ऑडिट की रिपोर्ट है जिसमें पिछले साल तक राज्य भर में खनन के कारण खतरे में आये 35 पुलों की संख्या अब 86 हो गयी है। धस्माना ने कहा कि इस मुद्दे पर कांग्रेस लगातार सरकार के संरक्षण में हो रहे इस अवैध खनन के खिलाफ संघर्ष कर रही है और भविष्य में भी सड़क से सदन तक इस मुद्दे को ठंडा नहीं पड़ने देगी। <https://www.awaaz24x7.com/news/illegal-mining-worth-hundreds-of-crores-revealed-in-the-cag-report-on-mining>

9. Congress alleges food scam in MP (uniindia.com) Aug 28, 2023

Months ahead of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly polls, the state's principal-opposition Congress on Monday lodged a complaint with Lokayukta NK Gupta regarding an alleged "nutritious food scam" running into approximately Rs 500 crore. "These inconsistencies affected no less than eight districts between 2018 and 2021. The CAG Report mentions irregularities vis-à-vis export and production besides fake documents. Eight government companies flouted the rules under the Aajeevika Mission," Rajya Sabha Member Vivek Krishna Tankha later alleged to media representatives at the party's state office. <http://www.uniindia.com/~congress-alleges-food-scam-in-mp/States/news/3039980.html>

10. Concor RoB Cracks: Metro spending on repairs, made agency liable for only 1yr (timesofindia.indiatimes.com) 29 Aug, 2023

Nagpur: Mahametro has kept the defect liability period (DLP) for the Concor railway over bridge (RoB) at only one year. An expert in civil works said this benefits contractors, as they ensure proper quality in works if DLP is kept high.

The Centre and state have equal ownership in Mahametro, but the company is enforcing DLP norms different than other government agencies of the Centre and state. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) had constructed RoB at Chinchbhuvan and kept the DLP at five years. The state's public works department (PWD) is constructing RoB at Kawrapeth in East Nagpur with DLP of 25 years. Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) and Nagpur Improvement Trust (NIT) follow DLP of state's PWD.

TOI had on Monday reported cracks and soil settlement in RoB constructed over Concor railway line between Airport South station and Khapri station. Mahametro is running Metro trains at 30 kmph speed as against 80 kmph on RoB for last two months. Repair works are underway, for which passenger services were limited to only one platform at three stations on Sunday.

Though Mahametro claimed it was a minor settlement, 65 metric tonne cement has been used to fill voids in the approach slab embankment of the RoB.

Mahametro spokesperson told TOI construction cost of RoB with a length of around 1km was around Rs40 crore. "M/s NCC Limited executed civil works and track works were done by M/s Rahee Infratech Ltd. DLP of civil works was one year from completion of construction. DLP ended on December 30, 2018."

Due to the lapsed DLP, Mahametro had to spend around Rs55 lakh on the rectification, and works are still going on.

Jivan Nikose, retired superintending engineer of state PWD, said, "DLP is one of the important factors in a tender. Contractors quote bids and do work taking DLP into consideration. It is obvious that the contractor pays more concentration on quality if DLP is long. Contractor will have to spend from his pocket in case of repair works. Therefore, contractor ensures quality work in case of longer DLP. It is totally wrong to keep DLP of one year that too for an RoB. Any structure will not develop defects within one year. Therefore, it is better not to keep clause of DLP of one year."

Vijaykumar Shinde, coordinator of NGO Jai Jawan Jai Kisan, said this is yet another case to prove that Mahametro compromised on quality to favour contractors. "Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) had exposed various irregularities and violations by Mahametro. Construction cost of Mahametro is higher compared to NHAI, NMC, NIT and state PWD. Thus, DLP of Mahametro should have been higher compared to these agencies. Therefore, detailed audit of entire project is necessary."

Denying that DLP was kept short to benefit contractor, Mahametro spokesperson said, "We are following standard practices and guidelines followed in earlier Metro rail projects like Delhi Metro, Bangalore etc. Additional period of defect liability and maintenance is a predefined contractual condition. Contractor quotes extra pessimistically anticipating unforeseen expenditures during bidding on that account. All government departments like Metros, CPWD, Railways, Airports Authority of India etc consider DLP of one year as a standard condition in General Conditions of Contract."

Mahametro spokesperson added PWD and NHAI mostly execute EPC or BOT projects, which are altogether different than the standard practice in Metros. “25 years of PWD and 5 years of NHAI are maintenance period and not DLP. Those are different aspects of the contractual obligations. In Metro projects, maintenance lies with authority itself after completion of the contract including DLP.”

IN A NUTSHELL

- * DLP plays important role in cost, quality of major projects
- * Mahametro kept DLP of one year in Concor RoB project
- * Design life of Metro Rail projects is 80-100 years
- * DLP of RoB ended on December 30, 2018
- * Cracks and soil settlement seen in RoB in March
- * Mahametro spent Rs55 lakh, and repairs continuing
- * State PWD keeps DLP of 25 years, NHAI keeps 5 years
- * NMC and NIT follow state PWD
- * Expert says contractors ensure proper quality works with long DLP
- * Contractors have to spend in case of defects, which they avoid by executing proper works
- * Expert says DLP of one year is as good as no DLP in tender

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/concor-rob-cracks-metro-spending-on-repairs-made-agency-liable-for-only-1yr/articleshow/103147743.cms?from=mdr>

11. Gokhale bridge work hits log jam as BMC needs more space to enable crane movement (*hindustantimes.com*) 29 Aug, 2023

Mumbai: The reconstruction of Gokhale Bridge, a key Andheri east-west connector, has once again hit a log jam. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation’s (BMC) bridges department wants 13 structures on the Andheri east side to be demolished for better movement of a crane that was brought in recently to assemble the girder.

An official from the BMC said the bridges department has requested the K east ward to clear these structures to make room so as to enable the maneuverability of the crane.

While the 13 structures are coming in the way of the construction of the bridge, civic officials have raised concern about the demolitions and evictions since the same cannot be undertaken during the monsoon season as per court orders.

Officials said the bridges department had initially requested 10meters clearance from the ward which was complete. However, the contractor now needs more space to maneuver the crane and the structures that were partially demolished will have to go completely.

“Of the 13 structures, four are legal and will have to be completely displaced under PAPs (project affected people). The procedure for these four will start soon. The remaining nine structures are encroached. But the latter can only be demolished in October since the demolition and eviction cannot be undertaken during monsoon as per court orders,” said a civic official.

“We are now trying to find a way to resolve this as soon as possible as one side of the bridge has to be ready by October,” the official added.

On Friday, P Velrasu, additional commissioner (Projects), along with other senior officials of the BMC's bridges department and ward visited the site to check the progress.

On Friday, Velrasu said, "Progress is satisfactory. All agencies are working in a synchronised manner. There are immediate issues concerning removal of some encroachments, of a billboard in railway premises etc. All the agencies are working together and if there is not much rain, we might open one side of the bridge as per schedule during Diwali."

The CAG report on Gokhale bridge had said that the demolition and reconstruction of the bridge was delayed by almost four years. "Audit observed that even after the serious incident of collapse of a part of the GKG Bridge in July 2018 and recommendations of the structural auditor, the BMC did not plan for the reconstruction of the bridge in a timely manner.

"Instead, Western Railways with the concurrence of the BMC carried out heavy repair works to steel girder pathway and PSC girder span on the bridge along with repair of the pipeline bridge from October 2018 to February 2020 on deposit basis with funds from BMC at a cost of ₹6.14 crore.

The BMC should have planned for the reconstruction of the bridge immediately following the recommendations of the structural auditor."

It added, "The approach road demolition and reconstruction were started in April 2020 while the demolition work of the railway portion of the bridge started in November 2022 and reconstruction work started in January 2023.

"The bridge was completely closed for public use from 07 November 2022. Thus, the demolition and reconstruction work of the bridge was delayed by almost four years."

The bridge, a part of which collapsed in 2018, killing two, is a key connector between Andheri east and west, and is one of the busiest routes in that suburb. Following the collapse, the bridge was kept partially open while the BMC worked on rebuilding it in phases.

The collapse also triggered the BMC to announce routine audits of all the bridges in Mumbai. It was during this audit in September 2022 that announced the bridge as unsafe forcing it to be completely shut from November 7, 2022.

Carnac bridge delayed again

The BMCs reconstruction of the 150-year-old Carnac Bunder bridge has hit a roadblock due to non-availability of land as there are 12 unauthorised structures on the road — abutting two administrative wards. The project will not meet its 19-month deadline.

As per the civic body, if demolition of unauthorised structures, on either side of the bridge, is not taken up on an urgent basis by the two wards, the reconstruction will be delayed.

Central Railways (CR) demolished the Carnac Road over bridge (ROB) portion on November 20 last year and reconstruction of the entire ROB has not yet been executed by the BMC's bridges department.

Repeated reminders by the bridges department to A ward in Fort and B ward in Dongri to remove the unauthorised structures — hutments, structures abutting the existing retaining wall of the bridge, encroachments, projections on existing road i.e., Lokmanya Tilak Marg — have not yielded desired results.

On the west of Carnac bridge is a jhunka bhakar kendra, a gymnasium, a Shiva temple, BEST substation and Pydhonie traffic police chowki.

On the east is another Pydhonie traffic police chowki, a Masjid toilet block, part portion of ROTA printing press, hutments, projections of footpath and on both sides of the bridge, there is shifting of water mains, old sewer mains and storm water drains, including BEST power cables.

According to the BMC, several structures at the site are proving to be a hindrance to the reconstruction of the bridge.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/reconstruction-of-gokhale-bridge-in-mumbai-delayed-again-due-to-demolitions-and-evictions-101693249785141.html>

SELECTED NEWS ITEMS/ARTICLES FOR READING

12. Indian Army to buy 130 tethered drones for long-distance surveillance, Intel inputs (*newindianexpress.com*) August 29, 2023

In continuation with its steps to strengthen intelligence and surveillance systems along the Line of Actual Control, the Indian Army on Monday signed a contract with local manufacturers for the supply of tethered drone systems and tank driving simulators.

The Indian Army in a message on X (f.k.a Twitter) confirmed the signing of a contract for the procurement of 130 tethered drones and 19 tank-driving simulators. “The induction of the new equipment will enhance the overall operational preparedness of the Army,” said the force.

Sources said the contract for the drone system for long-distance surveillance and intelligence gathering along the borders was signed with indigenous company Newspace Research Technologies Private Ltd. The contract for the other equipment was signed with Zen Technologies Limited, which will also involve skill development.

The Request for Technical and Commercial Proposals for the drones was issued by the armoured branch of the Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence in January this year, under the fast-track procedure.

As per the RFI, these systems are sought to fly not less than six hours in tethered mode and around 45 minutes in un-tethered mode. These drones are connected to a ground-

based tethered system with a flexible wire or cable for power and communications and can provide surveillance of beyond-line-of-sight targets for a prolonged period.

The Fast Track Procedure, as per the Defence Acquisition Procedure, involves “cases where expeditious procurement for urgent operational requirements foreseen as imminent or for situations in which a crisis emerges without a prior warning, or where undue/unforeseen delay due to reasons beyond the control of the acquisition setup, are seen to be impacting the capacity of the Forces, may be recommended by Service Headquarters for pursuance of FTP.”

Tethered drone systems are ideal for extended surveillance and security overwatch missions such as border control. Traditional drones have a greater range allowing them to perform missions the sensor cannot capture from a distance. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/aug/29/army-to-buy-130-tethered-drones-for-long-distance-surveillance-intel-inputs-2609673.html>

13. Leveraging India’s air power: A force to reckon with (*indianexpress.com*) August 29, 2023

India’s growth trajectory and its growing international relevance have fueled the country’s great power ambitions. What was once a dream seems an achievable reality shortly. India is increasingly being looked at with respect and with an expectation of a role of greater responsibility in world affairs.

For a nation that has not always understood and leveraged air power adequately despite its significant role in five wars — and years of consistent and dedicated service — there is a definite change in the air. It’s a welcome one. National security is no longer hyphenated to the land and maritime domains and is slowly transitioning towards a future-focused, multi-domain security approach. The recent increase in the participation of the Indian Air Force in international exercises with key strategic players is an acceptance of the role air power plays in national interest and security.

China’s growing use of its air force to implement its coercive foreign policy and revisionist strategies is evident in the Taiwan Strait and the East and South China Seas. Its recognition of India’s asymmetric air power advantage during the Depsang and Galwan crises has also led Beijing to deploy air power infrastructure in the Tibet Autonomous Region.

The inclusion of the IAF in the Army’s regular border talks is an important development. Given the growing capabilities of the PLA’s air force, an increase in the deployment of Indian air power for political signalling and coercion in air spaces in disputed areas may not be far off. Pressing it into service in the Indian Ocean — the lifeline of India’s trade, commerce and security imperatives and indispensable to the stability of the region — is also a strategic necessity. All elements of the nation’s military power must be included in India’s security construct to ensure a wider basket of strategic responses and options.

The approval of the deal to procure 26 maritime versions of the Rafale combat aircraft underscores two aspects — the critical role of air power in the maritime domain and the enhancement of the much-needed interoperability between land-based air power of the

IAF and carrier-based air power of the Navy. The US's use of aircraft carriers — they have played a significant political role in its coercive diplomacy — seems to have had an impact on China. The two China seas and its ports are the wellsprings of Beijing's economic power. Its security outlook is determined by the strategic concerns of the US and other nations frequenting the regional waters and airspace for reconnaissance, show of force and presence by exploiting the principle of “freedom of navigation”. China, therefore, seeks aircraft carriers to overcome the limits of its geography, assert its reunification strategy with Taiwan, counter maritime claims in the South and East China Seas and protect its sea lines of communication in the Pacific region.

India's Defence Acquisition Council has approved the Rafale fighter for the Navy. But it will be at least four years before deliveries begin, not counting the time to operationalise the platform in its designated roles. What till then? Can the nation afford to wait till the Navy's aircraft carriers become fully operational? Will they meet the maritime air power requirements required to position India as a global power? This is where the IAF's strategic capabilities must be leveraged, while also expanding its multi-domain capacity by swiftly rebuilding its combat bench strength.

New Delhi seems to appreciate the Air Force's vital role in India's national and regional security, as well as foreign policy. That is evident from the seven air exercises that India has participated in this year with the air forces of the US, France, Japan, UK, Greece and the UAE, as well as the 12-nation mega air exercise planned in October-November. This is not only in sync with India's bold foreign policy, but also signals international recognition of the IAF's professional capabilities and the larger role of air power in the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific regions. It's also an affirmation of the salience of land-based power.

As China continues to pursue a strategy of expansion to “regain its perceived historical territories and maritime spaces”, India's border issues with it are likely to get more complex. The direct access provided by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to the Arabian Sea — through the Gwadar port — and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor which opens into the Bay of Bengal at Yangon and Kyaukpyu are vital to Beijing. They help it tackle its Malacca dilemma. From India's perspective, both routes not only give China access to the Indian Ocean but also allow it to strategically sandwich India's eastern and western coasts. The Gulf of Aden, Malacca and Sunda Straits are similarly of equal strategic importance to both countries. However, only India has the unique strategic advantage of dominating the airspaces over these vital maritime spaces with its land-based air power capabilities. This capability will significantly bolster India's national security, its regional presence and geo-political standing. Engaging, training and exercising with the friendly regional air forces opens up several possibilities.

Leveraging air power offers several benefits — creating a unique hard power deterrence over the South China Sea, ensuring maritime and aerial freedom in the Indian Ocean region for all and enabling aerial access to strategically located air bases amongst friendly countries in the region. It also gives India the option of exercising its soft power by providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/a-force-to-reckon-with-3-8913751/>

14. India's draft policy on official statistics misses the mark (*livemint.com*) August 28, 2023

At a time when India's statistical system is facing growing questions from within and outside the government, the statistics ministry has published a revised draft policy on official statistics. It is largely a disappointment. It fails to provide a transformative roadmap for rebuilding our once-vaunted statistical system, though it makes interesting arguments about administrative statistics that need wider debate.

The current draft policy appears to be a diluted version of a previous draft published in 2018. That was two years after India adopted the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics which aim to protect the integrity and impartiality of statistical offices while guarding the privacy of citizens. The 2018 draft had a clear pathway to insulate statistical activities from political pressures. It envisaged greater financial and operational autonomy for the National Statistical Commission (NSC).

The NSC has awaited statutory backing for nearly two decades now. The lack of an effective statistical regulator has meant that Indian statistics are not subject to regular quality assessments or audits. Data users have to rely on intuition and guesswork while dealing with data-sets of varying quality in an uneven data landscape. Controversies over statistical output remain unresolved for years on end, and are sometimes unduly politicized. As regular readers of Truth, Lies and Statistics would know, the lack of an empowered statistical regulator has stunted the development of the Indian statistical system.

The 2018 draft recognized this problem in emphasizing the need to empower the NSC. Even the ministry of statistics and programme implementation (Mospi) acknowledged this issue. "Though the NSC, has since its inception, made a number of recommendations to improve the statistical system through its Annual Reports, yet, major structural changes remained mostly unexamined," said the ministry's vision document for 2019-24 published in 2019. "The mandate of the NSC is far reaching and for it to perform its functions effectively, it needs to be suitably reinforced with appropriate professional autonomy in making implementable recommendations." However, the current draft policy does not have anything to say on empowering the NSC. A code of statistical practice proposed in the earlier draft is also missing. Among other things, that code laid down transparency norms to be followed while releasing data-sets. The 2018 draft policy raised hopes that Mospi was serious about addressing India's statistical challenges. The current draft belies those hopes.

The current draft rightly emphasizes the need to harness administrative data-sets. Many databases, such as those related to vehicle registration and taxation, are generated as a by-product of routine administrative functions. So they are relatively inexpensive. Yet, the uneven quality and coverage of these administrative records, the wide variation in definitions used by different departments and frequent changes in administrative rules relating to these data-sets often make it difficult to use them for statistical purposes. These challenges aren't insurmountable, but they must be taken into account while incorporating these data-sets in regular statistical products. The draft policy acknowledges some of these challenges.

However, the draft policy goes on to say that the use of administrative data would minimize the use of surveys. This seems to stem from a serious fallacy. Even countries with far better administrative data-sets such as the US and UK haven't given up on household or business surveys. The Office of National Statistics in the UK runs 82 business surveys while the US Census Bureau runs more than 100 surveys of households and businesses every year.

Although greater use of administrative data can reduce reliance on some kind of surveys, they do not eliminate their need in many other areas. Most large economies depend on detailed questionnaires sent to businesses to track changes in business activity and economic parameters. Adding these questions in regular administrative forms can raise compliance costs, especially for small firms. Hence, only minimal information is canvassed through administrative records. To obtain detailed data, a randomly chosen set of firms is surveyed. This need is greater in countries that have incomplete administrative records and large informal sectors.

Also, note that surveys and administrative records are not always substitutes. Often they are complementary. In fact, improvements in administrative records can help improve survey quality. For instance, if factory inspectors are able to improve the coverage of factories in each state, it would help to improve the coverage and quality of the Annual Survey of Industries, whose sampling frame is based on lists supplied by factory inspectors. Surveys, in turn, can be used to track under-coverage of administrative data-sets. The Registrar General of India relies on surveys to check the coverage of birth and death registrations.

Overall, Mospi's draft policy does not seem to provide a clear and coherent framework for rebuilding India's statistical edifice. We need to set up a high-level statistical reforms commission headed by a non-partisan statistician or technocrat. This body should present a detailed statistical strategy document after consulting all key stakeholders, including India's community of non-official data users. Our citizens, policymakers and investors deserve no less. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/indias-draft-policy-on-official-statistics-misses-the-mark-11693232277604.html>

15. Coastal Road: Strong Indications of Cost Escalation, Deadline Extension (*freepressjournal.in*) August 28, 2023

As the coastal road contract comes to an end, the BMC-appointed consultants are in the process of analysing the remaining work and making a report to guide the civic body, but there are strong indications of cost escalation and the deadline being extended.

The project is underway in three phases – 1, 2 and 4. While the contract for phase 1 will end next month, phase 2 will end in October and phase 4 by the end of the year. Phases of the project

Phase 1 comprises Priyadarshini park to Baroda Palace and has been undertaken by L&T. Phase 2 begins from Baroda Palace and ends on the south side of Bandra-Worli Sea Link, with M/s HCC and HDC as project undertakers. Phase 4 is from Princess Street Flyover to Priyadarshini Park and is under L&T again.

Expecting the contract to be extended, BMC officials said, “At this stage, we can’t say whether there will be any cost escalation and if the deadline would be extended. Nearly 80% of the work is finished but we expect it to be extended. In that case, there will be cost escalation.”

Officials said that if contractors are paid more, then automatically charges of consultants would also increase. According to one civic officer, contractors may refuse further work if their contract is not extended, which is why the analysis report is important.

Another officer said that if the coastal road is proposed to be opened by the end of December, it will be difficult to finish the remaining finishing work or the last stage of work. “It will be difficult to bring goods-laden vehicles to construction sites. Moreover, coastal road authorities have increased the distance between two pillars in Worli on the request of fishermen but the work on pillars 7, 9, 10 and 11 will begin after October. Therefore, there are chances of the deadline being extended,” officials said. <https://www.freepressjournal.in/mumbai/coastal-road-strong-indications-of-cost-escalation-deadline-extension>

16. Govt changes rules to give ₹13.58-crore waiver to college run by BJP leader’s kin (*hindustantimes.com*) Aug 29, 2023

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government, in order to facilitate a waiver of ₹13.58 crore towards land charges of an engineering college controlled by the kin of BJP leader and Punjab governor Banwarilal Purohit, recently changed its own rules for this. The unscheduled proposal was put forward in the state cabinet meeting at the last minute despite strong objections from the revenue and finance departments.

Shri Ramdeobaba College of Engineering and Management (SRCEM) in Nagpur had proposed to start a self-financed university on its 16.85-acre campus at Zingabai Takli in Nagpur. The change of use/purpose of land earmarked for educational institutions attracts a levy of 10 percent of the land’s market price as decided by the Devendra Fadnavis government in 2019. When the proposal originally came up for approval in August 2019, the Shri Ramdeobaba Sarvajanic Samiti, which runs the college, was directed to pay the amount. A similar order was given to Mahatma Gandhi Mission (MGM) college, Nanded, which is run by NCP leader Kamal Kishor Kadam.

While MGM College paid the amount that year, SRCEM kept requesting the state government to waive it. After the change in government in June 2022, when the higher and technical education department rejected the request, the proposal moved to a higher level. Although not included in the cabinet’s agenda, it was brought before the cabinet at the last minute three weeks ago during the monsoon session.

Before it came to the cabinet, the state finance and revenue departments had strongly opposed the proposal, saying that it would not be appropriate to make an exception. The departments also mentioned that this would lead to a loss to the cash-strapped exchequer and set a precedent. “When the finance department suggested that 50 percent of the land cost be charged to the two universities in 2019, the state cabinet brought it down to 10 percent. MGM College has paid this to the government,” it has stated in its note.

The law and judiciary department also objected to the proposal, saying it was contrary to the cabinet's own decision taken in 2019. However, the cabinet, while giving its nod to the waiver, stated, "Since there is no transfer of the land to any other user, there is no need for the charges."

According to an official from the higher and technical education department, "Even if it is not a transfer, the aided college is being converted into a self-financed university with barely any regulation from the government." The official added that since the university was free to set its own fees, it ought not to profiteer on government land.

Rajendra Banwarilal Purohit, secretary, Shri Ramdeobaba Sarvajanik Samiti and Punjab governor's son, claimed that the charges levied were due to "a technical error", by considering it a land transfer. "We have neither changed the purpose nor have we transferred the land to any other institution," he said. "This has been certified by the district collector as well. Ours is a non-profit organisation, which has a five percent quota for poor students who get education free of charge. It will continue to be that way even after it is upgraded to a self-financed university."

Higher and technical education minister Chandrakant Patil was not available for comment despite several attempts. His office said the department would issue a statement in the next two days. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/maharashtra-government-changes-rules-to-waive-land-charges-for-bjp-leader-s-kin-owned-college-in-mumbai-101693249605029.html>