

CAG: Govt hosps lacked ambulances & hearse vans, underutilised Covid funds

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AUDIT FINDS HEALTHCARE LACKING IN LIFE SUPPORT

Availability of ambulance services and hearse vans in hospitals

Lok Nayak Hospital

It had only **2 patient transport ambulances (PTA)** against the requirement of **9**

The hospital had only **2 hearse vans** against **5**

It also **didn't have any advanced life support or basic life support ambulances**

Despite the availability of hearse vans, the **hospital was using PTAs for carrying bodies to mortuary** and to transport store items, wheelchairs, etc



As per SoP, every hospital should have a fleet of **one advance life support ambulance, one basic life support ambulance, nine patient transport ambulances and five hearse vans**

At three other hospitals

Other three hospitals covered under the audit — **Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya (CNBC), Rajiv Gandhi Superspecialty Hospital (RGSSH) and Janakpuri Super Speciality Hospital (JSSH)** — did not have any ambulance or hearse van

One ALS ambulance procured by RGSSH in Jan 2019 for ₹36.6 lakh was not put to use as it was not registered

JSSH stated in July 2022 that the requirement of ambulance service was limited as the **hospital was a tertiary care super speciality hospital and there was no functional emergency there**

CNBC stated in March 2022 that it was availing **ambulance services through CATS**

Other highlights

1 One-Stop Centre (OSC) of Lok Nayak for providing multiple facilities and services under one roof to rape survivors did not have dedicated staff

2 The average consultation time per patient was less than five minutes in medicine and gynaecology departments at Lok Nayak



3 The average stillbirth rate in Lok Nayak was higher than the average stillbirth rate of Delhi

New Delhi: More skeletons fell out of Aam Aadmi Party's cupboard on Friday, with the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General noting several deficiencies that refute the claims about the previous govt's the city's health infrastructure. CAG has pointed out that Lok Nayak Hospital, Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital and Janakpuri Super Speciality Hospital operated with inadequate ambulances and hearses, among other shortcomings.

The CAG report has also revealed under-utilisation of the allocated budget for Covid-19 emergency response and health preparedness. According to the report, Rs 245.1 crore of the allocation of Rs 787.9 crore remained unused.

At the 4 big hospitals, there was substantial under-utilisation of funds between 2016-17 and 2021-22. Lok Nayak did not use from 13.1% to 34.9% of the allocated funds during this period, whilst Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty recorded under-utilisation of 9.4-49.9%. Janakpuri Super Specialty's accounts showed under-utilisation of 6.1-10.4% and Chacha Nehru registered between 6.3% and 27.3% of unused funds.

DGHS standard operating procedures mandate that a hospital has to maintain one advance life support (ALS) ambulance, one basic life support (BLS) ambulance, nine patient transport ambulances (PTA) and five hearse vans. CAG said

that Lok Nayak operated with only two PTAs and lacked ALS and BLS vehicles. It also had just two hearse vans. Further, despite the hearses, the hospital used the ambulances to carry bodies to the mortuary, to move equipment and effect wheelchair transfers. Staff car drivers were tasked with ambulance operations.

The other three hospitals possessed neither ambulances nor hearse vans. Rajiv Gandhi

Super Specialty's ALS ambulance, purchased for 36.6 lakh in Jan 2019, remained non-functional due to registration problems. Janakpuri Super Specialty stated in July 2022 that its ambulance needs were limited since it was a tertiary care specialist facility without emergency services. Chacha Nehru indicated in March 2022 its reliance on CATS for ambulance support.

CAG also observed inade-

quate patient consultation durations, particularly at Lok Nayak's medicine and gynaecology departments, where average consultation times were below five minutes.

Data from Jan 2018 to March 2020 showed the medicine OPDs recording 673-718 registrations per day and gynaecology 205-253 registrations. In Jan 2022, Lok Nayak indicated 7-9 doctors at each medicine OPD unit daily, re-

sulting in 84-89 patients per doctor. With seven-hour workdays, each patient could have received under five minutes of consultation.

Lok Nayak's One Stop Centre to provide multiple facilities and services to rape victims lacked dedicated staff, contrary to SOPs mandating five counsellors, five senior resident doctors, five staff nurses and five nursing orderlies. Data showed that in April 2016 to Jan 2022, OSC handled 1,169 cases, including 235 sexual assault cases (24.4%) while functioning without dedicated staff and relying on casualty department personnel and on-call counsellors from DCW's Rape Crisis Cell.

Chief minister Rekha Gupta tabled the CAG reports in the assembly on Friday. In the run-up to the recently concluded assembly elections, BJP had promised to table all CAG reports, which it alleged had been withheld by the previous AAP govt, if it won the election. The new govt filed the first of 14 CAG reports — related to the regulation and supply of liquor in the capital for the financial years 2017-18 to 2020-21 — on Tuesday. AAP, which was in office for two consecutive terms until earlier this month, claimed that the tabling of CAG reports was a "routine procedure" and that its govt, led first by Arvind Kejriwal and then by Atishi, had already completed the process before the elections by sending the document to the assembly after securing the lieutenant governor's approval.

As its rift with US widens, EU seeks no-limit ties with India

Backs Rules-Based Order In Indian Ocean, Eyes Defence Pact

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: As she pledged EU's support for a rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that the 27-member bloc will explore a future security and defence partnership with India — similar to what it has with Japan and South Korea. She identified trade, technology and connectivity as other areas for taking India-EU ties to the next level, saying the relationship can become one of the defining partnerships of the century.

Without specifically talking about US President Donald Trump or his trigger-happy treatment of allies, she also said both India and the EU stood to lose from a world of spheres of influence and isolationism, and gained from a world of cooperation and working together. "Because we can offer each other distinctive alternatives and tools to make ourselves stronger, more secure and more sovereign in today's world. The kind of offer that cannot really be replicated by others," she said.

TALKING POINTS

- To expedite conclusion of FTA by the end of the year
 - Further focused discussions on defence industry and policy to explore opportunities from new initiatives and programmes
 - A review meeting with partners to take stock on the IMEEC initiative
 - Engage on maritime domain awareness with a view to promoting shared assessment, coordination and interoperability
 - Convene the next meeting of the Trade and Technology Council at an early date to deepen cooperation in semiconductors and other critical technologies
- Enhance the dialogue on clean and green energy between governments and industry, with a focus on green hydrogen
 - Strengthening collaboration in the Indo-Pacific including through trilateral cooperation projects



Photo: Piyal Bhattacharjee

On a new security and defence partnership with India, von der Leyen said this would help both sides step up work to counter common threats whether on cross-border terrorism, maritime security threats, cyber attacks or the new phenomenon: attacks on critical infrastructure.

"There is a lot that we can build on. For instance, the re-

cent collaboration on maritime security. And I am delighted at India's interest in joining defence industrial projects under the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation. India is working hard to diversify its military supply and to access new capabilities. And I believe we can help each other to deliver on our security objectives," she said.

Talking about the geopolitical and geoeconomic headwinds that both EU and India are confronted with, von der Leyen said the world had reached another inflection point. She said this was not a time to place limits on India-EU cooperation. "Or to get stuck looking for agreement on every issue of regional or global concern. It is time to be pragmatic and ambitious. And to realign our priorities for today's realities," she said.

Describing IMEEC as a potential modern golden road, von der Leyen said it could make trade between India and Europe 40% faster. "It is a green and digital bridge across continents and civilisations. This can be a win-win-win for Europe, India and our partners. We are ready to invest in concrete projects that can already start making these connections happen," she said.

"Make in India and 'made in Europe' can work together to drive our industries forward. And our common interests in de-risking our economies, in particular in sensitive technological areas, can help drive our economic security," she added.

India joins EU in calling for just and lasting peace in Ukraine

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New Delhi: PM Narendra Modi joined EU leader Ursula von der Leyen in expressing support — in a leaders' statement after their meeting on Friday — for a just and lasting peace in Ukraine that's based on respect for international law, principles of UN Charter and territorial integrity and sovereignty.

The leaders also reiterated their commitment to the "vision of the two-state solution" with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within recognised borders, consistent with international law. This is the first time India has reiterated its support for the two-state solution at the highest level since President Donald Trump announced his plan to take over Gaza.

The solidarity with the EU on Ukraine is particularly significant in the context of what happened in the UN this week when EU states led by France managed to water down the US's "forward looking resolution" on Ukraine in the General Assembly that called for lasting, but not just and comprehensive, peace and a swift end to the conflict. The language used in the India-EU leaders' statement is similar to one of the three amendments that France introduced in that resolution — just, lasting and comprehensive peace in Ukraine that respects the UN Charter and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Interestingly, neither leader explicitly mentioned the Ukraine issue in their media statements that followed their bilateral meeting.

Why US-Ukraine Deal Was Set To Fail

Aside from the jaw-dropping quarrel between Zelenskyy & Trump-Vance, the revised draft of the minerals pact seemed to favour Kyiv considerably more than US prez would have liked

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The US-Ukraine minerals deal that didn't get signed was a watered down version of the first one. The first version floated the idea that US will make a hefty \$500bn from Ukrainian mineral wealth. But a final draft seemed to offer more favourable terms for Ukraine. Here is why Trump would have never liked this version of the deal.

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What were the key features of the deal? | The principle underpinning the deal is that Ukraine's mineral wealth will secure American aid and investments. The idea was floated in Zelenskyy's 'Victory Plan' unveiled last Oct. What is being inked is a framework agreement that'll create a joint Reconstruction Investment Fund. The fund would be set up with controlling US stakes - subject to American law - to which Ukraine would contribute 50% of its revenues from future monetisation of Ukraine's natural resources. These include minerals, oil, gas, and associated infra such as ports and LNG terminals.

Crucially, the fund will exclude existing mining and natural resource businesses, meaning current revenue streams from Ukraine's natural resources will not be diverted to the fund. Plus, the fund is designed to reinvest revenues in Ukraine itself. Such reinvestments will happen at least annually to promote "safety, security and prosperity of Ukraine". Detailed terms and conditions will be defined in a Fund Agreement to be negotiated subsequently.

How much was the deal worth? | The answer, for the moment, is unclear. First, there are no clear estimates of the full extent of Ukraine's natural resources. Ukraine is said to control more than 100 major deposits of critical minerals, including titanium, lithium, rare earths and 19mn tonnes of proven reserves of graphite. However, Kyiv admits that resources worth \$350bn are

now in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. Ukrainian think tanks estimate about 40% of the country's metal resources are now under Russian control.

Plus, Ukraine currently has no commercially operational rare earth mines. Therefore, much exploration needs to be done to ascertain the true value of these minerals. Existing maps of resources date back 30-60 years. These are legacy geological reports that modern methodology will need to verify. Also, a Soviet-era policy



treats information on some reserves as state secret.

Note that Ukrainian govt got only about \$1.1bn from natural resource royalties last year. Hence, much investment needs to go into building the infra required to realise the deal's full potential. That means attracting additional investments into Ukraine's mining sector.

What were the challenges? | Aside from the fact that a significant portion of the minerals is located in Russian occupied territories, large parts of Ukraine are now heavily carpeted with landmines. These need to be safely cleared first for commercial operations to get going. However, this makes exploration and surveying of minerals an even more expensive proposition. But

the current deal is unclear on who will front the risk capital for this. That will be presumably spelt out in the subsequent Fund Agreement.

Plus, as long as the war continues sans a ceasefire, attracting investments in Ukraine's mining will prove challenging. This creates a dilemma: if the deal is meant to deter future aggression by Russia, the ongoing conflict itself is a hindrance to the operationalisation of the deal. With Ukrainian towns and cities, especially along the frontline, witnessing massive destruction, Ukraine's infra needs significant recovery before commercial activities can commence.

What the benefits could have been | Had the rough edges been ironed out, American companies were looking at a bonanza. For example, American producer of rare earth minerals, MP Materials, may be interested in the deal as it has been building a rare earth magnet manufacturing facility in Texas. So will Albemarle Corporation - the largest lithium miner in America.

Also, Trump wants to break China's hold over rare earths. Beijing produces about 90% of global rare earths crucial to advanced tech and defence industry. The US-Ukraine deal can potentially turn the tables on China. Meanwhile, for Ukraine, it would have opened the door to long-term American commercial interests in Ukraine. Zelenskyy has repeatedly said that he wants US to be a partner in Ukraine's development. This, it was hoped, would serve as a deterrent against future Russian aggression. However, there were no concrete security guarantees in the deal for Kyiv.

Trump, on the other hand, would have got a political victory and partial conversion of US aid to Ukraine from grants to loans. But much would have depended on the details in the fund agreement. American companies will only line up if there are clear opportunities for profit with minimum risk. Creating those conditions will be tough.

GDP growth at 6.2% in Q3, pegged at 6.5% for 2024-25

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: India's economic growth in the three months to Dec rebounded on the back of a recovery in govt and consumer spending, exports and a robust farm sector, while services remained steady.

Data released by National Statistical Office on Friday showed GDP grew by 6.2% in the Oct-Dec quarter of the current fiscal year, rising from the upwardly revised 5.6% in the July-Sept period. Growth had slowed to a seven-quarter low of 5.4% in the three months to July, triggering calls for measures to revive growth.

For the full 2024-25, NSO expects 6.5% growth from the earlier projection of 6.4%.

► **Related report, P 23**

Sensex hits 8-mth low, ₹ drops 28p

A cross-the-board selling, with IT stocks leading, pulled the sensex down 1,414 points on Friday to 73,198 — an over 8-month-low. The rupee fell 28 paise to 87.5, pressured by weakness in markets and rising trade tensions due to escalating tariff wars. **P 23**

EPF rate remains unchanged at 8.25%

EPF on Friday retained an interest rate of 8.25% on employees' provident fund deposits for 2024-25, benefitting over 7 crore subscribers. In Feb 2024, EPFO had increased the rate marginally to 8.25% from 8.15%. **P 12**

This Feb was India's warmest in 125 years of record-keeping

Summer Likely To Be Hotter Than Normal: IMD

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New Delhi: The past month was the warmest Feb in India since record keeping commenced in the country in 1901 and the upcoming hot weather season (March-May) is likely to be warmer than normal in most parts of the country with a high number of heatwave days during the period, the IMD said on Friday.

Both months of 2025 so far have figured among top three warmest on record, as Jan was the third warmest since 1901. Earlier, 2024 was declared the warmest year in records dating back to 1901.

Back-to-back warm winter months and the forecast of above-normal heat in March may negatively impact winter crops such as wheat and rapeseed during their maturing phase. Forecast of higher-than-normal heatwave days may threaten

11 MTHS OF HEAT

➤ India witnessing **unprecedented heat** in recent months

➤ Feb was the **11th consecutive month** when mean temps in the country were among **8 all-time highest** for the respective months. 2 of these months were the **hottest ever** while 4 others were **2nd or 3rd hottest** on record

➤ Minimum temps have been the **highest** on record in **5 of the last 8 months**



the output in certain states where sowing was delayed.

“Above-normal heatwave days are expected over Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, MP, Maharashtra, UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and north Karnataka from March to May,” said D S Pai, senior IMD scientist, while releasing the weather outlook for the hot weather season.

► **Continued on P 19**

22 missing after avalanche buries BRO site in U'khand

Swamped Under 6ft Of Snow, 33 Workers Survive

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Dehradun: Twenty-two Border Roads Organisation (BRO) workers are missing while 33 have survived after a massive avalanche struck an Army construction site, trapping 55 people under about 6 feet of snow, near Mana village on the India-China border at more than 10,000 feet above sea level in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district around 5am on Friday. The chief minister's office said 57 workers were assigned to the site, but two had taken the day off.

The search for the missing continues amid heavy snowfall, with temperatures falling to minus 6°C in treacherous terrain. Chamoli DM Sandeep Tiwari said, "By noon, 10 workers were rescued and taken to Mana Hospital. By evening, the number rose to 33". Indian Army said 22 workers managed to escape

Photo: ANI

➤ Mana, which is located 3km from Badrinath, is the last village on India-Tibet border at a height of **3,200m** (10,000 feet)

➤ Temperature is hovering around **-6 to -10°C**

➤ Army rescue teams are working amidst snowfall of **6 to 7 feet**

➤ 174 Army personnel carrying on rescue mission along with ITBP, BRO and disaster response forces



➤ DRDO lab DGRE issues yellow alert for avalanche risk in five hill districts, including Chamoli, for next **24 hrs**



Winter migration saved lives in Mana

Mana, a 2,000-strong village, had emptied out, thanks to a yearly migration ritual during winter. "We are fortunate we shifted to lower locations," said headman Pitambhar Molpha. **P15**

on their own and reached Badrinath safely.

"The avalanche struck along the national highway connecting Mana to Ghastoli.

Snow, rain wreak havoc in Himachal

Heavy snowfall and rain on Friday blocked more than 500 roads in Himachal, and disrupted power and water supply. Avalanches, landslides and flash floods have also been reported. **P14**

The workers were deployed at BRO's General Reserve Engineering Force (GREF) post, about 1km beyond Mana village, on a project to double-la-

'Anomalies' hope for T'gana tunnel op?

Using a ground penetrating radar, a National Geophysical Research Institute team identified "anomalies" in Srisailem Left Bank Canal tunnel, which could lead to eight missing workers. **P14**

ne the highway," a senior official coordinating the rescue operations told TOI.

➤ Continued on P 15

Trump: Putin would abide by any Ukraine peace deal

US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that he trusted Russian President Putin not to violate the terms of a potential peace deal with Ukraine, even as he refused to pledge US military support for a peacekeeping force. "I think he'll keep his word," Trump said of Putin as he hosted Britain's PM, Keir Starmer, at the White House. Of Putin, the president said, "I've known him for a long time now."

Trump's comments underscored his embrace of Putin ahead of meeting with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky.

In the opening weeks of his presidency, Trump has ended the diplomatic isolation of Russia, falsely accused Ukraine of starting the war with Russia and repeatedly disparaged Zelensky, including by calling him a "dictator." He appeared to change his tune Thursday. "I have a lot of respect for him," Trump said. Earlier in the news conference, when asked if he still thought Zelensky was a dictator, Trump deadpanned: "Uh, did I say that? I can't believe I said that."

Starmer was the latest in a series of European leaders to

come to Washington hoping to reason with Trump.

"History must be on the side of the peacemaker, not the invader," Starmer said as he stood next to Trump. "The UK is ready to put boots on the ground and planes in the air to support a deal, working closely with our allies. Because that is the only way peace will last," the PM said. But his efforts to nudge Trump in Ukraine's direction appeared not to have worked. Trump made no mention



of US forces supporting a peacekeeping mission that included UK troops.

In the Oval Office on Thursday, Trump was asked what would happen if Britain sent peacekeeping troops to Ukraine,

only for Russia to renege on a peace deal. Would the Americans come to the aid of the British in Ukraine? In the span of a minute, Trump seemed to say no ("They can take care of themselves very well"), and then yes ("If they need help, I'll always be with the British"), before landing back on no ("They don't need help"). "Could you take on Russia by yourselves?" Trump asked Starmer. Uneasy laughter broke out in the room. NYT