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Brief on what they kept from you about your money this week

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01 'Development' vs People at Barsu Oil Refinery Project at Ratnagiri

Villagers have intensified their protests as the Maharashtra government is pushing through the controversial Barsu oil refinery project despite opposition from local communities and environmental activists. 112 protestors have already been booked under charges such as rioting and unlawful assembly. The proposed joint venture between the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and the Oman Oil Company has faced opposition from farmers, fisherfolk, and other locals who fear it will damage their lands and livelihoods. The project has been contentious due to concerns about its potential environmental and social impacts on the fragile Konkan region.

02

Indigenous rights, Forest Rights Act trampled upon in Nicobar: Flags NCST

According to Forest Conservation Rules, any diversion of forest land would first require the District Collector to recognise and vest rights to locals under the Forest Rights Act. This was a prerequisite for the authorities to seek consent for diversion of tribal lands. It seems this was completely flouted in the clearance that was granted to ANIIDCO for the Great Nicobar project. The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has flagged such gross discrepancies and asked for detailed report within 15 days, based on a complaint raised by former bureaucrat EAS Sarma.

As it appears a No Objection Certificate was procured hastily from the Andaman Adik Janjati Vikas Samiti, a society both set and run by the administration. The Tribal Council soon after withdrew the consent granted by the Gram Sabha. They in fact alleged that the minutes of the meeting were typed after securing members' signatures. These are all signs of a regime desperate to bulldoze it's dubious vision of "development" with utter disregard for people, ecology, environment and wildlife.

03

India's Infrastructure Projects Suffer Record High Cost Overruns Due to Implementation Delay

According to a flash report by the Infrastructure and Project Monitoring Division of Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, there has been significant cost overruns due to delays in project completion. While the original cost of implementation of the 1449 projects (costing 150 cr & above) was 20,69,658.30 crore, their anticipated completion cost now is 25,25,348.87 crore. An overall cost overruns of a whooping 25,25,348.87 crore, i.e., 22.02% of the original cost.

The report highlights that the delay was due to factors like land acquisition, forest & environmental clearances, and law and order issues. But conceiving of mega-projects with disregard for environmental and livelihood costs often contribute to such “delays”, thereby adding the burden of overruns on the public exchequer. So, a focus solely on ‘delays’ is unfortunately reflective of a narrow approach which assumes that such development will automatically lead to a trickle down of benefits to the people. In reality, more often than not, it only helps a few at the cost of social and environmental harm. The govt needs to adopt a safeguard centric approach rather than a ‘clearance centric’ one.

04

Social & environmental responsibility must go beyond just green financial instruments?

The RBI has introduced a new framework for "Green Deposits," which are deposits specifically designated for allocation towards environmentally-friendly financial activities, such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, climate mitigation, and adaptation. Depositors receive interest on these deposits, and the framework will go into effect on June 1, 2023. While the inclusion of an annual impact assessment and third-party verification and publishing of reports are positive steps, the framework has significant flaws. The most notable of these is that social and environmental responsibility should be a part of the general lending framework, particularly for development financing, rather than being limited to the "green" domain. Indian banks' funding of thermal power plants and hydro power projects, which have had irreversible social and ecological impacts, highlights the need for mandatory social and environmental safeguard mechanisms for all major lending projects. The framework is a weak response to the demand from civil society organizations and affected communities for environmental and social safeguards in lending frameworks

05

Weak consumer pulse, rising costs, while the super rich splurge

Even while the media went gaga about the long queue in front of the new Apple store in Mumbai, the fact remains that as per the 2023 PwC Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey, 63% Indians are tightening expenditure on non essential goods and services. The grotesque levels of inequality in display is bad omen for the economic health of a country in which private consumption contributes to 60% of it's growth. The increase in demand for smaller (5/10/20 rupee) packets of food items even in urban markets in recent times bears testimony to the crushing blow of inflation on the poor even as the super rich indulge in what some are calling "revenge" spending after COVID. Trade data for instance shows that Imports of alcohol increased 54% in the first nine months of FY23.