

## Rekha Gupta, Atishi Spar Over Delhi's 'Freebies' in Fiery Assembly Debate



The Delhi Assembly saw a fierce confrontation as Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Leader of Opposition Atishi clashed over the financing of the previous government's popular "freebie" schemes. The heated exchange occurred during a debate on a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and centered on accusations of fiscal mismanagement and political motives. The debate exposed deep divisions over how public funds were allocated and who ultimately bore the cost of the subsidies.

Standing with a copy of the CAG report, Chief Minister Gupta launched a scathing attack on the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, accusing it of deceiving the public by making it seem as though the free schemes were coming out of their own pockets. "They acted like they were giving everything for free, but it wasn't free. It was the people's money," she stated. Gupta claimed that of the ₹4,800 crore the Delhi government received from the Centre, a significant portion was funneled into subsidies, ₹3,250 crore for free electricity, ₹482 crore for free bus rides, and ₹463 crore for water, at the expense of crucial infrastructure.

Gupta argued that this spending led to a massive fiscal swing, from a surplus of ₹4,566 crore in the fiscal year 2022-23 to a deficit of ₹3,934 crore in 2023-24. She also accused the previous administration of deliberately stalling key development projects, such as new flyovers, and allowing 24 hospitals to remain incomplete while their costs ballooned by an estimated ₹2,700 crore. "What they called 'governance' was just vote-bank politics," Gupta asserted, also alleging that AAP had blocked several Central government schemes, such as PM SHRI Schools and Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, simply due to their association with the Prime Minister.

In a sharp counterpunch, Leader of Opposition Atishi defended the former government's record by citing figures from the same CAG report. She highlighted that Delhi's tax revenue had increased annually, from ₹40,019 crore in 2021-22 to ₹56,000 crore in 2023-24. Atishi accused the Central government of "stepmotherly treatment" toward Delhi, claiming that while the Centre collects over ₹2.25 lakh crore in taxes from the capital, it provided only ₹850 crore and nothing in the last two years. The drop in total revenue, she argued, was not due to mismanagement but to this lack of financial support. "They're using this report to paint AAP as corrupt, when the truth is, we kept Delhi running without any help from the Center," Atishi stated.