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+ States allowed enhanced 4% of GSDP borrowing

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

 The government has accepted the 15th Finance Commission's recommendation to maintain the States' share in the divisible pool of taxes to 4% for the five-year period starting 2021-22.

The Commission has given an "in-principle" approval for creating a separate non-lapsable fund for the purpose of defence and internal security modernisation.

The States have been granted enhanced borrowing room of up to 4% of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for 2021-22, with an additional 0.5% limit for those undertaking critical power sector reforms.

Fiscal federalism
Terming the government's acceptance of the 4% vertical share for the States recommended by the Commission as a sign of its commitment to fiscal federalism, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced revenue deficit grants for 17 States amounting to ₹1.18 lakh crore in 2021-22.

The Commission's report, submitted to the President in November, was tabled in Parliament on Monday with the government's action taken report.

The Commission has recommended additional revenue deficit grants of ₹2.94 lakh crore for 17 States over the next five years.

'Record' allocation of ₹1.1 lakh crore for Railways

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

 Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed a "record" allocation of ₹1.1 lakh crore for Indian Railways, with a capital expenditure outlay of ₹2.15 lakh crore for the next financial year.

With a 33% increase in total capital expenditure for 2021-22 over ₹1.61 lakh crore (revised estimates) for 2020-21, the Railways said funds would be utilised to boost the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission' and towards the completion of vital infrastructure projects, capacity-building passenger amenities and safety enhancement.

According to the Budget documents, during the year, the Railways were provided ₹79,398 crore as "special loan for COVID-19-related resource gap" and towards liquidating the adverse balance occurred in public account in 2019-2020.

The total capital expenditure outlay includes the "highest-ever" ₹1.07 lakh crore from gross budgetary support, ₹7,500 crore from internal resources and more than ₹1 lakh crore from external budgetary resources.

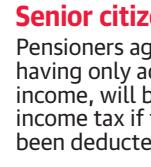
In the coming year, the government expects its revenue receipts from the Railways, including passenger, goods, other coaching and sundry other heads, to be about ₹2.17 lakh crore as against ₹1.46 lakh crore in 2020-21 (revised estimate).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



Manufacturing

To help achieve the goal of making India a \$5 trillion economy, the government has committed to provide ₹1.97 lakh crore over five years for the PLI scheme to boost domestic manufacturing



Senior citizens

Pensioners aged 75 and above, having only additional interest income, will be exempt from filing income tax if the tax amount has been deducted by the paying bank



Infrastructure

To meet infrastructure's long-term debt financing needs, the Budget has proposed establishing a Development Financial Institution. The goal is to have a lending portfolio of at least ₹5 lakh crore in three years

Recovery VEHICLE



Govt. bets on a real GDP growth of 10%-10.5% in the coming year and multiplier effect of an infrastructure push for jobs

 This Budget has a feel of reality and confidence of development, and showcases India's self-belief. It will also infuse new confidence in the world in these difficult times

NARENDRA MODI
PRIME MINISTER

 Forget putting cash in the hands of people, Modi government plans to hand over India's assets to his crony capitalist friends

RAHUL GANDHI
CONGRESS LEADER



ILLUSTRATION: SATEESH VELLINENI

crore for the COVID-19 vaccination programme, with a promise to provide more if the need arises. The overall Budget outlay for 'Health and Well-being', she said, is ₹2.23 lakh crore, marking a 137% rise over 2020-21.

Direct succour for some of the sectors and sections worst-affected by the pandemic may be short, but the government is betting on a real GDP growth of 10%-10.5% in the coming year after the estimated 7.7% decline in 2020-21. It hopes to ride on the multiplier effect of infrastructure spending, which the Minister said would also spur demand and job creation.

Invoking Rabindranath Tagore's aphorism 'Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark', Ms. Sitharaman compared the Budget to Team India's successful comeback in the Test series against Australia, and said it provided every opportunity for "our economy to raise and capture the pace that it needs for sustainable growth".

"I want to confidently state that our government is fully prepared to support and facilitate the economy's reset," she said, before unveiling a few big-ticket reform signals for global investors.

The foreign direct investment limit in the insurance sector will be raised to 74% from 49% and a "bare minimum" number of public sector enterprises will be retained even in strategic

sectors such as defence, under an ambitious new strategic disinvestment policy that will kick off with the sale of two public sector banks and a general insurance company in 2021-22.

A new development finance institution is being set up to fund infrastructure projects under the National Infrastructure Pipeline, while an asset reconstruction firm, or 'bad bank', will be tasked with taking over the bad loans of public sector banks to cope with rising NPAs. However, just ₹20,000 crore has been earmarked for recapitalisation of banks, lower than expectations.

Proposing a capital expenditure of ₹5.54 lakh crore in the year, 34.5% higher than 2020-21, the Minister targeted a fiscal deficit of 6.8% of the GDP, with gross market borrowings of about ₹12 lakh crore. Analysts said the Budget's fiscal arithmetic was perhaps the most credible in recent years, but achieving disinvestment and non-tax revenue targets will be critical to meet the deficit target.

"We plan to continue with our path of fiscal consolidation and intend to reach a fiscal deficit level below 4.5% of GDP by 2025-2026 with a fairly steady decline over the period. We hope to achieve the consolidation by first increasing the buoyancy of tax revenue through improved compliance and secondly, by increased receipts from monetisation of assets, including public sector enterprises and land," Ms. Sitharaman said.

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'Consumers will not be burdened by farm cess' **PAGE 4**
Govt. hopes to cut fiscal deficit to 4.5% by FY26 **PAGE 5**
LAC stand-off factored in for defence outlay **PAGE 6**

Interest on PF contributions over ₹2.5 lakh to be taxed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

 The Union Budget has proposed taxing the income from Provident Fund contributions of more than ₹2.5 lakh a year, usually made on a voluntary basis by employees.

A similar tax exemption offered to investors in unit-linked insurance plans (ULIPs) has also been capped to ensure that maturity benefits accruing from premium payments of more than ₹2.5 lakh a year will be subjected to capital gains tax.

For contributions up to ₹2.5 lakh a year to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), tax exemptions will remain, along with guaranteed returns, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

Exemption without threshold
"However, some people go to the extent of contributing ₹1 crore each month... what would be his salary? For him to get both tax concession and an assured income, is not comparable with an employee who earns ₹2 lakh and gets 8% return," she said.

"This exemption, without any threshold, benefits only those who can contribute a large amount to these funds as their share," the Budget documents explained.

In the case of ULIPs, death benefits will remain exempt from tax irrespective of the premium payment, said Rushabh Gandhi, deputy CEO at IndiaFirst Life Insurance Company.

Delhi govt. alleges 'stepmotherly treatment'

CM says Budget will benefit 'few big firms'; Sisodia rues 'least amount of grants'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Monday accused the Centre of "stepmotherly treatment" towards the city. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal alleged that the Union Budget would only benefit "a few big companies".

"This budget will provide benefit to a few big companies. This budget will work to increase the problems of common people with inflation," Mr. Kejriwal tweeted.

Deputy Chief Minister

Manish Sisodia, who also holds the finance portfolio, criticised the Budget saying it completely bypassed the education and health sectors.

Alleging that the Budget "spelt doom for the poor, middle class and farmers", Mr. Sisodia said the BJP-led Central government had again disappointed Delhi, which received only ₹325 crore while its residents paid ₹1.5 lakh crore as tax. The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir which, he said, was constitutionally on a similar

footing with the NCT of Delhi, had been provided a grant of ₹30,757 crore against ₹957 crore to Delhi.

'Left high and dry'
"This year, there was great anticipation around the Union Budget and the people of Delhi had high hopes from the Centre that justice would finally be done to them, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic," he said.

The municipal corporations of Delhi, Mr. Sisodia said, had again been left high

and dry with zero allocation against the demand of ₹12,000 crore while ₹2 lakh crore had been allocated to all other municipal bodies across India.

"Delhi continues to get stepmotherly treatment from the Government of India. The grant in lieu of share in Central taxes provided in the Union Budget 2021-22 has been kept unchanged for two decades at ₹325 crore. The total grants/loans/transfer to Delhi has been reduced from ₹1,116 crore to ₹957 crore," he said.

THE HINDU

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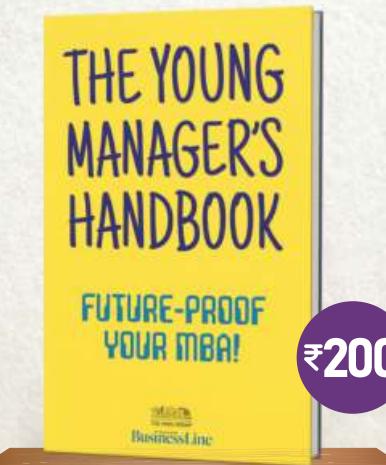


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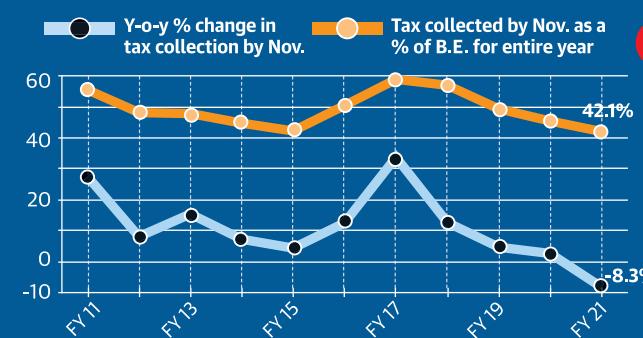


BUDGET SPEECH
Govt. aims to achieve fiscal consolidation by increasing buoyancy of tax revenue via improved compliance, and receipts from monetisation of assets

Low collection

By November 2020, only 42.1% of FY21's estimated tax revenue was collected, the lowest in at least 10 years. Tax collections contracted by 8.3% y-o-y in FY21 (up to November), the first contraction in at least 10 years

Source: Office of the Controller General of Accounts



The Budget has rightly envisaged a substantial jump in capital expenditure that has a strong multiplier impact on the economy
Dinesh Kumar Khara, Chairman, SBI

**Stake sale expected to fetch ₹1.75 lakh crore**

Four sectors to be strategic sectors

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The government on Monday budgeted ₹1.75 lakh crore from stake sale in public sector companies and financial institutions, including two PSU banks and one general insurance company, in the next fiscal year beginning April 1.

The amount is lower than the record ₹2.10 lakh crore which was budgeted to be raised from CPSE disinvestment in the current fiscal year.

Impact of pandemic
However, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the government's CPSE stake sale programme, and the target has been lowered to ₹32,000 crore in the Revised Estimates.

So far this fiscal year, the government has mopped up ₹19,499 crore from CPSE stake sale and share buyback.

For FY22, out of the total ₹1.75 lakh crore, ₹1 lakh crore is to come from selling government stake in public sector banks and financial institutions. About ₹75,000 crore would come as CPSE disinvestment receipts.

Unveiling the Disinvestment/Strategic Disinvestment Policy, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said four sectors – Atomic energy, Space and Defence; Transport and Telecommunications; Power, Petroleum, Coal and other

minerals; and Banking, Insurance and financial services – would be strategic sectors.

In strategic sectors, there will be bare minimum presence of the public sector enterprises.

The remaining CPSEs in the strategic sectors will be privatised or merged or subsidiary with other CPSEs or closed. In non-strategic sectors, CPSEs will be privatised, otherwise will be closed.

In her 2021-22 Budget speech, she said strategic disinvestment of BPCL, Air India, Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India, IDBI Bank, BEML, Pawan Hans, Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd, among others would be completed in 2021-22.

"Other than IDBI Bank, we propose to take up the privatisation of two public sector banks and one general insurance company in the year 2021-22. This would require legislative amendments and I propose to introduce the amendments in this session itself," she said.

Also the legislative amendments required for launching the IPO of LIC would be brought in in the ongoing session of Parliament. To fast-track the disinvestment policy, NITI Aayog would work out on the next list of central public sector companies that would be taken up for strategic disinvestment.

POCKET | RAVIKANTH



"I loved the focus on technology! Especially, the focus on electronic voting machines!"

FIFTEENTH FINANCE COMMISSION**Govt. agrees to maintain States' share in the divisible pool of taxes**

12.5% weightage for demographic performance of southern States in tax-transfer calculations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government has accepted the Fifteenth Finance Commission's recommendation to maintain the States' share in the divisible pool of taxes to 41% for the five-year period starting 2021-22, and given an 'in-principle' nod to the panel's suggestion to set up a separate non-lapsable fund for defence and internal security modernisation.

The Fourteenth Finance Commission had raised States' share to 42% of divisible revenues, but the Fifteenth Finance panel had reduced the share to 41% in its interim report for 2020-

21, citing the conversion of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh into Union Territories.

The Commission's report, which was submitted to the President in November with the government's action taken report on its suggestions, has recommended additional revenue deficit grants of ₹2.94 lakh crore for 17 States over the next five years. The government has accepted this recommendation as well as the panel's suggestion to enhance State's borrowing ceilings in 2021-22.

"I have provided, on the

Commission's recommendation, ₹1,18,452 crore as Revenue Deficit Grant to 17 States in 2021-2022, as against ₹74,340 crore to 14 States in 2020-2021," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget speech for 2021-22, terming the government's acceptance of the 41% vertical share for States recommended by the Commission as a sign of its commitment to fiscal federalism.

"In accordance with the views of the 15th Finance Commission, we are allowing a normal ceiling of net borrowing for the States at 4% of Gross State

Domestic Product (GSDP) for the year 2021-2022. A portion of this ceiling will be earmarked to be spent on incremental capital expenditure," she added.

An additional borrowing ceiling of 0.5% of GSDP will also be provided based on meeting specified reforms in the power sector. States are

expected to reach a fiscal deficit of 3% of GSDP by 2023-24, and maintain that level till 2025-26, as per the Commission's report. The Centre has accepted 'in-principle' this quantum of net borrowing ceilings for the States, as per the action taken report.

While the Commission has suggested the additional ceiling for power sector reforms be offered up to 2024-25, the government has said it will examine recommendations related to States' fiscal road map separately. Similarly, the Commission's recommendation to overhaul the Fiscal

The revenue deficit grants proposed for Andhra Pradesh and Kerala are far higher than the previous Commission's period

Responsibility and Budget Management law to ensure legislations are in sync with fiscal sustainability frameworks, will be examined separately, the government said.

The Commission, headed by N.K. Singh, has recommended creating a separate non-lapsable fund for modernisation of defence and internal security, a term of reference

the Centre had sought its views on. To bridge the gap between defence budget allocations and the projected budgetary requirements, the panel has mooted a fund of ₹2.38 lakh crore for the coming five-year period. It has recommended that ₹1.54 lakh crore of this fund be transferred from the Consolidated Fund of India, partially using receipts from the disinvestment of defence public sector enterprises and land monetisation.

The government has said the modalities and sources of funding will be examined in due course. The Commission has

sought to assuage the fears of southern States about losing some share in tax transfers due to the reliance on the 2011 Census data instead of the 1971 census, which could penalise States that did better on managing demographics. It has done so by giving a 12.5% weightage for demographic performance in its tax-transfer calculations.

"The revenue deficit grants proposed for Andhra Pradesh and Kerala are far higher than the previous Commission's period, while Tamil Nadu has also been earmarked for marginally higher grant on this front," an official said.

Tax slabs remain unchanged

Those aged 75 or above with only pension, interest income need not file returns

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

Without making any changes to the personal income tax slab, the Union Budget 2021-22 has provided relief to senior citizens in the filing of I-T returns; reduced the time limit for I-T proceedings; announced the setting-up of a Dispute Resolution Committee and faceless Income Tax Appellate Tribunal proceedings; provided relaxations for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs); offered an increase in the exemption limit from audit; and accounted for relief for dividend income.

To reduce the compliance burden on senior citizens aged 75 years or above, such taxpayers with only pension and interest income will be exempted from filing an I-T return – the paying bank will deduct the necessary tax on their income.

Easing complexity

In her Budget speech, Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman committed to reduce the complexity that NRIs face, on their return to India, on the issue of accrued incomes in their foreign retirement account. The Budget proposes to notify rules governing it.

The Minister, while presenting the Budget, also announced steps to attract foreign investment into infrastructure; relief for affordable housing and rental housing; tax incentives to the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC); relief to small charitable trusts; and steps for incentivising start-ups in the country.

The Budget has proposed to make dividend payments to REIT (Real Estate Investment Trusts) / InvIT (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) exempt from TDS (tax deducted at source).

For Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPI), the Budget has proposed the deduction of tax on dividend income at a lower treaty rate. As per the proposal, advanced tax liability on dividend income will arise only after the declaration or payment of dividend.

Affordable housing

Towards housing for all, the FM has proposed to extend the eligibility period for claim of additional deduction for interest of ₹1.5 lakh on loan taken for the purchase of an affordable house to March 31, 2022. For increasing the supply of afford-

dable houses, she also announced the extension of an eligibility period for claiming a tax holiday for affordable housing projects by one more year to March 31, 2022.

To promote supply of affordable rental housing for the migrant workers, the FM announced a new tax exemption for notified affordable rental housing projects.

"Amid the prolonged pandemic scenario, this extension was needed to support the latent housing demand in the country," said Shishir Bajaj, CMD, Knight Frank India. "Further, the relaxation on tax compliance for REIT investors will further improve the marketability of such products, considering we are likely to witness new REITs this year."

To reduce litigation in the system, a Dispute Resolution Committee for small taxpayers facing litigation is to be set up.

"Anyone with a taxable income up to ₹50 lakh and disputed income up to ₹10 lakh shall be eligible to approach the committee, which will be faceless to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability," the Minister said.

She also announced the

setting up of a National Faceless Income Tax Appellate Tribunal Centre.

Zero coupon bonds

The Budget has proposed to make notified infrastructure debt funds eligible to raise funds by issuing tax-efficient zero coupon bonds.

To promote the IFSC in GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City), the Budget has proposed more tax incentives, which include a tax holiday for capital gains from the incomes of aircraft leasing companies; tax exemption for aircraft lease rentals paid to foreign lessors; tax incentives for relocating foreign funds in the IFSC; and to allow tax exemption for the investment divisions of foreign banks located in IFSC.

Tushar Sachade, partner-deals tax, PwC India, said these measures would definitely give wings to create a sustainable ecosystem for operations in the aircraft leasing and financing sector.

For ease of filing of returns, the Budget has proposed that details of capital gains from listed securities, dividend income, and interest from banks and post offices, will also be pre-filled in returns.

FDI limit in insurance raised to 74%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Tax exemption on maturity proceeds of unit-linked insurance plans (ULIPs) offering components of both life insurance and investment, in debt and equity, will be available only if the annual premium paid is up to ₹2.5 lakh. The proposal will apply to ULIPs purchased on or after February 1.

However, the amount received on death, by nominee, will continue to remain exempt without any limit on the annual premium.

"The Budget endeavours to selectively bring in taxation parity between life insurance companies and mutual funds," said Rushabh Gandhi, deputy CEO, IndiaFirst Life Insurance.

Under existing provisions of the Income Tax Act, there is no cap on the amount of annual premium paid by any person during the term of the policy. Stating this, the Budget documents said

"High net worth individuals are claiming exemption under this clause by investing in ULIP with huge premium. Allowing such exemption in policy/policies with huge premium defeats the legisla-

tive intent... to provide benefit to small and genuine cases of life insurance."

Now, ULIPs for which the annual premium paid is over ₹2.5 lakh would be treated as equity-oriented funds. The rate of tax will depend on the period of holding.

Another announcement significance was the proposal to raise the foreign direct investment limit from 49% to 74% in insurance firms.

"Under the new structure, the majority of directors on the board and key management persons would be resident Indians, with at least 50% of directors being independent directors, and specified percentage of profits being retained as general reserve," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

Tax revenue may grow 16.7%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The government on Monday projected a 16.67% growth in gross tax revenue in the next fiscal beginning April 1, at over ₹22.17 lakh crore.

The revised estimates of gross tax revenue for the current fiscal has been pegged at ₹19 lakh crore, lower than the ₹24.23 lakh crore budgeted earlier.

Economic Affairs Secretary Tarun Bajaj said, "our revenue figure is understated not overstated. We have taken nominal GDP at 14.4% and revenue growth at 16.7%. So the buoyancy is only 1.16. We are hopeful we will get more than this".

In FY22, while the corporate tax collection is expected to grow 22.65% at ₹5.47 lakh crore, personal income tax is estimated to grow 22% to ₹5.61 lakh crore. Customs collection is projected to grow 21.43% to ₹1.36 lakh crore in the next fiscal.

INCOME AND TAX SCENARIOS

The graphic looks at various scenarios of taxable income for salaried individuals and calculates the total tax payable before the proposals in Budget 2021-22 and after applying them. This is based on E&Y calculations. To try out various scenarios, download Google Sheet at <http://bit.ly/taxscenario>

Particulars	Individual - taxable income below ₹10 lacs		Individual - taxable income (₹10 to 15 lakhs)		Individual - taxable income (₹15 to 50 lakhs)	
	Pre Budget	Post Budget	Pre Budget	Post Budget	Pre Budget	Post Budget
Income from salary						
Basic salary	4,50,000	4,50,000	8,50,000	850,000	11,50,000	11,50,000
HRA	1,80,000	1,80,000	1,50,000	1,50,000	5,00,000	5,00,000
LTA	75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000	1,50,000	1,50,000
Special allowance						
NPS contrib. by employer	45,000	45,000	85,000	85,000	1,15,000	1,15,000
Total income	8,30,000	8,30,0				



BUDGET SPEECH

To instill confidence among corporate bond market participants and to enhance secondary market liquidity, a permanent institutional framework to be set up



Markets on a high

The BSE Sensex surged on Monday with almost all sectors registering an increase. The table lists the change in index value across select sectors on budget day compared to the previous day's closing value

Source: BSE

Energy	+2.57%	▲
Healthcare	+0.26%	▲
Fast moving consumer goods	+1.81%	▲
Industrials	+4.88%	▲
IT	+1.19%	▲
Auto	+4.21%	▲
Banks	+8.33%	▲
Telecom	+4.07%	▲
Finance	+7.49%	▲
Realty	+6.65%	▲
Oil and gas	+2.2%	▲
Capital goods	+5.48%	▲
Power	+2.95%	▲

Glad that the scrappage policy has been acknowledged. When the policy comes out, it should have full incentive for scrapping
Dr. Pawan Goenka,
M&M



VIEWPOINT

NIRMAL JAIN,
Founder & Chairman, IIFL

A Budget to boost economic recovery

We should thank our Finance Minister and congratulate every Indian for this excellent Budget, as it is good for everyone and a step in the right direction. The best part of the budget is that there is no taxation announcement such as COVID-tax, long-term capital gains tax, or wealth tax as was expected by the market.

On the Finance Minister's part, this was a masterstroke as she ensured that the sentiment is not affected as it is essential to raise money for disinvestment as well as for privatisation. There were important announcements on the infrastructure front such as the establishment of a Development Finance Institution (DFI) to boost long-term financing for the country's infrastructure sector, allow Foreign Portfolio Investors to debt finance REITs and InvITs after necessary amendments to the law.

The budget has allocated ₹20,000 crore for the DFI, with an ambition for the lender to have a portfolio of ₹5 lakh crore in three years. Another positive is the 34.5% increase in the capital expenditure target in this year's Budget to ₹5.54 lakh crore for financial year 2021-22.

The Finance Minister also announced ₹2 lakh crore for States and autonomous bodies. This is very good because in the last few years we had seen that the government's capital expenditure declined to 16% from 18% earlier. This is important as it will boost investment, create jobs and aid economic recovery. The ₹1.75 lakh crore divestment target, which includes divestment of two PSBs and one general insurer, is achievable. FDI in insurance will be increased to 74%. These are decisive moves and will go a long way in pushing economic growth to a higher trajectory.

Centre to amalgamate market laws into single code

'Move to improve ease of doing business, remove friction between stakeholders'

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

The Centre on Monday announced setting up of a Single Security Market Code by consolidating the provisions of SEBI Act, 1992, Depositories Act, 1996, Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956 and Government Securities Act, 2007.

This was announced by Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the Union Budget 2021-22 in Parliament.

According to analysts, this move will improve ease of doing business in the country's financial markets, cut down compliances, reduce cost and do away with friction between various stakeholders.

In order to instil confidence among participants in the corporate bond market during times of stress and to generally enhance secondary market liquidity, the Budget has proposed to create a permanent institutional framework.

The proposed body would purchase investment grade debt securities both in stressed and normal times and help in the development



The move will also help to reduce the volatility in secondary market yields of relatively lower rated bonds in the AA and A category

SUMAN CHOWDHURY,
CHIEF ANALYTICAL OFFICER,
ACUITE RATINGS & RESEARCH

of the bond market, the Finance Minister said.

"While further details on the modus operandi for such a framework is awaited, it will clearly help to deepen the corporate bond market

which continues to face liquidity challenges," Suman Chowdhury, chief analytical officer, AcuTe Ratings & Research said.

"In our opinion, this will be fairly positive for debt mutual funds particularly credit funds which had witnessed significant outflows last year due to poor liquidity in certain corporate papers," he added.

"This will also help to reduce the volatility in secondary market yields of relatively lower rated bonds in the AA and A category," Mr.

Chowdhury said.

The government also announced establishing a system of regulated gold exchanges in the country.

For this purpose, SEBI will be notified as the regulator and the Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority will be strengthened to set up a commodity market ecosystem with arrangements including vaulting, assaying and logistics in addition to warehousing.

To provide protection to investors, the Finance Minister has proposed to introduce an investor charter as a right of all financial investors across all financial products.

"A significant change, the impact of which would be felt across industries, is the

proposed introduction of the securities market code. Also an important proposal, on expected lines, has been the introduction of certain dispute resolution mechanisms - reduction of the limitation period to 3 years should help in bringing certainty to taxpayers," said Rajeev Dimri, partner and head of Tax, KPMG India.



Sensex skyrockets 2,315 points on Budget cheer

Banking, finance stocks lead the pack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

day in almost 10 months. On similar lines, the broader NSE Nifty soared 646.60 points, or 4.74%, to close at 14,281.20.

Across-the-board buying
The benchmarks were propelled by across-the-board buying, with banking and finance stocks leading the charge.

IndusInd Bank topped the Sensex gainers' chart with a jump of 14.75%, followed by ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finserv, SBI, L&T and HDFC. Only three index components closed in the red - Dr. Reddy's, Tech Mahindra and HUL - shedding up to 3.70%.



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21 Jan | 5 PM

लाइव / ऑनलाइन एवं ऑफलाइन कक्षाएँ

- प्रारंभिक, मुख्य परीक्षा और निबंध के लिए महत्वपूर्ण सभी टॉपिक का विस्तृत कवरेज
- एनीमेशन, पॉवर प्लाइट, वीडियो जैसी तकनीकी सुविधाओं का प्रयोग
- मौलिक अवधारणाओं की समझ के विकास एवं विश्लेषणात्मक क्षमता निर्माण पर विशेष ध्यान
- अंतर - विषयक समझ विकसित करने का प्रयास
- निबंध लेखन - ऐली, PT 365, Mains 365 कक्षाएँ
- कॉम्प्रैहॉसिव स्टडी मटेरियल
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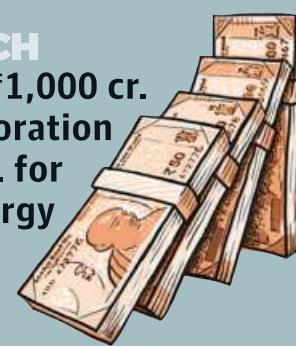
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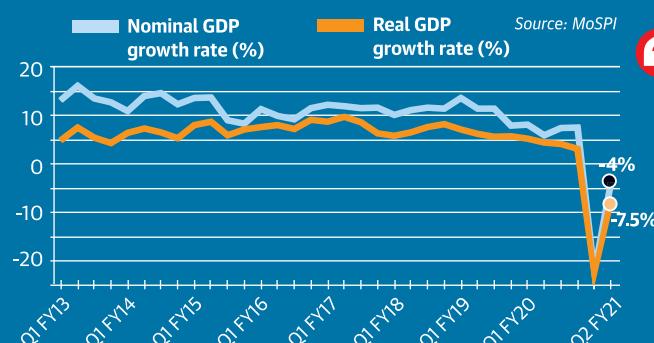


BUDGET SPEECH
Additional capital of ₹1,000 cr. for Solar Energy Corporation of India and ₹1,500 cr. for Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency has been planned



Technical recession

In the July-September (Q2FY21) quarter, India's real GDP contracted for the second time since 1996, the year when the country started recording such data. After contracting by 23.9% year-on-year in Q1FY21, the economy shrank at a slower pace (7.5%) in Q2FY21



A continued thrust on digital shows the long-term vision of the govt. to move towards an inclusive digital economy

Sunil Bharti Mittal,
Founder & Chairman,
Bharti Enterprises



VIEWPOINT

ASHOK P. HINDUJA
Chairman, Hindujas Group of Companies (India)



Unmatched times, extraordinary Budget

It is an unprecedented time; an extraordinary Budget was expected to put the economy back on track quickly with health and livelihood of people as the priority. The Finance Minister deserves to be complimented on presenting the best of what can be done under the circumstances. At the same time, situations as this serve as an opportunity for high-impact reforms, and we hope to see more of it coming during the year.

The Finance Minister has presented a holistic, integrated and interconnected approach to health, livelihood and economic development without losing sight of making India a \$5-trillion economy.

The experience of handling COVID-19 successfully has given the Modi government high confidence to do all the right things to help the economy recover, even by keeping the deficit levels high for a short window of time. The COVID-19 situation has taught us and the rest of the world to be self-reliant in essential technologies and production capacities. So, building an *Atmanirbhar Bharat* is a logical next step.

India has the potential to be the factory for the world. Manufacturing and the logistics infrastructure like warehousing, roads, rail network and the ports need to move to global standards of scale and efficiency. Manufacturing and infrastructure can bring millions of jobs to our people.

The Budget has addressed several enablers in this direction, like, specialised manufacturing parks, infrastructure as in highways, railways and ports, reforms in the power sector and affordable housing on rent for migrant workers.

Railways could move large amount of goods and people in a very cost-effective and environmentally-friendly manner. A relook at railways as the backbone of the country is certainly going to be beneficial.

Boost for auto
Voluntary vehicle scrappage policy is a well-deserved boost for the auto industry. This has been a long-pending demand from the environmentalists.

The need to improve urban infrastructure is recognised with allocations to water supply, cleanliness initiatives and metro rails. Enhancement in public bus transportation on a PPP model will go a long way in reducing pollution in cities and is a boost to bus manufacturers.

The proposal for the new Development Finance Institution is a welcome and we hope to see it operate at high standards and be able to attract global investors with ease.

Opening the insurance sector to 74% along with various other planned reforms as the single securities markets code, Gift City fintech hub, framework for corporate bond market, investor charter, company matters are a strong signal to the global investor community that we are moving ahead with reforms despite tough times.

The bold BFSI reforms announced for creating an ARC to have a pathway for transferring NPAs from PSB balance sheets will spur the lending sector. So, we are on the right track. Need to push the pedal harder and faster as much as we can.

POCKET | RAVIKANTH



'Consumers will not be burdened by farm cess'

Finance Minister reiterates the levy will ensure enhanced remuneration for the farmers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Pointing at an immediate need to improve agricultural infrastructure in the country, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday announced an Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC) on select items such as petrol, diesel, apples and alcohol. However, she stressed that this will not lead to an additional burden on the consumers.

During the post-Budget interaction with the media, the FM said basic Customs Duty rates have been reduced on most items where AIDC is being imposed, so as to not put a burden on the end con-

sumer. She added that this would ensure enhanced remuneration for the farmers.

"It is just a restructuring we've done. We reduced the Customs Duty and we levied a disproportionate amount of cess. So, it was not the exact amount of reduction in Customs Duty that we levied in the form of cess. For example, 10% was brought down for Customs, we have only added 5.6% [in AIDC], so the price for the end consumer has been reduced or in some cases has remained the same," she said.

She added that this has been done only to make sure that there is a dedicated amount coming out to the

Budget to improve agricultural infrastructure.

Additionally, AIDC of ₹2.5 per litre has been levied on petrol and ₹4 per litre on diesel. However, the Basic Excise duty and Special Additional Excise Duty rates on them have been reduced so that there is no additional cost to the consumer. Siraj Hussain, former Agriculture Secretary, noted the Customs Duty was shared with the States, while the cess would go entirely to the Centre. It would have an impact on sharing of resources between the Centre and the States, and more clarity would emerge once the fine print of the Budget docu-

ments was fully understood.

Meanwhile, asked about the farmers' protest, the Finance Minister said she believed that dialogue was the way forward.

"We understand that farmers are sitting at the borders... If they have any questions, the Agriculture Minister has never shied from sitting with them for a discussion... how many ever rounds it may take, and has said that we are ready for a clause-by-clause discussion with farmers."

To a query on how confident the government is about containing the fiscal

deficit at 6.8% as per BE 2021-22, Tarun Bajaj, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, said, "If you notice, our revenue figures for this time, if anything, are understated and not overstated."

"We have taken on nominal GDP at 14.4% and the revenue at 16.7%. So, the buoyancy is only 1.16%. We are hopeful we will be able to get more than this and achieve more in the other areas of non-tax revenue under disinvestment."

"We will definitely be within 6.8% and could be lower also," he said.

Ms. Sitharaman said, "our

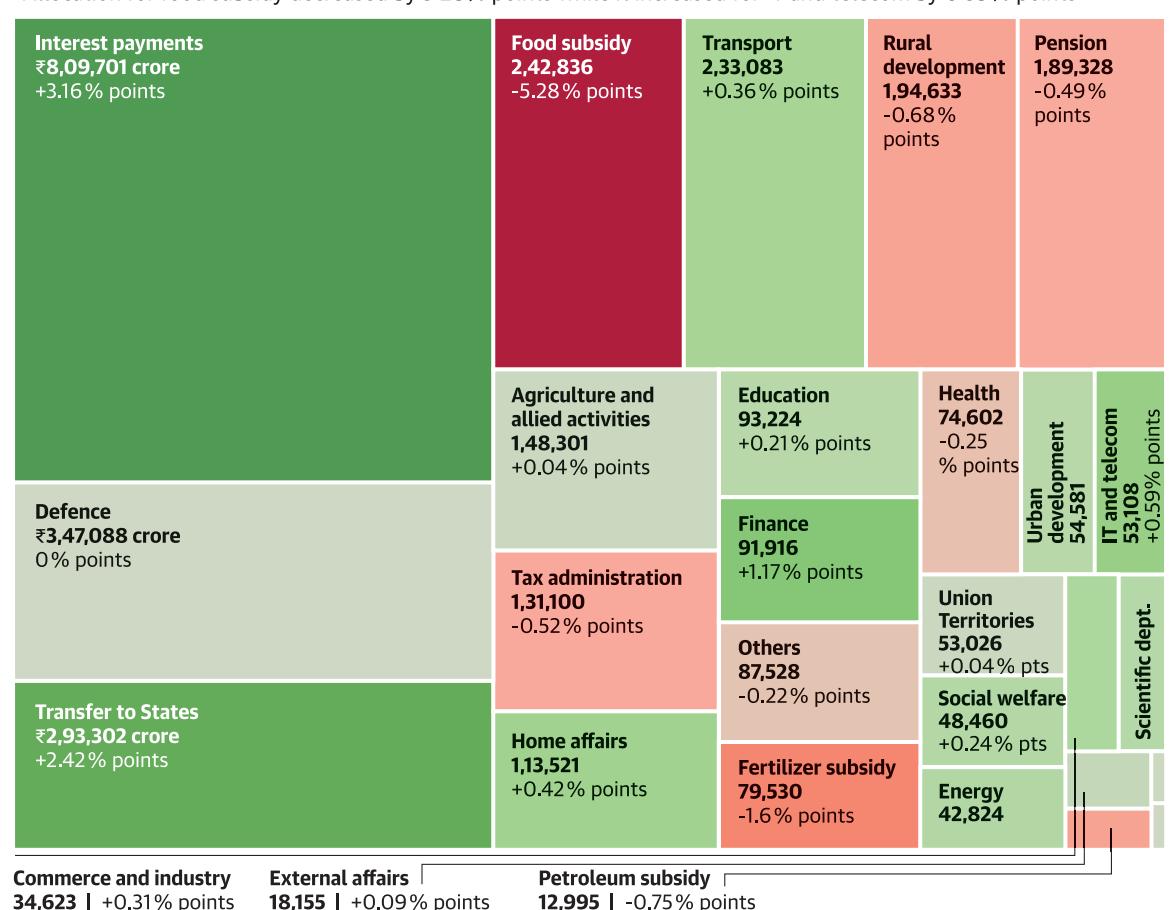
fiscal deficit, which started at 3.5% during February, has gone to 9.5% of the GDP. So, we have spent, spent and spent. Otherwise, fiscal deficit would not have reached this number. We've also given a clear glide path for deficit management and bringing it down."

She added that there were two important features to the Budget. "It is that we chose to spend big on infrastructure, which spans roads, bridges, ports, power generation, and so on and, to also attend to the needs of the health sector."

"Capacity building in health has taken a very big place in the Budget."

BUDGET BREAKDOWN

The chart depicts the budgeted expenditure (₹ crore) in FY22 and the change from FY21. For instance, the health sector was allocated ₹74,602 crore in FY22, while its share in total expenditure fell by 0.25% points from FY21. Allocation for food subsidy decreased by 5.28% points while it increased for IT and telecom by 0.59% points



Telecom revenue estimate cut steeply

For 2020-21, receipts pegged at ₹33,737 cr. against the projected ₹1.33 lakh cr.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The government has lowered revenue estimates from the telecom sector while pegging expected receipts at ₹53,986 crore in the next financial year, according to the Budget documents presented in Parliament.

The Finance Ministry, in the Budget for 2020-21, had projected a revenue of ₹1.33

lakh crore from the telecom sector, which was slashed steeply to ₹33,737 crore in the revised estimates presented on Monday.

"Receipts under Other Communication Services mainly relate to the licence fees from telecom operators and receipts on account of spectrum usage charges. De-

partment of Telecom collects recurring licence fees from various telecom service providers licensed by it," the document said.

Licence fee
The licence fee is levied at 8% of the adjusted gross revenue (AGR) – which is considered as income from sale of telecom services.

The lowering of revenue estimate comes at a time when the government has set the ball rolling for the spectrum auction in which radiowaves valued at ₹3.92 lakh crore will be put on the block.

The auction in seven spectrum bands for mobile services is scheduled to start from March 1.

SHIPPING

Government to privatise seven major ports, says Sitharaman

Announces ₹1,624-cr. subsidy scheme for shipping companies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Seven major ports, worth ₹2,000 crore, will see their operations privatised in the year 2021-22, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said while presenting the Union Budget 2021-22.

The Finance Minister also announced a subsidy scheme of ₹1,624 crore for a period of five years for Indian shipping companies to encourage more merchant ships with Indian flags. "This initiative will enable greater training and

employment opportunities for Indian seafarers," Ms. Sitharaman added.

The Budget also envisages boosting the recycling of ships at Alang in Gujarat. The Minister said the capacity of recycling shipyards would be doubled from 4.5 million light displacement tonne by 2024.

India has enacted Recycling of Ships Act, 2019 and acceded to the Hong Kong International Convention (HKS). She said post-enactment

of the law, about 90 ship recycling yards at Alang had already achieved HKS-compliant certificates.

India has 12 major ports under the control of the Centre. These major ports handle about 60% of its total cargo traffic. Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had recently said India aspired to grab at least 50% of the global ship-recycling business. The country's share in the ship recycling business is around 30% at present.

(With PTI inputs)

the case of personal vehicles (PV), and after 15 years in the case of commercial vehicles (CV).

'Good intent'
Kenichi Ayukawa, president, Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), "the vehicle scrappage scheme has a good intent and the auto industry would be keen to work with the government on suggestions for maximising benefits to environment and society."

Vehicles would undergo fitness tests after 20 years in automated fitness centres in

we take 1990 as the base year, there are approximately 37 lakh CVs and 52 lakh PVs eligible for voluntary scrappage. "As an estimate, 10% of CVs and 5% of PVs may still be plying on the road."

Vipin Sondhi, MD & CEO, Ashok Leyland Ltd., said the policy is good for the environment and for setting in motion a circular economy.

"However, we await further details of the policy as the industry had requested an incentive-based scrappage policy for it to be effective, Mr. Sondhi said.

Auto sector welcomes vehicle scrappage policy

Plan good for the environment, say industry bodies

N. ANAND
CHENNAI

Leading players in the automotive sector have welcomed the Centre's announcement on the voluntary vehicle scrappage policy to phase out old and unfit vehicles.

While tabling the Union Budget for 2021-22, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the policy would help in encouraging fuel-efficient, environment-friendly vehicles, thereby reducing vehicular pollution and the oil import bill.

Vehicles would undergo fitness tests after 20 years in automated fitness centres in



Vipin Sondhi, MD & CEO, Ashok Leyland Ltd., said the policy is good for the environment and for setting in motion a circular economy.

"However, we await further details of the policy as the industry had requested an incentive-based scrappage policy for it to be effective, Mr. Sondhi said.

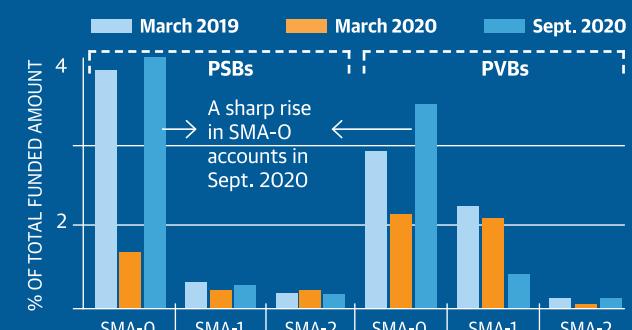


BUDGET SPEECH
A revamped reforms-based result-linked power distribution sector scheme will be launched with an outlay of ₹3,05,984 cr. over five years



Hidden stress

A sharp rise in Special Mention Accounts-O (loans overdue < 30 days) in Sept. 2020 points to the initial signs of stress after the lifting of the COVID-19-related loan moratorium on August 31. This shows that one month after the end of the moratorium, a higher share of customers are starting to default on payments



We strongly support the government's clean air focus with our EV plans that will accelerate the world's transition to sustainable mobility
Bhavish Aggarwal,
co-founder and CEO, Ola

VIEWPOINT

KUMAR MANGALAM BIRLA,
Chairman, Aditya Birla Group

A vision statement for the country

Over the years, we have seen bold budgets, pragmatic budgets, reformist budgets and workmanlike budgets. But Budget 2021 goes far beyond. This is the vision statement of a country on the cusp of real economic change. The Budget is built around the government's credo of minimum government and maximum governance. It lays out an action plan to deliver on the Prime Minister's clarion call for an 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

The Budget talks to the economic and business realities of the post-COVID world and gives primacy to reviving growth. The expansionary fiscal stance that enabled this growth push does not come as a surprise. The fiscal deficit target of 6.8% for FY22 is reasonable and acknowledges the changed global economic landscape.

The medium-term glide path of bringing down the fiscal deficit to 4.5% of the GDP by FY26 is realistic and creates the fiscal space for more growth-enhancing measures. More importantly, the government has not been reckless in using this fiscal space. It is commendable that the

Budget has targeted to reduce revenue expenditure in FY22 vis-à-vis the current year, even while boosting the capex significantly. This marks an improved quality of government expenditure.

The increased capital expenditure is expected to be spread across key pillars of infrastructure. The Budget has aptly focused on strengthening the

roadways, railways, including metro rail, port development, micro irrigation and much-needed distribution infrastructure for gas connectivity.

There seems to be a well-thought-out package to galvanise the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) – by incentivising States to provide more capex, creating a mechanism for monetising brownfield infrastructure assets, instituting a Development Financial Institution, allowing tax-free infrastructure bonds and removing the impediments for sovereign wealth funds' investment in infrastructure projects.

Beyond the admirable and much-needed infrastructure push, the Budget also reflects the government's conviction on privatisation. The Finance Minister called it the asset monetisation programme which has been ongoing, and will now be accelerated.

That means that several public sector entities will be opened up for this investment or privatisation, including two prominent public sector banks as well as a general insurance company owned by the government. The government intends to get out of all non-strategic sectors, leaving them to the creative energy and innovation of the private sector.

Banking & power reforms

There are two announcements in this Budget that are particularly important for addressing legacy issues for the economy. The setting up of an asset reconstruction company and asset management company to take over stressed assets of the banking sector is another attempt at cleaning up the NPA issue.

One hopes that this new initiative will be comprehensive and effective enough to dilute the overhang of NPAs on credit growth.

On the other issue of outstanding losses of the power distribution sector, the Budget has announced a new scheme with a substantial outlay of over ₹3 lakh crores over the next five years. The scheme will promote reforms in the power distribution sector. Both these announcements reflect a recognition that these legacy issues have weighed upon economic growth.

Inclusive growth

As in the previous years, the social sector and vulnerable sections of the economy received a lot of attention in the Budget, which demonstrates the government's intent to balance growth with inclusivity. In the aftermath of the pandemic, new schemes have been announced in the healthcare sector and also for migrant workers. Social security benefits are being extended to gig economy workers.

With the new initiatives for capacity building in the healthcare sector, the provision for health and well-being in the budget has been increased by 137%, which is remarkable. In many ways, health and education can be said to be soft infrastructure which builds human capital, which is what leads to sustainable growth of the future knowledge economy.

All in all, this is a far-sighted, ambitious and bold Budget with a realistic fiscal glide path that lays the foundation for long-term growth. India is poised for a take-off.

Govt. hopes to cut fiscal deficit to 4.5% by FY26

FY21 deficit is seen at 9.5%; road map includes asset monetisation and divestment of public sector enterprises

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has pegged the fiscal deficit for 2021-22 at 6.8% of the GDP and aims to bring it back below the 4.5% mark by 2025-26.

The original fiscal deficit target for 2020-21 was 3.5%. However, in reality, the deficit has shot up to a high of 9.5% of the GDP due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – low revenue flows due to the lockdown and negative economic growth clubbed with high government spending to provide relief to vulnerable sections of society, as well as a stimulus package to revive demand.

The government also took the opportunity to bring the food subsidy bill back on the

budget books, which includes a one-time payment of more than ₹2 lakh crore to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to deal with its accumulated loan from the National Small Savings Fund.

The Centre proposes to make amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003, to reflect these changes to the fiscal consolidation road map, Ms. Sitharaman said. She added that the Centre hopes to return to the path of fiscal consolidation by higher tax buoyancy through improved compliance on the one hand, and increased monetisation of its assets, including public sector enterprises and land, on the other. She also proposed to augment the Contingency

Fund of India from ₹500

crore to ₹30,000 crore.

More market borrowings

This year's fiscal deficit has been funded through government borrowings, multilateral borrowings, small saving funds and short-term borrowings. "We would need another ₹80,000 crore, for which we would be approaching the markets in these two months," the Minister said in the Lok Sabha.

In 2021-22, the government proposes to spend a total of ₹34.83 lakh crore, higher than the budget estimate of ₹30.42 lakh crore in the previous year, as well as the actual expenditure of ₹34.5 lakh crore. The coming year's spending plan includes ₹5.54 lakh crore as

capital expenditure, an increase of 34.5% over the current year's budget estimates. The gross borrowing from the market for the next year would be around ₹12 lakh crore, which would account for 1% of the 9.5% deficit.

Although this is a one-time expenditure, going forward, with the NSSF just taking the opportunity to clean that up," he said, adding that the accumulated loan from the NSSF to FCI, which is over ₹2 lakh crore

being discontinued, the budget will take on the burden of payments to the FCI.

"The government has indicated it is willing to borrow significantly more than FRBM targets currently allow. There are no additional taxes or funding mechanisms,

loan being discontinued, the budget will take on the burden of payments to the FCI.

"The government expects this will be financed through normal growth of the GDP. The only other revenues expected are from the monetisation of assets and disinvestment," said D.K. Srivastava, chief policy adviser at EY India and a member of the Advisory Council to the 15th Finance Commission. "If the economy normalises, this path should be feasible," he added.



OUTSIDE SUPPORT

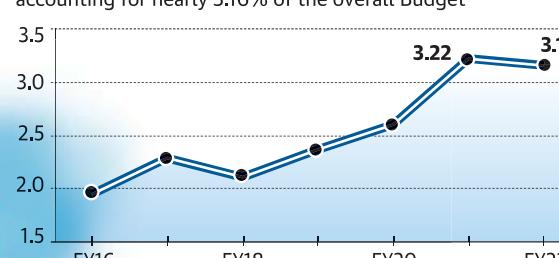
The internal revenue generated by the Railways has consistently fallen in the recent years, increasing its dependence on extra-budgetary resources

₹96.15
the amount
the Railways is
estimated to
spend to earn
₹100 in FY22

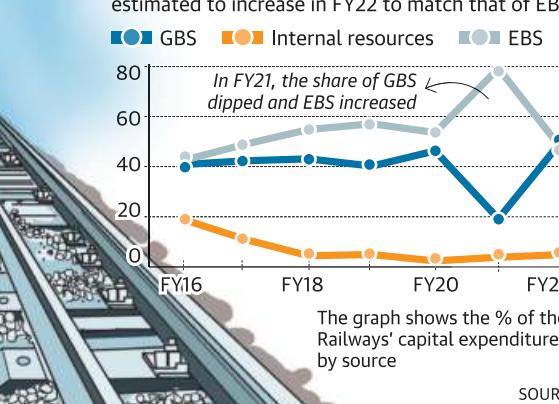
300 km
new lines to be
constructed in FY22

HOLDING STEADY

The Railways' share in overall budget has steadily increased since FY18. However, in FY22 it suffered a marginal decline, accounting for nearly 3.16% of the overall Budget



SEEKING ASSISTANCE | Having consistently failed to meet the expected internal revenue, the Railways' reliance on extra-budgetary resources (EBS) such as LIC funds and market borrowings significantly increased in the last five years. The outlay from Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) is estimated to increase in FY22 to match that of EBS



The graph shows the % of the Railways' capital expenditure by source

SOURCE: BUDGET DOCUMENTS

DATA: VIGNESH RADHAKRISHNAN, SUMANT SEN, NAresh SINGARAVELU
GRAPHICS & DESIGN: KANNAN SUNDAR, B. SRINIVASAN, JOSEPH SATHEESH, A. GANESAN, S.T. KARTHIK, L. BALAMURUGAN, B. KARTHIKEYAN
ILLUSTRATIONS: SATHEESH VELLINEZHI, J.A. PREM KUMAR, R. RAJESH

Jump in allocation for MSME sector

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
COIMBATORE

The Union Budget has doubled the allocation to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to ₹15,700 crore for the next financial year from ₹7,572 crore in 2020-21.

A majority of the allocation for 2021-22 is for the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme. The Centre had announced the scheme to revive MSMEs when the lockdown restrictions were relaxed and several MSMEs benefited from it, say industry sources.

According to the Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises, a reduction in customs duties on steel and ferrous and non-ferrous scrap will help bring down the raw material prices.

The Coimbatore District Small Industries Association said the plan to strengthen the NCLT framework, implement e-courts system and introduce alternate methods of debt resolution and special framework for MSMEs were significant.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways received ₹1,18,101 crore in the Union Budget, of which ₹1,08,230 crore is for capital expenditure. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said this was the highest-ever outlay for the sector.

The Finance Minister informed Parliament that under the Bharatmala Project, more than 13,000 km of roads had been awarded, and that by March next year, another 8,500 km would be awarded for construction.

The government also announced National Highway projects for the poll-bound States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and Assam.

Ms. Sitharaman said Tamil Nadu would get National Highway works totalling 3,500 km at ₹1.03 lakh crore.

These would include the Madurai-Kollam and Chittoor-Thatchur corridors, where construction would begin next year.

Kerala will get National Highway works of 1,100 km at an outlay of ₹6,500 crore, including the Mumbai-Kanyakumari corridor.



Under the Bharatmala project, over 21,000 km of roads will be laid. ■ R. DEEPAK

at an outlay of ₹6,500 crore, including the Mumbai-Kanyakumari corridor.

National Highway projects totalling 675 km will be built in West Bengal at a cost of ₹25,000 crore, including upgrading the existing road from Kolkata to Siliguri.

Assam currently has National Highway works of ₹19,000 crore under way and will see an investment of additional ₹34,000 crore in the coming three years for building 1,300 km of roads.

DEKHO INDIA

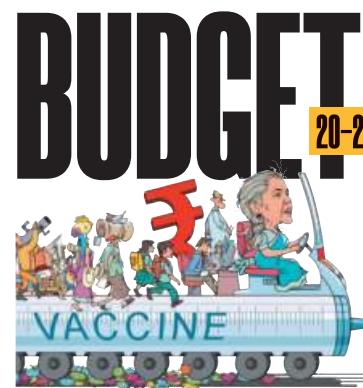
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**BUDGET SPEECH**

A Development Financial Institution with capital of ₹20,000 cr. will be set up. It will have a lending portfolio of at least ₹5 lakh cr. in three years

**Sectoral decline**

Gross value added (GVA) fell across many sectors in Q2FY21, with the services sector declining the most. Public administration and defence, mostly fuelled by government expenditure, which drove India's GDP growth in the past, also fell significantly. However, the manufacturing sector showed marginal improvement

Source: MoSPI

Year	AGRICULTURE	MINING	MANUFACTURING	UTILITIES	CONSTRUCTION	SERVICES	FINANCIAL & REAL ESTATE	PUBLIC ADMIN & DEFENCE
FY17 Q2	6.2	6.3	7.6	7.8	8.3	7.7	11.2	6.6
FY18 Q2	6	11.2	7.8	11.8	1.5	8.1	2.9	8.5
FY19 Q2	2.5	-7	5.6	9.9	5.2	7.8	6.5	8.9
FY20 Q2	3.5	-1.1	-0.6	3.9	2.6	4.1	6	10.9
FY21 Q2	3.4	-9.1	0.6	4.4	-8.6	-15.6	-8.1	-12.2

The emphasis on training our youth for the digitally driven world and steps to strengthen our human capital are game-changers

Keshav Murugesu,
Group CEO, WNS, and
past chairman,
NASSCOM

**VIEWPOINT**

RENU SUD KARNAD,
MD, HDFC Ltd.

An expansionist and bold Budget

Public anticipation towards Union Budget 2021-22 has been extraordinarily high this year especially when the Indian economy and the world is grappling with COVID-19 pandemic.

Hon'ble Finance Minister Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman presented the first ever paperless Budget, which focused on nation building, job creation, demand creation and as promised a budget 'like never before'.

The Union Budget proposals rest on six pillars viz., health and well-being, physical and financial capital and infrastructure, inclusive development for an aspirational India, reinvigorating human capital, innovation and R&D, minimum government and maximum governance.

The easy way out for the Finance Minister would have been to introduce a COVID-related cess, which was widely expected, but she has chosen the route of asset monetisation and to reinvest the proceeds in infrastructure, thus leading to a virtuous cycle, which is very similar to people expecting a draw at Gabba but it getting converted into a victory. We must ensure the execution will also happen the way Pant and team demonstrated.

As the Prime Minister rightly said, it is a budget of "Vikas Ka Vishwas". The Budget provides the confidence to all of us to work towards a better India.

Continuing the focus on the government's vision of 'Housing For All', the Finance Minister announced tax exemption, i.e. additional deduction of interest amounting to ₹1.5 lakh for loans taken to purchase an affordable house for one additional year, i.e., till March 2022.

With an aim to addressing the need of affordable housing for migrant workers, the Finance Minister announced tax exemption for notified Affordable Rental Housing Projects.

This push for the real estate sector, especially affordable housing, will boost the recent momentum in housing demand and help in creating jobs. Housing is one of the largest employment generators in the economy with linkages to nearly 300 industries – both in terms of direct jobs and the jobs it creates in ancillary industries such as cement, steel, power, etc.

The proposal to divest two PSU banks and recapitalisation scheme of ₹20,000 crore will give a strong boost to PSU banks to improve credit growth.

The Finance Minister announced that a Bill would be introduced for the setting up of a new development finance institution, called the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development, with a capital base of ₹20,000 crore and proposed lending target of ₹5 lakh crore within three years. This will act as an enabler for infrastructure financing for critical infrastructure projects.

The Finance Minister announced a bold and new age Budget. With a number of new ideas suggested, execution of these ideas is key. With the real GDP growth pegged at 11% in FY22 as per Economic Survey 2020, GST collection touching a record high of ₹1.19 trillion in January 2021, and the distribution of vaccines happening at a decent pace, I expect the Indian economy to back on track sooner than later.

Start-ups to get tax holiday till March 2022

Budget seeks to incentivise one-person companies by removing curbs on paid-up capital, turnover

MINI TEJASWI
BENGALURU

The Union Budget proposes to extend tax holiday for start-ups until March-end next year. It also proposes to extend the capital gains exemption for investment in start-ups by another year to encourage funding in the sector.

"I propose to extend the eligibility for claiming tax holiday for start-ups by one more year. Further, to incentivise funding of the start-ups, the Budget proposes to extend the capital gains exemption for investment in start-ups by one more year," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said while presenting the Union Budget on Monday.



Cash flow: Investors are being encouraged to look at the start-up sector to push innovation. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

The Budget also proposes to incentivise one-person companies (OPCs) by allowing them to grow without any restrictions on paid-up capital and turnover. OPCs will also be allowed to change the

director and head, policy advocacy at Nasscom, said most of these start-up announcements were only incremental and not inclusive in nature.

Limited scope

"For example, the proposed one-year tax holiday will be available only to some 400 start-ups in the country, that are recognised as well as certified by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT). However, we have over 40,000 start-ups which are recognised but not certified and therefore won't benefit from this tax relief," he said.

The apex body had, in fact, recommended to the Finance Ministry to include

'type' of the company at any time. Also, the residency limit has been brought down to 120 days from 182 days, making investments in India more convenient to NRIs.

Ashish Aggarwal, senior

₹2,513.01 crore was allocated for it. The remaining amount was allocated for "secretariat-social services" (₹50.7 crore), "capital outlay on education, sports, art and culture" (₹78.76 crore) and "North-Eastern areas" (₹45.52 crore).

The Archaeological Survey of India, which is responsible for the upkeep of over 3,000 Centrally protected monuments, saw its budget cut from ₹1,246.7 crore in the 2020-2021 BE to ₹1,042.63 crore in the 2021-2022 BE.

However, the expenditure

budget for ASI was revised to ₹860.8 crore in the RE for 2020-2021.

"The Museum on Prime Ministers of India, which is going to be inaugurated in the next financial year, has been allocated ₹77.78 crore. As India is going to celebrate the 75th anniversary of freedom and the 125th birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose, the budget of the Centenary and Anniversary Celebration scheme has been enhanced by 38.5% and ₹144.64 crore has been allocated," a Culture Ministry statement said.

The Commission said the fund will have four specific sources of incremental funding, which include transfers from the Consolidated Fund of India, disinvestment proceeds of defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs), proceeds from the monetisation of surplus defence land, including realisation of arrears of payment for defence land used by the State governments and for public projects and cost recovered from encroached land and proceeds of receipts from defence land.

This would be augmented by ₹100 crore a year for improved communication systems and technology upgrade for the police.

The Commission said the fund may be operated by a high-power committee notified by the Union government and may be headed by the Cabinet Secretary with the Secretaries of Defence, Home and Expenditure and the Chief of the Defence Staff as members.

Ministry will allocate ₹500 crore for redeveloping and improving the residential facilities for police personnel in Delhi.

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parts such as printed circuit board assembly, camera module, connectors, back cover, side keys, charger components; inputs or raw materials for lithium-ion batteries; ink cartridges and ink spray nozzles; finished leather products; nylon fibre and yarn; plastic builder wares and cut and polished synthetic stones, including cubic zirconia.

Imported items that will become cheaper are gold and gold dore; silver and silver dore; other precious metals like platinum and palladium and medical devices imported by international organisations.

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Mobile phones and spares will become pricier.

and air conditioners; LED lamps; parts and spares such as printed circuit board; raw silk and cotton; solar inverters and lanterns; automobile parts such as safety and toughened glass; windscreen wipers; signalling equipment; mobile phone

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LAC stand-off factored in for defence outlay

₹21,326 crore more for capital expenditure; in 2020-21, ₹20,776 crore allocated additionally for emergency procurements

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of the stand-off with China and an impetus for military modernisation, the allocation for capital expenditure in the defence budget saw an increase of ₹21,326 crore, or 18.75%, from the Budget estimates of 2020-21.

This is the highest increase in capital outlay for defence in the past 15 years, a release said.

Budget data also show that the armed forces got an addi-

tional allocation of ₹20,776 crore under capital expenditure in 2020-21 for emergency procurements in the face of massive mobilisation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The total allocation for defence in the Union Budget at ₹4.78 lakh crore, including for defence pensions, saw a marginal increase of 1.48% from the ₹4.71 lakh crore last year. The allocation for 2021-22 stands at ₹3.62 lakh crore, excluding defence pensions, which stood at ₹1.16 lakh

crore. Excluding defence pensions, the increase is about 7.34%, up from ₹3.37 lakh crore to ₹3.62 lakh crore.

Pension dip
However, data show that defence pensions have gone down significantly from the Budget estimates of 2020-21.

The capital allocation for 2020-21 was ₹1.13 lakh crore, which went up to ₹1.35 lakh crore for 2021-22.

Budget data show that in 2020-21, the armed forces

got an additional allocation of ₹20,776 crore under capital expenditure in the revised estimates, largely to cater to emergency procurements due to the LAC stand-off.

As the stand-off began with China in May last year, the Army deployed 50,000 troops and equipment along the LAC in eastern Ladakh.

The Indian Air Force (IAF), too, forward-deployed its frontline fighters. The services also went in for a series

of emergency procurements, including equipment and extreme weather clothing for the troops deployed in the high-altitude areas in peak winter.

Last month, the Chief of the Army Staff, Gen. Manoj Naravane, said that 38 de-

lays, estimated at ₹5,000 crore, were made last year through the "emergency and fast track" route and in addition, capital procurements for ₹13,000 crore were concluded.

The defence pensions saw a significant dip from ₹1.34 lakh crore in the Budget estimate of 2020-21 to ₹1.25 lakh crore in the revised estimate and further to ₹1.15 lakh crore allocated for 2021-22.

The 15th Finance Commission observed its report that the expenditure on defence services as a proportion of GDP declined from 2% in 2011-12 to 1.5% in 2018-19 and to 1.4% in 2020-21.

Non-lapsable fund for modernisation mooted

The indicative size is ₹51,000 cr. a year

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The 15th Finance Commission has recommended the constitution of a dedicated non-lapsable Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security (MFDIS) to bridge the gap between projected budgetary requirements and the allocation for defence and internal security.

The indicative size of the MFDIS for 2021 to 2026 is ₹2,38,354 crore and the maximum recommended is ₹51,000 crore a year, the Commission said in its report.

However, the unutilised amount from the normal budgetary allocations to the Defence Ministry and the Home Ministry for capital expenditure shall not be part of the fund.

The Defence Ministry has for long been demanding a non-lapsable fund, keeping in view the long trajectory of military modernisation.

In the action-taken report tabled in Parliament, the government said it had "in principle" accepted the creation of the fund in the Public Account of India.

The Commission said the fund will have four specific sources of incremental funding, which include transfers from the Consolidated Fund of India, disinvestment proceeds of defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs), proceeds from the monetisation of surplus defence land, including realisation of arrears of payment for defence land used by the State governments and for public projects and cost recovered from encroached land and proceeds of receipts from defence land.

This would be augmented by ₹100 crore a year for improved communication systems and technology upgrade for the police.

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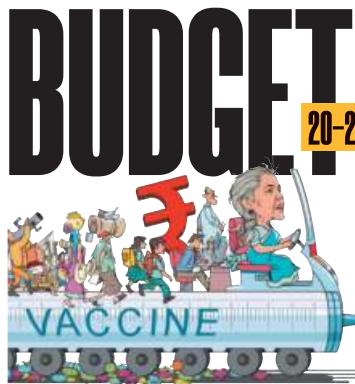
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Culture Ministry suffers a 15% cut

The Ministry has been allocated ₹2,687.99 crore, down from ₹3,149.86 crore

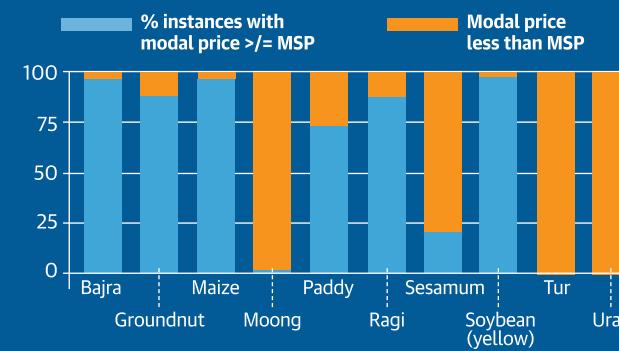


BUDGET SPEECH
For paddy, the amount paid in 2013-14 was ₹63,928 cr. In 2020-2021, this is estimated to rise to ₹172,752 cr. Farmers who benefited stood at 1.24 cr. in 2020-21

Unmet support

An analysis of modal prices at which 10 select crops were sold between Sept. 14 and Oct. 14, 2020 in over 600 wholesale markets shows that in 68% of instances, farmers sold their crops below the MSP. An instance is defined as a crop's average modal price on a particular day in a specific market

Source: agmarknet.gov.in



The heightened spending on agriculture and rural infrastructure is aligned to the policy interventions to create competitive value chains

Sanjiv Puri
Chairman & MD
ITC Limited**VIEWPOINT**AMISH MEHTA,
COO, CRISIL and Head of CRISIL Research**Aiming for growth of better quality**

The pronouncements in the Union Budget for the next fiscal is growth-centric and expansionary. It pushes many right buttons, while focusing on improving India's mid-term growth trajectory.

Spending will continue despite limited new tax revenue, and the focus is clearly on stimulating growth after a once-in-a-century shock.

While this implies higher-than-anticipated fiscal deficit and borrowings, and therefore adds an upside risk to interest rates, the quality of spending will improve, which is crucial.

The compound annual growth rate in capital expenditure versus fiscal 2020 is a praiseworthy 28%, while revenue expenditure growth is contained at 12%.

Segments such as roads, railways and power stand out in terms of allocations for next fiscal.

Reduced dependence on internal and extra budgetary resources – essentially off balance sheet financing done through public sector and government entities such as the National Highways Authority of India – for funding capex is also salutary.

There are also other noteworthy and progressive steps for the financial sector, including the plan to privatise some public sector banks, transfer bad loans to a 'bad bank', adequate allocation for recapitalisation, and increase in foreign direct investment limit in insurance.

Privatisation of public sector banks and a general insurance company through stake sale will help reduce the burden of recapitalisation on the government, and increase competition in the banking and insurance sector.

On the other hand, setting up of an asset reconstruction company (ARC) and an asset management company would help consolidate and take over existing stressed debt, and also manage and dispose of the assets to alternate investment funds and other potential investors for eventual value realisation.

With the establishment of ARC, impaired loans can move from the books of lenders, else it would have required higher provisioning from banks. This will help banks and non-banks to focus on fresh lending, leading to higher credit growth.

The government has also increased the existing National Infrastructure Pipeline from 6,835 to 7,400 projects – involving a cumulative spending of ₹132 lakh crore till fiscal 2025.

The thrust on domestic manufacturing is evident in higher customs duty for the Production-Linked Incentive scheme segments.

One area where more could have been done is the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) segment. That's because the better-than-expected corporate recovery seen in the past few months has passed them by. A few facilities would have gone a long way in supporting a sector that is critical for jobs and exports. Of course, these could be done outside of the Budget, too.

Lastly, the Budget assumes a sharp recovery in consumption segments without direct interventions. While there is no increase in income tax or new cess, the recovery curve will need monitoring, just to see if the private capex cycle is getting triggered finally.

Till then, the heavy lifting remit will continue to be on the government's rather broad shoulders.

Budget sends mixed signals on farm sector

While APMCs have been allowed to tap into agri infrastructure fund; outlays for PM-KISAN, AASHA have been slashed

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

The Union Budget sent mixed signals to the tens of thousands of farmers who have been protesting on Delhi's borders for the last two months, and the wider agricultural community.

On the one hand, the budget allocation for the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare

was slashed 8.5% in 2021-22. The flagship PM-KISAN scheme, meant to provide income support to farmers, saw a 13% drop in its budget, which is ₹10,000 crore lower than last year's initial allocation.

On the other hand, Fi-

nance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's speech emphasised the government's track record in paying minimum support prices (MSP) to farmers and the decision to allow State-run Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs) to access the ₹1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF).

Protesting farm unions are demanding a repeal of the three agrarian reform laws that they fear will lead to the collapse of the APMCs and weaken the system of government procurement at MSP rates, leaving small farmers at the mercy of corporate players.

This Budget should clear

all doubts with regard to the three laws, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said in a statement which spelt out Ms. Sitharaman's message to farmers. "In this Budget, the government has made a provision to empower APMC mandis along with its commitment to MSP. Originally, these were the two main doubts regarding the agricultural bills," he said, adding that he hoped farm unions would now consider the laws positively.

The AIF was created last year, as part of a COVID-19 stimulus package to develop cold chain storage and other post-harvest management infrastructure. Now Ms. Sitharaman has announced that APMCs will also be able to access these funds.

"It can be seen as a sign of support to the APMC system. If they are making APMCs eligible to borrow from this fund, and thus strengthen their infrastructure, the government seems to be sending a message that they are not going to be killed," said Siraj Hussain, former Agriculture Secretary and currently a fellow at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations.

Unlike in recent years, when agriculture announcements hogged top billing in

Budget speeches, Ms. Sitharaman only touched on the sector after the first hour of her speech on Monday.

Agriculture Cess

She also announced an Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess to be levied on petrol, diesel, gold and other imports, to improve facilities for production, conservation

and processing of farm produce and thus "ensure enhanced remuneration for our farmers".

However, farm advocates were not impressed, noting that schemes to provide a remunerative price for farm

produce, such as PM AASHA and the Price Support Scheme have seen budget cuts of 20-25%. PM KISAN, which gives each landowning farm family ₹6,000 of annual income support, has reduced its budget to match last year's revised estimates which reached 9 crore households, rather than trying to reach out to its original target of 14.5 crore households.

With regard to the AIF, Kiran Vissa, a Telangana-based leader of the Rythu Swarajya Vedika, said, "If you introduce laws to weaken the APMC system, then what is the point of giving APMC mandis access to an Agriculture Infrastructure Fund."

Farmers dismiss FinMin claims on MSP hike

They point to falling procurement

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Several farmer outfits dismissed Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's assertion in the Budget speech on Monday that there has been a sea change in the minimum support price (MSP) regime to ensure at least 1.5 times the cost of production across all commodities, besides a steady increase in the procurement of crops. The farmer groups termed the claim an "eyewash".

Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta-Ugrahan), one of the largest farmer unions in Punjab, said ensuring 1.5 times the cost of production on crops does not help in addressing farmers' plight as it does not provide a remunerative price. Farmers have been demanding the MSP based on the Swaminathan Commission's formula of C2 plus 50%, the BKU function said.

"The BJP failed to implement the Swaminathan Commission recommendation of fixing MSP according to the formula C2 plus 50%, which was promised by them during the 2014 parliamentary polls. They have betrayed farmers. By claiming that ensuring 1.5 times the cost of production is helping farmers is a 'hollow and misleading' notion," BKU general secretary Sukhdev Singh Korikalan said.

"As far as the rise in procurement is concerned, the government has been procuring crops such as wheat and paddy in Punjab, Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh only because farmers

have been protesting there. In other parts of the country, the government's procurement is minimal. Also, once the new farm laws get implemented and private markets start to come up, the government procurement will fall down eventually," he said.

Sukhdev Singh Pandher of Kisan Mazdoor Sangarsh Samiti said the reason for the rise in procurement of wheat and paddy is on account of private traders buying the foodgrain in States that lack Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) mandis; the traders then sell the crop in mandis of Punjab and Haryana.

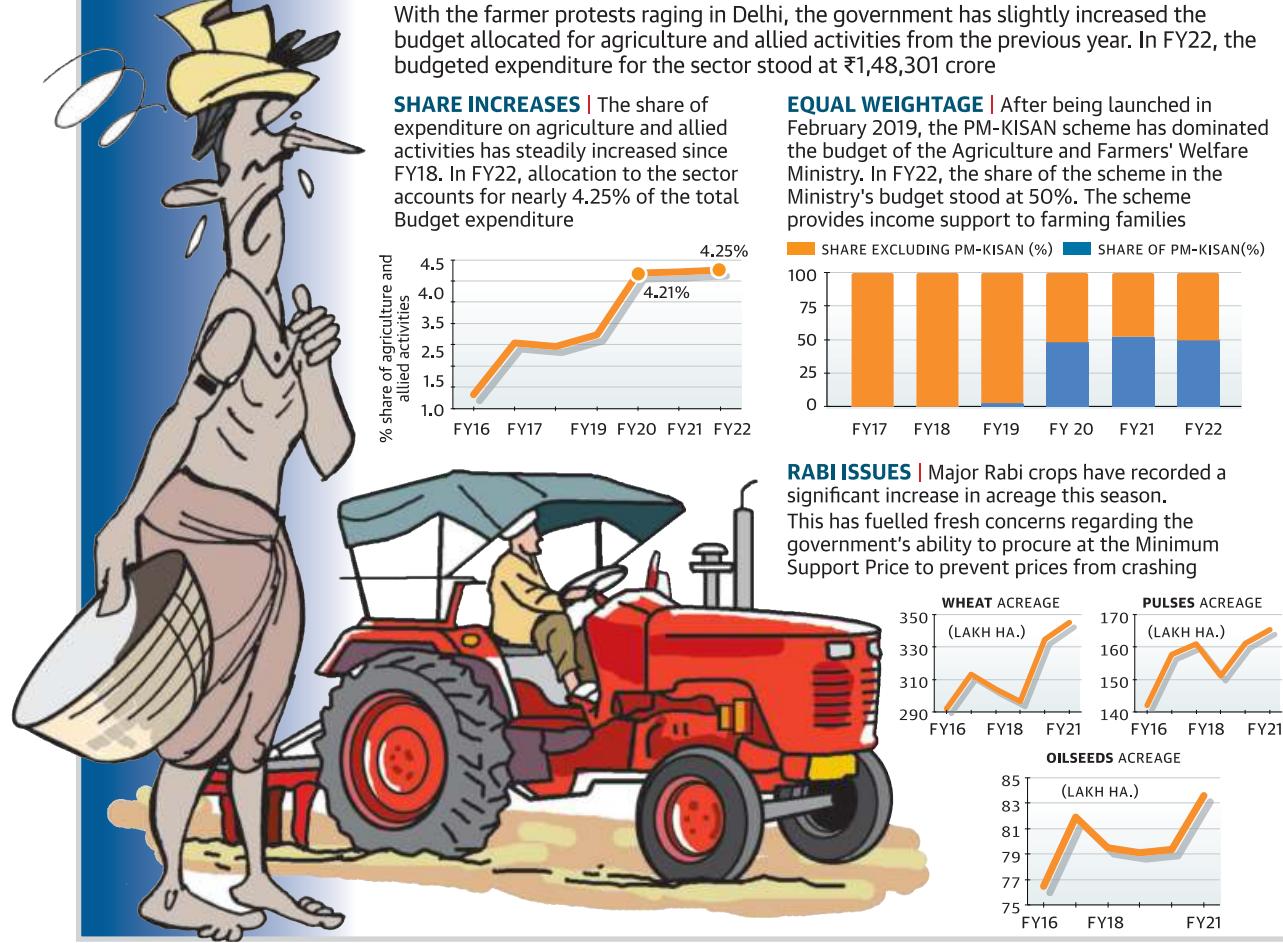
Govt. is procuring wheat, paddy in Punjab, Haryana only because of farmers' protests

SUKHDEV SINGH KORIKALAN
BKU GENERAL SECRETARY

"Private traders purchase wheat-paddy from farmers at a lower price than the MSP in neighbouring States and then sell it in mandis of Punjab and Haryana at MSP," alleged Mr. Pandher.

The government should make MSP a statutory right of the farmers as the price of 1.5 times the cost of production is merely an "eyewash", he added.

BKU (Lakhowal) general secretary Harinder Singh echoed the view that the rise in procurement was due to private traders buying at a lower price from farmers and then selling it in APMC mandis at the MSP.

ALLOCATIONS INCREASE, CONCERN REMAIN

SOURCE: BUDGET DOCUMENTS, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CO-OPERATION AND FARMERS WELFARE

5 fishing harbours to be modernised

Finance Minister also announces measures to promote seaweed cultivation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Five major fishing harbours will see substantial investments for modernisation and development, according to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget speech on Monday.

"To start with, five major fishing harbours – Kochi, Chennai, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Petuagh – will be developed as hubs of economic activity," she said.

Lastly, the Budget assumes a sharp recovery in consumption segments without direct interventions. While there is no increase in income tax or new cess, the recovery curve will need monitoring, just to see if the private capex cycle is getting triggered finally.

Till then, the heavy lifting remit will continue to be on the government's rather broad shoulders.

We will also develop inland fishing harbours and fish landing centres along the banks of rivers and waterways," she added.

Emerging sector

Ms. Sitharaman also announced measures to promote seaweed cultivation. "Seaweed farming is an emerging sector with potential to transform the lives of coastal communities. It will provide large scale employ-

ment and additional incomes," she said. "To promote seaweed cultivation, I

propose a Multipurpose Seaweed Park to be established in Tamil Nadu," she added.

Overall, the Fisheries Department saw an increase in budget allocations from ₹825 crore in 2020-21 to ₹1,220 crore in 2021-22. The Blue Revolution centrally sponsored schemes saw their budget allocations double, with the new Pradhan Mantri Matsya Samada Yojana alone getting a ₹1,000 crore allocation.

"As far as the rise in procurement is concerned, the government has been procuring crops such as wheat and paddy in Punjab, Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh only because farmers

I propose to discontinue the NSSF [National Small Savings Fund] loan to FCI for food subsidy and accordingly Budget provisions have been made in RE 2020-21 and BE 2021-22," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her budget speech.

FCI procures grains from farmers at an economic cost of almost ₹27 a kg for wheat and ₹37 for rice, and then provides it to 80 crore poor people through the public distribution system (PDS) at subsidised rates of ₹2 a kg for wheat and ₹3 for rice.

However, for several years, the budgetary allocation for PDS has not been sufficient to cover FCI's subsidy costs, forcing it to borrow from the NSSF at a rate of about 8%. Its outstanding

transparency, bringing a subsidy expenditure back on the government's books. It's an accounting adjustment that will help reflect the government's debts and current financial state more accurately," said D.K. Srivastava, chief policy adviser at EY and a member of the Advisory Council to the Fifteenth Finance Commission.

"Between this year and next year, the budgetary allocation will take care of most of FCI's outstanding claims," said former Food and Agriculture Secretary T. Nanda Kumar.

"The economic cost of procuring and distributing wheat and rice will go down, because the interest burden will be lower. FCI will also be left in better financial shape to face future challenges," he added.

Subsidies to aid the sugar industry and cane farmers have also shot up for the coming year.

A ₹2,000 crore allocation has been made for a new scheme to encourage sugar exports by helping sugar mills meet the marketing costs. A scheme to maintain a buffer stock of 40 lakh metric tonnes has seen its budget allocation jump from ₹200 crore to ₹600 crore.

Another scheme to help sugar mills convert surplus sugar into ethanol has also been expanded from ₹50 crore to ₹300 crore in the coming year.

The Minister further an-

"This is a move to increase

the amount paid in 2013-14 was ₹63,928 cr. In 2020-21, this is estimated to rise to ₹172,752 cr. Farmers who benefited stood at 1.24 cr. in 2020-21

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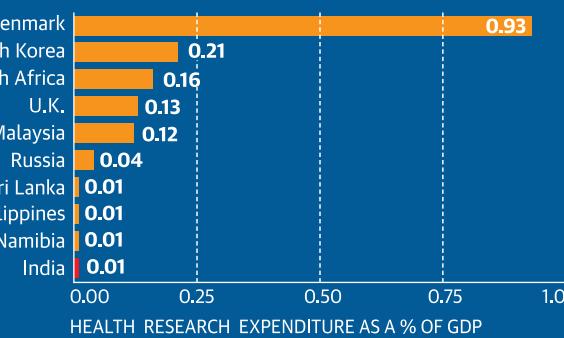


BUDGET SPEECH
The Pneumococcal Vaccine – a Made in India product – presently limited to only five States, will be rolled out across the country

**Health R&D**

India's research and development expenditure on health formed 0.01% of its GDP in FY2020-21, the lowest share among nations tracked by the World Health Organization. India's health R&D to GDP ratio was similar to countries such as Namibia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Source: WHO, Union Budget



Happy to see the huge boost in healthcare spending. The allocation of over ₹35,000 cr. for COVID-19 vaccination is promising

Kiran Mazundar Shaw,
executive chairperson,
Biocor

VIEWPOINT

PREETHA REDDY
Executive vice-chairperson, Apollo Hospitals, & president, NATEALTH

**Atmanirbhar healthcare**

Coming on the back of the COVID-19 pandemic, our Hon'ble Finance Minister's vision to make health of citizens as the foremost pillar for inclusive progress is greatly commendable. The outlay of ₹2,83,846 crore for health and wellness marking a 13% increase over the previous year, the Union Budget has taken the realm of care to an all-new orbit. Also, the allocation of ₹64,180 crore under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Swasth Bharat Yojana to develop primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare systems, in addition to the National Health Mission, will make medical care much more accessible to all in our country.

The roll-out of the vaccines heralded the end of the pandemic and it was a leap forward in making India self-reliant in indigenous vaccine development. The announcement of ₹35,000 crore for COVID-19 vaccines will go a long way in making this a reality and also making India self-reliant in this critical aspect of medicine.

Also, this Budget has turned the spotlight upon development of public health and health infrastructure in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, remote districts, which together will leave no stone

unturned in making healthcare accessible to all. Further, with advancements in telemedicine and digital health infrastructure, we can be assured that India's vision for Universal Health Coverage will be realised before the end of this decade.

Healthcare can be a very powerful engine for job creation, which would provide gainful

employment to millions. Budget 2021 addressed training and job creation in healthcare through the setting up of the National Commission for Allied Healthcare Professionals and the National Nursing and Midwifery Commission. This initiative will go a long way in streamlining the skilling of allied healthcare workers, who form the foundation of our health infrastructure.

It was heartening to note the continued focus on cleanliness with the launch of Swachh Bharat 2.0 on an outlay of ₹1.42 lakh crore over 5 years and Jal Jeevan Mission for clean water on an outlay of ₹2.87 lakh crore for 4,378 urban local bodies. This will go a long way in preventing several diseases.

Moreover, the proposals for infrastructure to boost sectors including railways, power, shipping and ports will all work to fuel productivity growth and wealth creation and ensure that the economy is back on the fast track to growth.

POCKET | RAVIKANTH



"I'm sure you heard about the gig economy? I am a gig economist. Once every year, I get to speak about budget deficit."

137% increase in health and well-being spend

This includes ₹60,030 crore for drinking water and ₹35,000 crore for vaccination

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget speech that the government expected to spend ₹2,23,846 crore in the coming year on "health and well-being... a 137% increase (from last year)."

This includes a ₹60,030-crore outlay on drinking water and sanitation, a ₹2,700-crore outlay on nutrition – both of these are handled by separate Ministries – nearly ₹49,000 crore as Finance Commission grants and ₹35,000 crore toward vaccination.

The Health Ministry expects to spend ₹71,269 crore

in 2021-22, an increase of roughly 9% from the budget estimates of last year. But this will be less than what the Ministry actually spent last year. The 'revised estimates' in the Budget documents show the Ministry spent ₹78,886 crore in the last financial year, about 20% up from the budgeted ₹65,012 crore.

Last year, the Department of Health Research (DHR), which funds organisations such as the Indian Council of Medical Research, had budgeted ₹2,100 crore for FY2020-21. However, they are expected to spend up to ₹4,062 crore by March and for the coming financial year

have budgeted ₹2,663 crore. The allocations in health also include spends by the Ministry of Ayush – about ₹2,970 crore – which is more than what's apportioned for the DHR.

Responding to the allocations, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said, "Investment on health infrastructure in Budget 2021 has increased... the focus on strengthening three areas – preventive health, curative health and well-being... will be of immense help to the country at this critical juncture."

New scheme

Ms. Sitharaman also announced a new Centrally

sponsored scheme, PM Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, that would be launched on an outlay of about ₹64,180 crore over 6 years to improve primary, secondary, and tertiary care health systems, strengthen national institutions, create new institutions to cater to detection and cure of new and emerging diseases.

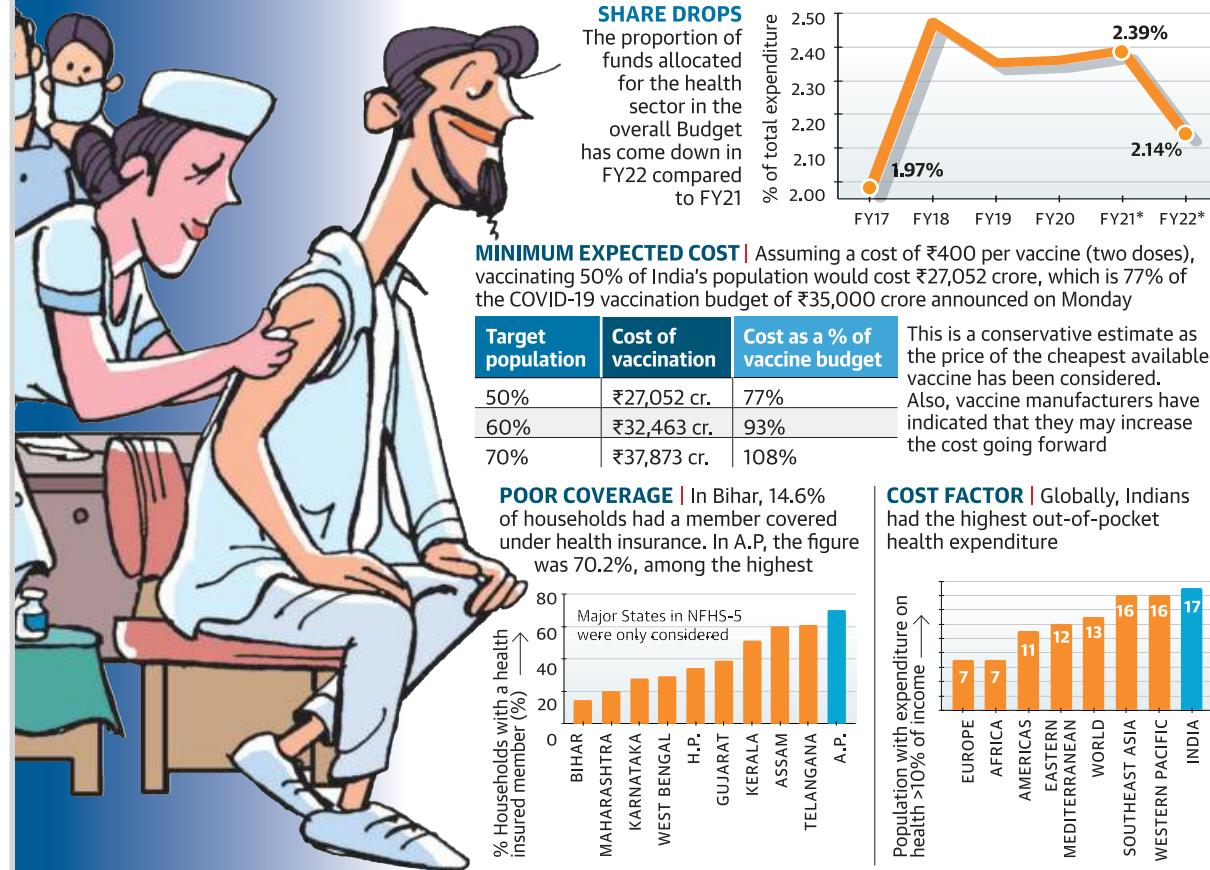
This scheme aims to support 17,783 rural and 11,024 urban Health and Wellness Centres, establish integrated public health labs in all districts, strengthen the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), its five regional branches and 20 metropolitan health surveillance units,

pneumococcal vaccines, will help India rapidly recover from the pandemic," said Adar Poonawalla, CEO, Serum Institute of India. Suchitra Ella, joint managing director, Bharat Biotech, said,

"The new health infra schemes with a significantly higher outlay of ₹35,000 crore for Bharat's mega COVID-19 vaccination drive is a huge fiscal medicine to contain the pandemic, reduce disease burden for the population, and the economy."

LOWER OUTLAY

The Budget speech mentions that the outlay for "health & wellbeing" (which includes spending on water & sanitation) increased by 137% in FY22. However, health outlay alone was ₹74,602 crore in FY22, 9.5% lower than FY21RE



SOURCE: BUDGET DOCUMENTS, PIB, NFHS, ECONOMIC SURVEY | *FIGURES FOR FY22 ARE BUDGET ESTIMATES; FY21 ARE REVISED ESTIMATES

Healthcare providers hail the boost

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Healthcare providers have hailed the Budget, saying it provides the much-needed fillip to the health sector and is a testimony to the commitment to not just fight back the COVID-19 pandemic, but to build a stronger and resilient health system. India has been demonstrating this, she said.

According to Professor K. Srinath Reddy, president of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), the Budget provides a much-needed fillip to health, sanitation, nutrition and pollution con-

trol. These are key elements in promoting the health and well-being of the population in a holistic manner, he said.

Dr. Prathap C Reddy, chairman of Apollo Hospitals, said, "Today, the Finance Minister said health was her first pillar and her announcements to develop primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare systems greatly gladdened my heart. This ground-breaking focus on health will provide access to medical care for all in our country, fuel job creation

and boost economic momentum."

Ashutosh Raghuvanshi, managing director and CEO of Fortis Healthcare, said, "The 137% increase is notable. Further, an infusion of ₹35,000 crore for vaccine development and distribution, ensuring preventive and frontline health and allied workers' skills building, along with surveillance on infectious building, reinforces the government's assurance on public health programmes..."

Budget for Women and Child Development shrinks

Several schemes have been re-grouped without adequate increments in allocations, says analyst

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

The Budget allocated for the Ministry of Women and Child Development shrank to 0.7% of the Budget announced on Monday, according to leading economists.

The Ministry received ₹24,430 crore for fiscal 2022, which was 0.7% of the Budget. In last year's announcement, it received ₹30,007 crore, which was 0.98% of the Budget, analyses Ritu Devan, vice-president, Indian Society for Labour Economics and co-convenor of Feminist Policy Collective.

This figure went down in the revised estimate for the current fiscal, which at ₹23,165 crore was 0.61% of the Budget.

Several schemes under



Dip in resources: The allocation for Poshan Abhiyan was slashed by 27%, from ₹3,700 crore last year to ₹2,700 crore this time. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

empowerment and Mission Vatsalya for schemes on protection of children.

"But what is worrying is that there are no adequate increments in allocations for

the schemes," says Sona Mitra, principal economist, IW-WAGE (Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy).

"Anganwadi services have been clubbed with other schemes under Saksham yet the Saksham budget in 2021-22 of ₹20,105 crore is less than the anganwadi budget in 2020-21 of ₹20,532 crore. Similarly, the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) has now been clubbed with other schemes under Samarthya, yet the allocation in

2021-22 is similar to the allocation for PMMVY alone in 2020-21," says Professor Reetika Khera, a social scientist.

"Women's safety and pre-

vention of violence has not seen any major announcements though the pandemic resulted in a surge in cases of violence against women," says Sona Mitra.

On nutrition, the Finance Minister said, "To strengthen nutritional content, delivery and outcome, we will merge the supplementary nutrition programme and the Poshan Abhiyan and launch Mission POSHAN 2.0. We shall adopt an intensified strategy to improve nutritional outcomes in 112 aspirational districts." But the allocation for Poshan Abhiyan was slashed by 27%, which went from ₹3,700 crore last year to ₹2,700 crore this time.

"The World Health Organization has repeatedly stressed the importance of clean water, sanitation, and clean environment as a prerequisite to achieving un-

iversal health. The Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) will be launched. It aims at universal water supply in all 4,378 Urban Local Bodies with 2.86 crore household tap connections, as well as liquid waste management in 500 AMRUT cities," she said.

This mission would be implemented over five years with an expenditure of ₹2.87 lakh crore.

Second round
The Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) 2.0 would be implemented over five years – from 2021 to 2026 – on an outlay of ₹1.41 lakh crore, she added.

"For further swachhta [cleanliness] of urban India, we intend to focus on complete faecal sludge management and waste water treatment, source segregation of garbage, reduction in single-use plastic, reduction in air pollution by effectively

managing waste from construction and demolition activities and bioremediation of all legacy dump sites," she said.

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Water supply, Swachh Bharat 2.0 missions for urban areas

Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) is aimed at all 4,378 local bodies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government would launch a mission to provide universal water supply to areas under all the 4,378 urban local bodies and the next phase of the Swachh Bharat Mission focusing on management of sludge, waste water and construction and demolition waste in cities, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in her Budget speech.

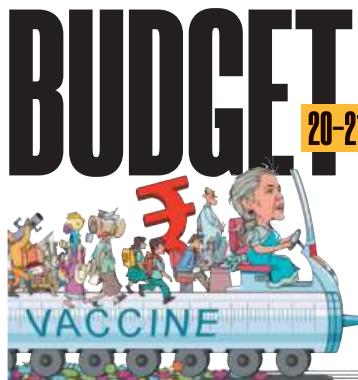
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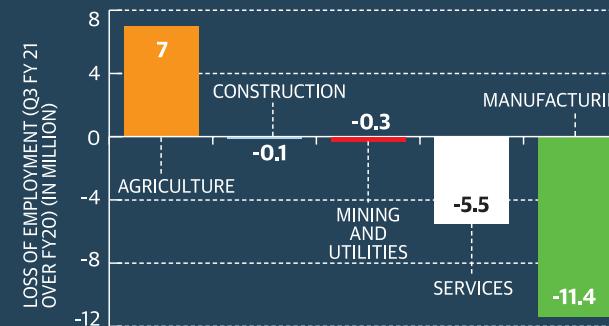


BUDGET SPEECH
Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) will be launched, aiming at universal water supply. It will be implemented over five years, with an outlay of ₹2,87,000 cr.

Job recovery

A recovery of the jobs lost due to the lockdown continued to elude the manufacturing and services sector at the end of Q3FY21. Most of the jobs lost in the construction and mining sectors were regained by the end of the quarter. Only agriculture saw an increase in employment during lockdown

Source: CMIE



Infusion of ₹20,000 cr. into PSU banks will boost credit growth. Takeover of banks' stressed assets by Asset Reconstruction Companies too will help

Padmaja Chunduru,
MD & CEO of Indian Bank



VIEWPOINT

UDAY KOTAK,
president,
Confederation of Indian Industry

Historic Budget with growth at its centre

Delivering on her promise of unveiling a 'Budget like no other', the Finance Minister announced a raft of prudent measures aimed at rejuvenating government spending towards critical areas of increasing allocation on infrastructure expansion, education, housing and health as India rolls out a vaccine drive to inoculate 1.3 billion people. Laying down the vision for providing further fillip to the government's flagship Atmanirbhar Bharat programme by spelling out the measures under the critical six pillars, the Budget ticked all the right boxes which would strengthen the path of recovery of the economy. This is a Budget catering to all aspects of lives, livelihoods and growth.

Recognising the need for giving infrastructure investments a renewed push, the sector has received key priority from the government in the form of several important announcements. The announcement regarding the setting up of the Development Financial Institution, which is likely to play a critical role in channelising investments in infrastructure and other key sectors of the economy, is in line with the CII's (Confederation of Indian Industry) recommendations.

In addition, the setting up of a National Asset Monetisation Pipeline is a great initiative and is likely to not only boost sentiment but to also generate additional resources for the government. Other measures, such as the setting up of seven mega

investment textile parks and giving choice to consumers to choose from more than one distribution company to buy power, are also in line with the CII's recommendations.

The pandemic has rightly brought back attention to the much-needed topic of improving healthcare infrastructure for the populace. In this regard, we are heartened to note a large 137% increase in health and well-being spending for FY22. The launch of the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana, Mission Poshan 2.0 and the commitment to provide ₹35,000 crore for COVID-19 vaccination in FY22 are all encouraging developments.

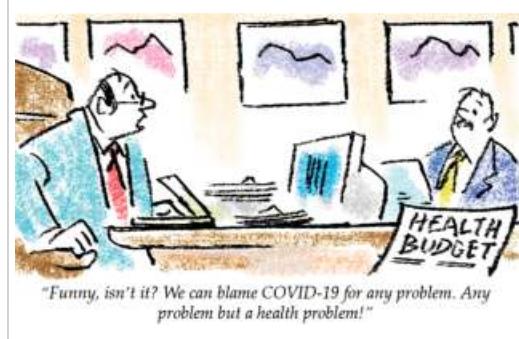
The financial sector saw the announcement of several landmark announcements, including the setting up of a 'bad bank' in the form of the Asset Reconstruction and Management Company; increasing FDI (foreign direct investment) limit in the insurance sector to 74%; the proposal to disinvest two public sector banks; and an IPO (initial public offering) of the Life Insurance Corporation and one general insurance company in FY22. All these are bold moves indeed, and are expected to buttress the growth recovery process, apart from making our financial sector future-ready.

The government's move to fund the pump-priming of the economy through raising of revenues by pursuing an aggressive disinvestment programme and proposing an asset monetisation programme in the next fiscal is welcome. The government needs to be commended for sticking to a counter-cyclical fiscal policy stance, as had been recommended by the Economic Survey, and this is in line with the CII's recommendation.

The CII applauds the proposal to halve the time frame for reopening of income tax assessment cases from six years to three years. For the reopening of serious tax evasion cases up to 10 years, the government has put in a monetary limit of cases involving over ₹50 lakh in a year. This will help reduce instances of tax harassment of income tax payers. On indirect taxes, the reduction in customs duty on certain inputs and raw materials, which have seen a sharp price increase in the last few months, will laudably keep the prices of the final products competitive.

We recognise that the commitment of the government to spur growth is not limited to announcements in the Budget alone. The three tranches under Atmanirbhar Bharat ably demonstrate this intent. In this regard, I would like to mention that the Budget marks an ongoing process rather than a one-off approach in making the recovery process more robust and equitable.

POCKET | RAVIKANTH



"Funny, isn't it? We can blame COVID-19 for any problem. Any problem but a health problem!"

Rural India's lifeline missing in Budget speech

Allocations for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act scheme stood at ₹73,000 cr.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The scheme that has been described as the lifeline of rural India during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown was completely missing from the Finance Minister's Budget speech on Monday.

Unmentioned in the speech, the Budget documents showed that the allocations for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme stood at ₹73,000 crore in 2021-22, higher than the budget estimates for the previous year, but lower than the revised estimates. Activists support-

ing MGNREGA workers warned that rural distress provoked by the pandemic was still continuing, and would require additional funding for the rural jobs scheme.

The importance of MGNREGA this year can be seen from the fact that the revised expenditure estimates for the demand-driven scheme stand at ₹1.11 lakh crore in 2020-21, sharply higher than the budget estimates of just ₹61,500 crore.

Faced with a mass exodus of migrant workers from the cities back to their villages during the lockdown, the Centre added a substantial extra allocation as part of



Hard at work: Workers engaged in desilting a dry pond under the MGNREGA scheme in Haryana. ■ V. V. KRISHNAN

COVID-19 relief to ensure that some employment could be provided to this newly jobless population.

The 2021-22 allocation, however, returns MGNREGA funding to the levels of ac-

tual expenditure in 2019-20, indicating that the Centre feels the crisis is over.

"Considering the unemployment scenario in rural India, which was at 9% even in December 2020, accord-

ing to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, it is inexcusable that the Finance Minister's speech did not have a single mention of MGNREGA," said Hannan Mollah, general secretary of the All India Kisan Sabha. "The Budget was a good opportunity for the government to raise the number of days of employment through MGNREGA to 150 days," he added.

"This undermines

MGNREGA and shows utter disdain for one of the most important programmes that provided a modicum of protection to the rural poor. The government has shown

neither commitment to nor an understanding of the situation of those who suffered most through the pandemic," said Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan activist Nikhil Dey.

The budgetary allocations for pensions for senior citizens, widows and the disabled in the coming year have been held at the exact same level as the original budget estimates during 2020-21.

The actual expenditure on these schemes was much higher owing to the additional pension amounts distributed as part of the COVID-19 relief package.

SPENDING SLACKENS

The charts depict the allocation for various social sectors/schemes as a % of total expenditure in various years:

MGNREGS | The proportion of funds allocated for the rural employment scheme has come down by 1.1% points



RURAL DEVELOPMENT | The proportion of funds allocated has come down by 0.7% points



HIGHER EDUCATION | The proportion of funds allocated has gone up by 0.1% points



SCHOOL EDUCATION | The proportion of funds allocated has gone up by 0.1% points



SOCIAL WELFARE | The proportion of funds allocated has gone up by 0.2% points



New scheme for public buses: Minister

Sitharaman also announces expansion of Metro Rail networks in Budget speech

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In a boost to urban transport, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech on Monday announced a new scheme for public buses, and the expansion of new Metro networks in Kochi, Chennai, Bengaluru, Nagpur and Nashik.

"We will work towards raising the share of public transport in urban areas

through the expansion of Metro Rail networks and the augmentation of city bus services. A new scheme will be

launched at a cost of ₹18,000 crore to support the augmentation of public bus transport services. The scheme will facilitate the deployment of innovative public-private partnership (PPP) models to enable private sector players to finance, acquire, operate

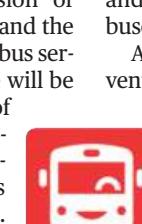
and maintain over 20,000 buses," she said.

A total of 702 km of conventional Metro lines were in operation, and 1,016 km of Metro and Regional Rapid Transit System lines were under construction in 27 cities.

Two new Metro technologies – MetroLite and MetroNeo – would be used in tier-2 cities and the peripheral parts of tier-1 ci-

ties to provide connectivity at a lower cost compared to conventional Metro systems.

The Centre would provide counterpart funding for the Kochi Metro Phase-II at a cost of ₹1,957.05 crore, the Chennai Metro Phase-II at a cost of ₹63,246 crore, the Bengaluru Metro Phase 2A and 2B at a cost of ₹14,788 crore, the Nagpur Metro Phase-II at a cost of ₹5,975 crore and the Nashik Metro at a cost of ₹2,092 crore.



Spending increases on schemes for SCs

Funding up by over 50%: Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Allocation for schemes for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) by all Ministries went up by over 50% in Budget 2021-22 compared to the previous year, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Thawarchand Gehlot said on Monday.

Mr. Gehlot said the allocation increased by 51.65%, from ₹83,256.62 crore in 2020-21 to ₹1,26,259.2 crore in 2021-22. This, he said, proved the government's mantra of "sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas" was working.

In her Budget speech, Fi-

nance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the Post Matric Scholarship Scheme for SC students had been revamped.

"I have also enhanced the Central assistance in this regard. We are allotting ₹35,219 crore for six years till 2025-2026, to benefit 4 crore SC students," she added.

The Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry was allocated ₹1,689.39 crore for 2021-22, of which ₹10,517.62 crore was for the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment and ₹11,71.77 crore for the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.

Central varsity to come up in Ladakh

School Department and Higher Education Department see decrease in allocation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

With Ladakh now being recognised as a separate Union Territory, the Centre proposes to set up a new Central university in Leh, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday.

The Education Ministry intends to introduce the Central University of Ladakh Bill in the second half of the current Budget session of Parliament itself, Higher Education Secretary Amit Khare told *The Hindu*.

The Finance Minister also said an announcement she made two years ago in her Budget speech 2019-20 would come to fruition this year as the Centre plans to introduce legislation to esta-

blish a new regulatory body, the Higher Education Commission of India.

Both the School Department and the Higher Education Department have seen their budget allocation fall for 2021-22. However, Mr. Khare said this is partly be-

cause all research funding, which used to come through the erstwhile Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), is now being rerouted through the new National Research Foundation (NRF) instead.

"The NRF is a very important step towards implementation of the National Education Policy. Earlier, MHRD's research funding would go only to Central universities. However, State universities and even private universities can now access research grants through NRF on a competitive basis. The Education Ministry is working closely with the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor for implementation of the NRF," he said.

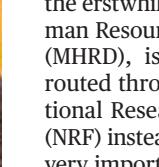
In nine cities that are hubs

of higher education, a new grant is being offered to create formal umbrella structures that would maximise research synergies, while also retaining internal autonomy.

Allocations for school education have been reduced from a budget estimate of almost ₹60,000 crore in 2020-21 to a budget estimate of almost ₹55,000 crore in 2021-22. "The allocations are nowhere close to the required amount needed to undo the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Ambarish Rai, convener of the Right to Education Forum. Ms. Sitharaman made no mention of the impact of the pandemic on school education, he added.



Allocations for school education have been reduced. ■ GETTY IMAGES



Safety hazards: Workers getting their temperature checked at a construction site in Chennai. ■ B. JOITH RAMALINGAM



Getting back on track

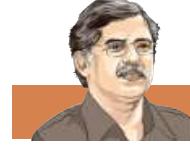
In times that call for deft stewardship of the economy, this year's Budget is a starting point

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made a brave effort to make good use of the lessons learnt from the unprecedented global health crisis and ensuring economic setback to put lives and livelihoods back on track. There is greater spending on health care and some fiscal push to undergird the struggling demand in the pandemic-hit economy. But this is no transformative budget that lives up to the heightened expectations of a weary population waiting for manna from the government. A lot more could have been done to address the chronic underinvestment in India's public health infrastructure by appreciably raising expenditure. The Union Budget for 2021-2022 presented to Parliament on Monday, instead reveals an estimated health outlay of ₹74,602 crore, almost 10% lower than the revised estimate of ₹82,445 crore earmarked for health spending in the current fiscal year. The Minister, however, has claimed a 137% increase in the budgetary outlay on 'health and well-being' by including a one-time expenditure of ₹35,000 crore set aside for the COVID-19 vaccination programme, ₹60,030 crore budgeted for the department of drinking water and sanitation, as well as the Finance Commission's grants for both water and sanitation and health totalling to almost ₹50,000 crore. While it is an inarguable fact that the availability of vaccines, ensuring universal access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation and adequate nutrition are all key in determining a population's well-being, an abiding thrust on creating and maintaining a sizeably more extensive public health infrastructure needed a substantially higher outlay on the standalone head. In fact, the Economic Survey had eloquently made the case for providing a massive boost to health spending, which it reasoned would serve as a direct means to raising overall economic output by reducing the economic burden of illnesses. To her credit, the Minister did announce that the government intends to introduce a new centrally sponsored scheme, 'PM Atma Nirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana', to develop primary, secondary, and tertiary care capacities over the next six years, at an estimated cost of ₹64,180 crore. How exactly this scheme pans out in terms of strengthening the beleaguered public health infrastructure in the remote and far-flung corners could well determine how prepared India is for the next unforeseen health emergency. A sizeable fiscal stimulus to reinvigorate consumption demand could have gone a long way in completing the recovery. While the revised estimates for the current financial year project a fiscal deficit of 9.5% of GDP on account of expenditure surging to ₹34.50-lakh crore, the Minister has opted for a mere ₹33,000 crore increase in the overall expenditure outlay in her Budget estimates for the next fiscal. Here again, she has pointed to the ₹5.54-lakh crore set aside for capital expenditure to contend a 34.5% increase in outlay over the current year's Budget estimate. Far from being an expansionary Budget, Ms. Sitharaman has opted to contain overall spending so as to rein in the fiscal deficit to 6.8% in the coming fiscal itself. The country cannot afford a premature scaling down of fiscal support at a time of rising inequality.

Strapped as the government is for funds in the wake of this year's economic contraction denting its revenue receipts, the Budget does make bold to set out a few avenues for resource mobilisation. With the Minister announcing her resolve to complete the pandemic-delayed strategic stake sale in several state-owned companies in the coming fiscal, the Budget has accounted for ₹1.75-lakh crore in capital receipts from disinvestment. She also proposes to privatise two more public sector banks and a general insurer in 2021-22 and has committed to ensuring that the necessary legislative amendments to enable the LIC's IPO are introduced in the current session of Parliament. The Budget also throws open the doors for increased FDI in insurance – the foreign ownership limit would be raised to 74% after amendments to the Insurance Act, 1938. Still, it remains to be seen how eager overseas insurers may be to raise their stakes, given the government's intention to make its proposal politically acceptable by including safeguards such as mandating that a majority of board positions and key management personnel be restricted to resident Indians and requiring the companies to set aside a specified percentage of profits as general reserve. Also on the block for possible sale or lease through concessions are state-owned undertakings' land assets that the government intends to monetise. In finding the capital for its National Infrastructure Pipeline, the Budget proposes an asset monetisation pipeline that would include highways, airports and ports. The aggressive stance on privatisation notwithstanding, the government is still likely to face an uphill task in achieving its ambitious disinvestment goal given that private investment is still anaemic. Ms. Sitharaman has also embarked on creating a 'bad bank' for dealing with the pile of stressed and bad bank loans. The Budget proposes establishing both an Asset Reconstruction Company and an Asset Management Company that would consolidate and take over existing stressed debt and then help dispose of the assets. It is these plans to privatise two state-run banks and also undertake a clean up of the stressed assets that have prompted the Minister to set aside just ₹20,000 crore to recapitalise the remaining public banks. Ultimately though, given its effort to mobilise resources without tweaking direct taxes at a time when several States are headed to the polls, the government has had little option but to tap the market for debt. With the Budget positing a gross market borrowing of ₹12-lakh crore, the government will end up getting 36 paise of every rupee it nets from borrowings and other liabilities, an 80% increase. Given these challenges, the Budget can only be the starting point for a year that calls for deft stewardship of the economy.

Carrying over fiscal conservatism

A lenient tax regime that favours private capital, and restrained debt-financed spending are quite evident



C.P. CHANDRASEKAR

Bruised by the COVID-19 pandemic, Indians, like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, are looking for renewal. So, even granting that an annual budget is not a corrective for all ills, evidence of a change in course was expected in Budget 2021. Change also seemed possible. With the worst of COVID-19 and the lockdown-triggered contraction behind it, the government could intensify efforts to not just accelerate recovery but also turn its attention to the neglected health sector and redress the damage inflicted on the poor by the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Conflicting signals

Official signals were, however, conflicting. Coming at the end of a year of the pandemic, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman claimed that the Budget would be one "like never before". But experience did not give cause for confidence. Additional expenditure by the Centre incorporated in multiple packages over the last year have been estimated as amounting to only around 1.5% of GDP. Yet, there were statements to the effect that much had already been done before the Budget. The multiple stimulus packages were identified as several mini-Budget-like interventions, and the Budget, it was argued, had to be seen as just one more event in that series.

Overall, the Budget seems to carry over the fiscal conservatism witnessed during 2020-21. In that fiscal year, when the crisis called for hugely enhanced spending, to-

tal central government expenditure increased by just 13.4%, relative to what had been originally budgeted, when the pandemic had not been factored in. Since expenditure on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) programme and on food subsidies had to be increased as minimal support measures in the context of the economic disruption, spending elsewhere had clearly been reduced. Despite the extraordinary crisis, falling revenues had led to the government holding back on its aggregate spending to rein in the fiscal deficit and its debt.

Revenue base erosion

Tax concessions, such as the sharp reduction in corporate tax rates in September 2019, and the misconceived Goods and Services Tax regime, underlie the erosion of the revenue base. Though presented before the COVID-19 pandemic was officially acknowledged, the Budget for 2020-21 had projected only a modest increase in the revenue receipts of the Centre, from ₹16.8-lakh crore in 2019-20 to ₹20.2-lakh crore. The revised estimates suggest that revenue receipts actually fell to ₹15.6-lakh crore.

Moreover, the government's ambitious disinvestment agenda that was expected to pull in ₹2.1-lakh crore of non-debt capital receipts seems to have been completely derailed. The sum garnered was just ₹32,000 crore. In the event, if spending had to be hiked significantly, deficit concerns had to be dropped. The government was clearly not willing to go in that direction, keeping expenditure growth low relative to requirement. That conservatism seems to persist. Total expenditure is projected to rise by just 0.95% in 2021-22 relative to revised estimates for 2020-21, even if



14.5% relative to the Budget estimate for 2020-21.

Unwinding support measures

With fiscal conservatism persisting, the government is set to wind down even the limited support it afforded to those hit hard by the pandemic. During the current fiscal, expenditure on the MGNREGA programme touched an estimated ₹11,500 crore (RE) as compared with a budgeted ₹61,500 crore and an actual expenditure of ₹71,687 crore in 2019-20. Many deprived of jobs and livelihoods were supported by the programme. There is no reason to believe that all of them can now return to their erstwhile occupations, since the economy is still performing poorly.

Yet, allocations for the MGNREGA programme are, going by Budget figures, to be drastically curtailed, from the ₹11,500 crore spent in 2020-21 to ₹73,300 crore in 2021-22. The picture is the same with food subsidies, which are to be reduced from as much as ₹4,22,618 crore in 2020-21 to ₹2,42,836 crore in 2021-22. Clearly, in the government's perception, the case for support is over, and the time has come to unwind even the limited support measures that the pandemic forced it to undertake.

What then makes the Finance Minister declare this Budget as being one "like never before"? Amid the multiple claims made in Part A of the Budget speech, two claims seem to be specially geared to creating the image of a never-be-

fore Budget.

One is a declaration that the Budget incorporates a package for "health and well-being" that would take spending on its constituent items from a budgeted ₹94,452 crore in 2020-21 to ₹2,23,846 crore in 2021-22. An increase in health spending, of 137%, is presumably influenced by the lessons from the pandemic.

The other is a multi-faceted infrastructural investment thrust supported with a claimed 35% increase in capital spending, from ₹4.12-lakh crore budgeted in 2020-21 to ₹5.54-lakh crore in the Budget for 2021-22.

Explaining health spending

However, these claims lose force when subjected to scrutiny. To generate the huge increase in health spending, the Budget speech resorts to a rather expansive definition of what can be considered health. In fact, allocations for the Department of Health and Family Welfare do not reveal any significant increase. Budget 2020 provided for around ₹65,000 crore for the Department of Health. Compared to that figure, the Budget estimate for 2021, of ₹71,269 crore, points to a not-to-spectacular 9.6% increase.

What is more, the Budget estimate for 2021-22 is 9.6% lower than the revised estimate of expenditure of the Department of Health and Family Welfare in 2020-21, of ₹78,866 crore. To generate the impressive increase in the allocation to "health and well-being", the Budget speech includes in the figure expenditure on the Jal Jeevan Mission aimed at providing safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections. That component of the "health and well-being" Budget rises from ₹10,905.50 crore in the revised estimate for 2020-21 to ₹49,757.75 crore in the Budget esti-

mate for 2021-22, being favoured by a ₹50,000 crore allocation from the cess-financed Central Road and Infrastructure Fund originally created to finance roads and highways. Drinking water matters and must be provided but cannot be a substitute for core health facilities.

Wishful thinking

In the case of the infrastructural push described in the speech, the budgetary funding provided hardly seems adequate. What emerges is that the intention is to experiment with diverting resources garnered from the sale of existing assets of the public sector to part finance new investments in infrastructure. Besides disinvestment of equity, strategic sale, and privatisation of the public financial sector, expected to yield ₹1.75-lakh crore in 2021-22, there is much stress on "monetising idle assets", especially land, available with public agencies.

As the failed experiment with an overambitious disinvestment agenda included in Budget 2021 suggests, this effort to strip public units of their assets to support private-led infrastructural expansion may be more in the nature of wishful thinking.

The pandemic notwithstanding, Budget 2021-22 suggests that there is no change in the neoliberal fiscal stance of the current government. A lenient tax regime that favours private capital, restrained debt-financed spending, and excessive reliance on disposing of public assets to finance limited expenditures remain the principal elements of that stance. The pandemic may have forced increased spending in a couple of areas. But even before it recedes, the government seems bent on restoring the old normal.

C.P. Chandrasekhar is an economist and columnist based in New Delhi

Despite some hits, the Budget has crucial misses

That there is no targeted employment programme to alleviate the immediate crisis is a matter of concern



R. NAGARAJ

The Budget, at its simplest, is the government's tentative income and expenditure statement. Like all financial statements, the devil lies in the fine print. At its broadest, the Budget is a pious statement of the government's policy and ideological intentions. It is also the government's statement of how it seeks to tackle the immediate political (electoral) and economic challenges. Hence, any quick assessment of the Budget has to be preliminary. So how is the Budget likely to affect the lives of citizens immediately, and economic aggregates such as investment, output, employment and income distribution in the medium term?

India's meagre response

Domestic output or GDP, net of inflation, is expected to decline by 7.7% in the current financial year (FY2020-21), compared to the previous year (FY2019-20). The decline in per capita income is by 8.7%. The contraction is one of the worst among the world's major countries. The novel coronavirus pandemic and the resultant lockdown led to massive job and livelihood losses (<https://bit.ly/3r8KUcu>).

Unlike most advanced countries and emerging market economies, India's response to address the distress of the masses has been meagre. The govern-

ment's additional public spending to cope with the unprecedented crisis has been a little over 1% of GDP. As is widely known, the output (GDP) contraction in 2020-21 has come on top of a slowdown in GDP growth over much of the previous decade (the 2010s), fall in employment, the decline in real wages, rise in the number of people in poverty, and, hence, an expected rise in the proportion of undernourished children. Much of the decline in the growth rate is on account of an unprecedented fall in fixed investment rate as a ratio of GDP, especially in infrastructure sectors.

Capital expenditure proposal
Given the context, the present Budget's focus on stepping up public investment by 34.5% in the coming fiscal year (compared to the current year) is a welcome sign. The Finance Minister's speech said the government will borrow an additional ₹80,000 crore for the purpose in the next two months. The estimated fiscal deficit for FY2021-22 is 6.8% of GDP for the central government. And States are allowed a higher fiscal deficit, if the expenditure is on capital investment.

These figures certainly look impressive. Realisation of these investments would crucially depend on tax revenue realisations, disinvestment proceeds, sale of rail and road assets and the government's ability to raise resources from the market, without raising interest rates for the private sector. There is no mention of the government's recourse to debt monetisation. While the investment intentions are evident, its financing efforts

seem to have too many loose ends. The proposed Development Finance Institution (DFI) is also welcome. One of the reasons for poor industrial and infrastructure investment during the last decade was a lack of long-term credit for infrastructure, which by definition yields low rates of return spread over a long period of time. Commercial banks, whose deposits are for short to medium term, find it difficult to lend for long term (more than five years) for the fear of maturity mismatch. Moreover, as banks were laden with rising non-performing assets on account of poor corporate sector performance during the last decade, their ability to make fresh loans was adversely affected. Further, contemporary experience shows that most successful industrialising economies have relied on DFIs for providing long-term credit (<https://bit.ly/3j5cqVs>).

While the renewal of the idea of DFI is welcome, many caveats are in order. Its Achilles heel is in securing stable long-term, low cost sources of finance. The Finance Minister's speech mentioned that the proposed DFI will be financed by foreign portfolio investments (FPI), which is a cause for concern. By definition, FPI represents short term inflows with exchange rate risks, while infrastructure invest-

ment is for long term whose revenues will be mostly in rupees. Such an investment will inevitably lead to currency and maturity mismatch, raising cost of capital. Hence, there is a need to consider alternative long-term sources, preferably from domestic sources, or international development agencies.

Health and employment

The first of the "6 pillars" that the Finance Minister described in her speech deals with health infrastructure – rightly so. If the announcement made represents a substantial annual fixed investment in improving urban sanitation, drinking water and sewage facilities, it is indeed a welcome step.

There are lessons to be learnt from rural Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, however. As the recent National Family Health Survey data for 2019-20 for select States showed, just constructing toilets in household premises is of little use without adequate access to water and sewage facilities, which are public goods in nature (best provided by local governments). Unless these complementary facilities are constructed in a coordinated manner, the effectiveness of such investments would be minimal.

The Budget has very little to say about employment. Surely, the proposed step-up in infrastructure would create labour demand. It bears repetition that the 2010s were a decade of job loss growth, as in official National Sample Survey estimates. The pandemic has rubbed salt into the country's wound, leading to the migration

of people from rural areas to urban centres. The future of this polarised country.

G.B. SIVANANDAM,

Coimbatore

+

crisis, which is still with us (as the report cited above shows). Unfortunately, there is very little acknowledgement and response to the crisis in the Budget.

Inequality glossed over

There is no mention of the stupendous rise in economic inequality during just the last year. While the poor lost their jobs and livelihoods in 2020, corporate India's profits zoomed. The rank of the richest Indian is at the 12th spot on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. Why could not the Budget consider a special tax on the super-rich – as many countries are now moot ing? The Budget does not seem to reckon with such a rise in inequality, let alone seek to redress it.

In summary, if the capital expenditure plan outlined in the Budget speech is credible, and implemented with assured financial backing, it could revive the investment cycle. The proposed development bank for term lending for infrastructure is welcome, provided its sources of finance are cheap, long term and mostly domestic. Investments in urban public health infrastructure – sanitation, water supply and sewage – are in the right direction if implemented in a coordinated manner.

That there is no targeted employment programme to alleviate the immediate crisis is a matter of concern. Government apathy towards those who lost jobs and livelihoods due to the health and economic shocks last year seems galling.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

What's in the Budget
The quest to have a Budget that was hailed as a six-pack economic push, with measures to accelerate economic recovery, has not been encouraging. There could have been allocations for direct cash transfer to poor households to tackle the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The Budget does not have the much-needed massive financial outlay for the revival of small and medium-scale industries. Figures highlighted by the Finance Minister to portray the government as farmer-friendly cannot be cited to validate the three new farm

laws. The super-rich seem to have escaped this time too in terms of taxation. The disinvestment of 'national assets' and privatisation do not strengthen the economy. The reason why Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and Assam have been chosen for favourable treatment is not far to seek – they are election-bound States.

G. DAVID MILTON,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

- In general, the Union Budget looks good as it focuses mainly on health care, innovation and R&D infrastructure, and

transportation networks. Very surprisingly, Tamil Nadu got a sizeable allocation towards the metro rail phase and improvement of the highway network. However, from a tax-payer's point of view, it is a lacklustre Budget as there was no announcement on any categories of an increase in the income ceiling limit, standard deduction or towards exemption under 80CC.

R.V. BASKARAN,
Chennai

- Farmers' protest
For the imbroglio to subside it would take a much committed and rationalist

government to adopt a humanitarian and realistic view of the concerns of the farmers – which is expecting too much from this government. That this government chose the pandemic period to usher in the farm laws and the repeal of labour laws, circumventing all mandatory procedures, says much about its motives. Let us not forget its earlier measures such as demonetisation or even the sudden lockdown that caught many unawares. The unflinching grit and determination of the protesting farmers and their commitment to the cause is exemplary. In their success lies the future of this polarised country.

Andamans plan
It is perplexing why the very few remaining pockets of pristine nature reserves, which are not only ecologically fragile but also home to vulnerable and ancient tribes, are being targeted in the name of development (Page 1, "A bullet through an island's heart", February 1). We have a very long coastline, much of which is untouched by "sustainable development". The people living in these coastal regions are yearning

A promising Budget with a few disappointments

While the Budget promises to revive the economy faster, it continues to emphasise the protectionist trend



M. GOVINDA RAO
is the Chief Economic Adviser, Brickwork Ratings and former Director of NIUPPF. Views are personal



A Budget that fails to address the hunger pandemic

In a year of economic slowdown and growing inequality, we have been presented with a stingy Budget that fails to ensure the bare necessities for all



DIPA SINHA
teaches at Ambedkar University, Delhi

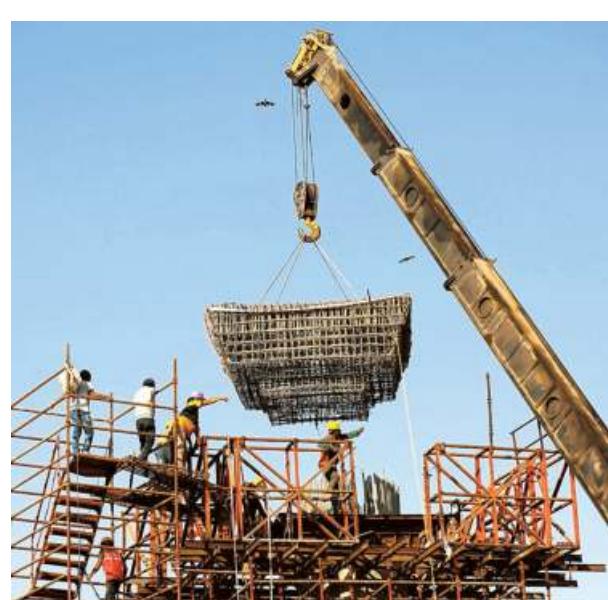


The Finance Minister has delivered, but the road ahead is long

This Budget scores very high marks on credibility and on its potential to create domestic output and jobs, but much more remains to be done



ANANTH NARAYAN
is Professor of Finance at the SP Jain Institute of Management & Research



The National Statistical Office estimates that our COVID-19-impacted economy will contract by 7.7% in the current fiscal year 2020-21 (FY20). While severe, this estimate likely does not incorporate the significantly higher distress amongst many of our micro, small and medium enterprises.

Thankfully, there are silver linings. We have avoided a second wave of COVID-19, and the worst is hopefully well behind us. Economic activity is rebounding - witness the encouraging GST collections of

a record ₹1.2 lakh crore for January 2021. But our economy, which was structurally weak even before COVID-19 hit us and has since suffered a body blow, needs to be nursed back to full health.

Against this backdrop, the 2021 Budget can be evaluated on three parameters. First, on the credibility of the Budget math. Second, on its potential to deliver what India ultimately needs - adequate domestic output and jobs. And third, on how the Budget raises resources, and its impact on the economic recovery.

The credibility of the math

This Budget scores very high marks on credibility. For too long now, our Budgets have resorted to accounting smokescreens that masked the true extent of our fiscal imbalance. Thus, revised estimates of revenue receipts would invariably be unrealistically high, only to be brought down sharply later when the books were finalised. Likewise, under the cash accounting that our governments follow, expenditure would be brought down by simply not releasing payments. Instead, entities such as the Food Corporation of India would be encouraged to borrow from elsewhere, in lieu of dues from the government.

As a result, against the FY20 revised fiscal deficit estimate of 3.8% of the GDP presented in last year's Budget, shorn of accounting jugs-

gery, the true deficit is estimated at 5.4% of GDP. Adding borrowings of other central public sector enterprises, the Central Public Sector Borrowing Requirement stood at 7.2% of GDP, nearly twice the official headline central fiscal deficit.

This year, the Finance Minister has largely come clean on the budget math. She has declared much higher than expected fiscal deficit numbers of 9.5% of the GDP and 6.8% of the GDP for FY21 and FY22, respectively. In doing so, she has put out realistic estimates of revenue receipts, and recognised 'off balance sheet' expenditures.

This truth augurs well on several fronts. First, with realistic revenue budgets, the pressure on tax authorities to engage in tax terrorism should subside. Second, the government can now release its payments and refunds on time, easing a financial bottleneck that has dogged us for a while. Third, a focus on the 'real' numbers should allow for a better-informed debate on ways to improve our fiscal balance.

Hopefully, our State governments will also follow this example of providing credible budget math. The 'true' Centre and State combined fiscal deficit is likely around 15% of GDP, far higher than we have ever seen before.

The Finance Minister has largely come clean on the budget math. She has declared much higher than expected fiscal deficit numbers of 9.5% of the GDP and 6.8% of the GDP for FY21 and FY22, respectively. In doing so, she has put out realistic estimates of revenue receipts, and recognised 'off balance sheet' expenditures.

Domestic output and jobs

There is one path for us to pay down this accumulating public debt, achieve durable growth, keep inflation in check, and ensure stable external balance - and that is by creating adequate domestic output and jobs.

The Budget scores well on its potential to create domestic output and jobs.

While expenditure for FY22 has been maintained at the elevated levels of FY21, there is a shift away from revenue expenditure - the regular payments towards items such as administration, interest, and subsidies, that are arguably less productive - and towards productive investments. Capital expenditure in FY22 is budgeted to increase by 26% over FY21, with focus on areas such as infrastructure, roads, and textile parks.

Alongside a promise to deliver more on health, education, nutrition and urban infrastructure, these complement ongoing efforts to foster domestic jobs and output, including reform of labour laws, corporate tax rate cuts and production-linked incentives.

There are also efforts to revive our stressed financial services ecosystem. The Finance Minister announced the creation of a government Asset Reconstruction Company, or 'bad bank', to warehouse some of the large non-performing assets that permeate the industry.

She also announced the creation of a new development financial institution to facilitate and fund infrastructure investments. While in principle these are welcome ideas, much depends on how the modalities are structured and on their execution. We await clarity on this score.

The Budget focuses on raising funds via disinvestment and asset sales, rather than via additional taxes. Again, I commend this choice - while the wealthy can perhaps pay more to fund our deficit, we should avoid endangering our fragile economic recovery from COVID-19 with any additional tax burdens.

The long road ahead

While the Budget has delivered on truth and held out some potential for the creation of domestic output

Budget is the reform signals it gives. Besides providing ₹20,000 crore for recapitalisation of public sector banks (PSB), an Asset Reconstruction Company and an Asset Management Company are to be set up to purchase the bad assets of banks. The decision to privatise two PSBs and a host of other companies such as Air India, Shipping Corporation of India, Pawan Hans and Containment Corporation of India, and the statement on disinvestment in strategic sectors, provides a clear signal. Increasing FDI in insurance, too, is on similar lines. Similarly, the creation of Alternate Investment Funds is important to avoid asset-liability mismatch in the banking sector. These are important announcements. However, there will be questions about the funding and governance of the new institutions.

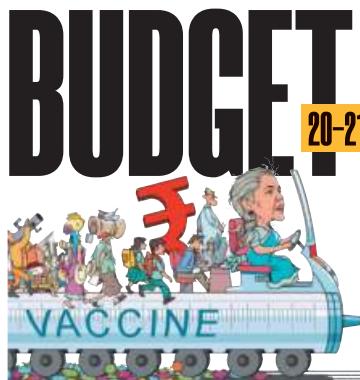
The disappointing thing about the Budget, however, is the continuation of the protectionist trend. In the name of self-reliance, we seem to be returning to the pre-1991 days. The Budget seeks to remove exemptions on a number of items and increases rates on some others. There is a broad-based infrastructure cess as well. This is surely retrograde.

The most important part of the

terms of what is required to meet the National Food Security Act entitlements. But it is clear that there is no provision for an expanded or universal PDS which many have been recommending.

In fact, it is shocking that even the health budget has not been increased, with the allocation for health this year being lower than the revised estimate for 2020-21 (₹74,602 crore versus ₹82,445 crore). The only increase here seems to be in the allocation for the COVID-19 vaccine which is a one-time expenditure and does not contribute to strengthening the health system.

Missing the mark
Overall, from the point of view of addressing hunger or providing a demand stimulus, this Budget misses the mark. The total expenditure of ₹34,83,236 crore is only ₹32,931 crore above last year's revised estimates. While it is ₹4,00,000 crore more than previous year's budgetary allocation, much of this difference is because of the correction in the food subsidy numbers. What we have been presented with in a year of economic slowdown and growing inequality is a stingy budget that fails to ensure the 'bare necessities' for all.



This Budget is the continuation of the aggressive, pro-corporate economic policies the Modi govt. has been pursuing. It has nothing for the poor
D. Raja, CPI general secretary

It is a welcome Budget given COVID-19 and constraints on revenue collection. I congratulate the Central govt. for presenting a balanced Budget
Nitish Kumar, Bihar CM

The Budget is in accordance with the expectation of public welfare and Atmanirbhar Bharat. It has taken care of every class, including farmers...
Yogi Adityanath, U.P. CM

Will the Budget be able to deal with poverty, unemployment and inflation...on this basis, the activities of the government and this Budget will be judged
Mayawati, BSP chief

At a time when the country's scientists gave life to the people by inventing COVID-19 vaccine, the Budget has put people on the path of death
Ajit Pawar, Deputy CM, Maharashtra

BUDGET 20-21

Finance Minister has deceived people of India: Chidambaram

Why is there no increase in Defence budget for soldiers, asks Rahul

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Congress said on Monday that the Union Budget for 2021-22 was full of "deception", with former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram charging Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with not sharing information such as imposing new cesses on a large number of products, including petrol and diesel.

He also accused Ms. Sitharaman of "conjuring up mind boggling numbers in the health sector, questioned her silence on Defence allocation that he claimed was "flat" and accused the government of "bleeding" public sector banks to sell them off.

Separately, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi tweeted that instead of "putting cash in the hands of the people, Modi Govt plans to hand over India's assets to his crony capitalist friends".

In another tweet, Mr. Gandhi wondered why there was no increase in the De-



Not satisfied: P. Chidambaram addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi on Monday. • PTI

fence budget for the soldiers, even though "Mr. Modi did PR photo-op with them on Diwali".

Former Commerce Minister Anand Sharma, too, expressed his disappointment and said Ms. Sitharaman "chose to be timid when she was required to be bold".

Addressing a press conference along with Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala, Mr. Chidambaram said, "She did not mention defence at all, as if the

Chinese had vacated occupied Indian territory. She did not mention that defence expenditure in 2021-22 will see no rise. It is flat at ₹3,47,088 crore, almost the same as the ₹3,43,822 crore in the current year."

Talking about the health sector allocation, he said the government added expenditure under vaccination (₹35,000 crore), Finance Commission grant (₹49,214 crore) and sums allotted to sanitation and water. "Shorn

of these add-ons, the allocations for health were ₹72,934 in 2020-21 and ₹79,602 crore in 2021-22," he said.

The senior Congress leader said the Finance Minister had "deceived" the people of India, especially the poor, working class, migrants, farmers, industrial units that had been closed down permanently and those who had lost their jobs, both regular and informal.

'No rescue plan'

He noted that though the Finance Minister referred to farmers 11 times in her speech, the agriculture sector had been "short-changed", micro small medium enterprises sector "dismissed" with a "meagre" allocation of ₹15,700 crore and there was no rescue plan for the closed units.

Mr. Chidambaram also demanded a probe to find out how Bloomberg news agency put out the Revenue Deficit and Fiscal Deficit numbers 40 minutes before the Finance Minister read it.

SJM raises caution over PSU sell-off

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

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IN BRIEF



Kangana gets summons on Javed Akhtar's plaint

MUMBAI

The metropolitan magistrate court on Monday issued summons to actor Kangana Ranaut to appear on March 1 on a criminal complaint filed by lyricist Javed Akhtar alleging defamatory statements made by the actor about him.

Accused can meet counsel in jail: U.P. govt.

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has informed the Allahabad High Court that the lawyer for the three persons jailed along with journalist Siddique Kappan, while they were on their way to Hathras, would be allowed to meet them in jail. Research scholar Atiq-ur-Rehman, activist Masood Ahmed, Kappan and Mohammad Alam, the driver of the cab ferrying them, were arrested on October 5.

Order on Sivasankar's bail plea on Wednesday

KOCHI

The Economic Offences Court, Ernakulam, will pronounce its order on a bail application of M. Sivasankar, former Principal Secretary to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, in the dollar smuggling case on Wednesday. Opposing the bail plea on Monday, counsel for the Customs contended that Mr. Sivasankar's influence posed a danger of intimidation of witnesses.

Lt. Gen. Mohanty is Vice-Chief of Army Staff

NEW DELHI

Lt. Gen. C.P. Mohanty on Monday assumed charge as the Vice-Chief of the Army Staff. He succeeds Lt. Gen. S.K. Saini, who retired on January 31. Lt. Gen. Mohanty was earlier serving as the Southern Army Commander. He has commanded a battalion on the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir and in the northeastern region.

Firm told to pay ₹2056 cr. for excess mining

BHUBANESWAR

A leading mining company has been slapped with a fine of ₹2056 crore towards compensation for carrying out excess excavation of iron ore in Odisha's Keonjhar district. Sarda Mines Private Limited had environment clearance to raise 6.66 lakh tonnes of iron ore during February and March of 2020. Instead, the company produced 49.61 lakh tonnes.

One more Trinamool MLA quits party, likely to join BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

Defections from the Trinamool Congress continue unabated. On Monday, Diamond Harbour MLA Dipak Kumar Halder resigned from the party.

Diamond Harbour, located in South 24 Parganas district, was a constituency that voted overwhelmingly for Trinamool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee in 2019.

A few days ago, Mr. Halder met former Kolkata Mayor Sovan Chatterjee, who had defected from the Trinamool to the BJP more than two years ago. The meeting and his subsequent resignation have fuelled speculation that Mr. Halder

Farmers threaten to block highways

Stir planned on February 6; protesters say govt. is on a path of withdrawing support to agriculture

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Farmer leaders heading the agitation against the three farm laws on Monday announced to block the national and State highways across the country on February 6 in support of their demands.

Making the announcement, Balbir Singh Rajewal, who heads a faction of the Bharatiya Kisan Union in Punjab, accused the government of repression by blocking roads around the protest sites, suspending Internet services and snapping the water and power supply at the three sites. He was addressing a joint press conference by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, a coalition of farmer unions, at the Singhu border here.

Mr. Rajewal said the trains were being diverted to prevent the farmers from reaching the protest sites in the national Capital from the neighbouring States. The Twitter accounts of those supporting the movement were withheld and journalists arrested, he said. "It has, therefore, been decided to block highways for three



Getting ready: An aerial view of the Delhi-Ghazipur border, where barricades are being erected, on Monday to prevent the farmers from entering the city. • ANI

hours on February 6 in the afternoon in protest against the repressive measures of the government. It was also discussed at the meeting that the budgetary allocation to agriculture has been reduced," said Mr. Rajewal.

Darshan Pal, Krantikari Kisan Union's Punjab unit

president, said the Delhi police had released a list of 122 people arrested in connection with the violence during the Republic Day. He said a committee had already been set up to meet them in jails and provide them legal aid. Mr. Pal claimed that the Fe-rozepur-Mumbai Punjab

Mail was diverted to Rewari and two more trains were terminated at Rohtak causing inconvenience to farmers headed to protest sites.

Fears over FCI

Accusing the government of being 'arrogant' and 'shrewd' to reduce the bud-

getary allocation for agriculture amid the ongoing agitation, Swaraj India national president Yogendra Yadav said the government had not allocated anything for the FCI. He said it raised fears that it could be a conspiracy to shut the FCI.

The farmer unions, in a press statement, said the Budget had proved the farmers' apprehensions right – that this government is on a path of withdrawing support to agriculture, not strengthening it. Despite the huge farmers' protests and deep discontent at their economic plight, the Union government gave the lowest priority to agriculture. The share of agriculture and allied activities in the Budget has fallen from 5.1% to 4.3%; even in absolute terms, the allocation fell from ₹1.54 lakh crore to ₹1.48 lakh crore.

Even as the farmers announced to protest against alleged repression by the government, the MHA extended the suspension of Internet till 11 p.m. on February 2 at Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri – the three protest sites bordering Delhi.

Farmers' stir: Twitter blocks several accounts

Messages were in support of agitation



Twitter contested the order as the accounts were not in violation of Twitter policy.

cement agencies to prevent any escalation of law and order in view of the ongoing farmers' agitation. However, most accounts were restored in the evening. A source said Twitter contested the order as the accounts were "not in violation of Twitter policy."

The accounts were taken down after the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeITY), based on a request by the MHA, asked Twitter to act against 250 Twitter handles. The MeITY directed Twitter to block around 250 tweets/Twitter accounts, which were using #ModiPlanning-FarmerGenocide hashtag and making fake, intimidatory and provocative Tweets on January 30.

"This was done on a request of the Ministry of Home Affairs and law enforcement," said a source.

Twitter said, "Pending our discussions with the regulatory authorities, we temporarily withheld these accounts... During our subsequent meetings with the officials, Twitter conveyed that the accounts and Tweets in question constitute free speech and are newsworthy. Therefore, these Tweets and accounts have now been unwithheld."

Modi speaks to Netanyahu on Delhi blast

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday spoke to his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu and conveyed his "strong condemnation" of the January 29 blast near the Israeli Embassy here.

The Prime Minister conveyed his strong condemnation of the terror attack near the Israeli Embassy. He assured Mr. Netanyahu that India accords the highest importance to the safety and security of Israeli diplomats and premises, and would deploy all its resources to find and punish the perpetrators," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a release.

Mr. Kushner had held two meetings with senior JD (U) leaders and was likely to firm up arrangements for the merger in the next few weeks, said sources in the know.

"He [Mr. Kushner] has been speaking to former Bi-

Kushwaha meets former rival Nitish

RLSP chief explores ways for the merger of his party with the Janata Dal (U)



Upendra Kushwaha

fore, a merger is what was discussed," said a source.

The RLSP fought the Assembly elections as part of an alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen and the Janta Party (Socialist), but did not win a seat. "His party, however, did manage to damage the JD (U)'s prospects in many seats, especially the Shahbad and Buxar areas," said a source.

No Kushwaha in Cabinet

"With Mewalal Choudhary resigning as Minister, as his appointment in the wake of corruption allegations was found politically untenable,

we have no Kushwaha representative in the Bihar Cabinet. There are 12 seats in the Legislative Council to be nominated by the Governor and Upendraji could well be accommodated," said the source.

Interestingly, a Bihar BJP team is in New Delhi to finalise the nominees for the MLC seats and discuss Cabinet net expansion.

The State Assembly polls saw the JD(U) shrink from its earlier footprint, a situation that arose, say party leaders, due to the scatter of old socialist Janata family votes and the rebellion by Lok Janshakti Party leader Chirag Paswan.

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GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA		
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER,		
KALAHANDI RWS&S DIVISION, BHAWANIPATNA		
INVITATION OF BID THROUGH e -TENDERING		
Bid Identification No-33/EE/RWSS/2020-21/Bpt Dated.29.01.2021		
01. Name of the work :- As per ANNEXURE - A		
Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender online for bidding on office hour only
1	2	3 4 5
Executive Engineer, Kalahandi RWS&S Division, Bhawaniapatna	33/EE/RWSS/2020-21/Bpt Dated.29.01.2021	04.02.2021 10.00 AM 24.02.2021 05.30 PM 25.02.2021 10.00 AM onwards
Cost of tender paper & payment of EMD to be made online payment system. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal http://tenderodisha.gov.in		
Executive Engineer, Kalahandi RWS&S Division, Bhawaniapatna O-995: DIPR/673/Tender/2021		
e-mail: eerwsskld@gmail.com, eerws_kd@nic.in, Phone No: 06670-230784		

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Tender Notice No.8/F/F&R/T.No.19,20,21,22/20		

IN BRIEF



4 metro stations closed on Green Line for 7 hours

NEW DELHI
The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation on Monday closed the entry and exit gates of four metro stations on the Green Line for nearly seven hours due to the ongoing farmer's agitation. Brigadier Hoshier Singh, Bahadurgarh City, Pandit Shree Ram Sharma and Tikri border metro stations were closed around 9.45 a.m. due to security reasons. They were reopened at 5.30 p.m. Metro services on several sections have remained affected over the last one week due to the stir.

Protesters set up desk to track 'missing persons'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

An information desk has been set up at the Singhu border protest site to track the details of persons believed to be missing after the violence on January 26.

A team of advocates will work on the cases.

Advocate Simranjeet Kaur Gill, who is among several lawyers that joined together to start the project, said they have been told that there are over 450 missing persons, however, they had collected information of only 250 persons by Monday afternoon.

"Announcements are also being made about informing farmer leaders, or at the stage, about missing people. We already have a list of people who have been arrested. We believe there are people who have been illegally detained," she added.

A team of 150 lawyers will work on the cases and look for these people in police stations and will track court proceedings after their arrest.

Police refute allegations
The Delhi police have refuted allegations of "illegal detention". "There are rumours being spread about illegal detention and missing farmers after the January 26 violence. The police have registered 44 cases and arrested 122 persons so far," Delhi Police public relations officer Eish Singh said, adding that details of these persons are available online.

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED



CHEMA

General public is hereby informed that one girl namely **Chema D/o Manoj Kumar R/o H.No. B-5/151 S.J. Enclave, New Delhi** has been missing/kidnapped from her residence since 22.01.2021. In this regard, a case **GD No. 58A Dated 23.01.2021** has been registered at P.S. **Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi**. The description of the missing girl are as under.

Age: 18 Years, **Complexion:** Shallow, **Height:** 4' 10", **Face:** Oval, **Built:** Normal, **Wearing:** Grey colour kurta and white colour pajama. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out her but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone has any information about the missing/kidnapped girl then please inform PS: Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi at following Tel No./e-mail: cic@cbi.gov.in and Website: http://cbi.nic.in, providing clue about the missing girl.

Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641

Fax No. 011-24368639

PS: **Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi**

Ph.: 011-24106345
DP/491/SW/2021

PRESS NOTICE ON SHORT TERM BASIS TO BE ISSUED FOR PUBLICATION IN NEWSPAPERS FOR E-TENDERING

The Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division No.I Kulu at Bhuntar invites offline tenders on short time basis on behalf of Government or Himachal Pradesh from approved eligible contractors for the following works :-

S. No.	Name of Work:	Estimated Cost	EMD Cost of Tender	Time of completion (months)	Cost of form
1.	A/R & M/O to LWSS BadhaiBadgarn in G.P Gopalpur in tehsil Banjar DistKullu H.P.(SH:- Annual running repair, maintenance and operation of the scheme for pump house to existing storage tank for 1 Year	312880	6258	One Year	250
2.	A/R & M/O to LWSS Teel Bachoot in tehsil Banjar DistKullu H.P.(SH:- Annual running repair, maintenance and operation of the scheme for pump house to existing storage tank for 1 Year	457200	9144	One Year	250

Last date sale of tender forms:- 04-02-2021 upto 5:00 PM and opened on 05-02-2021 up to 12:30 PM.

The tender forms/NIT and other detailed conditions can be downloaded from the website www.hppihp.org or from office of the Executive Engineer upto date specified above.

(Er. Ravinder Kumar Sharma)
Executive Engineer
Jal Shakti Division No.I
Kulu at Bhuntar

HP/5461/20-21

HIMSUNCHA AVAM JANSAMPARK

More tractors arrive at Singhu border

Several steps taken in Punjab, Haryana to increase strength at protest site; farmers vow to intensify stir

HEMANI BHANDARI

NEW DELHI
Over 500 tractors from Haryana made their way to the Singhu border protest site on Monday in an attempt to reassure farmers that the stir will continue to intensify.

Amrjeet Dayanand, 25, a resident of Haryana's Sonipat, said that members of Sarohia khap from 12 villages had come to the Delhi border with their tractors.

"We gathered at 9 a.m.

and started from Sonipat. The over 500 tractors led to a jam around 10 km long. This is a show of the power of farmers and that this stir is not going to end," he said.

Sudhir Saroha, 20, said that a few people had tarnished the purpose of the protest on January 26 and farmers have to now correct it. Members of one village will stay here every day for the next 12 days, he added.

"When our leader Rakesh Tikait cried, we all were moved. We will take this struggle to the end," said Billo Ranji, 50, from atop a tractor in which she was joined by 100 other women.

Measures are being taken

both in Punjab and Haryana to increase the crowd at all border protest sites.

Turn up or pay fine

Back in villages in Punjab, Bharat Kisan Union (BKV) office-bearers said that committees have been set up to ensure people turn up for the protest in Delhi. "Com-

mittees have been formed

with the people's support and it has been decided that one person from every family will come for the protest and if they don't, they will have to pay a fine which will be decided depending on their financial position," said Amreek Singh, district pradhan, BKU, Jalandhar (Punjab). He added that people should know that if they do

not turn up for the stir then their own future is bleak.

Similarly, in some Haryana villages, rules have been drawn up to ensure people participate in the agitation.

Bajinder Singh, 32, from Karnal, said that in his village of Rattak the same rule of one person per family has been decided, in addition to one tractor.

Dilbagh Singh from Karnal said that people in two trolley-walls will come for the protest and stay for four days till the next two trolleys arrive.

On Monday, the Delhi Police installed spikes at the Tikri border and put another layer of security by fixing cement between two layers of barricades. Also, Twitter ac-

counts of the Kisan Ekta Morcha and other handles sup-

porting the farmers' protest were "withheld in India in response to a legal demand".

Women farmers from Haryana arrive at the Singhu border to join the ongoing protest against three farm laws brought in by the Centre, on Monday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Timings

DELHI

TUESDAY, FEB. 02
RISE 07:09 SET 18:02
RISE 22:47 SET 10:16
WEDNESDAY, FEB. 03
RISE 07:09 SET 18:03
RISE 23:51 SET 10:51
THURSDAY, FEB. 04
RISE 07:08 SET 18:03
RISE 00:00 SET 11:29

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	26	05
Safdarjung	26	05
Palam	24	08

Delhi Palam Today

23°C Shallow to moderate fog likely during cold morning at some places. Dry winds likely. A comfortable sunny day would prevail.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

23°C Light to moderate fog easterly winds likely. Rise in morning temperature and sky may turn partly cloudy towards evening.

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IN BRIEF



Rashtrapati Bhavan to reopen from Saturday

NEW DELHI
The Rashtrapati Bhavan on Monday said it would reopen for visitors from February 6. Public viewing has been closed due to COVID-19 since March 13, 2020. Visitors can book their time slots online. A maximum of 25 visitors will be allowed per slot. During the tour, visitors will have to follow COVID-19 protocols.

Indian Oil to promote fuel, energy conservation

NEW DELHI
Starting this year, Indian Oil Corporation Limited (Delhi Division) is organising 'Retail Outlet Talk' events at prominent petrol pumps across the city for interaction and brand mileage. The interface is aimed at spreading consumer awareness, promoting conservation of petroleum and energy, and reducing excessive dependence on oil.

Air Quality of Delhi-NCR				
Delhi	352	Gurugram	271	
Ghaziabad	412	Faridabad	352	
Noida	369	Greater Noida	384	
■ Good	■ Satisfactory	■ Moderate		
0-50	51-100	101-200		
■ Poor	■ Very Poor	■ Severe		
201-300	301-400	>400		
Air Quality Index at 4 p.m., yesterday (Average of past 24 hours)		Source: CPCB		

Air quality of Delhi in 'very poor' category

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI
The air quality of Delhi and Noida was in the "very poor" category and Gurugram's "poor" on Monday, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data.

The national capital's air quality is expected to slightly deteriorate on Tuesday. "The AQI is likely to marginally deteriorate but within the high end of the 'very poor' category for the next two days. AQI is forecasted to marginally improve and in the middle-end of the 'very poor' category on February 4," said government-run monitoring agency, SAFAR.

The speed of surface-level winds was "low", which aided in the accumulation of pollutants near the surface.

'Sero survey shows 56% have antibodies'

Over 7,000 healthcare workers get jabs, 15 adverse events reported; govt. to increase vaccination sites to 183

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

About 56% of the over 28,000 people whose blood samples were collected in January during a serological survey have developed antibodies against COVID-19, officials told *The Hindu*.

The Delhi government conducted the fifth serological survey – the largest till now – to get an idea about the percentage of the population with antibodies against COVID-19, before the vaccination drive. As a part of the survey, blood samples of people of different age groups were collected.

"The overall seroprevalence is a little over 56%. In some districts, the value is higher, and others have a lower value," the Delhi government official said.

A second official also confirmed the development.

The Delhi government is yet to make the results of the



The government plans to increase the number of vaccination sites to 1,000 in a phased manner. ■ FILE PHOTO

survey public.

cate herd immunity.

The current result shows that Delhi might be close to herd immunity, depending on quality of sample selection. But according to experts, different parts of even the same city can attain herd immunity at different times.

The first such survey done in the city in June-July had shown that 23.4% of people surveyed had developed antibodies against the virus.

Similar surveys in August showed that 29.1% of people

will be using Covishield and 25 Covaxin. The 183 sites will be set up in 114 hospitals,

have antibodies, 25.1% in September, and 25.5% in October. A positive result implies that the person has developed antibodies against the virus. This means that the person was infected at some point and developed immunity against it.

Frontline workers

Meanwhile, 7,893 healthcare workers took the COVID-19 vaccination in the city on Monday, said a Delhi government spokesperson.

There were 15 Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI). Of these, 10 were from Covishield and five from Covaxin.

The government has planned to increase the number of vaccination sites from 106 to 183 from Tuesday, said an official.

"Of the 77 new sites, 52

will be using Covishield and

25 Covaxin. The 183 sites will be set up in 114 hospitals,

with some hospitals having multiple vaccination sites," the official said, adding that the sites are being increased as frontline workers, including police and teachers, are expected to start getting vaccinated later this week following Centre's directions.

The departments concerned are updating the list of frontline workers and the process is still under way.

Each vaccination site has a target of 100 healthcare workers each, so the total target has increased from 8,100 to 10,600. The government plans to increase the number of vaccination sites to 1,000 in a phased manner.

121 new cases, 3 deaths

The national capital saw 121 fresh COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, taking the tally to 6,35,217, read a health bulletin released on Monday. Three more fatalities have pushed the death toll to 10,856.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18:00)
Forecast for Tuesday: Dense/very dense fog likely in isolated pockets over Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim and Bihar. Cold wave/severe cold wave conditions likely in isolated pockets over Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	... - 23.4	7.5	... - 25.3	Kozhikode	... - 34.8	... - 19.3	... - 25.3
Ahmedabad	... - 32.4	11.6	... - 19.3	Kurnool	... - 32.5	... - 19.3	... - 19.3
Aizawl	... - 18.3	5.7	... - 7.6	Lucknow	... - 23.8	... - 7.6	... - 7.6
Allahabad	... - 26.0	5.7	... - 22.4	Madurai	... - 32.1	... - 22.4	... - 22.4
Bengaluru	... - 29.6	16.8	... - 21.4	Mangaluru	... - 36.2	... - 21.4	... - 21.4
Bhopal	... - 27.7	7.4	... - 19.0	Mumbai	... - 34.9	... - 19.0	... - 19.0
Bhubaneswar	... - 28.7	13.8	... - 17.4	Mysuru	... - 31.0	... - 17.4	... - 17.4
Chandigarh	... - 24.1	6.7	... - 5.3	New Delhi	... - 26.4	... - 5.3	... - 5.3
Chennai	... - 30.6	10.7	... - 7.4	Patna	... - 21.2	... - 7.4	... - 7.4
Coimbatore	... - 31.5	19.6	... - 26.2	Port Blair	... - 31.6	... - 26.2	... - 26.2
Dehradun	... - 22.9	6.4	... - 20.6	Puducherry	... - 31.0	... - 20.6	... - 20.6
Gangtok	... - 11.6	5.1	... - 16.3	Pune	... - 30.3	... - 16.3	... - 16.3
Goa	... - 35.2	22.0	... - 12.6	Raipur	... - 28.6	... - 12.6	... - 12.6
Guwahati	... - 25.0	10.0	... - 6.3	Ranchi	... - 23.7	... - 6.3	... - 6.3
Hubballi	... - 30.0	19.0	... - 16.1	Shillong	... - 15.8	... - 4.5	... - 4.5
Hyderabad	... - 29.6	20.6	... - 6.1	Shimla	... - 16.1	... - 6.1	... - 6.1
Imphal	... - 22.7	4.8	... - 4.5	Srinagar	... - 0.4	... - 5.5	... - 4.5
Jaipur	... - 27.2	8.9	... - 24.8	Thiruvananthapuram	... - 34.0	... - 24.8	... - 24.8
Kochi	... - 31.8	25.0	... - 21.2	Tiruchi	... - 31.7	... - 21.2	... - 21.2
Kohima	... - 18.5	5.0	... - 22.4	Vijayawada	... - 31.4	... - 22.4	... - 22.4
Kolkata	... - 23.4	9.6	... - 23.2	Visakhapatnam	... - 29.0	... - 23.2	... - 23.2

(Rainfall in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Yesterday

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	36	110	.58	.161	.176	... - 25.3
Bengaluru	7	.33	.25	.103	.92	... - 19.3
Chennai	... - 11	.21	.54	.72	.103	... - 7.6
Delhi	37	142	108	.438	.390	■
Hyderabad	.9	.70	.29	.154	.131	■
Kolkata	13	.77	.38	.291	.180	■
Lucknow	15	.84	106	.286	.316	■
Mumbai	12	.42	.34	.241	.198	■
Pune	... - 27	.44	.127	.134	.134	■
Visakhapatnam	21	.36	.48	.272	.154	■

In observation made at 4 p.m., Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 421 indicating that the air quality level is very poor in contrast, Bagalkot, Karnataka recorded a healthy AQI score of 37

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

BJP faces farmers' anger in western U.P.

Banners have come up after an oblique appeal made at panchayats to boycott those against their cause

ANUJ KUMAR
GAZIABAD

The surge of farmers at the Ghaziabad border has begun to show its socio-political impact in western Uttar Pradesh with banners coming up in villages of Bijnor, Shamli, and Ghaziabad wherein locals have shown their ire against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders and supporters.

In Banthla village of Loni, a banner says the village boycotts Loni MLA Nand Kishore Gurjar. The Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) had alleged that Mr. Gurjar was present at the Ghaziabad protest site on the evening of January 28 with his supporters and would have beaten up farmers had their leader Rakesh Tikait didn't stand firm. In Bijnor's Rashidpur Garhi, the banner takes a more threatening tone.

The banners have come up after an oblique appeal was made at the panchayats in Muzaffarnagar and Baghpat that people should boycott those who were against farmers.

In the Bajna panchayat in Mathura, Rashtriya Lok Dal



A banner at Banthla village in Ghaziabad. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

leader Jayant Chaudhary made a similar appeal to socially ostracise people who were against farmers.

Sources in the BJP agree what Mr. Gurjar's actions did hurt party's image in the sugarcane belt but add that the MLA has a tendency to comment on every issue and loves to court controversies "He is a 'bayan bahadur' (quote warrior) who loves to court controversies. What he did was in his individual capacity and a clear deviation from the party line," said a BJP member from Loni requesting anonymity.

Local sources say Mr. Gurjar has a running feud with the municipality chairman Ranjeeta Dham, whose husband was a contender for the party ticket from Loni. The banner might be a ploy to ruin his prospects for the future.

Move neutralised

After the incidents of January 28, Mr. Gurjar tried to present himself as a community leader but the BKU was quick to neutralise it with Madan Bhaiya, a Gurjar heavyweight and a four-time MLA who unsuc-

cessfully fought the 2017 Assembly election against Mr. Kishore on an RLD ticket, coming in support of protesting farmers.

A Jat BJP leader agreed there is anger but it is more of an "emotional issue" about the "dignity of the community" rather than mass opposition of farm laws. "Anyway, now we have something to defend in elections rather just praising our achievements," he chuckled, underlining how people in the region had been donating huge amounts for the construction of the Ram Temple.

Surya Mani Raghuvanshi, editor of an eveninger in Bijnor, said banners might get or have already been removed by the administration but the resentment against the ruling party is palpable. "However, its result would be clear only after the Panchayat elections."

Naseer Shah, a senior advocate in Mathura who raises issues of farmers, said anger was brewing in the region but it found an expression after the emotional outburst of Mr.

Tikait. "After the mahapanchayat in Bajna, several small panchayats are being organised in various parts of the district. On Monday, a meeting was organised in Baldev area where about 1000 farmers participated. This is significant because earlier even if there was a call not more than 100 turned up for such panchayats," he said.

'We didn't put banners'

Yudhvir Singh, general secretary of BKU, said the banners were not put up by the outfit. "We don't have the budget to put posters nor do we target supporters of any particular party. Our job is to raise issues of farmers irrespective of the government in power. It might be the doing of the locals."

Mr. Singh reminded the Ram Temple issue was also an "emotional" one. "We are a country of emotional people. The government promised to double the income of farmers. That remains a tempting jumla. It has yet to come up with a formula to make it a reality," he said.

Farmers throng Bijnor panchayat

Will expose the new farm laws across the country, says BKU

ANUJ KUMAR
GAZIABAD

On Monday morning, BKU general secretary Yudhvir Singh tweeted a video of a villager announcing the call for a panchayat by beating the drum attached to the carrier of his bicycle. "Can the suspension of internet service stop this as well?" asked Mr. Singh.

He was proved right as thousands of farmers turned up for the panchayat in Bijnor despite pressure from the administration.

"You can't stop the flood of people. The administration tried it in Baraut on Sunday but had to regret eventually," said Mr. Singh. "It is just a start. We will expose the laws across the country."

The panchayat was attended by RLD leader Jayant Chaudhary and Gaurav Tikait, son of BKU president Naresh Tikait.

Mr. Chaudhary said the panchayats have shown light after darkness enveloped every farmer's house after the Ghaziabad incident on Thursday. "Ajit Singh (RLD president) made a start and to-



Farmers at the panchayat in Bijnor on Monday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

day's show of strength is its example."

The good thing, he said, was people were reaching these panchayats on their own accord after spending their money on travel. "The farmers in western U.P. have woken up and they want the government to accept their demands."

He said the government should accede to people's demands as it is expected in a democracy. "I appeal to the Prime Minister to step back and give up on his adamant stance."

Mr. Singh said there was nothing in the Budget that

can explain the government's promise of doubling farmers' income. "There is no concrete plan to improve the condition of farmers when the cost of farming keeps rising. Most of the provisions go to agro-industries," he said.

Earlier, the Bijnor administration made massive arrangements for the panchayat with four ASPs, eight DSPs, 22 SHOs and 600 constables on the ground, besides fours companies of the PAC were pressed into service. Ramit Sharma, IG Modradab, also camped in Bijnor.

Punjab helpline for persons missing since tractor parade

State Ministers meet Home Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Amid growing concerns over more than 100 persons from Punjab reportedly missing in the Delhi-Haryana region since Republic Day tractor parades, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Monday announced a helpline number, 112, to report all such instances.

The Chief Minister said his Cabinet colleagues had met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and he (Capt. Amarinder) would personally take up the cases with the Ministry of Home Affairs.

"Our hearts are with

those fighting for their rights at the Delhi borders," said the Chief Minister.

"We are trying to get details and will ensure that they return to their homes," said Capt. Amarinder during a virtual event, attended by sarpanches of various villages.

Shromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal announced that the party had established a control room along with a helpline at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib in Delhi to provide assistance, including legal aid, to farmer families whose members were reported missing since January 26 or had been arrested.

The Chief Minister said his Cabinet colleagues had met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and he (Capt. Amarinder) would personally take up the cases with the Ministry of Home Affairs.

"Our hearts are with

Rajasthan local body election results put Congress in front

It expects to form governing boards with Independents

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

The results for elections to 90 urban local bodies in Rajasthan's 20 districts have put the ruling Congress in a position of advantage, as the party expects to form the governing boards in over 50 municipal bodies with the support of Independents. The Congress has secured 1,194 of the 3,034 wards, while the BJP won 1,146 and Independent candidates bagged 631.

Though the Congress has got a clear majority in 19 municipal bodies, against BJP's majority in 23, the Independents who will be a deciding factor in 37 urban bodies are likely to extend support to the Congress. The voting for electing chairpersons of municipal bodies will take place on February 7.

The Congress suffered a setback in the Ajmer Municipal Corporation, which was the only municipal corpora-



tion going to polls. Of the 80 wards in Ajmer, the Congress won 18 and the BJP 48. The urban local bodies for which the polling was held on January 28 included nine municipal councils and 80 municipalities.

Among other parties, the Nationalist Congress Party won 46, Rashtriya Loktantrik Party 13, CPI(M) 3 and Bahujan Samaj Party one ward.

The NCP was the surprise winner in two municipal councils – Niwai in Tonk district and Nokha in Bikaner district.

Of the five municipal bodies in the four State Assemblies where by-elections are due, the Congress and the BJP won one each and the Independents obtained majority in three. While Rajsamand went to Congress and Bhilawala district's Sahara to the BJP, the Independent candidates won in Udaipur district's Bhinder and Churu district's Sujangarh and Bidasar.

'People supported us'

Pradesh Congress Committee president Govind Singh Dotsara said here on Monday that the people in the State had supported the ruling party in the middle of the farmers' agitation.

He said the Congress would form the boards in more than 50 local bodies, as it had not allotted its symbols and extended support to Independents in several municipal councils and municipalities.

Budget shows Centre's total apathy towards common man: Punjab CM

He trashes claim that health sector allotment has been hiked

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Rejecting the Union Budget as being reflective of the BJP-led Central government's total apathy towards the common man, the middle class and the farmers, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said on Monday that even the vital defence sector had not been adequately addressed despite the growing border threat from China and Pakistan, while Health allocation was actually down amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Trashing the Centre's claim that the health sector allotment had been increased by 35%, the Chief Minister said the fact was that numbers had been effectively fudged to project a hike by including the ₹35,000 crore COVID-19 vaccine allotment and the amount set aside for sanitisation and cleanliness under the health head. Actually, the budget for health was down 10%, he added.

Punjab Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal said



the entire North India had been ignored again in the Budget he termed 'poll-bound States-centric'. "The Union Budget's politicisation has now reached unprecedented levels," he said.

Both agriculture and defence get a nominal increase, he said. "All northern States are focused on agriculture and defence, and the idea of Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan has been consistently ignored by the NDA government. The Budget is silent on agriculture, it is silent on unemployment, it is silent on agricultural unrest, it is silent on MSP, it is silent on revenue generation, it is silent on the middle class,

and it is silent on Discoms," he said.

BJP's former ally, Shiromani Akali Dal said the budget was anti-farmer, anti-poor and anti-common man, and the sole focus of the BJP-led Central government was on selling off national assets to its corporate friends.

SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal said the Budget had also punished Punjabis for supporting the peaceful agitation against the three agricultural laws, as nothing was earmarked for the State.

Anti-Punjab budget: AAP Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) termed the Budget anti-people and anti-Punjab. Senior leader of the party and Leader of the Opposition in the Punjab Assembly, Harpal Singh Cheema, said the Budget would only increase the problems of the common man, along with inflation.

Haryana Congress president Kumari Selja said the Budget had disappointed every section.

Budget focused on poll-bound States only, says Rajasthan CM

No measures to address unemployment'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Monday said the Union Budget, which was focused on the five election-bound States, did not contain any concrete measures to address the issue of unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. "The Budget is anti-poor, anti-farmer and disappointing. It lacks any direction," he said.

"The entire focus of the Budget is on the States of West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, which are going to polls. It seems to be more a electoral States' Budget rather than the Union Budget," Mr. Gehlot said in his reaction to the Budget speech of Fi-

nance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Mr. Gehlot said the middle-class taxpayers had hoped that the Narendra Modi government would give some relief by changing the income tax slab, but this did not happen. Every section of the society had been left "completely disappointed," he said.

Discrimination against State' The Chief Minister said the State government was expecting a national project status for the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project and the special State status in the Har Ghar Nal Yojana for piped water supply. The Centre had discriminated against Rajasthan, Mr. Gehlot said.

Odisha will be hit by reduction in Central taxes: CM Patnaik

STAFF REPORTER

BHUABEESWAR

Odisha would be hit by the "drastic" reduction in its share in Central taxes, said Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in his reaction to the 15th Finance Commission recommendations on Monday.

Mr. Patnaik, however, found many positives from the national perspective in the first Budget in the post-COVID-19 scenario.

"Odisha would be hit by a drastic reduction of its share in Central taxes, by about ₹10,840 crore for the current year, and as per the recommendations of the 15th Fi-

nance Commission, the [State's] horizontal share will decrease from 4.629% to 4.528% for the coming five years. This will seriously impact the State," Mr. Patnaik said.

He pointed out that capital investments were very much required in Odisha, both in the Railways and highways sectors, as they had been planned for other States.

The Chief Minister expressed satisfaction over the focus on women's empowerment as 'Mission Shakti' was mentioned in the Union Budget.

TAMILNADU STATE AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD

Short Tender Notice No.1/30/Dr/F/115/2020/Dated: 01.02.2021

Lumpsum Contract (Two cover system)

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, sealed tenders will be received for the work by the Executive Engineer, Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board, Guindy, Chennai-32, from the PWD Registered Contractors Class above 75.00 lakhs, upto 30.00 lakhs, on 18.02.2021. The tender will be opened by the Executive Engineer on the same day 18.02.2021 at 3.30 PM. in the presence of tenders present at that time.

S/L.No.

Name of Work

Establishment of core infrastructure for Agro processing Cluster at

1) Kanjanayakkalpetti in Salem District, 2)T.Puttur Village of Cuddalore District,

3)Chennappalai village of Krishnagiri District, 4) Thiruvannamalai Market Committee in Thiruvannamalai District, 5) Kotur Village in Tenkasi District, 6) Mukkampatti Village of Madurai District, 7) Thangampatti Village in Dindigul District.

Note: The tender Schedules will be available during Office hours up to 17.02.2021, after remitting cost of tender schedule Rs. 16/- (for each work) including GST in the shape of DD, in favour of "Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board, Guindy, Chennai-32, Post Box No. 1017, Chennai-600032, Tamil Nadu, India".

(2) Further particulars can be obtained from the office of the Executive Engineer, Tamil Nadu State Agricultural Marketing Board, CIPET Road, Guindy, Chennai-32 during office hours i.e., 10.00 am to 5.45 pm on all working days. (3) The tender received after due date and time will be summarily rejected.

(4) Period of completion 12 months for each work. (5) Value put to tender For Sl.No (1) ₹467.00, (2) 1359.32, (3) ₹295.54, (4) ₹1438.35, (5) ₹1334.00, (6) ₹1732.45, (7) ₹1396.62 (8) ₹1415.11, (9) ₹114.95, (10) ₹19.42, (11) ₹7.15.65, (12) ₹1.60, (13) ₹1.42, (14) ₹1.32, (15) ₹1.23, (16) ₹1.12, (17) ₹1.02, (18) ₹0.92, (19) ₹0.82, (20) ₹0.72, (21) ₹0.62, (22) ₹0.52, (23) ₹0.42, (24) ₹0.32, (25) ₹0.22, (2

REVIEW



A new life
The MacBook Air M1 is a great base model from Apple ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

I was in class VIII when Apple announced its first MacBook. It was gorgeous for its time and every high schooler had to have the white polycarbonate laptop. Its design standard was set by the Powerbook G4, one of Apple's early laptops. Then came the aluminium unibodies of the late 2000s and 2010s, offering a premium finish ultimately setting Apple apart from others in terms of design and price point; these models were a landmark of my university years. What did they all have in common though? They were powered by Intel chipsets.

So last year, when Apple announced M1, their first native chipsets for Macs, I was keen to get my hands on one. If you are going to opt for any MacBook, the space grey and gold models are the ones to go for; leave the silver behind in 2018. It is easy to keep these unibodies clean, a simple wipe-down with a microfibre cloth has it looking fresh-out-the-box in a jiffy.

Just like its predecessors, the only available ports on the device are two Thunderbolt / USB-4 ports on the left and one AUX port on the right, so be ready to invest in a connecting hub for this device.

All in working order?

The display on MacBook Air M1 is eye-catching. If you see this in a store, it will imprint on you. With practically no bezels, the 2560x1600-resolution (227 pixels per inch) Retina display shows off sharp and clear text as well as vibrant colours on a P3 colour gamut. This means, considering most users have been using sRGB for well over a decade now, display P3 offers a 25% larger colour space compared to sRGB. Editing photos and videos and creating animations on the MacBook Air M1 is a minute-detailed process.

With my 2015 MacBook Air, there were some overheating issues which stressed me out to the point of shutting it off and waiting for it to cool down. Apple paid attention to this common malady and the MacBook Air M1's fanless design paired with the chipset sustained a lot of the battery for a neat cooling effect. In eliminating

that wheezing fan noise, Apple integrated an aluminum heat spreader that dissipates the heat the system generates, so no matter how intense the task, the laptop is hush-hush.

The battery holds strong with this one; I could use the device for about 16 hours before it had to be charged from a red low battery to a white full bar - and the best part is, charging just takes an hour. As do its predecessors, this laptop charges via Thunderbolt/USB-4 and the typical Mac adapter, and, yes, I do see the rumours swirling about the return of MagSafe chargers. However, I have had loose contact issues with the MagSafe chargers for MacBook in the past. I quite like the USB-4 option as it feels secure.

Accompanying this pleasant silence is the keyboard.

I am not a fan of butterfly mechanisms for keyboards, but MacBook Air M1's Magic Keyboard is equipped with a scissor mechanism. Essentially, individual keys are attached to the keyboard via

two plastic pieces that interlock in an X-form, and snap to the keyboard and the key. Compared to the controversial butterfly variant, the scissor mechanism has more travel time, allowing for bet-



We took the M1-powered MacBook Air for a ride and our heads are still spinning. Is this luxe laptop worth the hype, though?

SPECIFICATIONS

DIMENSIONS & WEIGHT:	Height: 0.41-1.09 cm; Width: 30.41 cm; Depth: 21.24 cm; Weight: 1.29 kg
APPLE M1 CHIP:	8-core CPU with 4 performance cores and 4 efficiency cores; 7-core GPU; 16-core Neural Engine
BATTERY & POWER:	Built-in 49.9-watt-hour lithium-polymer battery; 30W USB-C Power Adapter
STORAGE:	256GB configurable to 512GB, 1TB or 2TB
WIRELESS:	Wi-Fi: 802.11ax Wi-Fi 6 wireless networking; IEEE 802.11a/b/g/n/ac compatible; Bluetooth: 5.0 wireless technology



ter fluidity on the user's part. Plus, there is less likelihood of dust and debris getting caught under the keys, thankfully. And, the top right key is the power button and the Touch ID key.

But then...

My point of contention with this MacBook Air is the camera. Apple claims it includes their latest image signal processor (ISP) within the M1 chip, promising better noise reduction, greater dynamic range, and improved auto white balance and Machine Learning-enhanced face detection so users look their best during video calls. I did not experience this at all.

In fact, there was far too much noise and grain, so much that I ended up using the EpocCam app and my smartphone as an external webcam to attain high-quality clarity during video calls. Reddit forums are spewing vitriol against the lacklustre camera, and I will admit, I did not particularly like this feature in such a grandiose device.

Software-wise, the Mac-

Book Air sings when running on M1 and macOS Big Sur combined. The latest OS is stunning with minimal bugs. As someone who often uses Chrome and kept away from Safari due to the latter's often glitchy performance in the past, Apple's native browser is lightning fast and intuitive with macOS Big Sur. The widgets scheme for the desktop is easily accessible with a swipe on the Force Touch TrackPad while not cluttering up the workspace.

Rounding off this experience, the review device sported an 8 gigabyte RAM but thanks to the M1 chip and I got the horsepower that a 16 gigabyte RAM would have offered. This is innovation; breathing new life into existing tech while not overwhelming the user with bigger numbers. And at ₹29,900, it is an investment for a long-term device with boosted technologies.

Be sure to pick up AppleCare plans as Apple India has upped its service game for those with these plans for quicker turnarounds if there is ever an issue.

TECH-A-BYTE



Eye track, you track

In a paper titled 'Synchronised eye movements predict test scores in online video education,' published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, they show that just by looking at students' eyes one can predict how well students will do on quizzes based on educational videos. The City College of New York team, was able to show that inter-subject correlation of eye-movements during educational video presentation is substantially higher for attentive students, and that synchronised eye movement are predictive of individual test scores on the material presented in the video. Their results suggest that online education can be made adaptive to a student's level of attention in real-time. "We were able to reproduce the results using standard web cameras to capture eye-movements in a classroom setting, and with over 1,000 participants at home, without the need to transmit user data," states researcher Lucas C. Parra from CCNY.



Now, for biometrics

WhatsApp is bringing biometric authentication to its web and desktop versions, providing an additional layer of security when linking devices. The new feature will prompt users to 'unlock' using facial or fingerprint authentication before they can scan a QR code to link their device. It is available to both Android and iOS (on iOS 14 and above) users. They can access the feature under 'WhatsApp Web or WhatsApp Web/Desktop' in the settings menu, then tap on 'Link Device' and follow the on-screen instructions. Recently, WhatsApp has received criticism from privacy experts after it announced its updated privacy policy and terms of service. While announcing the feature on Twitter, it wrote, "WhatsApp does not see your face or fingerprint data," and added, the authentication is handled by a device's operating system using the biometrics stored there.



Battle royale, with masala

The wait is over, and the much-hyped FAU-G is finally here, in the form of its first campaign mode — and it offers a mixed experience

JULIAN ALMEIDA

The absence of popular battle royale PUBG after its ban in India has prompted developer nCore Games to step into the arena to fill that void with their very own Make in India solution, FAU-G. Revealed by actor Akshay Kumar, the game has gained a lot of hype over the last few months. The Republic

prisoner by Chinese forces. You play as this lone warrior, taking the fight against the enemy to save your squad against all odds.

Clearly, the story and setting does twang that patriotic bone pretty well. At this moment the Battle Royale mode as well as a Deathmatch Mode tantalise you from beneath their disabled states. The campaign itself is surprisingly well-narrated in Hindi and the cutscenes are well done with it is hand-drawn animated art style.

What is interesting about FAU-G is that it is a brawler, or beat-'em-up at heart. Think Streets of Rage, but in 3D. Taking into consideration the 'no open fire allowed' agreement between India and China from November 1996, this is all about hand-to-hand combat with a lot of weapons thrown into the mix. The gameplay itself is very simple, with just

Battle-ready Screenshots from FAU-G ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



FAU-G : FEARLESS AND UNITED GUARDS

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: nCore Games

PRICE: Free to Play - iOS + Android

your attack button and a block action to defend yourself, in addition to the D-pad. All you need to do is point your character in the direction of the enemy and smash that attack button.

While it is easy to get into, the game gets repetitive very fast. Your character has the same combo set, which varies a bit. Levels are linear and consisting of sections with ene-

mies in them. Move forward, engage, move forward again in a simple arcade-y cadence. This is familiar gameplay that is very simple to grasp.

FAU-G is a pretty tough game, as you are swarmed with enemies that relentlessly assault you. The punch button was often unresponsive, leaving my character open to multiple attacks especially in between animations. Couple that with a healing mechanism that requires you to rest at a campfire (much like Dark Souls), the fights veer from intense to frustrating. Melee weapons are effective but they do break fast, and are in short supply. It is tough fighting an armed enemy soldier, while

you are hanging on to your last drop of health. The challenge is great, but it would be great if some of these mechanics are balanced.

What FAU-G does get right are the fluid movement controls, the smooth framerate and decent graphics. There are some nice details in the levels, too. You can change the skins on your character as well as purchase weapons off the store. Twenty percent of your purchases goes to the Bharat ka Veer trust, which is a great incentive.

When Fortnite started, it was a rough deathmatch game. The same was with PUBG, No Man's Sky and Fallout 76, they did not become superstars overnight. There is a lot of effort that goes into building and getting the mechanics right. This is a great first step for FAU-G with its interesting formula. All it needs is a few tweaks and balances to its mechanics as well as its multi-player modes. The future of FAU-G is something to look forward to.

The writer is a tech and gaming enthusiast who hopes to one day finish his sci-fi novel



Grandmother of the SOIL

She is 105 years old and still wakes up before the sun to head to the fields. Meet R Pappammal, an organic farmer from Coimbatore who was awarded the Padma Shri for agriculture this year

AKILA KANNADASAN

Have a fruit, will you? Help yourself, there's plenty."

"Get him a *bonda* from that shop. Don't send anyone away without giving them something to eat."

"Have some water first."

It is nearly impossible to hold a conversation with 105-year-old R Pappammal while she welcomes a steady stream of relatives, friends, and journalists to her home in Thekkampatti village near Coimbatore. Not when she insists on feeding every one of them.

She was awarded the Padma Shri this year for popularising organic farming and ever since the announcement, a few days ago, has been giving numerous interviews. "I gave 30 interviews yesterday," she says over phone, laughing.

This bustle is new to her, but she has been taking it in her stride; posing for cameras, sometimes smiling, sometimes

looking stern and visibly exhausted from walking to her field every time a photo-journalist asks her to. "This is all like a dream," says Pappammal.

Pappammal comes from a generation of farmers who believe in doing the hard work themselves. "I used to assist her in the fields and remember her chiding me if I rested even for a little while," recalls her sister's grandson R Balasubramaniam.

"She would say, 'When I am working non-stop at this age,

what makes you stop? Get back to work'." He adds, "She was

quite intimidating: six-feet tall, with a stern voice and feet that never rested, we would bury ourselves in work whenever she was near."

Pappammal is from a family of agriculturists. She owns a 2.5-acre farm in her village, and in

the past, grew lentils such as horse gram and green gram. Now, she mostly grows bananas.

Over the years, she has worked closely with Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. She would travel alone to their many farmers' meets, and implement all that she learned.

At one such meeting, Pappammal heard the term 'organic farming' for the first time. She came home and tried it out. "I learned that all the chemicals that we used on our crops were harmful for the soil and for consumers," she says. Her methods soon gained popularity and the University started sending students on field visits to her village to learn from her. "They visited her as part of the 'Village Stay Programme,'" says Balasubramaniam.

Pappammal too visited farms that the University recommended. "They would send her a letter a week ahead and she took a bus to the village or town," says Balasubramaniam. This way, Pappammal learned from the best in the field and also shared what she knew with them. "She has travelled to several cities for farmers' meets," recalls Balasubramaniam adding that at most of them, she was probably the only woman farmer.

Soon, the sari-clad lady with a firm tone became a local celebrity. She had no fear. "She never thought twice about approaching any officer in the many meetings she attended," says Balasubramaniam, adding,

"She would walk right ahead, enquire about his family and hometown and get whatever she wanted done."

Her family got used to her ways. For 50-year-old Balasubramaniam, her travels often resulted in a steady supply of treats when he was younger. "She would buy us *jalebis* and *ladoos* from the city," he remembers. "She was stern, but loved us very much." Another aspect that defined Pappammal was her eye for perfection; even if the task was something as mundane as de-weeding, she would insist on doing it perfectly.

A common question Pappammal endures is the secret to her long life. "I think it is what I ate growing up," she says. "I cooked millets such as *ragi*, *thinai*, and *samai* in a mud pot with water and mixed this with curd or buttermilk and drank it with crunchy onions or green chilies," she says. This was her breakfast before she headed out to the fields at 4 am. "I brushed my teeth with neem twigs and used no other chemicals," she adds. "Instead of soap, I rubbed myself clean with stone."

She also never allowed age to slow her down. "Even today, I wake up before the sun, wash my face, and go around the village once," she chuckles. "I cannot sit still."

Forever young 105-year-old Pappammal at her farm in Thekkampatti village near Coimbatore ■ M PERIASAMY



POOCHE CAFE



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



TIGER



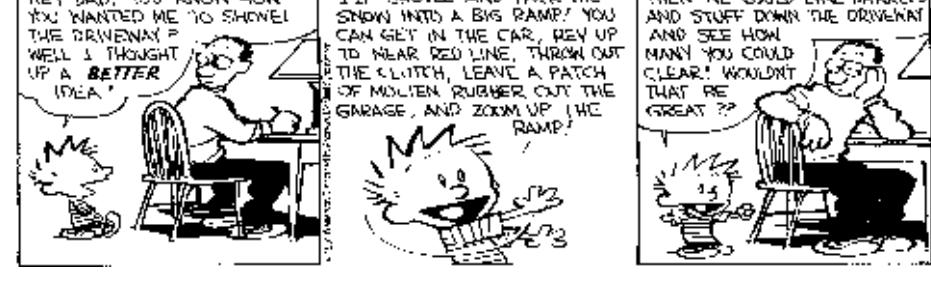
PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBES



In search of forever skies

In *Nomad's Land*, a book for young adults, Paro Anand introduces the world of displaced communities and their search for boundless horizons through the story of two schoolgirls



Holding a mirror to the world
Paro Anand with her dogs at her Delhi home; book cover of *Nomad's Land* ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

DEEPA ALEXANDER

It is a sunny winter afternoon in Delhi and Paro Anand is lounging with her three dogs. "They are rescues – two Alsatians and a 'raasta'" says the writer of books for children and young adults over phone as she shushes their barking.

Paro's stories, however, are often set in worlds far away from that idyllic afternoon. She has written about hope and horror in equal measure, traversing more often than not the worlds of terrorism, sexual abuse, domestic violence and Indian childhoods with rare sensitivity.

Her telling of stories on a patchwork of lives has led to some of her books being bartered in a few school libraries, but earned her the Sahitya Akademi's Bal Sahitya Puraskar in 2017.

Paro's fearless telling of the world, as she sees it, comes from an eclectic childhood spent growing up across India and Southeast Asia. "My journalist father was posted in Delhi, Chandigarh, Calcutta, Malaysia and the Philippines. It helped me adapt, make friends in strange environments. It was also liberating as I could create a backstory wherever I went. That was the start of the writer of weird stories," laughs Paro, adding that reading was not something she enjoyed at first.

"We spent the hour before dinner reading while listening to classical music. I hated it as I wanted to talk about my day. We had an open shelf policy at home and anyone could read anything. I discovered Joy Adamson's *Born Free* which pushed me to become a writer."

Paro began reading plays by Bertolt Brecht and Tennessee Williams much before her peers did, and it led her to become a teacher of drama. "There were not many Indian plays that the kids or I wanted to do. Most were western scripts. If Indian, they were drawn from the *Mahabharata* or *Panchatantra* with stories that often did not connect. So I started writing plays. Most literature for children is escapist, which is fun but there is also a need for truth, a need to represent young people who are not represented or under-represented. It empowers

children to find a commonality. So I wrote consciously on hard topics always ending on an upswing; young people have the ability to be instruments of change," says Paro, speaking of *No Guns At My Son's Funeral*, *Like Smoke and The Other*. "The responses shake me up. Have I scratched a wound or put a balm?"

Building bridges

And still, Paro perseveres to tell it as it is; like she has in *Nomad's Land* (published by Talking Cub).

The novel is about Shanna, a Kashmiri Pandit, and Pema, a Qashshayi and the tragic circumstances that bring them together. In tight, energetic prose, between the lost paradise of Kashmir where Shanna's father is killed in a grenade attack and Pema's reimagining of a homeland she has never seen, Paro weaves a tapestry of falling walls, blurred borders and identity in a time of cultural assimilation. "In an age of Rohingyas, Syrians and Tibetans, *Nomad's Land* could belong anywhere. We need to connect our children to these realities. I feel we haven't done that with stories of Partition; because we follow the culture of *aage chalo* [look forward]."

Paro writes two hours every day, sometimes in a traffic jam, sometimes two books at a time. She is also a grandmother who has managed to keep a ear to the ground when it comes to what kids think and speak these days. "I'm a great eavesdropper," she laughs.

"Children should be left to choose the reading of their choice but parents and schools tend to monitor. I've had children come up to me during my Literature In Action sessions and tell what they'd like to hear more about – whether it is domestic violence or masturbation. I may write it and it may be published, but it will never make it to a school library."

Paro believes that 'forever skies' – a term she uses in *Nomad's Land* – is what should be bequeathed to our children. "When you tend to unsee the wholeness you cut up their sky. Children do not demand assimilation. And because of that the world and our country is in good hands."

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

NOTEMAN REMINDS PEOPLE OF THE IMPORTANT THINGS.

Remember pizza.

I SEE.

NO FURTHER QUESTIONS, YOUR HONOR!

I DON'T SEE WHY SOME PEOPLE EVEN HAVE CARS!

I'LL SHOVEL AND PACK THE SNOW INTO A BIG RAMP! YOU CAN GET IN THE CAR, REV UP THE ENGINE, THROW OUT THE CLUTCH, LEAVE A PATCH OF MOLTEN RUBBER OUT THE GARAGE, AND ZOOM UP THE RAMP!

THEN WE COULD LINE BARRELS AND STUFF DOWN THE DRIVEWAY AND SEE HOW MANY YOU COULD CLEAR! WOULDN'T THAT BE GREAT?

I DON'T SEE WHY SOME PEOPLE EVEN HAVE CARS!

I'LL SHOVEL AND PACK THE SNOW INTO A BIG RAMP! YOU CAN GET IN THE CAR, REV UP THE ENGINE, THROW OUT THE CLUTCH, LEAVE A PATCH OF MOLTEN RUBBER OUT THE GARAGE, AND ZOOM UP THE RAMP!

THEN WE COULD LINE BARRELS AND STUFF DOWN THE DRIVEWAY AND SEE HOW MANY YOU COULD CLEAR! WOULDN'T THAT BE GREAT?

I DON'T SEE WHY SOME PEOPLE EVEN HAVE CARS!

Military seizes power in Myanmar coup

Army has declared a state of emergency for a year; Aung San Suu Kyi, other elected leaders detained

REUTERS
NAYPYITAW

Myanmar's military seized power on Monday in a coup against the democratically elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained along with other leaders of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party in early morning raids.

The Army said it had carried out the detentions in response to "election fraud", handing power to military chief Min Aung Hlaing and imposing a state of emergency for one year, according to a statement on a military-owned television station.

The Generals made their move hours before Parliament had been due to sit for the first time since the NLD's landslide win in a November 8 election viewed as a referendum on Ms. Suu Kyi's fledgling democratic government. Phone lines to the capital Naypyitaw and the main commercial centre of Yangon were not reachable, and state TV went off air. People rushed to markets in Yangon to stock up on food and supplies while others lined up at ATMs to withdraw cash.



Political crisis: Supporters of the Myanmar military waving religious and Army flags in Yangon, Myanmar, on Monday. ■ AP

Soldiers took up positions at city hall in Yangon and mobile Internet data and phone services in the NLD stronghold were disrupted, residents said.

Ms. Suu Kyi, Myanmar President Win Myint and other NLD leaders had been "taken" in the early hours of the morning, NLD spokesman Myo Nyunt told Reuters by phone.

"I want to tell our people

not to respond rashly and I want them to act according to the law," he said, adding that he expected to be arrested himself. Reuters was subsequently unable to contact him. A video posted to Facebook by one MP appeared to show the arrest of another, regional lawmaker Pa Pa Han.

The detentions came after days of escalating tension between the civilian govern-

ment and the military that stirred fears of a coup in the aftermath of the election.

Ms. Suu Kyi's party won 83% of the vote in only the second election since a junta agreed to share power in 2011.

The Army issued a statement, saying power will be transferred to the winning party after "holding a free and fair election", but did not specify a timeline.

India monitors situation with 'deep concern'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India on Monday expressed "deep concern" over reports of an unfolding military coup in Myanmar.

India's official response came hours after the Myanmar military declared a state of emergency for one year and detained State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We have noted the developments in Myanmar with deep concern. India has always been steadfast in its support to the process of democratic transition in Myanmar. We believe that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld. We are monitoring the situation closely," a press statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs said.



Min Aung Hlaing

damaged by her time in office, where she failed to push back the military, and even defended the Army's pogrom against Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2015.

NEWS ANALYSIS

China factor

Officials also say a harsh reaction from India, on the lines of that from the U.S., which has threatened action against those responsible for the "coup" unless they revoke the military's takeover, would only benefit China.

Apart from strategic concerns, India has cultivated several infrastructure and development projects with Myanmar, which it sees as the "gateway to the East" and ASEAN countries.

These include the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport network, as well as a plan for a Special Economic Zone at the Sittwe deep-water port.

Finally, India still hopes to help resolve the issue of Rohingya refugees that fled to Bangladesh, while some still live in India, and will want to continue to engage the Myanmar government on that.

Another reason for the shift is the change within India.

dia, say diplomats.

"In 1989, there was a public clamour for India to take a strong stand against the military's actions and to stand up for Aung San Suu Kyi. I don't see a loud pro-democracy discourse going out from India this time around," says former Ambassador to Myanmar, Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, referring to street protests and fierce speeches in Parliament that took place in India at the time, calling on then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who had visited Myanmar in 1987, to deal strictly with the junta.

In 1989, after the SPDC military government arrested Ms. Suu Kyi, then External Affairs Minister Narasimha Rao had reportedly told a parliamentary panel that not only would the government provide financial support to the democracy movement, no Burmese (Myanmarese) refugees seeking shelter in India would be turned away. Subsequently, however, the government took a more pragmatic approach, engaging the military, while pushing for more freedoms in Myanmar and ASEAN countries.

In the past decade, the balance between engaging Myanmar's civil and military establishment became easier, once Ms. Suu Kyi was released and the NLD was allowed to form a government in 2015.

"The arrangement between them suited India, as our approach was to smoothen the relationship on both sides. With Monday's developments, our capacity to play both sides in now diminished," explained a former senior official who dealt with the bilateral ties.

West condemns coup, China's response is muted

UN Secretary-General calls the move a 'serious blow to democratic reforms', seeks release of leaders

REUTERS
NEW YORK

The United Nations led condemnation of Myanmar's military on Monday after it seized power, calling for the release of elected leaders, including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the developments were a "serious blow to democratic reforms" and urged all leaders to re-

frain from violence and respect human rights, a U.N. spokesman said.

The U.S., Britain, Australia and the EU condemned the military's coup and detentions and its declaration of a state of emergency. The Army said it had taken action in response to "election fraud".

China's response, however, was more muted. "We hope that all sides in Myanmar can appropriately han-

dle their differences under the Constitution and legal framework and safeguard political and social stability," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.

U.S. President Joe Biden said Washington may consider reimposing sanctions lifted during the nation's transition to democracy. "The U.S. removed sanctions on Burma (Myanmar) over the past decade based on progress to-

ward democracy," Mr. Biden said in a statement. "The reversal of that progress will necessitate an immediate review of our sanction laws and authorities, followed by appropriate action."

Restore democracy

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson also condemned the coup. "The vote of the people must be respected and civilian leaders released," he

said on Twitter.

Japan said it opposed any reversal of the democratic process in Myanmar. "We strongly call on the military government to restore democracy as soon as possible," said a Foreign Ministry statement.

The head of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, called for the "immediate and unconditional release" of all those detained.

In a joint visit to Naypyidaw in October 2020, Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla and Army Chief Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane met with both State Councilor Suu Kyi and Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, making it clear that New Delhi saw both relationships at par.

Another reason for the change is Ms. Suu Kyi herself, whose image as a democracy icon and Nobel peace laureate has been

In

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visit

to

Naypyidaw

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Another reason for the shift is the change within India.

As trial looms, Trump names defence lawyers

His Senate trial is due to start on Feb. 9



Donald Trump

statement from Mr. Trump.

Mr. Schoen has represented Mr. Trump's ally Roger Stone, and said he was in discussions to join the legal team for Jeffrey Epstein in 2019 days before the disgraced U.S. financier killed himself while in jail on allegations of trafficking underage girls for sex.

His lead lawyers, David Schoen and Bruce L. Castor, Jr., are "highly respected trial lawyers" with backgrounds in criminal law and defence, according to a

statement from Mr. Trump.

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No Indian role in developing ECT in Colombo

Port workers unions had opposed any foreign role or investment in the East Container Terminal

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Reneging on a 2019 agreement with India and Japan, Sri Lanka has decided to develop the strategic East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port on its own. The Sri Lankan government would instead offer the West Container Terminal to India for possible investments, a senior government source told *The Hindu*.

The decision was taken at Monday's Cabinet meeting helmed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, when members "unanimously" agreed to proposals submitted by the Minister of Ports and Shipping, the source said. It comes amid mounting pressure from Port union work-

ers against any foreign role or investment in the ECT project, where nearly 70% of the transhipment business is linked to India.

Asked about the development, a senior Indian source said: "We would hope that Sri Lanka does not unilaterally decide on this matter, as there is a tripartite agreement on it."

For New Delhi, the strategic ECT project in Colombo has been high on priority. It has figured in talks at the highest levels, including when External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited in January.

A week after his visit, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa told agitating Port worker unions that the Adani Group – Government of India's no-

minee – would invest in the terminal, and that the Terminal would not be "sold or leased" to any foreign entity, signalling that his government was taking forward the 2019 memorandum of cooperation (MOC). The Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) was to hold a 51% stake in the operations, while India and Japan together would hold 49%, as per the MOC, which was signed by the former Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration.

Port workers' resistance

However, amid growing resistance from port workers since the Rajapaksa government's position appears to have shifted.

The first indication that Sri Lanka might keep India and Japan out of the deal came earlier on Monday, when Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa told union representatives that the operation of the terminal would be "100%" with the SLPA, because the "foreign company" did not agree to the proposals made by a committee appointed by the subject minister.

The PM's remarks seem to have shocked the Indian side, as there has been no communication from Colombo that ongoing negotiations – held in person and virtually – had ended, according to sources. The remarks prompted a media statement from the Indian High Com-

mission for the first time since the controversy heightened. A spokesman of the Indian mission on Monday reiterated "the expectation of the Government of India for expeditious implementation" of the trilateral MOC signed among Sri Lanka, India and Japan in May 2019, for the development of ECT with participation from the three countries. "The commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka in this regard has been conveyed several times in the recent past, including at the leadership level...all sides should continue to abide by the existing understandings and commitment," the statement had said, hours before the Cabinet decided otherwise.

SUDOKU

7	8		3	5	9		1	
6		4			5	7		
4	6						7	
	9					5		
3					1		9	
7	8		4		2			
5		7	3	2	1	8		

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 13159 Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

P	N	B	S	P	S	A		
T	U	N	R	E	I	C	A	
M	M	O	U	L	G	H		
H	A	V	A	N	O	L	N	G
A	S	C	T	A	A			
B	U	K	S	H	E	G	A	X
I	D	E	R	P	O	L		
R	Q	B	A	S				
M	A	R	U	L				
A	I	A	R	U				
B	L	ACK	L	E	G	T	R	A
I	C	L	E	R	A	I	N	S
A	E	S	U	A	M	N	A	
E	M	I	N	O	S	C	Z	A
B	O	G	N	E	N			

FAITH

Path to salvation

Salvation is the ultimate goal of human existence. While there is no physical or tangible path in sight for anyone to reach this goal, the Charama sloka in the Gita is explicit in this regard. The Lord's magnanimity is prominent in His promise to relieve the jiva of all sins and thereby make him eligible to attain mukti if he gives up all else and seeks refuge at His feet alone. This cue is taken by all azhwars in their hymns and interpreters read a direct reference to the Charama sloka in many verses of the Namnambal Tiruvandadi of Tirumazhisai Azhwar, pointed out Sri A. K. Sundarrajan in a discourse.

Azhwar hails the glories of the Lord. He is the Supreme and Absolute Being, who is the essence of Jnana, Shakti, Poornatva and so on. He is the ultimate goal and refuge for all. To the jiva who is full of faults and feels that there is no reprieve except to be caught in the endless cycle, Azhwar shows that it is the good fortune and blessing for all that the Lord's

First Test likely to remain behind closed doors

TNCA's move to issue 360 tickets to member clubs doesn't find favour with England; limited crowd a possibility for second

ENGLAND IN INDIA

S. DINAKAR
CHENNAI

On a day of fast developments involving three stakeholders – BCCI, ECB and host association TNCA – a “closed door” Test looks likely, at least for the first match beginning here on February 5.

It appears that the TNCA's announcement allowing 180 member associations, which amounts to just 360 tickets, and the media for the opening game has not gone down well with the ECB and England team.

The agreement

One of the pre-conditions for the tour was ‘closed door’ Tests and the Englishmen, it is learnt, are not budging from that agreement.

Sources indicate that if the first Test takes place without any incident, and the Englishmen are reassured about the safety measures, then a limited crowd and media could be allowed for the second Test.

It may be recalled that when England hosted Tests

last summer, against the West Indies and Pakistan, at the height of the pandemic, the media was allowed to cover the matches.

Earlier in the day, indications were that a limited number of spectators and the media will be allowed for the first Test and as much as 50% of the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium could be filled by the spectators for the second.

Indeed, the TNCA officials had a busy Monday, first holding a meeting among themselves and then engaging in deliberations with the BCCI.

The trigger

The Tamil Nadu Government's decision to allow 50% spectators in the stadium for all sporting events had opened up the issue.

TNCA secretary R.S. Ramaasamy had said to *The Hindu*, “For the first Test, since we don't have time to prepare and all along our mindset was ‘Tests without crowds,’ we will issue tickets only to 180 member clubs, each of whom will get two tickets.



Normal service resumes: Virat Kohli and his teammates train at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Monday. • BCCI/TWITTER

“For the second Test, we have decided, along with the BCCI, that we would have 50% of the stands full. But the spectators would not be seated anywhere near the pavilion.”

The press box, he had said, would be open to the media for both the Tests here.

However, an England team spokesperson said, “We are not going to comment on speculation. We are still waiting to hear from the BCCI, in terms of their protocols for the forthcoming Test series.”

The tone of the reaction suggested that the Englishmen were not happy with

the developing situation. Now we appear to be moving back towards square one. Would we see crowds at least in the second Test? Or would it be a ‘closed door’ affair at Chepauk?

With things happening at a hectic speed, Tuesday could throw us another surprise.

Both teams clear COVID-19 tests

■ The India and England players have returned three negative tests for COVID-19 during their six-day quarantine, clearing the way for their first net session on Tuesday

TV PICKS

ISL: Star Sports 2 & 3 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.
Premier League: SS Select 1 & 2 (SD & HD), 11.30 p.m. & 1.45 a.m. (Wednesday)

IN BRIEF



Nuggets halt Jazz's 11-game winning streak

LOS ANGELES
Nikola Jokic matched his career-high 47 points as Denver Nuggets cooled off the hottest team in the NBA on Sunday with a 128-117 victory over Utah Jazz. **The results:** Knicks 115 lost to Clippers 129; Nuggets 128 bt Jazz 117; Pacers 110 lost to 76ers 119; Raptors 115 bt Magic 102; Wizards 149 bt Nets 146; Timberwolves 109 bt Cavaliers 104.

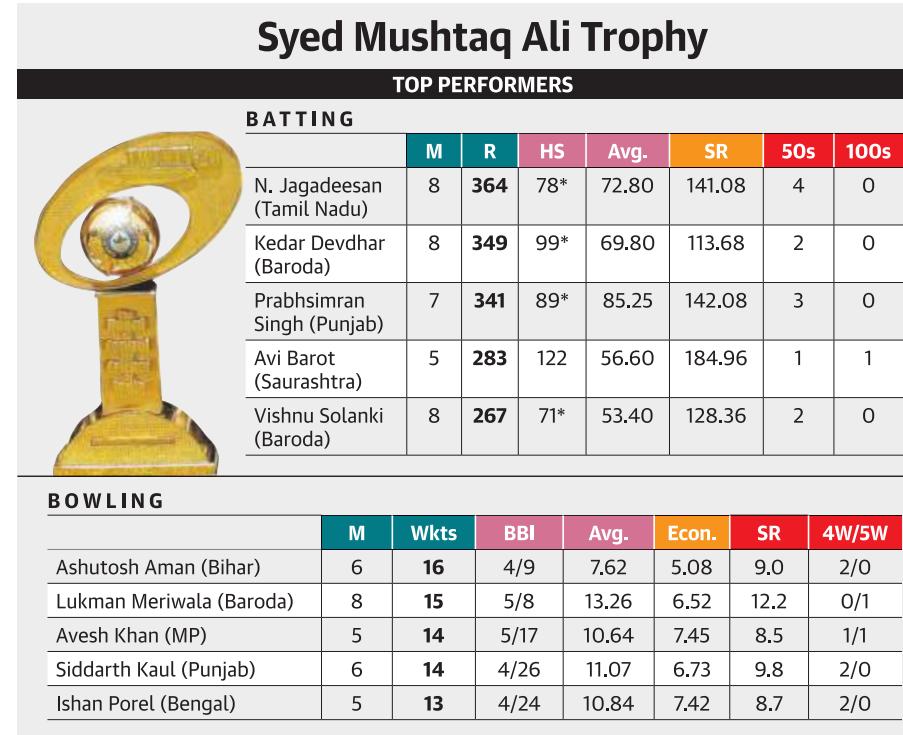
Indian women hold Argentina 1-1

Buenos Aires
The Indian women's hockey team held Argentina to a 1-1 draw in its last match of the tour here on Sunday. Skipper Rani struck for India in the 35th minute while Emilia Forcherio converted a penalty stroke. India had drawn 2-2 and 1-1 with the junior team and lost 2-1, 3-2 to Argentina-B and lost to the seniors 3-2 and 2-0 earlier. PTI



Denmark men retain World handball title

Cairo
Denmark defeated Sweden 26-24 to win a second successive men's world handball title here on Sunday. Olympic champion Denmark had defeated Norway to lift the 2019 trophy on home ground. Spain defeated seven-time World champion France 35-29 to finish third. AFP



Nagal loses his season opener

Serena eases past Gavrilova at Yarra Valley Classic

Classic, Serena Williams stepped up preparations for another tilt at a record-equaling 24th Grand Slam title with a 6-1, 6-4 win over Daria Gavrilova. “I felt that I was composed and in the zone. Just trying to do the things that I've been working on,” said the 39-year-old Serena.

The Indian, ranked 139th in the world, couldn't convert the two break opportunities he had. He also dropped serve four times against the World No. 72 from Lithuania.

At the WTA Yarra Valley

McDonald bt Richard Gasquet 7-6(2), 7-5; Albert Ramos-Vinolas bt Blake Mott 6-2, 6-4.

WTA Yarra Valley Classic (first round): Petra Martic bt Vera Lapko 4-6, 6-3, 6-2; Karolina Pliskova bt Elisabetta Coccialetto 6-3, 6-2; Marketa Vondrousova bt Varvara Gracheva 6-4, 6-0; Serena Williams bt Daria Gavrilova 6-1, 6-4.

Important results: ATP Murray River Open (first round): Ricardas Berankis bt Sumit Nagal 6-2, 6-2; Jeremy Chardy bt Martin Cilic 2-6, 6-3, 7-6(8); Mack-

enzie McDonald bt Richard Gasquet 7-6(2), 7-5; Albert Ramos-Vinolas bt Blake Mott 6-2, 6-4.

WTA Gippsland Trophy: Second round: Elina Svitolina bt Andrea Petkovic 6-1, 6-4; Simona Halep bt Anastasia Potapova 6-4, 6-4.

Chahar scores unbeaten 101

Krish Chahar scored an unbeaten 101 as Sporting

DELHI ROUND-UP

Football calendar released
A calendar with extensive information and details about legendary Indian and international footballers was released on Monday. The calendar, compiled by Football Delhi vice-president Hem Chand, includes a World Cup diary from 1998 to 2018. Former players including Ranjit Thapa, Aziz Qureshi, Anadi Barua and Football Delhi officials were present.

L.B. Shastri in semifinals
Man-of-the-match Arnav Singh Bugga (4/17 and 67 n.o.) shone as L.B. Shastri Club beat Swastik Sports Management by nine wickets and made the semifinals of the Turf Youth Cup u15 tournament.

The scores:
SSM 130 in 36.5 overs (Bhavya Sharma 52, Vishesh Sharma 36, Arnav Singh Bugga 4/17) lost to LBSC 132/1 in 17.2 overs (Kirit Kaushik 37, Dev Mehra 3/10).

Easy for Darling Club

Ronak Singh's 3/27 and Aryan Kumar's 52 helped Darling Frontline Club defeat BS Club by 94 runs in the fourth Phool Singh memorial tournament.

The scores:

DFC 231 in 39.2 overs (Aryan Kumar 52, Aryan Chaudhary 39, Vishal Bhatia 4/29) bt BS Club 137 in 31.1 overs (Mohit Sarsar 38, Ronak Singh 3/27).

Swastik slams double ton

An unbeaten 117-ball 201 by Swastik Chhikara and 152 by Kushal Pal saw Subhania Club put it across Ravindra Academy by 177 runs and enter the final of the Sunil Jain memorial tournament.

The scores:

Subhania Club 415/4 in 40 overs (Swastik Chhikara 201 n.o., Kushal Pal 152) bt Ravindra Academy 238/7 in 40 overs (Gaurav Kaushik 70, Lakshay Kundra 63, Siddhant Kalucha 43).

Dushyant claims four

Jayveer Singh's 73 and Dushyant Raghav's four wickets helped Noida Wonders beat Ashish Nehra Academy by 57 runs in Skillz Youth Cup u19 tournament.

The scores:

Noida Wonders 262 in 40 overs (Jayveer Singh 73, Inness Mahajan 58, Manav Singh 3/58) bt ANA 205/9 in 40 overs (Ronit Berry 54,

Arian 43, Aryan Gaur 40, Dushyant Raghav 4/20).

Chahar scores unbeaten 101

Krish Chahar scored an unbeaten 101 as Sporting

We'd love to play in front of crowds soon: Leach

S. DINAKAR
CHENNAI

Among the biggest challenges for a visiting team to be playing in India is coping with the pressures of playing in front of huge crowds.

With the host association trying its best to allow 50% crowd at least for the second Test here, England left-arm spinner Jack Leach, in an interactive chat here on Monday, was guarded with his response.

He said “We all want to play in front of crowds. Obviously it needs to be safe, and we don't want to be adding to a problem (COVID-19) that's affecting the whole world.”

Leach added, “So if it's safe and if it's good, then great. We'd love to play in front of crowds as soon as possible.”

Asked about England's spectacular Test series triumph in India, 2012, and left-arm spinner Monty Panesar's successful strategy of being quicker through the air, Leach responded, “Monty bowled very well, but everyone has a different optimum speed and mine is different. And you got to be



Jack Leach... a role to play. ■ GETTY IMAGES

yourself when you bowl.”

Calling India a quality side, Leach observed, “I feel like it's a great chance to test ourselves against what on paper is probably the best side in the world. But they have right-handers and I may have a role to play.”

Leach has 44 wickets in 12 Tests but will be remembered for the precious one not out in Test history.

No. 11 Leach battled 60 minutes as an inspired Ben Stokes powered England to an incredible victory, adding 73 runs for the last wicket in the Ashes Test at Leeds, 2019.

This Leach is tough. Appearances can be deceptive.

Van Foreest triumphs; Hari seventh



Jorden van Foreest. ■ TWITTER/TATASTEELCHESS

SPORTS BUREAU

WILK AAN ZEE
P. Harikrishna finished seventh before 21-year-old Jorden van Foreest upstaged his Dutch compatriot Anish Giri in the title-deciding Armageddon game in the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament here on Sunday.

Important results: Round 13: Jan-Krzysztof Duda (Pol) drew with P. Harikrishna; David Anton Guijar (Esp) drew with Anish Giri (Ned); Jorden van Foreest (Ned) bt Nils Grandelius (Swe); Aryan Tari (Nor) drew with Fabiano Caruana (USA); Magnus Carlsen (Nor) bt Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra).

Final standings: 1-2. Foreest, Giri (8.5 points each); Foreest bt Giri in the deciding Armageddon game; 3-5. Espenmo, Caruana, Firouza (8 each); 6. Carlsen (7.5); 7. Harikrishna (6.5); 8-9. Tari, Grandelius (6 each); 10. Duda (5.5); 11-13. Anton, Wojtaszek, Vachier (5 each); 14. Donchenko (3.5).

Mobashir helps JFC get back on track

SPORTS BUREAU

After a run of five matches without a win, Jamshedpur FC (JFC) registered a 1-0 victory over Odisha FC in the Indian Super League (ISL) in Bambolim on Monday. Mobashir Rahman's maiden ISL goal lifted JFC to



Sublime! Messi drilled home a perfect free-kick to put Barcelona ahead. ■ REUTERS

Barcelona moves to second

Messi nets his 650th for the club

EURO LEAGUES

REUTERS

BARCELONA

Lionel Messi and Antoine Griezmann fired Barcelona to a 2-1 win at home to Athletic Bilbao in LaLiga on Sunday, avenging the recent defeat to the Basque side in the Spanish Super Cup final. The fifth straight Liga victory helped Ronald Koeman's side move above Real Madrid on goal difference into second place on 40 points, 10 behind leader Atletico Madrid which has a game in hand.

In addition, there has been no change in the allocation of ₹50 crore for