

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | TUESDAY 2 | FEBRUARY 2021

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WEATHER



Max: 29°C
Min: 21°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Thai 20
Tithi: Panchami
Star: Hastham
Rahukalam:
3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam:
9 am to 10.30 am
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.22 am
Zohar: 12.28 pm
Asar: 3.42 pm
Maghrib: 6.10 pm
Isha: 7.23 pm

CM to give ₹1,117 cr relief to farmers affected by crop loss

Chennai: The Tamil Nadu government will provide Rs 1,116.97 crore as input relief to about 11.43 lakh farmers across the state, anticipating central assistance, for the crop loss of the ryots due to rains in January, Chief Minister K Palaniswami said on Monday. The relief sum will be credited directly to their bank accounts, he said in a statement. ■ **P9**

SI dies as rowdy runs him over with cargo auto

DC CORRESPONDENT
THOOTHUKUDI, FEB. 1

In a revenge action, a police sub-inspector here was knocked down to death by a two-wheeler mechanic, as the officer seized his cargo auto for creating ruckus at the Eral bazaar. This is the second such ghastly murder in the district in five months, after a rowdy element murdered a 28-year-old constable, Subramanian, hurling country bombs on him when he attempted to nab him last August 18, near Murappanadu in the district. On Monday, Eral police sub-inspector, V Balu (55), was riding pillion on his bike along with constable Pon Subbaiah (40), on patrol around 1 am when he was fatally knocked down by a cargo auto at the Korkkai intersection on the road to Umarikaadu. Balu died on the spot and constable Pon Subbaiah was rushed to the Thoothukudi government medical college hospital for treatment. Investigations revealed that it was not an accident, but a pre-planned murder committed by two-wheeler mechanic, Murugavel (35), son of Rajagopal of Vazhavallan village, said police superintendent, S Jayakumar. The accused surrendered on Monday morning before the Vilathikulam Judicial magistrate Saravankumar, who remanded him to judicial custody. Besides a government job for a member of the sub-inspector's kin, the government has announced a solatium of ₹50 lakh for the family, and ₹2 lakh for the injured constable, Pon Subbaiah.

TNCA to allow 50% crowd for second Test

Chennai: The second India-England Test starting here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on February 13 will have spectators with 50 per cent stand occupancy, confirmed a Tamil Nadu Cricket Association official. ■ **P12**

Gaganyaan will start in December this year

New Delhi: The launch of the first unmanned mission of Gaganyaan is slated for December, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday. The mission was originally scheduled for launch in December 2020 but had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. In her budget speech, Ms Sitharaman said as part of Gaganyaan, India's manned space mission, four Indian astronauts are being trained on generic space flight aspects in Russia.

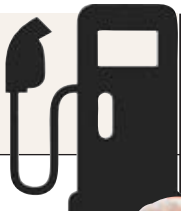
COUNTER POINT



Good news grandpa... you don't need to file income-tax returns now!

↑74%

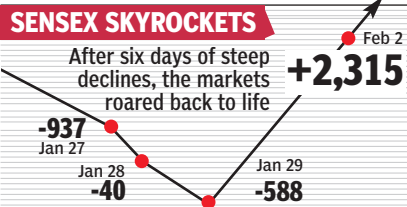
₹2.5/litre
on petrol, and ₹4/l on diesel
agri development cess



When you create capital expenditure, you are confident that what you are spending money on is asset creation
— **Nirmala Sitharaman, FM**



HIKE IN FDI LIMIT FOR INSURANCE SECTOR



It's a pro-active Budget that gives boost to wealth as well as wellness. It contains vision of self-reliance as well as inclusiveness.

— **Narendra Modi, PM**



FOR YOU AND ME

• Personal vehicles to undergo fitness test after 20 years, heralding scrappage policy

TACKLING NPA MESS

• Govt to set up asset reconstruction company, AMC to manage NPAs

IMPORT DUTY CHANGES ALTER PRICES

COSTLIER • Compressors for refrigerators and air conditioners • LED lamps, parts and spares such as printed circuit board • Automobile parts like safety and toughened glasses, windscreen wipers, signalling equipment • Mobile phone parts like PCBA, camera module, connectors, back cover, side keys • Mobile phone charger components



CHEAPER

• Gold and gold dore • Silver and silver doreprecious metals like platinum and palladium • Medical devices imported by international organisation and diplomatic missions • Customs duty cut on number of steel items to provide relief to MSMEs

FM SINGS SPENDING NOTE

India hikes capital expenditure to come out of Covid-induced slowdown

Health sector gets booster dose with 137% hike

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

India's health sector got a huge boost in Budget 2021-22 with finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman saying there was a "137 per cent" increase in health spending by the government. Terming "health and well-being" as one of the "six pillars" of the Budget, Ms Sitharaman also announced a new Centrally sponsored scheme, PM Atma Nirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, with an outlay of ₹64,180 crore to boost healthcare infrastructure.

"Taking a holistic approach to health, we focus on strengthening three areas: preventive, curative, and well-being... The investment on health infrastructure has increased substantially. Progressively, as institutions absorb more, we shall commit more... The Budget outlay for health and well-being is ₹2,23,846 crore in Budget Estimates (BE) 2021-22, against this year's BE of ₹94,452 crore, an increase of 137 per cent. I have provided ₹35,000 crore for Covid vaccines in BE 2021-22. I am committed to provide further funds if required," said Ms Sitharaman in her Budget speech.

The FM has also added allocations for drinking water, sanitation and nutrition with health to calculate the 137 per cent hike. The actual hike for health and family welfare is 9.6 per cent, health research is 26.8 per cent and for Ayush it is 40 per cent. Drinking and sanita-

• The FM a new Centrally sponsored scheme, PM Atma Nirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, with an outlay of ₹64,180 crore to boost healthcare infrastructure.
• She said health was one of the six pillars of Budget

tion allocations have got a 179 per cent hike while there was a 27 per cent cut in allocation for nutrition.

The FM said India has launched two vaccines against Covid-19 at present and two more vaccines are expected soon. Besides, 17,000 rural and 11,000 urban health and wellness centres will be set up, along with integrated public health labs in each district. The pneumococcal vaccines will be rolled out across the country to prevent deaths due to pneumonia, septicæmia and meningitis.

A new Centrally sponsored scheme, PM Atma Nirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, will be launched with an outlay of about Rs 64,180 crores over six years. The FM said this will develop capacities of primary, secondary, and tertiary care health systems, strengthen existing national institutions and create new institutions to cater to the detection and cure of new and emerging diseases. This will be in addition to the National Health Mission.



Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her staff pose for a picture as she leaves the finance ministry to present the annual budget in Parliament in New Delhi on Monday.

— **AFP**

Election-bound states get massive budget allocation

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

The Union Budget saw the Centre announcing a number of multi-crore fund allocation for infrastructure in the four poll bound states of West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam.

Though it is in power in Assam it wants to retain power while wanting to be a real challenger in the others. These states are

scheduled to go to polls after April and May this year. In Tamil Nadu, a 3,500-km long highway at an investment of ₹1.03 lakh crore was announced. Kerala got a ₹65,000-crore road infrastructure project. This would entail construction of 1,100 km of roads in the state. The finance minister specifically mentioned that the phase two of the Kochi metro railway, covering a

length of 11.5 km at a cost of ₹1957.05 crore, would be carried out from the allocation, besides including the 600-km section of the Mumbai-Kanyakumari corridor that would pass through Kerala.

For West Bengal, the finance minister announced ₹25,000-crore worth of road projects.

A stretch of 675 km of National Highway is to be created.

ed circumstances, it shows India's confidence and will instil self-confidence.

To satisfy farmers protesting over the Centre's three farm laws, he said the Budget focuses on increasing their income.

gramme in FY22. Similarly, on capital expenditure, the outlay for FY22 has gone up by 34.5 per cent (vs FY21 BE) at ₹5.54 lakh crores, and ₹44,000 crore under capital expenditure will be given to the department of eco-

nomic affairs in FY22. FY21 capital expenditure is seen at ₹4.39 lakh crores," she said.

Calling it a healthcare-centric Budget, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said even as it was presented amid unprecedent-

CM welcomes union budget

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami welcomed the Union Budget presented on Monday, pointing out that many of the announcements would help Tamil Nadu redeem its economy that went for a spin following the outbreak of the pandemic.

Palaniswami thanked Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for the Tamil Nadu specific announcements in the budget. The allocation for the development of the Chennai fishing harbor and the announcements on the two inter-state road projects between Madurai and Kollam and Chittoor and Thatchur was welcomed by both of them.

Welcoming the allocation of ₹35,000 crore for Covid-19 vaccination, Palaniswami demanded the release of the Centre's 50 per cent share of the funds for the second phase of the Metro Rail project.

Referring to the announcement on setting up textile parks, he urged the Centre to allot two textile parks to the State, one in the southern districts and the other in Salem.

TN infra gets major push in budget

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced several mega infrastructure projects for the poll-bound Tamil Nadu in her budget presentation on Monday.

They include the construction of 3,500 km of national highways in the state which entail an investment of ₹1.03 lakh crore. These include the Madurai-Kollam corridor.

Two expressways connecting Chennai have also been

featured in the Budget. The work on the first, the 278 km Bengaluru-Chennai Expressway, is expected to be initiated in the current financial year. The Chennai-Salem corridor also got a mention in the budget though it has been facing stiff opposition from farmers and environmentalists.

The finance minister gave a boost to seaweed farming by proposing a ₹3,700 crore multipurpose seaweed park to be established in Tamil Nadu which will provide employment opportunities

• The projects include national highways (Rs.1.03 crore), seaweed park (Rs 3,700) core and the second phase of Chennai Metro.

and additional incomes to the coastal population.

The Centre's renewed thrust on public transport has come to the rescue of the ₹63,246 crore second phase of the Chennai metro project. The 118.9 km project

with three new corridors will be financed by the Central and state governments and with aid and loans from agencies such as Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) which has approved a loan of ₹20,000 crore for the project. The work, which was inaugurated in November last year, is expected to be completed in six years.

Chennai Metro Rail Limited estimates that the mass rapid transport system will account for 25 per cent of transport trips in the city

when its second phase is completed.

The finance minister has chosen Chennai for setting up one of the five mega fishing harbours which will be developed as hubs of economic activity. The other hubs will be built in Kochi, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Petaughat.

The budget has proposed to set up seven mega textile parks across the country. The Tamil Nadu government has already demanded that one of them be set up in the state.

was emerging from decades of strict military rule and international isolation that began in 1962.

It was also a shocking fall from power for Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace laureate who had lived under house arrest for years as she tried to push her country toward democracy and then became its de facto leader after her National League for Democracy won elections in 2015.

STOCK MARKETS GIVE THUMBS UP TO BUDGET

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD | DC
MUMBAI, FEB.1

Stock market witnessed a mammoth rally buoyed by the Budget announcements as the market was relieved with no adverse tax announcements and finance minister instead resorting to a long list of non-tax revenue mobilisation measures to finance much bigger budgeted expenditures.

NEW VEHICLE SCRAPPAGE POLICY TO BOOST AUTO SECTOR

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, FEB. 1.

Automobiles honchos say the announcement of the Scrappage Policy in the Budget to phase out old and polluting vehicles is expected to significantly boost the auto industry as also contribute to a clean India. This policy is a programme that encourages vehicle owners to scrap vehicles older than 15 years old and purchase new ones instead.

NEIGHBOUR'S | WOES

Aung San Suu Kyi, other leaders detained. Its for a Army

Military stages coup in Myanmar

Naypyitaw (Myanmar), Feb. 1: Myanmar's military staged a coup on Monday and detained senior politicians including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi — a sharp reversal of the significant, if uneven, progress toward democracy the Southeast Asian nation has made following five decades of military rule. An announcement read on military-owned Myawaddy TV said Commander-in-Chief

Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing would be in charge of the country for one year.

It said the seizure was necessary because the government had not acted on the military's claims of fraud in November's elections — in which Suu Kyi's ruling party won a majority of the parliamentary seats up for grabs — and because it allowed the election to go ahead despite the coronavirus pandemic.



The takeover came the morning the country's new parliamentary session was

to begin and follows days of concern that a coup was coming.

The military maintains its actions are legally justified — citing a section of the constitution it drafted that allows it to take control in times of national emergency — though Suu Kyi's party spokesman as well as many international observers have said it amounts to a coup. It was a dramatic backslide for Myanmar, which

was emerging from decades of strict military rule and international isolation that began in 1962.



REACTIONS

As expected, the finance minister has paid special attention to election bound states. She announced large capital outlays for Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam



— **P. CHIDAMBARAM**,
Former finance minister

Forget putting cash in the hands of people, the government plans to handover India's assets to his crony capitalist friend. China occupied our territory and killed our soldiers. PM spends Diwali with them for PR photo-ops.



— **RAHUL GANDHI**,
Congress leader

I won't comment on the Budget in a hurry. But from what I have heard (about budgetary provisions) so far, it should be for the country and not for elections. This is the budget of the country and not of polls



— **UDDHAV THACKERAY**,
Maharashtra CM

The Budget has the potential to be a catalyst to revive the economy and implement development programmes. It will act as a 'speed booster' to the economy which was badly hit due to Covid-19.



— **B.S. YEDIYURAPPA**,
Karnataka chief minister

They (BJP) lecture others on nationalism, but in practice, they are the ones who sell the nation. They are selling everything from PSUs, insurance, railways to ports. This is a budget to deceive the masses.



— **MAMATA BANERJEE**,
West Bengal CM

We welcome the FM's emphasis on healthcare spending and immunisation, especially for Covid-19 and the pneumococcal vaccines as this will help India recover rapidly from this pandemic.



— **ADAR POONAWALLA**,
saCEO, Serum Institute

Earlier, they sold Railways, Air India, Bharat Petroleum, and others. This Budget is about more such entities that will be sold including gas pipeline, stadium, roadways and warehouses.



— **TEJASHWI YADAV**,
RJD president

Kisan protests raging and agriculture allocations reduced. Promising MSP but allocation for price support schemes reduced. Soaring petrol prices additional cess on petroleum product.



— **SITARAM YECHURY**,
CPI(M) general secretary

The Budget presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman will pave the way for an Aatmanirbhar Bharat, making India a \$5 trillion economy and doubling farmers' income



— **AMIT SHAH**,
Union home minister

Multiple pluses: increased govt spending in major sectors like infrastructure, agriculture and health-care; safety net expanded for the vulnerable; & opportunities for greater private investment



— **JYOTIRADITYA SCINDIA**,
BJP leader

Agri cess, customs to pinch pocket

Imported alcohol to attract 100% cess, apples 35%; higher customs to make mobiles, refrigerator, AC, LED lights, leather products costlier

SANGEETHA G
with agency inputs
CHENNAI/NEW DELHI,
FEB. 1

By levying agricultural infrastructure and development cess on certain products and lowering the customs and excise duty, the Centre will be able to increase its revenue and reduce the revenue devolved to the states, without any major impact on the consumer.

The Budget has proposed agriculture infrastructure and development cess on the customs duty of certain products like petrol and diesel, apples, certain alcohol, kabuli chana, soybean and palm oil, Kabuli chana and cotton.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has proposed a new cess of 100 per cent on imported alcoholic beverages.

AIDC cess of ₹2.5 per litre has been levied for petrol and ₹4 per litre for diesel. Among a list of products, the Budget has levied 2.5 per cent AIDC on the customs duty of gold, silver and dore bars, 100 per cent on certain alcoholic beverages, 17.5 per cent on crude palm oil, 20 per cent for crude soybean and palm oil, 35 per cent for apples, 40 per cent for peas, 30 per cent for Kabuli chana, 50 per cent for Bengal gram/chickpeas and 5 per cent for cotton.

However, except gold, silver and dore and cotton, the basic customs duty on most of the products have been reduced so that there is no impact on the consumer. "Overall there would be no additional burden on the consumer on most of these items," finds the Budget.

In case of petrol and diesel, consequent to imposition of AIDC on petrol and diesel, the basic excise duty (BED) and special additional excise duty (SAED) rates have been reduced on them so that overall consumer does not bear any additional burden, it said.

A large number of commonly used items, including refrigerators, air conditioners, LED lights and cellphones, will become more expensive due to hike in customs duty on their imported parts.

Customs duty on the compressors for refrigerators and air conditioners has been hiked to 15 per cent from 12.5 per cent, while the same on LED lamps, parts and spares such as printed circuit boards has also been increased from 5 per cent to 10 per cent.

Likewise, customs duty on solar inverters has been hiked to 20 per cent from 5 per cent earlier, and solar lanterns will



Members of Uttar Pradesh Adarsh Vyapar Mandal and Ficci during a Budget debate while watching finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's speech on Union Budget 2021-22 in Lucknow on Monday.

— PTI

Gold, silver will become cheaper

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

Gold and silver will become cheaper by 2.19 per cent after the customs duty was brought down from 12.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent.

Earlier, gold and silver used to attract import duty of 12.5 per cent. With the addition of cess, surcharge and three per cent GST, the total tax incidence was 16.26 per cent. The Budget has proposed to reduce the customs duty to 7.5 per cent. However, with the addition of Agriculture Infrastructure and

Development Cess as well as GST, the total incidence will come down to 14.07 per cent.

The Budget also proposed to lower the basic customs duty on gold dore bar from 11.85 per cent to 6.9 per cent. With the addition of agricultural infrastructure cess and social welfare surcharge, the customs duty will be 10.09 per cent for gold dore against 10.75 per cent in case of refined gold. Dore will be thus cheaper by 0.66 per cent against refined gold.

Basic customs duty on silver dore too has been reduced from 11 per cent to



6.1 per cent and platinum and palladium from 12.5 per cent to 10 per cent. Basic customs duty on gold and silver findings will come down from 10 per cent to 20 per cent, waste and scrap of precious metals by 2.5 per cent and precious metal coins also by 2.5 per cent.

The basic customs duty on gold stood at one per cent in 2012. With the

widening of current account deficit, import duties on gold and silver were increased from 2012 onwards. This has however supported the expansion of the grey market in recent years.

"The rationalisation of import duty on gold to around 10.75 per cent from 12.5 per cent is a welcome move and timely. Hopefully, this is the first of a series of such cuts to make bullion an asset class that operates mainstream. It is a much-needed incentive for the organised and compliant players in the bullion and gold jewellery market.



Farmers pull out paddy saplings before transplanting them in a field at Ahatguri village, near Morigaon district, on Monday.

— PTI

Extra ₹1.5L deduction on affordable home loans

New Delhi, Feb. 1: The government on Monday extended the additional tax deduction of ₹1.5 lakh on interest paid on housing loan for purchase of affordable homes by one more year to March 31, 2022, a move aimed at boosting demand in the sluggish real estate sector.

The additional deduction of ₹1.5 lakh over and above ₹2 lakh was introduced in

the 2019 budget. This was allowed for those buying homes for the first time and of up to ₹45 lakh cost.

In the Budget speech for 2021-22 fiscal year, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government sees "Housing for All" and affordable housing as priority areas.

"In the July 2019 Budget, I provided an additional deduction of interest,

amounting to ₹1.5 lakh, for loan taken to purchase an affordable house. I propose to extend the eligibility of this deduction by one more year, to 31st March 2022," she said.

The minister said the additional deduction of ₹1.5 lakh shall therefore be available for loans taken up till March 31, 2022, for the purchase of an affordable house.

— PTI

Khelo India sees biggest reduction in allocation

New Delhi, Feb. 1: The impact of Covid-19 was felt on the national sports budget as the government allocated ₹2596.14 crore for the financial year 2021-22 — a reduction of ₹230.78 crore when compared to the amount earmarked initially for the previous year.

In the last financial year, the government had allocated ₹2826.92 crore for sports, which was later

revised to ₹1800.15 crore because of the lack of activity caused by the pandemic. This year's allocated amount is ₹795.99 crore more than the revised Budget of 2020-21.

However, the spending last year was severely impacted after Tokyo Olympics was postponed, domestic events were cancelled in almost all sports and no foreign training

and competition was possible for most of the Indian athletes. The sports ministry bears the cost of all foreign training and competition, including participation in the Olympics.

The government's flagship Khelo India programme was handed the biggest reduction — of ₹232.71 crore — among all sports heads for the 2021-22 Budget.

— PTI

₹18,000 crore scheme for public transport in urban areas

New Delhi, Feb. 1: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday announced a Rs 18,000 crore scheme to augment public transport in urban areas.

While presenting Union Budget 2021-22, she said the government would work towards raising the share of public transport in urban areas through expansion of metro rail network and augmentation of city bus service.

"A new scheme will be launched at a cost of Rs 18,000 crore to support augmentation of public bus transport services," she said.

It will facilitate deployment of innovative public private partnership (PPP) models to enable private sector players to finance, acquire, operate and maintain over 20,000 buses.

The scheme will boost the automobile sector, provide fillip to economic growth, create employment opportunities for the youth and enhance ease of mobility for urban residents. It may be noted that metro train services are expanding all across the country at a rapid pace.

— PTI

No deduction for firms for delaying PF payments

New Delhi, Feb. 1: (PTI) The government on Monday said the employers who delay the deposit of workers' share of social security contributions like employees' provident fund will not be able to claim the amount as deduction from their income.

An amendment in this regard is proposed in the Finance Bill 2021, to ensure that firms deposit the social security contributions of their employees like Employees' State Insurance (ESI) well in time.

Besides it is proposed to tax interest earned on annual provident fund contribution of over ₹2.5 lakh from April 1, 2021. At present there is no tax on interest earned on provident fund deposits.

The government has also proposed to set up a Web portal to map informal sector workers, like gig and platform workers, to provide them various benefits like health, credit and food etc.

In her budget speech, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in Lok

Sabha, "We have noticed that some employers deduct the contribution of employees towards Provident funds, superannuation funds, and other social security funds but do not deposit these contributions within the specified time."

She was of the view that for the employees, this means a loss of interest or income.

In cases where an employer later becomes financially unviable, non-deposit results in a permanent loss for the employees.

The minister told the House, "In order to ensure that employees' contributions are deposited on time, I reiterate that the late deposit of employees' contribution by the employer will not be allowed as deduction to the employer."

These amendments will take effect from April 1, 2021 and will accordingly apply to the assessment year 2021-22, and subsequent assessment years as per the Finance Bill 2021.

According to the speech document, in order to

rationalise tax exemption for the income earned by high-income employees, it is proposed to restrict tax exemption for the interest income earned on the employees' contribution to various provident funds to the annual contribution of ₹2.5 lakh.

This restriction shall be applicable only for the contribution made on or after April 1, 2021.

Under the social security schemes run by the retirement fund body EPFO, employers as well as employees contribute 12

per cent of basic wages each towards social security schemes run by it.

These social security schemes provide the benefit of provident fund, group insurance and pension to organised sector workers which mainly include private and public sector undertakings and staff.

Similarly, for the ESI scheme, employees deposit 0.75 per cent of the wages and that of employer's is 3.25 per cent of the wages. The ESI is a health insurance scheme provided mainly to industrial work-

ers. The finance minister has also announced to set up a dedicated web portal for collecting information of informal sector workers to provide them benefits of various government schemes like health, credit, food and other benefits.

The minister also said that for the first time globally, social security benefits will extend to gig and platform workers.

However, she did not elaborate whether it would be provided through the ESIC or any other agency or body.

— PTI



TWEETS

TEJASVI SURYA
@Tejasvi_Surya

1 of biggest takeaways from budget is no increase in direct taxes though current fiscal deficit is poised to be 9.5% of GDP. No heavy tax burdens for salaried & middle class. At same time, fiscal stimulus & development has not stopped. This is real #Atmanirbhar BharatKa Budget



SMRITI Z IRANI
@Smritiirani

Infrastructure is the most important factor for the growth of any economy and the Nation. Historic push given to Infrastructure sector across various segments in #AatmanirbharBharatKaB uget will have multiplier effect thereby propelling economic growth.



HARDEEP SINGH PURI
@HardeepSPuri

Proposal of continuation of tax holidays on investments in Affordable Housing in #Budget2021 & interest deduction of additional ₹1.5 lakh to promote housing till March 2022 & tax exemption for Affordable Rental Housing Complexes will boost the Real Estate Sector.



SANJAY NIRUPAM
@sanjaynirupam

Selling assets for generating revenue is not at all a wise move. The thrust of #Budget on dis-investment is a bit scary. Privatisation of Roads, Railways, Ports and other infra sectors will make our country vulnerable. It can never make India Atmanirbhar. #UnionBudget2021



KIRAN MAZUMDAR-SHAW
@kiranshaw

#budget2021 has focused on growth investment n jobs. Investment in infra healthcare n mega projects is key to bringing back jobs n financing thru divestment monetisation n privatisation expeditiously will determine success @nsitharaman



PIYUSH GOYAL
@PiyushGoyal

The focus of #Aatmanirbhar BharatKa Budget is to make India future-ready. Whether you look at the huge jump in health sector, phenomenal increase in capital expenditure in Railways, support given to @FCI_India, industry, Startups, today every sector is a happy sector.



SUSHMITA DEV
@sushmitadevinc

Modi Govt's #Budget2021 plans to sell public infra to crony friends. Provides NO relief to marginalised. Hits hard at the Middle Class by Taxing PF. Nothing to promote Women at Workplace. No respite on Petrol, Diesel & LPG. Assaults Rural Women by slashing NREGA fund by 42%.



RAILWAYS GETS ₹1.10 LAKH CRORE TO BECOME FUTURE READY BY 2030

Sitharaman seeks monetisation of dedicated freight corridors, proposes lighter versions of metro rail for smaller cities and periphery of big cities, aims at full electrification of railways

RAJNISH SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB 1

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the budget has allocated a massive ₹1.1 lakh crore for Indian Railways. Out of this, ₹1.07 lakh crore would be used as capital expenditure for the Railways.

In her third budget, the minister unveiled a new ambitious plan for the railways which would help the Indian Railways to be future-ready by 2030 with global standards.

The crucial eastern and western dedicated freight corridors, which would further boost economic growth, will be commissioned by June 2022. In addition, some sections of the dedicated freight corridors will be made on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode in a bid to involve more investments in railway infrastructure. The minister said efforts would be made to see how the Railways can monetise dedicated freight corridors to generate additional financial resources.

"We will undertake future dedicated freight corridor projects namely East Coast corridor from Kharagpur to Vijayawada, East-West Corridor from Bhusaval to Kharagpur to Dankuni and North-South corridor from Itarsi to Vijayawada. Detailed Project Reports will be undertaken in the first phase," Sitharaman said.

While announcing the future projects for the Railways the finance minister stated that Railways will work towards raising the share of public transport with an outlay of ₹18,000 crore. New metro projects like Metrolite and Metroneo technologies will be deployed in tier-2 cities and along the periphery of tier-1 cities. In another important announcement the Finance Minister told the Parliament that 100 electrification of broad gauge rail tracks by December 2023. The effort would be to obtain 100 per cent electrification of broad gauge rail tracks by December 2023.

There would be an investment of ₹18,000 crore scheme to augment public transport in urban areas. In an attempt to mobilise for further expansion, the Railways would also try to monetise pipelines of GAIL (India) Ltd, Indian Oil Corp (IOC) and HPCL which are on railway land.

INFRASTRUCTURE

● National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) now expanded to 7,400 projects.

● It will require a major increase in funding both from the government and the financial sector

THREE STEPS ARE PROPOSED TO BE UNDERTAKEN TO ACHIEVE THIS

1 CREATION OF INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES: FINANCIAL FINANCING:

- A Bill to set up a Development Financial Institution (DFI)
- With provision of ₹20,000cr

2 BIG THRUST ON MONETISING ASSETS

- Launch of National Monetisation Pipeline

Some important measures are:

- Natinal Highway Authority of India and PGCIL
- Railway to monetise Dedicated Frieght Corridor assets for operations and maintenance after commissioning
- The next lot of airports will be monetised for operations and management concessions

3 SHARP INCREASE IN CAPITAL BUDGET

- BE of ₹5.54 lakh crore, 34.5% more than the BE of 2020-21

Scrappage policy to support auto

MICHAEL GONSALVES | DC
PUNE, FEB 1.

Automobiles honchos say the announcement of the Scrappage Policy in the Budget to phase out old and polluting vehicles is expected to significantly boost the auto industry as also contribute to a clean India. This policy is a programme that encourages vehicle owners to scrap vehicles older than 15 years old and purchase new ones instead.

The government's new voluntary vehicle scrappage policy which will be implemented April 2022 onwards, personal vehicles over 20 years old and commercial vehicles over 15 years old would undergo automated fitness tests.

Vehicles not meeting the prescribed norms would be taken off the streets which will boost the sales of new vehicles.

More details on the implementation of this decision will be revealed by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways or MoRTH in due course.

Union Finance Minister Sitharaman in her speech said, "We are separately announcing a voluntary vehicle scrapping policy to phase out old and unfit

vehicles." "This will help encourage fuel-efficient and environment-friendly vehicles, thereby reducing vehicular pollution and oil import bills."

Vehicles would undergo fitness tests in automated fitness centres after 20 years in case of personal vehicles and after 15 years in case of commercial vehicles," Sitharaman pointed out.

This policy will also spur the growth of electrification and alternate fuel vehicles, and lower fuel import bill for the government.

Welcoming the policy, Road Transport, Highways and MSMEs Minister Nitin Gadkari said the policy will lead to new investment of around ₹10,000 crore and create as many as 50,000 jobs. He also said the policy would cover over 1 crore light, medium and heavy motor vehicles.

"Over 51 lakh light motor vehicle older than 20 years and 34 lakh vehicles older than 15 years to be scrapped. Also, 17 lakh medium and heavy commercial vehicles older than 15 years are plying without a valid fitness certificate. These 1 crore vehicles will be a huge enabler for new vehicle sales," Gadkari said.

Post Covid, India poised to be land of promise: FM

New Delhi, Feb. 1: Drawing inspiration from the recent performance of the Indian cricket team in Australia under trying circumstances, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday asserted that India is well-poised to truly be the land of promise and hope in the post-Covid-19 world.

The Finance Minister while presenting the Budget for 2021-22, said as it had happened after the two World Wars, there are signs that the political, economic, and strategic relations in the post Covid-19 world are changing.

She noted that the country's fight against the pandemic continues into 2021 and the country is all set to bring in two more vaccines for the infectious disease.

"Today, India has two vaccines available, and has begun medically safeguarding not only her own citizens against Covid-19, but also those of 100 or more countries. It is an added comfort to know that two or more vaccines are also expected soon," Sitharaman said.

Currently, the country is utilising two vaccines — Covishield and Covaxin — for country's Covid-19 vac-



● **SITHARAMAN NOTED that the country's fight against the pandemic continues into 2021 and the country is all set to bring in two more vaccines for the infectious disease.**

cination drive.

"Now, just as it had happened after the two World Wars, there are signs that the political, economic, and strategic relations in the post Covid world are changing," the Finance Minister noted.

Booster for village broadband

New Delhi, Feb 1: The government on Monday allocated ₹14,200 crore for telecom infrastructure that entails completion of optical fibre cable-based network for Defence services, rolling out broadband in 2.2 lakh panchayats and improving mobile services in the North East.

The government had approved ₹24,664 crore for an advanced communications network for defence services in lieu of their vacating spectrum for mobile telephony in May

2018. The project was to be completed within 24 months.

According to the budget document, the finance ministry has earmarked an outlay of ₹5,200 crore to rollout the entire optical fibre cable (OFC) required for setting up the Defence communications network, issue purchase order for all equipment components for the entire project to commission nationwide dedicated full-fledged communication network.

The finance ministry

has allocated ₹9,000 crore to boost telecom connectivity across the country which includes high-speed OFC or satellite-based broadband services across the 2.2 lakh village panchayats in the next financial year. The government has set a target to lay 6.7 lakh kilometer of OFC, 1.2 lakh wifi access points and 6.5 lakh fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) connections to be installed in 2021-22.

The budget has made provision to instal 600 mobile towers for 4G serv-

ices in Arunachal Pradesh and two districts of Assam and another 600 mobile towers for 4G in Meghalaya. Telecom Equipment Manufacturers Association (TEMA) chairman emeritus NK Goyal said it has been demanding funds for optical fibre-based infrastructure.

"The fund allocation for telecom infrastructure is the need of the hour specially for the north east. This will be a life line for our citizens of North East," Goyal said. — PTI



A man watches a live streaming of the 2021 union budget on his mobile phone, in Kolkata on Monday. — AFP

₹3.05 lakh cr plan to revive discoms

New Delhi, Feb. 1: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday proposed a ₹3.05 lakh crore scheme spread over five years to revive discoms and a framework to provide electricity consumers option to choose from service providers.

These two announcements are aimed at ensuring 24X7 Power for All as envisaged by the central government.

Last year, the government had enforced consumers rules for the power sector to ensure delivery of services.

But loss-making and cash-strapped discoms — which are mostly owned and run by state — are unable to buy sufficient power from generation firms to provide round

the clock supply. Total outstanding dues of the discoms towards power generating firms stood at over ₹1.35 lakh crore as of December 2020.

In her budget speech in the Lok Sabha Sitharaman said, "The viability of Distribution Companies is a serious concern. A revamped reforms-based result-linked power distribution sector scheme will be launched with an outlay of ₹3,05,984 crores over 5 years".

The minister said the scheme will provide assistance to discoms for infrastructure creation, including pre-paid smart metering and feeder separation, up-gradation of systems, etc., tied to financial improvements. — PTI

HOUSING GETS ₹54,581 CRORE

New Delhi, Feb. 1: The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry was allocated ₹54,581 crore for the next fiscal, according to the Union Budget for 2021-22 announced on Monday.

The Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban, a flagship programme of the Modi government, has been given ₹2,300 crore in the 2021-22 Union Budget that was presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament. — PTI

FISCAL | DEFICIT

Gross tax revenues for a 5-year period to be ₹135.2 lakh crore

Tax devolution to states at 42%

New Delhi, Feb. 1: The 15th Finance Commission has recommended that the states be given 42 per cent of the divisible tax pool of the Centre during the period 2021-22 to 2025-26.

The panel's report also provides a range for fiscal deficit and debt path of both the Union and states and also recommended additional borrowing room to states based on performance in power sector reforms.

Finance Commission is a constitutional body that gives suggestions on Centre-state financial relations. The report of the 15th Finance Commission was tabled in the Lok Sabha by Finance

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

In order to maintain predictability and stability of resources, especially during the pandemic, the 15th Finance Commission has recommended "maintaining the vertical devolution at 41 per cent — the same as in our report for 2020-21," an official statement said.

It is at the same level of 42 per cent of the divisible pool as recommended by the 14th Finance Commission, the statement said, adding that however, a required adjustment has been made of "about 1 per cent due to the changed status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kash-

mir into the new Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir".

As per the glide path, fiscal deficit should be 6 per cent in 2021-22, 5.5 per cent in 2022-23, 5 per cent in 2023-24, 4.5 per cent in 2024-25, and 4 per cent in 2025-26. The panel, headed by former bureaucrat N. K. Singh, had in November last year submitted its report titled "Finance Commission in Covid Times" to President Ram Nath Kovind.

The gross tax revenues for a five-year period is expected to be ₹135.2 lakh crore. Out of that, divisible pool (after deducting cesses and surcharges and cost of collection) is esti-

mated to be ₹103 lakh crore, as per the Commission.

States' share at 41 per cent of divisible pool comes to 42.2 lakh crore for 2021-26 period. "Including total grants of ₹10.33 lakh crore and tax devolution of ₹42.2 lakh crore, aggregate transfers to states is estimated to remain at around 50.9 per cent of the divisible pool during 2021-26 period," it said.

Total transfers (devolution + grants) constitutes about 34 per cent of estimated Gross Revenue Receipts of the Union leaving adequate fiscal space for the Union to meet its resource requirements

and spending obligations on national development priorities, the Commission added.

The Commission was asked to give its recommendations on wide-ranging issues. Apart from tax devolution, the Commission was asked to recommend performance incentives for States in many areas like power sector, adoption of DBT, solid waste management etc as well as funding mechanism for defence and internal security.

This report has been organised in four volumes. Volume I and II, as in the past, contain the main report and the accompanying annexes. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

ITA hails ₹1,000-cr package for tea workers

Kolkata, Feb 1: The Indian Tea Association (ITA) on Monday hailed the budgetary provision of ₹1,000 crore for the welfare of tea workers in West Bengal and Assam. It would improve sustainability and strengthen the alignment with sustainable development goals (SDG), ITA said in a statement.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman earlier on Monday presented the first paperless Union Budget for 2021-22. The association said it also expects that the tea estate population would be provided a more comprehensive coverage on welfare schemes related to housing, education, sanitation and medical facilities.

Most tea gardens in Assam and West Bengal are located in remote far-flung places and suffer from several transportation bottlenecks, it said.

Agri cos cheer higher allocation to farm sector

New Delhi, Feb 1: Agri and food companies on Monday hailed the decision to hike farm credit target and increase allocation for the agriculture ministry in the Budget, saying this will help in boosting farmers' income and overall growth of the sector. Asserting that the government is committed towards farmers' welfare, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday proposed 10 per cent hike in the farm loan disbursement target to ₹16.5 lakh crore, and introduced an agri infra and development cess of up to 100 per cent to create post-harvest infrastructure for improving farmers' income. The minister also proposed higher allocation for Rural Infrastructure Development Fund and Micro Irrigation Fund, and extended Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to APMCs for augmenting infrastructure facilities. "2020 has been a year of exceptional and unprecedented challenges and has highlighted the critical importance of two core sectors, agriculture and healthcare. The Union Budget 2021 has correctly called out the role of these two sectors in leading the nation's recovery and being catalysts to sustainable growth," said D Narain.

Women & child development get more

New Delhi, Feb 1: A sum of ₹24,435 crore has been set aside for the Women and Child Development (WCD) Ministry for the next fiscal in the Budget announced on Monday, a 16.31 per cent increase over the 2020-21 financial year.

Out of ₹24,435 crore, the highest amount has been allocated to the newly announced Saksham Anganwadi and Mission Poshan 2.0 scheme with ₹20,105 crore. Poshan 2.0 scheme in an umbrella scheme covering the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Anganwadi Services, Poshan Abhiyaan, Scheme for Adolescent Girls and the National Creche Scheme. The amount set aside for the Women and Child Development (WCD) Ministry is 16 per cent higher over the 2020-21 financial year. In 2020-21, ₹30,007.09 crore was allocated which was revised to ₹21,008.31 crore.

₹15K cr more for science-related ministries

New Delhi: The Ministry of Science and Technology has been allocated ₹14,793.66 crore in the budget 2021-22, a 20 per cent increase from the current fiscal.

Separately, the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) has been allocated ₹1,897.13 crore.

The Ministry of S&T has three departments -- Department of Science and Technology (DST), Department of Biotechnology and Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR). All these departments played key role in combating the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

In the budget 2021-22, the DST has been earmarked ₹6,067.39 crore, while the DBT has been given ₹3,502.37 crore, and the DSIR Rs 5,224.27 crore.

In 2020-21, the Ministry of S&T was allocated ₹14,473.66 crore but it was eventually revised to ₹11,551.86 crore. The allocation the previous fiscal was ₹12,637.43 crore.

SAFE TAP WATER FOR 2.86 CR HOUSES

Jal Jeevan Mission (urban) aims at universal water supply in all 4,378 urban local bodies in over 5 years at outlay of ₹2,87,000 crore

New Delhi, Feb 1: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday announced that the Jal Jeevan Mission (urban) will be launched with an aim to provide tap water connections to 2.86 crore households.

The ambitious mission will be implemented over five years at an outlay of ₹2,87,000 crore.

"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. It will be implemented over 5 years, with an outlay of 2,87,000 crores," Sitharaman said in her budget speech.

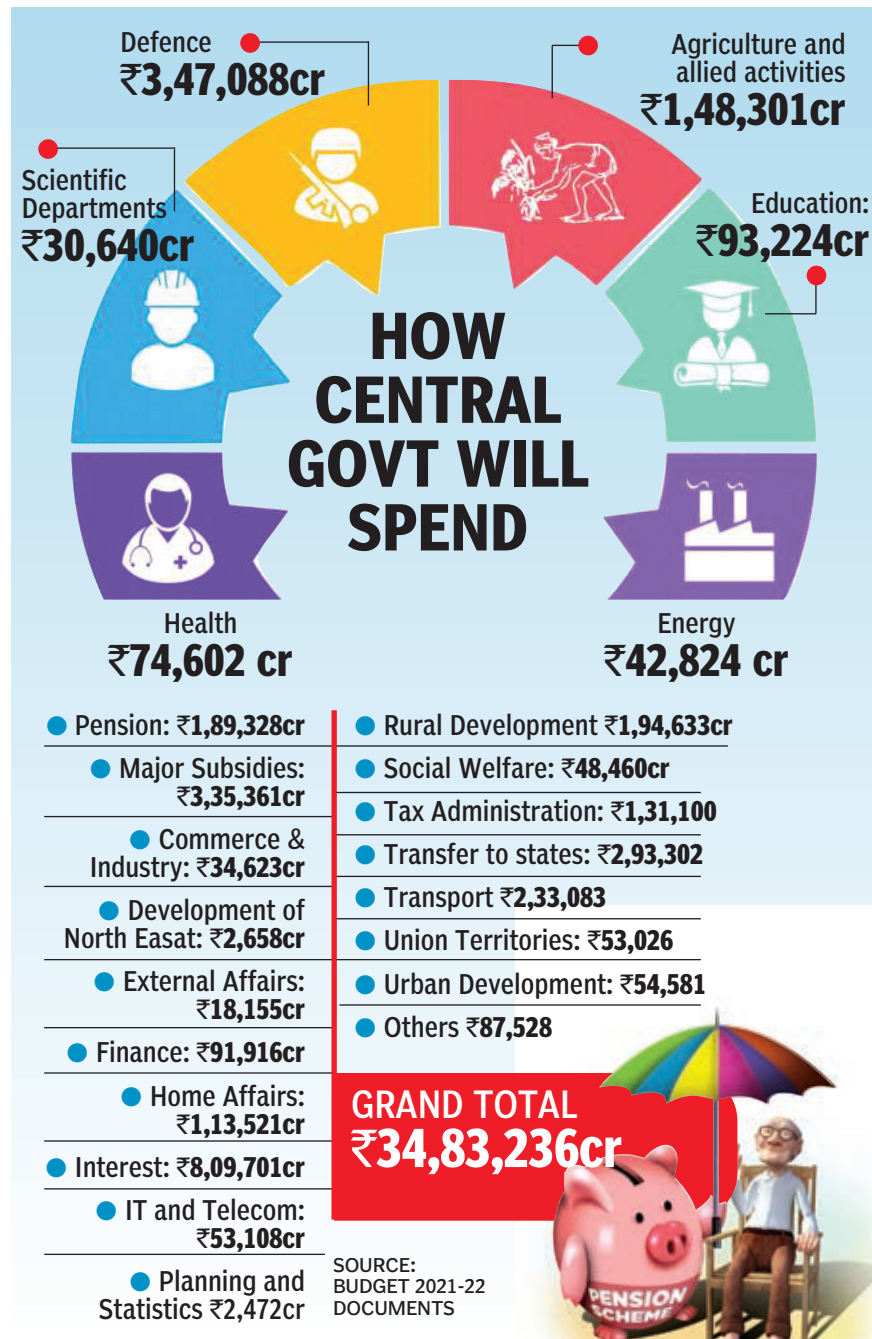
Launched in 2019, Jal Jeevan Mission (rural) aims to provide tap water connections to rural households by 2024.

Three crore tap water connections have been provided under this so far. ~ —PTI

₹7,524 CRORE ALLOCATED FOR TRIBAL MINISTRY

New Delhi: The government on Monday set aside ₹7,524 crore for the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in the Union Budget for the financial year 2021-22, an increase of 36 per cent over the last fiscal year.

A sum of ₹7,411 crore was allocated to the ministry in the financial year 2020-21, which was later revised to ₹5,508 crore. Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda said it was the "best budget so far", as it was prepared under unprecedented circumstances. "The budget has been prepared keeping the qualitative development of all areas in mind. There is no example to describe what we went through due to Covid-19 in 2020," he tweeted. Of the total ₹7,524 crore, the largest chunk — ₹2,393 crore — has been allocated for "tribal education". This time, ₹250 crore has been earmarked for the development of particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs). PVTGs are characterized by declining or stagnant population, low level of literacy, pre-agricultural level of technology and economic backwardness. During her third budget speech in Lok Sabha, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed to increase the unit cost of Eklavya Model Residential School from ₹20 crore to Rs 38 crore, and to Rs 48 crore in hilly and difficult areas. "This would help create robust infrastructure facilities for our tribal students," she said. The government has set a target of establishing 750 Eklavya Model Residential Schools in tribal areas, she added. —PTI



Budget allocates ₹73,000 crore for MGNREGA

SANGEETHA G | FC
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

The budgetary allocation on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme FY22 has been reduced 34.5 per cent compared to the revised estimate of FY21.

For the next fiscal, the government has allocated ₹73,000 crore for MGNREGA.

GA scheme as against ₹1,11,500 crore of the revised estimate of FY21. However, the allocation is higher than last fiscal's budget estimate of ₹61,500 crore.

In its first stimulus package of ₹ 20 lakh crore, the government had announced an extra allocation of ₹40,000 crore for MGNREGA. During the pandemic, the govern-

ment had increased the allocation for the scheme in order to help the migrant labourers moving back to their rural homes.

The Finance Minister, however, did not mention anything on the scheme during her Budget speech.

As per the latest update, total expenditure under this scheme is ₹89,269 crore which is 92 per cent of fund utilization. The

scheme promises 100 days of employment each year to every rural household in demand of work. Over 34 lakh households have completed 100 days of employment. It has provided work for 14.4 crore active workers.

MGNREGA had helped the rural sector and agriculture and allied activities withstand the pressures of the pandemic.



SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFIT TO BE EXTENDED TO GIG WORKERS

New Delhi, Feb 1: The government on Monday said social security benefits will be extended to platform and gig workers.

Presenting the Union Budget for 2021-22, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government also proposed setting up of a portal to collect information on gig-workers, building and construction workers, among others. A portal will be set up to collect info on gig & platform workers, building & construction workers, among others to provide them benefits like health, credit (easy financing), food and others, Sitharaman said in her budget speech in Lok Sabha. —PTI

LABOUR WELFARE

- **TO ENSURE** that employees' contributions are deposited on time, late deposit of employee's contribution by the employer shall never be allowed as deduction to the employer.
- **ELIGIBILITY FOR** claiming tax holiday for start-ups extended till 31st March, 2022
- **THE CAPITAL** gains exemption for investment in start-ups extended till 31st March, 2022
- **MIGRANT WORKERS** and Labourers
- **ONE NATION** one ration card implementation underway; 32 states and UTs covered so far and remaining 4 to be integrated in next few months
- **IMPLEMENTATION OF 4** layout codes underway
- **New Portal** to collect information on unorganized labour force, migrant workers especially, to help formulate schemes for them.
- **Singler** registration and licensing, and online returns to reduce compliance burden on employers

Agri infra, development cess in; 10% hike in farm loan target

NEW DELHI, FEB 1

Asserting that the government is committed towards farmers' welfare, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday proposed 10 per cent hike in the farm loan disbursement target to ₹ 16.5 lakh crore in the Budget, and introduced an agri-infra and development cess of up to 100 per cent to create post-harvest infrastructure for improving farmers' income.

The minister also proposed higher allocation for Rural Infrastructure Development Fund and Micro Irrigation Fund, and extended Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to APMCs for augmenting infrastructure facilities. The government also proposed substantial investments for the develop-

● **The Government is allocating ₹75,100 crore for the farmers of the country, announcing an increase in agricultural credit target to ₹16.5 lakh crore in FY 2021-22**

ment of fishing harbours, fish landing centres and promote seaweed farming. Presenting the first digital Budget in Parliament, Sitharaman said the proposal on agriculture will further strengthen "the Sankalp of the nation first, doubling farmers' income, strong infrastructure.", among others. To provide adequate credit to our farmers, the minister

said, "I have enhanced the agricultural credit target to Rs 16.5 lakh crores in FY22. We will focus on ensuring increased credit flows to animal husbandry, dairy, and fisheries".

When the minister was mentioning about MSP procurement, the Opposition shouted slogans saying that the government should repeal the new farm laws, against which some farmers are protesting at Delhi borders for over two months now.

Sharing further on MSP procurement, the minister said the government's payment on wheat procurement has increased to Rs 62,802 crore in 2019-20 and even better in 2020-21 from the level of Rs 33,874 crore in 2013-14. —PTI

Def modernisation: 18% increase in capital outlay

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

Narendra Modi government on Monday hiked the "capital outlay" for defence modernization by 18 per cent to ₹1.35 lakh crore in Union Budget 2021-22 amidst stand-off with the China.

"This is highest ever increase in capital outlay for defence in 15 years," said defence minister Rajnath Singh. Meanwhile, Fifteenth

Finance Commission of India on Monday in a report tabled in the Parliament recommended setting up a ₹ 2.38 lakh crore non-lapsable Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security (MFDIS) to bridge the gap between projected budgetary requirements and budget allocation for defence and internal security. Finance ministry indicated that it has in-principle accepted this recommendation.

Last year India spent additional ₹23,000 crore on emergency arms procurement by army, navy and air force as tensions with China heightened after Galwan Valley incident. This took the revised budget estimate for capital outlay to ₹1.34 lakh crore in 2020-21 against allocation of ₹1.13 lakh crore. This means that there is 0.40 per cent increase in budget allocation for capital outlay in 2021-22 when compared to revised esti-

This is highest ever increase in capital outlay for defence in 15 years.
Rajnath Singh
Defence minister

mates of 2020-21. In the Union budget 2021-22, Army has been allocated ₹36,480 crore, Navy ₹33,253

crore and Air Force ₹53,214 crore for modernization and infrastructure development.

The burgeoning defence pension budget has been reduced by 13 per cent to ₹1.15 lakh crore in 2021-22 from ₹1.33 lakh crore last year.

"Last year pension budget was more because approximately Rs 18,000 crore was to be paid on account of pension arrears. Also salary and pension are based on actu-

als," said a senior official.

The overall defence budget allocation has increased just marginally by 1.5 per cent at ₹4.78 lakh crore in 2021-22 against ₹4.71 lakh crore in the last year's budget.

Excluding defence pension, the total allocations for defence services and other organisations and departments under defence ministry for the FY 2021-22 is ₹3,62,345 crore which is an increase of ₹24,792 crore over FY

2020-21. The capital allocation for DRDO has been increased to ₹11,375 crore. This is an increase of 8 per cent over 2020-21 and 8.5 per cent over 2019-20.

The allocation for Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has been increased to ₹6,004 crore which is 7.48 per cent increase over FY 2021-22 and 14.49 per cent over FY 2019-20 as India builds crucial infrastructure near line of actual control (LAC) with China.

SHORT TAKES

TAX EXEMPTION
ON ULIP
PROCEEDS CAPPED

In order to bring in taxation parity between life insurance companies and mutual funds, the Union Budget 2021 has proposed to limit the exemptions on proceeds from unit-linked insurance plans (Ulips) that have so far allowed large investors to receive tax-free returns. The government has proposed to amend the clause in the Income Tax Act pertaining to taxation of proceeds from Ulips, according to the Finance Bill, 2021. For Ulips taken on or after February 1, the maturity proceeds of policies with an annual premium of more than Rs 2.5 lakh will be taxable on a par with equity-linked mutual fund schemes. Individuals holding multiple Ulips with an aggregate premium in excess of Rs 2.5 lakh will have to pay tax on the proceeds. Till now, under the current provisions, all proceeds from Ulips were tax free, irrespective of the amount of premium paid by the individual.

—Falaknaaz Syed

ON CARDS: SINGLE
SECURITIES
MARKET CODE

The government on Monday proposed to introduce a unified securities markets code, a move that will help in boosting the ease of doing business in the country's financial markets. The move would help in cutting down compliance costs and reducing the friction between rules enacted by capital markets watchdog Sebi, depositories and government, experts said.

The finance minister proposed to consolidate the provisions of Sebi Act, Depositories Act, Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act and Government Securities Act into a rationalised single securities markets code. Towards investor protection, the minister also proposed to introduce an investor charter as a right for all investors in all financial products.

Law Chaturvedi, ED and CEO of Reliance Securities said the single securities market code will bring out ease of doing business in Indian financial markets.

FPIs CAN DEBT
FINANCE REITS
AND INVITS

In a significant move to augment funds for the infrastructure and real estate sectors, the government proposed permitting foreign portfolio investors an entry into debt financing of emerging investment vehicles Reits and InvITs. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman also proposed exempt taxes on dividends on Reits and InvITs, which will make such investment vehicles attractive and lucrative for investors.

Reits (Real Estate Investment Trusts) and InvITs (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) are relatively new investment instruments in the Indian context but are popular in global markets. While a Reit comprises a portfolio of commercial real assets, a major portion of which are already leased out, InvIT comprises a portfolio of infrastructure assets such as highways and power transmission assets.

The FM said the measures will further ease access of finance to InvITs and REITs.

₹1,500-CRORE
SCHEME TO BOOST
E-PAYMENTS

The government proposed a Rs 1,500-crore scheme to promote digital transactions in the country, a move that the industry believes will drive adoption of e-payments in smaller cities and spur innovation by fintech firms. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said there has been a manifold increase in digital payments in the recent past. "To give a further boost to digital transactions, I earmark Rs 1,500 crore for a proposed scheme that will provide financial incentive to promote digital mode of payment," she said.

Cheering the move, Payments Council of India chairman and Infibeam Avenues Ltd executive director Vishwas Patel said the announcement would incentivise digital payments.

"Hopefully, it will be used to reimburse losses suffered by payment service providers for processing RuPay debit cards and UPI transactions for free in the year 2020 as well as top up the Rs 500 crore fund set up by RBI as part PIDEF," he said.

74% FDI IN INSURANCE SOON

Majority directors, key management must be Indian residents; move could see inflows of around ₹30,000 crore in three years in sector

Powered by
**FINANCIAL
Chronicle**

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, FEB. 1

The Union Budget 2021 has set the ball rolling for getting higher foreign capital in the insurance sector by raising the foreign direct investment limit (FDI) from 49 per cent to 74 per cent and allowing foreign ownership and control with safeguards. The move, according to experts, could see inflows of around Rs 30,000 crore in three years in the sector.

In the revised structure, majority directors and key management must be of resident Indians. At least 50 per cent directors must be independent directors and a fixed percentage of the profits must be retained as general reserves.

Presenting the Budget 2021-2022, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her speech, said, "I propose to amend the Insurance Act, 1938 to increase the permissible FDI limit from 49 per cent to 74 per cent in insurance companies and allow foreign ownership and control with safeguards."

Ashvin Parekh, managing partner at Ashvin Parekh Advisory Services, said, "It is a long awaited reform and should be welcomed as it would bring in about Rs 30,000 crore in the insurance sector over the next three years. But it will take some time since it would require an amendment in the Insurance Act."

In 2015 when the FDI limit was lifted from 26 per cent to 49 per cent, the Indian management control clause was inserted into the Act. Although the expectation was that the insurance sector would get fresh capital of Rs 25,000 crore, the actual infusion into the sector was just around Rs 5,400 crore, as Indian promoters of existing companies monetised their investments by selling their stake to the foreign joint venture partners.

COTTON DUTY A
BLOW TO UNITS
DOWNSTREAM

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

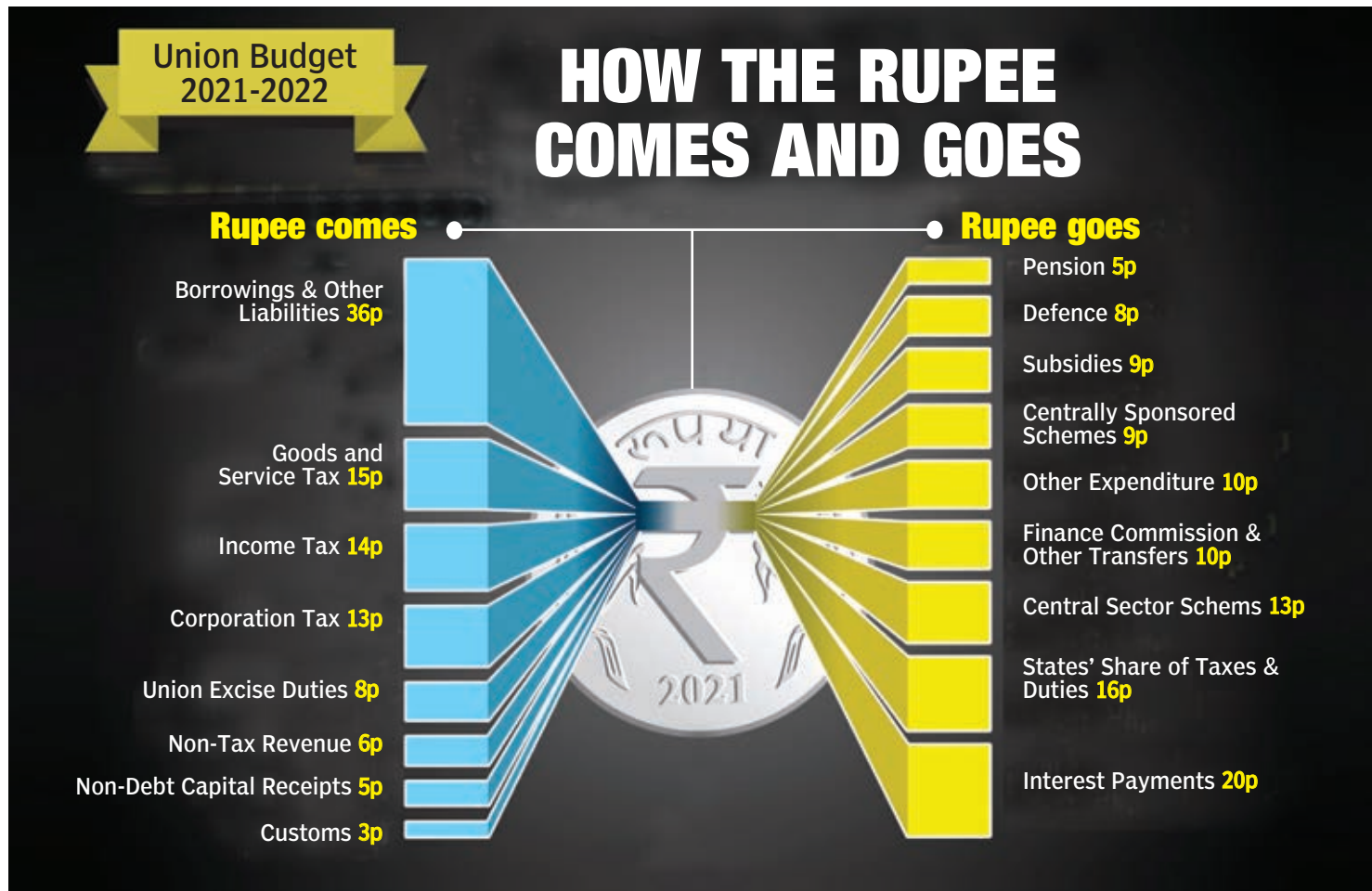
The textile industry finds the 10 per cent import duty on cotton as a "severe blow" for the downstream industries. The duty will make products like bed sheets and fine shirting dearer.

Cotton and cotton waste imports are currently under nil duty. The budget has imposed 5 per cent Basic Customs Duty and another 5 per cent Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess on cotton.

The cotton textile industry has to import Extra Long Staple cotton, organic cotton and contamination-free cotton to the tune of 10 to 12 lakhs bales per year. India produces just 3 per cent of its consumption and has to import the deficit to meet the demands of the global customers and also the domestic market.

"The extra long staple cotton, in which India has a clear production deficit, are largely imported from Egypt and the US and are used for making bed sheets, fine shirting and other products made using fine yarn. The price of these products will go up and affect our competitiveness," said Sanjay Jain, an industry veteran.

The country is already flooded with cheaper imports of readymade garments from Saffa countries and the import duty will further make Indian products costlier, said Ashwin Chandran, chairman, Sima.

De-nationalisation of banks
begins; insurer also on radar

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, FEB. 1

Apart from a strong disinvestment pipeline (BPCL, Air India, Shipping Corporation of India, etc) intended to be completed in FY22, the government on Monday also proposed to privatise two public sector banks and one non-life insurance company in the year 2021-22. It also announced that LIC would be listed on the bourses next fiscal. The moves would help the government meet the disinvestment target of Rs 1.75 lakh crore and reduce the fiscal constraints.

The government will bring necessary legislative changes in this parliamentary session to enable the disvestment plans, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said during her budget speech on Monday. She, however, did not specify which banks the government was looking to sell stake in, or how much it would divest.

FY21 fiscal deficit
pegged at 9.5%

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

With macroeconomic uncertainty in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government on Monday pegged the fiscal deficit for the current fiscal year 2020-21 at 9.5 per cent of GDP. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who expects to reduce the deficit to 6.8 per cent next fiscal, also proposed a gradual fiscal consolidation path to bring down the fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent by FY26. She further signalled a counter-cyclical fiscal policy to boost medium-term economic growth.

Sitharaman said the government would borrow about Rs 12 lakh crore in FY22. "The expenditure

for the next fiscal has been pegged at Rs 34.83 lakh crore, which includes Rs 5.54 lakh crore of capital expenditure. The fiscal deficit for FY21, pegged at 9.5 per cent of GDP, will be brought down to 6.8 per cent in FY22," she said, adding the Centre will move the market to borrow Rs 80,000 crore more to fund FY21 fiscal deficit.

The finance minister accepted the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission (FFC) and also raised the ceiling for state borrowing to 4 per cent from 3 per cent allowed earlier, with the facility for additional 0.5 per cent conditional borrowing. The FFC's recommendation to retain 41 per cent share for states in the divisible pool of taxes was also accepted by the FM.

Kajal Gandhi, banking and financial services analyst at ICICI Direct, said, "After the government's last announced merger of 13 public sector banks into five, the government has taken the first step towards privatising state-run banks, starting with divestment of two PSU banks, in a bid to expedite long-awaited reforms in the banking sector. We believe merged PSU banks like Bank of Baroda, Punjab National Bank or non-merged banks like Bank of

India, Bank of Maharashtra, may be on the radar."

Meghna Suryakumar, co-founder & CEO, Credidwatch said, "The government's commitment to the privatisation of two banks is a healthy indicator that it is serious about growth. This should bring in more professionalism and sophistication into the banking industry. It comes nearly 52 years after the nationalisation of banks in India, but it's still a great time to do this."

In 2019, it had sold a majority stake in IDBI Bank to LIC, effectively privatising the lender.

Besides the two banks, the government will divest stake in a general insurance company.

Bad bank to gulp
NPAs get leg-up

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, FEB. 1

The government announced a slew of proposals for the banking sector, prime being the proposal to set up a bad bank that would buy distressed assets out of the books of public sector banks, thereby freeing funds for lending. It also announced capital infusion of Rs 20,000 crore into state-owned banks to boost credit growth.

Also, in a major relief to depositors, the finance minister announced that the government will be moving an amendment to the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) Act, 1961, in this session which would allow cus-

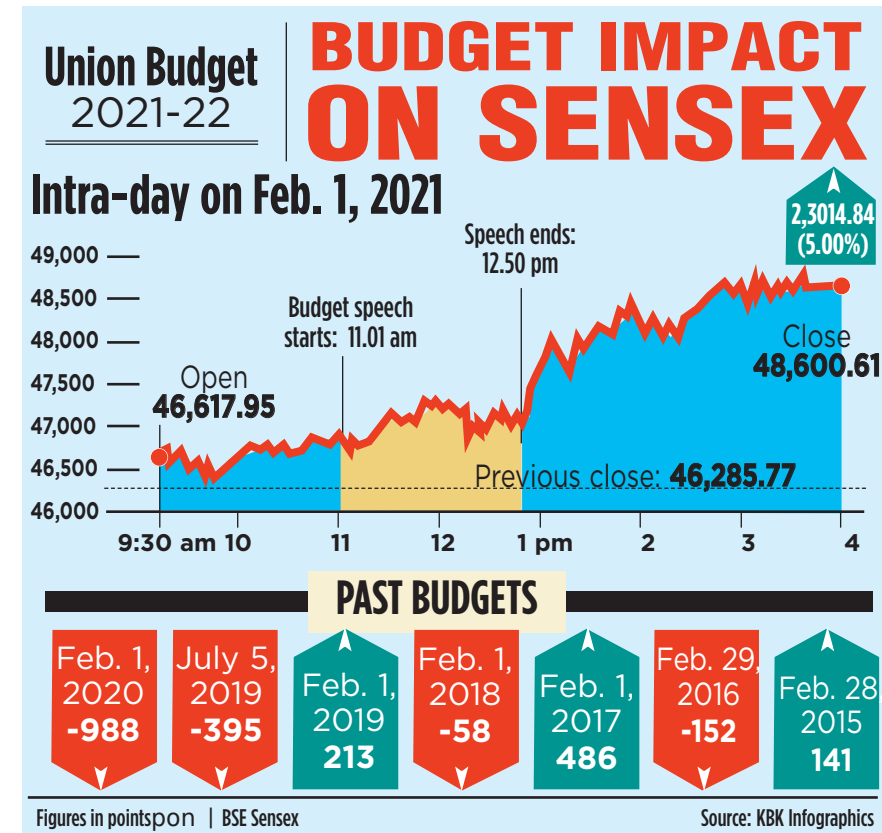
tomers to withdraw up to Rs 5 lakh even if a bank is temporarily disabled.

"The high level of provisioning by public sector banks of their stressed assets calls for measures to clean up the bank books. An Asset Reconstruction Company Limited and Asset Management Company would be set up to consolidate and take over the existing stressed debt and then manage and dispose of the assets to Alternat Investment Funds and other potential investors for eventual value realisation," the FM said.

In a post-budget press briefing, finance ministry officials said the structure will be set up with public and private sector banks.

The decriminalization of compliance in Limited Liability Partnerships will help the smaller entities think through their business and financing models without worrying about criminal liabilities in case there is a gap in compliance.

The tax holiday for start-ups and capital gains exemption have been extended by one more year till 31st March, 2022.

PPP MODEL FOR
MAJOR PORT
OPERATIONS

New Delhi, Feb. 1: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said major ports will move from managing operational services on their own to a model where a private partner will operate it for them.

For the purpose, seven projects worth more than Rs 2,000 crore will be offered by the major ports on the public-private partnership (PPP) mode in 2021-22.

Sitharaman also proposed to launch a subsidy support scheme of Rs 1,624 crore in global tenders floated by ministries and CPSEs over five years to Indian shipping companies.

She said the initiative would enable training and job opportunities for seafarers.

—PTI

Fear gives way to cheer at stock market

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 1

The stock market witnessed a mammoth rally, buoyed by the Budget announcements. The market was relieved that the budget had no adverse tax announcements.

There was no looking back for the market which used to see huge volatility on Budget days. The Sensex closed with gains of 2,314 points, or 5 per cent, the biggest ever Budget day gains in absolute terms, closing at 48,600.61.

The Nifty-50 Index closed 656.60 points, or 4.74 per cent, up at 14,281.20.

The Sensex rallied from the very beginning of the Budget speech on mega announcement like voluntary vehicle scrapping policy, a sharp increase in capital expenditure, by 34.5 per cent more than 2020-21 at Rs 5.54 lakh crore for 2021-22, privatisation of two public sector banks and a general insurance company, hike in FDI limit in the insurance sector from 49 per cent to 74 per cent and divestment target of Rs 1.75

lakh crore.

Financials, bank stocks and realty were big gainers as were the cement, capital goods and infrastructure stocks, elated by the big-bang Budget announcements while IT, FMCG and pharma sectors were the laggards on a historic day.

The big gainers included IndusInd Bank (14.75 per cent), ICICI Bank (12.47 per cent), Bajaj Finserv (11.23 per cent), SBI (10.30 per cent), L&T (8.61 per cent) and HDFC (8.61 per cent). ITC gained 6.25 per cent as no new excise duty was

announced this time on cigarettes.

Investors' wealth swelled by over Rs 6.34 lakh crore as BSE's market capitalisation soared to Rs 192.46 lakh crore from Rs 186.12 lakh crore last Friday.

Brokerages and analysts welcomed the absence of Covid tax and wealth tax on the super-rich and the positive economy boosting measures like extending incentives for buying affordable house and housing projects.

"The FY22 budget has been much better than the

market's expectations. The feared and anticipated measures around Covid cess, higher capital gains tax or wealth tax etc. did not materialise. This will provide a huge relief to the market and the economy and help in sustaining the buoyant sentiments in the economy," Motilal Oswal, MD & CEO, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

"Government has clearly articulated the focus towards Infra and Capex spending, we believe this will push the Capex spending in the economy and

augur well for the overall economic revival of India. The significant increase in allocation to the healthcare sector should lift the general well-being in the economy," Oswal said.

Rather than taxing, FM announced more incentives for foreign and domestic investors.

"The rationalisation of tax structures for FPIs, NRIs, InvITS and Reits will also help attract more funds for capital formation in India," said Ashishkumar Chauhan, MD & CEO, BSE.

SHORT TAKES

AMARINDER: BID TO SIDELINE NON-BJP STATES

Chandigarh, Feb. 1: Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Monday flayed the Union Budget, saying it reflects the Centre's persistent efforts to sideline non-BJP ruled states.

The Shiromani Akali Dal and the Aam Aadmi Party too dubbed the Budget as anti-common man, accusing the Centre of selling off national assets to corporates. The reactions came hours after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget for 2021-22. The Punjab CM claimed that the Budget was reflective of the BJP-led central government's apathy towards the common man, the middle class and farmers.

He criticised the Centre for the step motherly treatment meted out to Punjab and other northern states, claiming that it was "designed" to cater to the poll-bound states of West Bengal and south India with a massive infrastructure development allocation for these regions.

The Budget also manifests the central government's persistent efforts to sideline non-BJP states like ours, as well as its anti-federal mindset, said the CM, pointing to the gap between the fiscal deficit targets fixed for the Union government and states.

The Punjab CM claimed the vital sector of defence has not been adequately addressed despite the growing border threat from China.

HARYANA CHIEF MINISTER HAILS UNION BUDGET

Chandigarh, Feb. 1: Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Monday said the Union Budget for 2021-22 will lay the foundation for a self-reliant India, a claim junked by the Opposition Congress who dubbed it as disappointing.

Haryana Congress president Kumari Selja said the Union Budget completely ignored the state.

Reacting to the Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on Monday, Khattar said it will lay the foundation for a self-reliant India, create infrastructure and generate jobs.

Despite challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the finance minister presented a very balanced Budget, he said, adding that it took care of all sections of society with a focus on infrastructure development, health, agriculture and education sectors.

Recounting its key points, Khattar said over 15,000 schools will be strengthened as per reforms proposed in the new National Education Policy.

This Budget talks of all-round development of all parts of the country, he claimed, adding that it provided for a record increase in allocation for infrastructure building.

'STEP-MOTHERLY TREATMENT GIVEN IN BUDGET'

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

The Delhi government on Monday accused the Centre of giving step motherly treatment to the national capital in the Union budget, and claimed the budget is aimed at benefitting few big companies.

"This budget is aimed at benefiting few big companies. It will increase inflation and problems for the public," Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted in Hindi.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said Delhi continues to get step-motherly treatment from the central government.

"Union Budget is a vision document of any government and spells out its economic agenda for the next financial year. This year there was great anticipation around the Union Budget and people of Delhi had high hopes from the central government that justice would finally be done to them, particularly amid the Covid-19 pandemic which has devastated lives of many people," he said.

"Delhi continues to get step motherly treatment. 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 and transfers from Centre to Delhi has been reduced from ₹1,116 crore to ₹957 crore," he added.

MAMATA: BUDGET IS ANTI-PEOPLE
Says petrol and diesel prices are going to shoot up again

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, FEB. 1

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday described the first paperless union budget as "anti-people" and a "disguised" and "camouflaged" deception by an "incognito government" at the Centre.

The Trinamul Congress supremo also slammed the budgetary proposals for privatisation of many central public sector undertakings while expressing fear of another round of fuel price hike soon.

At the Uttar Banga Utsob (North Bengal Festival) inauguration in Siliguri, Ms Banerjee claimed, "God knows what this budget is all about! It is anti-people, anti-farmer and anti-country. I asked Amit Mitra, our finance minister who is among a few with good knowledge about the global economy, to tell me about the budget in a nutshell. He said, it is disguised and camouflaged to deceive the people. That means it is a fake budget of an incognito government."

Mocking the allocation of ₹25,000 crore for a 675-km-long Kolkata Siliguri National Highway network as a poll-gimmick ahead of the Assembly election in the state, the TMC chief not only rejected it but also asked the Centre to utilise the fund for the farmers' welfare.

"When we are doing everything, what else will you do in new Kolkata-



1	2	3	4	5	6
Health & wellbeing	Physical & Financial capital and infrastructure	Inclusive Development for Aspirational India	Reinvigorating Human Capital	Innovation and R&D	Minimum Government & Maximum Governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fiscal deficit stand at 9.5% of the GDP for 2020-21, estimated to be 6.8% in 2021-22 The capital expenditure for the year 2021-22 will be 5.54 lakh crore as against 4.12 lakh crore allocated in BE 2020-21, an increase of 34.5% Proposal to allow states to raise borrowings up to 4% of GSDP in 21-22 No IT filing for senior citizens above 75-years who get pension and earn interest from deposits Reopening window for IT assessment cases reduces from 6 to 3 years. In case of serious tax evasion, with evidence of concealment of income of ₹50 lakh or more, assessment can be re-opened up to 10 years with approval of the Principal Chief Commissioner Tax holiday for affordable housing projects extended till March 2022 Increase of 137% in the outlay for Health Mission POSHAN 2.0 to improve nutritional outcomes across 112 Aspirational Districts 					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highest ever outlay of ₹1,18,101 lakh crore for Ministry of Road Transport and Highways with an aim to complete an additional 11,000 km of national highways in the year. Strategic disinvestment of BPCL, Air India, Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India and IDBI Bank among other PSUs to be completed this year An amount of ₹1.97 lakh crores allotted to nurture global manufacturing champions and increase jobs for the youth over 5 years, starting this FY as part of AatmaNirbhar Bharat Agriculture infrastructure fund to be made available for Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) for augmenting their infrastructure 1,000 more Mandis to be integrated with e-NAM to bring transparency and competitiveness Voluntary vehicle scrapping policy to phase out old and unfit vehicles: After 20 years in case of commercial vehicles. Fitness tests to be done in automated fitness centers



NOW, just as it had happened after the two World Wars, there are signs that the political, economic, and strategic relations in the post Covid world are changing.

NIRMALA SITHARAMAN,
Finance minister

Siliguri route? Are you trying to teach Bengalis to do Hamaguri (crawling)? Ahead of polls, they are now talking of building road in Bengal. While Bengal is showing the way, there is no need to build road here. You better go to the farmers and spend the

money after them while abolishing the three farm laws. We will get our roads built. Do not play such politics in the time of election," she told the Centre.

On the Centre's proposal for the tea workers' welfare in two states including West Bengal, Ms

Banerjee pointed out, "Before the last Election they promised to open all the tea gardens here. Without fulfilling that, they today talked of allocating ₹1,000 crore for tea gardens. They only spread lies instead of doing anything."

Lashing out at the Centre for its privatisation drive in the government sector, she argued, "From rail-ways to port to airport to insurance, everything is being sold. 23 more PSUs are in line. How much more money do they (BJP) need? Common people and

farmers are totally ignored. Cess has been levied in the agricultural infrastructure. Petrol and diesel prices are going to shoot again despite its hike for eight times. There is also no mention of abolition of the three farm laws in the budget."

● **LASHING OUT** at the Centre for its privatisation drive, she argued, "From railways to port to airport to insurance, everything is being sold. 23 more PSUs are in line. How much more money do they (BJP) need?"

MAHA RULING PARTIES CLAIM BUDGET NEGLECTS STATE

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 1

Ruling parties in Maharashtra — Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress — have slammed the budget saying it has neglected the highest tax paying state in the country. The union government has announced projects only for poll-bound states in the budget, they said.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said, "The budget should be announced for the entire country and not for the elections."

Senior Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said that Maharashtra is the most neglected state in terms of budgetary provisions. "For the past several years, people like us have been trying to find Maharashtra in the Union budget. But Maharashtra is not seen in it. Maharashtra, and particularly Mumbai, makes a huge contribution in terms of revenue for the country, but the state has always faced injustice."

When asked about a cess on certain items, including petrol and diesel, in the budget Mr Raut quipped, "Petrol price in some parts of the country has already reached ₹100 per litre. The government may even want the rates to soar to ₹1,000 per litre."

The NCP termed the union budget as 'a move towards "privatisation." "The Budget presented by the Central government is very disappointing. It seems a move towards privatisation. The common man has been neglected in this budget. Similarly, no concrete decision has been made for farmers. The Budget failed to meet expectations of the people amidst the coronavirus pandemic," said Home Minister and senior NCP leader Anil Deshmukh in Nagpur.

Another NCP leader and state Housing Minister Jitendra Awhad tweeted, "The new budget in simple words ... #India For Sale."

Maharashtra Congress chief and state Revenue Minister Balasaheb Thorat said that Maharashtra and Mumbai have got nothing from this budget. "It shows the central government's vindictive attitude," he said.

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 1

Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Monday took strong exception to introduction of cess on petrol and diesel in the Union Budget and said it was a move towards centralization of revenue. He said such an arrangement would weaken the Centre-state fiscal balance.

"Centralization of revenue by introduction of cess in petrol and diesel will weaken the Centre-state fiscal balance. Banks have to be made accountable to extend credit to women, farmers and MSMEs," he said reacting to the Union Budget. The Union government proposes agri cess of ₹2.5 per litre on petrol and ₹4 per litre on diesel.

Mr Patnaik, who is also the president of Biju

● **MR PATNAIK**, who is also the president of Biju Janata Dal, an arch rival of the BJP, apprehended that the state would be hit by drastic reduction of share in central taxes by about ₹10,840 crore for the current year. The horizontal share will decrease from 4.629% to 4.528% for coming 5 years.

Janata Dal, an arch rival of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), also apprehended that the state would be hit by drastic reduction of share in central taxes by about ₹10,840 crore for the current year and as per the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission the horizontal share will decrease from 4.629 per cent to 4.528 percent for coming 5 years. This will seriously impact the state. Further capital invest-

ments are very much required in Odisha both in railways and highways sectors as it has been planned for other states," the CM said.

He observed that there is a need to increase allocation in social assistance programmes and quantum of transfers for local bodies.

Mr Patnaik, however, appreciated the Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's "bold steps" in the budget to address the post Covid-19 scenario challenges.

"This Budget has focused on capital investment to push growth. Reintroduction of Developmental Financial Institution, allocation for Covid vaccine, industry and sector specific interventions, bold decision to expand fiscal deficit to provide growth impetus and a medium and long term vision for 'self-

reliant India] are some of the positive points," the CM said.

The CM expressed happiness that the Union budget has turned Green with a digital budget like what Odisha has been following from last year.

"I am also delighted to see Mission Shakti appear in the Union budget focusing on women empowerment. After Odisha's Mamata scheme was adopted by the Union government from 2011-2012, replication of our state's flagship women empowerment initiative Mission Shakti clearly shows that Odisha sets a benchmark for the nation. I am hopeful that after Mamata and Mission Shakti the next logical step towards women empowerment would be reservation for women in Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies. We will continue to fight for this," he said.

Budget let down like never before: Cong



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at Parliament House complex on the day of Budget 2021-22 presentation, in New Delhi, Monday.

— PTI

budget 'like never before'. Her mandate was to present an annual statement of revenue and expenditure for 2021-22. What she did, however, was to estimate expenditure over 2 years or 3 years or 4 years or, in one case, over 5 years," he said. She made a reference to the prime minister 14 times and to the farmers 11 times, he pointed out.

"The budget was a let down like never before. This budget, like the previous one, will unravel sooner than you think," he said.

Chidambaram said the numbers show that the fiscal situation is in a mess. He said the revenue deficit and fiscal deficit this year have exceeded every prediction, including the government's prediction.

"Investors and lenders will bristle," he said, on FM pegging fiscal deficit of 4.5 per cent by 2025-26 and not coming out with a credible plan.

He alleged that the FM paid special attention to poll-bound states as she announced large capital outlays for Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam.

"People are not fools: they know that the proposals are only outlays and the actual expenditure will happen only after the schemes are approved and

over a period of several years depending upon the pace of implementation," he said.

Congress chief spokesperson Randeev Surjewala said the FM has only deceived people in this budget.

"Extreme injustice has been done to rural India and the poor," he said, alleging that the MGNREGA budget has been cut by 42 pc. "This attack of the Modi government on the poor labourers, SC, ST and backward will be fatal for rural India."

He alleged that farming and farmers' neglect continues as farm budget has been reduced by 6 pc, PM Kisan Samman budget reduced by 13 pc and petrol for market intervention scheme reduced by 25 pc.

"In the Modi government's budget, all government properties will be sold from airport to rail, godowns to ports, roads to rail, power transmission line to BHEL. That is why 'Sell and eat everything and leave nothing,'" he said. Senior Congress leader Anand Sharma tweeted, "The FM could have been brave but chose to be timid. The nation needed a bold budget and more direct transfers to the weaker sections to revive demand, restart job creation." - PTI

SHORT TAKES

Southern dts: Mixed response from industrial fraternity

Tirunelveli, Feb. 1: The 2021-2022 Union Budget has evoked mixed reactions from the industrial fraternity in the southern districts. The 10 percent import duty on cotton has been well received by the traditional cotton growing areas of Thoothukudi district and Tenkasi district but the spinning mill owners in Rajapalayam and Kovilpatti regions fear the import duty on cotton would increase their production cost. The import duty will further affect the industry, said a cotton mill owner in Rajapalayam.

Increase in capital expenditure hailed

Chennai, Feb. 1: National Executive member of FICCI and past president of SICC, R Ganapathi, described the Union Budget 2021 presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as proactive and growth oriented.

Paying compliments to the finance Minister for providing substantial allocation towards capital expenditure, he said another important initiative is on healthcare, where the allocation was likely to be around ₹2,23,846 crore, a 137 percent rise from the previous budget. He also hailed the allocation of ₹35,000 crore for COVID-19 vaccination.

He said the target to get Rs 1.75 lakh crore through divestments in 2021-22 would be a challenge, but not impossible, and described as a positive announcement the setting up of a Development Financial Institution (DFI) with ₹20,000 crore allocation, a long time demand of the industry.

"The Budget 2021 gave a renewed push to disinvestment and asset monetisation as the government strives for capital creation," he said. However, an area of disappointment is that there is no announcement for the tax-paying middle class in the budget, he said, adding the announcement of Agri Infrastructure and Development Cess on a number of items including fuel and liquor will fuel inflation and additional burden to common people. "Budget imposed a Rs 2.5 per litre agri infra cess on petrol, Rs 4 on diesel, and 100% on alcoholic beverages," Ganapathi said.

Government spending sets tone for recovery

Srivats Ram, President, Madras Chamber of Commerce & Industry "The Budget for FY2021-22 has several positives for the revival of the Indian economy during a difficult period, with continuity of economic reforms and stability. In the backdrop of an unprecedented crisis, the government spending of ₹ 4.5 lakh crore over plan is welcome news for the economic recovery, especially in the rural economy. By budgeting an even higher government spend in 2021-22, FM has set the tone for accelerated GDP growth and job creation with a long-term bias. In addition, the focus on privatisation including public sector bank divestment, asset monetisation, increased access to long-term global capital through increase in FDI threshold in insurance, and establishment of a long-term development finance institution should catalyse growth in the short, medium and long-terms," said Mr Srivats Ram, President of Madras Chamber of Commerce & Industry. "While the spurt in government expenditure would be a cause for concern for fiscal management, it is comforting to observe that the main purposes are asset creation and income generating avenues. To summarise, this is a growth-oriented budget that promises resilience and recovery through stimulating broad-based consumption," he said.

George Rajkumar, Country President, Grundfos India

"Grundfos India welcomes the additional allocation towards the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation. It was great to see the focus on urban water supply. Keeping the growing water crisis in mind, the decision to dedicate a INR 2.87 lakh crore outlay over 5 years, for the renowned JJM, which is aimed at universal water supply in all 4,378 urban local bodies, with 2.86 crore household tap connections and liquid waste management in 500 AMRUT cities is a good one. The move to include liquid waste management backed by the budget allocation of ₹1,41,678 crore for Urban Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 is a great step to look at sustainable water and waste water management in India."

BITTER, SWEET: DELTA FARMERS

While some welcome rise in crop loan allotment, others question its rationale when farmers are already in debt trap

G SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, FEB. 1

The Union budget presented by Union Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday was greeted with a mixed reaction from farmers of the Cauvery delta districts. While some hailed the increase in crop loan allotment, many said there was no point in increasing loan allotment when farmers are already in debt trap.

S. Ranganathan, secretary, Cauvery delta farmers' welfare association, welcomed the budget saying it would foster growth. Hence, it is a confidence boosting budget. He said that there is 137 percent increase in crop loan allotment from 6.5 lakh crore to 16.5 lakh crore.

"The budget has focused on all important segments like agriculture, health, transport and education. With respect to agriculture, the minister cannot announce MSP, and hence, she has hinted that it would come through. So, farmers need not worry on this aspect. It will be taken care of by government," added Ranganathan.

"The allotment of Rs 35,000 crore for Corona prevention is noteworthy. The allotment of more funds for the eight-lane express highway from Salem to Chennai is also welcome. In all aspects, this is a good budget," he said.

Sundara Vimalanathan, secretary, Thanjai district Cauvery farmers' protection association, said, "The budget is disappointing. We expected loan waiver. There is no word on that. There is no point in increasing crop loan allotment without bailing out farmers from older debts. Tenant farmers (who cultivate land on lease) have not been included for the Rs 6,000 relief payment per acre under the prime minister's relief scheme. They should also be included."

V. Jeevakumar, a farmer from Budalur said, "Farmers were disappointed as there is no announcement about repealing of the Centre's three legislations on agriculture reforms against which farmers are agitating."

Sami Nadarajan of Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam affiliated to the CPIM expressed shock over allotment of more funds to the Salem-Chennai eight-lane expressway, when farmers and people are against it.

N.V. Kannan, district secretary, Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam affiliated to the CPI, said that there is no concrete announcement about MSP for crops except a vague hint. There is no announcement about water management and underground water utilisation.

Nilgiris tea farmers upset over budget

B RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTHY, FEB. 1

The Union budget presented on Monday failed to bring cheers to tea growers, especially the small tea growers (STG) in Nilgiris. For the STG, the budget proposal only turned out to be a big disappointment as there was no announcement on minimum support price (MSP) for green tea leaf, and also there is no other special schemes for the struggling small tea growers.

Stating that the budget disappointed the STG who constitute the bulk of the



Senior Congress leader P. Chidambaram addresses a press conference as party General Secretary Randeep Surjewala looks on, at AICC HQ in New Delhi, Monday.

—PTI

Unions slam LIC disinvestment move

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

The budget declaration of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday about selling holdings of the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) via initial public offer (IPO) has drawn criticism from many quarters including its employees.

Responding to the central government's decision to disinvest the LIC stakes, the All-India LIC Employees Federation registered its strong opposition. Mr. P. Viyakumar, south zone secretary of the federation, said the move would

directly affect the life of the common man resulting in an adverse impact on the investors' confidence. It's an attempt to rope in private players for managing the assets of a profit-making public concern. Government wants to kill the goose which lays the golden egg. It will only help to escalate the ongoing financial crisis in the country," he rued.

Opposing disinvestment in the LIC, K. Swaminathan, vice-president, Insurance Employees Association (South zone) affiliated to All-India Insurance Employees Association, said they would not allow the government to imple-

ment the move. "We've called for a token strike on Tuesday against the move. After that we will go to the people and explain to them about the consequences of the decision. Otherwise, the government has to clarify what is the circumstance that led to take such a drastic decision. Financial minister must know LIC maintains huge trust among people for decades. Once private players are inducted into the institution, it will create a huge trust deficit among investors," he said.

"We strongly oppose the proposals of the government to increase FDI in the insurance sector and IPO of LIC," said Binoy

Viswom of All-India LIC Employees Federation. "Today LIC stands as a shining example of successful public enterprises in India.

LIC's success is primarily due to the trust and faith of the policyholders' that has helped it to grow to this stature. LIC's enormous contribution to the nation can only continue if LIC is preserved and nurtured as a government owned institution. LIC is the most important tool in the hands of the government to make India self-reliant. This is not the way to make India self-reliance or Atmanirbhar, Mr Viswom added.

Two expressways connecting Chennai have also featured in the Budget. The first is the Bengaluru - Chennai Expressway that is expected to cover 278 km. It is expected to be initiated in the current financial year. The second is the Chennai-Salem corridor.

To promote seaweed cultivation, a multipurpose seaweed park will be established in Tamil Nadu. According to reports, 1,500 tonnes of naturally produced seaweed is collected annually in the state. The government has MoUs with three companies for collecting seaweed produced by farmers between Pudukkottai and Ramanthapuram.



The finance minister quoted a Tirukkural couplet: Iyatrulm Eetalum Kaathalum Kaatha Vaguthalum Vala Tharasu; Explaining the lines, she said "a king is he who treasures gains, stores up, defends, and duly for his kingdom's wealth."

Textile ind welcomes announcement on parks

Coimbatore, Feb. 1: The textile industry on Monday welcomed the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, particularly the announcement on textile and apparel parks.

In a statement here, the Indian Textpreneurs Federation (ITF) appreciated the thrust given to the textile sector by proposing the seven mega integrated textile region and apparel parks (MITRA).

With the concept of the parks with a plug-and-play model, the textile and apparel sector, particularly the SMEs (small and medium enterprises), can build competitiveness in manufacturing, ITF convener Prabhu Dhamodharan said in the statement.

Further, the parks can be aligned with environmental, social and governance goals to attract international buyers as well as investors, he said.

Also lauded was the mention of a three-year period to capitalise the opportunities emerging from China and Tamil Nadu with a robust manufacturing eco system, he said.

Welcoming the budget, president of Tirupur Exporters Association Raja

The Southern India Mills Association (SIMA) wanted the Prime Minister to withdraw the levy of 10 per cent import duty on cotton and cotton waste to sustain global competition. The duty would not benefit the cotton farmers as the normal import of 12 to 14 lakh bales per year accounts only around 3 per cent of the cotton production in the country.

M. Shanmugham termed it a pragmatic one presented to address all issues in the sectors.

While appreciating the parks scheme, he said as expected, this would create global champions in exports and was hopeful that Tirupur exporters would opt to set up the units in the parks.

He thanked the government for allotting Rs 700 crore for the Amended Technology Upgradation Scheme (ATUFs) against Rs 545 crore in the last budget which, he said, would help clear the pending capital subsidy.

Also, he appreciated the allocation of Rs 30 crore for export promotion studies against Rs 5 crore in the last Budget, a requirement of the industry to know the export potential of specified products in the unexplored markets.

Raja Shanmugham expressed happiness over

Opposition parties flay Union Budget

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

DMK president M. K. Stalin and MDMK general secretary Vaiko flayed the Union Budget saying that there was nothing substantial for the State other than empty promises aimed at hoodwinking the people in view of the coming elections.

In separate statements, the two leaders pointed out that the insistence of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in going ahead with the eight-lane highway between Chennai and Salem, which has been opposed by the farmers, showed the Centre's apathy towards the aspirations of farmers.

Stalin described the budget as a bid to create a false impression that mega projects were in the anvil. After neglecting the State for six years, the Centre was trying to create the image in view of the coming Assembly elections, he said.

Pointing out specific instances, he said that though an announcement has been made for laying 3,500 km of roads in the State at a cost of Rs 1.03 lakh crore, no funds had been allocated for the purpose.

Similarly, there had been no indication of the Centre approving the Chief Minister's demand, made on January 19, for the Centre's share of 50 per cent funds for the Metro Rail project though the foundation for the second phase was laid on November 21 by the Union Home Minister, Stalin said.

Pointing out that no allocation has been made for the inter-linking of rivers or providing relief to those affected by the



recent cyclones Nivar and Puravi that hit the State badly, leaving several people, particularly farmers, in distress.

On the whole the budget has nothing to provide succor to various sections of people affected by various disasters including the Coronavirus pandemic, he said.

Vaiko said that the budget showed that the Centre had no plans of repealing the agriculture laws against which the farmers are agitating and only indicated a plan to implement them. He pointed out that there were no schemes for employment generation though there had been severe job losses in view to the pandemic.

Criticizing the privatization of banks and public sector insurance companies, he said the plan to implement the National Education Policy despite the opposition to it only showed the BJP government's plan to thrust its agenda on the States, he said, adding that there was nothing in the budget for Tamil Nadu.

WHAT IS IN FOR POLL-BOUND TN

3,500 km of NH works in the state of Tamil Nadu have been proposed with an investment of ₹1.03 lakh crore.

These include the Madurai-Kollam corridor, Chittoor-Thatchur corridor. Construction will start next year.



Construction of phase two of the Chennai metro railway of 118.9 km at a cost of ₹63,246 crore.

Five major fishing harbours - Kochi, Chennai, Visakhapatnam, Paradip, and Petuaghat - will be developed as hubs of economic activity.



DECCAN Chronicle

2 FEBRUARY 2021

Budget's thrust is good, now govt must deliver

In the most trying circumstances created by the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic, every section expected something from the finance minister. But Nirmala Sitharaman, thankfully, didn't indulge in any welfare grandstanding and presented her third Budget that can be described as the best possible in the current scenario. It is by far the most promising Budget delivered under the Narendra Modi government in terms of its intent and direction. It is heartening that Budget 2021-22 has exclusively focused on job creation by creating conditions that could boost industrial growth.

At the core of the Budget are the government's huge allocations for infrastructure through expenditure on the railways and roads and policy support to the automobile and construction sectors via tax and customs duty concessions and a vehicle scrappage policy. The proposal to expand freight corridors and introduce lighter metro rail versions will have two effects — one, boosting construction business and thereby creating jobs, and two, offering an alternative to fossil fuel-based modes of transport. An additional deduction of ₹1.5 lakhs in I-T for people to buy an affordable house could boost realty demand.

The policy direction given by the government's decision to continue the disinvestment, indeed privatisation, of Central government enterprises more vigorously by including two more public sector banks other than IDBI Bank could finally reshape the Indian economy by removing the deadwood. The decision to set up an Asset Restructuring Company — or a "bad bank" — to take over the non-performing loans of public sector banks could be a step in the direction of their disinvestment, as it would restore state-owned lenders to the pink of health and help the government realise a better valuation for its stake. The decision to monetise non-core assets is a step in the right direction as PSEs sit on huge tracts of land and buildings.

The establishment of a new development finance bank is a result of the late realisation that commercial banks with short-term depositors cannot fund projects with long gestation periods. The decision to raise foreign direct investment in insurance companies and to allow foreign firms to have management control with safeguards could invigorate the financial sector, especially the insurance space that requires promoters with deep pockets. It could become a game-changer if the government follows the same policy in the other sectors.

The proposal to extend social security to informal workers could set the stage for drastic labour reforms, which India badly needs if it seeks to become the base for companies looking for an alternative to China. There is relief that the minister did not resort to a new cess to fund the Covid-19 vaccination programme. The prices of some imported electronic items, including mobile phones, chemicals, refrigerators, among others, may see a small increase in prices to boost local manufacturing.

The major miss in the Budget is its failure to spend adequate resources to improve health infrastructure to make the country ready to deal with any future pandemics. Despite its tall claims to hiking healthcare spending to ₹2.23 lakh crores from ₹94,452 crores, the actual hike for healthcare is just around ₹20,000 crores, with the remaining funds going to water projects and vaccination programmes. But despite the misses, the intent and direction of the Budget are good, and the government must work on delivering on its promises as early as possible.

Myanmar back to square one

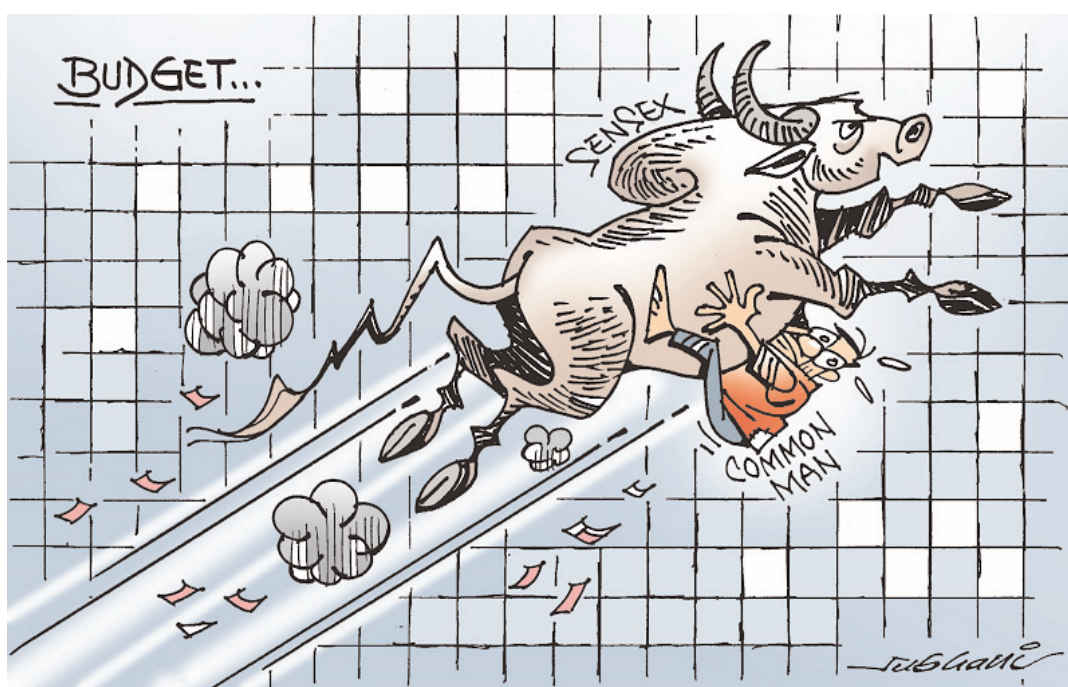
The military brass of Myanmar taking over the country again in the early hours of February 1 may have surprised the world but it does not come as a shock. Five years of faux democracy have been brought to an end with the once revered leader and torchbearer of freedom for the Myanmar, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, arrested again. A one-year state of emergency has been declared after the military took the reins back from an elected government and placed it squarely in the hands of Gen. Ming Aung Hlaing.

The reason given for the transfer of power is voter fraud in the elections held last November, which must be the weakest excuse and apparently taken right out of Donald Trump's playbook. The toughest sanctions of the West on the feared generals have had little effect historically but the United States minced no words on Monday in decrying the coup that mocks the winds of freedom that blew across the isolated country and led to Suu Kyi leading the first civilian government in half a century after a landslide victory for her party in 2015.

As a neighbour sharing a 1,600-km border with Myanmar, India must view the development with grave alarm as rebel groups of the Northeast may be emboldened to carry out operations in India knowing they can seek refuge across the border more freely now. The coup adds to the feeling that there is some kind of domino effect around the region with neighbours willingly falling into China's sphere of influence.

Myanmar's generals, beholden to China for years for supporting their illegal military rule, will only be too pleased. Even the veneer of democracy in a country in which the Army wrote the rulebook to reserve 25 per cent of the seats for itself in Parliament has been wiped out. We now fear even more for the fate of the Rohingyas, whose lot in genocidal tyranny got no sympathy from Ms Suu Kyi though it cost her the shining knight image globally.

Subhani



State back in saddle; can pvt sector drive growth?



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

It was a sober budget for sombre times. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman delivered her third Union Budget without rhetorical flourishes. It was not the "once in hundred years" Budget the finance minister had promised. There is nothing bold or imaginative. It is the usual State-led Budget. But her quotation from Rabindranath Tagore, "Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark", reflects the mood of the government. There is the feeling that the economy is at the end of the Covid-19 tunnel, and the post-pandemic turnaround is around the corner.

Ms Sitharaman has announced a huge capital expenditure outlay across sectors from health to infrastructure, and even to the financial sector, by setting up a Development Financial Institution with a capitalisation of ₹20,000 crores. She wants the DFI to develop a lending portfolio of ₹5 lakh crores. The political message is quite clear: that the State is back in the economic saddle. The Economic Survey 2020-21, placed in Parliament on January 29, had strongly recommended that in a time of crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the State should step in. The Budget has followed the advice proffered in the Survey.

But the catch lies in this. Most of the capital expenditure is directed toward projects that have a long gestation period, whether it is increasing health centres or setting up biological safety level laboratories or the national institutes of virology. It will take more than a few years for these to become functional in a

meaningful sense. At the most, it would create enough jobs in the construction sector as well as through recruitment for the facilities to be set up.

The ₹5.54 lakh crore capital expenditure outlay for 2021-22, a 34.5 per cent increase over the ₹4.12 lakh crore Budget estimate of 2020-21, may look sharp, but given the economic challenge, this incremental change is indeed quite modest.

The fiscal stimulus that the industrialists and analysts were looking for was that of an immediate one through direct and indirect handouts that would help in jiggling the economy. But the finance minister has refused to go the populist way, something that the Narendra Modi government has resisted through its grandstanding of the Atma Nirbhar Bharat packages through the different stages of the lockdown. The stimulus remains an indirect one. The government is willing to create financial institutions like DFI to funnel financial flows. The government itself will stick to building biological safety laboratories and virology centres.

The finance minister, who is a firm believer in economic reforms and a liberalised economy, found her hands tied, but she has held out the hope that privatisation will continue. She has announced that the government has approved the strategic disinvestment policy, though the details have not been spelt out. She seems to believe that the sale of Air India, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd *et al.* would be completed this year, and she has set the disinvestment target of ₹1.75 lakh crores, which may be dif-

ficult to realise.

The government has tackled the troublesome issue of the non-performing assets (NPAs) of the public sector banks by announcing the setting up of the Asset Reconstruction Company and Asset Management Company, which will serve as a "bad bank", as suggested in some quarters.

The only populist gesture with a political intent is her allocation of funds for economic corridors as part of augmenting road infrastructure in election-bound states like Tamil Nadu (₹1.03 lakh crores investment for 3,500 km), West Bengal (₹25,000 crores for 675 km), Assam (₹34,000 crores for 1,300 km, apart from the ₹19,000 crores earlier allocated). But she cannot be faulted for these allocations because she was indeed looking at the bigger infrastructure push. The outlay for the ministry of road transport and highways is ₹1,18,101 lakh crores, of which, the minister said, ₹1,08,230 lakh crores was for capital expenditure.

The government does not seem to be too afraid of the 9.5 fiscal deficit for 2021, and it is hopeful that the deficit will be gradually reduced to 4.5 per cent by 2025-26. This looks like a realistic pathway. This would be feasible if the economy recovers its growth rate and tax and other revenues improve in the next couple of years.

The vague hope enter-

tained by the Narendra Modi government, especially by Prime Minister Modi himself, that India will become a prime player in the world economy in the post-Covid-19 situation may not work out though it is no fault of the Prime Minister's optimism. India is not yet an economic engine of growth globally as China is, and there are many things to be sorted out in the domestic market. The major issue is that of reviving competition. And that seems to be a steep climb back. There are only a few big players in the private sector, and while the government may deny all the charges of encouraging "crony capitalism", the main issue is that economic vibrancy will not be restored without real competition. The "Start Up India" programme was supposed to create competition, but the success of "Start Up India" has been lukewarm.

The suspicion lingers that the government is only too keen to be helping the economy and that the private sector is equally content to play second fiddle to the government. The dreams of a free market economy have now receded that much because of Covid-19. The government can justifiably retort that it has been forced to be in the driver's seat and that it will have to do the job. Mr Modi will be only too happy to set targets for every sector in the economy!

The private sector can continue to remain passive and follow the goals set by the government, and we can abandon all our dreams of a liberalised economy! Or, the private sector can clinch the initiative, and entrepreneurs can step out and set up businesses and create jobs. India can get back to a high growth trajectory only in conditions of a market economy, and only if the private sector plays a major role.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

In her third Budget, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman offered nothing that was bold or imaginative; and it was certainly not the 'once in a hundred years' exercise she had promised. The government still seems to think that a turnaround is around the corner.

LETTERS

FARM LAWS IMBROGLIO

This is with reference to the editorial *Pass a resolution on MSP, drop cases against farmers* (Feb. 1). Since two months, farmers' unions are demanding the repeal of the three laws and nothing else. Both Centre and unions could not see eye to eye on this vexatious problem and tensions on Delhi borders may once again lead to violence and police action on a larger scale than on January 26. When they agree to disagree, no logical solution is possible to 40-odd farmer unions.

Parthasarathy Mandadi, Tirupati

RETURN OF SASIKALA

APROPOS YOUR report *Sasikala's return would only put AIADMK in cleft stick* (Feb. 1). Overall, the AIADMK is seen as less corrupt and less susceptible to sectarianism and language chauvinism. Besides, it has regard for Tamil culture and tradition and does not prevent Tamils from joining the national mainstream. But Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami can't replicate Jaya's charisma and magnetic appeal. And one would agree with Babu Jayakumar that he is in a cleft stick. His mentor Sasikala could well call the shots as a group within the AIADMK is still beholden to her for all the favours she bestowed upon them in Jaya's rule. The group believes that she can contribute to AIADMK's victory in about 70 constituencies in Tiruchy, Thanjavur and other places in the south. Rather than plough a lonely furrow, EPS must join hands with Sasikala to be able to take on a formidable DMK.

Kangayam R. Narasimhan, Chennai

INHUMAN ACT

IT IS really shocking to learn that a team of the Indore Municipal Corporation was trying to dump homeless elders brought by them in a truck on the side of the highway in a move to get rid of those pathetic elderly people wrapped in filthy rags. This they have done with intent to get rid of them in their process to 'cleanse' Indore city and enable it to retain its 'country's cleanest city' award. When the cruel act of the civic staff was video-graphed by the agitating public and went viral, the Chief Minister of BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh tried to put the inhuman act of his government under wraps saying that those involved in the incident were suspended from service. It is an open secret that the staff, who are now made the scapegoats, would not have ventured to throw the pathetic elders on the highway in the biting cold without instructions from their high commands at the helm of affairs.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

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Chandrajit Banerjee



Game-changer that will help enable growth with inclusion

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has presented the Union Budget 2021-22 amidst extraordinarily difficult times created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our GDP growth is estimated to witness the largest ever contraction of 7.7 per cent during the present year. Besides, the paucity of fiscal space, constraints within the financial sector to lubricate the system and headwinds from the global economy are the other challenges which could impact the country.

Under the circumstances, the finance minister must be commended for presenting a landmark Budget. The Budget has deployed varied policy levers to rebuild the economy devastated by the pandemic and steer it towards full revival and growth. The provisions serve to galvanise the growth enablers to build a robust and competitive India, in line with the "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" vision. At the same time, the Budget also focuses on social welfare and inclusion by addressing the issues of employment generation.

Standing on six strong pillars, the Budget seems to have played just the right strokes to stimulate investment and physical and social infrastructure and the focus on augmenting capital

expenditure is in line with the CII's recommendations. Further, the disinvestment roadmap, asset monetisation, ensuring simplification, predictability and stability in tax policy, financial sector reform and inclusion, promoting the ease of doing business, steps to increase India's involvement in global value chains and measures to facilitate innovation, among others, are all moves that will help India get back to its potential growth rate.

The immediate concern of the finance minister has been to reinvigorate the economy, stimulate demand and alleviate widespread distress emerging from the Covid-19 setback. Against this backdrop, the Budget has taken a pragmatic decision of adopting a counter-cyclical fiscal policy impulse to resuscitate growth with inclusion. The rise in capital expenditure in the Budget also underscores the commitment towards improving the quality of fiscal spending by channelising expenditure in productive areas such as physical or social infrastructure.

However, fiscal prudence has not been discarded. A clear medium-term roadmap has been delineated for a return to the path of fiscal consolidation as the finance minister plans to bring down the deficit to less than 4.5

per cent of GDP by 2025-26. There is also transparency in the Budget as off-balance-sheet financing is gradually being brought into the mainstream.

There are several positives in this Budget on the infrastructure front. Some of the key initiatives such as the setting up of the National Asset Monetisation Pipeline, creating economic corridors, setting up of seven Mega Investment Textile Parks, and giving a choice to consumers to pick from more than one distribution company to buy power, among others, are noteworthy and will have a spillover effect on the economy. Successful implementation of these infra projects will be the key for the country to get back to the trajectory of pre-Covid growth track and create much needed jobs at the bottom of the pyramid. The setting up of a Development Finance Institution (DFI) to finance infrastructure and key sectors of the economy will address the long-term funding problem of the infrastructure sector.

India at present spends a meagre 1.3 per cent of GDP on healthcare, that is lower than the desired level of six per cent. Hence, the government's prescription to make an unprecedented 137 per cent hike in expenditure on healthcare and well-

being is spot on. The specific allocation for Covid vaccination is also significant as it will boost sentiments and help in the economic recovery. The launch of a new Centrally funded scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana, Mission Poshan 2.0 and the commitment of providing ₹35,000 crores for Covid-19 vaccines in FY22 are all encouraging developments.

The finance minister has made bold announcements in the direction of making the financial sector future ready. These include setting up a "bad bank" in the form of Asset Reconstruction and Management Company, increasing the FDI limit in the insurance sector to 74 per cent and the proposal to disinvest two public sector banks, the IPO of LIC and one general insurance company in FY22. These are game-changing initiatives that would buttress growth revival in the real sector of the economy.

The Budget has taken major strides towards building a climate of business confidence among entrepreneurs. Announcements such as extending decriminalisation of business laws to LLPs under Companies Act 2013, setting up the Dispute Resolution Committee to reduce litigation among taxpayers, strengthen-

ing of the NCLT framework for speedy dispute resolution, making the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal faceless and jurisdiction-less, will be well received. The other announcements like reducing the timeframe for reopening of income-tax assessment cases from six years to three years, putting a monetary limit of over ₹50 lakhs in a year for reopening of serious tax evasion cases will improve the business climate by reducing harassment to taxpayers.

On the indirect tax front, the reduction in customs duty on certain inputs and raw materials including long products of alloy & non alloy stainless steel, copper scrap, among others, that have seen a sharp price increase in the last few months, is laudable as it will help to keep the prices of the final products competitive. The government has also reiterated its commitment to help industry get integrated in global value chains by focusing on facilitating import of raw material and thrust on value added exports.

Overall, this is a development-oriented and pragmatic Budget which will help reset growth while promoting social inclusion.

The writer is the director-general of the Confederation of Indian Industry

IN BRIEF

Security stepped up in Tiruchy, Chennai airports

Tiruchy: Security personnel launched a search at the airport here after receiving a bomb threat call on Monday, police said.

Subsequently, security at the airport in Chennai was also stepped up. According to police, about 200 passengers were evacuated from the airport here before a search of the premises was conducted by CISF personnel, besides police, using sniffer dogs and metal detectors. —PTI

Prince of Arcot receives Tirukkural Arabic audio CD from CM

Chennai: Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami released Tirukkural Arabic audio CD here on Monday. Prince of Arcot Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali received the audio CD at Chief Minister's chambers at Secretariat. The CD was produced by International Institute of Tamil Studies, Government of Tamil Nadu, and the event was organised by Tamil language development and Tamil culture department, under the directorship of Dr. G. Vijayraghavan and the Arabic translation, recitation and coordination by Dr. A. Jahir Husain, Arabic Department, University of Madras, according to a press release.

CoP inaugurates Operation Smile

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

The Chennai police on Monday launched the Operation Smile to identify, track, locate, rescue and rehabilitate children who had one missing and found to be subjected to abuse and exploitation.

Commissioner of police Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal inaugurated the initiative in the city with 12 teams deputed in twelve police districts. The operation was formally launched on Monday and is slated to conclude on February 15.

Various issues involved in conducting the operation, practical problems and how to tackle were discussed in the programme.

Training on procedures to be followed in tracing missing children and conducting rescue operations for children involved in begging, children involved in hazardous industries and bonded labour was imparted. Apart from rescuing the children, training was given on steps to be taken to reunite the children with their parents or family members.

Special teams consisting of police personnel and representatives from the woman and child welfare, child welfare committee, Child Line and NGOs have been constituted to search for missing children in religious places, railway stations and public places.

Girl injured in elephant attack in temple gets job and ₹25 lakh

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

Coming to the rescue of a 23-year-old techie, who suffered injuries on her neck and throat resulting in speech impairment, difficulty in breathing and solid food intake, due to the attack by an elephant at a temple in Trichy when she was 3 years old, the Madras high court has directed the state government to pay her Rs 25 lakh as compensation and provide a suitable job in the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment department in Trichy district.

Justice Krishnan Ramasamy delivered the judgment while allowing a petition filed by the victim, Sindhu alias Sindhu Lakshmi.

The judge rejected the stand of the authorities that the incident took place not due to the violent behaviour of the elephant, but following developments after the assistant mahout fell down, leading to people running amok and the petitioner along with her mother falling in a garbage carrier vehicle and sustaining injury on her neck.

After going through several documents including doctors' reports, the statement of mahout, after the incident on October 3, 1999, when the girl was returning along with her parents after worship inside the Arulmigu Samayapuram Mariyamman Temple, Trichy, and a newspaper report stating the district collector's visit to the hos-

pital, where the child was admitted, the humane judge said the authorities were attempting to cover up the elephant attack and making different statements. "Therefore, this court is unable to find any truth in the statements of the respondents (authorities) as well as the statements of mahout and the joint commissioner of HR & CE", the judge added and put the liability on the state for its negligence.

The judge said, "several temples maintained by the state are keeping elephants within their premises as part of tradition and religious practices. Recently in a popular temple in the state, the deep bonding between the elephant and the mahout was shown in TV channels. It was

remarked that an elephant is a huge animal with a child's mindset and despite its intelligence, needs proper care and caution. This being so, the state should be very cautious when the devotees are visiting temples with the elephant being there".

The judge said the petitioner had completed her BE in computer science and as per her affidavit filed before this court, she has specifically stated that she has a problem only in speech and otherwise she does not have any problem in executing work at the office. She is competent to execute any computer-related work at the office of the HR & CE department or any temple that comes under it.



Three workers killed in building collapse

Madurai Feb 1: Three construction labourers were killed and as many injured when a decades-old building collapsed during renovation work here on Monday, police said. More than 10 workers were engaged in the renovation work when one of the walls of the building with sub-divided apartments collapsed. Three of them were pulled out dead from the debris, Police said. Three others injured in the mishap were being treated at a government hospital. —PTI

CM to give ₹1,117 cr relief to farmers affected by crop loss

Chennai, Feb 1: The Tamil Nadu government will provide Rs 1,116.97 crore as input relief to about 11.43 lakh farmers across the state, anticipating central assistance, for the crop loss of the ryots due to rains in January. Chief Minister K Palaniswami said on Monday.

The relief sum will be credited directly to their bank accounts, he said in a statement. Owing to the heavy rains last month, a total of 6,62,689 hectares of agricultural crops besides 18,645 hectares of horticultural crops were damaged, the chief minister said.

"Taking a considerate view of the farmers' plight, my government has already announced a relief higher and above the ceiling permitted by the state disaster relief fund guidelines, to the ryots affected by cyclones Nivar and Burevi," Palaniswami said.

Accordingly, the input relief for rain-fed and irrigated paddy crop and other irrigated crops was enhanced to Rs 20,000 from Rs 13,500 per hectare. While the relief for all rain-fed crops, except rain-fed paddy, was hiked to Rs 10,000 from Rs 7,410 per hectare, the relief for the perennial crops was increased to Rs 25,000 from Rs 18,000 per hectare.

He informed that a Central will visit Tamil Nadu again from February 3-5 to assess the extent of crop loss of farmers. Listing out the measures launched by his government to mitigate the conditions of the farmers, Palaniswami said shortly after cyclone Nivar made a landfall near Puducherry on November 25 and 26 last year, Tamil Nadu was hit by the Burevi storm even as relief and rehabilitation activities were on. —PTI

Six killed and three injured as van hits bus

DC CORRESPONDENT
KRISHNAGIRI, FEB. 1

A picnic to Bengaluru from Erode turned a tragedy for nine persons as their van rammmed the rear of a government bus, killing six of them on the spot and injuring three others.

The accident occurred in the early hours of Monday at Kaveripattinam, 15 kilometers from Krishnagiri. The three injured have been admitted to the government hospital here.

Witnesses said, the omni van carrying eight persons to Bengaluru from Bhavani, Erode district, rammmed the

bus which was halted at a place for passengers to relieve themselves.

The van first hit P. Devaraj (29), a techie from Bengaluru and native of Gobichettipalayam in Erode. He was travelling in the bus heading towards Bengaluru from Salem. It is alleged that Devaraj did not notice the van on the road and had tried to get across, but was hit by the van.

Van driver P. Boopathi (21) of Edappadi, Salem district, tried to avoid Devaraj, but hit him and later stopped after hitting the rear of the bus.

Six persons including

Devaraj died on the spot. The dead have been identified as M. Siva Kumar (22), P. Lingeshwaran (20), R. Antony (22), K. Prasanth (22), van driver P. Boopathi (21) and techie P. Devaraj. Three others admitted to the government hospital are M. Gowtham (17), B. Dharani (23) and R. Ashok (20). Except Devaraj and Boopathi, others belong to the places surrounding Bhavani in Erode district. Their relatives said that the victims were close friends and were on a trip to Bengaluru. The condition of the three in hospital is said to be critical.

Government bus topples, 18 injured

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

Eighteen persons, including some children and women, suffered injuries when a government bus was travelling toppled near Acharapakkam on Tiruchy- Chennai NH on Monday morning.

The accident happened when the bus was going to Koyamb-edu from Tindivanam in Villupuram district.

At around 8: 30 am when the Government bus was near Perumbar

Kandigai village near Acharapakkam, its driver tried to overtake a vehicle proceeding behind when he allegedly lost control of the wheels.

The bus toppled on its side injuring the passengers on board.

On being informed, Acharapakkam police rushed to the spot. Ambulance services shifted all the injured passengers to two hospitals in Melmaruvathur and Maduranatakam.

Acharapakkam police have registered a case and the investigation is underway.

Remarks on Prophet Mohammed evoke protest in Tiruchy district

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, FEB. 1

Prof. K. M. Kader Mohideen, national president of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUMI), has strongly condemned Kalyanaraman, a BJP functionary, for his derogatory remarks against Prophet Mohammed and appealed to the Tamil Nadu government to arrest him immediately.

In a press release at Tiruchy on Monday, Prof. Mohideen pointed out that following the bad remarks of Kalyanaraman, protests are taking place across the state. He said when Prophet Mohammed was praised by everybody for his avatar to protect human society, Kalyanaraman's remarks

against him were totally unwarranted.

Mohideen wanted the Tamil Nadu government to take note of the sentiments of the Muslims by initiating suitable legal action against Kalyanaraman.

The members of the Tiruchi district unit of the Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jamaath led by Kulam Dasthageer took out a demonstration at Palackarai in the city on Monday against Kalyanaraman. They also urged the government to arrest him under the National Security Act.

Among others, Kovai Rahamathullah, district secretary Syed Zaheer, treasurer Mohamed Hussain and spokesperson Tiruchy Rahamathullah spoke.

Two employees of private printers limited were electrocuted after they came into contact with a high tension live wire while they were installing a flex board in Kanchipuram on Monday. While one of them died on the spot, another is undergoing treatment in a critical condition.

According to the police, Elango (28) and Senthil (24), were the employees of a local printing press in Kanchipuram and were assigned to install a flex board at the roof of a building in Kanchi's Gandhi Salai.

The two men climbed up the roof of

the building to install the board, when the iron rod of the board, allegedly came in contact with a high tension overhead wire. Police sources said Elango and Senthil who were holding the hoarding were electrocuted and thrown off.

Eyewitnesses immediately alerted the local EB office and disconnected the power supply. However, Elango died on the spot, while the locals have rushed Senthil to the Kanchipuram Government Hospital where he remains critical. The body of the deceased was sent for post-mortem.

Kanchipuram Police registered a case and began an investigation.



In a first of its kind attempt in Chennai, techies Swetha and Chinnadurai got married underwater near Neelankarai on Monday. —DC

Stalin vows to appoint 'makkal nala paniyalarkal'

SANJEEVI ANANDAN | DC
KRISHNAGIRI, FEB. 1

DMK leader M.K. Stalin promised re-appointment for 'makkal nala paniyalarkal' during his election campaign here on Monday. The DMK leader was here at K. Poosaripatti village for his 'Ungal thokuthiyil Stalin' (Stalin in your constituency) as part of his election campaign to meet the people and receive petitions from them, with a promise that he would solve their issues within 100 days,

if DMK was elected back to power. To a grievance raised by S. Moorthi of Veppanahalli constituency, Stalin said, "Makkal nala paniyalarkal was appointed by the DMK in 1990, without any partiality unlike the AIADMK that gave noon meal staff jobs only to its party men. Those workers were sacked by the AIADMK in 2001. Now, as many as 200 workers have died. It is my promise to re-appointment makkal nala paniyalarkal, if DMK is elected."

Answering a woman who appraised him about non-availability of drinking water from the DMK's project 'Hogenakkal drinking water scheme', Stalin said that the party had implemented various drinking water projects including the Ramanathapuram and Hogenakkal drinking water projects, to provide safe drinking water to people. Keeping in mind the benefits of these schemes, the later governments should have fully implemented them, but did

not do so merely because they were projects of the DMK rule. He assured to cover all regions coming under water projects after the outcome of the assembly elections.

Stalin also recalled his days in prison during the emergency period. He said that February 1 is a very important day in his life, because he was arrested that day and sent to jail as prisoner of the emergency period declared by late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

According to Stalin, police came

in search of him when he was not in his Gopalapuram residence. "Police came in search for me when I was at Maduranthagam for a drama titled 'Murase mulangu'. My father called the police after my return and I was arrested and kept in Chennai Central jail," added Stalin.

He turned emotional as he narrated how a party worker, Chitti Babu, saved him but later died in the Chennai government hospital, because of torture in jail.

No curbs on functioning of lower courts from Feb. 8

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

The registrar general of Madras high court has ordered that no restrictions are centrally imposed for functioning of the subordinate courts in full capacity with effect from February 8. However, the registrar general stated that it is open to the principal district judges to decide the mode and manner of functioning, depending on the Covid-19 situation prevailing in their respective district,

or even a particular taluk.

All the principal district judges/district judges in Tamil Nadu and the chief judge, Puducherry shall ensure better functioning of subordinate courts, without compromising on the Covid-19 protocol. The opening of bar associations' rooms, chambers and canteens inside the premises of the subordinate courts will be considered by the high court three weeks after the courts commence physical hearing in full capacity.



Chennai's first Miyawaki forest at Koitpuram turned one on Monday. Greater Chennai corporation commissioner G.Prakash and other officials at the forest. —DC

Coal India Limited
(A Maharatna Company)

"All the tenders issued by CIL and its Subsidiaries for procurement of Goods, Works and Services are available on website of Coal India Ltd www.coalindia.in/ respective Subsidiary Company. CIL e-procurement portal <https://coalindiatenders.nic.in> and Central Public Procurement Portal <https://eprocure.gov.in>. In addition, procurement is also done through GeM portal <https://gem.gov.in>."

SOUTH EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKS

(1) Tender Notice No.: E-R-T-74-20-21, Date: 27.01.2021.
Work: (1) Raipur Division - Construction of JCO Mess for RPF at Raipur, (2) Raipur Division - Replacement for corroded pressure filter at Loco filter house BMY. Tender Value: ₹ 61.37.712/-.

Submission of Tender: Upto 11.00 hours on 04.03.2021. Opening of Tender: 11.00 hours on 04.03.2021.

For further details/purchase of tender document, eligibility criteria and the complete details for the above work, please contact office of the Sr. Divisional Engineer (Co./South East Central Railway, Raipur or refer/download tender document which is available on our website: www.ireps.gov.in

Divisional Engineer (Co./South East Central Railway) Raipur.
PRR/Engg/1P/136
fSouth East Central Railway @sccrail

ARULMIGU VANJIAMMAN TEMPLE
Mulanur, Dharapuram Taluk, Tiruppur District.
The Executive officer, Arulmigu Vanjiamman Temple, Mulanur invites sealed tender at the office from the Registered Public Work Department Contractors for the following work.

S. No	Name of work	Value of work in lakhs	Earnest Money Deposit Rs.	Schedule Cost Rs.
1	2	3	4	5
1	Pilgrims rest Shed	71.14	45,575/-	15,000/- + 12% G.S.T.

1. Date of availability of Tender Documents from **17.02.2021 at 5.45 PM**
2. Completed tender for the work shall be received up to **18.02.2021 till 3.30 PM** at the office of the Executive Officer, Arulmigu Vanjiamman Temple, Mulanur and Opening shall be on the same day at **4.00 PM**
3. The tender documents downloaded from the website www.tenders.tn.gov.in and www.tnhrc.org
Place: Mulanur, R. Thilagavathi, R.M.Balavadeivel,
Date : 30.1.2021 JPR/Engg/1P/136 Executive Officer Trustee

भारत सरकार / Government of India
परमाणु ऊर्जा विभाग / Department of Atomic Energy
नाभिकीय ईंधन सस्मिन्न / Nuclear Fuel Complex
बहिः वायु प्रबंधन अनुभाग / Effluent Management Section

जन निविदा नोटिस / PUBLIC TENDER NOTICE

निम्नलिखित कार्य के लिए मूल्यबद्ध निविदाएं एलटद्धार आमंत्रित की जाती हैं Sealed Tenders are hereby invited for the following work

क्र. सं. Sl. No.	कार्य का विवरण Description of work	अनुमानित लागत Estimated Cost	ईएमडी Earnest Money Deposit	निविदा दस्तावेज लागत का मूल्य Cost of Tender Document	निविदा की विक्री एवं प्रस्तुतिकरण Sale & Submission of Tender	संविदा की अवधि Duration of Contract
01.	Providing tanker with driver for the transfer of effluents within NFC	Rs. 17,35,600/-	Earnest Money Deposit declaration to be submitted	Rs. 500/-	02.02.2021 to 16.02.2021 Submission: On or before 23.02.2021 till 1400 hrs.	24 Months

अधिक जानकारी के लिए वेबसाइट पे जाएं For further details visit our website www.nfc.gov.in
नाभिकीय ईंधन सस्मिन्न, बहिः वायु प्रबंधन अनुभाग AECM EMI Section
भारत के राष्ट्रपति के लिए तथा उनकी ओर से For and on behalf of the President of India

SHORT TAKES

17 PEOPLE STUCK ON BOAT RESCUED IN ODISHA

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 1

Fire services personnel rescued all the passengers from a boat that got stuck in the middle of Odisha's Chilika lake on late Sunday evening.

The incident took place when the boat was returning from Kalijai temple located on an island in the lake. "The machine developed technical glitches at Nalabana when we are returning from Kalijai temple. We all the family members went there to have darshan of Goddess Kalijai," boat driver Sankar Behera said.

The boat carrying around 17 passengers, including some children, developed some technical snags leading to malfunctioning of the engine. Though the boat took the help of another machine of a fellow boat, it didn't support, a passenger said.

"We took the help of a fellow boat's machine. But it didn't support. Fear gripped all the passengers as the boat got stuck in the deep water in the night. Then we called the fire station for rescue," said Sudarshan Behera, a passenger. On being informed, the fire fighters launched an operation to rescue the travellers. They pressed two boats into service.

"We got a phone call that a boat was stranded in the middle of the lake after its machine developed technical glitches. With two boats, we launched the operation to locate the passenger boat. After an hour-long search, we finally traced the boat at around 10.30 pm and successfully rescued all the passengers and the stranded boat," said Nityananda Jena, fire officer.

COURT ISSUES SUMMONS TO KANGANA

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 1

A metropolitan magistrate court in Andheri on Monday issued summons to Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut in connection with a defamation suit filed against her by lyricist Javed Akhtar. The magistrate has asked her to remain present before the court on March 1.

R.R. Khan, the magistrate, heard the arguments from Akhtar's lawyer Jay Kumar Bhardwaj on the inquiry report filed by the police. The Magistrate court in December 2020 had ordered the local police to file a report in after hearing Akhtar and his lawyer Niranjan Mundargi. The court had further ordered Juhu police to file a report by January 18, 2021, however, they had sought more time.

In the report, police told the Magistrate that offences alleged against Kangana are made out for further investigation. Advocate Bhardwaj argued that the report stated that offences alleged against Kangana Ranaut were made out for further investigation. The report by Juhu police included statements from the common witness — a doctor — who also testified that no such conversation as alleged by Kangana in the interview took place.

ORDER RESERVED ON VARAVARA RAO'S BAIL PLEA

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 1

The Bombay HC on Monday reserved its order on a plea seeking medical bail for 81-year-old activist Varavara Rao, who was arrested in connection with the Bhima Koregaon case. Of the 365 days since last February, jailed activist-poet Varavara Rao spent 149 days in the hospital, his counsel Indira Jaising told the court to highlight his poor health condition and push for interim bail.

Opposing the bail plea, Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Anil Singh on behalf of National Investigation Agency (NIA) contended before the division bench of Justice SS Shinde and Justice Manish Pitale that the charges against Rao were very serious.

Upon this, Justice Shinde said that charges were not being framed and speedy trial was also part of the fundamental rights. Referring to the charges under Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, he said the police and military have lost their lives over this.

Singh replied to the court that there has been no mention of the test for dementia in the latest medical report of Rao because the test was not suggested by the neurologist.

Back on track



After nearly 10 months hiatus, Mumbai's local train services have been opened for general public with some restrictions from Monday in Mumbai. Help of local police is being taken to manage the crowd and all authorised entry/exit points and ticket counters have been opened for smooth conduct of the services.

— RAJESH JADHAV

ACTIVE COVID-19 CASES DROP TO 1.68 LAKH

New Delhi, Feb. 1: The tally of active Covid-19 cases in India has dropped to 1.68 lakh which is just 1.56 per cent of the total instances of the viral infection reported so far, while the recovery rate has reached 97 per cent, the Union health ministry said on Monday.

A total of 1,04,34,983 people have recovered from Covid-19 so far. While 11,427 cases were reported in a day till Monday 8 am, as many as 11,858 patients recuperated from the disease during the same period, widening the gap between recoveries and active cases by 1,02,66,748.

With a consistent rise in the number of people getting recuperated, India's Covid-19 recovery rate has reached 97 per cent, one of the highest globally, the health ministry said, adding the country's daily new deaths have fallen below the 120 mark with 118 fatalities were recorded in a day. It said that 86.47 per cent of the new recovered cases are observed to be concentrated in 10 states and UTs. Kerala reported the highest 5,730 single-day recoveries, followed by 1,670 in Maharashtra and 523 in Tamil Nadu.

The ministry said of the fresh cases reported on Monday, 80.48 per cent were from five states and UTs. Kerala continues to report the highest daily new cases at 5,266, followed by 2,585 in Maharashtra and 522 in Karnataka.

Kerala and Maharashtra cumulatively contributed 68.71 per cent of the daily new cases. Six states and UTs account for 76.27 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum 40 fatalities, Kerala 21 and West Bengal nine deaths. Till Monday 8 am, more than 37.5 lakh beneficiaries have received shots in 69,215 sessions conducted so far. — PTI

One more MLA quits TMC ahead of elections

Dipak Halder is loyalist of ex-Kolkata Mayor Sovan Chatterjee

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, FEB. 1

With West Bengal inching closer to the Assembly election, its ruling party Trinamul Congress continues to bleed with desertions as another rebel MLA Dipak Halder has quit it, dealing a blow to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee since his constituency is under the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha seat of which Banerjee is the MP.

Known to be a loyalist of TMC turncoat and former Kolkata Mayor Sovan Chatterjee who is now in the BJP, the two-time Diamond Harbour legislator in South 24 Parganas sent his resignation

from the party posts in a letter to the TMC leadership on Monday.

Breaking his silence after his exit from the TMC, Halder said, "I was not being able to work independently in the party for a long time. I had informed the party hierarchy also about it. But it bore no fruit. I was not being invited to any rally other than those of Banerjee. Moreover, I was humiliated many times leaving me in thoughts to not continue with the TMC further. So I quit the party," he said.

His exit from the Trinamul Congress came within three days of former state forest minister Rajib Banerjee's resignation as an MLA, departure

from the party and induction to the BJP with his four loyalists including two MLAs Baishali Dalmiya and Prabir Ghoshal.

Undeterred by the exodus, the Trinamul Congress supremo however argued, "The BJP is a gas balloon which looks growing big now. But it is us who will stay in power. Those, who are deserting us now, minted so much money that they are joining the BJP to wash themselves and come out as white from black. They would not have got tickets this time from the TMC."

Halder has, however, not resigned as an MLA. He is expected to defect to the saffron party soon.

The MLA also had met

Chatterjee at his residence in South Kolkata recently.

Chatterjee said, "Those who are leaving the TMC are not joining the BJP to become MLA or minister in future. They want respect in their work which they do not get in the Trinamul Congress."

Halder was staying away from the TMC and Banerjee's rallies for the last couple of months. He was suspended by the Trinamul Congress from the party after he was arrested by the police for his alleged link in a clash between rival factions of the party's students' wing in a district's college.

Halder later walked out on bail and was reinstated in the party.

PM condemns attack on Israeli Embassy

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

Condemning the terror attack outside the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi last Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday spoke to his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu and told him 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".

Both leaders also "expressed satisfaction about the close coordination between Indian and Israeli security agencies in this context".

They also spoke about cooperation in tackling the Covid pandemic and the issue of produc-

tion and supply of vaccines.

In a statement, India said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to His Excellency Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel on telephone today. The Prime Minister conveyed his strong condemnation of the terror attack near the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi on 29 January 2021. He assured Prime Minister 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. Both leaders expressed satisfaction about the close coordination between Indian and Israeli security agencies in this context."

Union leaders told a press conference at the Singhu Border here that they will block the roads between 12 pm to 3 pm on February 6.

They also alleged that farmers have been "ignored" in the Union Budget 2021-22, and water and power supply have been curtailed at their protest venues.

The Samkyukt Kisan

Farmers to hold 'chakka jam' on Feb. 6, to block highways

New Delhi, Feb. 1: Farmer unions Monday announced a countrywide 'chakka jam' on February 6 when they would block national and state highways for three hours in protest against the internet ban in areas near their agitation sites, harassment allegedly meted out to them by authorities, and other issues.

Union leaders told a press conference at the Singhu Border here that they will block the roads between 12 pm to 3 pm on February 6.

They also alleged that farmers have been "ignored" in the Union Budget 2021-22, and water and power supply have been curtailed at their protest venues.

The Samkyukt Kisan

Morcha, an umbrella body of protesting unions, also alleged that the Twitter accounts of Kisan Ekta Morcha and a user named 'Tractor2Twitter' have been restricted.

Swaraj Abhiyan leader Yogendra Yadav alleged the action against the Twitter account was taken on the "request of government authorities".

He also claimed that the Union government has "reduced the allocation to agriculture sector" in this budget.

Meanwhile, with parked DTC buses sealing main entry points, multi-layered security arrangements and check points — both by police and farmers' union volunteers — Ghazipur, the new focal point of the ongoing farm-

SC may resume physical court hearing in March

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

Nearly ten months after it had switched to virtual hearing through video-conferencing in the wake of nationwide Covid shutdown, the Supreme Court is likely to resume in March the physical court hearing along with virtual mode being described as hybrid hearing.

This was conveyed by the Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde on Monday to Manan Kumar Mishra — Chairman, Bar Council of India, representatives of the Supreme Court Bar — the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) and the Supreme Court Advocate-on-Record Association (SCAORA) and the Solicitor General of India Tushar Mehta — second highest law officer of India after Attorney General during a meeting convened by the CJI.

Telling the representatives of the bar and the BCI Chairman that the judges of the top court are "willing" to resume the physical court hearing, the Chief Justice asked the top court secretary general "to get the technical problems solved at the earliest so that court could resume its functioning physically from the first week of March 2021", said a BCI release.

The CJI told the representatives of the bar, who are since long asking for the resumption of normal court hearing, that there were "medical and technical" issues which the court registry is trying to sort out and solve, said the statement issued by the BCI Chairman.

The meeting was also attended by senior lawyer Vikas Singh — former president, Supreme court Bar association who had later in the day organised a lawyers gathering seeking resumption of open court hearing.

The statement by Manan Mishra said that the meeting also "decided" that hybrid system will continue till pandemic was over and as suggested by Vikas Singh that video-conferencing would be available to the lawyers present in Delhi that through cable connections from their chambers or cubicles to be

CENTRE TELLS SC: CAN'T GIVE CHANCE TO UPSC ASPIRANTS

New Delhi, Feb. 1: The Centre told the Supreme Court on Monday that it cannot grant an extra chance to the civil service aspirants who could not appear or prepare well for their last attempt in the UPSC exam in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, reiterating it would amount to extending differential treatment to similarly placed candidates.

The SC however adjourned the hearing in the matter till Friday after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta sought time to discuss the issue once again.

At the outset, a bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheswari was told by Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju that the Centre was not agreeable to giving a one-time concession to the candidates. — PTI

installed in the premises of the Supreme Court.

Apparently this would to the disadvantage of lawyers — mostly well established senior lawyers — addressing the court from any part of the country and even overseas.

"No lawyer should be allowed to join the video conference through the internet as it creates a lot of problems and it results in strong resentment among the members of the Supreme court bar. The Hon'ble Chief Justice of India also agreed to such proposal", said the release issued by BCI Chairman.

"The resumption of physical hearings in a hybrid manner will be based on normal listing of cases and not based on consent of the Advocates On Record/Advocates," a statement by SCAORA said.

In September last year, the top court had made an attempt to resume physical hearing of the cases and a few court rooms too were prepared for the same but it did not take off at all due to lukewarm response of the bar.

NUTRITIOUS PACKAGE

The government aims to boost the immunity of students ahead of opening of schools

Odisha to give 'happiness kits' to school students

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 1

Odisha school and mass education department has come up with a special kit to boost the immunity of the school students across the state.

According to state school and mass education minister Samir Ranjan Dash, the department will distribute happiness kits among the students of Class I to Class VIII to boost their immunity ahead of the opening of

the schools.

The distribution of the kits will begin from the February first week. No specific date on opening of school has been announced till yet.

The happiness kit will consist of wheat, chana, turmeric powder, cardamom, peanuts, jaggery, pen, pencil, notepad, sanitary napkin, toothpaste, iodised salt and soap.

In the first phase, these kits will be distributed among 1.83 lakh students

● HAPPINESS KIT will consist of wheat, chana, turmeric powder, cardamom, peanuts, jaggery, pen, pencil, notepad, sanitary napkin, toothpaste, iodised salt and soap.

of 1.916 schools in five districts — Nayagarh, Puri, Cuttack, Khordha and Sundargarh through an NGO. Later, all schools across Odisha will be covered under this exercise.

"As the department could not provide meals to the

students due to the closure of schools, we have come up with this initiative. Under this initiative, 1.83 lakh students of five districts will get the happiness kit in the first phase," Dash said on Monday.

"This is an effort to provide nutritious food to the students so that they can resume their physical classes with full vigour and immunity to stay safe in the Covid times," said an official of the NGO involved in the exercise.

Welcoming the move by the Odisha government,

parents have said it will benefit the students. "We failed to provide nutritious food to our kids during the Covid lockdown and closure of schools so we hope that this move will be helpful for us," said Ramachandra Behera, resident of Rayagada district.

There are more than 30 lakh students at 60,000 primary schools across Odisha. As of now, the schools across the state are yet to reopen for students of class 1 to 9 and class 11 owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Contents of the Happiness Kit.

**Feature Syndicate
(Asia Features)**

SHORT TAKES

Nagal begins new season with loss

Melbourne: India's Sumit Nagal began his 2021 season with an opening round defeat at the Murray River Open, losing in straight sets to Ricardas Berankis, here on Monday in the run up to the Australian Open. Nagal, who does not give up easily, suffered a rather tame 2-6, 2-6 defeat in the \$320775 ATP250 event.

Nagal, ranked 139 in the ATP singles chart, could convert none of the two break chances he earned while dropped his serve four times in the match against the world No. 72 from Lithuania.

It is first competitive event for all the players who have assembled in Melbourne for season's first Grand Slam and have completed quarantine. Bopanna has been paired with Denmark's Frederik Nielsen for the Murray River Open and they will open their campaign against Australian wild card pair of James Duckworth and Marc Polmans. — PTI

Hockey women hold Argentina

Buenos Aires: The Indian women's hockey team put up a spirited performance to hold formidable Argentina to a 1-1 draw and end their Tour on a high note, here on Sunday. Skipper Rani struck for India in the 35th minute while Emilia Forcherio scored for the home team through a penalty stroke. This was India's fourth scheduled match against the world No. 2 ranked side after the third match to be played on Saturday was abandoned due to incessant rains.

Earlier in the tour, India had drawn 2-2, 1-1 against the Argentina junior team and lost 1-2, 2-3 to Argentina 'B' team. Against the Argentina Senior side, India lost 2-3 and 0-2 in the first and second matches respectively. The Indians played with an intent to secure the elusive win against Argentina in their last match of the tour. But the experienced home team continued to showcase a dominant performance. — PTI

Nuggets halt Jazz's win streak

Los Angeles: Denver center Nikola Jokic matched his career-high with 47 points as the Nuggets cooled off the hottest team in the NBA on Sunday with a 128-117 victory over the Utah Jazz. Jokic erupted for 33 points in the first half — 22 in the first quarter — and added 12 rebounds for his 20th double-double to start the season. The Nuggets brought an emphatic end to Utah's 11-game winning streak, the longest in the league this season.

Whistleblowing platform launched

Lausanne: The International Testing Agency (ITA) on Monday announced the launch of a new whistleblowing platform to report suspicions of doping in sport. The ITA, which was created in 2018 in cooperation with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), said the "Reveal" platform would be an "additional opportunity for informants to speak out". "Not only does it provide our organisation with a new essential tool which will strengthen our fight for clean sport, it gives the sport and anti-doping community a wider coverage of whistleblowing opportunities," said ITA director general Benjamin Cohen. — AFP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: East Bengal vs Bengaluru FC from 7:20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

English Premier League: Wolves vs Arsenal from 11:30 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD; Sheffield United vs West Brom from 11:30 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD; Manchester United vs Southampton from 1:45 am (Wednesday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD; Newcastle United vs Crystal Palace from 1:45 am (Wednesday) on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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IN A NUTSHELL

A man of few words, Natarajan vows to stay humble

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

T. Natarajan is yet to come to terms with his newfound stardom. The left-arm pacer who hails from a humble background shot to fame after a stellar performance in the IPL and his exploits as a debutant in the Australia series have taken him further to dizzying heights.

Back home after a whirlwind overseas trip, Natarajan's life in Chinnappampatti, a non-descript village in Salem, has turned upside down. He has scores of fans and YouTubers crowd his home and he gets mobbed during temple visits.

The Tamil Nadu cricketer is humbled by how the public is celebrating his success, but finds it a bit awkward that he's not able to roam around freely. "Many fans come from faraway places hoping to meet me. It's all new to me. It still feels like a dream. I was waiting for a chance to play IPL. Once I began doing well there, five months just flew past. I have come up the hard way and that (humbleness) will never change," said Natarajan who resumed training on Monday.

Among the surprise visitors are directors and story writers from the Tamil film industry. As Natarajan's rags-to-riches story has caught the imagination of the youth, they want to capture it in a biopic. But Natarajan says his focus remains on playing for the country.

"A lot of people seem to be interested in my biopic. When I wasn't there, they came home to talk about the project. Right now, I don't want to think about anything else. I want to do my job properly and cement my position in the Indian team," he added.

Natarajan has made crores through his IPL contract and an array of sports management companies are trying to rope him in with plum contracts. However, his family hasn't forgotten their humble beginnings. Natarajan's mother still runs a roadside stall that sells fried chicken.

"After I bagged my first IPL contract, I told my parents they needn't to work anymore. But they have their own reasons to continue working and I respect that. My mother said she can't stay idle at home after having slogged throughout her life. When I got married, she said she would stop working gradually. Later, she said she couldn't sleep peacefully without running her shop. So, I left the choice to her," said Natarajan, who brought home a suitcase full of clothes for his newborn daughter after the Australia Test.

Natarajan thought his "life was over" when he was reported for suspect action on his Ranji debut in 2015. But he worked tirelessly under former TN Ranji spinner Sunil Subramanian to correct the action. "It was a time when I thought everything was over. I struggled a lot. It affected me mentally. But, my friends,



T. Natarajan.
— Instagram

Natarajan also spoke on managing his workload and the possibility of playing for TN in the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Excerpts:

■ **On managing workload:** This is the first time I've played for six months at a stretch. During the lockdown, I worked on keeping my body fit, which was very useful. Because I trained continuously during the six months, I was able to take care of the workload in IPL and in Australia. Even in the domestic circuit, I have not played all three formats in one whole season for Tamil Nadu because I'm prone to injuries. Even as net bowlers, the workload is high. But BCCI handled it pretty well in terms of training and rest. BCCI has given me a training schedule for the next three weeks. I will come to Chennai and start training.

■ **What did coach Ravi Shastri tell you?** He spoke to me before I made my India debut. He said in a bold voice, 'Continue to do whatever you have been doing so far but do it with utmost confidence. Do it daringly.' The kind of motivation one gets from him is enormous.

■ **Do you think you need to improve your pace as well?** Definitely, I can improve my pace a little more. From IPL to Australia limited overs series, I was clocking 135 kmph consistently. The pace, however, reduced a bit in the Test. I think it's because of strength/endurance.

■ **On the possibility of playing the Vijay Hazare Trophy for TN:** Definitely. If I am given the go-ahead by the BCCI, I will certainly play the Vijay Hazare Trophy. In fact, there was a request placed for me to feature in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20s for TN but BCCI asked me to take a break since I have been playing non-stop for the past 6 months. That's why I didn't play in the Mushtaq Ali T20.

■ **On the influence of bowling coach Bharath Arun:** I have worked with him in Chemplast and spent time with him in Australia and worked on numerous areas. His inputs were crucial. He was someone I knew well and was able to ask questions to, freely. He would share his inputs on how to bowl during a particular situation and how one could be more effective. Before every match, we would discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition, and that helped a lot.

■ **With India playing two Tests in Chennai, do you miss not being in the squad?** Definitely, especially after being with the team for a few months. But I do understand that it's important to take a break. Given that I did not spend time with my family in the past six months and with the birth of my daughter now, I am okay with it. Undoubtedly, it feels terrible to not be with the national side when they are playing in Chennai.

coaches at Chemplast, Bharat Reddy sir, motivated me a lot. Sunil sir helped me change my loading and run-up. By working on these two aspects, I was able to bowl again normally. But it took a year's time.

"I didn't understand what was going on at that time. The terminology that they used was foreign to me. My only aim was to go there, correct

my action and come back to play for TN again. I was not thinking whether the method they used was right or wrong. I didn't even doubt if I did this, will it work. I just worked to get it fixed. I bowled for long hours there. Even if they asked me to stop, I continued playing. All I had was the belief that I could overcome this hurdle," he added.

Natarajan said his aim

is to play all formats for India. "BCCI is making sure I am managing my workload judiciously. I am keen to work on my strength and endurance levels in the coming months. Having played continuously for the last six months, BCCI had given me rest for some weeks. This is the first time I've played for six long months at a stretch in my life," he said.



Shahrukh Khan

win. Last year, we had lost to Karnataka by a narrow margin in the final. This time, we gave a lot of importance to the process rather than thinking of the results," he said. His unbeaten 40 off 19 balls bailed Tamil Nadu out of a precarious position in the

semifinal against Himachal Pradesh. Talking about his finishing skills, Shahrukh said: "I have been working on my finishing skills for the past two years. I need to be in a good mind space when I go out to bat and take the team till the very end, irre-

TNCA TO ALLOW 50% CROWD FOR 2ND TEST

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

The second India-England Test starting here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on February 13 will have spectators with 50 per cent stand occupancy, confirmed a Tamil Nadu Cricket Association official. Tickets will go on sale after the BCCI makes the announcement. TNCA is mulling over the possibility of selling them only online to avoid serpentine queues in front of the box office.

The Chepauk stadium can accommodate 45,000 spectators. But with the BCCI demarking a few areas as no-entry zones, only about 15,000 tickets are expected to go on sale.

The TNCA is also contemplating allowing media and officials from member clubs for the opening Test starting on February 5.

According to sources, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had requested that matches be played behind closed doors. After the latest development, an ECB 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."

LEACH WANTS TO MAKE IMPACT AGAINST INDIA

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, FEB. 1

England left-arm spinner Jack Leach said bowling to top quality Indian batsmen at their own backyard is the ultimate challenge in Test cricket.

"India have come back from a great win in Australia, but I think it is just a great opportunity for all of us to test ourselves against possibly the best side in the world and do that here in India. This is the dream you have, to come to places like these. Obviously, it is a fantastic opportunity, and I want to enjoy it," said Leach, who took 10 wickets in England's 2-0 Test win over Sri Lanka recently.

England were the last team to clinch a Test series in India when they pulled off a stunning win in 2012-13 with spinners Graeme Swann (20 wickets) and Monty Panesar (17) playing key roles. There will be a lot of expectations from the visiting spinners this time around as well.

Leach said he has watched a lot of videos of Swann and Panesar, but he wouldn't be trying to copy them.

"Monty bowled a lot quicker through the air, and that on a spinning wicket can be very tricky," he said.

M. Ashwin dedicates title to late mother

Tamil Nadu spinner Murugan Ashwin turned emotional as he dedicated the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy to his late mother. The leg-spinner revealed that his mother suffered from Acute Myeloid

Heavy reduction in sports budget

New Delhi, Feb. 1: The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was felt on the national sports budget as the central government on Monday allocated ₹2,596.14 crore for the financial year 2021-22 — a reduction of ₹230.78 crore when compared to the amount earmarked initially for the previous year.

In the last financial year, the government had allocated ₹2,826.92 crore for sports, which was later revised to ₹1,800.15 crore because of the lack of activity caused by the pandemic. This year's allocated amount is ₹795.99 crore more than the revised budget of 2020-21.

However, the spending last year was severely impacted after Tokyo Olympics was postponed, domestic events were cancelled in almost all sports and no foreign training and competition was possible for most of the Indian athletes. The sports ministry bears the cost of all foreign training and competition, including participation in the Olympics.

"Initially, sports was allocated ₹2,826.92 in last year's budget which was later revised to ₹1800.15 after all sporting events across the world came to a halt because of the Covid-19 pandemic," a sports ministry official said, hinting why comparison should not be made with the revised budget of last year.

● **In the last financial year, the government had allocated ₹2,826.92 crore for sports, which was later revised to ₹1,800.15 crore because of the lack of activity caused by the pandemic.**

"There was hardly any activity last year as most of the national camps were closed because of the lockdown. In terms of infrastructure development and upgradation of stadiums too, there was hardly any progress because of the pandemic," the official added.

The government's flagship Khelo India programme was handed the biggest reduction — of ₹232.71 crore — among all sports heads for the 2021-22 budget, presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday.

The financial allocation towards Khelo India programme, which got ₹890.42 crore in the last budget, was reduced to ₹657.71 crore. The Sports Authority of India, whose allocation was reduced to ₹500 crore in the last budget, got a substantial hike this time with the government proposing an increase of ₹160.41 crore taking the total to ₹660.41 crore. — PTI

AUSTRALIAN OPEN DELAY A 'BLESSING' FOR SERENA

Melbourne, Feb. 1: Serena Williams admitted on Monday that she might have been forced to skip the Australian Open if it hadn't been delayed over the coronavirus, saying she needed extra time to shake off the achilles injury which cut short her 2020 season.

Williams, who beat Daria Gavrilova in her Yarra Valley Classic opener in Melbourne, suffered the injury at last year's US Open then withdrew from the French Open before the second round, ending her 2020 campaign. But the 39-year-old, who will launch her latest attempt for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title next week, got extra time to recover when the Open was postponed for three weeks over coronavirus complications.

"I couldn't practice because of my achilles," she told reporters.

"I needed time. I don't think I would have been here if it was during the regular season.

"(The delay) was an unwanted blessing.

"I definitely was pushing the limits, but I'm here."

An aggressive Williams showed no outward sign of injury as she beat home hope Gavrilova 6-1, 6-4 in the build-up tournament Monday. — AFP

Moutet upsets Tiafoe as ATP Tour resumes

Melbourne, Feb. 1: France's Corentin Moutet burned his credentials with a battling come-from-behind win over American Frances Tiafoe, but his veteran compatriot Richard Gasquet crashed at the first hurdle as the ATP Tour resumed Monday.

NextGen star Moutet, 21, posted a career-best result when he stormed into the final of the Qatar Open as a qualifier last year, finishing runner-up to Russian world No. 8 Andrey Rublev.

And he started 2021 well, ousting 2019 Australian Open quarter-finalist Tiafoe 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 in the Murray River Open, one of two ATP events being run concurrently at Melbourne Park ahead of next week's Australian Open.

"It was a long time since

I've played, especially in front of people. It wasn't an easy one, because I had to play against a tough opponent who is a great player. A tough match, but definitely a lot of pleasure," Moutet said.

But 14th seed Gasquet didn't fare as well, crashing to 194th ranked American Mackenzie McDonald 7-6 (7/2), 7-5.

Top seeds Stan Wawrinka and Grigor Dimitrov had byes into the second round.

Slovenian 13th seed Aljaz Bedene and big-serving South African Kevin Anderson were among the winners. The biggest names in the game, including Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal, are playing the ATP Cup teams event, which gets underway here on Tuesday. — AFP



M. Ashwin