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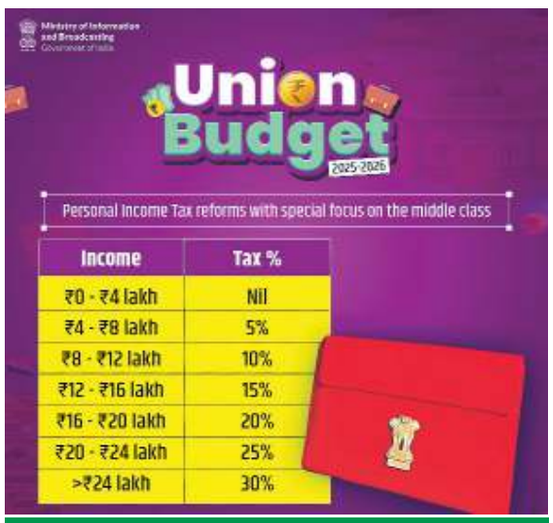
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Published From: HYDERABAD DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR CHANDIGARH BHUBANESWAR RANCHI DEHRADUN VIJAYAWADA

In her budget speech she referred to Gurajada Appa Rao who was known for opposing social evils through his writings. She quoted his lines: 'Desamante Matti Kaadoi, Desamante Manushuloi'; meaning, 'A country is not just its soil, a country is its people.'





NO INCOME TAX PAYABLE ON INCOME UP TO RS 12 LAKH

NO INCOME TAX PAYABLE FOR RS 12.75 LAKH FOR SALARIED TAXPAYERS

UNDER NEW TAX REGIME, TAX ON INCOME UP TO RS 4 LAKH IS 0%

No income tax upto Rs 12 L

Nirmala's 8th 'wonder', gives big relief to middle class
Unveils next generation reforms to shore up economy



This budget aims to initiate transformative reforms across six domains including taxation, power sector, urban development, mining, financial sector, and regulatory reforms-FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced significant income tax cuts for the middle class and unveiled a blueprint for next generation reforms as she looked to shore up a slowing economy amid global uncertainties.

Individuals earning up to Rs 12.75 lakh in a year will not have to pay any taxes after she raised the exemption threshold from Rs 7 lakh. She also altered tax slabs for people earning above this threshold to help save up to Rs 1.1 lakh in taxes for those with income up to Rs 25 lakh in a year.

The tax cuts, which will cost the exchequer about Rs 1 lakh crore, will benefit 6.3 crore people, or more than 80 per cent of taxpayers, who earn up to Rs 12 lakh a year.

"The new structure will substantially reduce taxes on the middle class and

The tax cuts, which will cost the exchequer about Rs 1 lakh crore, will benefit 6.3 crore people, or more than 80 per cent of taxpayers, who earn up to Rs 12 lakh a year

leave more money in their hands, boosting household consumption, savings and investment," Sitharaman said presenting what was dubbed as 'reformist' budget for the next fiscal in Lok Sabha.

The Budget for April 2025 to March 2026 fiscal (FY26) proposed to raise foreign investment limit in insurance sector to 100 per cent from current 74 per cent and continued spending spree on infrastructure while raising allocations for social sectors as well as providing for measures for poor, youth, farmers and women.

All this she did while managing to stick to the fiscal consolidation roadmap, projecting a fiscal deficit of 4.4 per cent of the GDP in FY26 as against an estimated 4.8 per cent in the current year ending March 31. Also announced were duty cuts on intermediaries and certain life saving drugs.

To balance the revenue lost, she budgeted a modest increase in capital spending at Rs 11.21 lakh crore in the next financial year compared to a lowered Rs 10.18 lakh crore in current fiscal. Besides, an increase in dividend expected from the Reserve Bank and other government-owned financial institutions will also help to contain the losses.

Continued on Page 2

'1 cr more people will pay no income tax'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

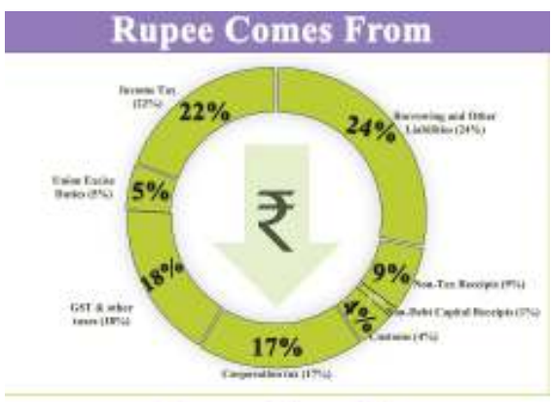
The government has put "substantial amount of money" in hands of people through rejig of I-T slabs in the Budget and an additional 1 crore people will pay no tax due to hike in tax rebate to Rs 12 lakh per annum, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday.

The 2025-26 Budget hikes the tax rebate available to individual taxpayer to Rs 12 lakh from next fiscal, from Rs 7 lakh currently.

"One crore more people will pay no income tax due to hike in rebate to Rs 12 lakh," Sitharaman said at the post-Budget press conference.

"Government has put substantial amount of money in hands of people" through I-T rate rejig, she said, adding that the government has responded to the voice of people. Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said tax bouyancy of 1.42 is expected in next fiscal, lower than 2 in current fiscal.







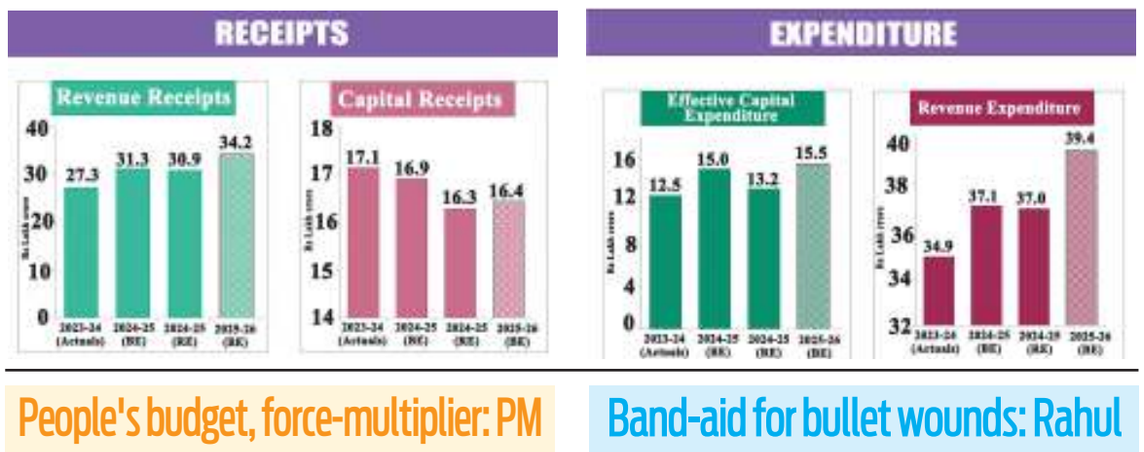
Rs 1.5 lakh cr outlay for interest-free loans to states

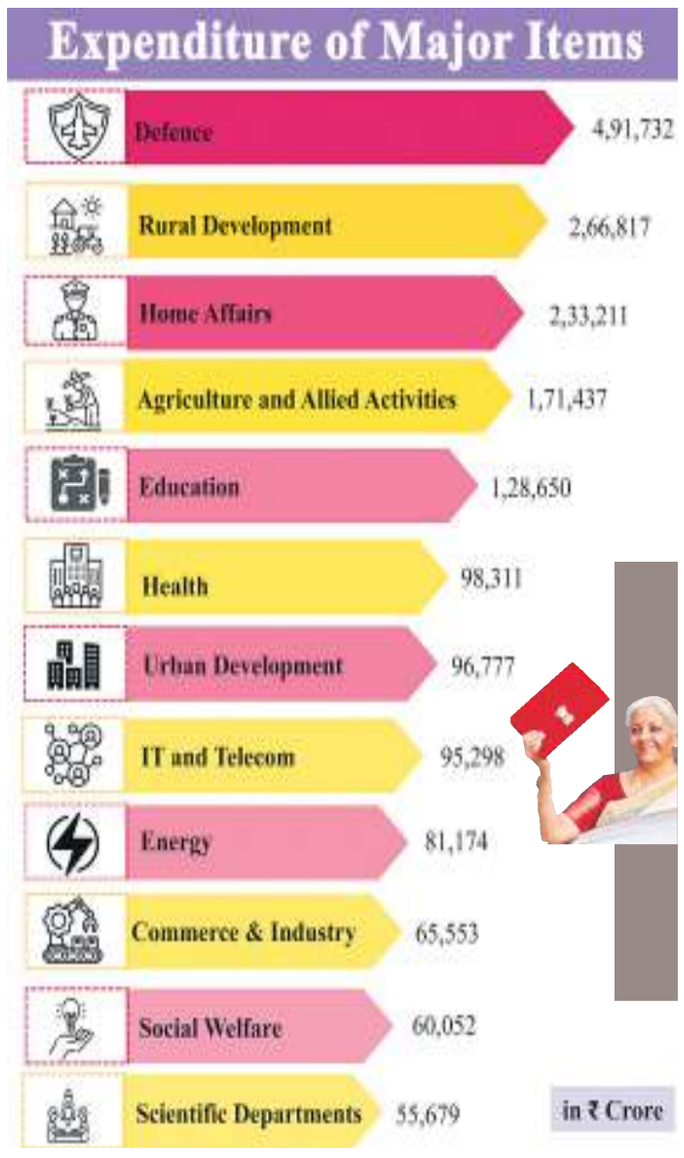
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said Rs 1.5 lakh crore will be provided towards 50-year interest free loans to states, for infrastructure development.

Presenting Union Budget 2025-26, Sitharaman further said building on the success of the first asset monetization plan announced in 2021, the second plan for 2025-30 will be launched to plough back capital of Rs 10 lakh crore in new projects. Regulatory and fiscal measures will be fine-tuned to support

Continued on Page 2





Items that cost less

1. MEDICINES & MEDICAL EQUIPMENT
36 life-saving cancer drugs are now fully exempt from customs duty. Six other essential drugs will have a reduced basic customs duty (BCD) of 5%, making healthcare more affordable.

2. CRITICAL MINERALS & BATTERY MANUFACTURING
Exemption on cobalt powder, lithium-ion battery waste, and 12 other critical minerals to support battery manufacturing and electric vehicle (EV) production.

3. LEATHER & TEXTILE INDUSTRY
BCD exemptions on wet blue and crust leather imports to support leather and footwear production. New incentives for textile sustainability and cotton farming reforms. This will result in cheaper leather belts, leather shoes, leather jackets

4. EVS & MOBILE TECHNOLOGY
35 goods for EV battery manufacturing and 28 goods for mobile phone battery manufacturing added to the exempted capital goods list, reducing costs and promoting domestic production.

5. ELECTRONICS & RENEWABLE ENERGY
LCD and LED components: BCD on open cells and key components reduced to 5%, lowering the cost of LED and LCD screens. Clean energy tech: Tax incentives for solar PV cells, wind turbines, motors, and batteries to boost green energy adoption.

6. MARINE & FISHERIES
Fish pasteur and frozen fish: Duties reduced from 30% to 5%, benefiting the seafood industry. Fish hydro licences: Reduced duties from 15% to 5% to encourage sustainable fishing practices.

7. TOURISM & HOSPITALITY
Visa-free waivers for select countries to boost inbound tourism and travel.

8. SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY
Raw materials for ship manufacturing will be exempt from BCD for the next 10 years, fostering industry growth.

9. TELECOM & DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE
Carrier-grade Ethernet switches: BCD reduced from 20% to 10%, aligning costs with non-carrier-grade switches.
Things Becoming Costlier As per Union Budget 2025-26 Announcements

Items that maybe costlier

1. ELECTRONICS
Flat panel displays: Basic Customs Duty (BCD) increased from 10% to 20%, making TVs, monitors, and similar electronic devices more expensive for consumers.

2. KNITTED FABRICS
Import duties on knitted fabrics have risen from 10% to 20%, leading to higher production costs for textile manufacturers and ultimately increasing clothing prices

People's budget, force-multiplier: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday lauded the Union Budget as a "people's budget" that fulfils the dreams of every Indian and said that it is a "force-multiplier" that will boost consumption, investment and growth.

In televised remarks after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Budget in the Lok Sabha, Modi highlighted a host of measures for different sectors and

Continued on Page 2



Band-aid for bullet wounds: Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress Saturday said the Union Budget 2025-26 has nothing to address the "illnesses", which it claimed, the economy was suffering from, while Rahul Gandhi described the Budget as a "band-aid for bullet wounds".

Asserting that the BJP-led Centre has "no new ideas", the Congress said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is walking on the "worn-out path" and not willing to break free as

Continued on Page 2



'Centre ignored Telangana'

CM, Ministers assess Budget, blasts Union govt

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy held an extensive budget review at the Command Control Centre, discussing fund allocations for departments and strategies for the state budget.

The meeting, attended by Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, ministers and finance department officials focused on analysing the impact of the Union Budget on Telangana.

The Cabinet is assessing the advantages and setbacks of the Union Budget in various sectors, with discussions centreing on fund requirements, resource distribution and Telangana's share in Central allocations.

The state is preparing to finalize its own budget based on this review, ensuring that necessary financial adjustments are made to meet its development priorities.

Addressing the media after the meeting, Minister Ponnam Prabhakar provided an update on the Comprehensive Household and Caste Survey. He said that the survey was conducted as per a resolution passed in the Assembly, and the government has now completed the process.

He said that the CM, Revanth Reddy, Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka and other ministers have been discussing how to implement the caste survey's findings.

Continued on Page 2



OBTUSE ANGLE



Congress MLAs' dinner meeting raises eyebrows

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

What began as internal criticism of governance lapses in the Telangana Congress Government seems to have now escalated into a full-blown political crisis.

Reports suggest that a group of Congress MLAs belonging to south Telangana have openly revolted against a heavyweight Minister, alleging unchecked corruption, unilateral decision-making, land dealings and pending bills.

Reports suggest that the situation has created ripples within the government and the party, and concerns that failure to address the issue promptly could lead to serious consequences.

Confirming that the MLAs met,

Reports suggest that the situation has created ripples within the government and the party, and concerns that failure to address the issue promptly could lead to serious consequences

Nagarkurnool MP Mallu Ravi said that the Jadcharla MLA had invited the MLAs to a dinner at a hotel. "The MLAs who were available attended the dinner. They discussed many issues at the dinner. However, there is no truth in the news that they are planning to quit the party. Some are wilfully spreading fake news against the Congress," he said.

Mallu Ravi said that news spread that Nizamabad Rural MLA Bhupathi Reddy, Jadcharla MLA Anirudh Reddy, Mahbubnagar MLA Yennam Srinivas Reddy, Nagarkurnool MLA Rakesh Reddy, Narayanakhed MLA Sanjeeva Reddy, Narsampwt MLA Donthu Madhava Reddy, Mahbubabad MLA Murali Naik, Wanaparthy MLA Megha Reddy, Alair MLA Beerla Ilaiah and two others had attended

Continued on Page 2

Eight Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh encounter

PNS ■ BIJAPUR

Eight Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Saturday, a senior police official said. An Insas rifle and a barrel grenade launcher (BGL) were among the weapons recovered from the encounter site, he informed.

The gunfight broke out around 8.30 am in the forest in Gangaloor police station area when District Reserve Guard and Special Task Force of the state police along with Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) were out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said.

The operation was launched on Friday after receiving information about the presence of cadres of the "West Bastar division" of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoists) in the area, he said.

"The bodies of eight Naxalites have been recovered from the spot. Many more ultras have either been killed or injured. The search operation at the site is still underway. We have recovered an Insas rifle, a barrel grenade

Continued on Page 2



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hyderabad 02

HYDERABAD | SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Padma Award Controversy: Kishan Reddy's Main Role?

While Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Minister of State Bandi Sanjay are busy locking horns over the Padma award for Gaddar, the real man behind the controversy seems to be quietly watching from the sidelines - Union Minister G Kishan Reddy. A little bird tells us that he was the one who handpicked the Padma awardees this time, and the choices haven't exactly gone down well in Telugu states. Names like Nagaphani Sharma, Nandamuri Balakrishna, and Manda Krishna Madiga have sparked debates, with many feeling that the awards lacked a true "people's Padma" spirit. Now, with the issue snowballing, it appears Kishan Reddy just wants the controversy to die down quietly. Interestingly, Bandi Sanjay - who is usually aggressive in defending BJP's state office - has given a rather toned-down response to Revanth Reddy's remark about renaming BJP office lane as Gaddar Lane in protest. And why? Word is, it's because of Kishan Reddy. While the party pretends to be unfazed, the reality is clear- the BJP state chief himself put them in an awkward spot.

Revanth's speech blunders keep the meme factory running

Politicians usually prepare their speeches meticulously - some even rehearse in front of a mirror. But Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy seems to be taking a more freestyle approach, and it's showing. No speech of his is going error-free, especially when he's under intense opposition scrutiny. Lately, getting names right has been a bit of a challenge for him. He recently referred to Twitter as TikTok, Amazon Web Services as Amazon Web Series, and Singapore's Institute of Technical Education as Information Technology Education. If that wasn't enough, he also claimed leprosy was being treated in Vikarabad, when it was tuberculosis. Despite being a powerful orator, these slip-ups are turning his speeches into a goldmine for meme-makers. While his supporters brush it off as minor mistakes, critics are having a field day. Maybe a little prep wouldn't hurt - unless, of course, he enjoys keeping the internet entertained.

BRS leaders call for protests, but where is KCR's family?

BRS working president K T Rama Rao has been busy giving one protest call after another, but when the big day arrives, there's one notable absence—KCR's family. Be it KTR, Harish Rao, or Kavitha, none of them seem too keen on hitting the streets with the cadre. Take the recent protest marking 420 days since BRS lost power. MLAs showed up, banners were waved, slogans were raised - but KCR's family? Nowhere to be seen. It's not just a one-off either. When the Congress government announced only Rs. 12,000 under Rythu Bharosa instead of Rs 15,000, KTR was quick to call for agitation. But the ones who gave the call didn't turn up themselves. KTR, in particular, has been giving speech after speech, urging party workers to fight against the government's policies. But on the day of action? He vanishes. Harish Rao and Kavitha, too, seem to be following the same script - loud calls, but no show. Party insiders are beginning to whisper: If the top brass doesn't lead by example, how long before the rank and file start questioning the need to take to the streets? The protests are happening, but the leadership is missing in action.

Surekha rises as Seethakka's bond with Revanth fades?

Not too long ago, Minister Seethakka was seen as one of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's closest allies, sharing a much-talked-about brother-sister bond. But things seem to have taken a turn. A little bird tells us that Revanth Reddy has been keeping his distance, maintaining a strictly professional approach with her. The reason? It is learnt that the Chief Minister isn't too happy with how some of Seethakka's allies are handling power - and allegedly misusing it. While she remains in the cabinet, the warmth in their equation appears to be cooling down. Meanwhile, Konda Surekha is emerging as the stronger force among the women ministers. Though both Seethakka and Surekha have publicly dismissed any differences, political circles are abuzz with talk of shifting equations.

'Donkey's egg' and the daughter-in-law drama: Congress strikes again

The drama around budget allocation for Telangana took a turn when Congress leaders decided to bring back their infamous "Donkey's Egg" (gadidha guddu which means zero) and "Telugu daughter-in-law" jibes. On the occasion of the Union Budget announcement on Saturday, TPCC chief Mahesh Kumar Goud didn't hold back, calling out the Centre for giving Telangana a "donkey's egg" in its budget. But it wasn't just the egg that had Congress tongues wagging. Mahesh Kumar Goud, along with TPCC working president T Jagga Reddy, took shots at Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, pointing out that, despite being a "Telugu daughter-in-law," she had done nothing significant for Telangana. Jagga Reddy, who wasn't impressed, went a step further, claiming that Sitharaman is only a Telugu daughter-in-law "for name's sake." According to him, she's politically weak and failed to secure a special budget for the state. Looks like the Congress is cooking up more than just budget grievances. They're once again using their signature barbs, and they won't stop until the "donkey's egg" saga is over.

(With inputs from Naveena Ghanate and Kolishetty Venkateshwarlu)

REPORTERS' DIARY

Discrimination again against TG, says Sridhar

Govt will forego revenue of Rs 1 lakh cr in direct taxes, Rs 2,600 cr in indirect taxes

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu slammed the Union Budget, calling it a blatant act of discrimination against the state. He accused the Centre of rewarding election-bound and NDA-ruled states and systematically ignoring Telangana, despite its significant contribution to the national economy.

Sridhar pointed out that Telangana contributes 5% to India's GDP and remits Rs 26,000 crore as taxes to the Centre, but has been denied its rightful share.

"Even as the overall budget increased by 12% compared to last year, Telangana has been neglected purely for political reasons," he said. The minister called the BJP government's treatment of Telangana a betrayal, highlighting that despite the state electing eight BJP MPs, it received no special allocations.

He revealed that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and ministers had repeatedly approached the Prime Minister and Union Ministers, seeking Rs 1.63 lakh crore for various projects. However, their requests were met with silence.

He also criticized the Centre for rejecting critical infrastructure demands, including Hyderabad Metro Phase-2. The state sought Rs 17,212 crore for a 76.4-km expansion, but the Centre refused to allocate even a single rupee.

Despite Hyderabad's rapid transformation, funds were denied for modernizing underground drainage systems. Telangana sought Rs 4,000 crore for the restoration of the heavily polluted 55-km-long Musi River, but the request was ignored.

Sridhar asked whether India is really a union of states or just a union of election-bound states. He pointed out that while Bihar received special financial packages, Telangana was completely overlooked. "The BJP government strategically rewards states where it seeks electoral gains, leaving others to suffer," he said. He highlighted the Centre's failure to fulfil long-standing promises and its neglect of Telangana's needs, including no allocations for IIT, IIM, IIIT, Navodaya schools, or Sainik schools.

"No funds sanctioned for new airports in Telangana. Key projects were ignored despite repeated appeals. The Integrated Coach Factory and Bayyaram Steel Plant were left out. No new railway projects for Telangana. Tribal University, which is a long-pending demand, was outright rejected. The Godavari-Musi Link which is the crucial river linkage project was ignored. The Centre refused to provide any relief under MGNREGA relaxations," he said.

Sridhar warned that Telangana will no longer accept this step-motherly treatment. "The state's contribution to national progress is undeniable, and yet, it is being systematically excluded from Central allocations. The Centre must recognise Telangana's potential and grant it the resources it deserves," he said.

CM to campaign in Delhi for Cong candidates

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is going to New Delhi for a two-day visit. The Chief Minister will participate in the Delhi Assembly elections campaign on February 2 and 3, it is learnt. The Delhi Assembly election campaign will end on February 3 and the election will be held on February 5.

Besides the election campaign, the Chief Minister would also discuss with the high command Cabinet expansion, caste census, Rahul Gandhi's meeting in Suryapet, nominated posts etc, it is learnt.

TPCC to stage dharna at Ambedkar statue today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The TPCC decided to organise a huge dharna on Sunday to protest against the Centre's discrimination against Telangana in the Union Budget. The Congress will stage the dharna at the Tank Bund Ambedkar statue at 4 pm on Sunday.

The TPCC also decided to stage protests against the Centre's discrimination towards Telangana in its budget.

TPCC Chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud gave a call to stage protests across the state against the Centre's discrimination against Telangana.

The TPCC chief directed Congress leaders and cadres to organise protests across the state at local Ambedkar statues on February 3. He asked MLAs, MLCs, former election candidates, DCCs, Youth Congress leaders, NSUI leaders, Mahila Congress leaders and party-allied unions to join the protest.

He asked party workers to burn effigies of the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and Union Ministers from Telangana.

'Budget fails to address TG's pressing needs'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Government has strongly criticised the Union Budget, stating that it once again fails to address the state's pressing needs.

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka accused the Centre of undermining fiscal federalism, discriminating against Telangana in allocations and neglecting key development projects.

Bhatti pointed out that the increase in cesses while reducing customs duties on certain goods will shrink the divisible tax pool, reducing Telangana's share in Central funds. "This is a direct attack on the financial autonomy of states and will erode Telangana's rightful revenue share," he said.

He criticised the 30.5% increase in allocations for Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS), which now stand at Rs 5.41 lakh crore. "Instead of granting states greater control over their funds, the Centre is forcing them to depend on CSS transfers, curbing our ability to implement independent welfare schemes," he said. He accused the Centre of showering Bihar with goodies while ignoring Telangana, despite the latter's proven track record of efficient resource utilization.

He asked why a state like Bihar, which has had fiscal surpluses for many years, continues to receive special treatment while Telangana, which contributes significantly to the national economy, remains neglected. Bhatti expressed outrage over the lack of allocations for Telangana's irrigation schemes, despite the state's pioneering efforts in water conservation and providing irrigation infrastructure.

"How can the Centre claim to prioritize agriculture when it refuses to support Telangana's irrigation projects? This is nothing but a betrayal of our farmers," he stated. While the budget has announced new greenfield airports for Bihar and other states,

'Centre ignored ...

Continued from page 1

The sub-committee on caste categorisation has been reviewing progressive measures, which were discussed at the meeting.

The government has scheduled meetings on February 2 and 3 to focus on the Backward Classes (BC) Caste Survey. On February 5, the sub-committee's report will be presented to the Cabinet, after which it will be placed before the Assembly for discussion, ensuring transparency in the decision-making process.

Ponnam said the initiative is a historic transformation for Telangana and should serve as a model for the country.

Ministers Damodar Rajanarasimha, Sridhar Babu, Ponnam Prabhakar and Jupally Krishna Rao strongly criticised the Union Budget describing it as a deliberate attempt to sideline Telangana.

Sridhar pointed out that Telangana has been denied its fair share of funds despite contributing 5% to the national GDP. He said that while the state remits Rs 26,000 crore as taxes to the Centre, it has not received proportional funding.

He accused the Centre of politically driven discrimination, highlighting that even though Telangana elected eight BJP MPs, it has not been granted any special allocations.

Sridhar also condemned the selective distribution of funds, stating that while Bihar, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat received substantial allocations, Telangana was deliberately ignored. He asked whether this is not a clear case of political vendetta.

He criticised the Centre for failing to support infrastructure projects in Telangana, despite repeated appeals from the state.

One of the major concerns raised was the Hyderabad Metro Phase-2 Project. Telangana had sought Rs 17,212 crore for a 76.4-km Metro expansion, but the Centre did not allocate a single Rupee.

Similarly, despite Hyderabad's rapid growth, funds were denied for underground drainage systems under CSMP. The long-standing demand for cleaning the Musi River was also ignored, with the state's request for Rs 4,000 crore receiving no response. Sridhar also pointed out the Centre's neglect of Telangana's demand for an IIT, IIM, IIIT, Navodaya schools and Sainik schools.

He said that while greenfield airports have been approved for Bihar, Telangana's request for new airports was completely overlooked. Crucial irrigation and water conservation projects, including the Godavari-Musi river linkage, found no mention in the budget.

No income ...

Continued from page 1

The budget comes against the backdrop of the Indian economy growing at its weakest pace since pandemic and rising geopolitical risks particularly with the new US President Donald Trump threatening to impose widespread tariffs including on India.

The 6.4 per cent GDP growth estimated for the current fiscal and 6.3 to 6.8 per cent in the next are well below the 8 per cent growth needed to meet the ambitious goal of making India a developed nation by 2047.

"Our endeavour will be to keep the fiscal deficit each year such that the central government debt remains on a declining path as a percentage of the GDP," she said, projecting debt at 50 per cent of GDP by March 2031.

Other measures include a national mission to push high-yielding crops with a special focus on pulses and cotton production, hike in the limit of subsidised credit to farmers to Rs 5 lakh from Rs 3 lakh, missions to push manufacturing and exports, a new policy for labour intensive sectors like leather and footwear and a scheme to make India a global hub for toy manufacturing.

The finance minister also announced a social security cover for nearly 1 crore gig workers and a Rs 10,000 crore fund of funds for startups.

Another major announcement was setting a target of at least 100 gigawatt of electricity from nuclear energy by 2047 and amendment to nuclear liability regulations to allow private sector investment.

Central budget meant for Delhi, Bihar polls: Congress MPs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress MPs of Telangana said that the Centre prepared its budget keeping the Delhi and Bihar elections in view.

Telangana Congress MPs Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, Gaddam Vamshichand, Mallu Ravi, and Ramasahayam Raghuram Reddy responded to the Budget in New Delhi.

"The Budget mentioned Bihar five times. There is no mention of Telangana or the Palamuru-Rangareddy Project in the budget. No mention of AP bifurcation issues and tribal university name," they said.

The Budget is meant for businessmen, the MPs said and described it as an utter flop. They also said that Telangana suffered severe injustice in the Budget.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Tithi:	
Chaturthi:	Feb 01 11:38 AM to Feb 02 09:14 AM
Panchami:	Feb 02 09:14 AM to Feb 03 06:53 AM
Nakshatram:	
Uttara Bhadrapada:	Feb 02 02:33 AM to Feb 03 12:52 AM
Revati:	Feb 03 12:52 AM to Feb 03 11:16 PM
Rahukalam:	4:43 PM to 6:08 PM
Yamagandam:	12:29 PM to 1:54 PM
Varjyam:	12:04 PM to 01:34 PM
Gulika:	3:19 PM to 4:43 PM
Amritakalam:	08:24 PM to 09:53 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	12:07 PM to 12:52 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy
Temp: 32°c
Humidity: 46%
Sunrise: 6:48 AM
Sunset: 6:12 PM

Updated: February 1, 2025 5:00 PM

People's budget ...

Continued from page 1

noted that budgets generally look to fill the government's treasury but this one seeks to put more money in people's pockets and increase their savings.

This Budget focuses on making people a partner in India's development journey, he said, describing it as a historic and important milestone on the road to the country's progress. It lays the foundation for attaining these goals, he added.

"The Budget lays a strong foundation to increase savings and make citizens partners in development," Modi said, adding that its welfare initiatives for gig workers underscore the government's commitment to the dignity of labour. He said the measures presented in the Budget for the manufacturing sector will allow Indian products to shine globally.

The tax relief will provide big benefits to the middle class and salaried employees, he said, adding the Budget announcement that those earning up to Rs 12 lakh will have to pay no income tax will present those entering the job sector with a big opportunity.

Eight Naxalites ...

Continued from page 1

launcher and other weapons from the spot," Sundarraj said.

With this encounter, 50 Naxalites have been killed in separate encounters in the state so far this year.

On January 20-21, 16 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in the state's Gariaband district.

Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in separate encounters in the state, as per police.

Rs 1.5 lakh cr ...

Continued from page 1

the plan, the minister said. She said each infrastructure-related ministry will come up with a 3-year pipeline of projects that can be implemented in PPP mode. "States will also be encouraged to do so and can seek support from IIPDF (India Infrastructure Project Development Fund) scheme to prepare PPP proposals," the minister said.

Congress MLAs' ...

Continued from page 1

the dinner meeting. He said these are all Congress leaders and no one has quit the party. "They do even have such thoughts," he said.

The TPCC has been alerted about these reports and is focusing on coordination between Ministers and MLAs. It is learnt that TPCC chief Mahesh Goud has called the MLAs and asked them to hold talks together. It is reported that four of the 11 who met secretly are Palamuru MLAs. It is learnt that six more MLAs have got in touch through the phone.

By Saturday evening, when the news came out, the leaders started distancing themselves from it. Government Whip Beerla Ilaiah who was also part of the 11 MLAs said the "secret meeting" by the 11 MLAs is nothing but misinformation spread by the pink (BRS) media. Jukkal MLA Thota Laxmikantha Rao said that he was in New Delhi for the last three days and did not meet anyone secretly. He made it clear that he would launch legal action against those who have written false reports about him.

According to the minutes of the alleged meeting, the Minister in question has been projecting himself as the de facto second-in-command in the government, using his financial muscle from the Revenue portfolio which he handles to consolidate power. His growing influence, particularly in Hyderabad and its surrounding districts, has triggered resentment among fellow MLAs, who accuse him of large-scale land grabs and other illegal deals.

The group met over the Minister's close ties with some senior Congress leaders and ministers, and his independent approach on key matters has led to frustration within party ranks.

Congress MLAs are now openly expressing their anger, alleging that while some ministers remain inaccessible to address constituency issues, they are actively engaged in self-serving activities. Observers point out that despite having a comfortable majority in the Assembly, the Congress is struggling to maintain internal stability. Many Ministers, it is alleged, are treating their departments as personal fiefdoms, acting without coordination or accountability.

A glaring instance of this lack of unity was seen during a recent video conference on ration card distribution, where three Ministers presented contradictory views in front of officials, leaving Collectors perplexed.

Band-aid for ...

Continued from page 1

its governments had done in 1991 and 2004. The opposition party said the takeaway from the Union Budget 2025-26 is that the ruling BJP is wooing the tax-paying middle-class and the Bihar electorate.

Addressing a press conference here along with his party colleague Gaurav Gogoi, senior Congress leader and former finance minister P Chidambaram said these announcements will be welcomed by the 3.2 crore tax-paying middle class and the 7.65 crore voters of Bihar. But for the rest of India, the finance minister had nothing more than soothing words, punctuated by the applause of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said.

The finance minister is "walking on the worn-out path and not willing to break free as we did in 1991 and 2004", the Congress leader added.

"She is not willing to de-regulate. She is not willing to get out of the way of people, especially entrepreneurs and MSMEs and start-ups. It is the bureaucracy that will be happy with this budget. The government's stranglehold on the activities of people is getting tighter," the senior Congress leader said.

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sunday pioneer

hyderabad 03

HYDERABAD | SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 2, 2025

BUD-HIGHLIGHTS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Highlights of the Union Budget 2025-26 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on Saturday.

DIRECT TAX

- No personal income tax for income up to Rs 12 lakh under the new regime
- Limit will be Rs 12.75 lakh for salaried taxpayers due to a standard deduction of Rs 75,000
- Revenue of about Rs 1 lakh crore in direct taxes will be forgone
- New Income-Tax Bill to be clear and simple

INDIRECT TAX

- Removes seven tariff rates
- Social Welfare Surcharge on 82 tariff lines that are subject to a cess exempted

INSURANCE SECTOR

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the insurance sector to be hiked to 100 per cent from 74 per cent

GOVT RECEIPTS

- Total receipts other than borrowings at Rs 34.96 lakh crore; total expenditure at Rs 50.65 lakh crore
- Net tax receipts at Rs 28.37 lakh crore
- Fiscal deficit at 4.4 per cent of GDP
- Gross market borrowings at Rs 14.82 lakh crore
- Capex expenditure at Rs 11.21 lakh crore or (3.1 pc of GDP)

AGRICULTURE SECTOR

- Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana - The programme to be launched in partnership with states, covering 100 districts, to benefit 1.7 crore farmers
- Government to launch 6-year 'Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses' with focus on Tur, Urad and Masoor
- NAFED and NCCF to procure these pulses from farmers in next 4 years
- Comprehensive programme for vegetables and fruits
- Makhana Board to be established in Bihar to improve production, processing, value addition, and marketing of fox nuts
- Urea Plant with an annual capacity of 12.7 lakh metric tonnes to be set up at Namrup, Assam

MSME SECTOR

- Investment and turnover limits for classification of all MSMEs to be enhanced to 2.5 and 2 times, respectively
- Customised credit cards with Rs 5 lakh limit for micro-enterprises registered on Udyam portal, 10 lakh cards to be issued in 1st year
- New Fund of Funds, with expanded scope and a fresh contribution of Rs 10,000 crore to be set up
- New scheme for 5 lakh women, SC and ST first-time entrepreneurs to provide term-loans up to Rs 2 cr in the next 5 years announced
- Focus product scheme announced to facilitate employment for 22 lakh persons, generate a turnover of Rs 4 lakh cr and exports of over Rs 1.1 lakh crore

- 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs to be set up in Government schools in next 5 years

- Broadband connectivity to be provided to all government secondary schools and primary health centres in rural areas under Bharatnet project

- Additional infrastructure to be created in the 5 IITs started after 2014 to facilitate education for 6,500 more students

- Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence for education to be set up with a total outlay of Rs 500 crore

- 10,000 additional seats to be added in medical colleges and hospitals next year, adding to 75,000 seats in next 5 years

- PM SVANidhi scheme to be revamped with enhanced loans from banks, UPI-linked credit cards with a Rs 30,000 limit, and capacity-building support

- Government to arrange for identity cards, registration on e-Shram portal and healthcare under PM Jan Arogya Yojana for gig workers

- Infrastructure-related ministries to come up with a 3-year pipeline of projects in PPP mode; states also encouraged

- Support to states for infrastructure - Outlay of Rs 1.5 lakh crore proposed for the 50-year interest-free loans to states for capital expenditure and incentives for reforms

- Asset Monetisation Plan - Second Plan for 2025-30 to plough back capital of Rs 10 lakh crore in new projects announced

- Nuclear Energy Mission for research and development of Small Modular Reactors (SMR) with an outlay of Rs 20,000 crore to be set up, 5 indigenously developed SMRs to be operational by 2033

- Modified UDAN scheme announced to enhance regional connectivity to 120 new destinations and carry 4 crore passengers in next 10 years

- SWAMIH Fund 2 - A fund of Rs 15,000 cr aimed at expeditious completion of another 1 lakh dwelling units, with contributions from the government, banks and private investors announced

- 'BharatTradeNet' (BTN) for international trade to be set up as a unified platform for trade documentation and financing solutions.

Centre gave donkey's egg to TG in Budget, says Mahesh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Centre gave a donkey's egg in its budget for Telangana, TPCC Chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud said.

Congratulating Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on behalf of the TPCC for presenting the Union Budget for the 8th time in a row, Mahesh said that even though she is a Telugu daughter-in-law, Nirmalamma did not show any consideration for Telangana. There is nothing but injustice for Telangana in the Budget, he said.

He said that the Budget is nothing but a Bihar election budget. Bihar was given attention only because of elections, he said.

He said that the BJP discriminated against Telangana and wanted to damage it politically.

The Centre, which presented a budget of Rs 50.65 lakh crore, did not make even a single special allocation for Telangana. With Assembly elections approaching in Bihar, the BJP is using the Central budget for politicking, he pointed out.

The budget which uses money collected from all over the country should treat everyone equally, he said.

In her budget speech, Nirmalamma used the words 'Gurajada Apparao' meaning that the country is not its territory, but it is the people. Aren't the people of Telangana not people of this country, he asked.

He also asked what happened to the promises made by the Prime Minister and BJP leaders during the TG elections.



Mahesh said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, ministers and MPs had met Union Ministers and the Prime Minister and had appealed to them to come to Telangana to study many issues.

He said that railway projects, bifurcation guarantees, national project tag for the Palamuru-Rangareddy irrigation project, ITIR, Bayyaram steel factory, railway coach factory, IIM and many other projects are pending.

Telangana betrayed again, Uttam slams Centre

Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister Capt. Uttam Kumar Reddy lashed out at the Union Budget 2025-26, calling it anti-farmer, anti-poor and a betrayal of Telangana by the Centre. He accused the BJP government of crafting the budget with an eye on upcoming elections, favouring Bihar and Delhi while ignoring Telangana and other non-election states. "Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman opened her budget speech with a quote from the legendary Telugu poet Gurajada Appa Rao: 'Desamante Matti Kaadoi, Desamante Manushuloi' (A country is not just its soil, a country is its people.) Ironically, while quoting the Telugu poet, she completely ignored Telangana in her budget, exposing the BJP government's politically driven approach to financial allocations," he said. Uttam listed several unfulfilled commitments made under Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act 2014 like the Bayyaram Steel Plant, Kazipet Railway Coach Factory, Tribal University, national project tag for the Palamuru-Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Project and the Information Technology Investment Region (ITIR) for Hyderabad. "Telangana has been seeking these projects for a decade. But the BJP government turned a blind eye," he said. Uttam accused the BJP of using the budget as a political tool, directing funds towards election-bound states.

India has presented 73 annual budgets since its independence

Union Budget provides MEIL opportunities, says Sudha Reddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Budget would create big opportunities for Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited (MEIL) as it has made massive allocations for infrastructure, water supply and clean energy projects.

Philanthropist business leader Sudha Reddy hailed the budget as a game-changer for India's economy, emphasizing its focus on industrial expansion, sustainable development and MSME growth.

"A major highlight of the budget is the Rs 1.5 lakh crore loan for state governments to accelerate capital expenditure. This investment is expected to drive growth in roads, energy and water supply projects, the areas where MEIL has played a critical role. The extension of the Jal Jeevan Mission until 2028 reinforces the government's commitment to large-scale water supply infrastructure benefitting industry players," she said.

"This budget reflects a strong push towards infrastructure-led economic growth. The increased capital allocation will create new opportunities for industries, creating jobs and driving the nation's development," Sudha stated.

The budget also marks a transformative shift in clean energy with the Nuclear Energy Mission, targeting 100 GW of nuclear power by 2047. The government has also introduced policy support for solar, wind and EV battery production, strengthening India's position in sustainable manufacturing.

"The emphasis on clean energy is a testament to India's commitment to a greener future. Incentives for clean technology manufacturing will drive innovation, attract investments and contribute to a sustainable economy," she said.

Budget ignored real estate industry, says CREDAI

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI) Hyderabad states that the budget had failed to recognise the real estate sector's vital role in growth and job creation.

The Economic Survey 2024-25 says that real estate, along with financial and professional services, contributed nearly 45% to the total services GVA in the first half of FY25. It remains one of India's largest employment generators, supporting many industries. Despite this, the Finance Bill 2025 does not adequately address the sector's pressing needs.



The President of CREDAI Hyderabad, Rajashekar Reddy, highlighted key concerns of the real estate industry.

He criticized the lack of tax incentives, saying higher home loan deductions and lower GST on materials could boost growth. The Rs 1 lakh crore urban development fund is helpful but inadequate to meet infrastructure needs. With housing demand expected to reach 93 million units by 2036, more financial support is required.

The Rs 15,000 crore SWAMIH Fund-2 is a step forward but may not fully address stalled projects. CREDAI calls for relaxed mortgage conditions and interest subvention schemes to improve homeownership.

While expanding the Gati Shakti portal is promising, its impact on approvals is uncertain. Incentives for cement and steel could drive economic growth. Removing notional rent on second properties is positive, but more rental and commercial property incentives are needed.

CREDAI Hyderabad urges the government to prioritize real estate reforms to help achieve India's USD 4 trillion economic target. As amendments to the Income Tax Act are expected soon, it hopes these concerns will be addressed.

Meanwhile, Aparna Constructions Director Rakesh Reddy welcomed relief measures for mid-income and affordable home buyers but pointed out that key industry expectations remain unmet.

Rakesh said that granting industry status to real estate, streamlining approval processes, and enhancing liquidity support for developers could have accelerated growth. GST rationalization on under-construction properties, lower long-term capital gains tax, and higher tax benefits for homebuyers would have improved affordability and investment sentiment, he said.

Tax exemption up to Rs 12 lakh revolutionary: Bandi Sanjay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Budget is extraordinary, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said.

"The Budget helps the poor, the middle class, farmers, small traders and young entrepreneurs. This Budget is a blessing for the middle-class and small business owners. Income-tax exemption up to Rs 12 lakh is a revolutionary step. Never in the last 75 years has a budget been so favourable to the middle class," he said.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, Sanjay said that this is also a reform-driven budget. The fact that it is structured to make India the third-largest economy by 2027, after the US and China, is a significant achievement. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented a remarkable budget. This is proof that the BJP Government stands solidly with the poor and the middle class, he said.

Sanjay said that employees earning up to ?12 lakh per year will no longer have to pay Income-tax. As a result, each employee is expected to save an average of ?80,000 per year. Prices of televisions, mobile phones and leather products, mostly purchased by the poor and the middle class, will fall significantly. The prices of electric vehicles will also drop, helping to reduce pollution, he said.

He said that customs duty on medicines used by cancer patients and chronic diseases has been significantly reduced, which will lower their medical expenses. This budget ensures economic stability by balancing agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors, Sanjay said.

He said this budget is a boon for farmers as it provides Kisan Credit Cards to 7.7 crore farmers enabling easy access to loans. He said that around 50 lakh farmers in Telangana will have the opportunity to obtain bank loans of up to ?5 lakh.

Sanjay said Kisan Credit Cards have been introduced to free farmers from dependency on private moneylenders and middlemen. The farmers of Telangana should apply for Kisan Credit Cards immediately to get this benefit, he added.

The newly introduced 'Dhan Dhanya Krishi Yojana' will boost agricultural production increasing farmers' income, he said.

He said the announcement of a special commission for pulses and a National Cotton Commission will greatly benefit TG farmers ensuring better prices and increased profitability.

It is a dream Budget, says Kishan

Describing the Central budget as a dream budget, the Telangana BJP President, G. Kishan Reddy, said the state would get Rs 1.5 lakh crore for MSMEs in the next five years. Telangana has around 10 lakh MSMEs, he added. He said that urban areas will get Rs 10,000 crore and that 125 municipalities and corporations are going to get funds under the Amrut Scheme. The budget is meant for the middle class and the prices of medicine and electronic goods will fall due to the cut in taxes, Kishan said.

CII TG calls Budget agriculture, MSMEs–friendly

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



CII Telangana Chairman and Bharat Biotech International Ltd. Executive Director, Sai D Prasad

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Telangana described Union Budget 2025 as an agriculture and Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME)-friendly budget.

CII Telangana Chairman and Bharat Biotech International Ltd. Executive Director, Sai D. Prasad, said the budget will boost India's growth and strengthen labour-intensive sectors.

He said that reducing the tax burden on the middle class will increase consumption, while higher spending on urban infrastructure will attract more investments. He also emphasised that the budget supports agriculture and MSMEs, driving entrepreneurship.

Meanwhile, a former Chairman of the CII's Southern Region, Anil Epur, welcomed the Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana, which will be implemented in 100 districts with state collaboration.

He said the scheme will enhance agricultural growth by addressing productivity, crop diversification, storage, irrigation and credit challenges, ensuring farmer welfare and rural economic strength.

No concrete steps in Budget to cut healthcare costs: Burri

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Budget 2025 evoked mixed reactions. While some hailed its focus on strengthening healthcare infrastructure and reducing the tax burden, others pointed out gaps in prevention, medical education and financial protection for citizens.

Dr Ranga Reddy Burri, the President of the Infection Control Academy of India said that no concrete steps to reduce healthcare costs were taken and that this leaves millions vulnerable to financial problems.

He welcomed initiatives like promoting millet consumption, expanding digital healthcare through BharatNet, increasing the health budget by 12.9% to Rs 90,958 crore, and exempting duties on cancer medicines. However, he criticized the lack of focus on disease surveillance, antimicrobial resistance and primary care as well as the uncontrolled expansion of MBBS seats without strengthening faculty and infrastructure.

"The budget lacks emphasis on disease surveillance and prevention, despite the increasing threat of infections. Investing in cancer centres is positive, but early screening and prevention – far more cost-effective – received little attention.

AMR is a ticking time bomb, yet the budget offers no clear strategy to combat it. Strengthening primary healthcare is critical, yet it remains a weak link despite promises of accessible, affordable care," he said.

Jasdeep Singh, the CEO of CARE Hospitals, termed the budget as "transformative" for India's healthcare sector. He pointed to the establishment of day-care cancer centres in district hospitals, the increase in MBBS seats, health insurance for one crore gig workers, and customs duty exemptions on 36 life-saving drugs.

He also highlighted the extension of potable tap water projects and the promotion of medical tourism as key steps in improving public health.

FTCCI terms Budget forward-looking, people-friendly

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI) has welcomed the Union Budget, describing it as industry-friendly, people-friendly and progressive. Interacting with the media soon after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented her eighth consecutive budget, FTCCI President Suresh Kumar Singhal termed it as an inclusive budget that caters to all sectors. He congratulated the Finance Minister for addressing the needs of businesses and society alike.

Singhal said that the budget was a positive step towards economic growth and highlighted the increase in the income tax exemption limit from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 12 lakh, which exceeded FTCCI's recommendations. He noted that this unexpected relief would benefit the salaried class and boost household savings and investments.

'FM walking on worn-out path'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that the BJP-led Centre has "no new ideas", the Congress on Saturday said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is walking on the "worn-out path" and not willing to break free as its governments had done in 1991 and 2004.

The opposition party said the takeaway from the Union Budget 2025-26 is that the ruling BJP is wooing the tax-paying middle-class and the Bihar electorate.

Addressing a press conference here along with his party colleague Gaurav Gogoi, senior Congress leader and former finance minister P Chidambaram said these announcements will be welcomed by the 3.2 crore tax-paying middle class and the 7.65 crore voters of Bihar.

But for the rest of India, the finance minister had nothing more than soothing words, punctuated by the applause of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said.



"There is nothing to cheer about the fact that the government has improved the fiscal deficit from the budget estimate of 4.9 per cent to the revised estimate of 4.8 per cent. It was achieved at a huge cost to the economy," Chidambaram said.

"Those who did not believe us when we said that the economy is slowing down will, I hope, believe us now. Those who did not believe us that the capacity of the government to plan and implement schemes has diminished will, I hope, believe us now," he added.

The Congress leader said capital expenditure for 2025-26 has been increased by Rs 1,02,661 crore but "having regard to the experience of 2024-25, I doubt the capacity of the government to achieve the target".

"I am glad, however, that the finance minister has shed her faith in astrologically-determined numbers," the former Union minister said.

He said it is evident that neither the finance minister nor the prime minister cares for the advice of the chief economic adviser (CEA).

"He gave sensible advice in the Economic Survey. 'Get out of the way' was his call to the government. On the contrary, the budget is full of new schemes and programmes, many of which are beyond the capacity of this government. I counted at least 15 new schemes or programmes and four new funds," Chidambaram said.

The finance minister is "walking on the worn-out path and not willing to break free as we did in 1991 and 2004", the Congress leader added.



Telangana given short shrift in Union Budget

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Rajya Sabha Member Vaddiraju Ravichandra extended congratulations to Nirmala Sitharaman, who presented the Union Budget for the 8th consecutive time in Parliament. Despite the Central government introducing a massive budget of Rs 50.65 lakh crore for the financial year 2025-26, it is highly unfair that no special allocation was made for Telangana. This budget has once again deeply disappointed the people of Telangana.

The Central government showered benefits on states like Bihar and Delhi, keeping the upcoming Assembly elections in mind. While Bihar was promised the establishment of a Greenfield Airport, Telangana's airports in Mamnoor, Khammam, Adilabad, and Kothagudem were not given any attention, which is deeply objectionable. Ravichandra personally met the Minister of Civil Aviation, Ram Mohan Naidu, to submit a petition regarding these issues. Despite this, the budget made no mention of these airports, which is unjust.

Ignoring the legitimate demand of the people of Telangana for national status and funds for the Palamuru-Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Project is condemnable. Furthermore, the longstanding demand for the Bayyaram Steel Plant, Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), Sainik Schools, and the establishment of Navodaya Schools in newly formed districts was completely disregarded, he said



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All set for Inter practical exam from Feb 3

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



S Krishna Aditya

The Telangana Board of Intermediate Education (TGBIE) announced that practical examinations will begin on Monday and continue until February 22.

At a press meet here on Saturday, TGBIE Director S Krishna Aditya stated that this year saw the highest participation from 2nd-year students, with 5,07,956 candidates, including 19,000 backlog students. The state has 2,008 practical examination centers, with exam sessions running from 9 am to 12 pm and 2 pm to 5 pm on all working days.

Aditya mentioned that a total of 1,812 centers will host 2nd-year students, including 98,952 BiPC and 2,34,853 MPC students, totaling 3,33,805. Vocational course exams will take place at 463 centers for 49,137 1st-year and 46,110 2nd-year students.

The director mentioned that 180 private junior colleges received affiliation this year. He also highlighted technical issues on the website and assured strict cut-off dates for affiliations in the future.

Aditya announced that Hall tickets are available online, with the link provided to students. He noted to monitor exams, CCTV cameras are installed in all government, government-aided, and private unaided junior colleges, linked to the Command Control Centre (CCC) at the TGBIE Head Office.

The Director also introduced an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) service via the toll-free number 92402 05555 to assist students.

Wetland conservation to be integrated in tourism policy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



Telangana Minister for Environment, Forest, and Endowments Konda Surekha has highlighted the crucial role of wetlands in biodiversity conservation, stating that these ecosystems act as natural filters, improving water quality and mitigating environmental imbalances caused by pollution. Ahead of World Wetlands Day on February 2, the minister shared her thoughts on the significance of preserving these natural habitats.

The Minister stated that several water bodies in Telangana, including the Manjeera Reservoir, Pakala Lake, Kinnerasani Reservoir, Ramappa Lake, and Ameenpur Lake, have been identified as wetlands. She assured that steps are being taken to officially notify them under environmental regulations, with a comprehensive action plan being formulated for their protection.

Surekha further revealed that the Telangana government is integrating wetland conservation into its upcoming ecotourism policy, ensuring that these sites receive priority. She stressed the need for public participation in wetland preservation efforts, stating that government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to protect these valuable ecosystems.

"Wetlands are vital for sustaining biodiversity. They help regulate floods, provide sanctuary to rare fish and plant species, and serve as a habitat for both native and migratory birds. Additionally, they play a crucial role in ensuring water security for both drinking and agriculture," Surekha said. She emphasised that these ecosystems act as nature's filtration system, helping maintain ecological balance while supporting livelihoods.

Referring to India's commitment to wetland conservation, Surekha noted that the country joined the Ramsar Convention in 1982, demonstrating its dedication to preserving wetlands. She also pointed out that under UNESCO's guidance, this year's theme for World Wetlands Day—"Wetland Restoration for Our Future"—aims to raise awareness about the need for protecting these vital ecosystems.



CM visited Delhi over 30 times, but got nothing for TG in Budget: Harish

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former Finance Minister T Harish Rao has strongly criticised the Union Budget 2025-26, calling it politically motivated and biased towards election-bound states while neglecting overall national development. He questioned whether the BJP-led Central government's vision of "Viksit Bharat" could be achieved with such an approach and urged the Centre to introspect its discriminatory budgetary allocations.

Harish Rao pointed out that states with upcoming elections had received substantial allocations, while non-election states like Telangana were ignored. "Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman says 'the nation is its people,' but this budget makes it seem like only a few states matter to the Centre," he remarked.

Lashing out at the repeated pattern of election-driven budgets, he said, "In 2024, the budget was tailored for Andhra Pradesh. Now, it's for Delhi and Bihar. Will the 2026 budget be for Uttar Pradesh and the 2027 budget for Gujarat? When will there be a budget for the entire nation?" He accused the BJP government of systematically neglecting Telangana, questioning why the state, which contributes 5.1% to the national GDP, was once again left out.

He highlighted that despite Telangana having two Union Ministers and eight MPs from the BJP, along with eight Congress MPs, none of them secured any special allocations for the state. "This budget is not for India, it is for three or four states," he said, adding that the BJP had used the budget to reaffirm that Telangana was not a priority.

Harish Rao also criticised the Centre for failing to allocate funds for the Tribal University promised under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act. He accused the Congress government in Telangana of being ineffective in securing central funds, noting that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy wrote a letter requesting Rs 40,000 crore just 10 days before the budget, but did little else to fight for the state's interests. "CM Revanth Reddy has visited Delhi over 30 times in a year—what has he achieved for Telangana?" he asked, demanding answers from the Congress leadership.

He further pointed out that while Bihar received major incentives, including a Makhana Board, Western Kosi Canal project, IIT Patna expansion, a Greenfield airport, and food processing units, Telangana was completely ignored despite electing Congress and BJP MPs. "Bihar's JD(U), which supports the BJP at the Centre, secured Rs 26,000 crore for various projects last year.

BJP demands holding of local body polls

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY



BJP leader Matham Rishikesh

BJP Rangareddy district executive committee member Matham Rishikesh has strongly criticised the Congress government for its inaction regarding local body elections. The inaction on the part of the government has pushed the governance into disarray. He demanded immediate elections before the situation worsened further.

Speaking on the issue, Rishikesh pointed out that while the government aggressively prepared for general elections well in advance, it has been stalling local body elections for over a year since the terms of sarpanches and other local representatives ended. He expressed concern that Gram Panchayats, Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituencies (MPTCs), and Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituencies (ZPTCs) are suffering due to the prolonged delay.

Highlighting the dire consequences of the government's inaction, he alleged that several contractors and sarpanches had resorted to suicide due to financial distress after not receiving payments for completed works in Gram Panchayats and municipalities.

The BJP leader urged Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, the Chief Secretary, government officials, and District Collectors to take immediate steps to conduct local body elections without further delay.

Young generation should take inspiration form Ambedkar

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Former minister and MLA T Harish Rao unveiled a statue of BR Ambedkar at Rangadampally in Siddipet town limits. He emphasised the importance of upholding Ambedkar's ideals. "Whenever we see his statue, we should be reminded of his vision. Today's youth should take inspiration from Ambedkar. If Article 3 on Ambedkar had not been included, the Telangana state would not have existed today," he said.

Harish Rao pointed out that though former chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao started the Dalit Bandhu scheme, the Congress government has failed to implement it effectively. He also said KCR installed the 125-foot Ambedkar statue, but Revanth Reddy put restrictions on it. He called for an opportunity for the statue to be seen without any hindrances, without resorting to unnecessary complications.

He mentioned that KCR had launched the Ambedkar Overseas scheme, but the Congress government failed to give scholarships to students under this scheme. He highlighted that previous late chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy had introduced several welfare schemes.

KCR had implemented them welfare schemes for the benefit of the people. Harish Rao further asserted that there should not be a village in the Siddipet constituency without an Ambedkar statue.

He criticised the union Union Budget, claiming it has neglected Telangana while favoring certain other states like Bihar and Andhra Pradesh.

Tiger triggers panic in Mancherial district

PNS ■ MANCHERIAL

A wave of panic has spread across the Mancherial district owing to the movement of a big cat. The Forest Department officials have found pugmarks near the Rajarajeswara temple in Kannala village under Bellampalli mandal. For the past three months, both the people and Forest Department officials in the Komuram Bheem Asifabad and Mancherial districts have been living fear since the discovery of movement of the big cat.

Earlier, a tiger which came from Maharashtra created panic in the district. After the tiger reportedly returned to its place of origin, people heaved a sigh of relief. However, the tiger's movement now in the Mancherial district has once again created fear.

Due to the suspected movement of a tigress, parents are too scare to send their children to schools. Forest officials explained that a tigress had recently moved from Tiryani in Kumram Bheem Asifabad district in search of a new territory. They are actively tracking her movements with animal trackers and are taking additional steps to ensure the safety of local residents.



pubmarks

Suspect opens fire at police, injures constable

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



Battula Prabhakar

A police constable received bullet injury when a suspected criminal opened fire on a police team that had gone to apprehend him at a popular pub in the Financial District of Gachibowli on Saturday night. According to reports, Battula Prabhakar, an alleged repeat offender, who was involved in several house burglary cases, had taken refuge in Prism Pub. A team from the Madhapur Central Crime Station (CCS), which had been tracking him, arrived at the pub around 8 pm.

When the CCS officers attempted to arrest Prabhakar and asked him to surrender, he tried to escape and fired at them using a country-made pistol. The bullet hit Madhapur CCS head constable Venkatrami Reddy in the thigh.

The Gachibowli police, however, chased the suspect and took him into custody. The injured constable was rushed to hospital.

LHPS demands national holiday on Sevalal Maharaj Jayanti

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

The Lambadi Hakula Porata Samiti (LHPS) has urged the government to declare February 15, the birth anniversary of Sant Sevalal Maharaj, as a national holiday. The demand was made during a one-day deeksha organised by LHPS in front of the Mandal Parishad office in Shadnagar constituency in Rangareddy district, on Saturday.

LHPS Telangana State President M Rambal Nayak emphasised that Sant Sevalal Maharaj, the revered deity of 12 crore Banjara tribals across India, played a crucial role in uniting and uplifting the community.

He demanded that the Telangana Legislative Assembly pass a resolution recognising Sevalal Maharaj Jayanti as a public holiday and forward it to the Central government for approval. Additionally, he called for large-scale Maha Bog Bandar Pujas to be held at Bhavani Mata and Sevalal Maharaj temples across the country to honor his legacy.

Four women from Telangana reported missing at Kumbh Mela

PNS ■ JAGTIAL

Four women of a family, who went to the Kumbh Mela from Jagtial, Niramla and Karimnagar districts, have reportedly to be missing. The family members of the women have been spending anxious moments. All four women are sisters, and they are above 55 years of age.

According to family members, The women, along with eight other women from Jagtial district traveled to the Kumbh Mela on January 27. After taking the holy dip, four of the women went missing. Naraswamma from the Vidyanagar area of Karimnagar district, Rajamma from Kothwada, Buchavva from Kadenga in Nirmal district and Sathavva are missing. None of them have mobile phones. As a result, their families are deeply concerned.

The family members appealed to the local authorities to search for their missing relatives. Some other relatives from Karimnagar and Nirmal districts also traveled to help search for the women.

Authorities in Prayagraj are actively searching for the missing women and making announcements over loudspeakers. However, as of now, there has been no trace of them.

Tourism potential not exploited fully in district

PNS ■ HANMAKONDA

The undivided Warangal district is home to ancient structures from the Kakatiya era, serene lakes that reflect the beauty of nature, mesmerising waterfalls that captivate tourists, and renowned temples that stand as a testament to its rich heritage. Thousands of tourists come to visit the tourist destinations in the undivided district. In Hanmakonda, the thousand pillar temple, Padmakshi temple, the UNESCO recognised Ramappa temple, the beautiful Laknavaram lake, and the waterfall stand out. In Mahabubabad district, places like Pandavulagutta, Bhadrakali temple in Warangal, and Warangal Fort are prominent.

However, there is a lack of government encouragement for tourism development. The tourist attractions have minimal facilities, causing visitors to face difficulties.

After the formation of the state, the BRS government divided the districts. But till today, tourism offices have not been established in these districts. Hanmakonda, Warangal, Jangaon, Mahabubabad, Mulugu, and Jayashankar Bhupalapalli were created as new districts. While Hanmakonda has some tourism offices, others do not have tourism offices at all. The former tourism office, based in the undivided Warangal district, continues to operate from the Hanmakonda Collectorate. While there are many tourist spots in the newly formed districts, there is no tourism office, leading to poor monitoring. The development of tourism in these districts is stagnating.



Tourism has been neglected severely under the previous government. Before that, during the Congress rule, there was some development, and funds were released for the districts. However, the BRS government did not pay attention to it. Currently, tourism offices only exist in three districts: Hyderabad, Hanmakonda, and Nalgonda. There are three officers for these offices, covering 19 to 10 districts. The tourism office in Hanmakonda, which is responsible for the undivided districts of Warangal and Nalgonda, has to manage tourism monitoring for the nine districts.

The Tourism Department is facing a severe shortage of funds. The government is not providing funds for the development of tourist spots. There is no budget even for promoting these places or organising festivals. As a result, the existence of the district Tourism Department is under question. Except for the funds provided by the Central government for Tribal Tourism circuits (around Rs 30 crore) and the UNESCO recognition of Ramappa temple, no significant funds have been provided by the state government for the development of tourism in the united Warangal district. Places like Laknavaram, Pakala, and Medaram Sammakka Saralamma Jatara have received some attention, but most other tourist destinations are lacking development due to the absence of funds.

There is also a severe shortage of staff in the Tourism Department. Most of the current employees are contract workers. The tourism office in the district currently has seven employees, including three district officers and several others who have been working as contract staff for years. Even for key tourist spots in the undivided district, there are no guides to explain their significance to foreign tourists and visitors from other states. Currently, only two guides are working for the Ramappa temple and Warangal Fort, and both are also on contract.

The long-awaited proposal for setting up a Shilparamam (art and craft village) has remained stalled for 15 years. Though the Congress government approved the project and allocated

Rs 6.5 crore, the construction has not yet started. There is still a delay in selecting the land for the project. Local citizens believe that the current Congress government should take responsibility for implementing this project.

If the Shilparamam is set up, the number of tourists will increase, and local artisans will find work.

Liquor shop found selling 'expired beer'

PNS ■ WARANGAL



Expired beer being sold at liquor shop here has caused a flutter. Ale drinkers, who bought beer at the liquor shop on Thursday, took ill after drinking the allegedly expired beer.

On Saturday too, the customers found that the liquor shop had been selling the alleged expired beer. When questioned, the liquor shop owner allegedly behaved rudely with the customers and said that they had been receiving the same stock. He agreed to refund the money if they wanted.

The customers reportedly complained to the officials of the Prohibition and Excise Department. What action will be taken is to be seen.



President's office gets Rs 141.83 crore

NEW DELHI: The Union Budget on Saturday allocated Rs 141.83 crore for the staff, household and allowances of the president, a nominal increase of Rs 8.22 crore from Rs 133.61 crore earmarked in the revised estimates for ongoing fiscal. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had earmarked Rs 144.18 crore in the Budget for 2024-25 which was revised to Rs 133.61 crore. The fund allocation is for salaries and allowances of the president, the expenditure on the household establishment of the president, including staff salaries, discretionary grants of the president and provision for capital section. The document shows that of the total allocation, Rs 60 lakh has been allocated for the salary and allowances of the president, which remained unchanged from the last budget. The amount allocated under the head 'president's secretariat' provides for the establishment and allied expenses with respect to it, which includes grants-in-aid for Dr Rajendra Prasad Kendriya Vidyalaya on the campus of the president's estate and also includes provision for the capital section.

Rs 5 crore earmarked for assistance to poor prisoner



NEW DELHI: The Centre has earmarked Rs 5 crore in the 2025-26 budget for providing financial assistance to the prisoners who languish in jail because they could not afford their bail money. Under the 'Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act' 2023, State Legal Services Authorities have established Legal Service Clinics in jails to provide free legal assistance to persons in need. The Legal Service Clinics are managed by empanelled Legal Services Advocates and trained Para-Legal Volunteers. The budget documents, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on Saturday, show that Rs 5 crore funds have been reserved to help prisoners unable to afford the penalty or the bail amount. The Centre had kept Rs 20 crore in the previous budget but only Rs 1 crore could be put to use as states and union territories did not come with cases for clearance under the scheme, an official said.

FM announces National Geospatial Mission



NEW DELHI: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced a Rs 100 crore National Geospatial Mission to develop foundational geospatial infrastructure and data, a move aimed at modernising land records, aid urban planning and promoting earth observation systems. Geospatial refers to data associated with a specific location on the Earth's surface, which is crucial for positioning systems and adding layers of information on a map. "We will start a National Geospatial Mission to develop foundational geospatial infrastructure and data. Using PM Gati Shakti, this mission will facilitate modernisation of land records, urban planning, and design of infrastructure projects," Sitharaman said. The finance minister allocated Rs 100 crore for the National Geospatial Mission.

Social security scheme for gig workers



NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced a social security scheme for one crore gig workers engaged with online platforms and said the government will provide them identity cards and facilitate their registration on the e-Shram portal. The move will help these platform workers get benefits of social welfare schemes run by various government agencies. Presenting her eighth straight budget in Lok Sabha, Sitharaman said, "Gig workers of online platforms provide great dynamism to the new-age services economy. Recognising their contribution, our government will arrange for their identity cards and registration on the e-Shram portal." She further said that these workers will be provided healthcare under the PM Jan Arogya Yojana. This measure is likely to assist nearly 1 crore gig workers, she said.

Rs 5,915-Cr allocation for Ministry of DoNER

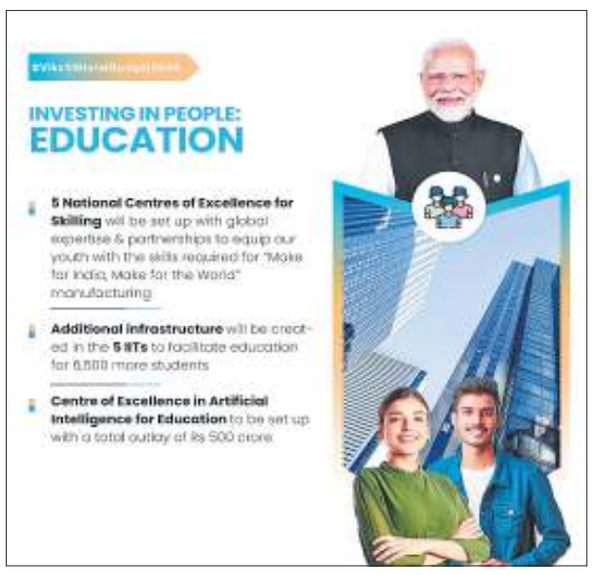


NEW DELHI: The Union Budget 2025-26 has allocated Rs 5,915 crore for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), which is a significant 47-per cent hike over the ongoing fiscal's allocation. The budget 2024-25 had allocated Rs 4,006 crore for the Ministry of DoNER. Officials said other initiatives that will indirectly benefit the northeastern region include expansion to 120 new destinations, including enhanced connectivity for the region, under the UDAN -- the regional connectivity scheme. There will be a focus on smaller airports and helipads in hilly and remote districts to boost regional air travel, with a target to carry four crore passengers in the next 10 years. The additional 0.5 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) borrowing will allow the states to implement electricity distribution and augment intra-state transmission, and it is expected to improve energy availability and reliability in the northeast, the officials said.

EDUCATION IN BUDGET

AI push, infra expansion at 5 new IITs, 10000 extra medical seats

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Infrastructure expansion at the five new IITs to accommodate 6,500 more students, 10,000 new medical seats and an allocation of Rs 500 crore to set up a Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence for education. These are among the big announcements for the education sector in the 2025-26 budget.

The Ministry of Education has been allocated more than Rs 1.28 lakh crore in the Union Budget 2025-26, higher than the revised estimate of Rs 1.14 lakh crore in 2024-25.

While the Higher Education department has been allocated an amount of Rs 50,067 crore, the school education department has received Rs 78,572 crore.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who presented her eighth straight Union Budget, also said the government will launch 'Bharatiya Bhasha Pushtak' scheme to provide digital form of Indian language books for schools and higher education.

She announced the government will create additional infrastructure at five Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and expand IIT Patna. The announcement to expand IIT Patna comes ahead of the Bihar Assembly polls due later this year.

"The total number of students in 23 IITs has increased by 100 per cent from 65,000 to 1.35 lakh in the past 10 years. Additional infrastructure will be created in the five IITs started after 2014 to facilitate education for 6,500 more students. Hostel and other infrastructure capacity at IIT Patna will also be expanded," she said.

The five new IITs are at Jammu, Bhilai, Dharwad, Palakkad and Tirupati.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan welcomed the announcement, saying it will lead to "leap frogging" in various parameters.

"Additional 6,500 seats will be added in these IITs over a period of five years and infrastructure will be upgraded to cater to them. The budget emphasises on investing in people and facilitating all-round development of India's human capital.

"With poor, youth, farmers and women as the pillars, this is a budget that will uplift sentiments of the poor and middle class, accelerate spending, catalyse investments, spur growth, remove regional imbalances, build rural prosperity, nurture research, innovation and entrepreneurship, invigorate our education and skilling landscape, lead to employment-led development and unlock the tremendous potential of Brand India," Pradhan told reporters.

The IITs have been allocated an amount of Rs 11,349 crore in the union budget, up from a revised estimate of Rs 10,467 crore in the current financial year.

Sitharaman announced that 10,000 additional seats will be added in medical colleges and hospitals next year towards the goal of adding 75,000 seats over the next five years.

"Our government has added almost 1.1 lakh undergraduate and postgraduate medical education seats in 10 years, an increase of 130 per cent. In the next year, 10,000 additional seats will be added in medical colleges and hospitals towards the goal of adding 75,000 seats in the next five years," she said.

The FM also announced 10,000 fellowships will be provided for technology research in IITs and IISc over the next five years.

"Five national centres for excellence for skilling with global expertise and partnerships will be set up and 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs will be set up in government schools in the next five years to cultivate scientific temper in young minds," she said.

Sitharaman said broadband connectivity will be provided to all government secondary schools and primary healthcare centres in rural areas.

"I had announced three centres of excellence in AI for agriculture, sustainable cities, and health in 2023. Now, a Centre of Excellence in AI for education will be set with an outlay of Rs 500 crore," she said, in a big Artificial Intelligence (AI) push in education.

From University Grants Commission (UGC) to National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), most bodies under the Ministry of Education have received an increased allocation.

Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), the country's top business schools that witnessed consistent cut in their allocated budget in a push to make them self-reliant, have also received an increased allocation of Rs 251 crore against a revised estimate of Rs 227 crore last year.

Defence outlay pegged at Rs 6.81L crore



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Saturday set aside Rs 6,81,210 crore as defence outlay for 2025-26 over the current fiscal's allocation of Rs 6.22 lakh crore amid the military's push for modernisation in the face of security challenges from China and Pakistan.

Out of the total allocation, Rs 1,80,000 crore has been earmarked to the armed forces for capital expenditure that largely includes purchasing new weapons, aircraft, warships and other military hardware.

The defence ministry said the total defence budget of Rs 6.81 lakh crore is an increase of 9.53 per cent over the outlay made for the current financial year.

On the capital outlay, the defence ministry said Rs 1,48,722.80 crore is planned to be spent on "modernisation budget" to procure new military hardware and remaining Rs 31,277 crore is for expenditure on research and development and to create infrastructural assets.

It said Rs 1,11,544 crore that is 75 per-cent of the modernisation budget has been earmarked for procurement through domestic sources. Twenty-five per cent of domestic share that is Rs 27,886 crore has been provisioned for procurement through domestic private industries. The capital outlay for the armed forces in the next fiscal is 4.65 percent higher than the budgetary estimate Rs 1.72 lakh crore in 2024-25. The revised capital outlay for 2024-25 has been estimated at Rs 1,59,500 crore.

The overall capital outlay has been put at Rs 1,92,387 crore out of which an amount of Rs 12,387 has been kept for defence services.

For the next fiscal, the revenue expenditure that accounts for day-to-day operating costs and salaries has been pegged at Rs Rs 4,88,822 crore that included Rs 1,60,795 crore for pensions.

The allocation for the defence budget is estimated at 1.91 per cent of the projected GDP in 2025-26.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh welcomed the overall allocation for the defence budget saying Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of making India self-reliant in defence sector has got a big boost.

NCRTC receives budgetary allocation of Rs 2,900 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC), India's first regional rapid rail project, has received an allocation of more than Rs 2,900 crore in the Union Budget 2025-26 announced on Saturday.

The NCRTC has started its operation in Delhi from January 5 after Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a 13-km section of the corridor from Sahibabad in Ghaziabad to New Ashok Nagar in the national capital.

The NCRTC received a total outlay of 2,918 crore in the current budget, while it was Rs 3,855 crore in last budget's revised estimates.

The union budget for 2025-26 was presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday.

After the inauguration of the NCRTC's Delhi section, commuters from the national capital can reach Meerut South in just 40 minutes.

Currently, two stations -- Anand Vihar and New Ashok Nagar -- are operational in Delhi, while a third one is under construction at Sarai Kale Khan. The 82-km Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor originates at Sarai Kale Khan in New Delhi and terminates at Modipuram in Meerut. It has 16 stations along with nine additional stations for the Meerut metro, making it a comprehensive and transformative regional transit solution.

MEA gets Rs 20,516 crore

NEW DELHI: In line with India's 'neighbourhood first' policy, Bhutan was on Saturday allocated the largest share of Rs 2,150 crore as development aid in the Union Budget for 2025-26 followed by Rs 700 crore to Nepal and Rs 600 crore to the Maldives. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was allocated a total of Rs 20,516 crore as against the current fiscal's budget estimate of Rs 22,154 crore and revised estimate of Rs 25,277 crore. Like for 2024-25, an amount of Rs 100 crore has been set aside for the Chabahar port project. Located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Iran's southern coast, the Chabahar port is being developed by India and Iran to boost connectivity and trade ties. The total overseas development partnership portfolio for 2025-26 has been pegged at Rs 6,750 crore, which is nearly 33 per cent of the allocation made to the MEA. The outlay for overseas development assistance is an increase of about 20 per cent over current fiscal's allocation of Rs 5,667 crore.

HUA ministry allocated Rs 96,777 crore



NEW DELHI: In a bid to boost urban infrastructure, the Centre Saturday hiked the allocation for the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry by around 18 per cent, setting aside Rs 96,777 crore for it in the Union Budget 2025-26. In the budget presented in Parliament, the government also announced the setting up of an Urban Challenge Fund of Rs 1 lakh crore for "cities as growth hubs", "creative redevelopment of cities", and "water and sanitation". An allocation of Rs 10,000 crore has been proposed for it in FY 2025-26. The government has allocated Rs 96,777 crore to the HUA ministry for the next fiscal as against Rs 82,576 crore in Budget 2024-25. Presenting the Union Budget 2025-26, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) scheme will be revamped with enhanced loans from banks and UPI-linked credit cards with Rs 30,000 limit.

IB gets Rs 3,893.35 crore



NEW DELHI: The Intelligence Bureau (IB) has received Rs 3,893.35 crore in the Union Budget 2025-26, a nominal cut of Rs 72.80 crore as compared to the revised estimates for 2024-25. The IB, responsible for intelligence gathering, counter intelligence and counter espionage operations in the country, was allocated Rs 3,823.83 crore in 2024-25 and it was revised to Rs 3,966.21 crore, the Budget document said. It said the provision of Rs 3,893.35 crore for 2025-26 is for meeting the administrative expenses of the IB. The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID), another crucial intelligence arm in the country, was allocated Rs 158.23 crore, a massive cut of Rs 89.49 crore (around 36 per cent) from Rs 247.72 crore in 2024-25. The NATGRID aims to link databases as an input in combating terrorism. It also intends to create a facility to improve capability to counter internal security threats, the Budget document said.

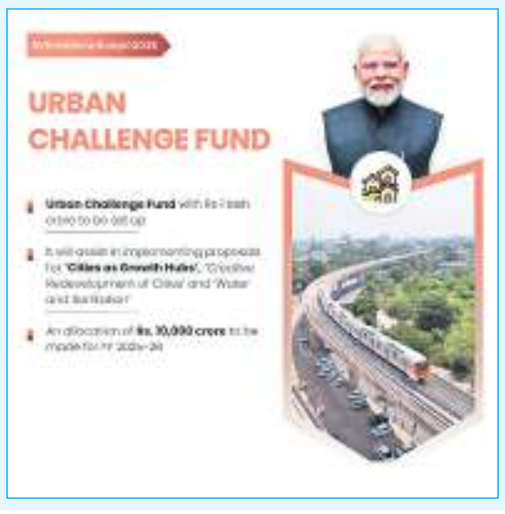
Health Ministry sees around 11 pc hike in allocation

NEW DELHI: The Union Health Ministry has been allocated Rs 99,858.56 crore in the Budget 2025-2026, an around 11 per cent hike over the Rs 89,974.12 crore in the budget (revised estimates) of 2024-2025 with the government announcing setting up daycare cancer centres at all district hospitals over the next three years. Two hundred of these daycare cancer centres would be established in the 2025-26 fiscal itself. Presenting the Budget for 2025-2026 on Saturday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said 10,000 seats will be added in medical colleges next year towards the goal of adding 75,000 seats in the next five years. As a relief on the import of drugs/medicines, 36 lifesaving drugs for treating cancer, rare diseases and chronic diseases have been fully exempted from basic customs duty (BCD). The government had earlier cut customs duty on Trastuzumab Deruxtecan, Osimertinib and Durvalumab from 10 per cent to zero. Further, 37 medicines along with 13 new drugs and medicines under Patient Assistance Programmes have been exempted from BCD, if supplied free to patients.

Budget proposes Rs 15k cr SWAMIH Fund-2



NEW DELHI: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced a fresh Rs 15,000 crore 'SWAMIH Fund' for completion of 1 lakh units in stalled housing projects across various cities, a move aimed at providing relief to distressed homebuyers whose investments are stuck. In November 2019, the Centre announced a stress fund named 'Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing' (SWAMIH), to complete stalled housing projects across India. The first fund, with a corpus of Rs 15,530 crore, is being managed by SBICAP Ventures Ltd, a State Bank Group company. Sitharaman, in her budget speech, announced the SWAMIH Fund-2 following the success of the first fund. Under the SWAMIH Fund-1, the finance minister highlighted that 50,000 dwelling units in stressed housing projects have been completed and keys have been handed over to homebuyers.



Railways gets Rs 2.52 lakh crore allocation

Targets revenues of Rs 3.02 lakh crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has approved a budget allocation of Rs 2.52 lakh-crore for the Railways for 2025-26 financial year, almost the same amount that was allocated in 2024-25.

According to the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday, the Railways has targeted higher revenues from passengers, goods and others heads.

"The total outlay provided for Capital Expenditure in Budget Estimate 2025-26 of Rs 2,65,200 crore includes Rs 2,52,000 crore from General Revenues, Rs 200 crore from Nirbhaya Fund, Rs 3,000 crore from Internal Resource and Rs 10,000 crore from Extra Budgetary Resources," according to the budget proposals.

"Total Receipt of Railways comprising revenues from passenger, goods, other coaching, sundry other heads and Railway Recruitment Boards etc. have been placed at Rs 3,02,100 crore in BE (Budget Estimates) 2025-26 as against RE (Revised Estimates) 2024-25 of Rs 2,79,000 crore," it said.

The budget document showed an increased earning from both passenger as well as freight services in 2024-25. For instance, the revised estimate for 2024-25 for passenger railway receipt showed Rs 80,000 crore as compared to the actual revenues of Rs 70,693 crore in 2023-24.

The freight earning in the revised estimate of 2024-25 stood at Rs 1,80,000 crores compared to the actual revenues of Rs 1,68,199 crore in 2023-24.

"Passenger revenue target has been kept at Rs 80,000 crore with a growth of 13.2%. Goods revenue target is maintained at 1,80,000 cr. which is 7% higher over 2023-24," a railway press note said.

However, a section of experts is of the view that the increase in goods revenue is not on expected lines as a huge capital expenditure has been made in the past few years.

"Total expenditure on Safety related activities in RE 24-25 is Rs 1,14,062 crore and in BE 25-26 Rs 1,16,514 crore. The Indian Railways is making significant progress in network expansion by adding nearly 4,000 km annually. The Indian Railways has laid 31,180 km of new track during the last 10 years," the note said.

Though the Railways claimed the Budger proposals make a big push on safety of rail operations, experts have a contrary view.





Where Ambience Meets Flavour





Delhi NCR gets an aesthetic addition of a new culinary scene with the launch of *CAMO - Modern Cookhouse*, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

CAMO - Modern Cookhouse, has opened its doors promising to transform the way food is experienced in the city. Blending bold flavours, artistic presentation, and a thoughtfully curated ambiance, CAMO sets the stage for a culinary adventure that is equal parts comforting and sophisticated.













INVITING AMBIANCE: With greenery inside the place, which is rare to see, makes the ambience aesthetic with lights. CAMO stands out with its unique design that seamlessly integrates indoor and outdoor spaces, creating an environment that is both dynamic and welcoming. The skylight bathes the space in natural light, making it an ideal venue for both casual outings and refined gatherings.

MODERN INDIAN & PAN-ASIAN DELIGHTS: The menu at CAMO is a testament to innovation, bringing together the richness of modern Indian and *Pan-Asian* cuisines in a way that both honours tradition and pushes creative boundaries. Standout dishes include the *Matar Hummus & Lavash Chaat*, the *Parmesan Charred Broccoli*, and the playful yet intriguing *Mushroom Chai*—a dish that encapsulates CAMO's commitment to reimagine classics.



SMALL PLATES THAT PACK A PUNCH: CAMO's small plates selection is designed for those who love to sample and share, offering a range of exciting flavours and textures. The *Puchka Tray* is a refreshing take on the classic street food favourite, served with mint guava water and anaar corn salsa for a sweet, tangy twist. The *Basil Spring Rolls*, packed with roasted peanuts and accompanied by Thai sweet chili sauce, bring a crunchy delight with every bite. Meanwhile, the *Cheddar Soya Tikka* impresses with its smoky flavours, complemented by a rich tomato chutney and pickled onions.

For non-vegetarian aficionados, the *Katsu Chicken Tenders* are a must-try. These crispy, golden-fried delights are served with burnt citrus and togarashi mayo, adding a depth of umami that lingers on the palate.

SUSHI SELECTIONS FOR EVERY PALATE: CAMO's *Uramaki Sushi* menu offers a mix of vegetarian and non-vegetarian options that cater to diverse tastes. The vegetarian selection includes the *Avocado and Cream Cheese*, as well as the *Korean Kimchi Kimbap*, which delivers a fiery, tangy punch. For seafood lovers, the *Citrus Salmon Mousse* and the *Loaded Crispy Dynamite* provide a perfect balance of flavours, with fresh ingredients and expert craftsmanship evident in every roll.



SWEET ENDINGS WITH DECADENT DESSERTS: No meal at CAMO is complete without indulging in its delightful dessert offerings. The *Milk Cake Khurchan* is a rich and creamy homage to traditional Indian sweets, while the *Gulab Jamun & Pista Rabri* brings together two beloved classics in a harmonious fusion. For those who crave a taste of nostalgia, the *Purani Dilli Ka Kulfa* is a must-try, featuring flavours of mango, akhrot anjeer, and jamun that transport diners to the bustling streets of Old Delhi.

A VISION TO REDEFINE DINING IN NOIDA: *Vikas Khurana*, the mind behind CAMO - Modern Cookhouse, is passionate about reshaping Noida's dining culture. "Noida is rapidly evolving into a gastronomic hub, with diners seeking experiences that go beyond the ordinary. At CAMO, we've embraced this change, introducing a menu that pays tribute to tradition while pushing creative boundaries. Familiar dishes are reimagined with ingenuity, passion, and love, delivering something truly distinct. Our mission is to create moments that stay with our guests long after their meal. CAMO isn't here to follow trends; we're here to reshape how dining is perceived in this dynamic city."

FACT SHEET

ADDRESS: CAMO, SH 02 & 03, Near Embassy Oxygen Business Park, Sector 144, Noida
COST FOR TWO: 2000 + taxes (exclusive of drinks)
OPERATIONAL TIME: 12pm to 11:30 pm

ITALY'S BEST, SERVED HERE



Pizza Pazzi offers a delectable Italian dining experience, serving authentic pizzas, pasta, and fresh salads, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

Whether you're a fan of classic Margherita or adventurous gourmet combinations, *Pizza Pazzi* caters to diverse palates, ensuring a satisfying dining experience.

Pizza Pazzi at *Select Citywalk Mall*, Delhi, is a hidden gem for Italian food lovers. While their pizzas are the star attraction, the restaurant also serves delicious pasta and fresh salads that deserve just as much praise.

Inspired by the charm of Naples and the Italian phrase "Pazzi" meaning "crazy about pizza", founder *Utsav Khaitan* envisioned *Pizza Pazzi* as a place where the essence of Italian dining could be cherished in a modern, accessible way.

At the heart of the concept is a menu designed by *Chef Riccardo*, whose expertise brings Italian flavours to life with authenticity and flair. Guests can look forward to a selection of masterfully prepared *Neapolitan pizzas*, celebrated for their airy bases, and thin-crust options that strike the perfect balance between lightness and crunch. Beyond pizzas, the menu also boasts fresh salads, expertly grilled specialties, and desserts that capture the spirit of a true Italian feast. The pasta dishes are well-prepared, with perfectly cooked al dente pasta coated in rich, flavourful sauces. Each dish is satisfying and well-balanced. The salads are fresh and crisp, with high-quality ingredients that add a refreshing contrast to the indulgent main courses. To end the meal on a sweet note, the *tiramisu* is a must-try. Light, creamy, and infused with just the right amount of coffee flavour, it's the perfect way to wrap up a delightful Italian feast.







The service at *Pizza Pazzi* is equally impressive, with attentive and friendly staff ensuring a smooth dining experience. Whether you're visiting for a quick bite or a leisurely meal, this spot delivers great food and warm hospitality in a cozy setting. Orders are served promptly, ensuring that diners can enjoy their meals without unnecessary delays. The ambiance of the restaurant is inviting, making it a suitable spot for both casual outings and special occasions.

FACT SHEET

ADDRESS: Select Citywalk Mall, Saket, New Delhi, Delhi 110017
COST FOR TWO: ₹2,000 + taxes
OPERATIONAL TIME: 12pm to 11:00pm











THE DIVINE GLOW OF AYODHYA

Ayodhya's spiritual essence, sacred sites and vibrant ghats offer a deeply immersive and divine experience

Ayodhya, the birthplace of *Lord Ram*, offered Hemant Shukla a divine experience with its serene *Saryu River*, vibrant ghats, and the grandeur of *Ram Mandir* amidst spiritual awakening.

As soon as the semester break began, I packed my bags, filled with excitement and patience, for a 23-hour train journey from the *Temple City of India*, *Bhubaneswar*, to the birthplace of *Lord Shri Ram*, *Ayodhya*. Since there is no direct train to *Ayodhya*, I boarded the Puri-Gwalior Express from Bhubaneswar to Prayagraj (Sangam City), arrived at midnight, and then took another train early in the morning, reaching Ayodhya around 9 a.m.

As I entered the *Ayodhya Dham Station* amidst a trail of morning mist, I could feel an aura of spirituality. The station itself resembled a temple,









beautifully adorned with carved paintings, banners, and lights, with a temple-like structure on top. Modern facilities ensured effective crowd management, blending tradition with convenience.

After stepping out, I made my way to the nearby *Neeraj Tea Stall*, a beloved spot among locals. A hot cup of tea for ₹10 and a plate of pakoras for ₹20, accompanied by a free-of-cost cheerful chat with the locals. They advised me to beware of the mischievous monkeys, notorious for snatching food items. Accommodation options ranged from economical dormitories and Dharamshalas for under ₹500 to mid-range hotels for ₹2,000 and even luxurious stays.

After freshening up, I hopped onto a city electric bus to *Naya Ghat*. A short walk led me to the serene banks of the *Saryu River*. The sacred river welcomed many devotees. Despite the winter chill and fog, I mustered the courage and plunged into the sacred waters, feeling an inexplicable connection with the divine.

Next, I visited the *Nageshwar Nath Temple*, established by *Kush*, *Lord Ram*'s son, to honour Lord Shiva with sacred Saryu water. *Ram ki Paidi* is a series of ghats on the bank of the *River Saryu*. The riverfront presents an outstanding landscape, especially on floodlit nights. Every year on Diwali, Ayodhya's *Deepotsav* is celebrated on these ghats with lakhs of diyas and laser shows. The vibrant energy surrounding the ghats during the festivities is truly blissful. From there, I walked to the road and took a ₹10 e-rickshaw to *Choti Devkali Mandir*, where *Goddess Parvati* is worshipped as Sita Mata's family deity. Near the main road, I treated myself to some delicious dahi jalebi at *Maurya Misthan Bhandar* for ₹50—a delightful experience for both my taste buds and spirit.

Before visiting the grand *Ram Mandir*, I headed towards the *Hanuman Garhi Temple*. This temple, dedicated to Lord Hanuman, had a long queue of devotees, but the wait was worth it. With 1 kg of prasad—besan ladoos made in desi ghee—for ₹480, I was ready for my next destination.

After that, I visited the *Ram Mandir*, which is within walking distance. I was amazed by the sight of the temple. Although it is still under construction, the energy and emotions I felt there are beyond words. It was a deeply spiritual experience. The temple has proper arrangements and facilities for pilgrims, including a dedicated facilitation centre to assist visitors. One can also pre-book a slot for the Ram Mandir Aarti Darshan online. By 4 p.m., I had completed all these activities and had lunch at Chandra Restaurant, which cost ₹500. Afterwards, I took some rest, preparing for another surreal experience yet to come.

AYODHYA'S HEARTBEAT

As the clock struck 7 p.m., *Ayodhya* dazzled in vibrant lights. The symbolic streetlights, soulful bhajans blending with city sounds, and the lively yet peaceful atmosphere felt surreal. Walking through the illuminated streets, I reached *Kanak Bhawan*, believed to have been gifted by Kaikeyi to Sita after her marriage to Lord Ram. The temple's architecture, reminiscent of Rajasthani palaces, left me in awe. The idols of Lord Ram and Sita exuded divine charm. As I sat in the temple's courtyard, time seemed to stand still. Attending the *Shayan Aarti* at 9 p.m. was a transcendent experience, with devotees singing bhajans in reverence.

After the aarti, I had dinner at *Kanak Rasoi* for ₹150 before heading back to my stay. The next morning, I caught my train back to *Bhubaneswar*, but a part of my soul remains in *Ayodhya*, especially in the divine embrace of *Kanak Bhawan*. This journey to the sacred land was not just a travel experience but a spiritual awakening that will forever resonate in my heart.

— Hemant Shukla

EXPLORE GOA LIKE NEVER BEFORE!

Mansão Curtorim invites guests to experience the lesser-known, tranquil side of Goa, where time slows down amidst lush paddy fields and historic landscapes, says **SHARMILA CHAND**



Nestled in the heart of *Curtorim*, a tranquil village in South Goa surrounded by lush landscapes, *Mansão Curtorim* is a 236-year-old Indo-Portuguese heritage villa that seamlessly blends the region's cultural and architectural facets with modern comforts.

I was fortunate to experience this meticulously restored heritage property which offers a serene retreat, inviting guests to immerse themselves in Goa's hidden gems, its timeless charm, and the tranquil pace of life in a peaceful village setting.

For me, sitting in the garden early morning with my precious cup of tea created an unforgettable revelry. The garden overlooks the lake which is lovely with several egrets playing perfect hosts to migratory birds. As I sip my tea, looking at pretty ducks gliding over the water of the lake, a gentle whisper of a cuckoo lures me to her charm, I can't stop looking at the sky in pretty hues of dawn while Coucal manages to steal the spotlight in the nearby gorgeous Champa tree with its deep resonant notes. Here the air hums with vibes that are beautifully soothing and invigorating.

THE STUNNING VILLA - HERITAGE MEETS MODERN COMFORT: With its Indo-Portuguese architecture, *Mansão Curtorim* blends colonial-era charm with modern luxury. Every corner of the heritage villa set on a 1.5-acre estate, speaks of finer details embracing elements of elegance and comfort. Truly, it's a haven for the discerning traveler.

The villa is a testament to Goa's rich colonial history, with its striking red-hued façade, colonial-era furniture, and intricate details like rosewood beds and ornate mirrors. When you enter the villa, you are transported to a bygone era, where traditional Portuguese design meets modern-day amenities.

Spacious living areas, breezy balconies, and carefully preserved vintage elements like patterned cement tiles and vintage ceilings highlight the villa's colonial heritage, making it a place where history is honored without compromising on comfort.

Mansão Curtorim features six elegantly appointed bedrooms, each offering a perfect balance of comfort and charm, blending the charm of traditional Portuguese architecture with modern comforts.





CULTURAL HERITAGE: Beyond its aesthetic beauty, *Mansão Curtorim* offers a rich cultural experience rooted in the local community and culinary traditions. Tucked away in *Curtorim*, a serene village adorned with sprawling paddy fields, coconut groves, and historic water bodies, the villa provides the perfect setting for those seeking both relaxation and a deeper connection with Goa's heritage. The nearby *Church of St. Alex*, dating back to 1597, and the peaceful flow of the *Zuari River* enhance the area's charm, making it a haven for birdwatchers, history enthusiasts, and those simply looking for tranquility.

CURATED IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES: Guests at *Mansão Curtorim* can explore the area through curated experiences that showcase the essence of traditional Goan life. Guided village walks, scenic cycling trails, and visits to heritage sites like *Chandor* and *Rachol* offer a glimpse into Goa's rich cultural fabric. The villa's serene surroundings are also ideal for creative pursuits, making it the perfect retreat for artists, writers, or anyone looking to unwind in an intimate and restorative environment. Whether you're looking to paint, write, or simply relax in nature's embrace, *Mansão Curtorim* aligns perfectly with *CGH Earth Saha*'s philosophy of providing meaningful, intimate, immersive experiences.

CULINARY DELIGHTS: A key highlight of *Mansão Curtorim* is its culinary offerings, which provide a delightful journey through Goa's rich and diverse food culture. The villa's chef has carefully crafted a menu that combines traditional Goan delicacies with popular Western favorites, catering to both vegetarians and meat lovers. The enticing aroma of *Chorizo Pilaf*, the delicate flavors of *Cauliflower Caldine*, and the rich, spicy notes of *Pork Sorpotel* and *Bharlelim Aimi* exemplify the depth of Goan cuisine. Guests can embark on a flavourful journey with iconic dishes like Bebinca, Sol Kadi, Xacuti, and Vindaloo, all rooted in Indo-Portuguese culinary traditions and enhanced by the region's distinctive spices and fresh ingredients.

For me every meal was a memorable event in a relaxed outdoor setting overlooking the lush courtyard. Right from cooking every dish to highlight the vibrant flavors of South Goa to impeccable presentation, the team takes Gastronomy to another level.

GOAN FENI AND TAPAS FOOD TRAIL: For those seeking a true Goan culinary adventure, the *Goan Feni and Tapas Food Trail* is an exciting opportunity to savour Goa's iconic spirit, paired with delectable tapas. This immersive food trail adds an extra layer of authenticity to the experience, giving guests the chance to taste the best of Goan cuisine in a truly unique setting.

TO CONCLUDE: Whether you are seeking a quiet retreat to reconnect with loved ones, indulge in creative pursuits, or explore Goa's cultural and natural wonders, *Mansão Curtorim* offers the perfect escapade. With its blend of history, beauty, and modern comfort, it is more than just a place to stay-it is an invitation to experience Goa in its truest, most immersive form.

— She is an author and independent writer



sunday pioneer

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HYDERABAD | SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Govt announces host of measures for startups

New Fund of Funds scheme with Rs 10k cr corpus

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Saturday announced a host of measures such as setting up of a new Fund of Funds Scheme (FFS) with Rs 10,000 crore corpus; and extension of period of incorporation by five years with a view to promote growth of budding entrepreneurs.

In 2016 also, the government had launched a similar scheme, with a corpus of Rs 10,000 crore, with contribution spread over the 14th and 15th Finance Commission cycles. The scheme was set up to catalyze venture capital investments and is operationalised by Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), which provides capital to Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)-registered AIFs, which in turn invest in startups.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the Alternate Investment Funds (AIFs) for startups have received commitments of more than Rs 91,000 crore.

These are supported by the Fund of Funds set up with a government contribution of Rs 10,000 crore, she said.

"Now, a new Fund of Funds, with expanded scope and a fresh contribution of another Rs 10,000 crore will be set up," the minister added.

AIFs in a meeting with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) had demanded infusion of more funds under the scheme.



Prominent AIFs of leading start-up investment firms supported under FFS are Chiratae Ventures, India Quotient, Blume Ventures, IvyCap, Waterbridge, Omnivore, Aavishkaar, JM Financial, and Fireside Ventures.

AIFs supported under FFS are required to invest at least two times the amount committed under FFS in startups. As on October 31, 2024, a total of Rs 20,572.14 crore has been invested by the FFS-supported AIFs in startups.

According to the DPIIT, the additional capital of Rs 10,000 crore will enable further public-private capital infusion in the startup ecosystem, promoting an increase in new ventures and the development of high-growth entities.

"The fresh contribution will allow the government to explore more avenues and instruments of funding for startups to further promote liquidity and flexibility in funding," it said. To improve access to credit, the credit guarantee cover will be enhanced for startups, from Rs 10 crore to Rs 20 crore, with the guarantee fee being moderated to 1 per cent for loans in 27 focus sectors important for Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The rationalisation of guarantee fee for startups in focus startups will encourage the infusion of debt capital for such units, which is cheaper than equity capital and important as many times startups may not be able to dilute equity further through equity-linked instruments.

Besides, a Deep Tech Fund of Funds will also be explored to catalyze the next generation startups as a part of this initiative.

The move will enable patient capital for deep tech startups which have high gestation period and carry higher risk. Besides the decision will also mobilize capital of greater ticket size as deep tech requires intensive research and development.

Further, the Finance Minister has proposed to extend the period of incorporation by five years to allow the benefit available to start-ups, which are incorporated before April 1, 2030. With an intent to build a strong ecosystem of the country for nurturing innovation and promoting startups, the government launched the Startup India initiative on January 16, 2016.

As per the government's eligibility conditions, entities are recognised as 'startups' under the Startup India initiative by the department. As of October 31, 2024, a total of 1,52,139 entities have been recognised as startups across more than 55 industries.

These units are eligible to avail tax and non-tax incentives under the Startup India action plan.

The government under the Startup India initiative, through its flagship schemes Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS), Startup India Seed Fund Scheme and Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups, has provided financial assistance to eligible recognised startups across sectors and through various stages of their business cycle.



Budget announcements 'bold'; to boost consumption: Assocham

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has presented a "bold" budget which will boost consumption, particularly by the middle class.

"The finance minister has placed her confidence in the middle class for leading the consumption-led growth. At the same time, there is a clear focus on unleashing the potential of the MSMEs, Startups and exports," Assocham President Sanjay Nayar said on the the Union Budget for 2025-26.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the Union Budget in the Lok Sabha on Saturday. It is a 'bold' budget to boost consumption particularly from the vibrant middle-class families, Nayar said.

He said pick up in consumption demand would, in turn, encourage investment as well in the medium term while several employment-oriented sectors such as tourism, textile, handicrafts, footwear and toys have been given an immediate impetus for take-off.

Ajay Singh, the Past President of Assocham said the Budget is "middle class-friendly" and will boost public spending setting stage for India's growth in coming years.

With the launch of a modified UDAN scheme that will introduce 120 new destinations and bring 4 crore additional passengers into the fold over the next decade, he said the aviation landscape in India is set for a transformative shift.

This initiative will not only make air travel more accessible to remote regions but will also drive economic growth and tourism, further empowering local economies, said Singh, who is also the CMD of airline SpiceJet. On tax-related announcements, Nayar said, leaving the annual income of individuals up to Rs 12 lakh a year tax -free and rationalising TDS/TCS thresholds and slabs would not only provide ease of living for common citizens but also provide an ease of doing business for small and micro-entrepreneurs.



Budget will help make India a top global tourism destination: Industry

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Industry experts on Saturday said the Budget announcements for the tourism sector will help make India a top global tourism destination and will create new opportunities for growth, jobs, and innovation.

The Union Budget 2025-26 proposes that the top 50 tourist destinations in the country will be developed in partnership with states in a "challenge mode", as tourism is a driver of employment-led growth and unveiled a series of initiatives aimed at boosting infrastructure, skill development and ease of travel. "The plan to develop the top 50 tourism destinations in partnership with state governments is a major initiative. This collaboration will not only improve infrastructure but also help spread tourism across the country, attracting more visitors and benefiting local communities," Pradeep Shetty, spokesperson, Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India - and Vice President, Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India, said.



Budget unveils major reforms for MSMEs

Aims to realise growth potential, create jobs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's eighth Budget provided a shot in the arm to micro, small and medium enterprises, as she proposed a slew of measures including enhancement of investment and turnover limits for their classification, increase in credit guarantee cover for micro and small enterprises and customised credit cards for micro entities registered on the Udyam portal.

As per the Budget announcement, any firm with an investment of up to Rs 2.5 crore and turnover under Rs 10 crore are classified as "micro".

A company with investment of up to Rs 25 crore and turnover of up to Rs 100 crore are classified as "small" and those with investment of up to Rs 125 crore and turnover under Rs 500 crore will be classified as "medium". The Finance Minister described MSMEs as the second power engine for development, as they constitute 45 per cent of the country's exports.

Budget rationalises customs tariff rates to 8

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has rationalised basic customs duty rates, slashing the number of levies to just 8, but has kept the effective duty rates on most items the same by adjusting cess to further ease of doing business.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman removed seven tariff rates in the 2025-26 Budget. This is over and above the seven tariff rates removed in 2023-24 budget.

After this, there will be only eight remaining tariff rates, including 'zero' rate to further ease of doing business.

GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said this count only considers Basic Customs Duty (BCD) with ad-valorem rates, ignoring the numerous specific and mixed rates that create hundreds of slabs.

"Additionally, part of the BCD was shifted to AIDC to reduce the official number of BCD slabs while keeping the total duty unchanged. Import duties also include AIDC, SWS (social welfare surcharge), and health cesses, meaning the actual number of slabs remains much higher than officially stated," Srivastava said.



Deloitte India Partner Harpreet Singh said the Budget proposes to merge four Customs Tariff Slabs of 25 per cent, 30 per cent, 35 per cent, and 40 per cent to 20 per cent, these generally cover products like soaps, plastics, chemicals, and footwear etc.

Similarly, 100 per cent, 125 per cent, and 150 per cent tariff rates, have been merged to 70 per cent, these typically cover laboratory chemicals and automobiles.

Deloitte India leader and partner, Indirect Tax, Mahesh Jaisingh said the effective rate has changed only in case of very few tariff items.

For the remainder, the difference in the reduced basic customs duty date has been compensated by imposing Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess (AIDC), Jaisingh said.

Govt set to hike FDI limit for insurance sector to 100 pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday proposed to raise the foreign investment limit to 100 per cent in the insurance sector as part of new-generation financial sector reforms. Presenting Budget 2025-26, the Finance Minister said the FDI limit for the insurance sector will be raised from 74 to 100 per cent. "This enhanced limit will be available for those companies which invest the entire premium in India. The current guardrails and conditionalities associated with foreign investment will be reviewed and simplified," she said. To enhance the FDI limit, the government will have to bring amendments to the Insurance Act 1938, the Life Insurance Corporation Act 1956, and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act 1999. Speaking to media after the Budget presentation, she said the draft Bill is also going to simplify certain procedure and rules. The draft Bill will be tabled in Parliament soon, she added. The Insurance Act 1938 serves as the principal Act to provide the legislative framework for insurance in India. It provides the framework for the functioning of insurance businesses and regulates the relationship between an insurer, its policyholders, shareholders and the regulator -- Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai).

The entry of more players in the sector would not only push penetration but result in greater job creation across the country.

CGST law amendment may hit realty sector: Experts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Saturday proposed a retrospective amendment to the CGST law concerning 'plant or machinery', a move that is likely to adversely impact real estate companies seeking input tax credit on the construction and leasing of commercial assets, said experts.

Against the backdrop of a Supreme Court ruling related to input tax credit, the government has mooted substituting the word 'plant or machinery' with 'plant and machinery' under a section of the Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) Act.

The government has proposed retrospective amendment in Section 17 (5), which provides an exhaustive list where input tax credit will not be applicable.

In its Budget document, the finance ministry said that "clause (d) of sub-section (5) of section 17 is being amended to substitute the words 'plant or machinery' with words 'plant and machinery'."

The amendment will be effective retrospectively from July 1, 2017, notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any judgment, decree or order of any court or any other authority, it added. The move comes in the backdrop of a Supreme Court order in the case of Safari Retreats Pvt Ltd. The apex court held that if the construction of a building is essential for supplying services like leasing/renting out, it could fall under the 'plant' category on which ITC (input tax credit) can be claimed under Section 17(5)(d) CGST)

Commenting on the proposed amendment in the CGST Act, Deloitte India Partner Harpreet Singh said, "This retrospective amendment to substitute the words "plant or machinery" with words "plant and machinery" under the input tax credit provisions of the GST laws may have a negative impact on the industry specially companies in real estate leasing business, as input tax in construction is a substantial part of the overall cost."

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL DEPUTY COLLECTOR, LA,
HYDERABAD AIRPORT METRO LIMITED,
HYDERABAD.

FORM–F
Notification by the Collector (LA), HAML
(See rule 7 (c))

File No.: C6/11/2025-LHS Dated: 01-02-2025

Where as the following notifications were issued and Gazettes were published for the Public purpose for Hyderabad Airport Metro Limited, Phase-II, from MGBS to Chandrayangutta, Corridor-VI, situated at Share-E- Hyderabad Village, Bahadurpura Mandal of Hyderabad District.

In response to the Said Notifications the following affected person (Property owners and others) have come forward to settle their claims through Negotiations. The details of the willing affected persons are as follows.

S.NO.	NOTIFICATION No. & DATE	GAZETTE No. & DATE
1.	C6 / 111 / 2024 – LHS (151 to 175)	HAML No. 39, Date : 07.12.2024

Name and address	Sketch No.	Promises No.	Extent in Sq.yds
1	2	3	4
1. Smt. Haleema Begum, W/o. Mohd Abdul Rub, R/o. 23-1- 485, Bibi Bazar x Road, Moghalpura, Hyderabad - 500002.	LHS 156	23-1-486	135.85
2. Sri. Mohd Raheem Ali Shah, S/o. Late Mohammed Ali Shah, R/o. 18-7-215/7/B/C, Aman Nagar-B, Talabkatta, Hyderabad- 500002.	LHS 156	23-1-486 to 489	7.15

It is hereby notified calling for claims and objections if any, to be filed before the District Collector, Hyderabad District / Special Deputy Collector, LA, HAML, Rasoolpura, Hyderabad within the Seven days of publication of this Notification.

Sd/- Special Deputy Collector, LA,
HAML, Rasoolpura, Hyderabad.

Place: Hyderabad
Date: 01-02-2025 D/PR Ro.No.647/LA/PP/ADVT/AGENCY/2024-25

HYDERABAD METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
4th Floor, Swarnajayanthi Commercial Complex, Ameerpet, Hyderabad.

PUBLIC NOTICE - PLANNING DEPARTMENT
File No. 006431/BP/HMDA/1381/SKP/2023

Shri Salasar Abode Infra Developers Private Limited rep by Sri. Abhishek Tibrewala previously applied for approval of Residential Building permission consisting of 1 Cellar + 1 Ground + 5 Upper floors in SY.Nos. 257 & 258 of Manchirevula Village Gandipet Mandal, Ranga Reddy District to an extent of 2405.88 Sq.Mtrs and same was approved by this office vide File no. 044357/ZOA/R1/U6/HMDA/20032021, dt. 08.02.2022.

Vide application dt. 02.03.2023 Shri Salasar Abode Infra Developers Private Limited rep by Sri. Abhishek Tibrewala applied for Approval of addition and alteration of Residential Building permission consisting of 1 Cellar + 1 Ground + 5 Upper floors in SY.Nos. 257 & 258 of Manchirevula Village, Gandipet Mandal, Ranga Reddy District to an extent of 2405.77 Sq.Mtrs.

Therefore, the Flat owners / Purchasers / Agreement Holders of said Residential Building in SY.Nos. 257 & 258 of Manchirevula Village, Gandipet Mandal, Ranga Reddy District may file their objections / suggestions in writing if any within (15) days to this office from the date of publication of this notice. If no objections / suggestions are received within the above period the request of the application for approval of Residential Building for addition and alteration of permission in SY.Nos. 257 & 258 of Manchirevula Village, Gandipet Mandal, Ranga Reddy District to an extent of 2405.77 Sq.Mtrs will be considered basing on the material papers available with this office.

Sd/- Metropolitan Commissioner,
Director, Planning-II, HMDA

R.O. No. : 968-PP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2024-25

UNION BANK OF INDIA
Mahabubnagar-II Branch
(Sol Id:03501)-Mahabubnagar Region
Opp Police Head Quarters, Mahabubnagar -509001, Ph: 9490501008
e-Mail Id: UBIN0803502@UNIONBANKOFINDIA.BANK

E- AUCTION SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6)/ Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s)/Co-obligants(s)/Mortgagoris) /Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable properties mortgaged/charged to Union Bank of India the Possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer, will be sold through e-auction on "As is where is, As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis on 31-12-2024, for recovery of outstanding dues and other expenses due to the Union Bank of India, Regional Office, Mahabubnagar from the following Borrowers and Guarantors

Name and address of the Borrower, Co-Applicant and Guarantor

Applicant: Mrs. Maryada Vinutha Devi W/o Maryada Prathap Reddy, Address: 1-1, Lakshmapur (P.N), Nadimpally, Achampet, Nagarkurnool District, Telangana State-509375, Mobile No.: 9502829908, 6281321443

Guarantor-1: G Rameshwari Devi,W/o (Late) G V Reddy, Address: Villa 61, Jayaberi Temple, Besides Jayaberi Peak, Narsingi, KV Rangareddy District., Telangana State-500075, Mobile No: 9849778599

Guarantor-2: E G James S/o E G Gershan, Address: H.No 4-190, Achampet, Nagarkurnool District, Telangana State-509375; Mobile No: 7396348545

Guarantor-3: Mrs. Kamatam Namatha W/o K Pradeep Kumar Reddy, Address: H.No 6-40, Mohammadabad Village, Gandeed, Ranga Reddy District, Telangana State -509337 Ph: 7794082939, 8897142686

Name and address of the Secured Creditor

Mahabubnagar-II Branch (Sol Id:03501) - # Opp Police Head Quarters, Mahabubnagar -509001, Telangana. ubin0803502@unionbankofindia.bank, Ph: 9490501008

Description of immovable secured assets to be Sold

SCHEDULE OF THE PROPERTY-1: All that the Open Plot No.8 in Survey Nos. 43/E and 43/U admeasuring 161.33 square yards situated at Kalwakurthy Village and Mandal, Nagarkurnool District, Telangana State, and property belongs to **E G James, S/o E G Gershan** and **Boundaries:-** East: Plot No.7, West: 30 Feet Wide Road, North: Plot No.9, South: 30 Feet Wide Road.

SCHEDULE OF THE PROPERTY-2: All that the Open Plot No.12 in Survey No.294, admeasuring 73.33 Square Yards situated at Achampet Village and Mandal, Nagarkurnool District, Telangana State, and property belongs to **E G James, S/o E G Gershan** and **Boundaries:-** East: Plot No.13, West: Plot No.11, North: 30'-0" Feet Wide Road, South: P.W.D Road.

SCHEDULE OF THE PROPERTY-3: All that the Open Plot No.242 & 243 in Survey No. 352 admeasuring 292.50 square yards situated at Jadcherla Village and Mandal, Mahabubnagar District, Telangana and property belongs to Mrs. Kamatam Mamatha, W/o K Pradeep Kumar Reddy and Boundaries:- East: Plot No.241, West: 35 Feet wide road, North: 30 Feet wide road, South: Plot No.222 and 223.

Date & Time of auction

11-03-2025 from 12:00 PM to 05:00 PM (with 10 min unlimited auto extensions)
E-auction website- **https://ebkray.in**

The secured debt for the recovery of which the immovable secured asset is to be sold:
Account No. 035030100120383 with total dues as on **23-01-2025** amounting to **Rs. 78,14,217.58/- + interest** and other charges

Reserve price for the property/Properties below which the property will not be sold:
Property-1: Rs. 20,57,000/-, Property-2: Rs. 18,70,000/-, Property-3: Rs. 37,31,503/-

EMD PAYABLE 10% of the Reserve Price Property-I : **Rs. 2,05,700/-**, Property-II : **Rs. 1,87,000/-**, Property-III : **Rs. 3,73,150/-**

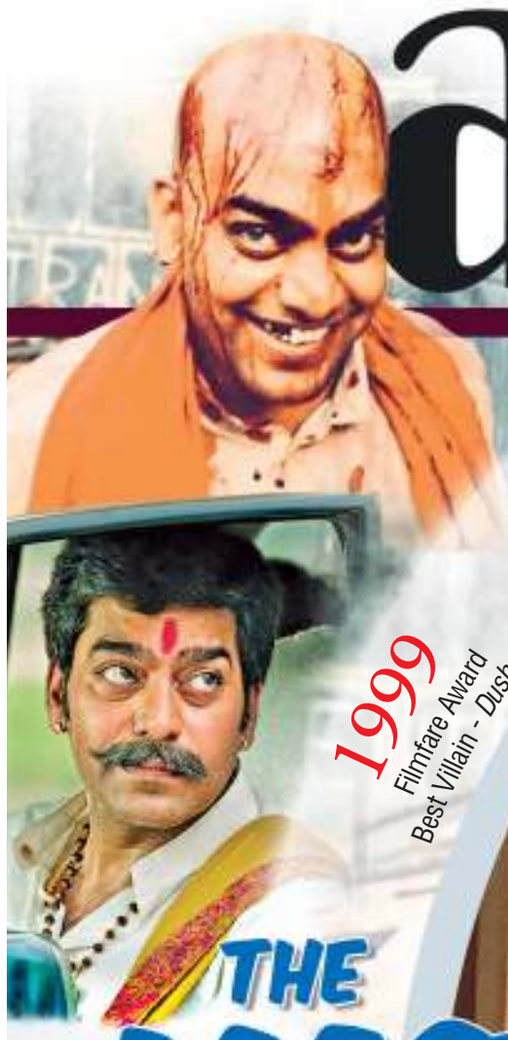
1) Registration: The Online E-Auction will be held through web portal/website https://ebkray.in on the date and time mentioned above with unlimited extension of 10 minutes. The intending bidders / purchasers required to register through https://ebkray.in by using their mobile number and valid email-id. The intending bidders / purchasers further required to upload KYC documents and Bank Details. The intending bidders / purchasers can be guided by the Buyer Manual provided in the home page of the website.
2) KYC Verification: On completion of registration, the intending bidders / purchasers are required to upload KYC documents and Bank account details. Registration and uploading formalities shall be completed well in advance.
3) EMD Payment: On completion of KYC verification, the intending bidders / purchasers may login and make the EMD payment, for EMD payment intending bidder/purchasers can be guided by the buyer manual provided therein after login as buyer. Payment can be made through payment gateway and also by way of creating challans and deposit the amount in the wallet. The payment shall be ensured well in advance before the stipulated time. If the required EMD amount is not held in the buyer Wallet, they will not be allowed to participate.
4) Bidding: The bidder has to select the property for which offer is submitted from the list mentioned in the above website and/ or bidder can directly enter Property ID.
5) Help Desk: For queries contact Number: 8291220220 & email ID support.ebkray@psballence.com ● For Registration and Login and Bidding Rules visit Buyer Manual link provided in the home page of https://ebkray.in ● **For auction related queries e-mail to ubin0803502@unionbankofindia.bank or contact 9490501008**
6) Steps Involved: Register on https://ebkray.in using mobile number and email ID. ● Upload requisite KYC Documents. ● Pay EMD amount by Payment Gateways and also by Generate challan and transfer EMD amount to bidder's EMD Wallet. ● Submission of bid shall be through Online mode on the auction date and time. ● In case of successful Bid, the balance bid amount to be paid as per the terms as mentioned hereunder.
Bidders are advised to go through the website: **https://www.unionbankofindia.co.in/auction-property/view-auction-property.aspx and www.unionbankofindia.co.in** tenders for detailed terms and conditions of Auction Sale before submitting their bids and taking part in the E-Auction sale proceedings. Successful bidder will be intimated through e-mail after the closing of the e-Bidding Process.
(9) In case of bidding the bid increment shall not be less than **Rs. 25000/-** in excess of highest bid amount or the immediate preceding bid, as the case may be with multiple increment value of **Rs. 25000/-**. **(10)** The sale will be confirmed in favour of the highest bidder and the confirmation of sale shall be subject to the confirmation by the Secured Creditor. **(11)** Bids once made shall not be cancelled or withdrawn. The failure on the part of bidder to comply with any of the terms and conditions of e-auction, mentioned herein will result in forfeiture of the amount paid by the bidder. **(12)** The successful bidder so declared by the Authorised Officer shall deposit 25% of the Sale Price (inclusive of EMD) in Cash/DD/RTGS/NEFT/Internet transfer/Cheque subject to realisation, immediately on the **sale day or not later than next working day** with the Bank in the **account bearing Number 035011980050000** and the balance **75% of the Sale Price on or before 15th day of confirmation of Sale or within such extended period as agreed** upon in writing between the secured creditor and the purchaser, in any case not exceeding 3 months. In the event of failure to tender 25% (15%+EMD) of the sale price as per the terms of Sale by the successful bidder, the EMD so deposited **by him shall be forfeited to secured creditor** and the bid accepted shall stand cancelled automatically and the defaulting bidder shall neither have claim on the property nor on any part of the sum for which it may be subsequently sold. **(13)** Legal charges for conveyance, stamp duty, registration charges and other incidental charges as applicable shall be borne by the successful bidder only. **(14)** The Authorised Officer will deliver the property on the basis of Possession taken on as is where is basis, to the purchaser free from encumbrances, known to the Secured Creditor on deposit of money by the purchaser towards the discharge of such encumbrances. **(15)** Bank, the Secured Creditor, reserves the right to accept / reject the highest bid without assigning any reason thereof or to cancel the sale. **(16)** The above immovable secured assets will be sold in **"As is where is", "As is What is" and "whatever there is"** condition. **(17)** To the best of information and knowledge of the Authorised Officer, there is no encumbrance on the property. However, the intending bidders should make their own independent enquiry regarding the encumbrances, title of the property put to auction and the claims / rights/ dues affecting the property, prior to submitting their bid. The E-Auction advertisement does not constitute and will not be deemed to constitute any commitment or any representation of the Bank to sell the property. The Authorised Officer/Secured Creditor shall not be responsible in any way for any third-party claims/rights/dues.

Place: Mahabubnagar
Date: 23-01-2025

Sd/- CHIEF MANAGER & AUTHORISED OFFICER
UNION BANK OF INDIA MAHABUBNAGAR-II
BRANCH (SOL ID: 03501)

sunday magazine
HYDERABAD, February 2, 2025
the pioneer
agenda

"Don't stop when you're tired, stop when you're done"
— David Goggins





2000
Filmfare Award
Best Villain - *Sangharsh*

1999
Filmfare Award
Best Villain - *Dushman*

THE MASTER OF VILLAINY

From *Dushman* to fanaticism of *Sangharsh*, to the courtroom intensity of *Mulk*, *Ashutosh Rana* has mastered every shade of villainy with effortless ease, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Indian cinema has always celebrated its heroes, but some actors have carved their legacy by embracing roles that challenge conventions. *Ashutosh Rana* is one such artist who has left an indelible mark with his fearless choice of characters. Known for his spine-chilling performances in films like *Dushman* and *Sangharsh, Rana* redefined villainy in the Hindi film industry. His performances were not just menacing but deeply impactful, leaving audiences captivated and disturbed in equal measure.

With a career spanning decades, *Rana* has mastered the art of bringing authenticity to every role, whether it's the calculated cruelty of a villain or the depth of a vulnerable, layered character. Films like *Raaz* and *Shorgul* showcased his ability to connect with audiences on an emotional level, proving that his craft is rooted in versatility.

Recently, *Rana* has been performing in 'Humare Ram,' where he plays the role of *Ravan*. In this portrayal, he brings a fresh perspective to the character, showing *Ravan* as not only a figure of ambition and power but one with deep emotional layers.

Rana reflected on his journey, his thoughts on storytelling and the challenges of balancing cinema and theatre. Here's what he shared.

Breathing Life into Villains

"Even with negative characters, the aim is always to go beyond the expected. Take Dushman, for instance. The character is negative, but it operates in a different emotional space than, say, my role in Sangharsh. These characters may share the label of being 'negative,' but they each carry unique baggage, emotions and complexities.

The idea is to bring something new every time. If you watch my work, my goal is that you shouldn't see traces of my past performances in the current role. You come to watch Ashutosh Rana in a new avatar, not as a repetition of something you've already seen."

Choosing the Road Less Taken

"All the characters you have seen, I have always selected roles I have not done or explored before. As an actor, you must decide whether you want to be an actor or an artist. If you are an actor, you repeat yourself. But if you are an artist, you must break yourself in each and every performance. This diversity is what defines an artist. My effort has always been not to repeat a character I've already portrayed."

The Evolution as an Actor

"I do not do any film in which I am not involved. Acting is not only my passion; it is my profession and my education. My education is acting, my profession is acting and my learning is acting. I do not take up any work in which I am not involved from within.

Whether it is a full-length central character or just two scenes in a film like Fighter, I do not play any role unless it allows me to evolve as a person and as an actor. Every character I play must push me forward."

Becoming Ravan

"Before doing this, I had written a book, Ramrajya, which became a bestseller and won awards. That process itself was a form of preparation.

Ravan is not a character bound by a single emotion; he operates on multiple levels. He has divinity, aggression, wisdom, purity and even impurity. Like the seven notes of music, To embody Ravan, I did not need to build him; I had to break myself. It is not a role where you add layers to create drama; it is one where you strip away everything until the essence of Ravan emerges. The process is not about constructing a persona; it is about deconstructing Ashutosh Rana so that Ravan can come through."

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



2014
SIIMA Award (Nominated)
Negative Role - *Tadakha*

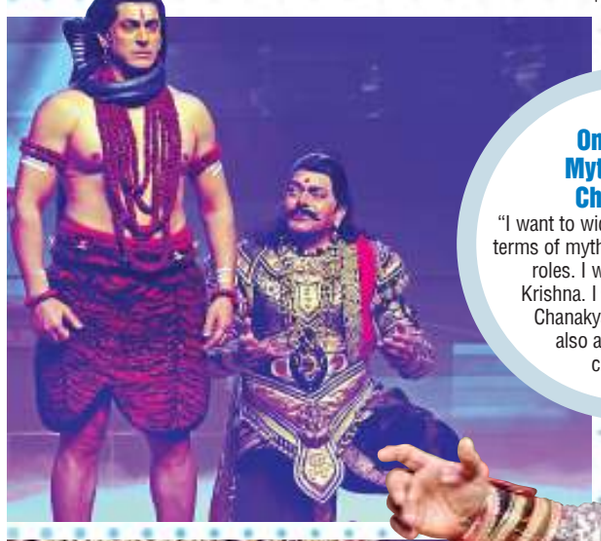
2021
Filmfare OTT Award
Supporting role - *Pagglait*

Do you feel that a role as iconic as Ravan leaves something within you?

"No, I believe everything is already within us. If we refer to the Gita, it teaches that all emotions come from within. Whether it is love, anger, or wisdom, they exist inside us, we just express them differently."

Drawing a Line Between Performance and Reality

"But it depends, do you see yourself as a player or a spectator? If you remain a spectator, the role will not consume you. But if you allow it to, it may shape your thoughts, whether it's Ravan's wisdom or dominance. That is why I have set clear boundaries. I do not take my home to the market, nor do I bring the market into my home. If you carry your emotions everywhere, they will consume you. My performance happens in the green room. The moment I wear Ravan's attire, I become Ravan. But the moment I remove my makeup, Ravan stays behind and Ashutosh walks out."

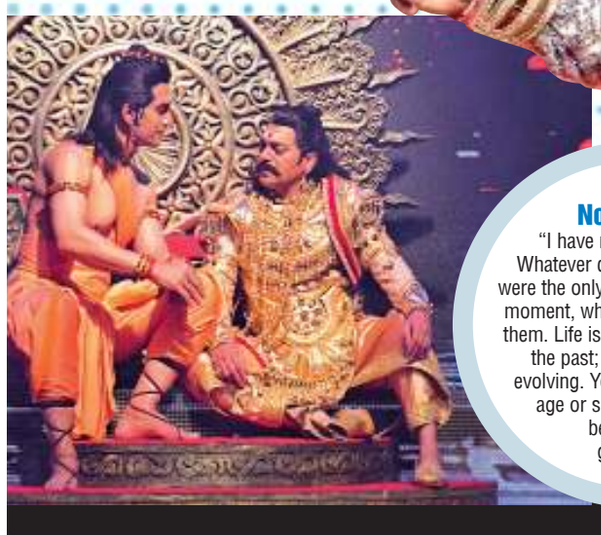


On Playing Mythological Characters

"I want to widen my spectrum in terms of mythology and historical roles. I would love to play Krishna. I would love to play Chanakya because that is also a very versatile character."







No Regrets

"I have no regrets in life. Whatever decisions you made were the only ones possible at that moment, which is why you made them. Life is not about correcting the past; it is a process of evolving. You either grow with age or simply grow old. I believe I am growing."

A New Perspective on Ravan

"My portrayal of Ravan in Humare Ram also challenges clichés. Traditionally, we view Ravan through a set image, an archetype that doesn't emotionally connect or move us. The characters I choose, whether negative or otherwise, have a wider horizon. They challenge the audience to look beyond the surface. When you engage with the story, the character naturally resonates. But my goal is never to create a character so overwhelming that you forget the story."

On Performing Across Different Mediums

"I have had the opportunity to perform in all mediums and I believe that every medium is just a means of expression. If your expression is true, it will connect with people, regardless of the medium, whether it is theatre, film, or television."

RAVAN: A HERO IN HIS OWN STORY?

Do you think Ravan could be considered the hero of his own story?

"Yes, absolutely. If you look at it from his perspective, he had his own beliefs, his own dharma. Every story has two sides. Even the gods had to take birth on Earth for a reason. That in itself shows the complexity of his character."

UNFORGETTABLE PRESENCE

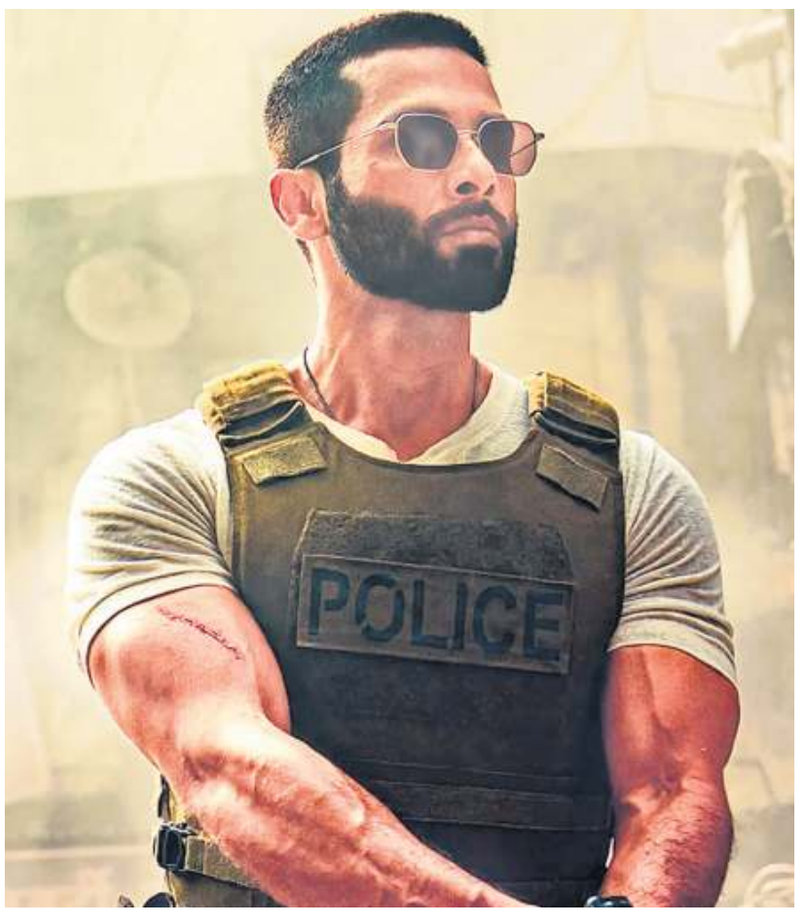
For Ashutosh Rana, acting is not about playing a character, it is about becoming, breaking and rebuilding. With every role, he steps into uncharted emotional depths, revealing not just a character but fragments of life itself. Be it a formidable villain, a layered mythological figure, or a storyteller who makes us pause and reflect, Rana's performances do not just entertain, they resonate. Long after the lights dim and the curtains fall, his stories remain, echoing in the minds of those who dare to look beyond the screen.

Recently, Rana has been performing in the theatre production 'Humare Ram,' where he plays the role of Ravan. In this portrayal, he brings a fresh perspective to the character, showing Ravan as not only a figure of ambition and power but one with deep emotional layers.

sunday pioneer
HYDERABAD | SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Deva breaks cop drama stereotypes with psychological complexity and bold performances

TEJAL SINHA
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DIRECTOR: ROSSHAN ANDRREWS

PRODUCER: SIDDHARTH ROY KAPUR

CAST: SHAHID KAPOOR, POOJA HEGDE, PAVAIL GULATI, PRAVESSH RANA, GIRISH KULKARNI AND KUBBRA SAIT

RATING: 4/5

PLOT

Deva introduces us to the troubled world of Deva Ambre (Shahid Kapoor), a hot-headed, rebellious cop driven by vengeance. The film starts with Deva riding through the streets on his bike, full of swagger, only to meet with an accident that causes him to lose his memory. As he wakes up in the hospital, his memory loss is a significant plot device, leaving him unaware of the events that led to his friend's death. This twist sets the stage for an intriguing journey of self-discovery and revenge. The backdrop of the film is filled with a corrupt system where powerful individuals exploit their positions, leaving innocent lives in shambles. Deva's friend, Roshan D'Silva (a key character), falls victim to this very system, which propels Deva on a mission to avenge his death. As the story unfolds, gangsters, politicians, and the police department become intertwined, and Deva must navigate this dangerous web to seek justice.

ANALYSIS

What sets Deva apart from typical cop dramas is its exploration of the psychological complexities of its protagonist. Rather than merely glorifying Deva as an infallible, angry hero, the film delves into the roots of his rage. The screenplay, penned by Bobby–Sanjay, Abbas Dalal, Hussain Dalal, Arshad Syed, and Sumit Arora, offers a deeper critique of the system and the flawed nature of its protagonist. Director Rosshan Andrrews avoids the traditional 'angry young man' trope, choosing instead to examine Deva's internal struggle with his emotions and his sense of justice. The film becomes not just about revenge, but a reflection on trauma, societal oppression, and the inherent flaws of the law enforcement system.

HIGHLIGHTS

One of the key strengths of Deva is its gripping narrative. While the film has its share of intense action sequences—ranging from head-smashing fight scenes to iconic pelvic thrusts that showcase Shahid Kapoor's undeniable charm—it's the psychological exploration of Deva's character that steals the show. The dialogues are sharp, and there's an abundance of memorable one-liners, especially in moments where supporting characters analyze Deva's rage. These moments offer a fresh perspective on the otherwise predictable cop genre. The film also presents a strong critique of the power structures in society, pushing the boundaries of the typical 'hero vs. villain' dynamic and showcasing the complexities of Deva's motivations. Shahid Kapoor's performance, especially in these reflective moments, stands out as one of his strongest in recent years.

DRAWBACKS

While Deva succeeds in many areas, it isn't without its flaws. The film's pacing in the first half can feel uneven, as it takes a while to establish the core plot and the psychological depth of its protagonist. The introductory sequences are a bit shaky, and there's an overarching sense that the film could have done with a tighter structure. Additionally, as is often the case in films of this genre, the roles of female characters like Pooja Hegde's Diya and Kubbra Sait's portrayal feel underutilized. The movie would have benefited from giving these characters more screen time, as they are often relegated to the background in favor of the male-centric narrative.

PERFORMANCES

Shahid Kapoor shines as Deva, capturing the essence of a man who is both a victim of his circumstances and a man of action driven by vengeance. His performance is multifaceted, showcasing both his physical prowess in fight scenes and his ability to convey emotional depth in quieter, introspective moments. Pooja Hegde, though limited in screen time, does well in her role as Deva's lover, providing an emotional anchor for the character. The supporting cast, including Girish Kulkarni as Diya's father and Parvesh Rana as Farhan, offer solid performances, though they don't have as much opportunity to shine. The film truly belongs to Shahid Kapoor, whose charisma and commitment to the role elevate the material.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

On the technical front, Deva does a commendable job with its cinematography and action sequences. The action choreography is dynamic and intense, with some well-executed stunts that keep the audience engaged. The soundtrack complements the film well, with the songs adding both energy and emotional depth to the narrative. The music also serves as a good contrast to the gritty tone of the film, especially during Shahid's charismatic dance numbers. The film's visual style, under the direction of Andrrews, effectively communicates the high stakes of the world Deva inhabits, although the first half could have used a more polished narrative flow.

VERDICT

Deva is an engaging exploration of a cop's psyche, woven together with action, emotion, and social commentary. Shahid Kapoor delivers a standout performance, elevating the film's exploration of anger and vengeance. While the film could have benefited from a more cohesive first half and stronger female character arcs, its unique take on the "angry young man" trope, combined with sharp dialogue and intense action, make it a film worth watching. If you're a fan of gritty, action-packed thrillers that question the systems in power, Deva might just be the film you're looking for.



PAINTED IN SOULFUL HUES OF INDIGO

The word 'Neel' evokes many interpretations— deep, serene hues of Indigo, the limitless sky, or the essence of eternity. For renowned textile and fashion designer Gaurang Shah, the founder of Gaurang Home, his latest collection, Neel—a thoughtful curation of bedspreads, comforters, pillow covers, table linens, hand-painted crockery, carpets and statement furniture pieces—is synonymous with possibilities. An antidote to the mass produced decor, Neel celebrates craftsmanship in its truest form, reinterpreting nature, and preserving India's rich cultural heritage.

GIFT RADIANCE WITH O3+ PROFESSIONAL MUST-HAVES



The O3+ Vitamin C Face Wash improves skin texture and reduces pigmentation while gently removing tanning and dead skin cells leaving your skin soft and bright. Enriched with Vitamin C for a clear complexion, Turmeric to revive natural glow and Licorice to soothe inflammation, it's the perfect daily companion for youthful, radiant skin. For sensitive skin the Chamomile Face Wash offers calming care while the BHA Purifying Face Wash Deeply cleansers and targets acne-prone skin. Start your Valentine's prep with these gentle yet powerful cleansers and reveal a luminous you.

WHAT'S NEW

TIMELESS STYLE, UNMATCHED COMFORT

COCO LENI launched its Coco Leni sunglasses collection called 'VIVA' which combines high-end fashion with cutting-edge materials. It is known for creating eyewear that emphasises style, durability and comfort. The collection celebrates enduring style and lasting comfort. Crafted from ultra-light, durable titanium and eco-friendly bio-acetate, these sleek frames combine modern elegance with sustainability.

Price: Rs 7500



GOODBYE UNEVEN SKIN

The Derma Co. 5% Glycolic + 2% Kojic Pigmentation Corrector Ampoule Kit, is designed to address skincare concerns like hyperpigmentation, dark spots, and uneven skin tone. Combining the powerful exfoliating properties of 5% Glycolic Acid with the brightening benefits of 2% Kojic Acid, this kit works to even out skin tone, reduce hyperpigmentation, and promote a radiant complexion. The 7 sealed ampoules in this kit ensure maximum efficacy, providing a fresh dose of active ingredients every time.

Price: INR 1230





LUXE CUSHIONS FOR EVERY SPACE

Enter the enchanting world of Gulzaar, where Kashmir's elegance and artistry grace your home. This collection tells its story through the delicate union of Jamawar, Pashmina and intricate Sozni embroidery. Crafted with reverence for tradition and a touch of modern luxury, it invites you to surround yourself with warmth and cultural richness. The collection is available in a variety of categories, including elegant cushions that add comfort and style to any space, where every detail echoes the grace of heritage and refined craftsmanship.

HOROSCOPE

ARIES

Joy and introspection will uplift you. Efforts will bring recognition. Embrace challenges, shared interests, and new experiences to overcome stress, and monotony, and foster meaningful connections.

TAURUS

Your creativity and determination will earn recognition despite delays. Overcome challenges confidently, cherish love and loyalty, and execute plans effectively for personal growth and satisfaction.

GEMINI

Overcome frustration and setbacks with resilience. Embrace job opportunities, strengthen relationships, and practice forgiveness. Let meditation and confidence guide you as others seek your wisdom.

CANCER

Overcome setbacks with willpower and seek guidance for decisions. Embrace love, joy, and life's luxuries. Avoid negativity, cherish meaningful friendships, and pursue new ventures with confidence.

LEO

Embrace unexpected connections and avoid self-pity or criticism. Mend relationships through forgiveness and quality time. Stay ethical, meditate, and trust that challenges will soon pass.

VIRGO

Stay calm under pressure and communicate openly. Avoid emotional outbursts, embrace love and support, guide others wisely, and think carefully before implementing changes for success and harmony.

LIBRA

Overcome frustrations with resilience and clear thinking. Embrace support, balance emotions, and prioritize relationships. You will take up new responsibilities enabling personal and professional growth.

SCORPIO

Stay humble and cautious to avoid mistakes. Confidence and charm will help you face challenges. Postpone changes, embrace gratitude, and overcome setbacks with resilience to achieve peace and success.

SAGITTARIUS

Embrace opportunities with creativity and determination. Avoid self-pity, and remain loyal. Financial and emotional support will boost success, while your generosity fosters love and joyful bonds.

CAPRICORN

Generosity and commitment bring family joy. Overcome setbacks with confidence, embrace guidance, refresh memories, and socialize to enrich your life. A new career opportunity ensures stability.

AQUARIUS

Stay calm under pressure and face challenges confidently. Overcome depression, focus on studies, and use reasoning to navigate business matters. Adapt to changes, maintaining confidence and resilience.

PISCES

Stay calm and avoid overestimating abilities. Communicate openly, face challenges with energy, and embrace support. Postpone project changes, avoid rash decisions, and prioritize health and well-being.

"IT'S THE FLAVOUR OF THE SEASON"

Pooja Hegde on the enduring popularity of cop thrillers

Pooja Hegde, known for her versatile roles in Indian cinema, is currently garnering attention for her latest release, the action-packed thriller Deva, which hit the big screen on January 31. In a recent interview, the actress shared her thoughts on the widespread love for cop films and discussed her fascination with people in uniform.

According to the Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan actress, the universal appeal of cop films lies in their intriguing mix of action, suspense, and the compelling personalities of the characters involved. In an interview, she explained, "I think a good film is a good film, and you can't keep a good film down. Maybe it's the flavor of the season, I don't know. Like maybe it's the mysteriousness of what they do and, you know, we're fascinated by them."

Hegde also shared a personal reflection on her long-standing intrigue with people in uniform. She said, "I've always been fascinated by people in uniform, you know, there's just something about it that is so intriguing and it's always like you see someone in uniform and you always just want to emulate them or you, there is this mystery."

In Deva, she plays a pivotal role alongside Shahid Kapoor and Pavail Gulati. Directed by Rosshan Andrrews, the film marks the director's debut in Hindi cinema. Deva follows the story of a skilled but rebellious police officer, who embarks on a major investigation. As the officer unravels layers of lies and betrayal, the suspense keeps viewers on the edge of their seats.

Reflecting on her career, the Beast fame expressed gratitude for the immense love and recognition she has received across multiple film industries. She has worked in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi cinema, and feels humbled by the acceptance she has experienced from audiences everywhere. The actress had previously shared, "I've always believed in going wherever the content is good. I've gone by my gut feeling. My journey has always been like… It's not just been that one pan Indian film." She added, "I've worked in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi, and I have been loved, appreciated, and accepted, which is a privilege I feel. It's an honour. It's truly humbling and it makes me work harder."

When asked about being referred to as the 'Queen of Crossovers,' she explained that she is at a stage in her career where the roles she chooses now will define her as an actor. She revealed that she is selective about the characters she portrays, aiming to take on roles that challenge her and allow her to showcase her versatility. "I just want to take versatile roles," she said, adding that she is working on a project where her character will be vastly different from her role in Deva.



Beyond her work in Deva, Pooja is also set to star alongside the renowned actor Suriya in the highly anticipated Tamil film Retro, directed by Karthik Subbaraj. The film is scheduled for release on May 1, 2025, and has already generated significant buzz.

Her career trajectory continues to inspire as she navigates multiple industries and delivers memorable performances. With a growing body of work that spans across different genres and languages, the actress proves her mettle in the entertainment world while staying true to her passion for diverse roles and storytelling.

STEPPING INTO NEW SHOES

Rajeev Khandelwal reflects on his role in *The Secret of the Shiledars*

Actor Rajeev Khandelwal is known for his diverse roles in Indian television and cinema, but his latest project, The Secret of the Shiledars, brings a completely new challenge to the table. In the upcoming series, Rajeev portrays a historical travel blogger—a role that required him to step out of his comfort zone, especially considering his admitted lack of experience with social media. In a latest conversation, the Table No. 21 actor shared how the role of a modern-day travel blogger, who embarks on a thrilling treasure hunt blending the past with the present, was not an easy fit for him. "It wasn't easy for me to portray a historical travel blogger because I'm so bad at social media," Rajeev confessed. "I don't even watch much content there." His admission might come as a surprise to many, but it highlights how challenging the role was for him given his limited interaction with the influencer culture.



He recalls the moments on set when his director, Aditya Sarpotdar, and the rest of the team pointed out how different his approach was compared to the typical travel bloggers they had in mind. "While shooting those scenes, I remember Adi (Aditya Sarpotdar) and others saying, 'Are sir, aapne dekha nai kya? Uss influencer ko dekho, voh kaise baat karta hai.'" (Didn't you see that influencer? Look at the way they speak). Despite this feedback, Rajeev initially approached the character with his own interpretation, not entirely sure of how to align it with the expected tone of a typical travel blogger. "The team wanted me to follow a particular tone or prototype typical of travel bloggers, which was a bit challenging because I had no real exposure to it," Khandelwal explained. But despite these challenges, he admitted that it was an exciting opportunity to learn something new and push his boundaries as an actor. "However, it was fun to step out of my comfort zone and learn something new!" he said with enthusiasm.

The Secret of the Shiledars presents him in a completely new light. The series follows the journey of his character, a historical travel blogger, as he embarks on an adventurous treasure hunt that delves into the legacy of the legendary Shiledars—stalwart defenders who played an essential role in shaping history. The show blends historical intrigue with a modern-day treasure hunt, offering viewers a unique mix of past and present. The series also stars Sai Tamhankar, Gaurav Amlani, and Ashish Vidyarthi, and is directed by the talented Aditya Sarpotdar, known for his work on Munjya. Aditya's vision for the series is clear—an intriguing historical narrative infused with adventure, making it a unique addition to the genre.

With its gripping narrative and Rajeev's commitment to his role, The Secret of the Shiledars promises to offer a fresh and engaging experience for viewers. The series, which launched on January 31, is now available for streaming on Disney+ Hotstar. The Showtime actor's portrayal of the historical travel blogger not only demonstrates his ability to adapt to new roles but also highlights his dedication to experimenting with different genres. As he continues to step out of his comfort zone and take on diverse roles, his career remains as exciting and unpredictable as ever.

CANCER IN WOMEN

Environmental factors at play

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

In an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, experts discuss the rising incidence of cancer among women, particularly lung, breast, and cervical cancers. With non-smoking women increasingly diagnosed with lung cancer, the conversation highlights the critical role of environmental factors, genetic mutations, and lifestyle choices. Experts emphasize the importance of early detection, regular screenings, and preventive measures like HPV vaccination to combat the growing health threat. They urge women to prioritize their health through informed choices, awareness, and proactive steps to reduce cancer risk



Cancer has become one of the leading health threats to women globally, with lung, breast, and cervical cancers among the most prevalent types. The rising incidence of cancer, particularly among women who are non-smokers, has brought increased attention to environmental, genetic, and lifestyle factors that may be contributing to this alarming trend. In a situation where even non-smoking women are being diagnosed with lung cancer, it has become imperative to understand the risk factors, embrace early detection, and implement preventive measures.

Cervical cancer, once the most common cancer affecting women, is largely preventable through vaccination and regular screening. According to Dr. Rajesh Kumar Jain, Director of Surgical Oncology at Action Cancer Hospital in Delhi, "Cervical cancer is the most common type of cancer that affects women, but the relief is that it is largely preventable through vaccination and routine screening. The HPV vaccine can significantly reduce the risk, and regular Pap smears help detect early changes in the cervix before they become cancerous."

Despite the availability of preventive measures, a lack of awareness remains a significant barrier. Many women in India avoid regular screenings, resulting in late-stage diagnoses when treatment is less effective.

The primary cause of cervical cancer is persistent infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV), a virus transmitted through sexual contact. If left untreated, the infection can lead to cancerous changes in the cervix.

Regular screenings and HPV vaccinations are critical to reducing the risk, yet many women remain unaware of these preventive tools.

While smoking has long been linked to lung cancer, recent trends have revealed a concerning rise in the number of non-smoking women diagnosed with lung cancer. This shift has raised questions about what is driving the disease in individuals who have never smoked.

Environmental factors, particularly air pollution, have emerged as major contributors.

Dr. Pritpal Kaur, a pulmonologist at Apollo Spectra Hospital in Karol Bagh, Delhi, emphasizes the overlooked environmental risks contributing to lung cancer in women. "Women often overlook environmental risks that contribute to lung cancer. Avoiding exposure to pollutants, ensuring proper ventilation in homes, and wearing masks in high-pollution areas can help reduce risks," she advises.

Air pollution is one of the most significant risk factors, with women exposed to high levels of carcinogenic particles through both outdoor and indoor pollutants. Household pollution, particularly from cooking with biomass fuels in poorly ventilated kitchens, is a major concern in many developing countries. Additionally, genetic mutations, such as EGFR mutations, have been found to play a role in lung cancer development in non-smokers, especially among women.

Another significant risk is secondhand smoke, which many women are exposed to in their homes or in public places. Radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas, can also accumulate in homes, increasing the risk of lung cancer, particularly in poorly ventilated spaces.

Preventive actions and early detection are critical in reducing the risk of these cancers. Regular vaccination against HPV, routine screenings like Pap smears, and avoiding exposure to harmful environmental factors can significantly lower the risk of cervical and lung cancers. Additionally, maintaining a balanced diet rich in antioxidants and avoiding exposure to toxic chemicals are essential measures for cancer prevention.

Dr. Narayana Subramaniam, Senior Consultant & Director of Head & Neck Surgery and Oncology at SPARSH Hospital, Yelahanka, Bangalore, highlights the importance of awareness and regular check-ups. "Cancer awareness is just as important as treatment. Women should prioritize their health by scheduling regular check-ups and making informed lifestyle choices," he stresses.

Women with a family history of breast cancer may also face a heightened risk of lung cancer, even without smoking. Furthermore, some studies suggest that hormonal changes during menopause could increase the susceptibility to lung cancer.

Indoor air pollution, including fumes from certain cleaning products and insecticides, may also contribute to lung cancer risk in non-smokers.

In addition to environmental and genetic factors, modern dietary habits have raised concerns. The increasing consumption of ultra-processed foods, which are laden with artificial additives, preservatives, and unhealthy fats, has been linked to the development of cancer. These foods can contribute to various health issues that ultimately increase cancer risk.

To mitigate this risk, experts recommend opting for healthier alternatives, such as minimally processed foods and nutrient-dense meals. Fresh fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, and healthy fats should form the cornerstone of a cancer-preventive diet. A shift towards a balanced, natural, and wholesome approach to eating is critical in maintaining overall health and reducing cancer risk.

As cancer continues to rise among women, it is crucial to increase awareness and take proactive steps to reduce risk. Preventive measures like vaccinations, regular screenings, and lifestyle changes can significantly lower the likelihood of developing cervical and lung cancers.

Environmental factors, such as air pollution and exposure to secondhand smoke, must also be addressed through better regulations and increased awareness.

Ultimately, women must prioritize their health, stay informed about potential risks, and adopt healthier lifestyle choices to prevent cancer and improve their overall well-being. Awareness, education, and early intervention are key in the fight against cancer.

TRENDING

MAMTA KULKARNI — PERSON



Founder of the Kinnar Akhara expelled Mahamandaleshwar Laxminarayan Tripathi from the Kinnar Akhara, for committing alleged treason and appointed Kulkarni as a Mahamandaleshwar without Rishi Das' knowledge.

COLLEGE TEACHER MARRIES STUDENT — VIDEO



A video of a college teacher marrying her student inside a classroom has gone viral. The incident took place at Nadia College, which is affiliated with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology in West Bengal.

DEVA — MOVIE



The Shahid Kapoor-starrer Deva has finally been released, which shows Kapoor in the top form as a rebellious cop caught in a gripping web of mystery and vengeance.

JAANE TU — SONG



The makers of Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna-starrer Chhava have released the song Jaane Tu, composed by AR Rahman, crooned by Arijit Singh, and written by Irshad Kamil. The song gives us a glimpse of the main lead's chemistry.

MAHA KUMBH STAPEDE — PICTURE



Several pictures and videos from the Maha Kumbh stampede had gone viral. In one of the viral pictures, two police officers are seen carrying an injured devotee towards the ambulance.

From child prodigy to playback icon

SP Sailaja's unstoppable rise



MISCHIEVOUS BEGINNINGS

I was very notorious. I was not at all this common calm and composed kid. I've been very lively and I used to do a lot of mischievous things. I enjoyed my childhood to the fullest.

SINGING: MY TRUE CALLING

I never had a Plan B. I love singing. It has always been my passion, my life. There was never any deviation. Many have asked me why I didn't continue acting, but that was never my calling. Singing is what I enjoy the most, and that's where my heart is. People have often asked me, 'Why don't you act?' But acting was never my bread and butter. Singing is my life, my passion, and my joy. There is never a second thought about it.



SINGING 10,000 SONGS FEELS 'NOTHING'

Singing about 10,000 songs feels 'nothing'. My brother sang about 40 to 50,000 songs. Where only am I standing? Lata Maa sang so many songs, Sushila amma sang so many songs. I would say I am definitely fortunate for singing so many songs. I am genuinely very happy.



LESSONS OF DEDICATION

I have learnt so many lessons from my brother. We had done more than thousands. We used to travel to the USA and on different world tours together. However, the first song from every performance, he used to always insist that we have a practice session. No matter even if we had back to back shows, he made sure that we practiced, did proper rehearsals and prayed before the show. This was very important for him. Even after singing 45,000 plus songs, he used to always get anxious singing every song as his first song. He used to be like 'I can feel butterflies in my stomach'. He had so much dedication. He always wanted to give the best to the audience because he believed that is why the audience and fans used to come. He used to say, 'They want the best for me, otherwise, they can also sit and watch me on television. I need to be able to connect with them. What I am singing is for them. I'm just not giving them a recorded version of my songs. I have to add something else.' With his performances, he always wanted to connect with the audience. Seeing his dedication, there was a lot that changed within me or else I used to just simply sing like a doll. I learned so much about how he used to attract a huge crowd. I learned so much and a lot of discipline from him. He was also very punctual when it came to his time. If the event was at 7, he would be ready by 6:55 itself. I've learnt so many things from him.

S P Sailaja, a name synonymous with melody and versatility, has carved an illustrious career in Indian music. With a career spanning over four decades, she has recorded thousands of songs in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam, working with legendary composers like Ilaiyaraaja, MS Viswanathan and Chakravarthy. Born into a musically gifted family, Sailaja is the younger sister of the iconic playback singer SP Balasubrahmanyam, whose influence helped shape her musical journey.

She made her playback debut in 1978 with the song 'Nee Kanti Chakrayyala' from the Telugu film Agni Nakshatram and quickly rose to prominence, becoming one of the most sought-after voices of the 1980s and 1990s. Her versatile voice, known for its clarity and emotive depth, allowed her to sing across genres, from classical-based melodies to peppy duets.

In addition to playback singing, she has also made a mark as a dubbing artiste, lending her voice to top actresses like Revathi and Radhika. Her acting career includes appearances in Telugu films such as Sagara Sangamam and Sankarabharanam, showcasing her talent beyond music. Throughout her illustrious career, she has been recognised for her contributions to the music industry, earning accolades and respect from peers and fans alike. Even as the music landscape evolved, she gracefully transitioned to judging reality shows and performing live concerts, continuing to inspire new generations of singers. With a legacy built on dedication, talent and a deep passion for music, Sailaja remains an enduring icon in Indian playback singing.

Beyond playback singing, she has excelled as reality show judge and live performer, embracing every facet of music with dedication. From her mischievous childhood to sharing the stage with legendary artistes, Sailaja's journey is a testament to hard work, perseverance and a deep love for the art. Even as she steps back to let new talent shine, her contributions continue to inspire generations of singers, proving that true music transcends time.

Over a candid conversation with ***The Pioneer***'s **Tejal Sinha**, she takes us through her inspirational beginnings, her bond with her brother and legendary musical maestro SP Balasubramanyam, her music, judging reality shows and more



AWKWARDNESS TO TRIUMPH - SINGING ROMANTIC SONGS WITH BROTHER

In the beginning, I felt shy singing romantic songs with my brother. I used to cover my face with paper while singing, and he would ask, 'Why are you doing that? Are you covering it for style?' But he explained to me that I was singing for a character, not for him. Over time, I understood the profession better and became more comfortable.



FINDING FINANCIAL HARMONY & BUILDING FUTURE TOGETHER

Every newly married couple faces challenges. Managing finances and balancing career and family life is something we all go through. In the film industry, there is an expectation to always present oneself in a glamorous way, which can be financially demanding. But those struggles taught me important lessons - how to save and plan for the future. My husband, on the other hand, believes in living in the present. Over time, we found a balance and built our financial stability together.

COMPOSERS AS MENTORS

Every composer has a unique style. Chakravarthy sir was my mentor in Telugu cinema, while Ilaiyaraaja sir introduced me to Tamil films. Each of them had their own way of guiding me. Ilaiyaraaja sir would push me to sing at a higher pitch to open up my voice, while MS Viswanathan sir always insisted on using a natural voice. Keeravani sir, on the other hand, prioritised comfort - if a singer struggled with a portion, he would modify it. Some composers were strict, while others were calm and patient. Working with all of them was a learning experience that shaped me as an artiste.



AUTHENTICITY IN MUSIC & EMOTIONS

Music is not just about technical perfection but about emotion, storytelling and connection. I always encourage contestants to immerse themselves in the soul of the song, to embrace its meaning and to express it with authenticity. While the industry has evolved and trends have shifted, my approach remains the same - helping singers find their unique voice and prepare them for the larger world of music beyond the show.

FEWER SONGS, MORE SATISFACTION

I had my time, my share of success. The new generation of singers deserves their opportunities. If a song comes my way, I will happily sing it. Otherwise, I'm content doing live shows, reality shows and devotional albums. I'm comfortable and satisfied with where I am. Some may question why I'm not singing as much anymore, but I believe in stepping back and allowing new talent to shine.



ANXIETY ON STAGE TO APPLAUSE BY BROTHER

We had a show in Hyderabad dedicated to RD Burman. I was extremely nervous because my brother told me, 'This isn't like any other show - you have to practice well.' His words made me even more anxious, and at one point, I told him, 'I don't think I can do this!' But on the day of the show, everything went beautifully. I performed a challenging song, and when I finished, my brother hugged me and kissed me on stage. He later told me, 'Today, you were the best.' Coming from someone who knows music inside out, that was the greatest compliment I could have ever received. That moment is etched in my heart forever. I was assigned Asha Bhosleji's songs, while Chitraji sang Lataji's songs. My brother sang Mohammed Rafi and SP Balasubrahmanyam songs, while Sudesh Bhosale sang Kishore Kumar's tracks. The entire show was magical. I was extremely nervous, but when it ended, my brother's words of appreciation meant everything to me.



MENTORING NEXT GENERATION

Having judged musical shows for over 15 seasons, I have witnessed an incredible evolution in both talent and the competition itself. Each season brings a new wave of passionate singers, eager to make their mark, and for me, it's a deeply enriching experience to guide them on their journey. Judging is not just about evaluating performances; it's about mentoring, nurturing raw talent and instilling confidence. While the stage is a platform for competition, it's also a space for growth, resilience and artistic expression. Over the years, I've seen contestants transform -some arriving unsure of themselves and leaving as confident performers with a bright future ahead.



RAPID FIRE

DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN THREE WORDS: Lazy, Bookbug and Spiritually inclined

YOUR DRIVING FORCE: My Guru, Sri Chandrashekaran Saraswati

HIGH/LOW PHASE IN YOUR LIFE: I don't feel anything as 'high' or 'low'. I enjoy every moment of my life and put any problem on the feet of my guru with the confidence that he'll handle the rest

FAVOURITE SINGER: Mohd. Rafi

YOUR INSPIRATION: Many - My brother, mother and many more