



Established 1865 sunday pioneer

BUDGET 2025

BHUBANESWAR, SUNDAY FEBRUARY 2, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

www.dailypioneer.com

PUBLISHED FROM DELHI | LUCKNOW | BHOPAL | BHUBANESWAR | RANCHI | RAIPUR | CHANDIGARH | DEHRADUN | HYDERABAD | VIJAYWADA

BUDGET 2025 FOR MIDDLE INDIA AND BIHAR



PROF. GOURAV VALLABH
GUEST REPORTER

The Union Budget 2025-26 has been presented, reaffirming Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unwavering vision for a Viksit Bharat. Over the past decade, while the goal has remained steadfast, everything else has evolved-transformative reforms spanning agriculture, MSMEs, youth empowerment, global trade, and middle-class welfare have redefined India's economic trajectory. In these turbulent global times, the budget emerges as a beacon of hope. Pragmatic yet bold, visionary yet rooted in reality, it reaffirms the government's unwavering commitment to building a future where growth is inclusive, opportunities are boundless, and India's rise on the global stage remains unstoppable.

The Indian middle class is no longer a silent observer; it is a dynamic force shaping the nation's future. Over the past decade, more than 25 crore Indians have transitioned out of poverty, fueling aspirations in fields such as sports, startups, space exploration, and technological advancements. This budget builds upon previous commitments, ensuring continued financial relief and empowerment.

Steady rise in tax exemption limits, offers greater financial relief and empowers millions of taxpayers. From ₹2.5 lakh in 2014 to ₹5 lakh in 2019, then ₹7 lakh in 2023, and now a remarkable ₹12 lakh in 2025-this consistent expansion has, for the first time, left a vast majority of the middle class completely out of the burden of paying personal income tax. Under the new tax regime, a taxpayer earning ₹12 lakh will receive a substantial benefit of ₹80,000-effectively eliminating their entire tax liability under the existing rates. This

means 100% of the tax payable as per previous slabs is now saved, allowing individuals to retain more of their hard-earned income. And this comes at a time when the share of income tax in total government receipts has actually increased from 19% to 22%. This makes it even more impressive-stronger tax compliance and a rapidly expanding formal economy have ensured that despite widespread tax relief, revenues remain robust and sustainable.

In a deeply considerate step, the government has doubled the tax deduction limit for senior citizens from ₹50,000 to ₹1 lakh, recognizing their evolving financial needs and ensuring a dignified, secure future. Yet, even as tax relief is extended to millions, fiscal prudence remains paramount. The fiscal deficit target has been firmly set at 4.4% of GDP, reinforcing the government's commitment to responsible economic management.

At the heart of India's economic fabric lies agriculture-the lifeblood of millions. This budget further strengthens the government's commitment to our farmers with transformative initiatives: enhanced credit through Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) will benefit 7.7 crore farmers, providing them with greater financial stability. A visionary 5-year mission to boost cotton productivity will enhance India's textile competitiveness, while the establishment of a dedicated Makhana Board in Bihar will offer vital institutional support to farmers engaged in niche agri-products. Additionally, a six-year roadmap for Atmanirbharta in pulses will reduce import dependence, ensuring food security and improving rural incomes.

In India, MSMEs have often remained small, not just by circumstance but sometimes by choice-to evade regulatory complexities and compliance burdens. However, this government does not see MSMEs as entities meant to stay small; it envisions them as dynamic engines of growth, capable of scaling, innovating, and driving economic transformation. In line with this vision, the budget introduces structured interventions to propel MSMEs forward so that they are not just surviving



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the Union Budget 2025-26 in the Lok Sabha

but thriving, contributing more significantly to India's industrial and economic landscape. In a significant move, the MSME classification criteria have been revised, with turnover and investment limits more than doubling-easing regulatory constraints and enabling more businesses to thrive. The credit guarantee cover has been doubled to ₹10 crore for Micro & Small Enterprises (MSEs) and ₹20 crore for start-ups, ensuring greater financial security and access to capital. To facilitate financial inclusion, 10 lakh credit cards with a ₹5 lakh limit will be issued to micro enterprises, enabling them to expand operations with ease. Additionally, a special scheme has been introduced to

provide term loans of up to ₹2 crore for 5 lakh first-time entrepreneurs, with a special focus on women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes. These transformative measures will not only fuel growth but also drive formalization and job creation across the sector. Recognizing that India's youth are its greatest asset, the budget places a sharp focus on education, research, and skill development. The expansion of IIT capacities and the introduction of the Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak scheme will strengthen higher education and promote learning in regional languages. To foster innovation from an early age, 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs will be set up in government schools over the next 5 years,

igniting young minds with hands-on scientific learning. Increased investment in medical education will help meet the growing healthcare demands of the nation, ensuring a skilled workforce in critical sectors. Furthermore, broadband connectivity for all government secondary schools and primary health centers will bridge the digital divide, ensuring equitable access to knowledge and healthcare services. A significant ₹20,000 crore allocation for private-sector-driven research, development, and innovation initiatives will accelerate India's technological advancements and global competitiveness.

The government's unwavering commitment to infrastructure development remains a defining pillar of this budget, reinforcing India's journey toward economic transformation. With a ₹1.5 lakh crore outlay for 50-year interest-free loans to states for capital expenditure-linked to incentives for structural reforms-the focus is firmly on sustainable and inclusive growth. The Asset Monetization Plan 2025-30, targeting ₹10 lakh crore in investments for new projects, will unlock value from existing assets while fueling fresh infrastructure expansion. Meanwhile, the extension of the Jal Jeevan Mission till 2028 ensures that the dream of 100% safe drinking water coverage becomes a reality for every household, improving public health and quality of life. These strategic investments will drive economic expansion, generate employment, and elevate India's global competitiveness.

To make India a more business-friendly destination, the budget introduces progressive regulatory reforms - A regulatory framework based on trust and principles to boost productivity and employment. A High-Level Committee for Regulatory Reforms to ease compliance burdens and Jan Vishwas Bill 2.0 to decriminalize over 100 provisions in various laws will enhance ease of doing business and attract both domestic and foreign investments. With an eye on global leadership, the government has launched key initiatives to integrate India into global supply chains. 'BharatTradeNet' (BTN), a

unified digital public infrastructure platform for international trade documentation and financing. A National Framework for Global Capability Centers (GCCs) to promote emerging Tier-2 cities as investment hubs. Exemptions on key imports, including 36 lifesaving drugs, LED/LCD TV components, 35 capital goods for EV battery manufacturing, and 28 capital goods for mobile phone battery manufacturing, are expected to boost domestic production and affordability. Rationalization of the customs tariff structure will take place, removing seven tariff rates to enhance trade competitiveness.

The 2025-26 budget is not merely a budget but a bold statement of vision, defining India's path towards self-dependency, global competitiveness, and shared prosperity. With a sharp accent on farmers, MSMEs, infrastructure, and ease of compliance, it creates a strong platform for long-term growth and yet keeps in consideration that anyone and everyone in India must have an opportunity to flourish. Despite budgeted consolidation, the government has delivered a citizen-first, progressive budget-one that inspires hope, induces investments, and accelerates national development.

Gone are the days when India was counted among the Fragile Five. Today, we stand on the cusp of greatness-soon to be recognized as one of the world's foremost economic powerhouses, a leader in business, resilience, and global influence. With structural reforms, strategic investments, and a future-ready approach, India is not just navigating change but shaping it. The journey toward Viksit Bharat is well underway, and this budget ensures that no Indian is left behind. From the fields of our farmers to the ambitions of our entrepreneurs, from the aspirations of our youth to the well-being of our senior citizens-this is a budget that empowers, uplifts, and inspires. The future belongs to India, and with unwavering resolve, we are building a nation that is strong, self-reliant, and unstoppable.

— The writer is a professor of finance at Xavier School of Management, XLRI

Milestone for Viksit Bharat: Majhi hails Union Budget

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Saturday welcomed the Union Budget 2025-26, calling it a "Viksit Bharat Budget" that lays a strong foundation for a developed India. He praised the budget's comprehensive approach to supporting diverse sections of the population, particularly its focus on key sectors like Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), infrastructure, healthcare and agriculture.

Through a series of posts on social media platform X, CM Majhi expressed his gratitude to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for her forward-thinking proposals, which he believes, will help uplift India's economy.

Majhi specifically highlighted the Finance Minister's



commitment to MSME development, which he thinks, will have a far-reaching impact on the nearly 7.5 crore employees working in the sector.

"The emphasis on MSMEs is a major step forward as these enterprises form the backbone of our economy. The provision will empower mil-

lions of workers across the country," he noted.

Majhi also praised the allocation of an additional Rs 10,000 crore for startups, which he sees as an important step towards fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. He described it as a major boost for young businessmen, pro-

viding them the resources needed to thrive.

On the education front, Majhi noted the allocation of Rs 500 crore for establishment of a Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence education. This, he emphasised, would enhance India's capabilities in emerg-

ing technologies and create a highly-skilled workforce to meet global demands. He also welcomed the expansion of five IITs, which would accommodate an additional 6,500 students, creating more opportunities for higher education.

In response to the tax relief measures, Majhi expressed his appreciation for the introduction of zero income tax up to Rs 12 lakh under the new tax regime.

The CM concluded his remarks by emphasising that the Union Budget 2025-26 sets the stage for India to emerge as a global leader by investing in its people, infrastructure and industries. He expressed his confidence that the ambitious goals outlined in the budget would drive India towards becoming a truly "Viksit Bharat".



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the Union Budget 2025-26, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and others look on in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi

Awe-stock Budget



PRASANNA SINGH
GUEST REPORTER

Finance Ministers frequently disavow any interest in tracking stock markets, and after the budget today, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will probably feel the same. After all, in a budget where she arguably made the biggest single announcement of all her 8 budget speeches, the response from the stock markets has been tepid, to say the least.

The move to raise the income tax limit to effectively Rs 12 lacs is a bold, huge move, that compensates for years of over taxation on the middle classes, many would argue. It will hopefully deliver the results the government wants, both politically and economically in the form of a recovery in consumption, something India has been missing sorely. In the new age of chaotic global markets stirred up by President Trump, India also seems to have decided to make a bolder bet on its domestic markets, rather than count on exports, as the focus seemed to be until not too recently. The stock market reaction, which saw categories like

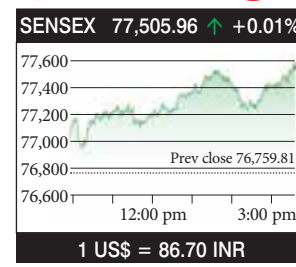
FMCG, retail and other consumer sectors like two wheelers rewarded immediately explains one side of the picture. The other side is the decline in the stock prices of what we call industrials or the large manufacturing led firms, mainly due to the absence of any similar proposals on the corporate tax front, or ease of doing business other than for startups etc. The reduction or lifting of duties on equipment and materials considered key for sunrise, strategically important sectors like EVs, clean technology and more is common sense thinking that will support further investment. It will need to be followed up by more targeted initiatives still like Performance linked incentive (PLI) schemes for components in these segments, and not just the headline products like solar cells, or Lithium Ion batteries. In agriculture, the focus on Pulses with the

announcement of a 5 year national mission is also welcome, and one hopes this will see better execution and results than the national oilseeds mission, which has simply not delivered anywhere close to what was promised. Pulses of course are not just a critical source of proteins, but also a more climate resilient crop that needs to be available more widely in a nutrition stressed country like ours. In that respect, the ridiculous inflation seen in their prices over the past 4 years is simply unacceptable, besides the rising dependence on imports.

In conclusion, one has to say that the budget has depended on just one cookie cutter announcement in terms of the change in income tax limit, placing a significant bet on its ability to kickstart a virtuous cycle of consumption and more private sector investment. On other aspects, it seems to have taken a more incremental approach to change, focusing more on improving efficiency and reducing interface with the bureaucracy, than anything else. The latter might be an underappreciated step, and if executed well, will surely be acknowledged in time as well. A 7/10 budget for me.

— The writer is Market analyst and Group Editor, SaurEnergy.com

MARKETS



Dense fog in State for another 2 days



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Dense fog, which disrupted normal life in many parts of the State in last few days, is likely to continue in several areas over the next two days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Saturday.

The Regional Office of the IMD here said that no large change in minimum temperature (night temperature) is expected to take place during next four to five days

in the State. The IMD issued a Yellow warning for dense fog for several districts for two days. Dense fog is likely to occur in districts like Mayurbhanj, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Kendrapada, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Angul, Keonjhar, Khordha, Cuttack, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati and Kandhamal.

Besides, shallow to moderate fog is likely to prevail during early morning hours at a few places

over these districts as well as in Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Deogarh and Subarnapur.

The IMD predicted dense fog at one or two places over Kendrapada, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khordha, Cuttack, Ganjam, and Gajapati districts on Sunday.

People have been advised to take necessary precautions while travelling during the early morning hours due to reduced visibility.

In city Ex-Army Colonel killed in hit-and-run mishap

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a glaring example of reckless driving, a former Army Colonel was killed after being hit by a speeding vehicle in the Niladri Vihar area of Bhubaneswar on Saturday.

As per reports, the mishap took place around 5.30 am near the Shani Temple in Niladri Vihar under the Chandrasekharpur police station of the city when the victim, identified as Rabindra Kumar Behera (64), was returning home after a morning walk. A doctor by profession, Behera was a resident of Defence Colony in Niladri Vihar.

After being hit by the speeding vehicle, Behera, a former Colonel in a Territorial Army, was critically injured and left bleeding on the road. The vehicle fled the scene after causing the accident.

Behera was rescued by locals and rushed to the Capital Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. His family members were informed and a postmortem was conducted, sources said.

A police team visited the mishap site and registered a case. Investigation was ongoing to trace the vehicle and its driver. Police said that steps have been initiated to examine the CCTV footage from the area to identify the vehicle involved in the accident.

Utkal Chamber terms Union Budget 'first class' Silicon Carbide Research Centre at IIT

Lauds support extended to MSME sector

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Utkal Chamber of Commerce & Industry Limited (UCCIL) President Dr Prabodh Mohanty lauded the Union Budget for 2025-26 presented before the Parliament by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday.

Dr Mohanty said the Union Government has treated MSME as the second growth engine followed by agriculture. So definitely, the MSME sector would get a boost from this budget. The MSME coverage or turnover limit has been expanded by 2.5 times, which is an encouraging move.



"The Union Finance Minister has announced easy access to credit for MSMEs. She has enhanced the credit limit for MSMEs without any collateral guarantee to Rs 10 crore from existing Rs 5 crore," Dr Mohanty said.

"This budget has given a positive indication of growth and it has a feel good factor. The budget has something for everybody. From the preliminary point, I can give it 60 out of 100 marks. It is a first class plus budget. It can move to super first class or excellent after analysing it in detail," he said.

The industry sector has got a lot of initiatives in this budget, he said, adding, Odisha would get benefits from the funding for infrastructure projects and tourism sector.

UCCIL Secretary Sanjeev

Mahapatra too welcomed the budget, terming it a well-balanced one and having specific focus for the MSME sector. The Income Tax slab has been revised and enhanced, which will support the middleclass and salaried employees, he said.

UCCIL Vice-President (Commerce) Murali Jammula said the Union Finance Minister has announced to double the credit support for MSMEs without any collateral guarantee. This will help the MSMEs grow.

In her Budget Speech, Sitharaman said, "Currently, over 1 crore registered MSMEs, employing 7.5 crore people and generating 36 per cent of our manufacturing, have come together to position India as a global manufacturing hub."

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A Silicon Carbide Research and Innovation Centre (SiCRIC), a joint industry laboratory between IIT Bhubaneswar and SiCSem Pvt Ltd, was inaugurated virtually by Union Electronics & Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnav during the Utkarsh Odisha Convention here.

The centre, being built in IIT Bhubaneswar at an initial cost of Rs 45 crore, is expected to indigenise the knowhow of SiC crystal growth and high volume production of 150 mm and 200 mm SiC wafers. It will provide research and innovation support to the Rs 3,000-crore SiC device fabrication and ATMP plant being



established by SiCSem 15 km from IIT Bhubaneswar in Infolvalley-2.

The foundation-stone for this plant was laid virtually by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi before the inauguration of SiCRIC.

IIT Bhubaneswar Director Prof Shreepad Karmalkar said, "The Central Government has sanctioned several semiconductor projects. The Odisha Government has

taken a decision to attract compound semiconductor fabs such as SiCSem and RIR. Building a semiconductor ecosystem requires close collaboration between industry and academia."

In Bhadrak 3 die as ambulance rams into dumper

PNS ■ BALESWAR

Three persons were killed when the ambulance in which they were returning home with a dead body of their relative, hit a dumper on National Highway-16 near Maitapur in Bhadrak district on Friday night.

Another person, who sustained critical injuries in the accident, was shifted to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack.

According to reports, Dibakar Jena (64), a resident of village Palasia in Sraddhapur GP under

Bhograi block in Baleswar district, had been admitted to SCB Hospital and died on Friday. Following his death, his wife, son and brother-in-law were returning to Palasia village with the body when the ambulance rammmed into a dumper from the rear.

The deceased were identified as Dibakar's son Sanjay, his brother-in-law Sudhanshu Jena and the driver Dillip Singh. Dibakar's wife Sabitri, who suffered critical injuries, was shifted to the Bhadrak District Headquarters Hospital and later to the SCB Hospital as her condition worsened.

Friends Club conducts 4th eye donation

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The Friends Helping Club again facilitated another eye donation programme. It was late Konchada Prabhakar Rao (77) whose corneas were collected. This was the 4th eye donation motivation by the club in 2025.

Dr Alok Sharma and Dr Sakshi Ravidra of Eye Bank, MKCG Hospital, collected the corneas of the deceased Rao at his residence at 2nd Lane Harihar Nagar Housing Board area. He passed away due to cardiac arrest.

Rao is survived by his son Srinu and daughter Mrs Valli. It may be noted he lost his wife



Laxmi in 2023.

Present during the eye donation were Dr KEP Subudhi, Jammula Suresh, Epari Badrinarayana, Konchada Ramgopal, Jammula Prabhakar Rao, Konchada Sreeram, Konchada Gopal Krishna, Konchada Ramu, and Varnasi Santosh Kumar, among other family members and relatives.

In Paradip Class-III student severely thrashed by teacher

PNS ■ PARADIP

A Class-III student of the Bethany Convent School in Paradip was allegedly severely beaten up by a teacher, Subhalaxmi Sahu, for failing to complete a mathematics assignment.

The student was taken to another classroom, where the teacher mercilessly assaulted him, leaving visible marks on his body.

The next day, the student's

father Balam Nayak attempted to meet the school principal to discuss the matter. However, the principal reportedly refused to see him and ordered him to leave the school premises. Frustrated and concerned, Nayak lodged a formal complaint at the Paradip Model police station, bringing the incident to the attention of the authorities and the media.

This incident has raised serious concerns about the

practices at the Bethany Convent School. Reports suggest that the school employs untrained and unqualified housewives as teachers, offering them low wages instead of hiring professionally-trained educators.

Additionally, the school allegedly engages in exploitative business practices, compelling parents to purchase all school supplies, including notebooks, pens, books, bags and uniforms, exclusively from the

school at inflated prices.

Parents have also accused the school management of disregarding the State Government regulations, including scheduling examinations on important cultural and religious festivals such as Ganesh Puja and Saraswati Puja. This has led to growing dissatisfaction among parents, who feel trapped in a system that prioritises profit over quality education and student welfare.

Capital High School 1982 batch fest

Charity held for blind school students

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Annual Function-2025 by 1982 batch students, Capital High School, Unit-III, Bhubaneswar, was held on January 26 here.

The officials of Bhimabhoi Government High School for the Blind, Unit-III, Bhubaneswar were invited as guests to the function. After introductory speech by Satrugna Sadangi, Dr Pradipta Mohapatra and Soumendra Kumar Priyadarshi, each 10th Standard student was given one



iPod and one Pen Drive by HoD-Speech and Hearing Department, SVNIRTAR, Jayshankar Panda.

For the hearing-aid to all

the students of Bhimabhoi Government High School for the Blind, one bluetooth sound system was also given. All 1982 batch stu-

dents, Capital High School, Unit-III, Bhubaneswar were present in the meeting promised to continue their charity in future.

DSBM workshop hails Union Budget



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A workshop on "Union Budget 2025" was organised at the D.A.V. School of Business Management (DSBM), Bhubaneswar on Saturday with an objective to empower the Commerce and Management students.

The students of DSBM had prepared working papers taking into consideration of last three years' Budget documents and Economic Surveys in various sectors such as Taxation, Education and Health Care, Digital, Infrastructure, MSME and Agriculture under the mentorship of experts. They deliberated expected announcement and possible reforms of the Union Budget 2025 in various dimensions. The students made a comparison on the announcement made by the

Union Finance Minister after the completion of live-streaming session of Union Budget 2025.

The students' community highly appreciated the announcement on financial support for Higher Education, Internship Opportunities, Skill Development initiatives and establishment of a Centre of excellence for Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education and expansion of digital infrastructure which will augment their professional career.

DSBM Principal Dr DN Mishra opined that the Union Budget 2025 is the most promising and progressive budget that would accelerate the economic growth at a faster rate. The unique feature of this budget is to take forward the economy towards achieving the vision of Viksit India 2047.

Liberal financing of MSMEs can stabilise Indian Rupee

During 1947, the value of a US dollar was Rs 3. Continuously getting devalued since then, it is Rs 87 to a dollar now. Unless MSMEs are prioritised, the Indian rupee shall go on getting devalued.

When the imports are more and exports are less in value terms, we land into trade deficit. In November 2024, we had a trade deficit of \$ 37.8 billion; and to avoid the situation, we need to devalue Indian rupee.

Neither agriculture nor large-scale industries are standalone sectors. The agri sector depends on MSMEs for the value addition of its products and the large scale for its ancillary support. That is why the MSME sector is today called the backbone of Indian economy or the growth engine of the nation.

That being true, we need to strengthen our MSMEs. The failure rate of MSMEs today is around 60% to 80%, which is alarming. Why is this so?

Sourcing finance is the biggest challenge for an MSME today.

The promoters have to satisfy various criteria to qualify for a



CAPT HARENDRA N MAHAPATRA

loan. Many amongst such criteria are unnecessary, impractical and difficult to satisfy. Different schemes floated by the government are also not being honoured by the banks in their right spirit.

CGTMSE scheme
It's a collateral free loan, where as the banks still insist on collateral security. If the borrower complains, the banks reject the proposal citing various reasons; whereas the main cause still being, "the collateral security". The government must ensure its implication in proper letter and spirit.

The loan, sometimes addressed as GST Loan, has also not taken up as per the scheme. Under the scheme, the borrower submits the required documents online and different banks offer different sanction amounts as per the borrowers' eligibility. Whereas the ground reality is different! When the borrower approaches the bank, they do not recognize this sanction and advice the borrower to apply afresh to the bank for the loan again. Depending on their normal appraisal again, either the loan will be approved or rejected!

As per the banks, the scheme is run by some private organization and in fact, we pay a processing fee and obtain the sanction online.

The government should take up the issue seriously with the banks and the online approval of the loan should be made mandatory for the banks to accept.

CIBIL
This is now the biggest issue of all MSMEs in the country. All loan applications have to pass through the CIBIL test and depending on their score allotted by CIBIL and on further scrutiny of the CIR of

the company or individual, the banks decide whether to fund or reject the loan application!

When we consider, MSMEs as the backbone of Indian economy and when financing being their main criteria of success or failure, it is now implied that CIBIL is the deciding factor for the rise and fall of our economy!

That being true, when we accord, such a huge responsibility on any organization, we need to ensure that it works with "Zero defect". Where as we find most reports of CIBIL are not updated and have various other mistakes which result in refusal of a loan to an otherwise eligible borrower!

CIBIL is a commercial organisation and working for profits! What is their basis of allotment of scores! Is it approved and if so, by whom?

We therefore suggest that such huge responsibility should only be undertaken by the government or CIBIL report should only be referred by banks as an advisory document.

Nayak Committee on working capital

This was set up by RBI in 1991 to provide working capital requirements to SSI. The essence of the Committee was to ensure that need based working capital must be provided to a SSIs, now called MSME. Whereas most banks are misinterpreting the committee report and under financing the unit! As a result, the capacity utilization reduces and gradually it becomes sick.

The Committee recommends 25% of its projected turnover should be provided as working capital, whereas, the banks allow only 20% of its last year's turnover.

Further, this should not be equally applicable for all industries. The working capital cycle of a textile industry is about 6 months compared to a hotel industry which deals mostly in cash and the working capital cycle is far less.

The government must review this and the working capital limit must be set up sector wise. Also the banks should strictly set up the limit on projected turnover.

Most MSMEs become sick due to shortage of working capital. Hence this aspect must be viewed seriously and monitored.

Renewal of working capital limit Before computerized accounting system was introduced, it was necessary for banks to consolidate the accounts of an unit at least once a year. Today, when each and every transaction is monitored by the banks online, where is the need for again calling for heap of documents, virtual and hard copies both, processing the documents for months! This keeps the company staff as well as the bank staff engaged for about 3 to 6 months.

Especially for an MSME, which is generally loaded with various compliances, must be allowed to focus on real business of sale, purchase, production etc, rather than running around for meeting different queries of regulators! At least the unnecessary compliances must be struck down.

Settled accounts to be eligible for funding after cooling period

An account is generally settled when both lenders and borrowers agree on a certain amount. This could be because of lapses by either parties.

After about one or two years of settlement, generally, the account

becomes eligible for funding again as per the RBI guidelines. Whereas the banks are averse to funding any settled account despite the age of settlement. Necessary instructions to banks may be issued in this regard.

Rehab of sick MSMEs

An industry can become sick due to various unavoidable circumstances. Hence, there must be provision for rehabilitation of the unit especially for potentially viable units. When the infrastructure is in place and the promoters are experienced, it is worth allowing a second chance to the unit. The investment and the risk shall be far less than promoting a new unit.

The SLIIC promoted by RBI must be revived and statutory powers must be provided to SLIIC for rehabilitation of potentially viable sick MSMEs.

The above suggestions, if implemented, will not only stabilise the Indian rupee, it will transform India into a developed nation soon.

(Working chairperson, EFCAI and chairman, Orissa Assembly of Small and Medium Enterprise; Mob: 9437057659; Efcail2@gmail.com)

'Drunken teachers a menace to study ambience'

NHRC directs Edu Secy to take action

RAJESH BEHERA ■ BHUBANESWAR

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recently asked the Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of India, to consider the issues of drunken teachers in schools and ensure the needful actions.

Disposing a petition of lawyer-cum-activist Radhakanta Tripathy, the apex rights watchdog passed the order on January 22.

Tripathy cited some cases from Jajpur, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Kalahandi and

other areas from Odisha where teachers come to school in inebriated condition.

The petitioner highlighted the issue of misconduct of the school teachers, including attending the schools in intoxicated condition in the country by violating the Right to Education of the children.

He quoted several incidents from different States including the incident of 05.09.2024 of a government school in Madhya Pradesh where a drunken teacher cut off a fifth-grade girl's braid for not studying properly.

He also quoted a review report of July 12, 2024 which disclosed that eleven government teachers came to

school in drunken condition regularly in tribal dominated Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh.

The petitioner also quoted such incidents from different parts of country like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, UP etc.

The drunken and intoxicated teachers not only deprive the minor students of their right to education but also create destructive environment in the schools and bring disrepute to the States and hence, are hindrance to national progress, Tripathy contended.

The physical and mental health of the teachers must be assessed by trained doctors and their service documents must be weighed ac-

ordingly. The failure and negligence of the State and Center in handling the menace of drunken teachers amounts to serious violation of human rights of the students and causing them prolonged injustice, the petitioner alleged.

He requested the NHRC for proper check up of the school teachers, surprise inspection by the higher authorities including the police/Excise officials to assess the number of drunken/intoxicated teachers in each and every district. A data-base of such drunken/intoxicated teachers must be prepared and corrective measures including legal action should be initiated, the plea added.

In Kendrapada Armed men loot valuables worth Rs 12L from house

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

Armed men looted a house on Friday night at Balisahi village of Bhuinpur panchayat under the Aul police station in Kendrapada district and decamped with valuables worth more than Rs 12 lakh.

The miscreants targeted the house of Narayan Sahoo and looted gold jewellery valued at Rs 10 lakh and a Rs 2 lakh in cash.

The miscreants broke open the main entrance to gain access to the residence, subsequently confining the family members by locking their bedroom door from outside.. Following the dacoity at

Sahoo's residence, the dacoits attempted to rob three other houses in the same village. However, their bid was foiled as some villagers congregated after hearing shouts, forcing the dacoits to flee.

On being informed by house owner Sahoo, the Aul police reached the spot and bagan a probe into the dacoity.

"We were locked by the dacoits from outside in our bedroom. Around five persons had entered our house and looted Rs 2 Lakh cash along with jewellery of over Rs 10 lakh. We contacted our neighbours over mobile phone and they rescued us," Sahoo said.

IN BRIEF

CII Odisha applauds Union Budget

Bhubaneswar: The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Odisha State Council welcomed the Union Budget 2025-26, commending its strong emphasis on reforms, economic growth, employment generation and support for startups and MSMEs.



In a live viewing session of budget 2025-26 organised by the CII, industry leaders and experts highlighted key aspects of the budget, describing it as progressive and growth-driven. Dr Pradipta Mohanty, Chairman, CII Odisha State Council, praised the budget for its inclusive approach, focusing on the welfare of all sections of society, including the poor, youth, farmers and women.

ASSOCHAM State unit praises Union Budget

Bhubaneswar: Chairman, Odisha State Development Council, ASSOCHAM Pankaj Lochan Mohanty said the Union Budget 2025 lays a strong foundation for growth, inclusion and investment. The PM Dhan Dhanya Krishi Yojana and the six-year mission for pulses would boost agricultural productivity and farmer incomes. Increased Kisan Credit Card limits would further support rural credit access.



Satyabrata new State Assembly Secretary

Bhubaneswar: The State Government has appointed Satyabrata Rout as the Secretary of the Odisha Legislative Assembly. A 2013-batch IAS officer, Rout was serving as an Additional Secretary in the Works Department.

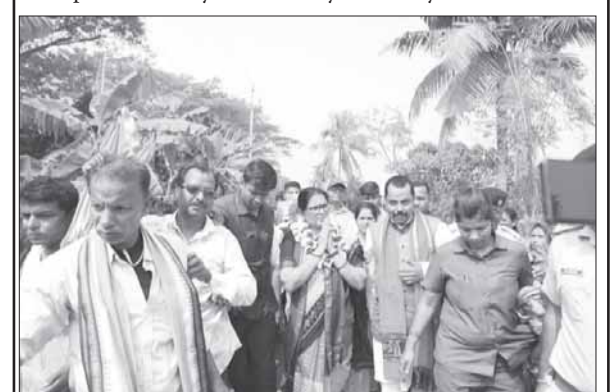


Police SI held taking bribe in Jajpur

Jajpur: The Vigilance police on Saturday caught Abhay Kumar Nayak, Sub-Inspector (SI) of the Sukinda police station in Jajpur district, while taking a bribe of Rs 5,000. Nayak had demanded the bribe from a person to help him in a family dispute matter. Nayak had earlier taken Rs 1,000. He further asked for Rs 4,000 and threatened to entangle the person in a criminal case otherwise. Left with no option, the person reported the matter to the Vigilance authorities. The entire bribe money was seized from Nayak's possession and further investigation was ongoing.

By CM lays stones for projects at Balanga

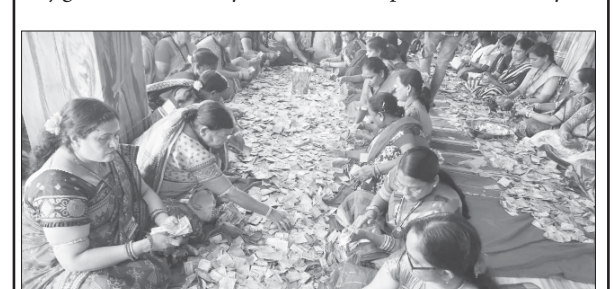
Balanga: Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida laid foundation-stones of various projects of the Balanga area under the Nimapara Assembly constituency on Friday at Khirikhia vil-



lage under the Balanga section of the Water Resources Department. She laid foundation stone of Bhargavi river embankment strengthening work. She also laid foundation stone for improvement of Gabakunda-Balanga road and Beraboi road. Nimapara Water Resources Department Executive Engineer Baikunthnath Dalai, Balanga SDO Sangram Keshari Mohanty and other officials were present in the programme.

Rs 94.5L collected from Majighariani Hundi

Rayagada: Rs 94,49,054 in cash, 93.10 grams of gold and 2.170 kg silver ornaments along with a few foreign currencies were collected from the Hundi of Rayagada's presiding goddess Maa Majighariani. Generally, the Hundi is opened twice in a year.



Union Bank employees along with volunteers of Satya Sai Organisation and Venkateswara Temple Committee were engaged in the counting of the money. Temple management committee chairman Rising Bidika and other committee members Debendranath Behera, V Basudev Rao, Radhakrishna Dalai, Palakanda Prakash and Mangaraj Huika were present.

In Kalahandi 8 inter-State dacoits arrested

Rs 3.5-cr cash, weapons seized
PNS ■ BHAWANIPATNA

The Kalahandi police have busted an inter-State gang involved in a major dacoity in the district by arresting eight persons.

The accused were involved in several robbery and dacoity incidents. Police have seized cash of Rs 3.51 crore from their possession along with several weapons and other articles. All the arrested criminals are residents of Jharkhand.

Earlier, unidentified miscreants had looted cash from a

local country made liquor unit in the Dharmagarh area on January 30. In the dead of night, approximately eight dacoits, armed with lethal weapons entered the premises and committed the crime after terrorising the staffs with firearms and sharp weapons. Later, the Dharmagarh police formed a team; and raids were conducted at different locations. The suspects attempted to flee the scene in an SUV bearing a Jharkhand registration number. The vehicle was subsequently intercepted and two robbers were nabbed.

JSpur: 4 yrs RI to man for molesting minor

PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

The Additional District and Session Judge [POCSO] Court, Jagatsinghpur, sentenced an accused hailing from Balikuda area to undergo 4 years of rigorous imprisonment and pay a fine of Rs 20,000 on the charge of molesting a minor girl child.

Reports said that accused Nabaghan Jena on April 17, 2024, had allegedly barged into the residence of the minor girl, touched her private parts when she was bathing.

The next day after being in-

formed by the victim girl, her mother lodged an FIR in Balikuda police station. Police registered a case under Sections 354, 354A of IPC and Section 8 POCSO Act against Nabaghan and forwarded him to court.

The trial of the case proceeded in POCSO court Jagatsinghpur after being registered as a special GR 37/2024. After the conclusion of the trial and depositions and shreds of evidence supplied by the prosecution, the court delivered the judgment on Wednesday.

Impregnating minor Brick kiln worker gets 10-year RI in K'pada

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

The Ad-hoc Additional Session Judge(Fast Track Special Court) of Kendrapada sentenced a youth, who is a brick kiln worker, to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment and slapped on him a fine of Rs 50,000 for sexually abusing a 15-year-old girl and rendering her an unwed mother.

According to Manoj Kumar Sahoo, public prosecutor of Additional District Judge - cum-Special Judge(POCSO

Court, the convicted person has been identified as Pradip Kissan(22) of Kanchanpur village under Kesinga police station in Sambalpur district.

Kissan was working in a brick kiln at Garajanga village under Marshaghai police station about two years back. He was staying in a rented house near the victim's house, who was 15-year-old. The accused developed relationship with the victim while he was regularly coming to the house of the victim to watch TV when the latter's parents

remained absent in house. The accused several times raped the minor girl and made her pregnant.

The victim's mother later lodged an FIR at Marshaghai police station on August 12, 2023 against Kissan. The police later registered a case and arrested the accused on August 14, 2023.

After the victim delivered a baby boy, the police got a DNA test of the child to establish its biological father.

Ad-hoc Additional Session Judge(Fast Track Special

Court) Tribikram Keshari Chinhara convicted Kissan in the case.

If the accused failed to deposit the fine amount, then he would be imprisoned for one more year, the court ruled.

Further, the court recommended to the government to provide a compensation of Rs 4 lakh to the victim for her and her child's proper rehabilitation. It has been directed to the Secretary of DLSA ,Kendrapada to take steps for sanctioning of the compensation amount to the victim.

Misconduct against BeMC Commissioner decried

By OAS Officers' Assn

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAMPUR

The Ganjam District OAS Officers Association convened a special meeting on Thursday evening here to address the alleged misconduct of Ward No 26 Corporator Dhiresha Sabat against BeMC Commissioner Bhabani Prasad Mishra.

The meeting, presided over by the association's president, was called following Commissioner Mishra's complaint that Sabat had humiliated and threatened him

in the presence of other Corporators, media persons, and BeMC staff during a corporation meeting held on January 29.

A fact-finding team from the association visited the BeMC office and interacted with the Commissioner, Mayor, corporators, and staff. After reviewing video footage and testimonies, the association concluded that the allegations made by the Commissioner were valid.

The association stated that Sabat, along with some other corporators, had been repeatedly displaying undue aggression toward OAS officers

of the Corporation. The Commissioner expressed concern that he might face physical assault in the future. Staff and officers of BeMC also reported being subjected to threats, creating an unhealthy and fearful work environment.

Following deliberations, the association strongly condemned the abusive behavior and threats made by Sabat and his associates toward the Commissioner and other OAS officers. It urged the Brahmampur SP to consider re-deploying the Personal Security Officer (PSO) for the Commissioner, which had

previously been withdrawn, due to the prevailing threat perception. The matter will also be brought to the notice of Ganjam Collector and the State OASA president, seeking immediate disciplinary action against the corporator.

"The continuous misconduct of a few corporators is unacceptable. Public representatives must uphold the dignity of governance instead of intimidating officials. We demand strict action to ensure a safe and respectful work environment for all officers," Ganjam District OAS Officers Association president Pramod Kumar Prusty said.

PPL to invest Rs 4K cr in 5 years

Signs MoU with State Govt

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Paradeep Phosphates Limited (PPL) aims to increase its fertiliser production and enhance crop yields, farmer prosperity and soil health.

It has committed to invest

Rs 4,000 crore over five years to increase its phosphatic fertiliser manufacturing capacity in both intermediate and final products. This will escalate the employment capacity to 100-150 directly and 700-1000 indirectly.

The company signed an MoU with the State Govern-

ment for this purpose on January 29. The agreement was signed between State Industries Secretary Hemant Sharma and PPL MD & CEO Suresh Krishnan. The company will also invest in renewable energy. The PPL's two manufacturing units in

Paradip, Odisha (1.8 MT) and

Zuarinagar, Goa (1.2 MT) produce a wide range of fertilisers, including DAP and various NPK grades as well as urea.

The PPL caters to over 9 million farmers through 70,000 retail points across 15 States and supplies industrial products such as gypsum, HFSA, sulphuric acid and ammonia.

Splinter group runs parallel body of Keonjhar forum

Activities condemned

RAJENDRA K SAHU ■ KEONJHAR

The Keonjhar Citizens' Forum condemned the activities of some of its members in a meeting here, who allegedly ran a parallel organisation.

Sources said that late Bhagirathi Mahanta was the founding president of Keonjhar Citizens Forum which was established in the year 2004. After late Bhagirathi, late Kiran Shankar Sahoo was elected as the president of the forum and during the period of Sahoo, the forum was very active to raise

different issues related to the development of Keonjhar including Medical College, Engineering College, Agricultural University, running of memu train from Keonjhar to Bhubaneswar, flyover in Joda and ring road in Barbil etc.

Regular meetings were held during his period and every thing was okay till Sahoo was the president. But after his death, the forum's activities got reduced and even its meetings were not held regularly.

However, after Dr Arun Kumar Sahoo and Ajaya Sahoo were elected as the president and secretary of the forum respectively about one



year back, activities of the forum again got a momentum and meetings were held regularly. However, some days back one Himanshu Kuanar who was the secretary of forum formed another forum in

same name and claimed himself to be the real president of the outfit. He did not accept Dr Sahoo as his head. The main allegation of Himanshu is that Keonjhar Citizen Forum, which was earlier a non-po-

litical organisation, was gradually showing its allegiance to BJP.

Every body present in the meeting particularly the senior members like Duryodhan Behera, Lal Mohan Patnaik,

Lal Mohan Rout, Bharat Chandra Patra, Niranjan Barik, Rajendra Kumar Sahu among others participated in the discussion and condemned how some members were trying to divide the forum for their own vested interest.

They also recalled the statement of CM Mohan Charan Majhi who had praised the role of the forum in a meeting held at Bhubaneswar some days back. Dr Arun Kumar Sahoo who had presided over the meeting also requested every one to follow the footsteps shown by Kiran Sahoo who was spending from his own pocket for the forum without depending upon outside help.



PM Modi terms Union Budget 2025-26 as "people's budget"

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday termed 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 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 ₹12 lakh will have to pay no income tax will present those entering the job sector with a big opportunity.

The prime minister praised the "historic" decision to pro-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi reacts on the Union Budget 2025-26, in New Delhi

mote the private sector in nuclear energy, saying civil nuclear energy will ensure a sig-

nificant contribution to the country's development in the future.

Stressing that the Budget has prioritised all employment generating sectors, he highlighted

two key reforms, including granting infrastructure status to shipbuilding that will boost the construction of large ships in India and accelerate the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' programme. Including hotels in 50 tourist destinations under the infrastructure category will provide a major fillip to tourism, Modi said, noting that the hospitality industry is the largest employment sector. He said the country was progressing with the mantra of 'Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi' (development as well as heritage).

He asserted that the announcements for farmers will lay the foundation for a revolution in the agricultural sector and the entire rural economy, as he highlighted that under the PM Dhan-Dhanya Krishi Yojana irrigation and infrastructure development will take place in 100 districts. Increasing the

limit of Kisan Credit Card from Rs three lakh to Rs five lakh will provide greater assistance to farmers, he added.

"The Budget has a 360-degree focus on manufacturing to strengthen entrepreneurs, MSMEs and small businesses, creating new jobs," the prime minister said, underlining that sectors like clean tech, leather, footwear and toy industries have received special support under the National Manufacturing Mission. He stressed that the goal is to ensure that Indian products shine in the global market.

Modi said the Budget places special emphasis on creating a vibrant and competitive investment environment in the states. In this context, he mentioned the announcements to double the credit guarantee for MSMEs and startups besides the introduction of a scheme to provide

loans up to ₹2 crore without guarantee for SCs, STs and first-time women entrepreneurs.

The prime minister said the announcements for gig workers, including their registration on the e-Shram portal for the first time, and enabling them to access healthcare and other social security schemes reflect the government's commitment to the dignity of labour. He said regulatory and financial reforms, such as Jan Vishwas 2.0, will strengthen the commitment to minimum government and trust-based governance.

This Budget not only addresses the current needs of the country but also helps in preparing for the future, Modi asserted, highlighting the initiatives for startups, including the Deep Tech Fund, Geospatial Mission and Nuclear Energy Mission.

Purvodaya: Budget pushes for Bihar Ministry of Education allotted ₹1.28 Lakh Crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With almost one-third electorates in the poll bound Delhi are people hailing from Bihar, the Union Budget on Saturday made several announcements for Bihar, including setting up of a Makhana Board, financial support for the western Koshi canal project, and support for enhancing the capacity of IIT Patna. Bihar, currently ruled by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), will go to polls later this year.

In her budget speech in the Lok Sabha, the finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman also announced that the Centre will set up a National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship, and Management in Bihar, besides facilitating greenfield airports in the state to meet future needs, in addition to the expansion of the capacity of the Patna airport and a brownfield airport in Bihta.

"In line with our commitment towards 'Purvodaya' (rise of eastern states), we will establish a National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management in Bihar, besides facilitating greenfield airports in the state to meet future needs, in addition to the expansion of the capacity of the Patna airport and a brownfield airport in Bihta.

"In line with our commitment towards 'Purvodaya' (rise of eastern states), we will establish a National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management in Bihar, besides facilitating greenfield airports in the state to meet future needs, in addition to the expansion of the capacity of the Patna airport and a brownfield airport in Bihta.

"In line with our commitment towards 'Purvodaya' (rise of eastern states), we will establish a National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management in Bihar, besides facilitating greenfield airports in the state to meet future needs, in addition to the expansion of the capacity of the Patna airport and a brownfield airport in Bihta.

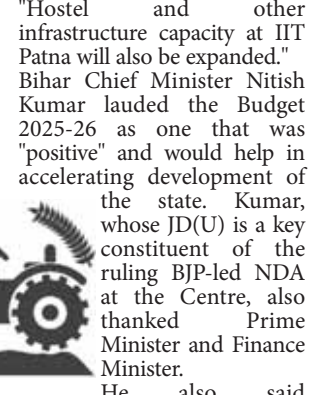


employment opportunities for the youth," she added.

A Makhana Board will be established in Bihar to improve production, processing, value addition, and marketing of the nut, Sitharaman said in her Budget speech.

The finance minister also said the Centre will provide financial support to Bihar for the western Koshi canal project, benefiting a "large number of farmers" cultivating over 50,000 hectares of land in the Mithilanchal region of the state. The Centre will create additional infrastructure in five IITs and provide support for enhancing the capacity of IIT Patna, she said.

"The total number of students in 23 IITs has increased 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," Sitharaman said, adding,



"Hostel and other infrastructure capacity at IIT Patna will also be expanded." Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar lauded the Budget 2025-26 as one that was "positive" and would help in accelerating development of the state. Kumar, whose JD(U) is a key constituent of the ruling BJP-led NDA at the Centre, also thanked Prime Minister and Finance Minister.

He also said greenfield airports proposed in the budget will go a long way in improving flight connectivity, which would give a fillip to the state's economic growth. While Union Minister for Food Processing Industry and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) chief Chirag Paswan hailed the budgetary announcements, JD (U) working president Sanjay Jha hailed the announcement of setting up of a Makhana Board in Bihar, saying it will unlock new opportunities for farmers and entrepreneurs.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Infrastructure expansion at the five new IITs to accommodate 6,500 more students, 10,000 new medical seats and an allocation of ₹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 ₹1.28 Lakh Crore in the Union Budget 2025-26, higher than the revised estimate of ₹1.14 Lakh Crore in 2024-25.

While the Higher Education department has been allocated an amount of ₹50,067 Crore, the school education department has received ₹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 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, Bhubaneswar, Dharwad, Palakkad and Tirupati.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan welcomed the announcement, saying it will lead to "leapfrogging" 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, farm-

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 Finance Minister 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 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 ₹251 Crore against a revised estimate of ₹227 Crore last year.

However, the budget granted to Indian Institute of Science, Education and Research (IISERs) has seen a drop of ₹137 Crore. Similarly, the allocated amount for World Class Institutions, has been reduced by more than 50 per cent. Last year, the amount allocated was ₹1000 Crore which has now been reduced to ₹475 Crore. The Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS), which runs residential Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas across the country, have got a reduced allocation of ₹5,305 Crore from the revised estimate of ₹5370 Crore this fiscal.

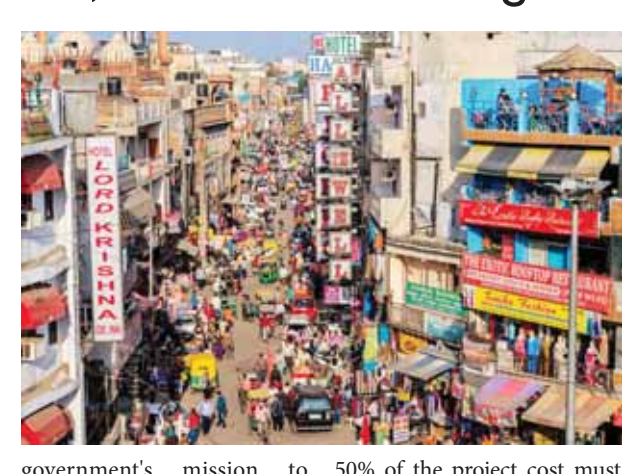
However, there has been a notable increase in the allocation for the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, which runs Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs), from ₹8,727 crore to ₹9,503 crore.

₹1 Lakh Crore, Urban Challenge Fund announced to boost city growth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant move aimed at accelerating urban development and addressing key housing and infrastructure needs, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday unveiled a series of bold proposals as part of the Union Budget 2025-26. Among the major announcements was the creation of an Urban Challenge Fund worth ₹1 lakh crore, designed to help transform India's cities into vibrant growth hubs, promote creative redevelopment, and improve urban water and sanitation systems.

Presenting the Union Budget 2025-26, Sitharaman explained that the Urban Challenge Fund will play a pivotal role in the



government's mission to enhance urban infrastructure. The fund is set to finance up to 25% of the cost of bankable urban development projects. To encourage collaboration and wider financial participation, the fund has specific stipulations: at least

50% of the project cost must come from other sources, such as bonds, bank loans, and public-private partnerships (PPPs). This model aims to leverage both private and public sector contributions to ensure the efficient and sustainable

development of urban areas. For the fiscal year 2025-26, the government has allocated Rs 10,000 Crore to the Urban Challenge Fund.

These funds will be directed towards enhancing urban infrastructure in cities across India, with a focus on developing cities as growth hubs, creative redevelopment, and improving water and sanitation facilities. Through these targeted investments, the government intends to address several critical issues facing urban centres, including inadequate infrastructure, poor sanitation, and rapid urbanisation.

This initiative is expected to play a key role in the development of sustainable, liveable cities. By focusing on improving essential services

and creating more efficient urban spaces, the Urban Challenge Fund aligns with the government's broader goals of promoting economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

The finance minister also said that under the Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH), 50,000 dwelling units have been completed in the stressed housing projects, with keys handed over to the homebuyers.

Another 40,000 units will be completed in 2025, further helping middle-class families which were paying EMIs on loans taken for apartments, while also paying rent for their current dwellings, she said.

"Building on this success, a SWAMIH Fund 2 will be

established as a blended finance facility with contributions from the government, banks and private investors.

This fund of ₹15,000 Crore will aim for expeditious completion of another one Lakh units," Sitharaman said.

The finance minister also announced that the PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) will be revamped with enhanced loans from banks, UPI-linked credit cards with ₹30,000 limit, and capacity-building support. The scheme has benefited more than 68 Lakh street vendors, giving them respite from high-interest informal sector loans, she said.

PM SVANidhi is a special micro-credit facility for providing affordable loans to street vendors.

Ministers allotted higher budget for hospitality and entertainment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Budget 2025-26 has allocated ₹1,024.30 Crore for expenses incurred by the Council of Ministers, the Cabinet Secretariat and the Prime Minister's Office, and for hospitality and entertainment of state guests. The allocated amount is slightly higher than the ₹1,021.83 Crore earmarked in 2024-25.

A total of ₹619.04 Crore has been allotted for the expenses of council of ministers in the coming fiscal. It was ₹540.95 Crore in 2024-25. This allocation is for expenditure on salaries, stipendary and other allowances and travel by Cabinet ministers, ministers of state, and former prime ministers. It also includes a provision for special extra session flight operations for VVIPs.

The National Security Council Secretariat has been allocated ₹182.75 Crore, against ₹270.08 Crore allotted in 2024-25. The provision is for meeting the administrative expenses and space programme of the National Security Council Secretariat.

A total of ₹70.12 Crore has been allotted to the office of the principal scientific advisor (₹65.72 Crore in 2024-25) for meeting the administrative expenses of the office and the National Research Foundation. The Cabinet Secretariat has been allocated ₹75.68 Crore, against ₹73.98 crore in 2024-



25, for meeting the administrative expenses of those of the Cabinet Secretariat and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has been allocated ₹70.91 Crore (₹65.30 Crore in 2024-25) for meeting administrative expenses. The Budget also allotted Rs four crore for hospitality and entertainment expenses, the same as that allocated in 2024-25.

This provision is for expenditure on government hospitality and entertainment of foreign state guests, official entertainment arranged at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on behalf of the vice-president and the prime minister, reception on national days, and investiture and ceremonies for presentation of credentials, among others.

The Budget also allocated Rs 1.80 crore for expenditure on payments of secretariat assistance to former governors, the same as that allocated in 2024-25.

Major boost to defence spending, focus on might and modernisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Keeping up the momentum of modernization and operational readiness, ₹6,81,210 Crores is allocated to defence for next fiscal. It is a hike of 9.53 per cent over current year's allocation of ₹6,21,940 Crore. The allocation for the defence budget is estimated at 1.91 per cent of the projected GDP in 2025-26.

The government has assured that funds will not be a constraint and if need be additional finance will be available to ensure to meet any challenge in the back drop of



fast evolving regional security scenario, sources said here on Saturday. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated Finance Minister Sitharaman for presenting a budget towards

fulfilling the Prime Minister's resolve of Viksit Bharat. "This budget will promote the development of youth, poor, farmers, women and all other sections of society. Recognising the contribution of the middle class, the budget has brought an unprecedented gift," he said. As regards procuring state of the art weaponry including aircraft, warships and systems, a total of ₹1,80,000 Crore crore has been allocated for capital outlay for 2025-26. The capital outlay in 2024-25 was ₹1.72

Lakh Crore. Moreover, ₹1.12 lakh crore is earmarked for 2025-26 for procurement from domestic industries. ₹1,11,544.83 Crore i.e. 75% of modernisation budget has been earmarked for procurement through domestic sources and 25% of domestic share i.e. ₹27,886.21 Crore has been provisioned for procurement through do 1,60,795 Crore i.e. 23.60% and balance ₹28,682.97 Crore i.e. 4.21% is for civil organisations under defence ministry.

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has been allotted ₹9,676.70 Crore under Capital and Revenue Head which is 26.50% more than the allocation for FY 2024-25 at Budget Estimate (BE) stage. This increase is primarily in line with the focus of the Government on capability development of ICG and equipping them with modern equipment. ICG not only strengthens coastal security, but also provides assistance to neighboring countries and commercial ships during emergency through faster response. A jump of 43% in Capital Budget i.e. from ₹3,500

₹3,500 Crore for FY 2024-25 to ₹5,000 Crore for FY 2025-26 will provide adequate financial space for acquisition of Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH), Dornier Aircraft, Fast Patrol Vessels (FPVs), Training Ships and Interceptor Boats. On revenue head, the allocation has been increased from ₹4,151.8 crore for FY 2024-25 to ₹4,676.70 Crore for FY 2025-26 which shows an increase of 12.64%. The increase will be utilised to fund the expenditure to be incurred on additional deployments of manpower and resources in addition to addressing the inflation.

₹182.75 Crore, against ₹270.08 Crore allotted in 2024-25. The provision is for meeting the administrative expenses and space programme of the National Security Council Secretariat.

A total of ₹70.12 Crore has been allotted to the office of the principal scientific advisor (₹65.72 Crore in 2024-25) for meeting the administrative expenses of the office and the National Research Foundation. The Cabinet Secretariat has been allocated ₹75.68 Crore, against ₹73.98 crore in 2024-

₹182.75 Crore, against ₹270.08 Crore allotted in 2024-25. The provision is for meeting the administrative expenses and space programme of the National Security Council Secretariat.

A total of ₹70.12 Crore has been allotted to the office of the principal scientific advisor (₹65.72 Crore in 2024-25) for meeting the administrative expenses of the office and the National Research Foundation. The Cabinet Secretariat has been allocated ₹75.68 Crore, against ₹73.98 crore in 2024-



Budget promotes rural industrialisation and export growth



DR VIJAY G KALANTRI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Budget 2025-26 can be described as well-balanced and progressive, emphasising growth and development by boosting consumption, rationalising taxes, introducing compliance reforms, and promoting the 'Make in India' initiative. It caters to all sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing,

and services by introducing 8 National Missions across these sectors, while also fostering research and innovation. One of the key highlights of the budget is the enhanced access to credit for MSMEs and startups, along with technical and technological upgradation support. The increase in investment and turnover limits for MSME classification will broaden the scope of MSME schemes, improving access to credit and bringing a wider range of businesses under the micro and small enterprise categories, thereby strengthening domestic manufacturing. To further support exporter MSMEs, the credit guarantee cover for term loans has been increased to INR 20 crores.

Additionally, a customised credit card with a limit of INR 5 lakh has been introduced for micro-enterprises registered under the Udyam Portal. Significant enhancements have also been made to credit cover for startups, with a moderated guarantee fee for 27 priority sectors, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. The budget places a strong emphasis on rural industrialisation, particularly through the expansion of logistics via India Post. This initiative is expected to drive industrial development in rural areas, helping shift the labor force from agriculture to more productive manufacturing and service sectors. Additionally, the introduction of special national missions, such as



'Aatmanirbharta in Pulses,' high-yielding seeds, and cotton, aims to improve crop productivity through investments in infrastructure, research and development, and export promotion. Several provisions have also been made to promote skill development and employment generation. A key focus has been placed on labor-intensive manufacturing sectors, including leather, footwear, toys, and food processing. The announcement of a National Mission for Manufacturing aims to drive growth through five key focus areas such as ease of doing business, workforce development, MSME growth, technology advancement and

quality production. A National Mission for Exports has been introduced to strengthen India's export ecosystem. The mission focuses on improving export credit, supporting MSMEs in overcoming non-tariff barriers, and simplifying tariff structures. The budget also rationalises import duties and taxes across several industries, including electronics, IT, marine products, textiles, leather, and minerals. These measures are expected to significantly reduce operational costs for domestic manufacturers, thereby enhancing their global competitiveness. Another major reform in the budget is the enhancement of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) limit in the insurance sector to 100%, specifically

for companies that reinvest 100% of their premium earnings. This move is expected to attract significant investments in the insurance sector while also stimulating domestic economic growth. Additionally, the budget outlines targeted investment initiatives to spur growth, including the establishment of fund of funds that focus on deep tech, artificial intelligence (AI), innovation, and electronics. A renewed thrust on infrastructure development has also been introduced, particularly through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). The budget encourages state governments to adopt similar initiatives, ensuring widespread infrastructural expansion and economic advancement.

The budget seems to have delivered on industry expectations. There has been a long-standing demand to reduce compliance costs and rationalise taxation, which has been fulfilled to a large extent. However, the execution of these policy reforms holds equal importance, and it must be ensured that these initiatives are implemented unconditionally and in the true spirit of their announcements. The tax relief provided to the middle class is one of the significant features of the budget, as it is expected to boost consumption and stimulate economic growth in the short to medium term. (The writer is Director, World Trade Centers Association (WTCA), NY)

Budget full of rhetoric, old announcements repackaged: Tejashwi



PNS ■ PATNA

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Saturday charged the NDA government at the Centre with indulging in "rhetoric" in the Union Budget, and presenting announcements made in the past with "repackaging". The former Bihar deputy CM, who addressed a press conference in Vaishali district, also slammed Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, whose JD(U) is a crucial ally of the BJP, for his inability to secure a fair deal for the state. "Just look at TDP supremo Chandra Babu Naidu, who has secured benefits to the tune of Rs 1 lakh crore for Andhra Pradesh. The Budget presented today is silent on any such help for Bihar. We also do not know where the Rs 59,000 crore promised last year has been spent," said Yadav, who is now the leader of the opposition. Training his guns at Kumar, who dumped RJD last year to realign with BJP, Yadav said, "We could not expect the CM to secure a better deal, since he no longer seems to be in his senses and has lost the ability to discern where not to clap his hands." The allusion was to an incident of January 30, when at the government function organised on the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Kumar, who is in his 70s, had started clapping. The inadvertence has provided fresh ammunition to detractors of the JD(U) supremo who have been

claiming that the longest-serving CM had grown mentally unstable and was, therefore, unfit for the top job. Yadav alleged, "The CM seems to have already abandoned the demand for special status, on which Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman did not speak a word while presenting the budget. There is not even a special economic package for the poor state which is being cheated by Modi government as all good things are being done for the prime minister's home state Gujarat." When his response was sought on announcements in the budget for Bihar, like setting up of greenfield airports, the young leader dismissed these as "rhetoric (jumlebaazi)" and asked, "Where is the budgetary allocation?" "These are all old things with some repackaging. Why is the Centre silent on projects like a new airport at Bihta, on the outskirts of Patna? When we were in power, we had acquired land for the purpose and handed it over to the Airports Authority of India," said the RJD leader. Yadav, whose father Lalu Prasad, the RJD president, is a former railway minister, also said that "the Modi government has done away with a separate Rail budget, which the people used to wait for as announcements used to be made on passenger fares in trains. The budget is silent on that".

Promising Budget accelerating the path for Viksit Bharat



DINESH JOSHI ■ NEW DELHI

The Budget 2025 delivered by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is a well-balanced and inclusive budget, ensuring economic growth, ease of doing business, and empowerment across multiple sectors. A major highlight is the significant relief given to the middle class through direct

tax exemptions. By exempting income tax up to Rs 12 lakh, the government has provided much-needed liquidity, allowing people to spend and save simultaneously. With an estimated Rs 1 lakh crore flowing into the hands of the middle class, consumption is expected to rise, benefiting key industries like FMCG, automobiles, and banking. This boost in demand will create a ripple effect across the economy, strengthening domestic growth. Additionally, this influx of liquidity is expected to drive positive sentiment in the stock market, leading to a rally in key sectors such as infrastructure, consumer goods, banking, and

manufacturing. However, despite these positive measures, the stock market remained volatile on Budget day, with the Sensex closing nearly flat at 77,505.96 (+5.39 points) and the Nifty 50 dipping slightly to 23,482.15 (-26.25 points). While the market initially reacted with enthusiasm, it later stabilised as investors assessed the long-term impact. Sectors like FMCG, real estate, media, and automobiles saw gains, while PSU banks, metals, pharma, and oil & gas declined. Beyond tax relief, the budget emphasises manufacturing, infrastructure, and ease of doing business. Measures such as compliance relaxations and simplified

KYC norms will make it easier for businesses to operate, attract investments, and scale efficiently. A stable and growth-oriented framework is essential for long-term sustainability, and this budget effectively addresses it. The National Manufacturing and Export Promotion Missions are another significant step. As global markets focus on self-reliance and resilient supply chains, these initiatives will boost India's competitiveness in global trade. Reforms aimed at industrial growth and export enhancement will strengthen the 'Make in India' movement, positioning India as a key player in the international market.

The budget also maintains an inclusive approach, addressing diverse stakeholders. It caters to startups, women entrepreneurs, farmers, MSMEs, and the common citizen. Key measures include support for small businesses, skill development programs for youth, and incentives for women-led enterprises, ensuring economic growth benefits all sections of society. Infrastructure development has received a significant push, with investments in roads, highways, and smart cities expected to improve connectivity and create employment opportunities. The focus on renewable energy and sustainability highlights the government's

long-term vision for green growth, aligning with India's commitment to a sustainable future. Overall, Budget 2025 strengthens economic foundations while prioritising inclusive growth. It lays a strong path for Viksit Bharat, ensuring industries, businesses, and individuals benefit from progressive reforms. With a forward-looking approach, this budget is set to drive economic momentum, reinforce investor confidence, and position India as a global economic powerhouse in the coming years. (The writer is Chairman & MD, SatyaGiri Group, and Co-Chair of FICCI Maharashtra State Council)

Himanta hails new urea plant in Namrup as 'game changer' for NE

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday hailed the announcement of a urea plant in the state in the Union Budget for 2025-26, stating that it would be a "game changer" for the entire Northeast. He said it was a long-standing demand of the people of the state. "What a historic day for Assam! #UnionBudget2025 has announced a 12.7 lakh MT urea plant in Namrup, a long standing demand of the people of Assam," he said in a post on X. It will not only help the state achieve self-sufficiency in fertiliser availability but also better channelise the natural gas resources, he added. "After the semiconductor plant in Jagiroad, this urea facility will be a game changer for the entire North East. On behalf of the people of Assam my heartfelt gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi Ji and



Hon'ble Finance Minister Smt @nsitharaman Ji," Sarma said. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her budget speech said that for self-sufficiency, the government had reopened three dormant urea plants in the eastern region. "To further augment urea supply, a plant with annual capacity of 12.7 lakh metric tons will be set up at Namrup, Assam," she added. PSU Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corp Ltd (BVFCL) is the only urea-making facility in the entire eastern



Budget more about political interests than people: Mayawati

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Saturday said that the BJP government's Budget, like that of the Congress previously, seems to be more about political interests and less about the people and the country. In a post on X in Hindi, Mayawati said, "Due to the tremendous impact of inflation, poverty, and unemployment in the country, along with lack of basic amenities like roads, water, and education, people's lives in India which has a huge

population of about 140 crore are quite troubled, which needed to be resolved through the Union Budget." But the Budget presented by the BJP government, like those by the Congress previously, seems to be more about political interests and less about the people and the country, she said. "If this is not the case, why are the lives of people continuously troubled, miserable and unhappy under this government? The dream of a 'Viksit Bharat' should also be in the interest of the Bahujans," she said.

Telangana Minister Surekha calls Union Budget disappointing



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Minister Konda Surekha on Saturday said she was completely "disappointed" with the union budget. "I have no words to express the sadness of not receiving enough allocation to the younger state of the country, Telangana, from India's Finance Minister, @nsitharaman," she said, in a post on X. Surekha further claimed that the requests from southern states were "overlooked," and "Telangana's promises were 'harshly ignored'".

Jharkhand as State, its people neglected completely in Union Budget, alleges JMM

PNS ■ RANCHI

The ruling JMM on Saturday claimed that the Union Budget 2025-26 has nothing for Jharkhand as the state and its people were "neglected completely" by the Centre. Earlier in the day, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the budget for the 2025-26 fiscal in Parliament. "Nothing has been proposed for Jharkhand in the budget. The neighbouring Bihar has been given many projects but Jharkhand and its people have been neglected completely," JMM spokesperson Manoj Pandey said. Bihar remained in focus in the presentation of the Union Budget for the 2025-26 fiscal with Sitharaman making several announcements for the state, including setting up of a makhana board, financial assistance for western Kosi canal and support for enhancing the capacity of IIT Patna. Jharkhand's minerals



contribute significantly to the country's economy but a "step-motherly treatment has been meted out" to the state, the JMM leader alleged. "We had expected that the Centre would announce payment of its due of Rs 1.36 lakh crore to the state. But, there is no mention of it in the budget. We want to ask why such an ignorant approach was taken towards Jharkhand," he said. The state BJP, however, claimed that the union budget has taken care of all sections of society, particularly women, youth, students, entrepreneurs and middle-class families. "The development-oriented budget further boosts Prime

Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas' and it will help achieve the dream of 'Vikshit Bharat' by 2047," Jharkhand BJP president Babul Marandi said. He said that salaried class and small entrepreneurs were given a major relief in the budget by increasing the income tax exemption limit to Rs 12 lakh. "This is not a small thing but a big jump," he said. Asked about what Jharkhand got in the budget, he said that the benefit of infrastructure development would help the state. "Many investors want to come to Jharkhand. It is the Jharkhand government's responsibility to create an environment for them," he said. BJP leader Champai Soren said that the "holistic, all-encompassing and inclusive" budget is the blueprint of the vision of the Narendra Modi government at the Centre towards building a self-reliant India.

Punjab once again ignored in Union Budget: CM Mann

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann expressed disappointment over the Union Budget on Saturday, claiming that the border state has been "ignored" once again and not given anything. Describing it as an "election budget", the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader said it only made announcements for Bihar. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented her eighth budget in Parliament on Saturday. Reacting to the budget, Mann alleged that Punjab has once again been "ignored" in the budget presented by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre. "The Union government has not given anything to the farmers and youngsters of Punjab," he said in a post on X. The chief minister criticised the Centre for not announcing a minimum support price (MSP) for crops or any



package for the state's industry. "The Centre has neither given an MSP to farmers nor has the state been given any package for any industry. Punjab has not been given anything that can improve its economy and future," he said. "This budget is only an election budget, in which there are announcements only for the state of Bihar," Mann added. Once again, the Centre has meted out step-motherly treatment to Punjab and Punjabis in the budget, he said, adding, "But we will make Punjab stand on its own feet."

Budget announcement on MSMEs will greatly benefit Manipur: CM N Biren

PNS ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Saturday said the enhancement of investment and turnover limits for the classification of MSMEs proposed in the Union Budget will be highly beneficial for the state. He also hailed the zero tax on income up to Rs 12 lakh per annum as a significant step towards alleviating the "financial burdens of hardworking families". "The New Classification Criteria for MSMEs will be greatly beneficial to Manipur which has been a major contributor to the MSME business registration among the North East states," the CM said in a post on X. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that to help MSMEs achieve higher efficiencies of scale, technological upgradation and better access to capital, the investment and turnover limits for classification will



be enhanced to "2.5 and 2 times, respectively". "I thank Hon'ble PM @narendramodi and Finance Minister, Smt @nsitharaman ji for the expansions in the investment limit & turn over limits which will further boost entrepreneurship, local businesses, trade and commerce," Singh said. He said the announcement made on income tax was a testament to the government's commitment to the aspirations and welfare of the middle class. "The announcement to exempt income tax on earnings up to Rs 12 lakh is a

significant step toward alleviating the financial burden on hardworking families. This initiative is part of a broader income tax bill, which is scheduled to be introduced next week. The reform is a testament to the government's commitment to the aspirations and welfare of the middle class, reflecting a step towards a more inclusive and prosperous future," he said. Singh also lauded the enhancement of regional connectivity under the UDAN scheme. "Manipur and the rest of the North East region have already seen a transformative change in air connectivity under the UDAN scheme which has boosted travel, tourism, and trade & commerce, contributing to the growth of the entire region. With additional airports across the country, the middle class will realise their aspirations for faster and more affordable travel," he said.

Team India focuses on form of Surya, Samson

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The series already in their pocket, India would look to address their nagging batting woes against an England team gunning for revenge after feeling hard-done by a debatable concussion substitute when the two teams clash in the fifth and final T20 International here on Sunday. The hosts will hope that struggling skipper Suryakumar Yadav and Sanju Samson are back among runs and adding spice to the otherwise inconsequential match is the resentment that England is carrying after the 15-run loss in the fourth game. India's 15-run win in the fourth T20 at Pune on Friday gave the hosts an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match affair, but left England exasperated over the choice of the concussion replacement who played an impactful role. Fast bowler Harshit Rana replaced all-rounder Shivam Dube after the latter copped a blow to his head while batting and the former returned 3/33 in his maiden T20I, derailed England's progress in the chase. The choice of replacement was approved by ICC match referee Javagal Srinath at half-time leaving the visitors complaining as India had a more like-for-like replacement in Ramandeep Singh available in the dugout.



England captain Jos Buttler remembered thinking "who's Harshit on for" as he strode out to bat but his team was also guilty of succumbing to pressure and squandering a perfect start on a flat deck at the MCA Stadium to concede the series. England were 65/1 in the seventh over chasing 182 and lost wickets in a heap once again to Indian spinners Varun Chakravathy (2/28) and Ravi Bishnoi (3/28), with the former stretching his tally in the series to 12.

However, despite the series in bag, India's concerns remain the same - Samson and Suryakumar's lean patch with the bat. Samson, who missed the Vijay Hazare Trophy for Kerala, came into the series evidently lacking match practice and has struggled against the express pace of Mark Wood and Jofra Archer who have troubled the Indian opener consistently. With only 35 runs in four matches so far, Samson's returns have been

"Sky" will be keen to shrug off the string of poor performances when he returns to his home ground Wankhede Stadium here, a venue which has played an indomitable role in building his reputation as a T20 specialist. Rinku Singh's 30 on Friday settled a lot of concerns around the swashbuckling left-hander, whose form and fitness were both in question going into the fourth match. Hardik Pandya and Dube's fifties powered India's charge in the fourth T20I with the all-rounders filling in for the batters' failure but another batting-friendly wicket here will give the Indians a chance to make amends one last time in the shortest format. Spoilt for choices in the bowling department, India could rest and play both their front-line pacers Arshdeep Singh and Mohammed Shami through the course of this series. But Sunday's contest could be another opportunity for the team management to test the readiness of Shami who is back after a lengthy injury-forced lay-off. For England, it has been a series of more misses than hits but they have been outplayed generally across departments. Harry Brook finally got a big knock on the board on Friday but his struggles persist against spin and particularly Chakravathy, while young guns like Jacob Bethell and Jamie Smith have had their struggles on their maiden Indian sojourn.



Gukesh draws with Wei Yi, Praggnanandhaa outwits Caruana in Tata Masters

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE

World champion D Gukesh maintained his half-point lead with an easy draw against Wei Yi of China, while R Praggnanandhaa outwitted top seed Fabiano Caruana of the United States to come within striking distance of the leader after the 11th round of Tata Steel Masters here. Playing the white side of an Italian game, Gukesh went for a relatively new plan by pushing his central pawn in the opening that just helped Wei Yi maintain parity after the trade of queens. The Indian was up a pawn when the endgame surfaced but the position was level and the peace was signed in 30 moves. The draw helped Gukesh jump to eight points out of a possible 11 in the first major tournament of the year, while Praggnanandhaa stunned Caruana with black pieces to move to 7.5 points. Sharing the second spot is Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan, who played out a draw with German Vincent Keymer. It was a Queen's gambit declined by Praggnanandhaa and Caruana went for one of the complex variations to show his intent after getting some mediocre results in the tournament thus far. Praggnanandhaa has seldom had trouble fighting complicated positions with loads of tactical possibilities, and Friday was no different as he went for an attack quickly against the white queen after the players had castled on opposite wings. As it happened, Caruana's 32nd move was a huge blunder giving Praggnanandhaa another victory five moves later. On a good day for other Indians too, P Harikrishna accounted for Alexey Sarana of Serbia while Leon Luke Mendonca put it across Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia. Arjun Erigaisi, meanwhile, played out another draw with Jorden van Foreest of Holland. In the penultimate round now, Gukesh is set to meet Foreest with black pieces and chess buffs expect some fireworks as the world champion will be keen to push ahead of the field. Praggnanandhaa will play his last white game in the tournament against Sarana while Nodirbek has to play another black against Erigaisi, who is yet to win a game having lost four and drawn seven. In the Challengers' section, Divya Deshmukh got a much-needed victory over Irina Bulmaga of Romania but R Vaishali found the going tough and lost to Aydin Suleymanli of Azerbaijan. Divya, on three points, still has a lot of catching up to do while Vaishali remained on five points. Meanwhile, Dutchman Erwin L'Ami regained the sole lead in this section after a finely-crafted victory over Chinese teenager Mioyi Lu. L'Ami, on eight points, benefitted as the overnight sole leader Nguyen Thai Dai Van was outdone by Svane Frederik of Germany. **Results Round 11:** Masters: Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 4.5) drew with Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 3.5); D Gukesh (Ind, 8) drew with Wei Yi (Chn, 6); Fabiano Caruana (USA, 5.5) lost to R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 7.5); Vincent Keymer (Ger, 4.5) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 7.5); Anish Giri (Ned, 6) beat Max Warmerdam (Ned, 3.5); Alexey Sarana (Srb, 5) lost to P Harikrishna (Ind, 5.5); Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 6) lost to Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 4).



Either Dube has become fast or Rana a batter: Jos Buttler

PTI ■ PUNE

England skipper Jos Buttler didn't hide his displeasure at how India used specialist fast bowler Harshit Rana as a like-for-like 'Concussion Sub' for all-rounder Shivam Dube, who bowls military medium, in the fourth T20I here which the hosts won by 15 runs to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series. Dube, who scored 53 off 34 balls on Friday, was hit on the helmet by a Jamie Overton delivery in the second-last ball of India's innings, leading to the concussion protocol being followed. Although Dube faced the last ball, but when India came out in defence of 181, Rana walked out to field instead of him. The concussion protocol allows a like-for-like replacement and Rana was a tearaway quick replacing medium pacer Dube, who the Chennai Super Kings use as an Impact Player in the IPL. Rana took 3/33, each wicket at a critical juncture, as India won by 15 runs. But the move by the Indian team management (read head coach Gautam Gambhir) left the England team high and dry. Buttler claimed that his team wasn't consulted and they would seek clarity from match referee Javagal Srinath about what exactly constituted a like-for-like replacement in case of concussion. "Yeah, I don't think it was like-for-like replacement. We don't agree with that. I think either Shivam Dube put on 25 miles per hour with the ball or Harshit has really improved with his batting," Buttler said in as many words, and the sarcasm wasn't lost on anyone. As for Rana's credentials as an all-rounder, he has a hundred and a couple of fifties at the first-class level, and averages 34. Buttler, however, admitted that even with Rana as a concussion substitute, England should have still gone on to win the match. "I still think we should have gone on to win the match, but yeah, we disagree with the decision. We had our chances to win the game, which we could have still taken, but I'd like to just get a bit of clarity around that." Asked if rival captains are kept in the loop about possible replacement, the stylish batter replied in the negative. "Well, there's no consultation. I think that's something, actually, as I came out to bat. I

was thinking, 'who's Harshit on for?' And they said he's the concussion replacement, which I obviously disagreed with; it's not a like-for-like replacement," added Buttler. "So, yeah, they said that the match referee had made the decision. So, we had no say in it or any part of it. But yeah, we'll ask Javagal (Srinath) some questions just to get some clarity around it." That Buttler was livid was understandable as Rana looked like an 'Impact Player' used in the IPL, and the England skipper is contemplating asking at the toss ahead of the fifth and final T20I in Mumbai on Sunday whether he can field 12 players. "Yeah, he did (seem like an Impact Player). I should have said, maybe, at the toss next game, I'll say we're going to play 12 as well." India's bowling coach Morne Morkel said that all they did was place a name to match referee Srinath. "We only gave a name to the match referee. After that it's out of our hands. Harshit was having dinner. He had to quickly get up and go out. I thought he did an excellent job," Morkel said. The like-for-like replacement in case of concussion substitute is a grey area that India have always used well. Last time India used the ploy against Australia in a T20I game during the 2020-21 series. Ravindra Jadeja was replaced by Yuzvendra Chahal as concussion substitute when the former was merely hit on the head and the issue had more to do with his hamstring.

Batting has always been close to my heart, says Hardik Pandya

PTI ■ PUNE

Hardik Pandya may be an all-rounder but he holds his batting exploits close to his heart because it gives him a "wonderful feeling" every time he scores big runs and guides India to victory. Pandya produced another sterling performance with the bat in the fourth T20I against England on Friday, emerging as the joint-highest scorer with Shivam Dube on 53 runs in the match here. His half-century not only guided India to a 15-run win but also helped the hosts take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series. "Batting has always been my number one (love) or close to my heart. That's a very satisfying day (on Friday), and at the same point of time before sleeping (it) gives me a wonderful feeling and I've always had a good sleep post that," the all-rounder said in a video posted by BCCI on 'X', formerly Twitter. Pandya, who played a pivotal role with the ball in helping India defeat South Africa to lift the T20 World Cup in the West Indies last year, said cricket is a way of life for him and he prioritises it over everything else. "For me, I love this sport way too much; it's been my life, it's been my priority, it's been my first love. The sport does



not wait much, your first love always gives you the kiss back," he said. "The sport has given me so much love that I always feel like I have to turn up and be very, very honest and very loyal to the sport," said Pandya, who bagged three wickets in the final against South Africa as India lifted their second T20 World Cup trophy after a gap of 17 years. Pandya added that his fans are his biggest asset and he wants to give them as much joy as possible. "I have always been someone who has played for the fans. When fans are there, when fans are chanting, it gives me the added motivation. At the same point of time, I really want to do well for them," he

said. Winning the T20 World Cup in the Americas was a dream come true and Pandya acknowledges things have changed quite a lot for him post the global success. "A lot of things have changed post World Cup. I really love to entertain the crowd and make sure every penny what they've spent is worth it," he added.

AFFIDAVIT
By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Jajpur on dated 14th October 2024, I Musa Sahoo, D/O Madhusudan Sahoo, vill- Balipokhari, Po-Paramanandapur, PS- Bhandaripokhari, Dist- Bhubaneswar, Odisha have changed my name from "Musa Sahoo" to "Yasomati Sahoo". Henceforth, I shall be known as "Yasomati Sahoo" for all purpose.
Sd/-
Yasomati Sahoo

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS DIVISION-II, BHADRAK
e-mail: rwd2@yashoo.co.in
* e-Procurement Notice for Road Works
Identification Online Tender 13/RWD/BDK-II / 2024-25 Dtd. 31.01.2025

- Name of the Work :- Road Works as per Annexure
- Total Number of Works :- 04 Nos
- Approximate Estimated Cost :- Rs. 5.94 lakhs - Rs 17.16 lakhs
- Class of Contractor :- As Per Annexure
- Period of Completion :- As Per Annexure
- Other details :- The details are as follows.

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender on line for bidding	Last Date & Time of seeking tender clarification	Date & Time of opening of Bid
1	2	3	4	5
Executive Engineer R.R.W. Division-II, Bhadrak	13	04.02.2025 At 04.00PM up to 4.00 PM	07.02.2025 up to 3.00 PM	11.02.2025 At 11.00 AM

7. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal "https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in"
8. Any other changes / Corrigendum may be seen only in website www.tendersodisha.gov.in
9. **Date of transparent lottery to be conducted on dt.15.02.25 at 11.30A.M. in the office of the Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division-II, Bhadrak.**
Sd/-
Executive Engineer
R.W. Division-II, Bhadrak
OIPR-25090/11/0016/2425

ODISHA HYDRO POWER CORPORATION LTD.
OFFICE OF THE SENIOR GENERAL MANAGER (ELECTRICAL),
BALIMELA HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT,
AT/POST: BALIMELA, DIST: MALKANGIRI, PIN-764051 (ODISHA)
E-mail : unit_head_balimela@yashoo.com / bhep_balimela@gmail.com
CAD-2412
e-Procurement Notice
NOTICE INVITING TENDER NO. BHEP/47/2024-25 DATED 29.01.2025
The Unit Head, Balimela Hydro Electric Project, Balimela, Dist- Malkangiri invites percentage rate bids in double cover system i.e. Cover-I (Technical Bid) & Cover-II (Price Bid) for the work through e-procurement from eligible contractors as detailed in the table below.

Sl. No.	Name of the Work	Approx. Estimated cost in Rs.	EMD in Rs.	Class of Contractor	Cost of bid documents in Rs.	Period of Completion
01	Renovation of colony drain at back side of Sai Baba Line and Mandir Line and heightening of compound wall, BHEP, Balimela	41,98,495.00	42,000.00	'B' class Civil Contractors registered with the state Govt./Central Govt./MES/ Railways	6,000/- + GST @ 18% = 7080/-	120 days

Availability of bid document in the portal: From 11:00 Hrs of 05.02.2025 to 20.02.2025 (Up to 17:00 Hrs)
Last date & time of submission of bid: Up to 17:00 Hrs of 20.02.2025
The date & time of opening of the bid: 12:00 Hrs onwards of 21.02.2025
(Only Technical bid)
Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal https://tendersodisha.gov.in
Sd/-
Unit Head
BHEP, Balimela
OIPR-04019/11/0055/2425

Panchayat Samiti Office, Bonaigarh-770038
Dist- Sundargarh
Tel-06626-244466
E mail-gri-bonaigarh@nic.in

ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାରଙ୍କ ଦ୍ଵାରା, ବଣିକଗଡ଼
OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, BONAIGARH

No- 214 /Date- 30.01.2025
Tender Call Notice No- 11/2024-25

Sealed Tenders are invited from the interested bidder for the civil work under BDO, Bonaigarh of Sundargarh district. The detail of works, eligibility, estimated cost and cost of tender paper has been uploaded in the district website sundargarh.odisha.gov.in The bidder should be B & C class contractor only. They have to submit the bid document to the undersigned in the address of office of the B.D.O. Bonaigarh, A.I.P.O. Bonaigarh, Pin-770038, Dist- Sundargarh (Odisha) through Registered Post / Speed Post only on or before 17/01/2025 up to 5:00 PM. The sale of tender paper will be from dated 03/02/2025 to 17/01/2025 in the district website sundargarh.odisha.gov.in The authority reserves the right to cancel or reject the entire process without assigning any reason thereof. The tender will be opened on dated 19.02.2025 at 11:00 AM in the office of the undersigned in the presence of the bidders or his/her authorized representatives.
Sd/-
Block Development Officer
Bonaigarh
OIPR-19333/11/0007/2425

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
JAGATSIINGHPUR (R&B) DIVISION, JAGATSIINGHPUR
E-Mail ID: eerbispr@gmail.com
GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
(e) PROCUREMENT NOTICE
B-904 Bid Identification No. S.E. JSP(R&B)-08 of 2024-25
TENDER CALL NOTICE

- The Superintending Engineer, Jagatsinghpur (R&B) Division, Jagatsinghpur on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites on Percentage rate basis bid in **Single cover system** in ONLINE MODE from eligible contractor for Building works as mentioned below.
- No. of Work :- 02Nos.
- Nature of work :- Building & E.I. works
- Class of Contractor :- "B" "C" & "HT"
- Tender Paper Cost :- Rs. 6000/- (Online)
- Available of bid documents in the website :- From 06/02/2025 to 5PM of 15/02/2025
- Date of Opening of Bid :- 11AM of 17/02/2025
- The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website https://tendersodisha.gov.in. Any addendum/ corrigendum/ cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer,
Jagatsinghpur (R&B) Division.
OIPR-34093/11/0011/2425

NATA - 2025
NATIONAL APTITUDE TEST IN ARCHITECTURE

Council of Architecture
A Statutory Authority of Government of India Under Architects Act, 1972

IMPORTANT PUBLIC NOTICE
ANNOUNCEMENT OF CONDUCT OF NATA-2025 APTITUDE TEST

The Council of Architecture (COA) is pleased to announce that National Aptitude Test in Architecture (NATA) 2025 shall be conducted by the Council on the designated Fridays (in afternoon session) and Saturdays (in two sessions) starting from March to June, 2025, subject to number of candidates registered for the session.

The NATA-2025 Brochure containing details of eligibility criteria for appearing in NATA, syllabus and registration along with other important details is available on the websites **www.nata.in** and **www.coa.gov.in**.

The registration for NATA 2025 would commence from **03.02.2025**. Candidates desirous to take admission into 1st year of 5-year B.Arch. Degree Program at COA approved Architectural Institutions during 2025-2026, are required to register themselves for NATA-2025.

New Delhi
Dated : 02.02.2025

Registrar



PHOTOS : PANKAJ KUMAR

SILENT TEARS of SACRIFICE

Surya Ki Antim Kiran Se Pehli Kiran Tak portrays the struggle against societal expectations, says SAKSHI PRIYA



Some plays stay with you, not just because of their story but because of how they make you feel. *Surya Ki Antim Kiran Se Pehli Kiran Tak*, performed at *Bharat Rang Mahotsav*, is one such production that draws the audience into its world with raw emotions and a compelling narrative. Directed by *Satyendra Parmar* and written by *Surendra Verma*, this powerful drama from *Upasana School of Performing Arts, Gujarat University*, takes the audience into the depths of personal struggles shaped by social customs.

A Story That Demands Reflection

Set in the 10th century BCE, the play follows Queen Sheelavathi, a woman of strength and dignity, who is forced into the ancient practice of *Niyog*, a tradition that allows a woman to conceive with a man other than her husband if the king is unable to father an heir. Sheelavathi, despite her unwavering devotion to her husband, finds herself bound by this custom. What follows is an emotionally charged night where both Sheelavathi and King Okkak struggle with their inner conflicts, she with the burden of an unwanted fate, and he with the helplessness of being unable to protect the woman he loves.

The narrative explores personal loss, sacrifice and the weight of expectations. Sheelavathi's silence is heavy with emotion, her pain evident in every scene. The dialogues are sharp and thought-provoking, forcing the audience to question societal norms that impose restrictions on individual choices.

The emotional depth of the play is enhanced by its powerful direction and script, which leave no room for

distractions. The focus remains entirely on the characters and their struggles, making the audience feel their turmoil. The pacing of the play is steady, allowing each scene to breathe and impact the viewers.

A Performance That Stays With You

The success of a play like this depends on its performances, and the cast delivers with conviction. The actress portraying Sheelavathi captures her emotional turmoil with piercing intensity. Every expression, every hesitation, and every unspoken plea adds depth to her character. The actor playing Okkak is equally compelling, portraying a man torn between love and duty with

remarkable restraint.

The stage design is minimalistic and allowing the focus to remain on the performances. The lighting is particularly striking, deep shadows heighten the tension, while golden hues symbolise the hope that still remains. The use of silence is just as powerful as the words spoken, making the audience feel the weight of Sheelavathi's suffering.

The play's strength lies in how it connects with the audience, evoking empathy and prompting reflection. Every moment is carefully crafted, ensuring that the emotions feel real and raw.

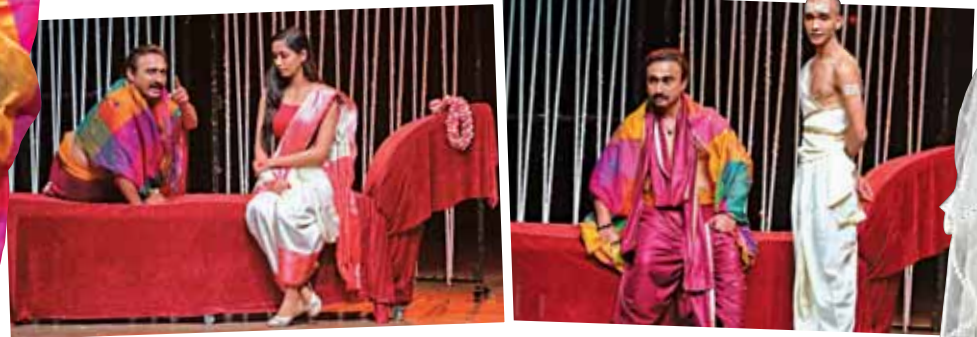


WHY SHOULDN'T YOU MISS

If theatre that challenges societal norms and provokes thought is what you seek, *Bharat Rang Mahotsav* is where you need to be. Hosted by the National School of Drama (NSD) at Mandi House, Delhi, this prestigious theatre festival is showcasing some of the most compelling productions from across the country. Running until 16th February, the festival promises a new play every day,

bringing fresh narratives and unforgettable performances to the stage.

Whether you're a theatre enthusiast or just looking for a meaningful experience, this festival is a celebration of storytelling in its purest form. Make sure to catch a play, immerse yourself in a new world and witness the magic of live theatre.



GAZE WITH GRACE



By TEAM VIVA

In the world of fashion, eyewear has moved from being a simple necessity to a bold statement of style and personality. It's no longer just about protecting your eyes, it's about framing your face with pieces that reflect your individuality. *John Jacobs* captures this transformation with frames that embody individuality and confidence.

The *Gilded collection*, celebrates elegance and inner strength. Crystal embellishments and timeless designs create a refined look, reflecting a journey of self-expression and resilience. Inspired by the gripping series *Squid Game*, the collection brings the iconic symbols and distinct green of the contestants' jerseys into a unique eyewear design. Each frame merges pop culture with striking aesthetics.

The Break The Frame collection dares to defy norms, offering bold shapes and vibrant colors for those who embrace their multifaceted identity. It's a call for authenticity in a world that often asks us to conform. In collaboration with *Outhouse Jewellery*, this collection takes eyewear into a futuristic realm, blending avant-garde design with luxury. This collection features innovative materials and sharp, modern silhouettes.

Each frame tells a story, offering the wearer the opportunity to express their unique style and view the world through a bold lens.



The Essence of Satyajit Ray



The Storyteller comes to life with Paresh Rawal's masterful performance turning out as a clash between artistry and commercialism, writes ABHI SINGHAL

RATING ★★★★★



He sells cotton; I spin yarns - The dialogue made me start my sayings from this as it showed a powerful impact of brilliant acting by the protagonists.

The Storyteller streaming on *Disney Plus Hotstar* is an adaptation of *Satyajit Ray's* short story *Golpo Boliye Tarini Khuro*. The story follows a storyteller hired by a wealthy businessman suffering from insomnia to narrate bedtime tales so that the businessman can sleep peacefully.

Set with the backdrop and vibes of Kolkata and Ahmedabad, with the essence of Bengali language in each line, *The Storyteller* will take

you back to the old times of *Satyajit Ray* and his classics. The movie is made with all of today's technology but still feels like every scene takes you back in time.

Tarini Bandopadhyay played effortlessly by *Paresh Rawal* as a gifted storyteller from Kolkata who has never penned down his tales, fearing criticism and rejection. An eccentric socialist, he has held 75 different jobs, changing every six months. After



bidding farewell to *Amrit Publication*, he comes across an unusual newspaper ad of *Ratan Garodia* played by *Adil Hussain*, a business tycoon from Ahmedabad who is in search of a storyteller to narrate original bedtime stories, having failed to cure his insomnia.

Tarini relocates to Ahmedabad, embarking on a new chapter in his life. The story line is a cult classic with deep message and dialogue writing. The story explores the clash between commercialism and

artistry, touching upon themes of plagiarism, self-discovery, and overcoming self-doubt.

I wouldn't be wrong in saying that *Paresh Rawal* consistently surpasses his own performances with each film, embodying the depth and composure of his characters. His portrayal of *Tarini* leaves a lasting impact on the story. Meanwhile, *Adil Hussain* delivers a standout performance as *Ratan Garodia*, exuding sharpness and cunning, revealing it only when necessary.

The only soft background music changing at times bringing emotions on the screens and the audience's mind enhances the feels of the film. Despite their brief appearances, *Revathy*, *Jayesh More* as *Garodia's* house help *Manikchand*, and *Tannishtha Chatterjee* as the librarian *Tarini* befriends, make a strong impact.

SUGGESTED BINGES



The Recruit Season 2
IMDB Rating - 7.4/10
OTT - Netflix
Cast - Noah Centineo, Teo Yoo, Young-Ah Kim, Felix Solis



Pushpa 2: The Rule
IMDB Rating - 6.3/10
OTT - Netflix
Cast - Rashmika Mandanna, Allu Arjun



The Storyteller
IMDB Rating - 7.3/10
OTT - Disney+ Hotstar
Cast - Paresh Rawal, Adil Hussain, Revathi

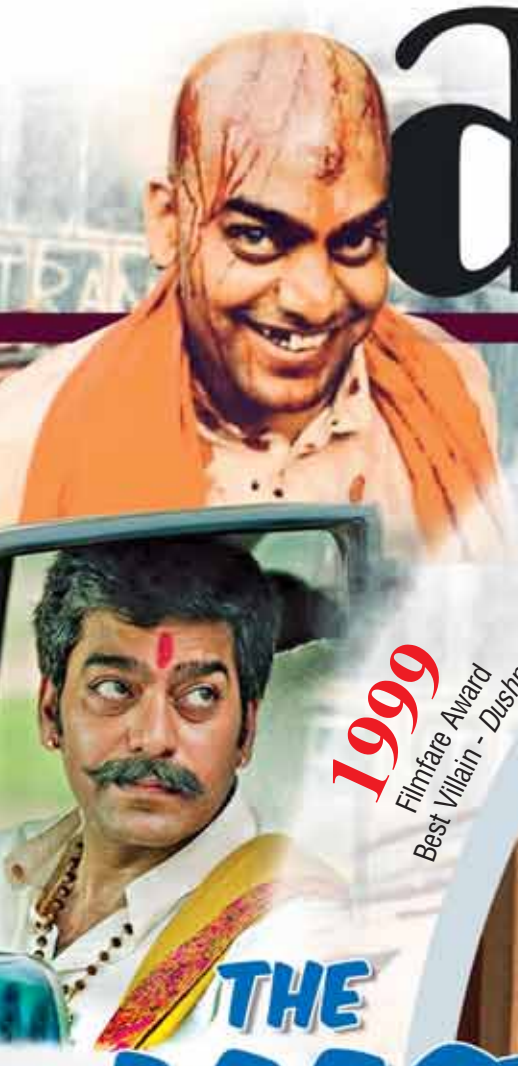


Mythic Quest Season 4
IMDB Rating - 7.7/10
OTT - Apple TV
Cast - Rob McElhenney, Charlotte Nicdao, David Hornsby, Danny Pudi



You're Cordially Invited
IMDB Rating - 5.5/10
OTT - Amazon Prime Video
Cast - Will Ferrell, Reese Witherspoon, Geraldine Viswanathan

"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 *Mulg*, **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."

2021
Filmfare OTT Award
Supporting role - Pagglaait

2014
SIIMA Award (Nominated)
Negative Role - Tadakkha



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."

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."

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."

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.



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 ambience, 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 Kimbab*, 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 reimaged 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."

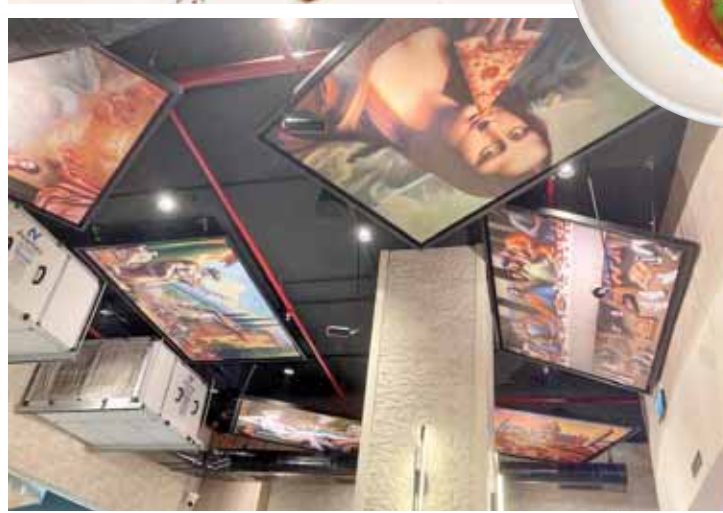
FACT SHEET

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 ambience 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





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,

THE DIVINE GLOW OF AYODHYA

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



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 Mishthan 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!

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

YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

The week begins on a high note with your efforts being recognized and celebrated, boosting your spirits immensely. You'll find yourself successfully wrapping up a significant endeavor, earning well-deserved accolades for your hard work. This period marks a time of joy and heightened achievement, exceeding your own expectations. Additionally, you might find yourself preparing for a journey, so it's wise to be ready for travel. However, amidst this success, stay grounded as getting overly carried away could lead to less cautious decisions. Some moments this week will call for decisive action, especially in personal relationships, where clear choices will be necessary. Emotionally, the week might present some challenges, including potential disappointments in personal connections, possibly leading to separations or the culmination of ongoing disputes in legal settings.

Lucky number 9 | **Lucky colour** Lemon Yellow
Lucky day Saturday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

Awaken and break free from the chains of limiting beliefs and unhealthy habits that may be subtly influencing your life. Currently, the atmosphere around you is rife with misunderstanding and deception, making it easy to be misled. This period is fraught with caution; impulsive actions could lead to unwelcome consequences. Engaging in uncertain ventures or succumbing to deceptive tactics could prove detrimental. Embrace sincerity and authenticity, as these qualities will enrich your life in the long term. You are destined for greatness and deserve to uphold your dignity and status. Stay alert, as new opportunities and projects are on the horizon, which will require your unique abilities and dedication. As the week concludes, prepare to relish moments of joy, celebration, and significant life events.

Lucky number 1 | **Lucky colour** Rose
Lucky day Tuesday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

It's essential to find harmony between various aspects of your life such as family, career, and personal finances, especially as you face new challenges. Sometimes, unexpected hurdles may appear, making it difficult to achieve your goals and potentially leading to stress or awkward social situations. It's important to maintain a balance in your physical, mental, and spiritual health and reconcile conflicting interests and desires. Avoiding responsibilities or commitments can lead to more complications. Engaging in acts of kindness and participating in community or spiritual activities can provide a sense of fulfillment and resilience. Be mindful of the honesty of your actions and consider if some difficulties might be of your own making. Working on eliminating negative behaviors can pave the way for smoother interactions and personal growth.

Lucky number 15 | **Lucky colour** Orange
Lucky day Wednesday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

Your home life will bring you joy and stability, fostering a nurturing environment where discussions about upcoming events or plans may take center stage. Should a family member have travel plans, they might find themselves needing to adjust their itinerary due to unforeseen circumstances, perhaps even returning home earlier than anticipated. This period will highlight the value of cherished family traditions and the wisdom passed down through generations. Professionally, you seek a role that provides fulfillment, stability, and a sense of connection with others. Leveraging your intellectual abilities will be key in advancing your objectives. Your thoughtful, perceptive nature will be instrumental in facilitating significant changes in your life. You'll find yourself in a financially stable position, enjoying the fruits of your efforts and the leisure to savor life's comforts.

Lucky number 3 | **Lucky colour** Sky Blue
Lucky day Thursday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

The upcoming period brings a significant boost in your ability to complete tasks with confidence, self-discipline, and patience. You're likely to experience a noticeable improvement in your financial situation, leading to increased comfort and greater self-awareness about what truly matters in life. Expect peace and happiness in your home environment, perhaps marked by new additions or changes like purchasing furniture or spending tranquil moments in the garden. A successful outcome in your endeavors will bring you joy, and you'll find comfort in the support and protection offered by longstanding relationships and family traditions. Your activities this week may revolve around shopping, dining, gardening, and financial transactions, highlighting a theme of prosperity and security. A significant celebration, possibly a wedding, may also be on the horizon.

Lucky number 6 | **Lucky colour** Olive
Lucky day Sunday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

You may feel constrained by your current circumstances and encounter resistance from those around you, hindering your progress toward your objectives. You might be seeking an escape from a burdensome situation or contemplating a change in your career path. The issues you face primarily stem from external sources rather than yourself, as others may not be fulfilling their responsibilities, contributing to challenges you encounter. If you feel trapped or exposed, it's crucial to address these challenges without delay. Start by liberating your thoughts from any fixed ideas to achieve a broader perspective. Once you gain more clarity and openness in your thinking, dedicate time to reflect deeply on your true aspirations. Additionally, a supportive individual could provide valuable guidance and encouragement, helping you navigate through these times.

Lucky number 4 | **Lucky colour** Lavender
Lucky day Friday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This week brings a surge of energy and creativity, pushing you to initiate and drive new projects forward. Your desire for recognition and a deeper understanding of your capabilities is prominent. This period challenges you to embrace tasks that test your abilities, fostering a sense of self-realization. An air of creative unrest signals a significant shift, opening doors to transformative opportunities. Your innate curiosity propels you to showcase your unique talents and perspectives with vigor. A business-related journey might be on the horizon, hinting at promising professional ventures, possibly including a new job or a significant shift in your career path. Additionally, a change in living situations could arise, adding to the week's dynamic changes. However, some might experience restless nights, disturbed by anxiety or unsettling dreams.

Lucky number 11 | **Lucky colour** Cherry Red
Lucky day Monday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week, aim to maintain a composed demeanor and avoid conflicts, as tensions could escalate into disputes or more serious altercations. Embrace the true essence of competition by understanding its demands, respecting others' viewpoints while confidently asserting your own. Let go of past burdens and avoid worrying about the unpredictable future; focus on achieving inner peace and self-reliance. Concentrate fully on present tasks to prevent being swamped by too much information. Employ sharp insight and a rational approach to navigate through complexities effectively. Be cautious, as you may encounter rigid, emotionless thinking that could challenge your perspectives. Strive for balanced interactions and thoughtful responses to maintain harmony in your environment.

Lucky number 10 | **Lucky colour** Beige
Lucky day Monday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

This week is shaping up to be quite promising, especially in terms of career advancements and personal connections. Unexpected opportunities for professional growth, such as a promotion or a significant increase in income, may appear. Prepare for potential business travel, which is likely to yield beneficial results for your future. You might find yourself considering a change in your workplace or even your home if you're renting. Emotionally, the week brings a wave of romance and passion, enhancing your relationships. You may encounter some indecision concerning a particular relationship or scenario. Trust your instincts during these moments. As the week concludes, a sense of emotional stability will emerge, allowing you to manage your feelings more effectively. Look forward to expanding your perspectives as new opportunities arise, possibly linked to personal milestones or innovative ideas that inspire greater achievements.

Lucky number 18 | **Lucky colour** Mint
Lucky day Tuesday



CANCER June 21-July 22

Your hard work, dedication, and resilience are paving the way for your aspirations to come to fruition. Expect an uptick in your accomplishments, potentially through advancements in your career, educational achievements, or profitable ventures using your skills. Your balanced approach to dealing with supporters and challengers alike will prove beneficial. Be aware, your success may draw envy this week. Consider making strategic investments, such as in real estate or other substantial assets, which could also contribute to your personal growth. You have all the tools needed to thrive in your endeavors. Towards the week's end, take some time for introspection. Although solitude can be challenging, it's essential for rejuvenating your energy and will ultimately enhance your inner fortitude and confidence.

Lucky number 8 | **Lucky colour** White
Lucky day Thursday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

You find yourself at a crossroads, sensing the need to transition from your current state to a more fulfilling path to enhance your effectiveness. Your drive and vitality are peaking, propelling you towards achieving ambitious goals. A male figure in your life may extend support, potentially enriching your personal connections with depth and creativity. However, your current pace may lead to impulsive actions. If triggered, your responses could be explosive, potentially harming your progress or relationships. Concerns about financial or business stability may arise, leading you to question past decisions. Nonetheless, maintaining a hopeful outlook and awaiting outcomes is advisable. Reconnect with the simple joys reminiscent of your youth by engaging with the younger generation, reviving the spirited child within.

Lucky number 20 | **Lucky colour** Navy Blue
Lucky day Friday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

This week involves a thorough review and reflection on recent efforts, providing a chance to learn from past missteps. Despite considerable effort, you may feel you haven't fully reaped the benefits of your work. Some doubts could cloud your thinking during this time. However, a sudden and promising opportunity could arise mid-week—perhaps a business prospect or a new role—bringing satisfaction and potential financial gains. It's a promising period for financial activities, like investments or launching ventures. Several options will emerge; careful selection is crucial to align with your goals. Watch your spending closely to avoid financial strain. Toward the week's end, travel might be appealing. Consider planning a getaway or a special outing with a loved one to rejuvenate and connect.

Lucky number 30 | **Lucky colour** Coral
Lucky day Thursday

Madhu Kotiya is a tarot card reader, spiritual healer, and Founder, MShezaim Institute of Tarot and Divination. Contact details: madhu@indiatarot.com, www.indiatarot.com, M: 9873283331

Expectation and Reality: The Sacred Waters of Devotion

THOUGHTFUL INSIGHTS



Dr. Tanu Jain

My hands tremble as I pack my bags for Mahakumbh, each item I place inside carrying the weight of generations of spiritual seekers before me. The anticipation burns in my chest like sacred incense, filling me with both excitement and trepidation. Years of listening to my grandmother's stories about this divine gathering have created a tapestry of expectations in my mind – visions of enlightened sadhus with eyes that pierce through the illusions of everyday life, of holy waters that shimmer with ancient blessings, and of an atmosphere so pure it could lift one's soul closer to the divine. In the weeks leading up to my journey, sleep becomes elusive. I lie awake; my mind painting pictures of what awaits me. I imagine myself sitting cross-legged at the feet of wise Sadhus, their words flowing like honey into my eager consciousness, transforming my understanding of existence itself. In these pre-dawn reveries, I see the mighty Ganges, her waters carrying centuries of devotion, prayers, and tears, ready to embrace me in her sacred flow. My heart races at the thought of joining millions of seekers, all united in their quest for spiritual elevation. But oh, how reality strikes with the force of a temple bell's resonance! The Kumbh that greets me is a beautiful paradox – a swirling hurricane of humanity where the lines between the sacred and the mundane blur into something entirely unexpected. My carefully constructed mental image shatters



like a clay pot on stone steps, only to be reformed into something far more complex and, surprisingly, more meaningful. Here I stand, my feet planted in the same sacred soil as celebrity stars and famous personalities. I have only seen on television. The sight of them stripped of their glamour, dressed in simple white cotton, their faces bare of makeup, stirs something profound within me. There is an raw beauty in watching a famous personalities wait patiently for their turn to take a dip, their usual entourage replaced by the company of ordinary devotees. In these moments, I realise that fame and fortune are but floating leaves on the eternal river of spirituality. The Sadhus, those mystical figures who populated my dreams, present themselves in all their contradictory glory. Some sit in deep meditation, their dreadlocks touching

the ground, their eyes closed to the material world, exactly as I had imagined. Others, to my initial shock and subsequent amusement, chat on smartphones while blessing devotees, their ancient wisdom finding new channels of expression in the digital age. My heart struggles to reconcile these contrasts, but gradually, I begin to understand that spirituality doesn't require a rejection of the present but it demands finding the sacred within it. The crowds – oh, the crowds! They overwhelm my senses like a tidal wave. Bodies press against bodies, moving like a living, breathing organism with its own consciousness. The air is thick with the scent of incense, sweat, and flowers. Sometimes, the press of people triggers a primal panic in my chest, but then, mysteriously, moments of profound peace emerge from the chaos.

When the evening aarti begins, and thousands of diyas set the river aglow, time seems to stand still. In these precious moments, all differences dissolve into the gathering darkness, and I feel connected to every soul around me in a way that transcends physical discomfort. The presence of VIP zones and special arrangements initially fills me with a bitter disappointment that tastes like ash in my mouth. How can true spirituality coexist with such worldly distinctions? But then I witness a prominent politician sitting barefoot in the mud, listening intently to a sadhu's discourse, his security detail maintaining a respectful distance. I see a famous cricket player queuing up with common devotees, his celebrity status surrendered to his role as a seeker. These sights soften my judgment, teaching me that the path to spiritual understanding takes many forms. As days pass, my expectations continue their dance with reality. The Kumbh reveals itself not as a perfect spiritual haven untouched by modernity, but as a living, breathing manifestation of India's soul – complex, contradictory, and utterly magnificent in its ability to embrace both tradition and change. My heart swells with unexpected joy when I see young influencers promoting ancient Sanskrit shlokas on their social media, or when a group of international tourists joins a traditional bhajan session with genuine devotion in their eyes. The transformation I experience is not the

one I anticipated. Instead of finding escape from the modern world, I discover something far more valuable – the ability to sense the divine pulsing within the heart of our contemporary reality. Each dip in the holy waters teaches me that spirituality isn't about escaping life's complexities but about finding meaning within them. As I prepare to leave, my heart full and my soul stirred, I understand that the true miracle of Mahakumbh 2025 lies not in its adherence to ancient ideals, but in its power to remain relevant while honouring tradition. I carry home not just holy water in a copper pot, but also the profound realization that in our quest for spiritual connection, we are all equal – celebrities, saints, and common seekers alike. The Kumbh has taught me that divinity does not require isolation from the modern world; it thrives in our ability to maintain faith and seek meaning within the beautiful chaos of contemporary life, regardless of who we are or where we come from. My journey may not have matched my expectations, but it has given me something far more precious – a deeper understanding of both spirituality and humanity, intertwined like the sacred threads that bind our ancient traditions to our evolving present. —The author's views are personal. The author is a civil servant at the Ministry of Defence and a spiritual speaker

Now you can write to us at agendapioneer@dailypioneer.com