

## WELCOMING INTERIM BUDGET

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has presented the interim budget 2024-25 with a focus on empowering farmers, women, youth and the poor.

This was the second interim budget of the Modi government's tenure. It is important to note that the interim budget primarily focuses on maintaining essential services until the new government takes charge, but it contains several key expectations. An interim budget, often known as a vote-on-account, is a financial plan presented by the government for a few months. It is often introduced when there is less time left for the tenure of the government to end.

Lok Sabha elections are to be held in the country in the next three months. Whichever government comes next, it will again present a full budget for the financial year 2024-25. It is a tradition in India that the full budget is not presented in the year before the general elections. This is to prevent the current government from using the budget as a political tool to woo voters with populist schemes. Therefore, an interim budget is presented to cover government spending until a new government is elected and presents its first full budget.

## Unity of I.N.D.I.A is a chimera

■ OMKAR DATTATRAY

The opposition bloc I.N.D.I.As unity is most uncertain and with each passing day it is falling apart. The big shock to the opposition unity is the coming out from it ,severing relations with I.N.D.I.A and aligning with NDA by Nitish Kumar the architect of the opposition unity called I.N.D.I.A .Strong ,constructive and positive opposition is sane -quo -non of the parliamentary democracy and without the strong opposition ,a functional ,dynamic and vibrant democracy is not possible and so the treasury benches should not aim to erase the opposition in the interest of democratic functioning .Thus I.N.D.I .A is most needed for the successful working of our democracy .But it is very disturbing and unfortunate that the coalition partners are in conflict with each other and in this way the day will not be far off when the opposition unity and alliance called I.N.D.I.A will fall like a house of cards .The leaders of I.N.D.I.A have ego and do not like to make sacrifice for the cause of opposition unity .The greatest blow to I.N.D.I.A came because of the parting of the ways with it by none other than the co-founder of the opposition alliance .Nothing good is going on in the opposition alliance and they cannot take on the formidable BJP/NDA in the ensuing general elections and in the state assembly elections .It seems that the opposition unity particularly the I.N.D.I.A is on ventilator and it is dying and cannot give a tough fight to the BJP in the ensuing general elections .Not only has Nitish Kumar deceived the opposition alliance and parted ways with the Mahaghatbandhan and allied with the NDA ,but AAP chairman and the Delhi chief minister ,Mamata Banarjee ,SP president Akhish Yadav and the AAP's Bhagwant Maan who is the chief minister of Punjab are not comfortable with congress and hence with the alliance .Samajwadi Party had agreed to give 11 assembly seats in Punjab assembly elections to the congress but at the same time has announced the list of 16 party candidates thus dashing the hopes of Congress-SP alliance .Similarly TMC of Mamta Banerjee is also not comfortable with the congress and talks to go alone in west Bengal .If I.N.D.I.A and its alliance partners like to fight the general elections as one combination ,its leaders should imbibe the tenet of sacrifice and should thus be ready to sacrifice some seats to the congress and each other to fight the NDA and Modi .There is infighting among the leaders of the I.N.D.I.A and its leaders are at cross roads with one another and there is factionalism ,groupism and clashes between the leaders of the opposition parties and every leaders wants to be the prime ministerial face of the I.N.D.I.A and thus there is lack of unity in the opposition front and thus it is very difficult for the opposition front to fight the NDA/BJP in the Lok Sabha polls .The opposition parties should work as one combination of different parties and should leave the issue of nominating the prime ministerial face before the polls and this issue should be left to be decided after fighting the elections jointly .The leaders of opposition bloc should learn the principle of give and take and they should be ready for sacrifice of seats to each other and they should work in unity ,cohesion and unison for the good of the alliance partners .Thus selfish and narrow interests should be shelved in the interest of opposition unity so that it can give a strong and tough fight to the BJP in the Lok sabha polls .All the leaders of the opposition front should work under the guidance of its convener who is also the president of congress party and so all the constituent units of the I.N.D.I.A should work in the interest of the opposition unity so that it can take on the BJP at the time of elections .Opposition parties had chosen a new name ,INDIA ,but they still have miles to go .In fact an alliance of Indian opposition parties ,called INDIA ,joins forces to take on Modi .India's popular and polarizing prime minister ,Narendra Modi ,has a fondness for abbreviations that create a buzz around his government schemes and dress down his rivals .The opposition had announced a new alliance called INDIA to unseat Modi and defeat his ruling party's electoral Juggernaut .The acronym ,which stands for Indian National Developmental ,Inclusive Alliance ,comprises India's previously fractured opposition parties that are aiming to keep the Modi government's increasingly powerful sway at bay .At stake ,the alliance says ,is the future of India's multiparty democracy and secular foundations that critics say have seen assaults from Modi's Hindu nationalist BJP .The opposition alliance is playing on its aeronym ,saying it will be Modi versus the country in 2024 polls .Modi will seek reelection to a third consecutive term in a national vote this year at a time when India's diplomatic reach is rising .However his rule at home has coincided with a struggling economy ,rising unemployment ,attacks by Hindu nationalists on country's minorities particularly Muslims and a shrinking space for dissent .India's BJP and congress both battling political infighting. .While BJP's problems stem from excessive micromanaging by its leaders ,the congress woes arise from its weak leadership .The opposition front comprising 26 parties has a new name INDIA which stands for Indian ,national Developmental inclusive alliance. All the twenty six parties have agreed to this name for one of the largest opposition front since independence .But today there is infighting ,groupism in the opposition front and the INDIA will fall at any time due to the infighting in the opposition bloc ,it can hardly take on the BJP in the polls and there is disunity ,confusion and chaos in the INDIA and its health is in bad shape and it cannot fight the BJP in the ensuing general polls .If the opposition front is divided INDIA ,how can it fight the Modi and BJP is a moot question. Only a unified and combined opposition can fight the BJP in the elections .But so far as INDIA is concerned there is dearth and lack of unity and the opposition is highly divided and thus it cannot take on the BJP in the general elections .For checkmating BJP and keeping Modi away from again coming to power for the third time in succession ,there is great need that the INDIA should work and fight the BJP and Modi as a united opposition. Otherwise it is more likely that the BJP will again sweep the Lok Sabha elections and therefore the opposition alliance should give importance to unity move and then fight the Modi and BJP as a joint force and not a pent up force.However so far as opposition unity is concerned it is in doldrums and the result will be a Modi government at the third time.

(The author is a columnist,social and KP activist).

# Governance, Development & Performance (GDP): Union Budget 2024

■ DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

The economy of the country will now be strengthened with a more comprehensive GDP that will be based on Governance, Development and Performance. This redefining of GDP came from none other than the Finance Minister of the country Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman as she presented her sixth straight and last interim budget of this government for the fiscal year 2024-25. With this budget, Ms. Sitharaman equalled the record of Former Finance Minister Late Morarji Desai in presenting the no. of budgets. The Union Budget 2024 was infact a Vote on Account ahead of the Lok Sabha elections scheduled ahead of the end of the term of the present government in May 2024. The interim budget functions as a provisional financial plan during an election year, addressing immediate financial needs until a new government is in place. Usually no significant announcements or reforms are presented in the Vote on Account and these are done in the subsequent full budget that is to be presented by the new government. While announcing the budget, Ms. Sitharaman also mentioned the massive transformation in the economy in the last ten years as a result of the various structural reforms and pro-poor programmes carried out by the present government. The last ten years have come up with monumental achievements. The participation of women in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) has increased by 28 per cent. Over rupees 22 lakh crore loans under MUDRA have been granted in the last ten years. Rupees 30 crore MUDRA Loans have been provided to women entrepreneurs. Under skill India Mission 1.4 crore youths have been given skill training and have been made job ready. In the last 10 years 25 crore peoples have been lifted out of poverty. Credit assistance has been provided to 78 lakh street vendors under PM Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi (PM

SVANidhi). The FM also made it clear that the next generation of reforms will be carried out in consultation with state governments and the eastern region of the country will be drivers of country's economic growth.

While highlighting the importance of a unified tax system, the Finance Minister said that the GST has reduced the compliance burden on trade and industry. A recent survey concluded that 94% of the industry leaders view the transition to GST as largely positive. The number of tax filers swelled by 2.4 times, Sitharaman said. The direct tax collection has trebled since 2014. In 2024-25, the tax receipts are projected at Rs 26.02 lakh crore. Sitharaman said that the government would spend rupees 11.1 lakh crore as capital expenditure in the next fiscal which is about 11% higher when compared to allocation of the current year. She further said that the crisis of yesteryears has been overcome and the economy now is back on the path of high sustained growth and that with the dedicated efforts and good intention the goal of Viksit Bharat will be achieved within the deadline.

Fiscal Deficit: The fiscal deficit i. e the gap between government's revenue and expenses is at 5.8% of the GDP for 2023-24 (FY24). Fiscal deficit in FY25 is expected to be 5.1% of GDP. The target is to reduce the fiscal deficit to below 4.5% of the GDP in 2025-26 (FY26). Tax proposals: Due to Vote on Account, this budget has proposed not to make any changes in the taxation rates prevailing in the country for direct as well as indirect taxes including import duties. Certain tax exemptions like for Startups and International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) units which are expiring have been extended till March 31, 2025.

Reforms in States for Viksit Bharat: An amount of rupees 75,000 crore has been proposed as 50 year interest free loan for milestone linked reform by various states/

Societal Changes: A high powered commit-

tee will be set up to review challenges arising from fast population growth and demographic changes.

Rural Housing and Renewable energy: As many as two crore more houses will be built under Primuminister Awas Yojana (G). Govt. will also go for viability gap funding for wind energy. Coal gasification and liquefaction capacity will be set up. There will be phased blending of CNG, PNG and compressed biogas. The government will also provide for financial assistance for procurement of biogas aggregation machinery. Through roof-top solarization, 1 crore households will be enabled to obtain up to 300 units of free electricity every month.

Encouraging Sunrise Technologies: For tech-savvy youth, a corpus of Rs 1 lakh crore will be established with 50-year interest free loan provided. The corpus will provide long term financing and re-financing with long tenures at low or nil interest rates. This will encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in sunrise domains. A new scheme will be launched for strengthening deep tech technology for defence purposes and expediting Atmanirbharta.

Agriculture: In the agriculture sector budget 2024 aims at promoting investment in post-harvest activity by both private and public sector support. More efforts will be put in to control Foot and mouth disease. It also focuses on empowerment of Dairy farmers'. Five integrated Aqua Park will be set up. Government also will launch Blue Economy 2.0 to promote aquaculture. The Primuminister Matsaya Sampada Yojana will be stepped up to enhance productivity and production of aquaculture, double exports and generate employment opportunities for the youths. Application of Nano DAP will be expanded in all agro-climatic zones in the country.

Health: Health care facilities under Ayushman Bharat will be extended to

## The key highlights of 2024 interim budget

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF

The 2024 interim budget presentation brought forth a slew of transformative initiatives aimed at bolstering various sectors of the economy and addressing pressing societal challenges. From innovative schemes fostering renewable energy adoption to strategic investments in healthcare and agriculture, this budget outlines a vision for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday presented the interim budget ahead of the end of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This marks her sixth Budget as the finance minister and the last in the second term of the Modi government.

Sitharaman adhered to tradition on Thursday by visiting President Droupadi Murmu before unveiling the pre-election Budget for 2024-25. She met with the President at Rashtrapati Bhawan before proceeding to Parliament. The budget focused on fiscal consolidation, infra, agri, green growth, and railways. However, no changes were made in the tax rates, which was a disappointment to salaried individuals. The Fiscal Deficit target for FY25 was set at 5.1 percent of the GDP, better than expected, while the FY24 target was also revised down to 5.8 percent. Meanwhile, the capex target of FY25 was increased by 11.1 percent to Rs 11.1 lakh crore.

"The Indian economy has witnessed a positive transformation in the last 10 years. People are looking towards the future with hope. In 2014, the country was facing enormous challenges. With Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, the Narendra Modi-led government overcame those challenges," has said Finance Minister Sitharaman in her budget speech.

The next 5 years will be years of unprecedented development and to realise the goal of becoming a developed country by 2047, Sitharaman stated and added that the "trinity of democracy, demography and diversity can fulfill aspirations of every Indian".

■ PURAN CHAND SHARMA

In our worldly life there exists a very popular and interesting practice of exchange of gifts, presents awards and donations etc. on some special occasions which become instrumental in fortifying our mutual relationship and maintaining social relations. It will be interesting for the readers to understand from the following moral story:-

"A newly married daughter came to her parent's house on her maiden visit and the family extended her the best of reception and the festivities continued for a week. Parents managed and arranged all those things which perfectly suited to their daughter's liking and taste. At the time of daughter's departure to her In- Law's house, Father gave her a big packet of Incense sticks of good quality and lovingly advised her to urgently light this incense stick while going for worship and prayer in your in-law's house. On seeing this mother spoke to her husband, 'what are you doing? , does anybody give incense sticks to the daughter moving back to in-law's house for the first time after marriage. Father acted promptly, put his hand in pocket and whatever money he laid hand at, quickly gave to the daughter.

As soon as the daughter arrived at her in-law's house, her Sasu maa very promptly and keenly looked at the things and presents she had been bestowed in lieu of her maiden visit to the parental home. She happened to see a packet of incense sticks which made her grim faced. Being internally upset she

asked daughter - in- law to use these Agarbattis tomorrow in her daily pooja. Next day morning while sitting for Pooja she opened the packing of incense sticks and saw a hand written letter of his father whose text made her too emotional with tears rolling down in torrents. Therein it was narrated " Dear daughter, This agarbatti burns itself, but emits and spreads soothing and captivating aroma all around in the house and it also charges the surrounding environment with palatable aroma. Just possible sometimes you may get upset with your husband due to certain issues or you may take offence with your mother and father in law, you may have bit of problem with your Devar and Nanad, at times some near and dear may shout at you, you may take umbrage with your close neighbours on trivial matters, in such critical times you may please turn focus on and keep this letter of mine in the centre of your thought process. The contents and the underlying message and the positive piece of life changing advice aroused her tender emotions , she burst into tears and started weeping bitterly. Sasu Maa rushed to her swiftly to understand as to what had happened to the newly wedded Bahu, her husband and Sasur also promptly reached in the Pooja room where Bahu was terribly sobbing, to take stock of the situation in its entirety. Her husband enquired about the cause of her weeping so severely. Sasur also asked her to precisely speak about the cause of this nasty happening. Sasu Maa started closely looking for any weird thing

energy, mineral, and cement corridor; and the high traffic density corridor.

The resultant decongestion of the high-traffic corridors will also help in improving the operations of passenger trains, resulting in safety and higher travel speed for passengers. Together with dedicated freight corridors, these three economic corridor programs will accelerate our GDP growth and reduce logistic costs.

After the success of Vande Bharat trains, the FM announced around 40,000 more rail bogies will be converted to Vande Bharat coaches. This will further create job opportunities while reducing travel time as well as increasing tourism across the country. The development of commodity-specific economic rail corridors can de-congest existing lines, mostly in the eastern part of the country. This is supportive of faster freight movement and turnaround times and should help reduce the logistics cost for India from 12 percent of GDP, improving competitiveness, especially manufacturing, against peers.

Viability gap funding will be provided for harnessing offshore wind energy potential for the initial capacity of one giga-watt. Coal gasification and liquefaction capacity of 100 MT will be set up by 2030. This will also help in reducing imports of natural gas, methanol, and ammonia.

Phased mandatory blending of compressed biogas (CBG) in compressed natural gas (CNG) for transport and piped natural gas (PNG) for domestic purposes will be mandated. Financial assistance will be provided for procurement of biomass aggregation machinery to support collection. The government will expand and strengthen the EV ecosystem by supporting manufacturing and charging infrastructure, the finance minister has said and added that greater adoption of e-buses for public transport networks will be encouraged through payment security mechanisms. Finance Minister announced that states will be encouraged to take up comprehensive development of iconic tourist centers' branding and marketing at a global scale.

around. In this process she laid hand at a well hand written letter of Bahu's father, just after reading the contents of the letter, she briskly hugged her terribly sobbing Bahu and passed the letter to Sasur ji, who handed over the letter to his son for reading it out. After understanding the whole situation , entire family was grossly taken aback. Sasu Maa addressed to all members of the family and asked them to get this letter framed, this is the highly phenomenal and the invaluable gift of my Bahu and keep it adjoining to the Pooja room. This framed letter of Bahu's father shall always beautify and incessantly spread bewitching fragrance and positive vibes in nook and corner of the house. Further this framed letter by virtue of its lovely and meaningful words would go a long way in purifying and providing lovely fragrance not only to the entire house but also to the surrounding environment. The bundle of Aggarbattis may exhaust in due course of time but the moral lesson and their indelible impression would have lifelong impact which can transform lives, strengthen family system making it a rich source of moral education and positive sanskars."

Crux message of this anecdote is that the parents and the entire family as a whole do have the opportunity and the needed ability to inculcate life values and the constructive traits in the kids right from the beginning with utmost care and devotion despite it being a colossal challenge amidst the uncontrolled usage of ever distracting electronic and social media when even a less

cover all ASHA and Anganwadi workers. More district level hospitals will be setup. 9 to 14 years old girls will be vaccinated against cervical cancer. Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 to be expedited for improved nutrition delivery, early childhood care and development

Air Connectivity: To promote air connectivity across different regions in the country, 517 new routes to be launched under Udaan Scheme

Tourism: Interest-free loans will be provided to states to promote tourism. Government will also allocate funds for development of tourism in Lakshadweep.

Railways: In a bid to improve operations of passenger trains, the FM announced three major economic railway corridor programmes viz energy, mineral and cement corridors, port connectivity corridors and high traffic density corridors. These corridors will improve logistics efficiency and reduce cost. The resultant decongestion of the high-traffic corridors will also help in improving operations of passenger trains, resulting in safety and higher travel speed for passengers besides reducing logistics cost. As many as 40,000 normal train bogies will be converted into high speed Vande Bharat bogies.

Reiterating Hon'ble Primuminister of the country Sh. Narendra Modi's resolve to work for four castes in India, the Finance Minister said that the needs and aspirations of the four categories of peoples the poor, women, youth and farmers' will guide country's growth. Hon'ble Finance Minister had listed inclusive growth and social justice as the priorities of the government. Hopefully next five years will witness unprecedented growth based on the philosophy of Antyodaya i. e rise and development of the last person in the society.

(The author writes on agriculture and social issues).

A rating system based on the quality of facilities and services will be established. Long-term interest-free loans will be provided to states for financing these developments. Projects for port connectivity, tourism infrastructure, and amenities will be taken up on our islands, including Lakshadweep, this will help in generating employment as well.

The FDI inflow during 2014-23 was \$596 billion marking a golden era. That is twice the inflow during 2005-14. For encouraging sustained foreign investment, the government is negotiating bilateral investment treaties with foreign partners, in the spirit of 'first develop India', said finance minister in her speech.

New-age technologies and data are changing the lives of people and businesses. They are also enabling new economic opportunities and facilitating the provision of high-quality services at affordable prices for all, including those at the 'bottom of the pyramid'.

She announced a corpus of rupees one lakh crore will be established with a fifty-year interest-free loan. The corpus will provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil interest rates. This will encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in sunrise domains.

The Skill India Mission's initiative to train 1.4 crore young individuals, along with the upskilling and re-skilling of 54 lakh youth, coupled with the establishment of 3,000 new Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), is a vital step towards bolstering the PLI and Make in India programs. This comprehensive approach is essential in enhancing the manufacturing sector's contribution to the GDP from 17 percent to 25 percent by 2047, thereby creating numerous job opportunities.

To ensure faster growth of the sector, the government will further promote private and public investment in post-harvest activities including aggregation, modern storage, efficient supply chains, primary and secondary processing, and marketing and branding.

than one year baby looks for a mobile as prop to feed milk and in most of the cases breast feeding is avoided by young mothers for maintaining their figure. Nothing to worry about, we need to be little focussed and determined to change the scenario for better future of our progeny. In earlier times when our joint family system was intact and well in place prior to the exposure of western culture and modern lifestyle and in general, the set up and system of the family was such that by and large three to four generations were living together wherein our finer cultural values, manners, traditions were passing on to the next upcoming generation in a natural process. At this critical juncture it has come to naught due to the changed social milieu. This is not something impossible but probably achievable by a bit of positive initiative and concerted efforts in the form of regular weekly family assembly for two hours inclusive of children. No sermons to be given but healthy GUP CHHUP. Some good bhajans, patriotic songs, poems, Inspiring stories of our national heroes ,Gods, social workers etc. healthy interaction with children involving them in discussion like in the last week what good you saw, what good you heard and what good you studied, then enjoying lunch or dinner together. This would be a kind of counselling within the family and in the end a pep talk by father or Grandfather which would strengthen bonding and mutual trust. Being united and in togetherness we shall accomplish the cherished goal.

Jai Hind