

!! Continuations from Page 1 !! Diverse agro-climatic...

systems, digital agriculture, start-up culture, advanced veterinary science, innovation, and data sciences will help in addressing the challenges and exploring opportunities in sustainable agriculture.

The Lt Governor directed the Agricultural Universities to prepare a strategy for diversification, value addition, supply chain management and profitable market linkage for small and marginal farmers.

The Lt Governor made certain valuable suggestions to improve productivity and make the agriculture and allied sector more lucrative for farmers and stakeholders.

He advised for chalking out an effective scientific strategy for organic and integrated farming. Our farmers should be provided necessary handholding and guidance on Monoculture farming so that they could avail the benefits of this 'Farming of Future', he said.

The Lt Governor emphasized on increasing awareness and dissemination of information on the benefits of crop rotation, digitization and precision farming tools among the farmers.

He also advised for Rural Action Plan for innovation, technological advances, and digital agriculture to make rural community accessible to the key flagship areas of the agriculture and allied sectors.

The Lt Governor shared various progressive steps taken by the government including Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), high density plantation, GI tags for niche products, agri-entrepreneurship, new Farmers Producers Organisations and developing educational institutions as a technical hub to support farmers.

J&K is the biggest producer of apple in the country. Last year, our annual production was 75 per cent of the country's total production. In the last 3 years, 2.44 lakh metric tonnes of CA storage additional capacity have been added and we are aiming to add similar capacity in the next 6 months, the Lt Governor further added.

Dr. B. N. Tripathi, Vice Chancellor, SKUAST-Jammu and Conference Chair emphasised upon the importance of diversification of agriculture and its potential in attaining food and livelihood security.

At SKUAST Jammu, the Lt Governor inaugurated the International Hostel of the University.

He also released the Souvenir cum Abstracts of the 6th J&K Agricultural Science Congress being organized by SKUAST-J in collaboration with J&K Science, Technology and Innovation Council, Department of Science & Technology, J&K.

On the occasion, J&K Science, Technology & Innovation Council, Department of Science & Technology handed over a cheque of the financial assistance of Rs 1.45 crore to SKUAST Jammu on account of research of R&D projects under the Sponsored Research & Extension Programme scheme.

Prof. Nazir Ahmad Ganai, Vice-Chancellor SKUAST Kashmir; Saurabh Bhagat, Commissioner/Secretary, Science & Technology Department; senior Officers of UT Administration and SKUAST, Agriculture Scientists, scholars and students were present.

LG lauds significant...

is created which makes the nation stronger," he said.

On the occasion, the Lt Governor paid homage to the Hockey legend Major Dhyan Chand. He also appreciated the incredible arrangements and the impressive performances of all the players.

A total of 25 men and 9 women teams participated in the tournament.

Earlier, the Lt Governor inspected and took salute at an impressive march past by the players of different teams. A souvenir of the tournament was also released by the Lt Governor.

Rajeev Rai Bhatnagar, Advisor to Lt Governor; RR Swain, DGP J&K; Dr Mahesh Dixit, Additional Director, IB; Vijay Kumar, ADGP Law & Order; Anand Jain, ADGP Jammu; Ramesh Kumar, Divisional Commissioner Jammu, senior officials of Police, Security Forces and UT administration, prominent sports personalities, sports enthusiasts and hockey lovers were present.

Security tightened in...

case, Birdi asserted that security grids are in place and are operational. Authorities have asked the public to remain cautious and vigilant in the wake of the attack.

"We have already intensified patrolling, and we are working on solving the case," Birdi told PTI.

Refusing to share details on the incident, Birdi said it will be premature to tell things. "Sometimes it becomes prejudicial for investigations but we are definitely working on it (on the case)," he said.

Security forces have also initiated a search operation in and around the area of the attack, and have been conducting random checking of individuals in various parts of the city.

The Wednesday's terror incident found mention in the Lok Sabha, with Congress MP from Ludhiana Rameet Singh expressing concern over the death of the two workers from his state.

"This is a matter of concern. Their bodies have reached Punjab today. What is the reason behind the killings? The government there has termed it as a terrorist attack. There is a need to take care of their families," he said.

National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah, while speaking at the Left Democratic Front (LDF) protest, asked why assembly polls are not being held in Jammu and Kashmir and wondered what was gained from the abrogation of the provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution.

"When they (Centre) abrogated Article 370, they said it was responsible for terrorism. Yesterday, two innocent people were shot dead (in Srinagar)," the former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said, while expressing his condemnation of the terror group for killing the innocent civilians.

In Jammu, a handful of activists of the Rashtriya Bajrang Dal (RBD) held a protest.

Dozens of RBD activists led by their leader Rakesh Bajrang assembled in the city and held protests and demonstrations against Pakistan and the terrorists.

Raising anti-Pakistan slogans, the protestors set afire the Pakistan flag.

"The targeted killings have begun again. Two non-locals, including a Sikh and Hindu, were killed in targeted killing. The aim is to create fear and force non-locals to flee Kashmir. This won't happen again," Rashtriya Bajrang Dal president Rakesh Kumar told reporters.

Kumar said that Pakistan and its terror infrastructure is trying to revive terrorism in Kashmir.

"This is an attempt to create fear psychosis among the minorities in the valley. They will not be allowed to be successful again," he said.

Civil society members held demonstrations in several areas of Kashmir, including at Srinagar's Lal Chowk, to protest the killing, officials said here.

BJP workers held a candlelight march at Ghanta Ghar at Lal Chowk.

In Kashmir, demonstrations were also held at Pulwama, Kulgam, Handwara and Anantnag towns.

In Anantnag, NC leader Syed Tauqeer joined a candlelight vigil. "We condemn the killing of innocent civilians. No religion allows such killings. It is an injustice with the families of the victims of this attack," Tauqeer said.

Jammu and Kashmir Congress working president Raman Bhalla has strongly condemned the killings and said that "a befitting reply should be given to the perpetrators of heinous crime on innocent people".

Bhalla said that Kashmiris are sick of death and destruction unleashed by radicals.

"They wish to live in peace and pick up peaceful life and ensure no more Kashmiris or non-locals are killed by the terrorists. Kashmir calls for peace and sustainable inclusive development for the betterment of future generations," he said.

Last year, terrorists had carried out three attacks on non-local workers, resulting in the death of two and injuries to three others.

While a circus worker from Udhampur district was shot dead by terrorists on May 30, 2023, in Anantnag district, brick kiln worker Mukesh Kumar from Bihar was shot dead by the ultras on October 31 last year in Pulwama district.

Three labourers were injured in an attack by terrorists in the Gagren area of Shopian district on July 13.

State can't be...

State pick out only two for example? Those who are excluded can always challenge their classification under Article 14 on the ground that we fulfil all criteria of backwardness. But the State can also rebut, saying we can classify a caste by looking at the extent of backwardness. It can say that we want to confer reservation to the most backward.

"But while conferring benefits on the most backward, you cannot exclude others. This will become a dangerous trend of appeasement. Some state governments will pick out a few castes while others will pick another set of castes. The idea is not for popular politics to play out in this. We will have to tailor it by laying down the criteria," the bench, also comprising justices B R Gavai, Vikram Nath, Bela M Trivedi, Pankaj Mithal, Manoj Misra and Satish Chandra Mishra, said.

The court, which reserved its judgment after hearing the submissions of the

Centre, states and others, said it is the role of the State to give reservation and remove social backwardness and while doing that, if it wants to remove the inequalities being faced by a class, it can do it.

It said sub-categorisation will aid in others within that caste to come up, otherwise only one segment will continue to get the benefits.

Appearing in the court on behalf of one of the parties, senior advocate Manoj Swarup mentioned about the heterogeneity within castes.

The top court had said on Wednesday that all SCs and STs might not be homogeneous in terms of their sociological, economic, education and social status.

"There is heterogeneity in terms of past occupation.... Social status and other indicators may be different for different castes inside the Scheduled Castes. So the degree of social and economic backwardness may vary from one person or caste to another," the bench had said.

On Tuesday, the top court had said it would examine the validity of its 2004 judgment that held that the states do not have the power to further sub-classify the SCs and STs for the grant of quotas.

It had made it clear that it will not get into the arguments related to the quantifiable data that led the Punjab government to provide for a 50-per cent quota within an already existing quota.

Of the 23 petitions, the lead one has been filed by the Punjab government, challenging a 2010 verdict of the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

The high court had struck down section 4(5) of the Punjab Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act, 2006 that provided a 50-per cent quota and the first preference to the "Valmiki" and "Mazhabi Sikh" castes in public jobs within the SC quota.

It had held the provision as unconstitutional on the ground that it violated the 2004 judgment of the apex court in the Chinnaiiah case.

The Chinnaiiah judgment had held that any "sub-classification" of the SCs would violate Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution.

The 2004 verdict had stated that only Parliament and not state legislatures can exclude castes deemed to be SCs from the Presidential List under Article 341 of the Constitution.

The top court is examining questions that whether a sub-classification inside the SC and ST categories could be allowed like in the case of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and if the assemblies are competent to introduce laws empowering the states to undertake the exercise.

Assailing the high court's verdict, the Punjab government approached the top court in 2011 and contended that the apex court's 2004 judgment was not applicable to it.

Taking up the Punjab government's plea, a five-judge bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra (since retired), on August 27, 2020, differed with the Chinnaiiah judgment and referred it for adjudication by a larger bench of seven judges or more for an authoritative pronouncement.

In the higher education institutions funded by the Centre, 22.5 per cent of the available seats are reserved for SCs and 7.5 per cent for ST students. The same yardstick is applied in the case of public employment as well. In Punjab and Haryana, there is no ST population.

Parliament approves both...

management of the UT Government in recent months.

Accordingly, the Central Government has agreed to provide Rs. 41751.44 crore to the UT Government in this financial year and Rs.37277.74 crore in the next financial year. These assistance figures were duly captured in the Revised Estimates of 2023-24 and the Budget Estimates of 2024-25 of the Union Government. This assistance includes the normal assistance (resource gap) to the UT Government, equity contribution for hydropower projects at Kiru, Kwar and Rattle, etc.

Building on this, Finance Department drafted its Supplementary Budget for 2023-24 and Vote on Account for 2024-25 and the two Appropriation Bills. The revised estimates for 2023-24 is overall lower than the budgeted estimates 2023-24 as the UT government was successful in streamlining its expenditure. The supplementary demands for 2023-24 of Rs 8,712.90 crore pertain to the four Departments of Finance, Power Development, Hospitality and Protocol and Cooperatives. The supplementary budget is required by Finance department in view of the repayment of debt, while Power Development department needs to provide for power procurement. The Hospitality and Protocol department intends to develop the new J&K Bhawan at Dwarka, New Delhi for which land will be allotted from DDA. The Cooperative department requires the funding additionality for its new CSS, Assistance to Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS). These additional demands are proposed to be catered with Supplementary Demands for the current year 2023-24.

The Parliament also approved the interim budget for 2024-25 for Jammu & Kashmir which makes provisions for the ongoing initiatives in J&K to promote social inclusion, enhance transparency, augment revenues, and step up infrastructure development. It also provides for ongoing measures for sustainable agriculture, industrial estate, PRI level works, employment generation, and developing tourism. The Parliament also approved the UT's Vote on Account for Rs. 59,364 crore. This interim budget covers revenue expenditure of Rs. 40,081 crore and capital expenditure of Rs. 19,283 crore. It provides for the ongoing measures and schemes as follows -

- 1) Rs 2959 crore provisioned for tap-water connectivity for rural areas under Jal Jeevan Mission with Rs 532 crore as UT Share.
- 2) Rs 934 crore for transforming agriculture and allied sectors of the UT through the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), including provisions for IFAD funded J&K Comprehensive Investment Plan (JKCIP).
- 3) Rs 1907 crore for rejuvenating school education infrastructure and services through funding under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, PM SHRI and PM Poshan.
- 4) Provision of improving road connectivity with Rs 1683 crore for PMGSY roads, Rs 300 crore for CRF roads, and Rs 1000 crore NABARD scheme.
- 5) Rs 1313 crore for strengthening decentralized governance by providing for local area works of panchayat and urban local bodies.
- 6) Rs 1271 crore for strengthening infrastructure and services in Health sector.
- 7) Rs 1093 crore for rural housing under PM Awas Yojana-Grameen scheme.
- 8) Rs 1000 crore for e social security coverage for Old aged, Widow and Disabled pensions.
- 9) Rs 660 crore for J&K's equity for in the hydro electric projects at Ratle, Kwar, and Kiru, which would provide stable revenue source and cheaper power.
- 10) Rs 505 crore for timely procurement of machinery, equipments, prosthetic aids and drugs in Health sector through the dedicated corporation.
- 11) Rs 500 crore for capitalization of Cooperative Banks, Rural Banks, J&K Bank, etc.
- 12) Rs 450 crore for infrastructure of new Colleges and Universities as per NEP vision.
- 13) Rs 430 crore for women empowerment intervention of Ladli Beti and Marriage Assistance
- 14) Rs 400 crore for construction of Transit accommodations for Kashmiri Pandit employees.
- 15) Rs 400 crore for development of Industrial Estates and related infrastructure.
- 16) Rs 370 crore under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Urban) scheme.
- 17) Rs 390 crore for Flood Management Project of River Jhelum.
- 18) Rs 450 crore for GST re-imbursement to ensure timely reimbursement of the claims.
- 19) Rs 272 crore for DDC /BDC grants improving local governance at district and block level
- 20) Rs 174 crore for development of model schools under PM-Shri scheme.
- 21) Rs 155 crore for industrial incentives, Start-ups, trade promotion, Job fairs etc.
- 22) Rs 155 crore for Heritage conservation, Tourism promotion, and promotion of festivals, cinema/ theatre.
- 23) Rs 150 crore for developing rooftop solar and other avenues of new and renewable energy.
- 24) Rs 140 crore for creation of Sports Infrastructure
- 25) Rs 104 crore for construction of Police Housing, Bunkers, Police Stations, CCTV, etc.
- 26) Rs 100 crore for conclusion of World Bank funded Jhelum Tawi Flood Recovery Project.
- 27) Rs 100 crore for Mission Youth programmes for education, skilling, and employment
- 28) Rs 91 crore for new tourism destinations, new circuits, Suffi circuit and identified religious circuits, ropeways, highway resting places and promotion of Golf.
- 29) Rs 70 crore under infrastructure for welfare of tribals for construction of Tribal Hostels/Milk Villages/ Nomad Shelters/Libraries for Gujjars.
- 30) Rs 100 crore for sewerage projects in urban areas, Rs 70 crore for development of new Townships and affordable housing and Rs 50 crore for Dal development.

With the Parliamentary nod to the two Appropriation Bills on the Supplementary Demands for 2023-24 and Vote on Account for 2024-25, the UT Government will now focus on expediting infrastructure projects and social and economic measures

and meeting the revenue realization targets.

27 pc OBC...

of posts that should be filled up by OBC recruitment and ensure all possible methods for a stricter adherence" to the 27 per cent reservation mandate for OBCs in appointment to the posts.

The committee through the experiences gained from its study visits across India were confronted with the variations in the format of OBC caste certificate being issued at state levels, the report said.

"It was found that there existed a sense of confusion among many beneficiaries vis-à-vis the specifications of the certificate. Moreover, the practice of subclassification of OBC into Most Backward Classes (MBC) and Extremely Backward Classes (EBC) was also brought to the notice of the committee," it said.

Non-specification of validity date of the OBC certificate is also one of the confusing factor which has figured, the report said.

The committee suggested that the DoPT -- the issuing authority of the format of OBC Caste Certificate -- needs to undertake a holistic review for ascertaining the difference and discrepancies, if any, in issuing of the certificate in states and Union Territories while ensuring that the validity period of each certificate is duly reflected on it at the time of issue.

Cabinet approves six...

comprehensive development in the area which will enhance their employment/self-employment opportunities," it added.

According to the government, the six projects, which cover 18 districts in the six states, will increase the existing network of the Indian Railways by 1,020 km and will provide about three crore man-days of employment to the people of the states.

The railway sections are Ajmer-Chanderya and Jaipur-Sawai Madhopur in Rajasthan; Luni-Samdari-Bhildi in Gujarat and Rajasthan; Aghori-Kamakha with new rail-cum-road bridge in Assam; Lumding-Furkating in Assam and Nagaland; and Motumari-Vishnupuram and Rail-Over-Rail at Motumari in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

"The projects are the result of the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan for multimodal connectivity which has been possible through integrated planning and will provide seamless connectivity for movement of people, goods and services," the statement added.

Cabinet decision on...

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana, which has been approved by the Cabinet will boost the fisheries sector, especially MSMEs associated with the sector, he added.

The government had earlier announced a Rs 6,000-crore scheme in order to formalise the unorganised fisheries sector, facilitate institutional finance to micro and small enterprises (MSMEs) and promote aquaculture insurance.

It also decided to extend the FIDF for another three years up to 2025-26 within the already approved fund of Rs 7,522.48 crore and budgetary support of Rs 939.48 crore.

J&K witnessed driest...

valley on Thursday, officials said here.

The minimum in Gulmarg skiing resort in north Kashmir fell to minus 12 degrees Celsius from previous night's minus 10 degrees Celsius. Gulmarg was the coldest recorded place in the valley on Wednesday night.

Pahalgal tourist resort in south Kashmir, which serves as the base camp for the annual Amarnath yatra, recorded a low of minus 11.9 degrees Celsius.

Kokernag and Qazigund towns in south Kashmir recorded a low of minus 4.5 degrees Celsius and minus 6.4 degrees Celsius respectively, the officials said.

Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 5.2 degrees Celsius compared to previous night's minus 2 degrees Celsius.

The minimum temperatures in Pahalgal, Gulmarg, Qazigund and Srinagar were around five degrees below normal for this time of the year.

Although 'Chilla-i-Kalan' -- the 40-day harshest winter period -- ended earlier this week, the cold wave has continued in Kashmir.

The valley is currently going through a 20-day-long 'Chilla-i-Khurd' (small cold) which shall be followed by a 10-day 'Chilla-i-Bachha' (baby cold).

Govt's focus on...

Jammu and Kashmir; 2024 25 in Rajya Sabha.

Later, the Upper House returned the 5 bills with voice vote, thus completing the process of passage of interim Budget of the Union government as well as for the UT of Jammu and Kashmir.

Sitharaman stressed that the highlight of the interim budget is the emphasis given by the government on capital expenditure and sustaining pace of economic growth.

The size of interim budget is Rs 47.6 lakh crore, with Rs 11.11 lakh crore earmarked for infrastructure development.

"With the capital expenditure being in the focus, in the last 3-4 years, we have made sure that our debt management is done in such a way that we honour the glide path for fiscal deficit that we had given in 2021," Sitharaman said.

The government has pegged the fiscal deficit, or gap between expenditure and revenue, at 5.1 per cent of the GDP for the fiscal year starting April 1, 2024. The government intends to eventually bring it down to 4.5 per cent of the GDP in the fiscal 2025-26.

"If for a rupee spent on revenue expenditure, you hardly get 98 paise return, whereas on every rupee spent on capital expenditure, you get Rs 1.46 as return. So public investment in infrastructure gives us greater returns," she said, and added the government has committed to spend about 17 per cent higher than revised budget (RE) of 2023-24.

"Our outlay is higher than the projected GDP growth rate of 10.5 per cent during the next financial year," she said.

During her reply she responded to issues raised by Rajya Sabha members during the discussion.

She hit out at an opposition party MP saying that she was "astonished" that the member had confused capital expenditure with expenditure on capitalists.

"Capital expenditure is not expenditure on capitalists! Capital expenditure is spent on creating assets, which can be used by all citizens equally and their common infrastructure which improves the 'ease of living' for everybody," she said.

The minister emphasised capital expenditure for creation of public infrastructure is growing faster than real GDP growth, and assured the House that the government has not reduced allocation for any social sector scheme to meet its fiscal target.

She further said that unemployment rate in rural areas has decreased from 5.3 pc in 2017 to 2.4 pc in 2023.

During his speech, Ashok Kumar Mittal (AAP) had made a reference to India's position in Global Hunger Index at 111th spot.

To this, Sitharman said the index is not a balanced approach to measure hunger and "lets be conscious of it". She also pointed index's data was based on mere sample size of 3,000 households, and added "it is not a precise index as 3 out of 4 parameters focus on children".

Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar too joined in and said "we need to be cognizant...how can we allow any organisation to liberalise us".

Several MPs from opposition parties had raised the issue of lesser allocation of funds to states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, under the devolution of taxes formula. Sitharaman, however, strongly countered the assertions, saying her government has not violated any recommendation of the Finance Commission.

"Whatever was recommended by Finance Commission has been already given as per time, and will be given till the time of Finance Commission," the minister said.

Several members has raised concerns over price situation in the country. To this, the minister said retail inflation has been brought down from average 6.8 per cent during April-December 2022 period to 5.5 per cent in the corresponding period of 2023.

Participating in the discussion, Congress leader Randeep Surjewala attacked the government for not doing anything for farm sector in the interim budget, though the farmers continue to suffer from higher input cost like fertilisers.

He also charged that the government has failed in fulfilling its promise of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

The Congress MP also sought to now why the government has not yet brought a law to give guaranteed minimum support price (MSP).

Citing the NCRB data, the Congress leader said more than one lakh farmers have committed suicide since 2014 but the government was not listening to farmers' pain.

"The Budget and appropriation bill do not have anything for hardworking people, and farmers," Surjewala said.

Jawhar Sircar (TMC) cautioned the government that India's GDP should reach USD 5 trillion mark in the near future, but "not at the cost of such high borrowing". He also raised concerns over fiscal deficit.

Binoy Viswam (CPI) rued that government has reduced subsidies on food and fertilizers, thus affecting both common citizens and farmers.

He also talked about tax devolution between Centre and states, and demanded due share of funds for Kerala.