

Union Budget 2025

The Union Budget for the fiscal year 2025, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2025, aims to address the nation's economic challenges while charting a course for sustained growth, fiscal prudence, and inclusive development. The budget builds upon the previous year's reforms, focusing on innovation, infrastructure, and social welfare. The government's primary focus is on spurring economic growth while maintaining fiscal discipline. India is projected to grow at 7% in 2025, driven by reforms in manufacturing, digital infrastructure, and rural development. The fiscal deficit for 2025 is targeted at 4.4% of GDP, slightly lower than the previous year, signaling the government's commitment to consolidating public finances. The Finance Minister has also outlined a roadmap to bring the fiscal deficit down to 3.5% by 2026, aiming for long-term fiscal health. The Budget proposes no changes to the personal income tax slabs but introduces a host of measures to simplify compliance. The income tax system will be made more transparent, with the government promising a reduction in paperwork and faster processing of returns. Tax rebates will be extended to middle-income families, helping to boost domestic consumption. Corporate tax reforms continue to encourage investment, particularly in technology, innovation, and green industries. The government has also committed to further reducing the compliance burden on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Infrastructure development remains a cornerstone of the 2025 Budget. The government has allocated Rs. 7.5 lakh crore for infrastructure projects, with a focus on building roads, railways, airports, and digital infrastructure. The PM Gati Shakti initiative, which aims to enhance logistics and connectivity, will see a significant boost. The government will continue its push for urban and rural development. Special attention will be paid to strengthening the PMAY (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana) scheme, targeting the construction of affordable housing and rural infrastructure. The Budget prioritizes social welfare programs, with increased allocations for health, education, and rural employment schemes. The government has earmarked Rs. 1.5 lakh crore for the healthcare sector, focusing on expanding healthcare infrastructure and making quality healthcare accessible to all citizens. The MGNREGA scheme, which provides rural employment, has been given a higher allocation, in line with the government's objective of improving livelihoods and ensuring job creation in rural areas. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) has also seen a budgetary increase to expand the coverage of health insurance for vulnerable populations.

BASANT PANCHAMI SIGNIFIES ECSTASY, PEACE AND PROSPERITY

■ PURAN CHAND SHARMA

Bharat is said to be country of festivals, after every now and then we observe some festival being celebrated in the country. Some of the festivals are celebrated across the National landscape whereas there are few festivals which are observed Region or state wise. All our festivals have a very special and unique significance. Man by nature remains excessively preoccupied in his personal, domestic and Social activities etc. Therefore, in due course of time whilst being engaged in his variety of chores , he also looks for rather urgently needs a break, some kind of pastime or event out of which he can imbibe needed solace, some kind of recharging with plenty of positive and constructive energy for giving his best on the domestic front as well as wider social spectrum. The most significant point to be underlined is that some ulterior activities apart from usual working are required to keep him fit enabling him to give his hundred percent to the family, society and the nation as a whole. Our festivals and identical events occur in a sequence. In fact all our festivals play a vital role in destressing us and save us from unwanted mental agony and superfluous negative thinking.

Origin and brief history of Basant Panchami

Deeply exploring our cultural History we find that the roots of this festival lie in Hindu mythology and on this auspicious day Brahamma, the Creator had manifested Maa Saraswati for enlightening the whole universe and making it more beautiful as well as charmingly worth living. In more worldly sense Basant Panchami happens to be the Happy Birthday of Maa Saraswati. Initially when the world was created , there was grim silence and no voice of any kind was there in the space all around.

Post her incarnation, there appeared music, different sounds and voices as well. It was, therefore , admitted and thought that MAA SARASWATI blessed the world with speech, music and generated hope for



one and all. Revered Goddess Saraswati is considered to be the established deity of wisdom, intellect and artistic inspiration. We all know that Bharat is a land of diverse traditions and festivals. Basant Panchami is also celebrated in the form of a vibrant ode to the arrival of Spring season and for the purpose of worshipping Goddess Saraswti.

This is the most significant Indian festival which blends cultural, spiritual and seasonal elements making it a day of joy, learning and blissfulness. Famous as Basant Panchami or Saraswati Puja , it is celebrated on 5th day of Magha, (January -February) , accordingly this year it falls on 2nd February, 2o25. People also celebrate it as Birthday of Goddess Saraswati to invoke her blessings, wisdom and kindness.

Significant incidents, events related with this festival

*Legendary poet KALIDASS was passing through extreme turbulent times after he had suffered many setbacks in his life, being despondent and driven by excessive negativity he had made up his mind to end his life, at that point of time GODDESS SARASWATI emerged from the waters

and transformed him into a Literary genius and in due course of time he shot into prominence forever.

*Arrival of Spring: Basant Panchami is the herald of spring season with particular focus on yellow colour representing spring time vibrancy. Yellow is the predominant colour during the spring season representing the blossoming of yellow Mustard flowers.

*Reunion of Kaamdeva and Rati: per Matsaya Puraana , Kaamdeva, the God of love was revived on the day of Basant Panchami with the blessings of Lord Shiva culminating into his reunion with his consort, Rati.

*Martyrdom of Veer Haqiqat Rai: At the time of his martyrdom he was of 12 years old, whilst in the school he had some altercation with Muslim kids of his class who started abusing Maa Durga, Haqiqat Rai told them not to do so but they did not relent, then Haqiqat Rai warned them if you do not stop then I would also hurl abuses on your Bibi Fatima.

The Muslim children were not deterred and the mutual quarrel continued, Haqiqat Rai again warned to desist from this kind of behaviour but they turned a

deaf ear, then he also abused their deity, then the Muslim children rushed to MOULVI, the religious teacher of the school, then to the Headmaster and ultimately to the king. All these people were asking Haqiqat Rai to beg pardon and convert to Islam by changing his religion but Haqiqat firmly told them ' I will neither beg pardon nor change my religion, the quarrel was started by them, they abused my Deity, I am not at fault , you do whatever you want but I will not quit my religion . They told him either you change your religion , beg pardon or you will be killed.

He fearlessly roared that I would prefer death than conversion to other religion. Ultimately 12 year old child Haqiqat Rai got martyred in 1742 on the day of Basant Panchami . Therefore, people also organize programmes in remembrance of Haqiqat Rai on the this day , who is our pride and a source of inspiration for the upcoming generations.

How this festival is celebrated and its core message

There may be a bit of variation in different parts of the country but in general on this auspicious day people worship MAA SARASWATI, the deity of knowledge and music with special puja and offerings wearing yellow clothes, flying kites which is a popular activity in North India symbolizing the joy of spring , organizing cultural programmes , offering yellow sweets, welcoming arrival of spring season. Cultural programmes such as Music, Dance and other related events also form part of the celebrations. The soothing and inspiring message of Basant Panchami is to stay united, live in togetherness and perfect harmony all the time.

Because it is a spring time, all kind of fun and frolic go hand in hand with delicious food, new clothes and social get together. Yellow colour is predominant as it symbolizes peace, prosperity and energy. This festival is highly impactful and recharges the people with enthusiasm and positive thinking.

Celebrating Basant Panchami: A Spring Festival

■ DR SONIA VERMA

Basant Panchami, also known as Vasant Panchami, is a vibrant Hindu festival celebrated with great enthusiasm across India, marking the arrival of spring. This festival occurs on the fifth day of Shukla Paksha (the waxing phase of the moon) in the month of Magh, which typically falls in January or February. Vasant Panchami heralds the end of winter, inviting warmth and renewal as nature begins to awaken from its slumber.

Significantly, Basant Panchami is dedicated to Goddess Saraswati, the revered deity of knowledge, music, arts, and wisdom. She embodies the creative energy of the universe and is worshiped by students, artists, and scholars who seek her blessings for success in their educational and artistic endeavors. The festival is characterized by the color yellow, symbolizing prosperity and the blossoming of mustard flowers that bloom during this season. Devotees often wear yellow attire, offer yellow flowers, and prepare traditional yellow sweets to honor the goddess.

The day is particularly auspicious for initiating educational pursuits. Many families observe the tradition of "Vidya-Arambha" or "Khadi-Chuan," where parents guide their young children in writing their first letters or syllables, often starting with the sacred "Om." This practice embodies the deep-rooted belief that beginning education on Basant Panchami under the blessings of Goddess Saraswati will lead to a prosperous and enlightened path.

Rituals and Celebrations

Basant Panchami is marked by a variety of rituals and celebrations that vary across different regions of India, showcasing the cultural diversity of the festival. Central to the festivities is the Saraswati Puja, where devotees gather to honor the goddess with fervor and devotion. In eastern states like West Bengal, Odisha, and Assam, the day is celebrated with elaborate rituals. Homes and educational institutions are adorned with images of Goddess Saraswati, and devotees offer her yellow flowers, fruits, and sweets. The sacred "Shodashopachara" (sixteen offerings) ritual is commonly performed, which includes items like sugar, milk, honey, and various fruits, symbolizing purity and devotion.

In these regions, students often bring their books and musical instruments to the puja, seeking blessings for wisdom and success in their studies and performances. After the puja, the offerings are distributed as Prasada, and families enjoy traditional yellow sweets such as "Puli" (sweet dumplings) and "Bora" (fried snacks), which enhances the festive spirit.

In western India, particularly in Gujarat and Maharashtra, Basant Panchami is celebrated with unique customs. People don yellow attire and participate in kite-flying activities, symbolizing the arrival of spring and the joy it brings. The festival also sees families coming together for communal meals, where dishes featuring saffron and turmeric are prepared, reflecting the yellow theme of the day.

Significance of Goddess Saraswati

Goddess Saraswati holds a central position in the celebration of Basant Panchami, symbolizing the profound connection between knowledge, the arts, and cultural values in Indian society. As the goddess of wisdom, music, and learning, she embodies the essence of education, making her veneration on this auspicious day particularly significant. Basant Panchami serves not only as a celebration of the arrival of spring but also as a reminder of the importance of intellectual and artistic pursuits in life.

The association of Goddess Saraswati with knowledge is deeply rooted in Hindu tradition. It is believed that she bestows her blessings upon students and scholars, guiding them on their educational journeys. On Basant Panchami, devotees pray for wisdom and enlightenment, seeking the goddess's favor to excel in their studies and creative endeavors. This day is especially important for young children, as many families observe the ritual of "Vidya-Arambha," where parents initiate their children's formal education by guiding them in writing their first letters. This act of beginning education on Basant Panchami under the auspices of Goddess Saraswati is thought to ensure a fruitful learning experience.

Cultural significance is further highlighted by the rituals performed on this day, which often include decorating homes and educational institutions with images of the goddess. Yellow flowers and sweets are offered as symbols of prosperity and joy. The color yellow represents the vibrancy of life and the blossoming of nature, resonating with the goddess's association with the arts and creativity.

Traditional practices also emphasize the collective nature of worship, as communities come together to honor Goddess Saraswati through music, dance, and art. Schools and colleges celebrate by organizing special pujas, where students participate actively, underscoring the integral role that education and the arts play in shaping a well-rounded individual. Ultimately, the reverence for Goddess Saraswati during Basant Panchami reinforces the idea that the pursuit of knowledge and artistic expression is a sacred duty, enriching both individual lives and society as a whole.

Astrological and Cultural Importance

Basant Panchami holds significant astrological importance, particularly due to its timing within the Hindu lunar calendar. Celebrated on the fifth day of Shukla Paksha in the month of Magh, this festival marks the transition from winter to spring, a period that is considered highly auspicious. The month of Magh, according to Hindu astrology, is associated with various positive energies, making Vasant Panchami an ideal time for initiating new beginnings.

Astrologically, Basant Panchami is viewed as a powerful "Muhurta," or auspicious moment, suitable for important life events and ceremonies. The day is believed to be a favorable time for conducting marriages, naming ceremonies, and housewarming rituals. The energy



of spring, characterized by growth and renewal, aligns with the idea of new starts. As the days grow longer and warmer, it is thought that the blessings of Goddess Saraswati, who represents knowledge and wisdom, will enhance the success of these endeavors.

The festival is not only a celebration of the arrival of spring but also a time when devotees seek divine guidance for their educational and creative pursuits. It is customary for families to perform rituals on this day to ensure success in exams, artistic ventures, and career advancements. The act of beginning education, especially for young children, is particularly significant. Parents often guide their little ones in writing their first letters, believing that commencing their learning journey on Vasant Panchami will bring them the goddess's blessings and lead them toward a prosperous future.

Moreover, the astrological significance of Basant Panchami extends to its role in the agricultural calendar. As farmers prepare for the new harvest season, they seek blessings for a bountiful crop yield. The day, therefore, becomes intertwined with the themes of abundance and gratitude, connecting the spiritual with the agricultural cycles of life.

In summary, Basant Panchami serves as a bridge between the spiritual and material realms, emphasizing the importance of timing in astrology and the cultural practices that align with these cosmic energies.

Chanting Mantras on Basant Panchami

During Basant Panchami, chanting mantras dedicated to Goddess Saraswati is a significant aspect of the rituals performed by devotees. These mantras are believed to invoke divine blessings, enhance educational pursuits, and foster creativity. Below are some commonly chanted mantras along with their meanings and the beliefs surrounding them:

Om Shree Saraswatyai Namah

This mantra is a simple yet powerful invocation to Goddess Saraswati, translating to "Salutations to Goddess

Saraswati." It is believed that chanting this mantra brings wisdom, learning, and clarity of thought. Devotees recite it with the intention of seeking the goddess's guidance in their educational and artistic endeavors.

Om Aim Klim Sauh Shri Mahasaraswatyai Namah

This mantra is an elaborate invocation that combines several sacred sounds (Bija mantras). "Aim" represents knowledge, "Klim" signifies attraction, and "Sauh" is associated with spiritual transformation. Together, this mantra is considered to attract the goddess's blessings for success in studies and artistic pursuits, promoting both intellect and creativity.

Om Hrim Aim Hrim Om Saraswatyai Namah

The repetition of "Hrim" in this mantra is thought to enhance spiritual connection and creative energy. "Hrim" is a seed sound that embodies the divine feminine energy. Chanting this mantra is believed to help devotees access their inner creativity while invoking Saraswati's wisdom.

Om Aim Saraswatyai Namah

This mantra is a direct and simple invocation to Goddess Saraswati, asking for her blessings. "Aim" signifies the pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment. It is particularly popular among students and scholars who chant it to enhance their learning capabilities and understanding.

Historical Context and Beliefs

The practice of chanting mantras during Basant Panchami is rooted in ancient Hindu traditions, where sound vibrations are considered to have profound effects on the mind and spirit. The chanting of these mantras is believed to clear mental blocks, enhance concentration, and foster a conducive environment for learning and creativity.

Many families incorporate mantra chanting into the "Vidya-Arambha" ceremony, where children start their formal education by writing their first letters under the goddess's blessings. This tradition signifies the belief that the goddess's presence during the initiation of

learning will ensure a fruitful educational journey.

The repetition of these mantras, often done for 51 or 108 times, is thought to amplify their potency. Devotees believe that consistent chantings align them with the divine energies of Goddess Saraswati, leading to improved knowledge, career success, and positive beginnings. The sacred sounds not only serve as a spiritual practice but also create a sense of community among worshippers, uniting them in their devotion to knowledge and the arts.

Legends Surrounding Basant Panchami

The festival of Basant Panchami is rich with legends and stories from Hindu scriptures that illuminate its origins and significance, particularly in relation to deities such as Lord Brahma and Kamadeva. One prominent legend attributes the birth of Goddess Saraswati to Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe. According to this tale, after creating the beautiful world, Brahma was disheartened by the silence that enveloped it.

To fill the void, he sprinkled water from his Kamandal (a traditional water pot) and summoned an angel, who appeared with a Veena, the classical string instrument. This angel, embodying the essence of knowledge and creativity, began to play melodious music, thus bringing life, vibrancy, and joy to the world. This angel is revered as Goddess Saraswati, and Vasant Panchami is celebrated as her birthday, marking the day she gifted the world with the arts, music, and knowledge.

Another captivating story from the Matsya Purana centers around Kamadeva, the god of love. In this narrative, Kamadeva was reduced to ashes by Lord Shiva due to a misunderstanding. His distraught wife, Rati, underwent a strict penance for 40 days to revive him. On the auspicious day of Vasant Panchami, her devotion was rewarded as Lord Shiva granted her wish, restoring Kamadeva to life. This event highlights the festival's association with love and rebirth, making it a

significant occasion across various regions in India.

Additionally, another legend speaks of Lord Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, who once tasted half-eaten fruits from Mata Sabari. This act is commemorated during Basant Panchami, emphasizing the festival's connection to devotion and the sanctity of offerings made to the divine.

These stories collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of Vasant Panchami, intertwining themes of knowledge, love, and the celebration of life, reflecting the deep spiritual and cultural significance that the festival holds in Hindu tradition.

Cultural Practices Across India

Basant Panchami is celebrated with unique cultural practices that vary widely across the diverse regions of India, each adding its own flavor to this vibrant festival. In central India, particularly in states like Gujarat and Maharashtra, kite flying takes center stage. The skies become a canvas of colorful kites as families and friends gather to engage in friendly competitions. This activity symbolizes the arrival of spring and the joy associated with it. The festive atmosphere is filled with laughter and excitement, as people showcase their kite-flying skills while enjoying traditional snacks and sweets, further enhancing the communal spirit of the celebration.

In contrast, in the Sikh community, Basant Panchami is commemorated with the practice of Langar, a communal meal served to all, regardless of their background. This act of serving food embodies the principles of equality and community service, reflecting the essence of Sikh teachings. The festival is seen as a celebration of the harvest season, where Sikhs express gratitude for the bountiful crops. Langar gatherings foster a sense of unity and togetherness, as people from all walks of life come together to share a meal, reinforcing the values of compassion and generosity.

Uttarakhand offers yet another perspective on Basant Panchami, where the festival is intertwined with the worship of Goddess Parvati and Lord Shiva. In this region, devotees partake in rituals that honor these deities as the mother and father of the earth.

The observance includes offerings of flowers and fruits, and many participate in local fairs and cultural programs that highlight the rich traditions of the area. The connection to nature is particularly emphasized, as the rituals reflect the reverence for the earth and its cycles, showcasing the harmonious relationship between spirituality and the environment.

These regional variations in celebrating Basant Panchami not only highlight the festival's significance in honoring Goddess Saraswati but also showcase the rich tapestry of Indian culture. Each practice, whether it be kite flying, communal meals, or nature worship, contributes to the overarching theme of renewal, knowledge, and community bonding that Vasant Panchami represents across the country.

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