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CM unveils key welfare initiatives; presents Rs 1.12 lakh Cr budget

STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday presented his first Budget for Jammu and Kashmir, outlining a series of pro-people initiatives and governance reforms.

Beginning his speech, the Chief Minister said, "With great humility and a profound sense of duty, I stand before you today to present my first budget as Finance Minister-marking the first Budget of an elected government in seven years. While it is an honour, I am acutely aware of the weight of responsibility that comes with being the custodian of Jammu and Kashmir's finances at this crucial juncture. This budget is more than just a financial statement-it is a roadmap for a new and prosperous Jammu and Kashmir, reflecting the aspirations of our people and laying a strong foundation for economic growth, social progress and sustainable development."

The budget focuses on social welfare, infrastructure development and financial stability. In his budget speech, the CM stated that J&K's economy is projected to grow at 9.5% in 2025-26, with major investments in infrastruc-



(L) CM Omar Abdullah along with his team outside the J&K Assembly. (R) CM presenting budget in the house on Friday.

ture, tourism, agriculture, and industry. On governance and fiscal reforms, he outlined the priorities of the government to bring in fiscal discipline and reforms to reduce reliance on central grants, improve revenue collection, and ensure financial stability. He said J&K is leading in digital governance with 1,166 online government services on the e-Unnat portal and having a real-time grievance redressal mechanism through JK SAMAD-HAN&RAABITA platforms.

Fulfilling a major poll promise, the Chief Minister announced 200 units of free electricity per month for all Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households in Jammu and Kashmir. Integrated with the PM SuryagharBijli Yojana, this initiative will facilitate the installation of grid-connected solar systems, ensuring energy security for the most vulnerable sections of society while eliminating electricity bills.

"With an investment of Rs 750 crore over five years, this step will reduce AT&C losses and promote sustainable energy. I urge this august House to support this transformative move towards a greener, more inclusive, and self-reliant Jammu & Kashmir," he said. Additionally, the chief minister stated, the government will construct dedicated Linemen huts and provide essential facilities for thousands of power sector workers who operate in extreme conditions. A Training Institute will also be established to enhance skills and train the technical support staff of power development department to ensure they are fully equipped with the technical skills.

For 2025-26, the Power Sector has been allocated Rs 2,021.37 crore under capital expenditure, marking an increase of Rs 762.80 crore from the revised allocation of 2024-25, he informed the House. As an additional measure of social security, the Chief Minister announced that all AAY beneficiaries will receive 10 kg of free ration per person per month starting April 1, 2025. This initiative will ensure enhanced nutritional support for vulnerable families.

"Our government is committed to strengthening food security through a robust and efficient Public Distribution System (PDS). Smart PDS will be implemented in 2025-26 to enhance service delivery, prevent leakages, and ensure fair and transparent distribution of essential commodities across Jammu & Kashmir," he said. Marking International Women's Day, the Chief Minister announced that women across Jammu and Kashmir will enjoy free ridership on government-owned public transport, including e-Buses, starting April 2025. In a significant relief for economically weaker sections, the

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶▶ 200 units of free electricity for AAY households announced
- ▶▶ 10 kg additional ration per person for AAY beneficiaries from April 2025
- ▶▶ Pensions enhanced for over 10 lakh vulnerable persons in J&K
- ▶▶ Marriage Assistance for EWS girls increased from Rs 50,000 to Rs 75,000
- ▶▶ Free ridership for women in J&K on Government owned transport including e-buses from April 2025
- ▶▶ Stamp Duty exemption for property transfer within blood relations
- ▶▶ Fiscal reforms unveiled to strengthen J&K economy
- ▶▶ J&K Govt to introduce new hydropower policy to attract private investment
- ▶▶ Allocation of Rs 15 Cr for glacial lake outburst flood risk monitoring proposed
- ▶▶ Series of welfare and development initiatives for 2025-26 unveiled

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Inaugurates Tawi Festival organised by Hari Tara Charitable Trust We need fine balance between Technology and Arts: LG

STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday inaugurated the 3rd edition of Tawi Festival organised by Hari Tara Charitable Trust (HTCT), at Amar Mahal Palace, Jammu.

The event also marked the beginning of Golden Jubilee celebration commemorating 50 years of Amar Mahal Museum and Library.

In his address, the Lieutenant Governor extended his felicitations to Dr. Karan Singh and everyone associated with the Hari Tara Charitable Trust for organizing the unique festival, and bringing together experts and practitioners from different fields to share and highlight new ideas in art, literature and history.

The Lieutenant Governor highlighted the valuable contribution of artists and litter-



LG Manoj Sinha speaking after inaugurating Tawi Festival organised by Hari Tara Charitable Trust in Jammu on Friday.

ateurs in inspiring change in the society and enriching the global knowledge platforms.

The Lieutenant Governor said, "Art is the essential element for building an enlightened society and helping the growth of citizens with value system and creativity. Art and Culture is as important for a prosperous and

- ▶▶ Says, science and technology has provided new facilities and redefined way human society works and lives; modern instruments are incomplete without rich and vibrant tradition of Art, Culture
- ▶▶ Society's economic development powered by Art, Culture
- ▶▶ Art is essential element for building enlightened society, helping growth of citizens with value system and creativity
- ▶▶ Art, Culture as important for prosperous, peaceful world as science and technology

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9

Working with Centre on time frame for restoration of J&K's statehood: Omar

STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday said his government is working with the Centre on a time frame for the restoration of statehood to the Union Territory.

Talking to reporters in Jammu after presenting his maiden budget in the legislative assembly earlier in the day, he said a Union Territory with an assembly is the "worst form of government".

"We are working on a time frame, but I do not think it is appropriate for me to talk about it at this point in time. Needless to say that it is work in progress," Abdullah said at a press conference. He was responding to a question about his meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman after assuming power in Jammu and Kashmir in October last year and whether any time frame was given to him for the restoration of statehood.

Abdullah said a Union Territory with an assembly is the worst form of government in the country. "I had no hesitation in saying this earlier, and I am saying it again that there should be only two systems in this coun-



Chief Minister Omar Abdullah addressing press conference in Jammu on Friday.

try -- either you have a UT without assembly or you have a state. A UT is an area too small to be a state, and that criterion does not apply to J&K," he said.

Asked whether he is satisfied with the funds allocated to Jammu and Kashmir by the central government, the chief minister said he is extremely grateful for what has been given. "I do not want to sound ungrateful by saying that we should have got more. Whatever we get, we will utilise, and

what we've got so far, we are thankful for it," he said.

Responding to a question about the long pending demand of the regularisation of daily wagers, need-based workers and other similar categories of workers, he said, "We have to do something for them."

"First, we have to decide their numbers because their number varies. We do not have a single number anywhere, and when we have that number, we can form a policy," he said.

Mela

Sunday, 9th March, 2025
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