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Mr Jaitley, show us the money

DECCAN CHRONICLE. | AKNISREE KARTHIK (/byline/aknisree-karthik)

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Experts hope that the Centre will give Bengaluru a chance to revive its flailing attempts at infrastructural growth.



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The run up the Union Budget has India awaiting a nail-biting finish from the NDA government, with Finance Minister Arun Jaitley set to present the Centre's final full budget before the 2019 polls. Experts hope that the Centre will give Bengaluru a chance to revive its flailing attempts at infrastructural growth, by boosting initiatives like Make in India and Swacch Bharat. Railway reforms are a major requirement

and could put Bengaluru on the path to a more efficient system, including a high-speed train from Bengaluru to Mumbai. Financial reforms like reducing corporate tax to 25%, another major demand, could boost the state's industry and its high corporate turnover. Experts agree that the growth of the city depends on the states but that the Union Budget can be a catalyst, reports Aknisree Karthik

Railways pitches suburban rail, doubling and quadrupling

The longest pending Bengaluru Suburban Railway network covering 170 km, as stated by the RITES feasibility study, should be implemented, and doubling and electrification of Yeshwanthpur-Banaswadi-Hosur and Yeshwanthpur-Tumakuru lines that are pending for a long time should be started, said Krishna Prasad, member, Karnataka Railway Vedike, listing out the city's demands in the Union Budget which will be presented by Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Thursday.

The "pink book", which covers the financial allocation for the Railways, will be part of the budget.

"We need automatic signalling for the entire 400 kilometre stretch in the Bengaluru division, along with quadrupling of Cantonment-Whitefield project, and the remaining funds for the Baiyappanahalli coaching terminal should be disbursed," said transport expert Sanjeev Dyamnavar.

Dyamnavar was referring to the world class railway coaching terminal announced by former railway minister Suresh Prabhu which was supposed to get ` 130 crore but received only Rs 32 crore last year.

Deputy General Manager and CPRO of SWR E. Vijaya said, "We have proposed doubling and electrification of all routes that don't have it right now, such as Yeshwanthpur- Banaswadi-Hosur and Yeshwanthpur-Tumakuru lines."

"After conducting a survey, we have included the proposal for Cantonment-Whitefield quadrupling. For all doubled lines, we have sent the proposal for quadrupling. For example, Bengaluru-Mysuru and Jolarpet-Dharmavaram. Though the Tumakuru line is doubled, the work is still going on till Arasikere," Vijaya said.

The ` 309 crore proposal for automatic signalling has also been sent by the division for Bengaluru City to Whitefield, Mandya, Yeshwanthpur-Tumakuru, Yeshwanthpur-Yelahanka, Yelahanka-K.R. Puram and Hosur Road- Baiyappanahalli-Lottegollahalli.

The Railway Board is also expected to approve the development of Cantonment Suburban Rail Terminal by adding two platforms in the budget. Krishna Prasad said, "They must sanction funds for new lines like Gadag-Wadi, Kuduchi-Bagalkot, Ginigera-Raichur- Mehaboobnagar and Tumakuru-Rayadurga. The Kalaburgi division, announced in 2013-14 is still awaited." Elimination of level-crossings was ignored in the 2017-2018 budget and only one rail under bridge was sanctioned.

Health

"There is a need for concrete strategies to achieve ambitious targets to eliminate leprosy by 2018, measles by 2020 and tuberculosis (TB) by 2025. Following the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017, expenditure is expected to focus on increasing the number of hospital beds in the country and to improve health care infrastructure in towns and districts. The National Health Protection Scheme, which was expected to provide a one lakh health insurance cover for all BPL families in the previous Budget, can be expanded to include families with income of upto Rs 2 lakh. And the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, a health insurance scheme for people below the poverty line, which enables them to receive in-patient medical care of upto Rs 30,000 in government or private hospitals, should meet their expenditure upto Rs 1 lakh for a more inclusive health insurance for the poor."

**Dr Usha Manjunath,
Institute of Health Management Research (IHMR)**

Energy and Power

"The budget should bring in more advanced development in the power sector. With 300 millions homes in the country requiring electricity, loss of power should be cut down. Currently only 70 per cent of the power generated is reaching its destination and 30 per cent is lost due to theft, non payment of bills and so on. In Karnataka, there should be more stability in coal supply to the thermal power plants to increase their production and avoid any disruption in their operation. There is also a need to start focusing on renewable energy across the country. We need a clear policy to help strengthen renewable energy production and supply . It's important for more industries and commercial establishments to opt for renewable energy."

**M.R. Sreenivasa Murthy,
former chairman of Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC)**

Finance and Tax

"After the rollout of GST last year, indirect taxes were subsumed into one universal tax. GST and incentives for digitised transactions will increase the economic activity in the formal sector and push up tax collections in the long run. With over 5.4 lakh new taxpayers being added to the tax base in the current financial year, the tax rates should be amended to mobilise more resources for infrastructure projects.

Some of the popular expectations of the salaried class include raising the basic income tax exemption limit to `3,00,000, and re-introducing the standard deduction which was abolished in (2005-06). Last year the salaried in the income group of Rs 50 lakh to `1 crore were adversely impacted with the levy of a 10 per cent surcharge.

The Economy Survey report, which came out on Monday, has indicated that creation of jobs will be one of the major challenges before the government. Industry is expecting support and relief, particularly in this new and challenging environment, to increase employment opportunities and push up exports. Also, corporate tax should be reduced to push up exports."

Kuldip Kumar,

Partner and Leader, Personal Tax, PwC India.

Infrastructure

"Cities are typically the responsibility of the state governments. But the Centre can play a catalyst role to kick-start urban infrastructure. It did this through the Smart City programme but less than 10 per cent of the funds has been utilised. The Centre should expedite spends on the Smart City programme through incentives and penalties. One hopes there are strategic infrastructure provisions in the Budget like National Highway road programmes around urban centres, expansion of the suburban rail, Metro investment and revitalising of Public Private Partnerships for roads, ports, and airports. Given the low private investment, one is looking for government stimulus for urban infrastructure this Budget."

V. Ravichandar,

Civil Evangelist and Chairman, Feedback Consulting

Realty sector

"We hope the Union Budget 2018 will be an enabler for the industry to march towards strong recovery and growth. The realty industry expects some concrete measures to boost demand in the sector through income tax sops to home-buyers. Some allocations for accessing of loans for acquisition of land parcels would be an accelerant too. Most importantly, we are hoping for a robust long-term strategy for the affordable housing segments in terms of cost of funds and GST relief to make them viable for all stakeholders involved."

Ashish R Puravankara,

President CREDAI Bengaluru and Managing Director Puravankara Ltd.

"A long pending demand of the real estate sector has been recognition as an infrastructure provider and an industry status. The Union government has made a progressive move with its RERA Act, but its implementation across states needs to be more consistent. The RERA rules are state-specific and need more clarity."

Mr. K P Pradeep,

CFO Brigade Enterprises.

"The GST is currently on a higher slab of 12 to 18 per cent. We definitely expect this to reduce with the new Budget. We also need clarity and transparency on the input credit tax. Moreover, the single window clearance has not been implemented as yet. They need to take cognizance of this and improve it. Also, the real estate sector should be given industry status as it is one of the largest contributors to employment in the country."

Mr. Farook Mahmood,

FIABCI World President and Chairman & Managing Director Silverline Realty.

Education

"If one accepts that a school education system is only as good as the teachers it employs, then conversations about improving it must begin by first examining the quality of teacher education in the country. We are all painfully aware of the problem of teacher shortage that plagues our nation's schools.

According to a recent report by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (2016-17), out of the six million teaching positions in government schools across the country, as many as 900,000 in primary schools and 100,000 in secondary schools are vacant. But it's not just a problem of the number of teachers, but also their quality. In the last year alone, a whopping 95 per cent of candidates from Tamil Nadu and 83 per cent of the candidates from Bihar, who appeared for the Teacher's Eligibility Test, failed to demonstrate fundamental instructional knowledge. Educationists in both states attributed the failure to substandard teacher training institutes. To counter these problems, the Union Budget for 2018 should allocate funds necessary to attract the best talent to the sector, raise the standards in teacher training institutes and welcome participation from foreign universities that align with the New Education Policy (NEP)'s goals to bolster the quality of teacher education in the country. We can talk about improving learning outcomes, investing in digital learning and setting up new assessment frameworks to improve the education system in our country, but ultimately, as far as any student is concerned, the education system comes down to the teacher in the classroom."

Kiran Pai

Director, Vidyashilp Academy

Overview

"The Budget is eagerly awaited this year as what it lays down will actually hit the ground as the country goes to the polls in 2019.

I look forward to two big issues being tackled at the macro economic level. The first big worry at hand is the four-letter word, JOBS! This Budget needs to be oriented to creating more jobs in a nation that is starved of them, while keeping the old jobs going, and filling in the gap in the lives of those who have part-time jobs that don't take care of their basic needs.

The second worry is the plight of the small farmers, who are part of the country's 69.1 per cent rural population. Currently, the plight of the farmer is off the radar, but it needs to be center-stage.

For me, and possibly for every forward-thinking Indian, these two issues are the biggest to solve. The Budget needs to take firm steps in both directions."

Harish Bijoor

Brand Expert and Founder Harish Bijoor Consultants Inc.

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