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JK Policy Institute
Advocating for Sustainability

A Monthly Newsletter by Jammu & Kashmir Policy Institute (JKPI)

BUDGET SPECIAL

SUMMARY OF THE **UNION BUDGET** 2024-2025

read INSIDE

Budget of Jammu & Kashmir for 2024-25 Introduced in Parliament

Page No. 16

SUMMARY OF THE UNION BUDGET 2024-2025

- INDIA'S INFLATION CONTINUES TO BE LOW, STABLE AND MOVING TOWARDS THE 4 PER CENT TARGET
- PM'S PACKAGE OF 5 SCHEMES AND INITIATIVES WITH AN OUTLAY OF ₹ 2 LAKH CRORE TO FACILITATE EMPLOYMENT, SKILLING AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR 4.1 CRORE YOUTH IN 5 YEARS
- FOR PURSUIT OF 'VIKSIT BHARAT', THE BUDGET ENVISAGES SUSTAINED EFFORTS ON 9 PRIORITIES FOR GENERATING AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL
- BUDGET 2024-25 FOCUSES ON EMPLOYMENT, SKILLING, MSME's AND MIDDLE CLASS
- NEW 109 HIGH-YIELDING AND CLIMATE-RESILIENT VARIETIES OF 32 FIELD AND HORTICULTURE CROPS WILL BE RELEASED FOR CULTIVATION BY FARMERS
- IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS, 1 CRORE FARMERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY WILL BE INITIATED INTO NATURAL FARMING
- A PROVISION OF ₹ 1.52 LAKH CRORE FOR AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED SECTOR ANNOUNCED FOR THIS YEAR.
- 1,000 INDUSTRIAL TRAINING INSTITUTES WILL BE UPGRADED
- GOVERNMENT WILL FORMULATE A PLAN, PURVODAYA, FOR THE ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT OF THE EASTERN REGION COVERING BIHAR, JHARKHAND, WEST BENGAL, ODISHA AND ANDHRA PRADESH
- FOR PROMOTING WOMEN-LED DEVELOPMENT, THE BUDGET CARRIES AN ALLOCATION OF MORE THAN ` 3 LAKH CRORE FOR SCHEMES BENEFITTING WOMEN AND GIRLS
- A PROVISION OF ₹ 2.66 LAKH CRORE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDING

RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE MADE THIS YEAR

- THE LIMIT OF MUDRA LOANS WILL BE ENHANCED TO ₹ 20 LAKH FROM THE CURRENT ₹ 10 LAKH
- GOVERNMENT TO LAUNCH A COMPREHENSIVE SCHEME FOR PROVIDING INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES IN 500 TOP COMPANIES TO 1 CRORE YOUTH IN 5 YEARS
- UNDER PM AWAS YOJANA URBAN 2.0, HOUSING NEEDS OF 1 CRORE URBAN POOR AND MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILIES WILL BE ADDRESSED WITH AN INVESTMENT OF ₹ 10 LAKH CRORE
- PHASE IV OF PMGSY WILL BE LAUNCHED TO PROVIDE ALL-WEATHER CONNECTIVITY TO 25,000 RURAL HABITATIONS
- EMPHASIS ON EXPANDING THE SPACE ECONOMY BY 5 TIMES IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS WITH A VENTURE CAPITAL FUND OF ₹ 1,000 CRORE
- MAJOR RELIEF TO 4 CRORE SALARIED INDIVIDUALS AND PENSIONERS IN INCOME TAX
- STANDARD DEDUCTION INCREASED FROM ₹ 50,000 TO ₹ 75,000/- FOR THOSE IN NEW TAX REGIME
- DEDUCTION ON FAMILY PENSION INCREASED FROM ₹ 15,000/- TO ₹ 25,000/-
- OVER 58 PER CENT CORPORATE TAX RECEIPTS COLLECTED UNDER THE NEW REGIME
- TWO THIRD OF INDIVIDUAL INCOME TAX PAYERS SWITCHED OVER TO NEW INCOME TAX REGIME
- ANGEL TAX ABOLISHED FOR ALL CLASS OF INVESTORS TO BOOST START-UPS AND INVESTMENTS
- CORPORATE TAX ON FOREIGN COMPANIES REDUCED FROM 40 TO 35 PER CENT TO INVITE INVESTMENTS
- 5 PER CENT TDS ON MANY PAYMENTS MERGED TO 2 PER CENT TDS
- CAPITAL GAIN EXEMPTION LIMIT INCREASED TO ₹ 1.25 LAKH PER YEAR TO BENEFIT LOWER AND MIDDLE INCOME CLASSES
- CUSTOM DUTY ON X-RAY PANELS, MOBILE PHONES & PCBA REDUCED TO 15 PER CENT
- PRECIOUS METALS INCLUDING GOLD AND SILVER TO BECOME CHEAPER, CUSTOM DUTY REDUCED TO 6 PER CENT

PART A

Despite global economy remaining under the grip of policy uncertainties, India's economic growth continues to be the shining exception and will remain so in the years ahead. Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs Smt Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the Union Budget 2024-25 in Parliament today said that India's inflation continues to be low, stable and moving towards the 4 per cent target. Core inflation (non-food, non-fuel) currently is 3.1 per cent and steps are being taken to ensure supplies of perishable goods reach market adequately.

INTERIM BUDGET

The Finance Minister said that as mentioned in the interim budget, the focus is on 4 major castes, namely 'Garib' (Poor), 'Mahilayen' (Women), 'Yuva' (Youth) and 'Annadata' (Farmer).

BUDGET THEME

Dwelling on the Budget theme, Smt Sitharaman said, turning attention to the full year and beyond, in this budget, we particularly focus on employment, skilling, MSMEs, and the middle class. She announced the Prime Minister's package of 5 schemes and initiatives to facilitate employment, skilling and other opportunities for 4.1 crore youth over a 5-year period with a central outlay of ₹2 lakh crore. This year, ₹1.48 lakh crore has been allocated for education, employment and skilling.

BUDGET PRIORITIES

The Finance Minister said, for pursuit of 'Viksit Bharat', the budget envisages sustained efforts on the following 9 priorities for generating ample opportunities for all.

1. Productivity and resilience in Agriculture
2. Employment & Skilling
3. Inclusive Human Resource Development and Social Justice
4. Manufacturing & Services
5. Urban Development
6. Energy Security
7. Infrastructure
8. Innovation, Research & Development and
9. Next Generation Reforms

Priority 1: Productivity and resilience in Agriculture

The Finance Minister announced that the government will undertake a comprehensive review of the agriculture research setup to bring the focus on raising productivity. New 109 high-yielding and climate-resilient varieties of 32 field and horticulture crops will

be released for cultivation by farmers.

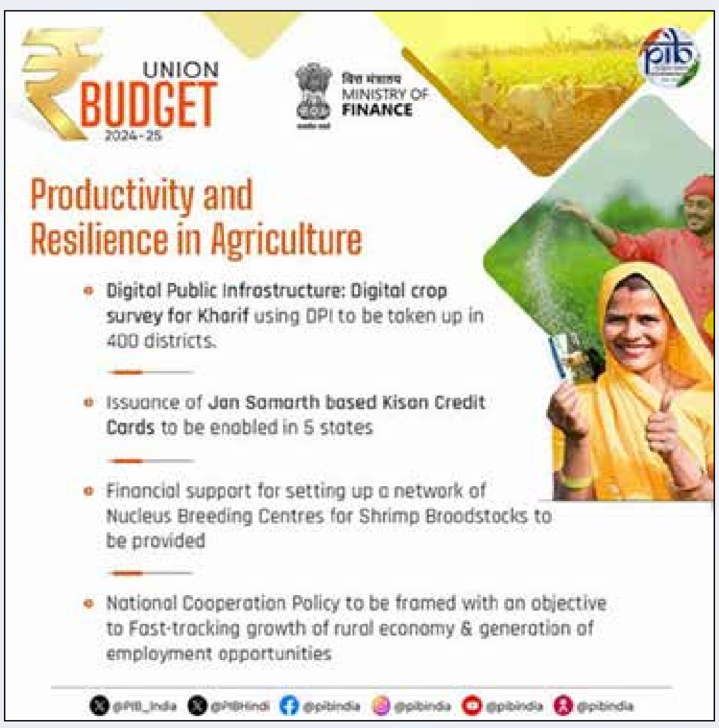
In the next two years, 1 crore farmers across the country will be initiated into natural farming supported by certification and branding.

10,000 need-based bio-input resource centres will be established.

For achieving self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds, government will strengthen their production, storage and marketing and to achieve 'atmanirbharta' for oil seeds such as mustard, groundnut, sesame, soybean, and sunflower.

Government, in partnership with the states, will facilitate the implementation of the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in agriculture for coverage of farmers and their lands in 3 years.

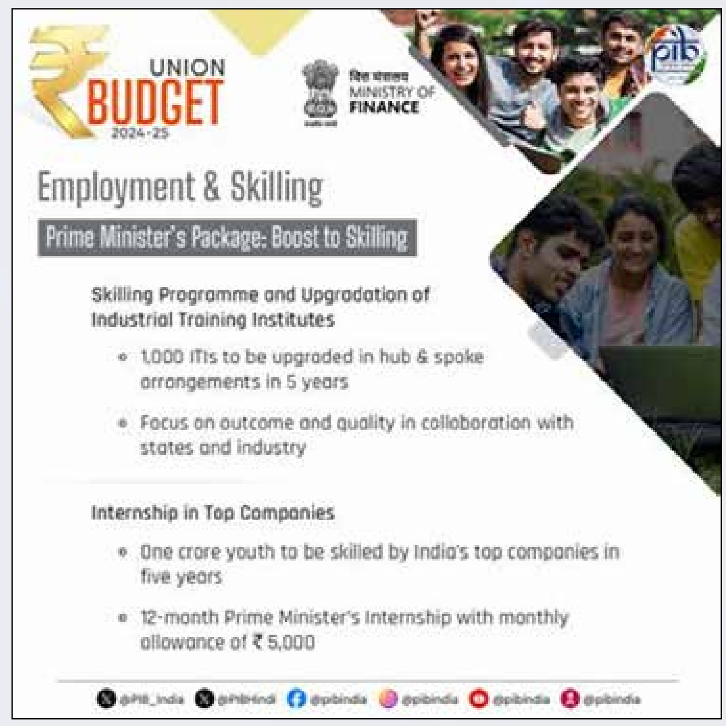
Smt Sitharaman announced a provision of ₹1.52 lakh crore for agriculture and allied sector this year.



Priority 2: Employment & Skilling

The Finance Minister said that the government will implement 3 schemes for 'Employment Linked Incentive', as part of the Prime Minister's package. These will be based on enrolment in the EPFO, and focus on recognition of first-time employees, and support to employees and employers.

Government will also facilitate higher participation of women in the workforce through setting up of working women hostels in collaboration with industry, and establishing creches.



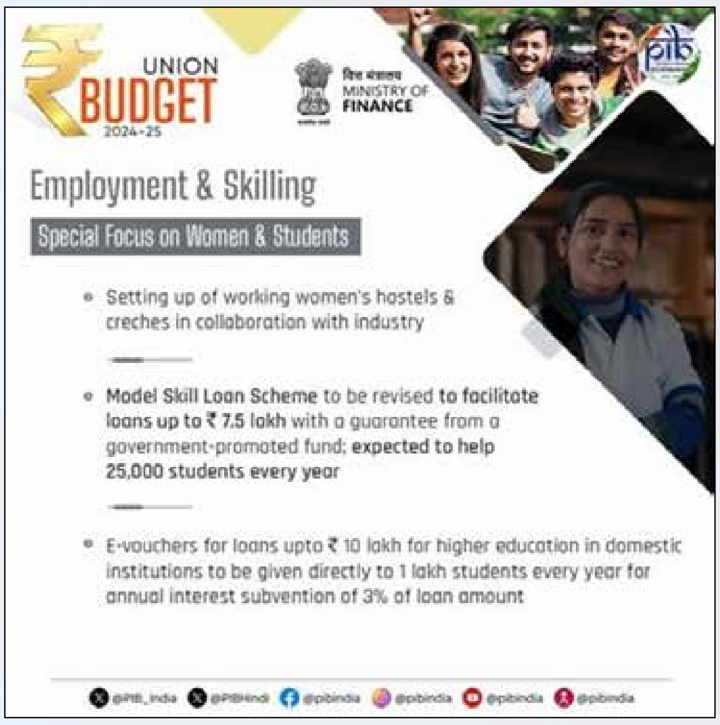
Referring to the Skilling programme, the Finance Minister announced a new centrally sponsored scheme, as the 4th scheme under the Prime Minister's package, for skilling in collaboration with state governments and Industry. 20 lakh youth will be skilled over a 5-year period and 1,000 Industrial Training Institutes will be upgraded in hub and spoke arrangements with outcome orientation.

She also announced that the Model Skill Loan Scheme will be revised to facilitate loans up to ₹7.5 lakh with a guarantee from a government promoted Fund, which is expected to help 25,000 students every year.

For helping the youth, who have not been eligible for any benefit under government schemes and policies, she announced a financial support for loans upto ₹10 lakh for higher education in domestic institutions. E-vouchers for this purpose will be given directly to 1 lakh students every year for annual interest subvention of 3 per cent of the loan amount.

Priority 3: Inclusive Human Resource Development and Social Justice

Talking about the Saturation approach, the Finance Minister emphasised that implementation of schemes meant for supporting economic activities by craftsmen, artisans, self-help groups, scheduled caste, schedule tribe and women entrepreneurs, and street vendors, such as PM Vishwakarma, PM SVANidhi, National Livelihood Missions, and Stand-Up India will be stepped up.



Purvodaya

Government will formulate a plan, Purvodaya, for the all-round development of the eastern region of the country covering Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. This will cover human resource development, infrastructure, and generation of economic opportunities to make the region an engine to attain Viksit Bharat.

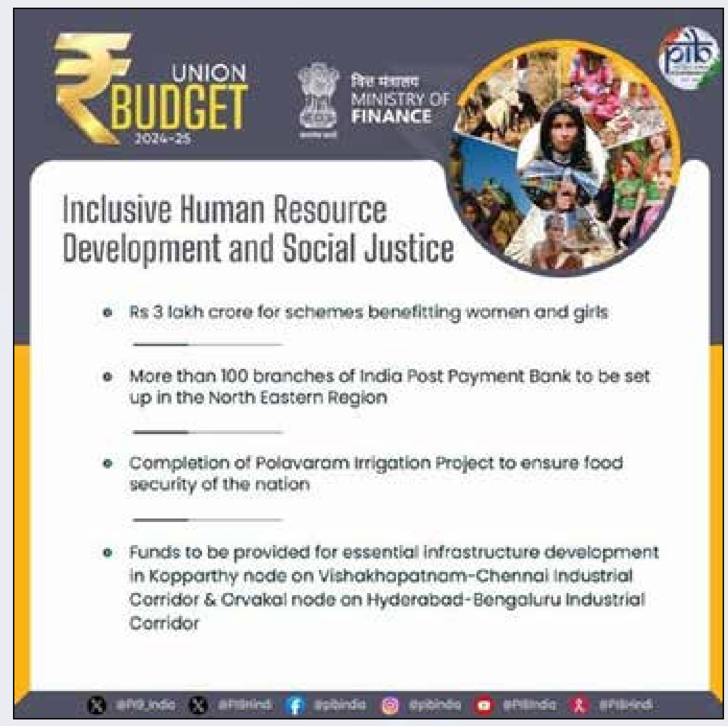
Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan

The Finance Minister announced that for improving the socio-economic condition of tribal communities, government will launch the Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan by adopting saturation coverage for tribal families in tribal-majority villages and aspirational districts covering 63,000 villages and

benefitting 5 crore tribal people.

More than 100 branches of India Post Payment Bank will be set up in the North East region to expand the banking services.

She said, a provision of ₹2.66 lakh crore for rural development including rural infrastructure was made this year.



Priority 4: Manufacturing & Services

Support for promotion of MSMEs

Smt Sitharaman said, this budget provides special attention to MSMEs and manufacturing, particularly labour-intensive manufacturing. A separately constituted self-financing guarantee fund will provide, to each applicant, guarantee cover up to ₹100 crore, while the loan amount may be larger. Similarly, Public sector banks will build their in-house capability to assess MSMEs for credit, instead of relying on external assessment. She also announced a new mechanism for facilitating continuation of bank credit to MSMEs during their stress period.

Mudra Loans

The limit of Mudra loans will be enhanced to ₹ 20 lakh from the current ₹ 10 lakh for those entrepreneurs who have availed and successfully repaid previous loans under the 'Tarun' category.

MSME Units for Food Irradiation, Quality & Safety Testing

Financial support for setting up of 50 multi-product food irradiation units in the MSME sector will be provided. Setting up of 100 food quality and safety testing labs with NABL accreditation will also be facilitated. To enable MSMEs and traditional artisans to sell their products in international markets, E-Commerce Export Hubs will be set up in public-private-partnership (PPP) mode .

Internship in Top Companies

The Finance Minister said that as the 5th scheme under the Prime Minister's package, government will launch a comprehensive scheme for providing internship

opportunities in 500 top companies to 1 crore youth in 5 years.

Priority 5: Urban Development

Urban Housing

Under the PM AwasYojana Urban 2.0, housing needs of 1 crore urban poor and middle-class families will be addressed with an investment of ₹ 10 lakh crore. This will include the central assistance of ₹ 2.2 lakh crore in the next 5 years.

Water Supply and Sanitation

In partnership with the State Governments and Multilateral Development Banks, government will promote water supply, sewage treatment and solid waste management projects and services for 100 large cities through bankable projects.

PM SVANidhi

She added that building on the success of PM SVANidhi Scheme in transforming the lives of street vendors, Government envisions a scheme to support each year, over the next five years, the development of 100 weekly 'haats' or street food hubs in select cities.

Priority 6: Energy Security

The Finance Minister said, in line with the announcement in the interim budget, PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana has been launched to install rooftop solar plants to enable 1 crore households obtain free electricity up to 300 units every month. The scheme has generated remarkable response with more than 1.28 crore registrations and 14 lakh applications.

Nuclear energy is expected to form a very significant part of the energy mix for Viksit Bharat.

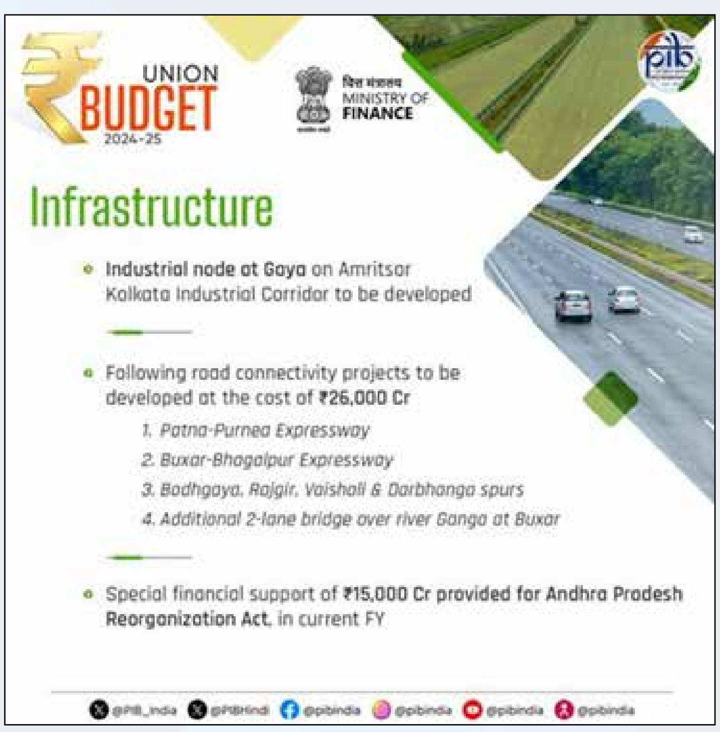
Priority 7: Infrastructure

The Finance Minister underlined that significant investment the Central Government has made over the years in building and improving infrastructure has had a strong multiplier effect on the economy. Government will endeavour to maintain strong fiscal support for infrastructure over the next 5 years, in conjunction with imperatives of other priorities and fiscal consolidation.

₹11,11,111 crore for capital expenditure has been allocated this year, which is 3.4 per cent of our GDP.

Pradhan Mantri Gram SadakYojana (PMGSY)

The Finance Minister announced that Phase IV of PMGSY will be launched to provide all-weather connectivity to 25,000 rural habitations which have become eligible in view of their population increase. For Irrigation and Flood Mitigation in Bihar, through the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme and other sources, government will provide financial support for projects with estimated cost of ₹11,500 crore such as the Kosi-Mechi intra-state link and 20 other ongoing and new schemes including barrages, river pollution abatement and irrigation projects. Government will also provide assistance to Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim for flood management, landslides and related projects.



Priority 8: Innovation, Research & Development

The Finance Minister said that government will operationalize the Anusandhan National Research Fund for basic research and prototype development and set up a mechanism for spurring private sector-driven research and innovation at commercial scale with a financing pool of ₹1 lakh crore in line with the announcement in the interim budget.

Space Economy

With our continued emphasis on expanding the space economy by 5 times in the next 10 years, a venture capital fund of ₹1,000 crore will be set up.

Priority 9: Next Generation Reforms

Economic Policy Framework

The Finance Minister said that the government will formulate an Economic Policy Framework to delineate the overarching approach to economic development and set the scope of the next generation of reforms for facilitating employment opportunities and sustaining high growth.

Labour related reforms

Government will facilitate the provision of a wide array of services to labour, including those for employment and skilling. A comprehensive integration of e-shram portal with other portals will facilitate such one-stop solution. Shram Suvidha and Samadhan portals will be revamped to enhance ease of compliance for industry and trade.

Government will develop a taxonomy for climate finance for enhancing the availability of capital for climate adaptation and mitigation.

Foreign Direct Investment and Overseas Investment

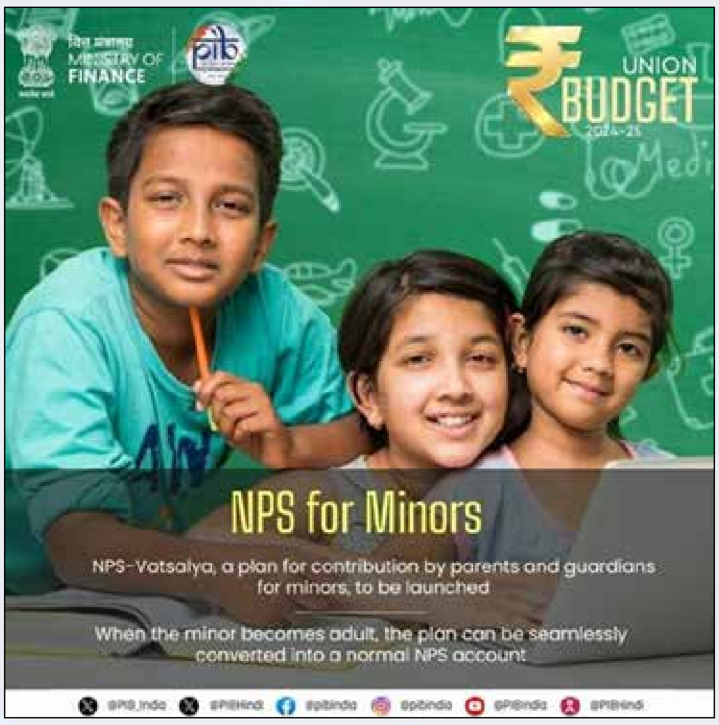
The rules and regulations for Foreign Direct Investment and Overseas Investments will be simplified to (1) facilitate foreign direct investments, (2) nudge prioritization, and (3) promote opportunities for using Indian Rupee as a currency for overseas investments.

NPS Vatsalya

NPS-Vatsalya, a plan for contribution by parents and guardians for minors will be started. On attaining the age of majority, the plan can be converted seamlessly into a normal NPS account.

New Pension Scheme (NPS)

The Finance Minister said that the Committee to review the NPS has made considerable progress in its work and a solution will be evolved which addresses the relevant issues while maintaining fiscal prudence to protect the common citizens.



Budget Estimates 2024-25

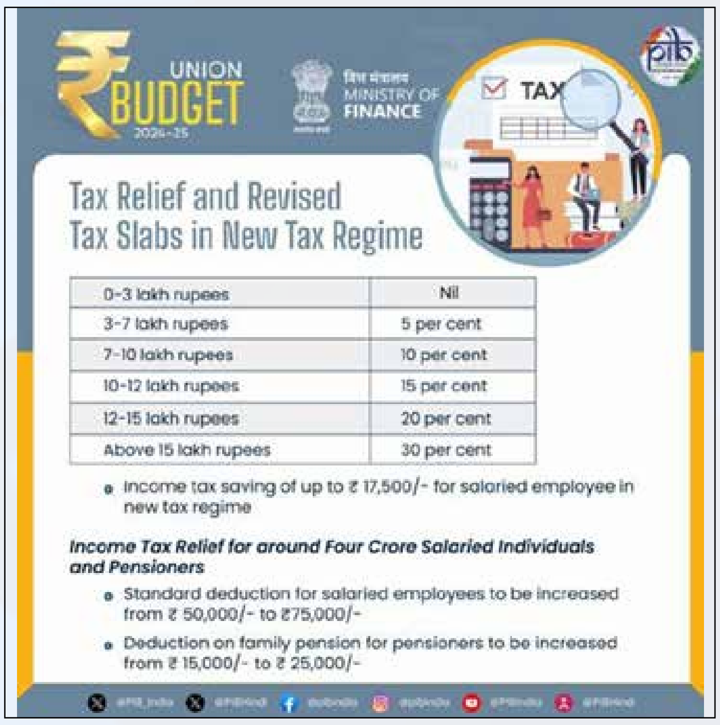
The Finance Minister informed that for the year 2024-25, the total receipts other than borrowings and the total expenditure are estimated at ₹32.07 lakh crore and ₹48.21 lakh crore respectively. The net tax receipts are estimated at ₹25.83 lakh crore and the fiscal deficit is estimated at 4.9 per cent of GDP.
She said, the gross and net market borrowings through dated securities during 2024-25 are estimated at ₹14.01 lakh crore and ₹11.63 lakh crore respectively.
Smt Sitharaman emphasised that the fiscal consolidation path announced by her in 2021 has served economy very well, and the government will aim to reach a deficit below 4.5 per cent next year.

PART B

Apart from giving relief to four crore salaried individuals and pensioners of the country in the direct taxes, Union Budget 2024-25 seeks to comprehensively review the direct and indirect taxes in the next six months, simplifying them, reducing tax incidence and compliance burdens and broadening the tax nets. The Budget proposes comprehensive rationalization of GST tax structure along with review of the Custom Duty rate structure to improve the tax base and support domestic manufacturing. A comprehensive review of Income – Tax Act is targeted at reducing disputes and litigations and to make the act lucid, concise and easy to read. Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman said that simplification of tax regimes without exemptions and deductions for corporate and personal income tax has been appreciated by tax payers as over 58 per cent of corporate tax came from simplified tax regime in 2022-23 and more than two third tax payers have switched over to the new personal income tax regime.

Budget 2024-25 increased standard deduction of salaried employees from ₹ 50,000/- to ₹ 75,000/- for those opting for new tax regime. Similarly, deduction on family pension for pensioners enhanced from ₹ 15,000/- to ₹ 25,000/-. Assessments now, can be reopened beyond three years up to 5 years from end of year of assessment, only if, the escaped income is more than ₹ 50 Lakh. The new tax regime rate structure is also revised to give a salaried employee benefits up to ₹ 17,500/- in income tax.

Table 1: New Tax Regime Tax Structure



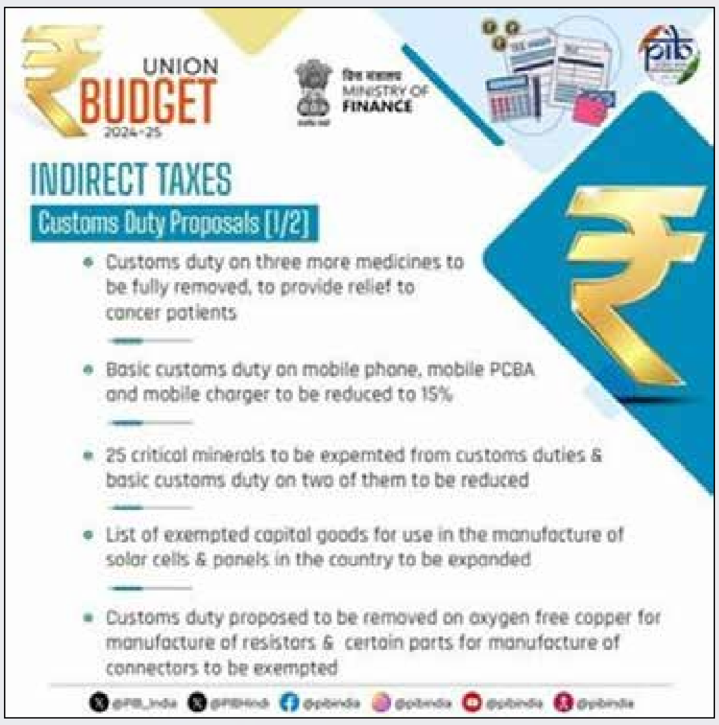
To promote investment and foster employment, Budget has given boost to entrepreneurial spirit and start-up ecosystem, abolishing angel tax for all classes of investors. Further, a simpler tax regime for foreign shipping companies operating domestic cruises is proposed looking at the tremendous potential of cruise tourism. Foreign mining companies selling raw diamonds in the country can now benefit from safe harbor rates which will benefit the diamond industry. Further, corporate tax rate on foreign companies reduced from 40 to 35 per cent to attract foreign capital.

Budget further simplified the direct tax regime for charities, TDS rate structure and capital gains taxation. The two tax exemption regimes for charities will be merged into one. 5 per cent TDS on many payments to be merged into 2 per cent TDS and 20 per cent TDS on repurchase of units by mutual funds or UTI stands withdrawn. TDS rate on e-commerce operators reduced from 1 per cent to 0.1 per cent. Now credit of TCS will be given on TDS deducted from salary. Budget decriminalized delay of payment of TDS up to the due date of filing of TDS statement. Standard Operating Procedure soon for simplified and rationalized compounding guidelines for TDS defaults. On Capital gains, short term gains shall henceforth attract a rate of 20 per cent on certain financial assets. Long term gains on all financial and non-financial assets to attract 12.5 per cent rate. Limit of exemption of capital gains has been increased to ₹1.25 Lakh per year to benefit lower and middle-income classes. Listed financial assets held for more than a year and unlisted assets (financial and non-financial) held for more than two years to be classified as long term assets. Unlisted bonds and debentures, debt mutual funds and market linked debentures will continue to attract applicable capital gains tax.

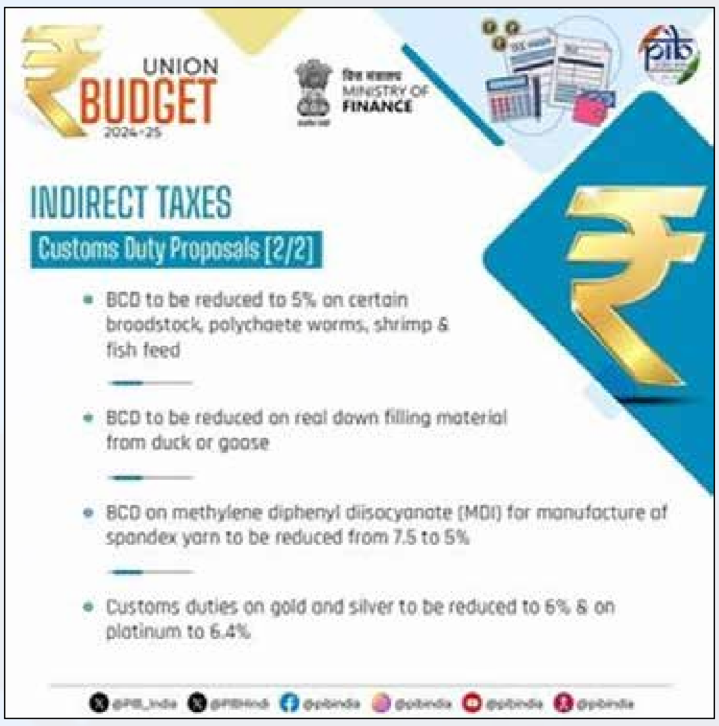
Acknowledging that GST has decreased tax incidence on common man and terming it as a success of vast proportions, Union Finance Minister Smt Nirmala Sitharaman said that GST has reduced compliance burden and logistics cost for trade and industry.

Now the Government envisages further simplifying and rationalizing the tax structure to expand it to remaining sectors. Budget also proposed to further digitalise and make paperless the remaining services of Customs and Income Tax including rectification and order giving effect to appellate orders over the next two years.

Custom duties have been revised to rationalize and revise them for ease of trade and reduction of disputes. Giving relief to cancer patients, Budget fully exempted three more cancer treating medicines from custom duties, namely, Trastuzumab Deruxtecan, Osimertinib and Durvalumab. There will be reduction in Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on X-ray machines tubes and flat panel detectors. BCD on mobile phones, Printed Circuit Board Assembly (PCBA) and mobile chargers reduced to 15 per cent. To give a fillip to processing and refining of critical minerals, Budget fully exempted custom duties on 25 rare earth minerals like lithium and reduced BCD on two of them. Budget proposed to exempt capital goods for manufacturing of solar panels. To boost India's seafood exports, BCD on broodstock, polychaete worms, shrimps and fish feed reduced to 5 per cent. Budget will foster competitiveness of Indian leather and textiles articles of export. BCD reduced from 7.5 per cent to 5 per cent in Methylene Diphenyl Diisocyanate (MDI) used for manufacture of spandex yarn. Custom duties on gold and silver reduced to 6 per cent and on platinum to 6.4 per cent. BCD on ferro nickel and blister copper removed, while, BCD on ammonium nitrate increased from 7.5 to 10 per cent to support existing and new capacities in pipeline. Similarly, BCD on PVC flex banners increased from 10 to 25 per cent considering the hazard to environment. To incentivize domestic manufacturing, BCD on PCBA of specific telecom equipments increased from 10 to 15 per cent.



For dispute resolution and dispose-off backlogs, Union Finance Minister proposed Vivad se Vishwas Scheme, 2024 for resolsution of certain income tax



disputes pending in appeal. The monetary limits for filing appeals related to direct taxes, excise and service tax in High Courts, Supreme Courts and tribunals has been increased to ₹ 60 Lakh, ₹ 2 Crore and ₹ 5 Crore, respectively. Further to reduce litigation and provide certainty in international taxation, scope of safe harbour rules to be expanded and transfer pricing assessment procedure to be streamlined.

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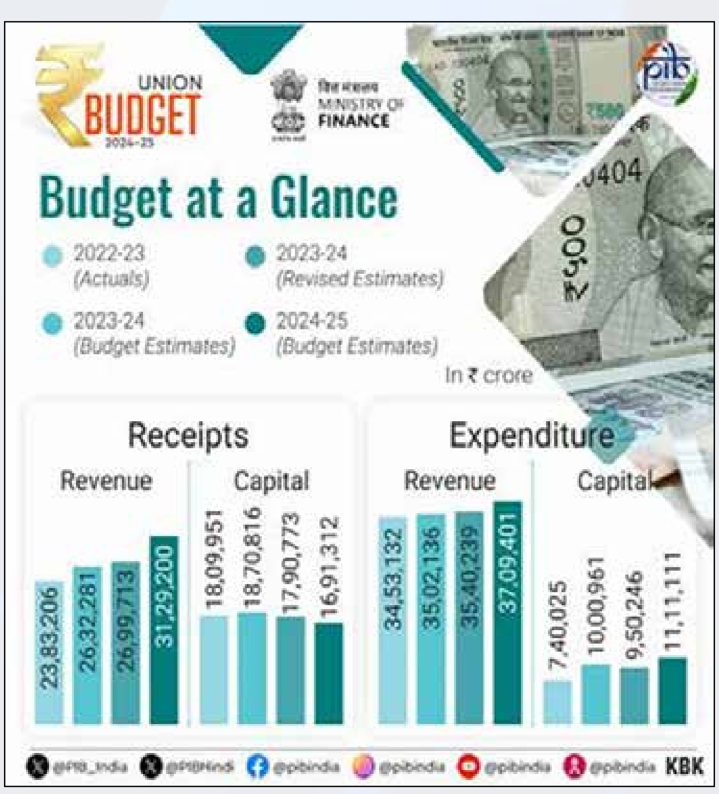
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE UNION BUDGET 2024-25

23 JUL 2024 New Delhi



The Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget 2024-25 in Parliament today. The highlights of the budget are as follows:

PART-A

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2024-25:

Total receipts other than borrowings: `32.07 lakh crore.
o Total expenditure: `48.21 lakh crore.
o Net tax receipt: `25.83 lakh crore.
o Fiscal deficit: 4.9 per cent of GDP.
• Government aims to reach a deficit below 4.5 per cent next year.
• Inflation continues to be low, stable and moving towards the 4% target; Core inflation (non-food, non-fuel) at 3.1%.
• The focus of budget is on EMPLOYMENT, SKILLING, MSMEs, and the MIDDLE CLASS.

Package of PM's five schemes for Employment and Skilling

- Prime Minister's Package of 5 Schemes and Initiatives for employment, skilling and other opportunities for 4.1 crore youth over a 5-year period.

1. **Scheme A** - First Timers: One-month salary of up to `15,000 to be provided in 3 installments to first-time employees, as registered in the EPFO.
2. **Scheme B** - Job Creation in manufacturing: Incentive to be provided at specified scale directly, both employee and employer, with respect to their EPFO contribution in the first 4 years of employment.
3. **Scheme C** - Support to employers: Government to reimburse up to `3,000 per month for 2 years towards EPFO contribution of employers, for each additional employee.
4. **New centrally sponsored scheme for Skilling**
   - 20 lakh youth to be skilled over a 5-year period.
   - 1,000 Industrial Training Institutes to be upgraded in hub and spoke arrangements.
5. **New Scheme for Internship in 500 Top Companies to 1 crore youth in 5 years**

NINE BUDGET PRIORITIES IN PURSUIT OF 'VIKSIT BHARAT':

1. Productivity and resilience in Agriculture
2. Employment & Skilling
3. Inclusive Human Resource Development and Social Justice
4. Manufacturing & Services
5. Urban Development
6. Energy Security
7. Infrastructure
8. Innovation, Research & Development and
9. Next Generation Reforms

PRIORITY 1: PRODUCTIVITY AND RESILIENCE IN AGRICULTURE

- Allocation of `1.52 lakh crore for agriculture and allied sectors.
- New 109 high-yielding and climate-resilient varieties of 32 field and horticulture crops to be

released for cultivation by farmers.

- 1 crore farmers across the country to be initiated into natural farming, with certification and branding in next 2 years.
- 10,000 need-based bio-input resource centres to be established for natural farming.
- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for Agriculture to be implemented for coverage of farmers and their lands in 3 years.

PRIORITY 2: EMPLOYMENT & SKILLING

- As part of the Prime Minister's package, 3 schemes for 'Employment Linked Incentive' to be implemented - Scheme A - First Timers; Scheme B - Job Creation in manufacturing; Scheme C - Support to employers.
- To facilitate higher participation of women in the workforce,
    - working women hostels and crèches to be established with industrial collaboration
    - women-specific skilling programmes to be organized
    - market access for women SHG enterprises to be promoted

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- New centrally sponsored scheme for Skilling under Prime Minister's Package for 20 lakh youth over a 5-year period.
- Model Skill Loan Scheme to be revised to facilitate loans up to
- `7.5 lakh.
- Financial support for loans upto `10 lakh for higher education in domestic institutions to be provided to youth who have not been eligible for any benefit under government schemes and policies.

PRIORITY 3: INCLUSIVE HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

PURVODAYA

- Industrial node at Gaya to be developed along the Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor.
- Power projects, including new 2400 MW power plant at Pirpainti, to be taken up at a cost of `21,400 crore.

ANDHRA PRADESH REORGANIZATION ACT

- Special financial support through multilateral development agencies of `15,000 crore in the current financial year.
- Industrial node at Kopparthy along Vishakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor and at Orvakal along Hyderabad-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor.

WOMEN-LED DEVELOPMENT

- Total allocation of more than `3 lakh crore for schemes benefitting women and girls.

PRADHAN MANTRI JANJATIYA UNNAT GRAM ABHIYAN

- Socio-economic development of tribal families in tribal-majority villages and aspirational districts, covering 63,000 villages benefitting 5 crore tribal people.

BANK BRANCHES IN NORTH-EASTERN REGION

- 100 branches of India Post Payment Bank to be set up in the North East region.

PRIORITY 4: MANUFACTURING & SERVICES

CREDIT GUARANTEE SCHEME FOR MSMES IN THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR

- A credit guarantee scheme without collateral or third-party guarantee in term loans to MSMEs for purchase of machinery and equipment.

CREDIT SUPPORT TO MSMES DURING STRESS PERIOD

- New mechanism to facilitate continuation of bank credit to MSMEs during their stress period.

MUDRA LOANS

- The limit of Mudra loans under 'Tarun' category to be enhanced to `20 lakh from `10 lakh for those who have successfully repaid previous loans.

ENHANCED SCOPE FOR MANDATORY ONBOARDING IN TREDS

- Turnover threshold of buyers for mandatory onboarding on the TReDS platform to be reduced from `500 crore to `250 crore..

MSME UNITS FOR FOOD IRRADIATION, QUALITY & SAFETY TESTING

- Financial support to set up 50 multi-product food irradiation units in the MSME sector .

E-COMMERCE EXPORT HUBS

- E-Commerce Export Hubs to be set up under public-private-partnership (PPP) mode for MSMEs and traditional artisans to sell their products in international markets.

CRITICAL MINERAL MISSION

- Critical Mineral Mission to be set up for domestic production, recycling of critical minerals, and overseas acquisition of critical mineral assets.

OFFSHORE MINING OF MINERALS

- Auction of the first tranche of offshore blocks for mining, building on the exploration already carried out.

DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE (DPI) APPLICATIONS

- Development of DPI applications in the areas of credit, e-commerce, education, health, law and justice, logistics, MSME, services delivery, and urban governance.

PRIORITY 5: URBAN DEVELOPMENT

TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

- Formulation of Transit Oriented Development plans and strategies to implement and finance 14 large cities above 30 lakh population.

URBAN HOUSING

- Investment of `10 lakh crore, including the central assistance of `2.2 lakh crore in next 5 years, under PM Awas Yojana Urban 2.0 proposed to address the , housing needs of 1 crore urban poor and middle-class families.

STREET MARKETS

- New scheme to support the development of 100 weekly 'haats' or street food hubs every year for the next 5 years in select cities.

PRIORITY 6: ENERGY SECURITY

ENERGY TRANSITION

- Policy document on 'Energy Transition Pathways' to balance the imperatives of employment, growth and environmental sustainability to be brought out.

PUMPED STORAGE POLICY

- Policy for promoting pumped storage projects for electricity storage to be brought out.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL AND MODULAR NUCLEAR REACTORS

- Government to partner with private sector for R&D of Bharat Small Modular Reactor and newer technologies for nuclear energy, and to set up Bharat Small Reactors.

ADVANCED ULTRA SUPER CRITICAL THERMAL POWER PLANTS

- Joint venture proposed between NTPC and BHEL to set up a full scale 800 MW commercial plant using Advanced Ultra Super Critical (AUSC) technology.

ROADMAP FOR 'HARD TO ABATE' INDUSTRIES

- Appropriate regulations for transition of 'hard to abate' industries from the current 'Perform, Achieve and Trade' mode to 'Indian Carbon Market' mode to be put in place.

PRIORITY 7: INFRASTRUCTURE

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BY CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

- `11,11,111 crore (3.4 % of GDP) to be provided for capital expenditure.

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BY STATE GOVERNMENTS

- Provision of `1.5 lakh crore for long-term interest free loans to support states in infrastructure investment.

PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAKYOJANA (PMGSY)

- Launch of phase IV of PMGSY to provide all-weather connectivity to 25,000 rural habitations.

IRRIGATION AND FLOOD MITIGATION

- Financial support of `11,500 crore to projects such as the Kosi-Mechi intra-state link and other schemes in Bihar.
- Government to provide assistance to Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim for floods, landslides and other related projects.

TOURISM

- Comprehensive development of Vishnupad Temple Corridor, Mahabodhi Temple Corridor and Rajgir.
- Assistance for development of temples, monuments, craftsmanship, wildlife sanctuaries, natural landscapes and pristine beaches of Odisha.

PRIORITY 8: INNOVATION, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

- Anusandhan National Research Fund for basic research and prototype development to be operationalised.
- Financing pool of `1 lakh crore for spurring private sector-driven research and innovation at commercial scale.

SPACE ECONOMY

- Venture capital fund of `1,000 crore to be set up for expanding the space economy by 5 times in the next 10 years.

PRIORITY 9: NEXT GENERATION REFORMS

RURAL LAND RELATED ACTIONS

- Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) or Bhu-Aadhaar for all lands
- Digitization of cadastral maps
- Survey of map sub-divisions as per current ownership
- Establishment of land registry
- Linking to the farmers registry

URBAN LAND RELATED ACTIONS

- Land records in urban areas to be digitized with GIS mapping.

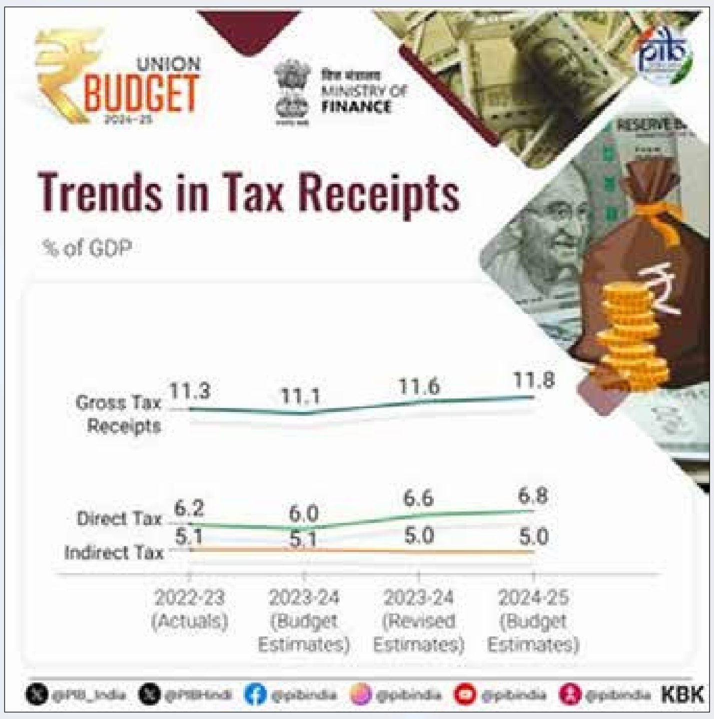
SERVICES TO LABOUR

- Integration of e-shram portal with other portals to facilitate such one-stop solution.
- Open architecture databases for the rapidly

changing labour market, skill requirements and available job roles.
- Mechanism to connect job-aspirants with potential employers and skill providers.

NPS VATSALYA
- NPS-Vatsalya as a plan for contribution by parents and guardians for minors.

PART B



INDIRECT TAXES

GST
- Buoyed by GST's success, tax structure to be simplified and rationalised to expand GST to remaining sectors.

SECTOR SPECIFIC CUSTOMS DUTY PROPOSALS

MEDICINES AND MEDICAL EQUIPMENT
- Three cancer drugs namely TrastuzumabDeruxtecan, Osimertinib and Durvalumab fully exempted from custom duty.
- Changes in Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on x-ray tubes & flat panel detectors for use in medical x-ray machines under the Phased Manufacturing Programme.

MOBILE PHONE AND RELATED PARTS
- BCD on mobile phone, mobile Printed Circuit Board Assembly (PCBA) and mobile charger reduced to 15 per cent.

PRECIOUS METALS
- Customs duties on gold and silver reduced to 6 per cent and that on platinum to 6.4 per cent.

OTHER METALS
- BCD removed on ferro nickel and blister copper.
- BCD removed on ferrous scrap and nickel cathode.
- Concessional BCD of 2.5 per cent on copper scrap.

ELECTRONICS
- BCD removed, subject to conditions, on oxygen free copper for manufacture of resistors.

Chemicals and Petrochemicals
- BCD on ammonium nitrate increased from 7.5 to 10 per cent.

PLASTICS
- BCD on PVC flex banners increased from 10 to 25 per cent.

TELECOMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT
- BCD increased from 10 to 15 per cent on PCBA of specified telecom equipment.

TRADE FACILITATION
- For promotion of domestic aviation and boat & ship MRO, time period for export of goods imported for repairs extended from six months to one year.
- Time-limit for re-import of goods for repairs under warranty extended from three to five years.

CRITICAL MINERALS
- 25 critical minerals fully exempted from customs duties.
- BCD on two critical minerals reduced.

SOLAR ENERGY
- Capital goods for use in manufacture of solar cells and panels exempted from customs duty.

MARINE PRODUCTS
- BCD on certain broodstock, polychaete worms, shrimp and fish feed reduced to 5 per cent.
- Various inputs for manufacture of shrimp and fish feed exempted from customs duty.

LEATHER AND TEXTILE
- BCD reduced on real down filling material from duck or goose.
- BCD reduced, subject to conditions, on methylene diphenyl diisocyanate (MDI) for manufacture of spandex yarn from 7.5 to 5 per cent.

DIRECT TAXES
- Efforts to simplify taxes, improve tax payer services, provide tax certainty and reduce litigation to be continued.
- Enhance revenues for funding development and welfare schemes of government.
- 58 per cent of corporate tax from simplified tax regime in FY23, more than two-thirds taxpayers availed simplified tax regime for personal income tax in FY 24.

SIMPLIFICATION FOR CHARITIES AND OF TDS
- Two tax exemption regimes for charities to be merged into one.
- 5 per cent TDS rate on many payments merged into 2 per cent TDS rate.
- 20 per cent TDS rate on repurchase of units by mutual funds or UTI withdrawn.
- TDS rate on e-commerce operators reduced from one to 0.1 per cent.
- Delay for payment of TDS up to due date of filing statement decriminalized.

SIMPLIFICATION OF REASSESSMENT

- Assessment can be reopened beyond three years upto five years from the end of Assessment Year only if the escaped income is ₹ 50 lakh or more.
- In search cases, time limit reduced from ten to six years before the year of search.

SIMPLIFICATION AND RATIONALISATION OF CAPITAL GAINS

- Short term gains on certain financial assets to attract a tax rate of 20 per cent.
- Long term gains on all financial and non-financial assets to attract a tax rate of 12.5 per cent.
- Exemption limit of capital gains on certain financial assets increased to ₹ 1.25 lakh per year.

TAX PAYER SERVICES

- All remaining services of Customs and Income Tax including rectification and order giving effect to appellate orders to be digitalized over the next two years.
- Litigation and Appeals'Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme, 2024' for resolution of income tax disputes pending in appeal.
- Monetary limits for filing direct taxes, excise and service tax related appeals in Tax Tribunals, High Courts and Supreme Court increased to ₹60 lakh, ₹2 crore and ₹5 crore respectively.Safe harbour rules expanded to reduce litigation and provide certainty in international taxation.

EMPLOYMENT AND INVESTMENT

- Angel tax for all classes of investors abolished to bolster start-up eco-system,.
- Simpler tax regime for foreign shipping companies operating domestic cruises to promote cruise tourism in India.
- Safe harbour rates for foreign mining companies selling raw diamonds in the country.
- Corporate tax rate on foreign companies reduced from 40 to 35 per cent.

DEEPENING TAX BASE

- Security Transactions Tax on futures and options of securities increased to 0.02 per cent and 0.1 per cent respectively.
- Income received on buy back of shares in the hands of recipient to be taxed.

SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS.

- Deduction of expenditure by employers towards NPS to be increased from 10 to 14 per cent of the employee's salary.
- Non-reporting of small movable foreign assets up to ₹20 lakh de-penalised.

OTHER MAJOR PROPOSAL IN FINANCE BILL

- Equalization levy of 2 per cent withdrawn.

CHANGES IN PERSONAL INCOME TAX UNDER

NEW TAX REGIME

- Standard deduction for salaried employees increased from ₹50,000 to ₹75,000.
- Deduction on family pension for pensioners enhanced from ₹15,000/- to ₹25,000/-

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BUDGET OF JAMMU & KASHMIR FOR 2024-25 INTRODUCED IN PARLIAMENT

Union Finance Minister, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, introduced the Budget of Jammu & Kashmir for 2024-25 in Parliament on 23rd July, 2024. The Appropriation Bill on the Regular Budget for 2024-25 will be considered by the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in this regard.

Finance Department of the UT Government had drafted the Regular Budget for the current year. For this, the Department had assessed the revenue receipts of the UT Government from GST, motor spirit tax, excise, and stamp duty. Further, the non-tax revenue from electricity and water supply, mining royalty, timber sales, annual rent from industrial lands, etc were also examined. The own revenue of the UT Government has been estimated at Rs. 21,860crore.

A detailed analysis of the fiscal situation of Jammu and Kashmir was carried out by the Finance Department to address the legacy challenges which include high staff strength, low revenue base, and high debt load. The high fiscal stress caused by the committed nature of the major expenditures has increased the UT's dependence on central grants. To address these challenges, the UT government has increased tax and non-tax revenues through improved GST return compliance, improved billing and collection efficiency, increased dealer registration, and transparent excise auctions.

All administrative departments also intensified efforts to harness central funds by enhancing execution speed. This led to a sharp increase in receipts of funds under centrally sponsored schemes.During the last financial year, the UT government also stringently enforced borrowing limits and curtailed the culture of overdraft. With close monitoring of public debt, the UT government was successful in tapering down the off-Budget borrowings. The government has restrained revenue expenditure through austerity measures and biometric verification of beneficiaries. The UT Government also pursued Government of India for increasing central financial assistance.

Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha, Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo and Principal Secretary Finance, Santosh Vaidya led the UT's efforts in this direction. Crucial meetings were held in June and July 2024 in Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Finance to review these demands of the UT Government. Union Home Minister and Union Finance Minister personally reviewed the fiscal management of the UT Government in recent months.

Considering the challenges faced and the strenuous efforts made by the UT government, Government of India has agreed to provide special financial support to Jammu and Kashmir coupled with reforms to come out of the fiscal stress. Accordingly, the Union Budget which was also laid before the Parliament provides for a special central assistance of Rs.17,000 crore for Jammu and Kashmir. The Union Government has agreed to provide for the salary, pension and other costs of Jammu and Kashmir Police for which an allocation of Rs 12,000 crore has been made in the annual budget. In addition, a lump sum special grant of Rs 5,000 crore as additional central assistance is being provided in the current financial year.

As a result of this Rs. 17,000 crore of special package, the fiscal deficit to GDP ratio of Jammu and Kashmir will reduce to 3.0% in the financial year 2024-25. This special package will be part of the overall central assistance which is estimated at Rs. 67,133 crore during 2024-25. This unprecedented assistance would lead to complete improvement in fiscal position enabling the Government of Jammu & Kashmir to work towards fulfilling the developmental needs and aspirations of the people, while maintaining stable fiscal health.

The budget of Jammu and Kashmir for 2024-25makes provisions for the ongoing initiatives for infrastructure development, sustainable agriculture, new industrial estate, PRI level works, employment generation, developing tourism, and social inclusion.During preparation of the interim budget proposals, consultations were held with all the Departments and various stakeholders to provide for ongoing initiatives and arrive at realistic budgetary numbers. For finalizing expenditure proposals, assessment of financing needs of infrastructure projects, social and economic measures undertaken by Departments was undertaken.

The budgetary exercise focused on the imperative of advancing the cause of the greater collective good within the realistically realizable resources.The budgetary estimate for this financial year 2024-25 is about Rs. 1,18,390crore, includingrevenue expenditure of Rs. 81,486 crore and capital expenditure of Rs. 36,904crore. The major outlays under the budget of Jammu and

Kashmir for 2024-25 are as below -

MAJOR OUTLAYS UNDER BUDGET 2024-25

1. Rs. 9400 crore for subsidy and budgetary support for purchase of power from the National grid and the Power purchase agreements with power generation companies.

2. Rs. 3983 crore for Construction of roads & bridges under PMGSY, CRIF, NABARD loan schemes& Bridge scheme.

3. Rs. 1875 crore for rejuvenating school education infrastructure and services through funding of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), career counselling services, and setting up of modern schools for quality education with PM SHRI funding

4. Rs. 1808 crore for strengthening decentralized governance by providing for local area development works of PRIs, ULBs, BDCs and DDCs.

5. Rs. 1714 crore provisioned for tap-water connectivity for rural areas under Jal Jeevan Mission.

6. Rs. 1484 crore for completion of Smart City projects in Srinagar and Jammu cities, construction of infrastructure projects under Jhelum Tawi Flood Recovery Project (JTFRP), construction of sewerage treatment plants in urban areas, and development of new townships for housing.

7. Rs. 1430 crore for comprehensive social security coverage under assistance schemes for Old Age, Widow, and Disabled, and for the women empowerment interventions of Ladli Beti and Marriage Assistance schemes.

8. Rs. 1317 crore for strengthening infrastructure and services in the health sector under National Health Mission mechanism.

9. Rs. 1104 crore for construction of own houses of houseless poor families in rural areaswith PM Awas Yojana- Grameen support

10. Rs. 1068 crore for Provision for salaries, food grains, cash assistance for Kashmiri migrants and construction of transit accommodation for Kashmiri migrant employees.

11. Rs. 1021 crore for transforming agriculture and allied sectors of the UT through the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), with the five-year outlay of Rs 5013 crore, including provisions for IFAD funded J&K Comprehensive Investment Plan (JKCIP) and development ofcold storage and high density plantation.

12. Rs. 923 crore for development and upgradation of Industrial Estates, for providing GST refund incentive and incentives as per the Industrial Policy for industrial units, promotion of trade through JKTPO's events for boosting investment and employment

13. Rs. 776 crore for equity support for the hydro electric projects at Ratle, Kwar, and Kiru, which would provide stable revenue source and cheaper power.

14. Rs. 586 crore for Universal health insurance coverage for all families of Jammu & Kashmir.

15. Rs. 500 crore for providing of drugs, machinery and equipments for health institutions.

16. Rs. 475 crore for upgradation infrastructure of colleges and universitiesand for rollout of the National Education Policy.

17. Rs. 518 crore for promotion of Tourism, development of new tourism destinations and new circuits, construction of ropeways, conduct of Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra and film festival and promotion policy.

18. Rs. 445 crore for improving sanitation and waste disposal facilities, IHHLs, CSCs & achieving ODF+ status in the rural areas.

19. Rs. 390 crore for flood management projects of river Jhelum.

20. Rs. 405 crore for schemes for self-employment, Start-ups, Seed Capital Fund, implementation of Mission Youth schemes, and support to self help groups for generation livelihoods.

21. Rs. 179 crore for construction of security related infrastructure, police housing colonies, bunkers in border areas and installation of CCTVs in police stations.

22. Rs. 150 crore for installation of solar rooftops and solar pumps.

23. Rs. 335 crore for creation of sports infrastructure, heritage preservation, promotion of festivals and theatre and development of Infrastructure and initiatives for welfare of Tribals, like tribal hostels, milk villages, nomad shelters, etc.

24. Rs. 100 crore for Capital support for revitalization of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and Cooperative Banks.

25. Rs. 500 crore for MGNREGA works at Gram Panchayat level.

26. Rs. 401 crore for development of Dal lake, afforestation, wildlife management, and preservation of protected areas.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS 2024-25

- Competitiveness Improvement of Agricultural and Allied Sectors project in Jammu and Kashmir (JKCIP) at an estimated value of USD 100 million loan from International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD to be implemented.

- Implementation of all 29 projects approved under Holistic Agriculture Development Programme for Rs 5013 crore over five years.
- 25,000 MTs of Controlled Atmosphere (CA) storage capacity to be added.
- Development of Chrysanthemum theme Park at Cheshmashahi, Srinagar.
- 60,000 backyard poultry units in rural areas.
- Establishment of Micro Food Processing Units for creating employment opportunities, especially in rural areas.
- Construction of 6 Grain storage units in 6 districts which are deficit in grain storage facility under the Scheme "World's Largest Grain Storage".
- 12,000 additional Self Help Groups (SHGs) to be formed.
- 80,000 houses to be constructed under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin (PMAY-G).
- 26,000 hectare area to be covered under Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP)
- New 12 off-beat tourist destinations, 6 each in Jammu and Kashmir divisions, to be developed. Keran as border tourist village, Tosamaidan and Sitharan as circuits.
- Revival and restoration of 75 identified heritage sites/cultural sites. Establishment of 8 cultural centers.
- 46 estates to be developed to fulfill the goal of 'Made in Jammu and Kashmir'.
- Under Jammu and Kashmir Rural Employment Generation Programme (J&K REGP), 1,372 units are targeted to be setup during 2024-25.
- New Start-up Policy to be introduced for creating entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- Two Cancer Institutes' at Jammu and Srinagar to be made fully operational during 2024-25.
- Enhancing DNB Seats to 400 and creation of ABHA IDs for 1.35 crore population.
- 100% screening of 30+ age population for hypertension and diabetes.
- AIIMS, Awantipora to be made functional by March, 2025.
- New Nursing College at Handwara to be set-up.
- Attainment of TB free status in all the remaining districts.
- 2,176 new Kindergartens to be established.
- 18,499 Schools to be provided sports equipments', 2,584 Schools to be provided ICT labs and Smart Classrooms, 43 Robotic Labs and 30 Virtual Reality Labs to be established.
- Establishment of Science Centres in 100 Schools and vocational Education to be introduced in new 554 Schools.
- 20 national sports events to be organized in 2024-25.
- Placement drives for 1,000 pass outs to be organized in collaboration with big business and industrial establishments.
- New initiative to create ecosystem for promotion of enterprises and self-employment, generate over 5 lakh opportunities for self-employment and expand investments through credit support.
- New age courses to be introduced in 10 Industrial Training Institutes.
- Outreach and counselling activities to be conducted for aspiring job seekers through Model Career Centers (MCCs).
- All persons with disability to be covered under Nirmaya Health Insurance Scheme.
- 11 Shakti Sadan and 04 Sakhi Niwas to be established.
- 7,708 women beneficiaries with establishment of 1,502 units to be targeted under self-employment scheme
- 80 schools to be transformed into smart schools in tribal areas.
- An addition of 3,014 MW installed capacity in phased manner till year 2026-27 with cumulative increase of design energy of 10,714.50 Million units per annum.
- Creation/Augmentation of 38,150 KVA Distribution Transformer, Replacement of 14,000 Ckm of dilapidated LT bare conductor.
- Providing of reliable power supply to the far-flung and remote areas of Gurez.
- 5,000 Kilometres of road length to be black-topped during 2024-25
- 194 new projects sanctioned at an estimated cost of Rs 1023.42 crore under NABARD to be taken for execution during 2024-25.
- Rs 1000 crore new road and bridge projects to be taken up under NABARD loan assistance under RIDF Tranche XXX during 2024-25.
- Completion of 60 ongoing bridges is targeted during 2024-25.

- 4.26 lakh households to be provided Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTCs) to achieve 100% coverage under tap water connections.
- Shahpur Kandi Dam project likely to be commissioned which will benefit Jammu and Kashmir with 1,150 cusecs of irrigation water facilities to 32,186 hectare of land in Kathua and Samba.
- Balance work of Tawi Barrage to be completed. 197 minor irrigation schemes to be completed during 2024-25, which envisages creation of irrigation potential of 38,723 hectare.
- All projects to be completed under Smart city mission.
- Western Foreshore Road along Dal Lake, Srinagar to be constructed.
- Introduction of 200 e-buses under PM e-Bus Sewa scheme.
- Inter Model Station (IMS) in collaboration with NHAI to be developed at Katra.
- Finalization of Master Plan of all 78 Cities/Towns.
- Development of Sewerage network of Houseboats in Dal-Nigeen Lake, including sewerage network of hamlets inside lake.
- Implement of Van se Jal, Jal se Jeevan, an innovative water conservation techniques through water shed management approach, promote sustainable agricultural practices and revitalize traditional water bodies, including wetlands.
- Conservation and rejuvenation of Wular Lake to enhance the livelihood of the local people, through ecotourism.
- Completion of construction of 1,500 flats as transit accommodation for Kashmiri Migrant employees during 2024-25.
- Remaining 276 posts out of 6,000 posts under PM-Package for Kashmiri Migrants to be filled in 2024-25.
- e-KYC of all beneficiaries under Public Distribution System to be completed.
- Roll out of Smart PDS in Jammu and Kashmir.
- 4,000 AC agriculture pumps to be replaced by Solar Pumps in phased manner under PM-KUSUM
- Around 04 MW rooftop solar power plants to be installed on the government buildings. 22,494 Government buildings to be 100% solarised in phased manner.
- 5,000 improved biomass cook-stoves to be provided in the tribal areas to reduce indoor air pollution and fuel use.
- Solarization of all routes and camps of Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra.
- Operationalization of Bio-Technology Park at Kathua.
- Young Scientist Awards/Fellowships among the outstanding researchers.
- IDTR at KotBhalwal, Jammu to be completed and operationalized in 2024-25.
- Institute of Inspection and Certification Centre (ICC) at Samba, Jammu to be completed in 2024-25.
- Implementation of Vehicle Location Tracking Platform (VLTP) for safety of women in public transport vehicles.
- Automated Testing Stations (ATSs) to be established for testing fitness of motor vehicles in private sector.
- Construction of Modern Bus Terminal at TRC, Srinagar.

JKPI Publications

Kashmir's shortage of skilled workers: Impact on economic growth

SEMRAN PARVAIZ

Kashmir faces numerous ongoing economic challenges, with a significant issue being the shortage of skilled workers. This deficiency hampers economic growth and development. Despite Kashmir's substantial potential in tourism, agriculture, and handicrafts, these opportunities are often squandered due to the lack of skilled labour.

The shortage of skilled workers leads to several adverse outcomes. Local businesses struggle to fill positions, often resorting to hiring people from outside the region, which complicates competition in the modern economy. From workers in paddy fields to those in apple orchards, there is a persistent need for both skilled and unskilled labour from other states in India, resulting in various consequences.

In this commentary, we will explore the reasons behind the shortage of skilled workers and its impact on Kashmir's economy.

IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCES FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

Human resources (HR) are the foundation of any economy. They drive innovation, support entrepreneurship, and boost productivity. In today's competitive world, a region's ability to attract, retain, and develop skilled professionals is crucial for economic success. Skilled workers contribute directly to economic output and create an environment where new ideas and businesses can flourish. Without a strong HR base, the economy of any country or region cannot thrive. Having enough skilled workers is essential for nations experiencing inefficiencies and slow growth. In Kashmir, the absence of skilled HR is a major barrier to achieving sustainable economic development compared to other states of India.

Kashmir's HR landscape is shaped by its unique history and socio-political context. Decades of conflict have disrupted the region's educational and economic infrastructure, causing significant challenges in real human capital development. The educational system, affected by conflict and lack of resources, struggles to produce graduates with the skills needed by modern industries. Additionally, socio-political instability has led to a brain drain, where educated and skilled individuals leave in search of better opportunities.

PROBLEMS WITH LIMITED SKILLED HUMAN RESOURCES IN KASHMIR

There are noticeable differences between the skills of job applicants from Kashmir and those from other states. Many Kashmiri applicants lack the technical skills, industry-specific knowledge, and professional experience that employers seek. This gap arises from outdated educational curricula and limited access to advanced training. Moreover, people here have fewer chances for hands-on experience. Consequently, local businesses struggle to find suitable candidates, leading to unfilled positions or hiring less qualified individuals from Kashmir. Furthermore, companies from Kashmir then hire individuals from other states, which further weakens our economy.

Here is a breakdown of how the shortage of properly skilled individuals affects different companies and businesses.

CHALLENGES FACED BY COMPANIES

Kashmir lacks a sufficient number of companies compared to other states. The few that exist face major hurdles in recruiting and retaining skilled workers. The limited local talent pool forces many businesses to recruit from outside the region, leading to higher costs and longer recruitment times. Additionally, socio-political instability and frequent disruptions make it hard for companies to operate smoothly. The lack of a stable, skilled workforce discourages investment from other states or countries, making it difficult for local businesses to expand or compete with firms from other regions. These challenges create a vicious cycle that limits economic opportunities.

IMPACT ON LOCAL BUSINESSES AND STARTUPS

The scarcity of skilled workers severely affects local businesses and startups. Without experienced professionals, these enterprises struggle to innovate, adapt to market changes, and expand operations. This is especially harmful to startups, which rely on innovation for growth. The inability to attract and retain skilled employees forces many startups to abandon their ambitions or shut down entirely. As a result, the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kashmir remains underdeveloped, further hindering job creation and economic diversification.

WHY IS THERE A HUMAN RESOURCE SHORTAGE IN KASHMIR?

There are multiple reasons why Kashmir has a human resource shortage. We will discuss them in detail one by one.

OUTDATED EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The primary reason is the educational setup in Kashmir. The schools and universities in Kashmir lack proper infrastructure, have outdated curricula, and do not have enough qualified teachers. These issues lead to graduates who are not ready for modern workforce demands. The focus on rote learning instead of practical skills and critical thinking leaves students unprepared for real-world challenges. The absence of vocational training and professional development programs worsens the situation, creating a workforce that doesn't meet the needs of local businesses and industries.

SOCIO-POLITICAL FACTORS

Socio-political instability greatly affects HR development in Kashmir. Years of conflict and unrest create a volatile environment, which disrupts educational institutions frequently. This instability drives many skilled professionals to leave the region for better opportunities in other parts of the world. This brain drain deprives Kashmir of skilled individuals who could help local development. Additionally, the psychological impact of living in a conflict zone affects the motivation and aspirations of the youth, further hindering the development of a skilled workforce.

LIMITED EXPOSURE AND OPPORTUNITIES

People in Kashmir lack exposure and opportunities compared to other states of India. Kashmir's geographical and political isolation limits exposure to global best practices and reduces opportunities for professional growth. The region lacks access to advanced training programs and international collaborations, as well as diverse professional environments. This isolation restricts local professionals from acquiring new skills and networking with peers, making it difficult for them to stay updated with industry trends. Limited opportunities for internships, workshops, and on-the-job training further impede the development of a competent workforce. As a result, local talent remains underdeveloped and unprepared for a competitive job market.

CULTURAL AND SOCIETAL INFLUENCES

Cultural and societal norms in Kashmir also shape the HR landscape. Traditional values and social expectations often prioritize family and community responsibilities over individual career ambitions. This cultural context discourages young people from pursuing professional development and higher education. Societal pressures may also limit women's participation in the workforce, reducing the available talent pool. The emphasis on conventional career paths like government jobs over entrepreneurial ventures prevents innovation, as people are reluctant to take risks, which are essential for economic growth and development.

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF WEAKER HUMAN RESOURCES

The HR deficiency affects local businesses and startups. Without skilled employees, these organizations struggle to innovate, adapt to market changes, and compete with larger companies. There are many ways through which the lack of a properly skilled and unskilled workforce affects Kashmir.

EFFECTS ON ECONOMY

The HR shortage in Kashmir has far-reaching economic implications. For example, in paddy harvesting, people are entirely dependent on skilled and unskilled labourers from other states. The region's inability to develop a skilled workforce hinders economic growth, limiting investment and industrial development potential. The lack of qualified professionals forces businesses to operate below their potential, reducing productivity and economic output. This situation also affects public services and infrastructure development, as skilled professionals are needed to manage various projects. Since there is no or less available workforce, companies do not make sufficient profits, weakening them. Consequently, a strong local economy in Kashmir remains unattainable.

BRAIN DRAIN

The HR shortage leads to a significant brain drain, with many of Kashmir's brightest and most skilled individuals migrating elsewhere for better opportunities. This migration depletes the region of its intellectual and professional capital, making it harder to build a robust economy. The loss of skilled workers affects all sectors, from healthcare and education to business and technology. The continuous outward migration of local talent negatively impacts innovation and entrepreneurship.

> The lack of a stable, skilled workforce discourages investment from other states or countries, making it difficult for local businesses to expand or compete with firms from other regions...

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating opportunities for skill development is key to closing the HR gap. This can be achieved by offering ongoing professional development programs and internships. Both government and individual efforts are needed to boost the skilled workforce in Kashmir. The problems already discussed must be addressed effectively, and everyone has a role to play in this process.

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

Fixing the HR gap in Kashmir requires a significant overhaul of the education system. This includes upgrading infrastructure and updating curricula to align with industry needs. The focus must be on improving teaching quality, emphasizing practical skills and critical thinking instead of rote learning. Vocational training programs that provide students with specific job market skills are essential.

SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation is crucial for economic growth in Kashmir. This involves creating a supportive environment for startups, with governments providing funding, mentorship, and business services. Available facilities must be accessible to people at the grassroots level. Promoting a culture of innovation through competitions and workshops, as well as collaboration with established companies, can boost new business activities.

BUILDING PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Building strong public-private partnerships is key to developing human resources in Kashmir. Collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and the private sector can lead to effective training programs and job opportunities. These partnerships can align education with industry needs, ensuring graduates are work-ready. Joint efforts can also support infrastructure development, research, and innovation.

Fixing the HR gap requires a combined effort from everyone in Kashmir. The government must focus on educational reforms and invest in modern infrastructure to build a strong foundation for skill development. Schools should update their curricula and focus on practical, job-related skills. Marks and distinctions alone are insufficient in today's competitive job market. Promoting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship through supportive environments, funding, and mentorship is vital for encouraging new businesses and economic growth.

CONCLUSION

The lack of skilled workers in Kashmir is a significant obstacle to the region's economic success. This problem stems from interconnected issues, such as poor education, political instability, cultural influences, and limited exposure to global best practices. These factors collectively hinder the growth of a capable workforce, essential for economic progress. The effects of this HR shortage are severe.

Investing in people is not just a strategy for economic growth—it is essential for sustainable development in Kashmir. With proper planning and improved living standards for residents, the region can reach its full potential. Focusing on human capital will help Kashmir compete nationally and globally, attracting investment and creating new opportunities for its people.

Escalating vulnerability of rangelands in Jammu & Kashmir

ZAHOOR AHMAD DAR

In 2022, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists to preserve and enhance the livelihoods of nomads, semi-nomads, and pastoralists. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been named the lead UN agency for its implementation. According to the FAO, up to 35% of grasslands are at risk of degradation, with other rangelands showing significant risk at 26-27%. This indicates the grave threat rangelands are facing and underscores the need for improved rangeland governance. The severity of this issue is highlighted by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which emphasizes that the degradation of vast rangelands endangers the climate, the welfare of billions of people, and their access to food. Rangelands are critical for biodiversity, with around 33% of global biodiversity hotspots found in these areas. They are also culturally significant, as 24% of the world's languages are found in rangelands.

Rangelands conserve freshwater, act as carbon sinks, and prevent land from becoming desertified. Thus, rangelands play an important role in ensuring food security and protecting livelihoods.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

Rangelands are characterized by natural or semi-natural ecosystems grazed by livestock or wild animals. They include natural grasslands, forests, marshes, and shrublands used by cattle and wild animals for grazing and foraging. In addition to grasses, forbs, bushes, and shrubs, their vegetative cover may also include open forests and agroforestry systems. Rangelands makeup 54% of all land cover, produce one-sixth of the world's food, and hold one-third of the planet's carbon stores. Approximately 80 million square kilometers are covered by rangelands worldwide, with 78% found in drylands, primarily in tropical and temperate latitudes. Of this, 67 million square kilometers are used for cattle production, and 9.5 million square kilometres are protected.

About 1 billion animals are sustained in rangelands, which are managed by pastoralists in more than 100 nations. This underscores the critical role of rangelands in both ecological preservation and agricultural production. According to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), deserts and xeric shrublands constitute 35% of rangelands, tropical and subtropical grasslands make 26%, tundra 15%, temperate grasslands, savannas, and shrublands 13%, montane grasslands and shrublands 6%, Mediterranean forests, scrub, and woodlands 4%, and flooded grasslands and savannas 1%. Rangelands are found in a variety of biomes and ecosystems, making them extremely diverse.

Rangelands are an important economic resource in many countries and a symbol of their cultural identity. Predominantly found in Africa and South America, rangelands provide 16% of the world's total food supply and 70% of the feed for domesticated herbivores. Additionally, rangelands are home to several World Heritage Sites and have shaped the identities, values, and rituals of pastoralists for centuries. Livestock production contributes 4% to India's GDP and 19% to Ethiopia's. Brazil produces 16% of the world's meat, with cattle and livestock accounting for one-third of the country's agribusiness GDP.

INDIAN CONTEXT

In India, rangeland vegetation covers approximately 121 million hectares, ranging from the Thar Desert to the alpine meadows in the Himalayas. The total grassland area decreased from 18 million hectares to 12 million hectares between 2005 and 2015, with less than 5% of India's grasslands being within protected areas. There are about 13 million pastoralists in India across 46 different groups. An estimated 40% of India's land area is used for grazing, which includes 23% of forests and 17% of grasslands.

India holds 20% of the world's cattle population, most of which are raised in pastoralist systems for grazing together, according to the 2020 report "Accounting for Pastoralists in India." Livestock contributes 4% of the country's GDP and 26% of the agricultural GDP, making it a significant component of the Indian economy and supporting rural livelihoods. India is home to 20% of the world's livestock, including 193 million cattle, 149 million goats, 110 million buffaloes, 74 million sheep, 9 million pigs, 300,000 camels, and 58,000 yaks.

Under privatization, conversion, and misappropriation, communal rangelands—also known as common property resources (CPR)—have decreased from 70 million hectares in 1947 to 38 million hectares in 1997. In several states, pastoralists are prohibited from entering forests or other protected areas. Their movements are further restricted by mining and energy developments, which hinder their access to essential rangeland resources. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 helps pastoralist groups protect their land rights. For instance, grazing rights were granted to the Van Gujjars community in Rajaji National Park following a High Court ruling.

J&K CONTEXT

In Jammu and Kashmir, rangelands cover 4.32% of the total area (3.53% in Jammu and 13.22% in Kashmir), encompassing 959,500 hectares. These rangelands are crucial for the livelihoods of local communities, supporting pastoralism, agriculture, the harvest of medicinal plants, and tourism. Approximately 25% of the population in Jammu and Kashmir, including nomads and semi-nomads such as the Gujjars, Bakerwals, Chopans, and Gaddis, depend partially or wholly on rangelands.

In Jammu and Kashmir, field crops such as paddy, maize, oats, and wheat are grown over 500,000 hectares and can provide a local source of fodder for livestock during the winter. Additionally, Jammu and Kashmir has an abundance of fodder tree leaves, such as those from willows and poplars, which are rich in proteins and minerals and are traditionally used to feed livestock during times of scarcity.

The 2024 Global Land Outlook Thematic Report on Rangelands and Pastoralists highlights the urgent need to protect rangelands from endangerment. Key drivers of rangeland degradation include unsustainable land and livestock management practices, climate change, and biodiversity loss due to land conversion. Additional factors contributing to rangeland degradation and fragmentation are tenure instability, disputes over water and grazing limits, laws that promote the overuse of rangeland resources, and changes in consumer behavior.

RANGELAND GOVERNANCE

Rangelands and their communities face serious threats from land degradation. The degradation of rangelands reduces income, productivity, and mobility, adversely affecting the health of both people and animals and increasing the likelihood of conflict over dwindling water and land resources. The impacts of rangeland degradation vary across households, communities, and geographical areas, with marginalized populations, including women, youth, and Indigenous people, being disproportionately affected. Additionally, rangeland degradation can have far-reaching consequences due to hydrological disturbances, leading to sand and dust storms that can exacerbate animal mortality and diminish production and health over larger areas.

Rangeland governance is essential in addressing the challenges faced by these areas. The interactions between formal and informal institutions, as well as the laws, norms, and customs they follow, shape how people and the environment interact on rangelands. This process is known as rangeland governance. Inclusive rangeland governance is the cornerstone of many programs that promote group action for rangeland conservation, sustainable management, and restoration.

Global warming is making rangeland habitats increasingly vulnerable, threatening ecological security. Sustainable management of rangeland resources is crucial, as the impacts of degradation disproportionately affect the vulnerable and poor. The task of gathering fuel and water from dwindling resources falls particularly on women and children. Addressing the energy issue is becoming critical for the sustainable management of rangeland resources, as overgrazing and local attempts to meet energy demands are gradually depleting these resources.

The participation of pastoralists and other rangeland users is key to effective rangeland management and governance. The Participatory Grassland and Rangeland Assessment (PRAGA), developed by FAO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), employs a blend of scientific, indigenous, and local knowledge to assess rangeland health based on the management goals of local land users.

Major challenges facing rangelands include climate change, which, along with the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, affects soil water availability and many aspects of ecosystem structure and function. Meeting both traditional and new demands on rangelands will depend significantly on how they are managed. Coherent policies, effective management, and balanced commercial incentives are essential, as the current lack of these elements, coupled with ineffective management, endangers the livelihoods and cultures of pastoralists. Rangeland communities, often a minority in political and administrative decisions about investment and development, are frequently neglected, voiceless, and powerless.

WAY FORWARD

To effectively address climate change in rangelands, the integration of climate-smart management practices is essential. Additionally, steps must be taken to prevent the conversion of indigenous community land for commercial or other uses. Conservation efforts should focus on both protected and non-protected rangelands, with a simultaneous emphasis on designing effective conservation practices.

Strategies are needed to minimize damage to rangelands from climate change, overgrazing, and other imminent threats. Increasing the presence of native species can enhance carbon sinks by improving vegetation cover and reducing methane emissions. Promoting agroforestry in regions where woody species and grasses co-exist, and incentivizing farmers with marginal land holdings to produce forage seeds through participatory methods, can be beneficial.

Moreover, to protect and enhance the productivity and health of rangelands and their inhabitants, increased political focus and well-informed investments are urgently required.

Scenario of Dairy Farming in Kashmir Valley: Challenges and Path Forward

MUKHTAR DAR AND

DR. SMRUTI SMITA MOHAPATRA

INTRODUCTION

Jammu & Kashmir has witnessed a massive increase in dairy production for the last five years. Jammu & Kashmir has set up hundreds of dairy farming business units. The households that are rearing dairy cows for family consumption have also produced surplus milk. In the past two decades, the Kashmir Valley's milk production has increased by approximately 250%. Official sources state that there are 32 lakh cows in Jammu and Kashmir, which represents 1.04% of all cows in India. The milk economy in Jammu & Kashmir is about Rs 9080 crore. By the end of January 2023, Jammu and Kashmir had produced 2513.72 metric tonnes of milk, an increase over the year 2022. There are over 40,000 dairy farms in the Kashmir valley. Despite such growth in this sector, Jammu and Kashmir is still falling away from becoming self-sufficient in milk and milk products. There is still a large scope to streamline the dairy sector with a proper policy framework to make Kashmir self-reliant in milk production. Due to its profitability and rising demands, it is deemed to create more employment opportunities in the region. However, beyond press releases and headlines there are several challenges that are affecting the dairy farmer in Kashmir. In a recent study, JK Policy Institute tries to find out such challenges that the native dairy farmers are facing.

DAIRY FARMING IN KASHMIR

Dairy farming was a traditional pursuit of farming in Kashmir. Earlier it was used to meet the milk demands of households. As households started to produce surplus milk with the advent of crossbreeds like Holstein Friesian (HF), they could earn along with meeting the household needs. The other factor that helped to develop dairy farming in Kashmir was the expansion of road-based connectivity; due to which dairy cooperatives like Jammu & Kashmir Milk Producers Co-operatives Limited (JKMPCL), popularly Snowcap, reached the far-off place to collect the milk from farmers. Pertinently, in Kashmir, every area or village has a dedicated person locally called 'Goer' who collects milk from the village or surrounding area from the dairy farmers at the first light of dawn. Later the Goer sells it.

In Kashmir, there is a lot of demand to produce milk locally to meet the self-sufficient status. It implies that there is a scope for employment. With the awareness programmes and high demand for milk, hundreds of unemployed people ventured into the dairy business. The initial investment cost between Rs 5,00,000 and 10,00,000 having four cows hundreds of dairy farms were set up in Kashmir. The initial investment may vary with the increasing number of dairy cows. It also depends on the type of cowshed and the land. In a questionnaire prepared by the JK Policy Institute addressing various concerns around the dairy business, it came forth that cowsheds are constructed by dairy farmers on their own mostly on their milking land. Few dairy farmers have renovated their traditional cowsheds. In 2022, Ghulam Qadir Bhat of Hukhlatri village of Budgam district started dairy farming with four Holstein Friesian (HF) lactating cows with an investment of around Rs 5,00,000 by renovating his traditional cow shed. Mostly the crossbreed cows from Punjab are being brought to Kashmir. With four lactating cows, the annual income of the farmer remains around Rs 5,05,000 with an expenditure cost of around 3 lakhs excluding the fodder that is being produced at home. One HF cow pours around 14 litres of milk each day. The price of one litre of milk varies from 32-40 rupees depending on the fat and Solid Not fat (SNF) content in milk. It has been measured on an analyser unit provided to the village milk cooperative societies by JKMPCL. It is pertinent to mention here that Jersey cow's milk has more fat content compared to HF. And its rate varies from Rs 40-50.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For crossbred livestock in particular, high-yielding and nutritious feed is crucial for both scientific and financial livestock management. The production of livestock is more efficient on cultivated fodder than on degraded grazing grounds; nevertheless, the amount of arable land used for fodder production in Jammu & Kashmir is only 4% due to stagnant fodder cultivation. According to Ahmad (2016), Jammu & Kashmir produces 86.5 lakh tonnes of fodder altogether, of which 61.4 lakh tonnes are green fodder and 25.1 lakh tonnes are dry fodder. Jammu & Kashmir has a 27.31% deficit in dry feed and a 67% shortfall in green feed. The majority of concentrates used in the feeding of cattle and poultry are imported. Thus, the majority of the feed and fodder that reaches Kashmir is imported at extremely high costs from outside the state. Kashmir should be the site of the feed mill. Similarly, farmers should be assisted to produce good quality with good quantity fodder on their lands by providing high-quality seeds so the deficit can be minimized and farmers become self-sufficient to feed their animals.

Marketing is paramount for any farming to grow and prosper. The dairy farmers of Kashmir valley lack marketing techniques and avenues. Mostly milk producers sell their milk to local milkmen (Goer) at the rate of 30-35 rupees. In some places, there are milk analyzers that are helping farmers to receive better rates as compared to unmeasured selling. However, still the rate is not appropriate. The Government of Jammu and Kashmir on October 13, 2022, revised the rate of fresh milk in the loose form (boiled) and its byproducts. The cow milk (loose form boiled) having 3 to 3.5% fat and 8.5% SNF is Rs. 45 per litre. The curd standard is Rs 55 per/kg. The cheese Kashmiri (Paneer) dry without the water content is Rs 250 per/kg. However, farmers did not get such rates. It is important to note that a litre of water is sold for 20 rupees, whereas a liter of milk is sold for 30 rupees. The administration should take steps to fix the appropriate rate for milk and the rate should be disseminated to the public through different means. The rate list should be pasted at every milk analyzer unit and milk shop. Violators should be punished.

Knowledge is the first step toward any farming endeavour's success. The same is true for dairy farming. Many times, dairy farmers experience losses as a result of inadequate guidance. In 2016, three cows were acquired from Punjab by Ghulam Qadir Dar of Budgam's Lasipora village. However, he later sold them since they were not producing sufficient milk. Later with guidance from the animal husbandry department, he restarted dairy farming. It is reported that cows from other states are being transported to Kashmir Valley. Thus, the frequent and extensive travels result in the calves being lost and under stress. Second, the harsh winters in Kashmir make it extremely difficult for farmers to rear them, in many cases they do not survive. The animal husbandry department has a role to play. They should produce high-quality cow breeds through artificial insemination that can produce a good quantity and quality of milk and the animal can survive the temperate weather of the valley.

CONCLUSION

Since Jammu and Kashmir has still a long way to becoming self-sufficient in milk and milk products, there is a high demand for the establishment of dairy farming units in the state. However, in contrast to earlier times when animals were raised up with minimal work, cow-rearing in the twenty-first century is an extremely costly endeavour. To expand dairy farming in Kashmir, dairy farming needs to be turned into a properly organized sector. The industry can move from a net deficit to a net surplus, but this will require outputs that should be more than the input cost. Fodder and feed should be available at lower prices and the role of field-level workers and dairy stakeholders to be enhanced in order to properly disseminate information. Thus, dairy farming can become a source of nutrition, rural employment, and women empowerment in Kashmir Valley.

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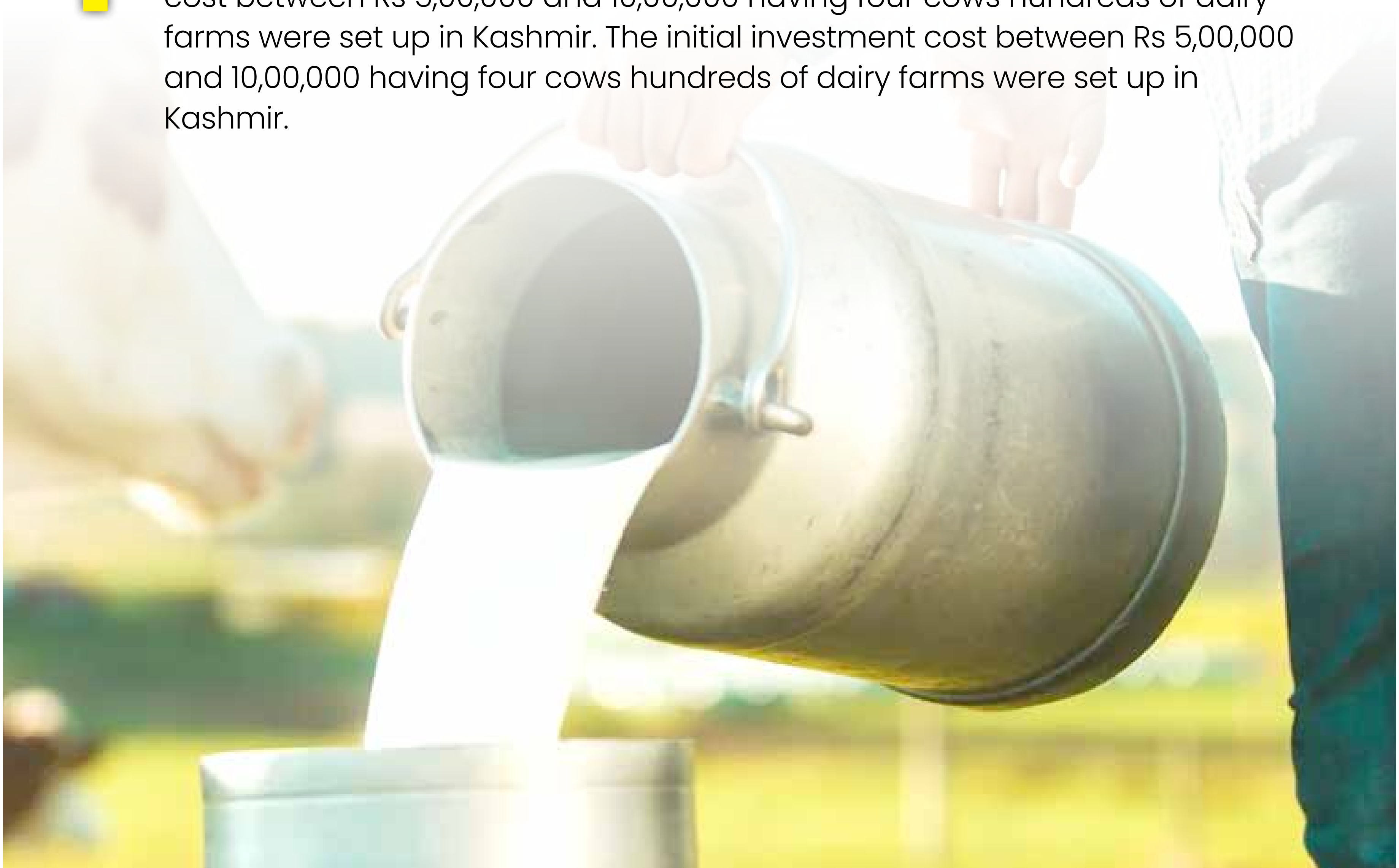


The smart village initiative and its potential impact on J&K

LAVYA BHASIN

As per the latest data from 2022, around 908.8 million people in India reside in rural areas. Similarly, there are 6,850 villages in Jammu and Kashmir, home to about 9.1 million people. These facts and statistics align with Mahatma Gandhi's statement that the soul of India lies in its villages.

However, it must be acknowledged that Indian villages, despite being the soul of India and the backbone of its economy, face significant challenges such as lack of infrastructure, limited access to education and healthcare, connectivity issues, and economic weaknesses. Taking steps towards the implementation of 'smart villages' can help overcome these hurdles and more.

Therefore, this commentary aims to explore the idea of smart villages, with particular reference to the case of Jammu and Kashmir. It will first examine the components of a smart village, the need for creating smart villages, and lastly, discuss the strategies for their implementation.

WHAT IS A 'SMART VILLAGE'?

A smart village is a community that creates value for its people and ecosystem using simple and cost-effective technologies, capturing some of that value for itself. It follows a management approach based on natural principles, employing sustainable technical interventions to achieve self-reliance in food, water, energy, education, employment, and other essential needs. Smart villages rely on a participatory approach to develop and implement strategies that enhance their economic, social, and environmental conditions.

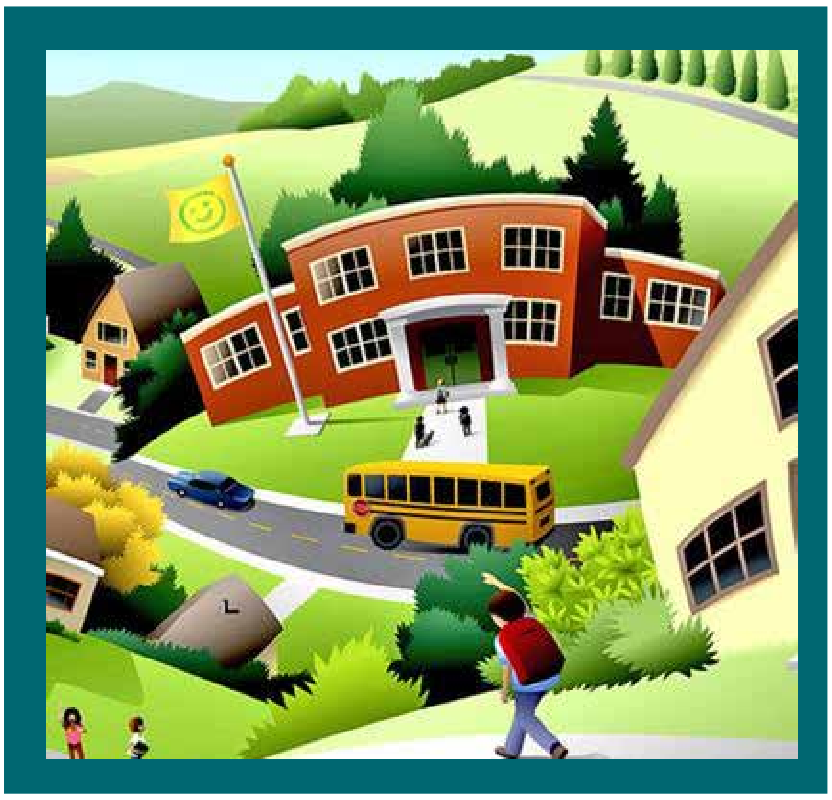
Some of the components of a smart village include:

SMART ENERGY:

The term 'smart' in this context refers to the creation and management of mini, micro, and nano grids within the energy ecosystem of a village or a group of villages. This concept is particularly relevant for rural areas with unreliable or no grid connectivity. These micro and nano grids promote energy self-reliance within rural communities and provide the opportunity to return surplus energy to the grid. Chhotkei village in the Angul district of Odisha has emerged as the first village in India to implement a smart microgrid.

SMART CONNECTIVITY:

Smart connectivity encompasses two key aspects of the concept of a smart village. First, it involves providing reliable and high-quality broadband and voice communications. Second, it includes integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions across various domains, such as education, accessing services, and realizing legal rights. Mori Village in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, also known as a super-smart village, exemplifies smart connectivity. It is fully digital, with all households enjoying Wi-Fi, internet connectivity that enables cashless transactions, and 15 Mbps internet speed through a fibre grid. Additionally, every household has access to a television with 250 cable channels.



SMART AGRICULTURE:

Smart Agriculture, also known as smart farming, involves adopting advanced technologies and data-driven operations to enhance sustainability in agricultural production. This approach, also referred to as Precision Agriculture (PA), is driven by the Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data and Advanced Analytics (BDAA), and the decreasing cost of sensors in the semiconductor industry. It is a technology-enabled method for managing farming that observes, measures, and analyzes the needs of individual fields and crops. By enabling farmers to apply tailored care and manage water more effectively, Smart Agriculture boosts production, improves economic efficiency, and reduces waste and environmental impact. Noorpur Bet in Punjab is an example of a climate-smart village that utilizes Precision Agriculture.

SMART EDUCATION:

Smart Education refers to the establishment of ICT-equipped schools that facilitate internet access and, consequently, access to a vast knowledge base, thereby eliminating the information isolation often experienced by rural communities. In villages, Smart Education also encompasses distance learning, adaptive learning, and the use of ICT for both adaptive and cognitive learning. An example of this is the Nandangram smart village in the Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal, where gainful employment, education, and health are addressed through the creation of Health, Education, and Employment (HEE) centres.

SMART HEALTH:

ICT-enabled m-health initiatives can facilitate mobile health diagnostic solutions that require minimal local medical skills while providing access to specialist healthcare services from urban centres when necessary. In a smart village, improved nutrition levels result from enhanced agricultural productivity due to associated development initiatives and reduced waste. Additionally, epidemiological data can be collected, offering opportunities for more effective interventions and early warning systems to address health-related challenges.

SMART ENVIRONMENT:

Smart villages can act as environmental stewards by using technologies to monitor key environmental indicators, such as forest health, water quality, soil conditions, and changes to the landscape. The concept of a Smart Environment in a smart village also includes effective waste management. An example of this is a project in the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh.

SMART INFRASTRUCTURE:

Smart Infrastructure in a smart village not only enhances accessibility for villagers but also promotes overall development within the community. This infrastructure includes roads, institutional buildings, weather station equipment, hospital facilities, telephone towers, and more. Most of these elements can be established through the efforts of dedicated village residents and guiding institutions, with the convergence of funds, functions, and personnel. Smart Infrastructure also encompasses basic amenities such as sanitation, safe drinking water, internal roads, tree plantation, and water conservation. An example of this is Dhanora in Tehsil Bari, District Dholpur, Rajasthan.

Developments and Initiatives for the Implementation of Smart Villages in India:

Currently, there are no specific initiatives or proposals under consideration by the Ministry of Rural Development for the formulation of Smart Village policies. However, under the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM), various modern amenities are being developed in rural areas through the convergence of funds and resources from Centrally Sponsored, Central Sector, and State schemes, supported by the dedicated Critical Gap Fund (CGF). Notable modern amenities established under the 21 components of SPMRM in Rurban Clusters across the country include smart classrooms, Wi-Fi hotspots, Citizen Service Centers, solid and liquid waste treatment plants, solar water pumps, water ATMs, e-rickshaws, and digital libraries.

Some other schemes, while not specifically focused on Smart Villages, indirectly support the concept. These include PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana), PMAY-G (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin), and SAUBHAGYA (Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana), among others.

Additionally, a conference titled “Smart Village Panchayat: Empowering Rural Communities; Leaving No One Behind” was held in Lucknow in 2022. The event aimed to realize the Prime Minister of India’s vision of ‘Minimum Government, Maximum Governance’ by designing and building Smart Villages that are self-sufficient in providing services and employment at the grassroots level.

Dhanora Village in the Dholpur district of Rajasthan was India’s first Smart Village. Adopted by the Eco Needs Foundation, the village was transformed into a Smart Village through various sustainable development efforts, including improvements in sanitation, housing, road reconstruction, access to solar power, clean drinking water, tree plantation, and water conservation. Once difficult to access due to poor roads, Dhanora has now become a model village with all basic amenities, including internet connectivity and uninterrupted electricity. Similarly, 16 villages across five districts in Ahmedabad have been designated as smart villages by the State Government under the ‘Smart Village Incentive Scheme.’

Next, we will explore whether such smart villages could become a reality for Jammu and Kashmir.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SMART VILLAGES: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JAMMU AND KASHMIR

A key question that arises is why Smart Villages are needed in Jammu and Kashmir. The answer is twofold. Firstly, villages often receive less attention during significant economic reforms, such as industrialization. For instance, while there have been repeated efforts to develop Srinagar as a ‘smart city,’ similar initiatives have not been extended to the villages in J&K. Secondly, given J&K’s strong cultural ties, the Smart Village concept offers a sustainable growth model for villages, promoting inclusiveness without compromising their cultural roots.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to assert that prioritizing the creation of smart villages should be considered equally important, if not more so, than the development of smart cities. Failing to do so may exacerbate migration, resulting in unsustainable growth and deteriorating living standards.

Currently, villages in Jammu and Kashmir are situated in remote areas with limited accessibility due to poor infrastructure. Furthermore, extreme weather conditions and the lack of sustainable heating systems mean that villagers often burn coal for warmth in the winter, which contributes to environmental pollution. For instance, Wandaji village in the Kupwara district of Kashmir still lacks electricity even today. Similarly, the villages of Kundiyan and Pathroo in the Keran Valley sector of Kupwara district only recently received electricity for the first time in 75 years. Given these conditions, it is clear why Smart Villages could be a crucial and necessary development for J&K.

To establish smart villages in Kashmir, it is important to recognize that the region’s hilly terrain is naturally suited for generating substantial amounts of solar energy. This potential can be harnessed through solar grids to create a foundation for smart energy solutions. Currently, over 300 villages lack access to high-speed internet. However, the Jammu and Kashmir Revenue Department has allocated 37 kanals of land to BSNL to facilitate the deployment of a 4G mobile network. This initiative will not only ensure smart connectivity but also enhance the global presence of these villages.

The government of J&K has approved a ₹30.40 crore ‘Sensor-Based Smart Agriculture Project’ to integrate technology into agriculture using IoT for automation, improved resource efficiency, and increased profitability. Implementing this smart agriculture in the villages would be highly beneficial, as agriculture is a primary source of livelihood for many rural households. According to 2024 statistics, the literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir is only 67.16%, with a significant portion of illiteracy concentrated in the villages. Providing internet facilities for education in these villages could significantly enhance educational outcomes and transform the prospects for these communities.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND CONCLUSION

So far, we have explored why ‘Smart Villages’ programs should be implemented in the villages of Jammu and Kashmir and the potential benefits of doing so. However, a crucial question remains: How can we turn this concept into reality? In other words, how can we implement these programs? Additionally, a key concern is determining the sources of funding for such projects.

The primary source of funding is government schemes and policy-making, which include funds from the central government, state government, municipal corporations, and panchayats, as well as MLA and MP funds. Additionally, funding and initiatives can come from private and public sector corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, overseas development agencies, personal social responsibility (PSR) contributions, and moral social responsibility (MSR) funds. For example, several villages—such as Sanwala in Haryana, Ajit in Rajasthan, Vadnanagar in Gujarat, and others—have been adopted by Indian Americans for transformation into smart villages.

In 2020, the government introduced the ‘Back to Village 3’ (B2V-3) scheme in Kashmir. However, the follow-up results were disappointing due to the lack of a clear roadmap. A village becomes a ‘Smart Village’ when its development meets all the requirements in five basic categories: *Retrofitting, Redevelopment, Green Fields, e-Pan (electronic planning), and Livelihood. With focused attention and well-sequenced plans, meeting these requirements can become more than just a distant dream.*

Improper carcass disposal in Kashmir: A public health and environmental crisis

MUKHTAR DAR

INTRODUCTION

India accounts for 15% of the global animal population and has the highest number of cattle worldwide. The Basic Animal Husbandry Statistics report for 2021 states that there are 536.76 million livestock in India. Livestock accounts for around 6.20% of the country's overall GDP and 31.0% of the GDP from agriculture (BAHS, 2021). In India, two-thirds of rural households depend on livestock for their livelihood (Economic Survey 2020–21). Similarly, one of the most significant economic sectors in Jammu and Kashmir is the livestock industry.

According to the 20th Livestock Census, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh have 8.32 million animals. Sheep, cattle, goats, and buffalo make up 36.84%, 30.41%, 21.93%, and 8.03% of the total populations of J&K and Ladakh, respectively. Consequently, a substantial number of carcasses are produced in villages and cities. However, Jammu and Kashmir has been using the most inappropriate methods to dispose of dead animals. The most widely used mass animal carcass disposal method is burial, but in J&K, dead animal carcasses are often thrown into nearby streams, contaminating the water, posing grave threats to human health, and polluting the nearby environment.

THE CRISES OF DEAD ANIMAL CARCASSES IN KASHMIR

Jammu and Kashmir is facing escalating environmental and public health crises due to the improper disposal of waste. The JKPI has extensively highlighted this issue and brought it to the attention of policymakers. This report highlights the unscientific disposal of dead animals in open spaces and how it poses severe threats to the ecosystem, public health, and aesthetic beauty.

In 2021, under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Watrahail block of Budgam district, with a budget of around 1 lakh, established a playground for the residents of Ramhuma and nearby villages to provide a recreational space for children. However, what was envisioned as a vibrant space for recreational activities has devolved into a dumping ground for dead animals. Notably, the famous distributary, Ahij of Sukhnag River, runs alongside this ground. The dead bodies of cows lying along this river pose a serious threat to both human health and the environment. The decomposing carcasses are contaminating the water supply, spreading harmful bacteria and diseases. During rains, animal carcasses are washed away by the gushing force of water, disrupting aquatic life and biodiversity and endangering the local communities who rely on the river for drinking water, bathing, and irrigation.

Notably, this area has the Budgam-Doodhpathri road running along one side, with irrigation offices and water filtering facilities nearby. Despite this, little has been done to remove these carcasses. The silence at the public and administrative levels indicates backwardness and carelessness. This neglect could have devastating consequences. Similarly, the presence of dead carcasses on the banks of the road leading to Hanief-u-Din Gazi's shrine in Rathson village of Budgam poses a significant health risk to the devotees, visitors, and nearby villages. The decomposition of these carcasses releases unpleasant odours and potentially hazardous pathogens into the environment, spoiling the aesthetic perspective and spiritual atmosphere that shrines are meant to provide. The sight and smell of carcasses are disturbing for travellers, nearby villagers, and devotees.

Ironically, such situations have been normalized in Kashmir. Similarly, on the banks of the Sukhnag River near Zanigam village of Budgam, dozens of dead animal carcasses can be seen. Such scenes near water bodies are common in rural areas due to the lack of a carcass management system in Kashmir.

Unfortunately, neither private nor government organizations, including Panchayats and Municipalities, are involved in disposing of dead animals. Government and civil organizations have somehow overlooked and paid little attention to this issue. Additionally, farmers lack awareness regarding the consequences of improper disposal of animal carcasses.

Research published in the Journal of Pharmacognosy and Phytochemistry, titled "Awareness of Kashmiri Livestock Owners with Respect to Public Health Issues, Zoonosis, and Environmental Hygiene in Flood-Affected Areas of Kashmir Division (J&K, India)," assesses the awareness of livestock owners about the spread of diseases through improper disposal of animal carcasses. The findings revealed that a significant number of respondents

(89.17%) believed they had no knowledge about how dead animals could contaminate public health sanitation. Additionally, 41.67% of owners perceived their environmental hygiene practices to be of poor quality. These findings highlight a clear lack of awareness and knowledge among respondents concerning public health, zoonotic diseases, and environmental hygiene. This suggests that there have been insufficient awareness campaigns and educational efforts in these areas by relevant authorities.

As there is no system in place to properly dispose of dead animals in Kashmir, people throw away carcasses wherever it is convenient for them. Some throw them into rivers, while others discard them in public places. This practice increases the risk of spreading zoonotic diseases like Anthrax, Tuberculosis, Brucellosis, and Salmonella. Besides, these dead animals spoil the aesthetics of our water bodies and beautiful pastures. Further, carcasses emit strong and unpleasant odours, causing a nuisance to nearby residents and passersby.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

THE MORTALITY COMPOSTING PROCESS

Composting Overview: Composting is a natural process where bacteria, fungi, and microorganisms break down organic materials into compost. In mortality composting, this process involves decomposing animal carcasses using microorganisms. Your role is to create the right environment for these microorganisms to work efficiently.

PROCESS:

Setup: Place the animal carcass in a composting bin and surround it with a bulking agent (e.g., sawdust or straw) rich in carbon.

Decomposition: Inside the carcass, anaerobic microorganisms decompose the material, producing fluids and gases like hydrogen sulfide and ammonia. These gases diffuse into the bulking agent.

Aerobic Breakdown: Aerobic microorganisms in the bulking agent then convert these gases into odourless carbon dioxide (CO2) and water (H2O). This aerobic process generates heat, raising the compost pile's temperature.

Heat Effect: The high temperature helps eliminate viruses and bacteria, while the bulking agent controls odors. The compost pile is left undisturbed until it cools down and aerobic activity slows. At this stage, most of the flesh and small bones decompose.

Turning the Pile: The pile is then turned to introduce more air, increasing aerobic activity and raising the temperature again. Once the temperature drops, the composting process is nearly complete, with most flesh, hide, and small bones decomposed.

ON-FARM PROCESS:

Three Bins:

Primary Bin 1: For initial carcass and bulking agent addition.

Primary Bin 2: For composting in the first heat cycle.

Secondary Bin: For the second heat cycle.

CYCLE:

Add carcasses and bulking agent to the first bin until full.

Once full, start a new pile in the second bin and transfer the first bin's pile to the third bin for the second heat cycle.

When the second bin is full, it is left to compost, and a new pile is started in the now-empty first bin.

After completing the second heat cycle, the first bin's compost is removed and either stored or spread on fields.

Duration: The entire composting process typically takes 7 to 24 weeks, depending on factors like bulking agent type, temperature, moisture, management, and animal size.

Material Changes: Finished compost becomes dark brown to black, with reduced particle size and a soil-like texture. The volume and weight decrease as carbon dioxide and water evaporate, and raw materials turn into crumbly, fine-textured compost.

BENEFITS:

Biosecurity: Provides year-round carcass disposal without disease spread, prevents disease entry from off-farm vehicles, and kills pathogens through high temperatures.

Environmental Impact: Minimizes odour, protects groundwater, and recycles nutrients into beneficial fertilizer and soil amendment.

Cost-Effectiveness: Low to moderate startup and minimal operating costs.

Ease of Use: Requires effective management and minimal training.

CONCLUSION

The disposal of dead animals is a significant issue, as around 70% of the population is associated with livestock, and death is a natural phenomenon. Therefore, it is paramount to create a sense of responsibility and awareness among farmers, local governing bodies like Panchayats and Municipalities, and other government and civil agencies about the negative repercussions of improper disposal of dead animals. Awareness programs, similar to those for plastic waste, should be initiated to educate the masses, Panchayats, municipalities, and civil bodies so that this serious issue does not go unnoticed. Eventually, it will enter the public sphere, prompting government agencies to initiate policies related to carcass management.

The government should prioritize clearing carcasses from environmentally sensitive areas like Karshan Ramhuma and similar places to prevent health hazards. Subsequently, the government should enact strict regulations prohibiting the disposal of dead animals near public areas, roads, and water bodies. Violators of these regulations should face legal consequences. Panchayats should take responsibility for enforcement.

In developing countries like India, traditional disposal methods for dead carcasses, such as burial, burning, incineration, composting, and rendering, are still followed. However, in some areas, people simply throw dead animals into open fields. While all these methods have their drawbacks, they are not as harmful as open disposal. Thus, it is essential to encourage farmers, municipalities, and Panchayats to adopt any feasible traditional method. Burial is often an effective method of carcass disposal if pits are constructed, located, and managed correctly.

The government should strictly instruct Panchayats to take care of dead animals. The responsibility of disposing of these carcasses lies with Gram Panchayats and Municipalities. Panchayats can allocate MNREGA funds for the burial of dead animals. The general rule is that carcasses should be buried in an eight-foot-deep pit. Panchayats can also generate revenue and promote sustainable agriculture with little effort.

Dr. S.K. Dhaka, a senior scientist at the Agricultural Science Centre, explains to Goan Connection that organic compost created from animal remains, such as cow dung combined with decomposed carcasses, contains extremely nutritious organic material that is vital for soil. This compost is high in essential nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, boron, manganese, and others that benefit crop growth. It acts as a comprehensive organic supplement for farming, potentially lowering the need for additional compost or synthetic fertilizers and supporting sustainable agricultural methods. Thus, through this process, the environment can be protected, and the need for fertilizers can be reduced.

Livestock plays an important role in our economy. However, it is shameful for both the owners and the authorities to let these creatures rot in open fields, particularly after they have been a source of income and sustainability. It is disturbing that these carcasses, with their foul odour, create a public nuisance, and nothing substantial has been done to address this sensitive issue. This is not only a matter of health and environmental concern but also a classic case of human apathy.

Furthermore, it highlights a loophole in the Swachh Bharat Mission that, despite substantial funding, nothing has been initiated for the proper management of dead animals. Hundreds of animals die every day in J&K, and it is paramount to provide them with proper burial or management to put an end to the rampant process of dumping them in open fields.

The need for food and nutrition education in schools

NEHA AGGARWAL

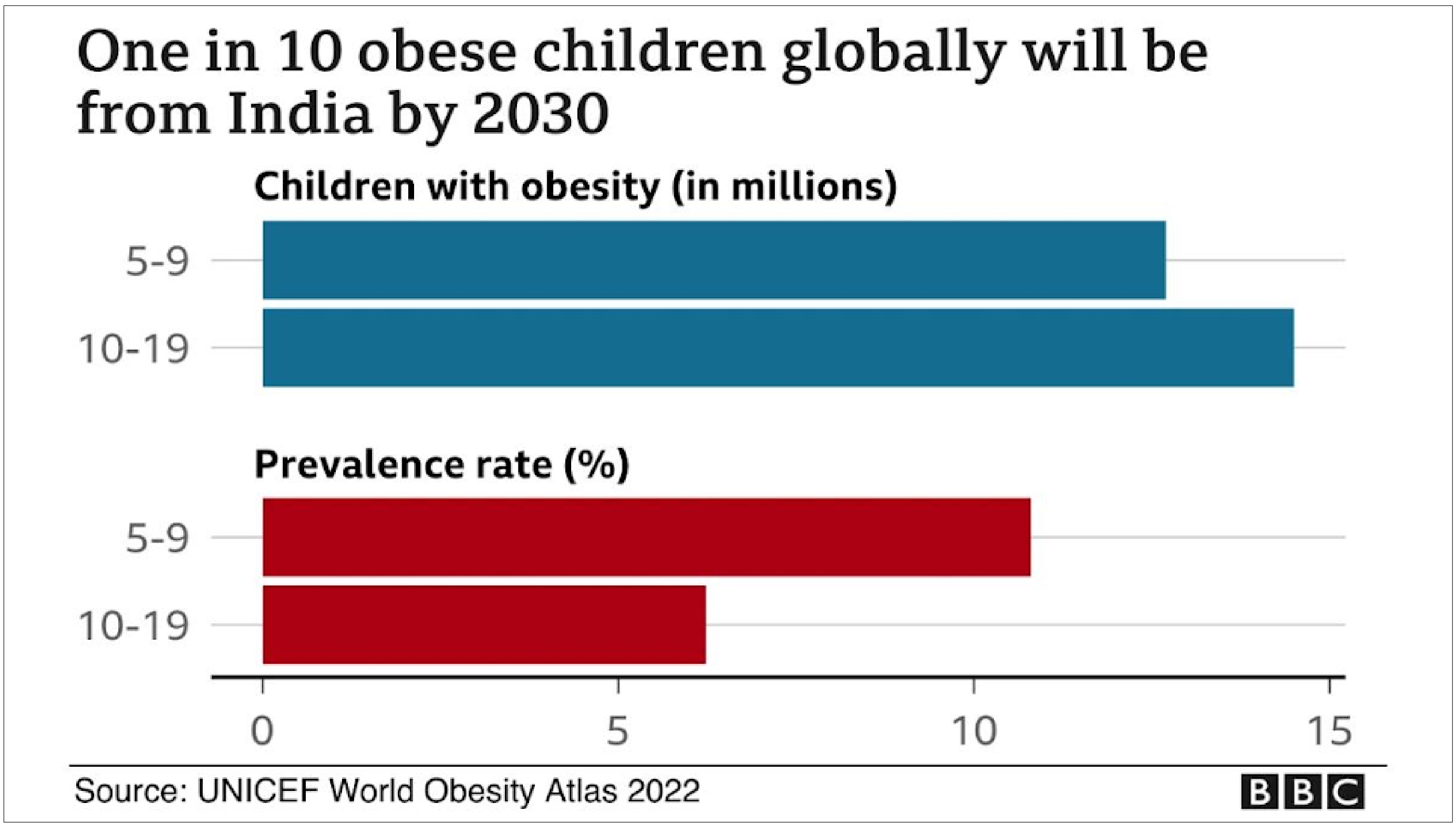
Food is a fundamental determinant of health, accounting for approximately 60-70% of what shapes our overall well-being. It is a source of nourishment for our bodies and fuel for our minds. In today's world, packaged foods have become integral to our daily lives, resulting in a significant increase in the incidences of underweight, overweight, and obesity. Worldwide, excess weight contributes to approximately 2.8 million deaths annually. Currently, in India, 3.4% of children are overweight, according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-21). The UNICEF World Obesity Atlas 2022 predicts that India will have over 27 million obese children, accounting for one in ten children globally by 2030.

However, the problem is not confined to obesity and overweight; underweight and malnutrition are equally pressing concerns. India has long been at the forefront of countries with the highest numbers of child malnutrition. This paradoxical situation—where undernutrition and overnutrition coexist—is primarily driven by widespread nutritional illiteracy. Many children and families lack the knowledge necessary to make healthy food choices, leading to both underweight and overweight conditions. As these health challenges are mainly caused by the increasing consumption of unhealthy and highly processed foods, the need for food and nutrition education becomes vital. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, and one promising strategy is the introduction of basic nutritional education into the school curriculum. Teaching children about a balanced diet, its components, and how to read and understand food labels will encourage a behavior change conducive to adopting a healthy diet. This article advocates for the inclusion of fundamental nutrition concepts and food label literacy as core components of the school curriculum.

FUNDAMENTALS OF NUTRITION

Nutrients from food and fluids are utilized by the body for growth, energy, and other purposes. There are some essential nutrients that the body cannot synthesize and must be obtained from food. In this context, a balanced diet is important. A balanced diet is essential for achieving and maintaining a healthy weight and meeting the body's nutritional needs. The cornerstone of a balanced diet is diversity and proper proportioning of essential nutrients, such as proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals, water, and fibres. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a healthy diet encompasses several key components:

- **Fruits and Vegetables:** Consuming at least 400 grams (about five portions) of fruits and vegetables per day, excluding potatoes, sweet potatoes, cassava, and other starchy roots.
- **Legumes, Nuts, and Whole Grains:** Including legumes (e.g., lentils and beans), nuts, and whole grains (e.g., unprocessed maize, millet, oats, wheat, and brown rice) in the diet.
- **Limit Free Sugars:** Ensuring that less than 10% of total energy intake comes from free sugars, which is about 50 grams for a person consuming 2000 calories per day, with an ideal target of less than 5% for added health benefits.
- **Limit Fats:** Keeping less than 30% of total energy intake from fats.



- **Reduce Salt Intake:** Consuming less than 5 grams of salt per day.

These principles offer a general framework for a balanced diet that varies based on individual needs and cultural contexts. Despite the importance of nutrition, the present curricular framework falls short of providing comprehensive health education. The Planning Commission, 2008 writes that the current curriculum fails to acknowledge health and nutrition holistically and does not provide adolescents with two major food skills i.e. planning of meals and food purchasing.

A study titled, "Quantitative and qualitative analysis of nutrition and food safety information in school science textbooks of India" conducted to examine the level of food and nutrition education in private Indian secondary schools also paints a grim picture. It reveals that

- Nutrition topics got less than 10% of pages in textbooks of grades I to VII. These topics were omitted in subsequent grades. Nutrition topics in textbooks beyond grade IV became repetitive and inconsistent. Important topics such as nutritional needs during adolescence, obesity, unhealthy foods, and food labeling are not covered.
- The nutrition curriculum was too theoretical and limited. It was further contradicted by the packaged food in the school canteens.
- Food safety got a mere 1% of page allocation, that too only in grades I to III books.

FOOD LABEL READING

When we buy a food item at the grocery store, we usually check the expiry date, but do we take the time to read and understand the food labels? For the majority of people, the answer is no. Food labels generally provide crucial nutrition information, such as the amount per serving of saturated fat, trans fat, carbohydrates, cholesterol, sodium, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients in a packaged food item. These labels include nutrient-reference values, expressed as % Daily Values intended to help consumers assess how a specific food can fit into their daily diet. As the primary mode of communication between the food industry and consumers, food labels play an instrumental role in guiding healthy food choices.

However, food labels are often underutilized due to a lack of basic food label reading skills. A range of consumer research studies reveals that food labels are often overlooked or misunderstood. For instance, the study titled "Exploring the Influence of Food Labels and Advertisements on Eating Habits of Children: A Cross-Sectional Study from Punjab, India" found that a significant percentage of children did not find food labels noticeable (61.9%) or readable (55.8%). Furthermore, more than half of the children (52.2%) face difficulty in understanding the components of the food label, and only a small fraction (6.9%) could accurately interpret the nutritional information presented. Almost half of the students (49.3%) reported that they were never influenced by food labels. A considerable percentage (59%) said they did not alter their buying behavior based on label information. This aligns with findings from another study titled, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labels for Pre-Packaged Processed Foods in India. The study found that most Indians read food labels primarily to check the brand name and expiry date rather than to examine nutritional values.

Consumers frequently encounter difficulties in understanding quantitative information, interpreting correct serving sizes, and utilizing the % Daily Values (%DVs) to evaluate their diet. Most consumers can locate calorie content on the Nutrition Facts Panel (NFP), but fewer can use the percentage information or serving size data to estimate the food's contribution to their daily nutritional needs. This highlights a significant gap in public knowledge and suggests a pressing need for educational interventions. Incorporating food label reading into the school curriculum could bridge this gap by equipping students with essential skills for making informed food choices. The forthcoming section will explore the benefits of including nutrition education in the school curriculum.

BENEFITS OF NUTRITION EDUCATION

Effective nutrition education can help prevent a range of diet-related diseases such as childhood obesity, fatty liver disease, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension. It will foster lifelong healthy eating habits by teaching students about balanced diets, portion control, and the nutritional value of foods. These habits will contribute to physical health by reducing the risk of chronic conditions and supporting mental well-being. Healthier foods over unhealthy junk foods help students recognize the link between diet and mood, thus reducing stress, and improving cognitive function.

Besides informed choices, understanding food labels is essential to bring a much wider change. If the majority of us start reading labels, companies will be compelled to abandon false marketing tactics. Well-informed consumers can pressure companies to improve their product formulations and cut out poor ingredients. Revant Himatsingka aka food pharmer aptly put it, "The most important skill in the 21st century is not coding, it's decoding." The recent reports released by the Indian Council of Medical Research have also emphasized the critical importance of carefully reading food labels. ICMR's released dietary guidelines state that health claims on packaged food are designed to catch the consumer's attention and convince them that the product is healthier than it is. Their survey revealed that the use of clear, symbol-based nutritional information on the front side of food packaging can help consumers become savvy consumers who can navigate the complexities of food labeling, and make healthier choices.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Incorporating nutrition education into school curricula presents a range of challenges that must be addressed to create effective programs. A primary challenge in this regard is the constraint of budgetary resources. Implementing a comprehensive nutrition education program requires substantial financial investment, which many schools struggle to secure. Budget constraints can hinder the development of detailed curricula, the acquisition of suitable educational materials, and the provision of training for educators. To overcome this challenge, seeking grants from government bodies, non-profit organizations, and private foundations could be a viable solution. For instance, partnerships with health-focused organizations or educational foundations could provide both the funding and resources necessary for the development of effective nutrition education programs and teacher training.

Another significant obstacle is the lack of practical assignments and the presence of an outdated and limited curriculum. Existing nutrition education programs often fail to stimulate critical thinking and are contradicted by sales practices in the school food environment, where unhealthy, energy-dense foods are frequently promoted over healthier options. This disconnect between educational content and real-life food choices highlights the need for a more dynamic and engaging approach to nutrition education.

In addition to these limitations, the effectiveness of nutrition education programs is often undermined by insufficient support for teachers. Educators frequently report a lack of explicit curriculum guidelines, inadequate materials, and insufficient training experience. These deficiencies can impede their ability to deliver nutrition education effectively and engage students in meaningful learning experiences. Addressing this issue requires the creation of a well-structured and comprehensive nutrition curriculum, along with the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers. Training programs should be designed to equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to teach nutrition concepts effectively. This includes offering interactive workshops, and online resources, and establishing support networks for educators to share best practices and challenges.

Limited engagement of parents, teachers, and students in school canteen operations also poses a significant challenge. The absence of clear government guidelines for canteens, coupled with poor knowledge among canteen staff about healthy food preparation, exacerbates the problem. Additionally, students' preferences for energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods further complicate efforts to promote healthy eating. To address these issues, it is essential to adopt a collaborative approach that involves all stakeholders in the nutrition education process. Engaging parents through informative sessions, involving teachers in developing and supporting nutrition initiatives, and creating opportunities for students to participate in interactive learning activities such as cooking demonstrations and food label scavenger hunts can foster a more supportive environment for nutrition education. Establishing clear guidelines for school canteens and providing training for canteen staff on healthy food preparation are also crucial steps toward aligning the school food environment with nutrition education goals.

Moreover, successfully implementing nutrition education requires more than just classroom instruction; it demands a consistent and supportive food environment that reinforces classroom teachings. Unfortunately, there is often a disparity between the nutritional messages delivered in the classroom and the quality of foods available in school canteens. To bridge this gap, schools should consider adopting the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework and the associated School Food Policy framework endorsed by the World Health Organization in 2014. This approach advocates for environmental changes that support healthy eating by increasing the availability of nutritious food options and reducing the availability of unhealthy choices in school canteens. By aligning canteen practices with classroom nutrition education, schools can reinforce healthy eating habits and provide students with a consistent message about the importance of nutrition. Addressing these challenges also involves overcoming various psychosocial, behavioral, and environmental barriers that students face in adopting healthy eating habits.

CONCLUSION

A lack of understanding about nutrition and food labels can significantly impact the health and quality of life of India's 1.2 billion citizens, leading to a substantial strain on public health resources. Upgrading school-based food and nutrition education is essential for equipping young people with the skills needed to navigate the challenges of a fast-food environment and reduce their risk of obesity and diet-related chronic diseases.

> Effective nutrition education can help prevent a range of diet-related diseases such as childhood obesity, fatty liver disease, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension. It will foster lifelong healthy eating habits by teaching students about balanced diets, portion control, and the nutritional value of foods.

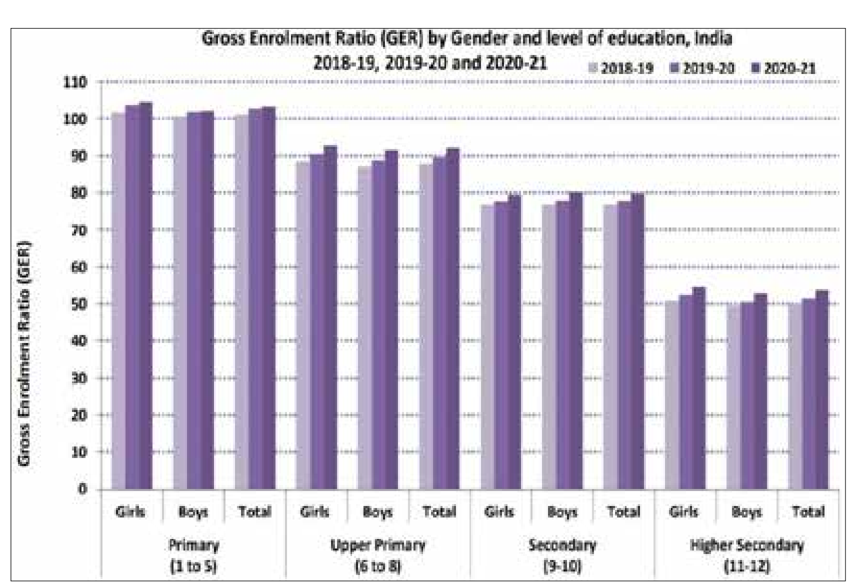
From enrollment drops to infrastructure gaps: The state of education in J&K

ZAHOOR AHMAD DAR

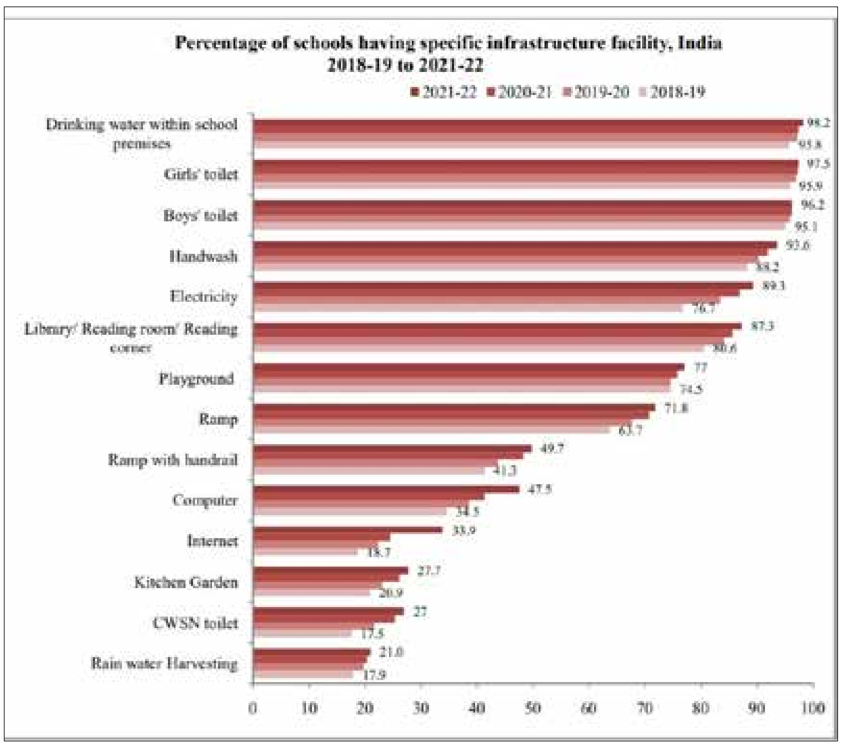
Education is a critical pillar of societal development and the cornerstone of human progress. It serves as a gateway to opportunity, upward mobility, and development, acting as an engine of social transformation. Students are the most essential elements of any education system. To fulfil the objectives of education, student enrollment is a prerequisite for producing desired results and expanding access to education. A declining enrollment rate in schools is not a good sign but rather a growing cause for concern. Increasing enrollment is considered a positive indicator, ensuring access to opportunities. India's education system is among the largest in the world, with over 1.5 million schools, 8.5 million instructors, and over 250 million students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds spread across 29 states and 7 union territories, according to the 2019 report of the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+).

In India, the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) is the only official source of information for the school education system. This organizational structure evolved over a long time. UDISE was launched in 2012-13 by integrating the District Information System for Education (DISE) for elementary education and the Secondary Education Management Information System (SEMIS) for secondary education. According to the UDISE+ report for 2021-22, total enrollment in schools (Class 1 to 12) increased by 0.76% in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21. The total enrollment in 2021-22, from primary to higher secondary levels of school education, was slightly over 25.57 crore. Enrollment was 13.28 crore for boys and 12.28 crore for girls, representing an increase of more than 19 lakh students compared to 2020-21. However, this increase in enrollment does not reflect growth across all states in India.

The gross enrollment ratio (GER) is an important indicator used to determine the number of students enrolled at specific levels of education, such as primary, secondary, or tertiary. It assesses the general level of student participation in the education system. The following GER data is based on gender (boys and girls) in India for the years 2018-19, 2019-20, and 2020-21, covering different levels of education: pre-primary, primary, upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary.



The UDISE+ report also provides a comparison of several major school infrastructure facilities available from 2018-19 to 2021-22. This includes electricity connections, libraries, internet access, ramps, handwashing facilities, and drinking water. The UDISE+ 2021-22 data shows that all major infrastructural facilities have improved in 2021-22 compared to the previous year.



KASHMIR CONTEXT

Despite efforts to expand access to education, Kashmir is grappling with low enrollment. An analysis of enrollment for the academic years 2023-24 and 2022-23, based on UDISE+ data for government schools, shows a decline of 61,451 students in one year. This decline was observed when comparing the UDISE data for 2022-23 and 2023-24. The decrease in student enrollment was identified in 554 schools across Jammu and Kashmir within a year.

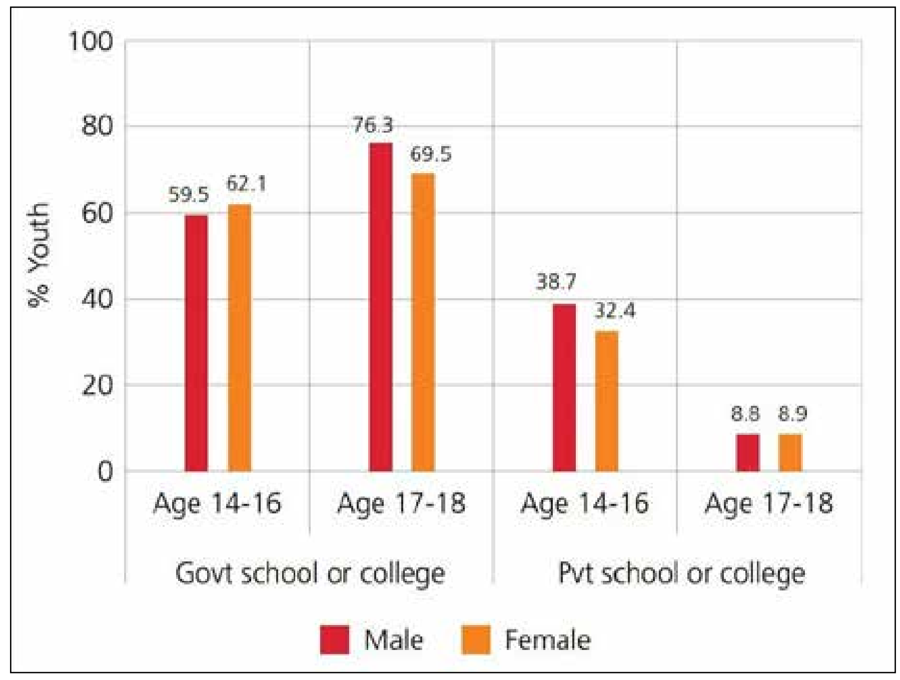
The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022 revealed that the enrollment of children aged 6-14 years in government schools in J&K decreased from 58.3% in 2018 to 55.5% in 2022. According to the report, 4.8% of children aged 15-16 were not enrolled in schools in J&K. Furthermore, the survey indicated that approximately 72.8% of schools have toilets used by both girls and boys, highlighting that 47% of girls experience a shortage of toilets. This compromises students' access to the basic facilities they are entitled to.

The Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL), an agency under the Government of India, revealed that student enrollment in government schools across J&K decreased by 2%. According to the report, enrollment decreased by 0.2 lakh at the primary level and 0.1 lakh at the upper primary level, resulting in a reduction of 0.34 lakh at the elementary level. The decrease was approximately 0.07 lakh at the secondary level and 0.04 lakh at the higher secondary level.

Due to the abysmal or zero enrollment of students in government schools, the total number of public schools in Jammu and Kashmir decreased by nearly 19% in 2023. Government schools also witnessed a decline in the retention rate, which was 60% at the elementary level and 50% at the secondary level. The Ministry of Education (MoE) reported that out of the total 23,173 schools in the UT, 848 have zero enrollment. Furthermore, there are 16,179 schools with fewer than 50 students enrolled. Additionally, there are 2,413 single-teacher schools in the UT. According to a Project Approval Board (PAB), the J&K School Education Department has performed poorly in retention rates at the primary, upper primary, and secondary levels. The PAB reported that total enrollment declined by nearly 1.75 lakh across classes in 2019-20.

The "JK Vision Document 2047" emphasizes the critical importance of skilled human resources in teaching. The region's educational infrastructure has been severely impacted by financial constraints and a scarcity of qualified teachers. The infrastructure and hygienic amenities at educational institutions are depicted in a dismal light in the ASER Report 2022. According to the report, over half of the schools in J&K lack toilets for girls, and 30% of schools in the region lack water facilities.

The 2023 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) presented the educational scenario of Anantnag district in south Kashmir as a case study. The ASER team surveyed about 1,410 children aged 14-18 regarding their enrollment and employment status. According to the survey, 5.5% of girls and 1.7% of boys under the age of 18 are not enrolled in school. The survey reported that 61% of youth in this age group, including 59.5% of males and 62.1% of females, are enrolled in government institutions, while 0.4% are enrolled in vocational training or other courses.



% youth currently enrolled in school or college, by age group, type of institution and sex

The findings of the ASER report reveal that about 76.5% of youth aged 14-16 can read at least a second-grade level text, 39.3% can perform division, and 87.2% can read English sentences. The ASER report further indicates that 19% of youth aged 17-18 are not enrolled in a school or college, while 72.2% are enrolled in government institutions and 2.3% are enrolled in vocational training or other courses.

Age group and sex		Enrolled in:			Not enrolled	Total
		School (Std X or below)	School (Std XI and XII)	Under-graduate or other		
14-16	Male	85.4	12.9	0.0	1.7	100
	Female	80.3	14.0	0.2	5.5	100
	All	82.4	13.6	0.1	3.9	100
17-18	Male	14.2	56.4	14.5	15.0	100
	Female	11.9	48.4	18.1	21.6	100
	All	12.8	51.6	16.7	19.0	100
14-18	Male	56.5	30.5	5.9	7.1	100
	Female	51.8	28.4	7.7	12.2	100
	All	53.7	29.2	7.0	10.1	100

'Not enrolled' includes youth who never enrolled or have dropped out.
'Undergraduate or other' includes youth who are enrolled in college to pursue an undergraduate degree or a certificate or diploma course.

Distribution of youth by Age group and Enrollment status (%)

WAY FORWARD

According to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4), all boys and girls should have access to primary and secondary education that is fully free, equitable, and of high quality by 2030, to produce learning outcomes that are both relevant and useful. However, the current school education system in J&K is plagued by a host of problems, particularly the ongoing crisis of declining enrollment rates. Poor design and layout of schools discourage parents, and another unresolved issue is the lack of infrastructure in government schools. The government should initiate an inquiry to determine why deficiencies in government school infrastructure persist. As a result, there has been a growing trend toward private schools, largely due to perceptions of higher quality in education and infrastructure.

Besides these issues, other ancillary problems include inadequate teacher allocation, poor systemic governance, lack of teacher training, outdated teaching practices, and poor infrastructure. An important factor is the rising cost of living and the impact of inflation on individual households and the economy as a whole. Inflation particularly affects the poor and marginalized, making it difficult for parents to afford basic education, even in public schools. Rising costs for items such as books, uniforms, and transportation can lead to a decline in school enrollment as these expenses become unaffordable.

To address the declining student enrollment in schools, the government should constitute a high-level committee of academicians and administrators to conduct an unbiased examination of the entire problem and develop frameworks and proposals for new policies. Although low student enrollment numbers are not solely the result of teachers' performance, the department should investigate why parents in J&K prefer private schools over public ones.

Flawed policies of previous governments should be reviewed to identify problems and determine necessary policy interventions. The government must examine how schools in J&K were established under the former SSA model, rather than focusing solely on the enrollment decline. It is now widely acknowledged that the plan was designed to appease the vote bank and that no regulations were followed when schools were opened in rural areas. Therefore, the responsibility for the issues within the department should lie with successive administrations rather than with lower-level department officials or the teaching community.

A declining enrollment rate in schools is not a good sign but rather a growing cause for concern. Increasing enrollment is considered a positive indicator, ensuring access to opportunities. India's education system is among the largest in the world, with over 1.5 million schools, 8.5 million instructors, and over 250 million students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds spread across 29 states and 7 union territories, according to the 2019 report of the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+).

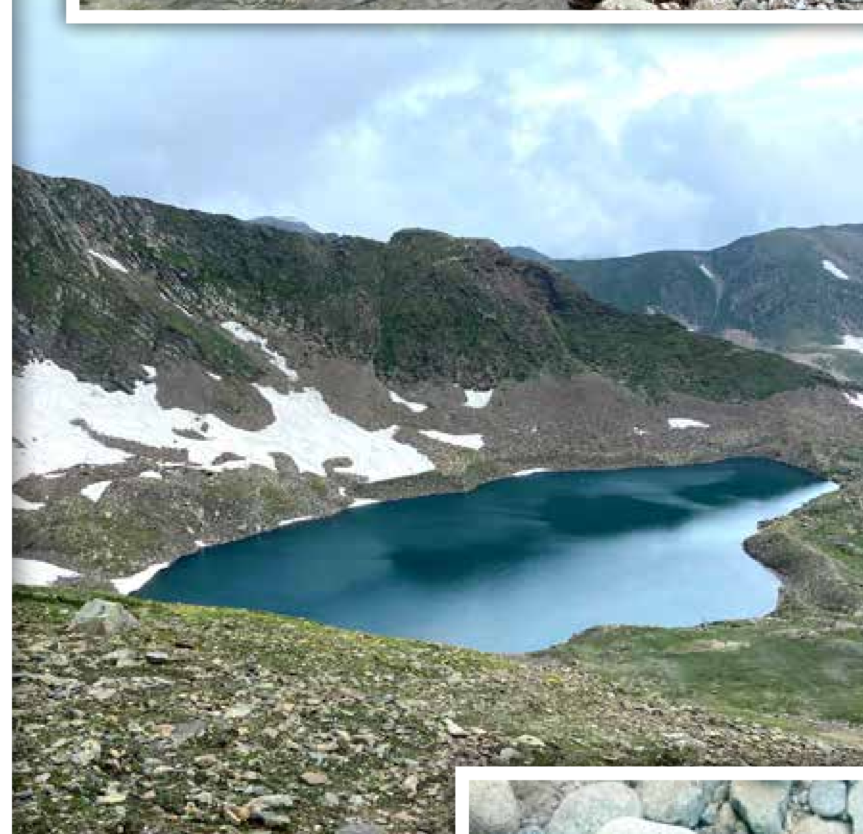
About **Art in Life Foundation**

ART IN LIFE FOUNDATION

An initiative towards sustainability and equality

A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE BY **JAMMU & KASHMIR POLICY INSTITUTE, JKPI,** to explore how we can move from research to practice and make a meaningful contribution to improve the lives of people in our communities.

SEASON OF TREKKING, ANGLING AND MORE



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