

Indian business leaders in UAE cheer budget

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THERE ISN'T MUCH TO COMPLAIN

50% decrease in income tax for Rs250,000-Rs500,000 bracket

24% increase in rural spending

35% increase in funds allocation for scheduled castes

6% increase in defence spending

100% village electrification by May 1, 2018

₹4

TRILLION

for infrastructure, Railways to get ₹1.31 trillion

10

MILLION

houses for poor by 2019

- ₹ 1.84 trillion for various schemes for women and children
- ₹ 400 billion dedicated for Long Term Irrigation Fund
- 100 international skill centres with foreign language courses
- National testing agency for entrance exams, freeing up CBSE



India's budget has been hailed as a game-changer for the country's economy.

Most expect economy to gain new traction as it recovers from the impact of demonetisation drive

The Indian business and professional community in the UAE has greeted Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's budget as a reform- and growth-driven roadmap to catapult the economy to a higher growth trajectory.

The budget has been hailed as a game-changer, and most business leaders expect the economy to gain new traction as it recovers from the impact of the demonetisation drive.

Here's what they had to say:

Yusuffali M.A., chairman of Lulu Group

The budget looks like a game-changing one. Initiatives such as BharatNet to connect rural headquarters and 100 per cent electrification of villages are sure to give a big boost in making India cashless and digital economy. As a retailer I welcome the tax incentives given for digital transactions and POS equipment industries and limiting the cash transaction to Rs300,000. Setting up of skill enhancing centres to train job seekers going abroad will definitely make our youth get better positions and make them more competitive as per the global standards.

Paras Shahdarpuri, chairman, Nikai Group

The budget has laid strong foundation for sustainable growth of Indian economy and more importantly, of the

society, for many years to come. Jaitley has given special focus to the upliftment of rural Bharat by investing heavily in the farmers by promising them to double their income in the next five years, by providing special assistance to the schedule caste, schedule tribe, minorities and OBCs, by increasing the allocation by more than 30 per cent. The other major step taken is to hit at the root of corruption in India by reducing cash contribution to political parties to as low as Rs2,000.

James Mathew, group CEO, Crowe Horwath, UAE and Oman

This year's budget is a follow-up to the last year's, which was pro-poor and high on the rural economy. With 24 per cent increased budget allocation on the rural sector in infrastructure development, 10 million households will be out of poverty. A much-anticipated budget after the demonetisation exercise, clearly displays that the government has employed technology and right people to identify the key problem that prevails in the India with collecting correct data.

Shailesh Dash, entrepreneur and founder, AI Masah Capital

The budget is a very balanced one, which will be very good for the low-income group, farmers and women. With almost \$60 billion allocated towards infrastructure spending, this is a good move for the country as a whole.

Dr B.R. Shetty, chairman of UAE Exchange

Macro-economically a good budget. Common man to get great relief with the reduction of on income. Healthcare gets an impetus with establishment of two more AIIMS, which means affordable quality care to more people. Rural development gets into focus with infrastructure and cleanliness taking the lead. Farmers to get double the income in five years, intensifying focus on agriculture, the spine of the economy. National agricultural market on digital space will get the best price for the farmers. Digital economy aims to bring transparency in political funding, income structures and financial inclusion, enhancing the lifestyle of the poor.

Dr Ram Buxani, chairman of ITL Cosmos Group

First time in the history, I feel, the Finance Minister has openly admitted that ours is a largely non-tax compliant society who conveniently evade taxes and in that direction has decided to take stringent and punitive steps against economic offenders by introducing new law. And to give still one more opportunity to citizens to be responsible, he has brought down tax rates substantially. The budget shows that the government is keen to take the country forward.

Dr R. Seetharaman, group CEO of Doha Bank

India has benefited from lower oil prices resulting in improvement in current account deficit to 0.3 per cent of GDP and deceleration in CPI to 3.4 per cent in December 2016 from more than six per cent during 2016. The demonetisation impact is expected to be transient in nature as the government has already re-monetised the system.

Kiran Sangani, managing partner, Sangani & Company

A balanced budget covering all segments of the population, including farmers by giving incentives through Kissan Loan and reduction of rate of interest. Through Skill India and providing huge funds, and establishing different educational institute for high and secondary education, youth empowerment is given a big boost. The budget also takes care of the poor and underprivileged people.

Sunny Varkey, chairman of GEMS-Varkey Group

The budget's increased focus on growth, citizens' welfare, massive infrastructure development and poverty alleviation underscores the general view that India stands out as a bright spot amid world economic gloom. Other

game-changing initiatives such as increased fund for secondary education and the system of annual learning outcome in schools ensure higher academic standards. Incentives for affordable housing and the pledge to provide ten million homes for the poor are indeed great initiatives.

Sudarshan Malpani, managing director of Alpen Asset Advisors Limited

A growth-focused budget which gives further impetus to the Indian economy. The government has achieved a fine overall balance, boosting the key sectors of infrastructure, housing and agriculture. The budget will push consumption and demand higher leading to job creation across India in various industry sectors. Billions of dollars will be spent on housing, roads, railways and the rural economy.

Abbas Ali Mirza, former president of IBPC

After the recent demonetisation drive, expectations were rife that the finance minister would present a budget that would contain several tax reforms including deductions and concessions and also address concerns with regard to ease in doing business in a cashless economy. To some extent these expectations were met. The proposed ban on cash payments exceeding Rs300,000 is yet another step that is worthy of mention.

Adeeb Ahamed, managing director of Lulu Financial Group

A well-balanced budget with greater emphasis on the agriculture sector and increased provisions to uplift economic and social conditions in rural India. The agenda to transform, energise and clean India, will allow the government to lead the country towards a brighter future. Adherence to fiscal discipline, with emphasis on growth and development, increased allocation to agriculture credit and other development schemes, increase in infrastructure spending are this year's key elements.

Azad Moopen, chairman and managing director of Aster DM Healthcare

The budget has some positive elements with reductions of the income tax and measures to improve GDP growth. However the healthcare sector has not been given much focus to attain the goal of Right of Health for all citizens. The NRIs also don't have much to cheer except the removal of prior sanction for FDIs. The much-awaited scheme of health Insurance for the returning NRIs didn't find place in the budget. One of the major areas that will benefit the common man is the decision to make generic medicines more widely available.

Navin Kapoor, member of IBPC

Expectations from the budget were high due to a large extent on account of demonetization impact on GDP growth. Faster remonetisation and tax incentives to both corporate and individual would spur growth. The finance minister has done fine balancing act between increased expenditure on infrastructure growth and fiscal deficit at 3.2 per cent to push reform agenda.

Kulwant Singh, president of IBPC

The government has taken a lot of initiatives to reform many sectors. There is a lot of emphasise on rural development, infrastructure and connectivity of rural areas and metros, ease of documentation, digitalisation. The budget will help transform the nation from a non-tax compliance society to a tax compliance society.

Raju T. Jethwani, chairman of Eurostar Group

A positive budget with a large focus given to the agriculture and rural infrastructure. This should have a good impact on the common man and the economy at large. It is a highly growth focused budget with a balanced spending on various key sectors including agriculture, infrastructure, railway and housing.

Sudhesh Giriyan, COO of Xpress Money

A forward-looking budget designed to propel the economy forward. The taxation reforms, market liberalisation policies, FDI automation reforms, proposed increased spending on infrastructure, healthcare for the underprivileged, education and agriculture - all mainstays of the Indian economy, are all pro-growth steps, taken in the right direction.

Rizwan Sajan, chairman of Danube Group

The government expenditure directed towards rural development, healthcare and infrastructure, is a very good sign, as it will help take India to the next level. The reformed FDI laws and the new laws underlining cash transactions will surely change the way businesses run in India and we can definitely expect a better economic environment as well as a larger growth.

Sudhir Kumar Shetty, president of UAE Exchange

A change-making budget. It combined Union and Railway Budget, which set a trend and reflected government's intention to streamline the budget. Its vision is to Transform, Energise and Clean India, shaping a digital economy and building TechIndia. Agriculture, infrastructure, youth, education, women, children, minorities, and digital sectors have been covered well in the proposal.

Amit Rathore, CEO of Quintype

The government's continued support to Digital India initiatives indicates clarity of vision and purpose. 2017 is already on its way to being a great year for Digital Media and monetisation in particular, as publishers find ways to fight back the Facebook threat, both in terms of revenues & audiences. New digital revenue streams are making new media publishers as much as 100x old models - so on the whole I see a good year for digital, broadband penetration, media consumption on the internet and for Quintype. The Finance Minister's continued focus on using the start-up ecosystem to stimulate growth & create more jobs is encouraging.

Surendra Hiranandani, chief managing director of House of Hiranandani

I would term it as a reform oriented budget where the expenditure was well directed towards economic growth and development, especially in the rural areas. It also reflected the government's concern and priority to improve the investment climate with a view to stimulate growth. The massive push for improvement in infrastructure including record capital expenditure for roads, railways will indirectly benefit the real estate sector in the long run.

Faizal Kottikollon, chairman of KEF Holdings

A bold and progressive budget, striking the right balance for different sectors with an eye on growth and employment. The budget has provided larger investments in infrastructure, rural sector and poverty alleviation, which will not only push the GDP higher, but realise such growth in an inclusive manner. It's heartening to see a 24 per cent increase in rural and agricultural sector spend and a record amount allocated for infrastructure.

Kamal Vachani, group director of AI Maya Group

A budget for the long-term growth of the economy. Income tax rate cut is a welcome step that gives big relief to medium income people. The move to reduce tax for companies with a turnover up to Rs500 million is a good decision. No capital tax gain tax on property if sold after two years is a welcome move as this will boost the property market.

Sripriyaa Kumaria, director-general of India Trade & Exhibition Centre ME

The impetus given to rural, agricultural, infrastructure sector with the 24 per cent more allocation and reduction in personal income tax, combined with the much needed push for the MSME sector with a tax reduction will be a

game-changer for the Indian economy in the long run. However, in the current scenario with the cash crunch leading to demonetisation, there is no immediate relief for the common man.

Sudesh K. Aggarwal, chairman of Giant Group

I see great emphasis on the growth of farming, agriculture and rural development sector. This will benefit very large section of the society. Doubling the farm income in five years is very ambitious and difficult to achieve when projected agricultural growth is only 4.1 per cent. Efforts have been made to put economy back on track after the recent demonetisation setback. Overall this is a good budget.

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