



MSP hike norms not clear: experts

Page 2



No Aadhar, no LPG supply

Page 3



North East trade fair kicks off

Page 4

Union Budget reaches out to farmers, the deprived

APOORV PERTI

Chennai: The rural sector was the primary focus of the Union Budget for the fiscal year 2018-19 which has promised a better deal for farmers, a boost to the rural economy and a helping hand to the poor.

In what has been described as an election year budget, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said that free LPG connections would be provided to eight crore women below the poverty line under the government's Ujjwala Yojana.

Jaitley said free electricity would be given to four crore additional households and 50 crore poor Indians would get health insurance of up to Rs 5 lakhs a year under the National Health Protection Scheme.

Jaitley also announced that a dedicated affordable housing fund would be set up in the National Housing Bank and said it was in line with the Government's plan to have housing for all by 2020. Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana; up to 1 crore houses were planned to be built in rural areas.

In what has been seen as a move to appease angry farmers, Jaitley said farmers would get a minimum support price that was 1.5 times the cost of production. A fund of Rs. 2,000 crore was to be set up for upgrading rural agriculture markets. The government would also allo-

cate Rs. 500 crore towards Operation Green which would ensure that the farmers got the right price for their produce and that their income doubled by 2022.

Organic farming would receive a boost with the formation of clusters of 1,000 hectares. Women would be encouraged to take up organic farming under the National Rural Livelihood Programme. The use of solar power for farm operations would be encouraged, Jaitley said.

Furthermore, institutional credit for agriculture would be raised to Rs. 11 lakh crore in 2018-19, up by Rs. 1 lakh crore from the previous

year.

A number of rural livelihood projects would be implemented and the allocation under national livelihood mission will be raised to Rs. 5,750 crore in the next fiscal year.

Jaitley said the government had identified 115 'aspirational districts' which would be converted to model of development. With an outlay of Rs. 2.04 lakh crore, 99 cities would be selected for smart city projects.

Under the regional development plan, up to ten prominent tourist sites would be developed into iconic locations.

Another announcement made by the Finance Minister was that the emoluments of the President, Vice President and Governors would be raised to Rs. 5 lakh, Rs. 4 lakh and Rs. 3.5 lakh per month respectively. The salaries of members of parliament would be subject to automatic revision every five years indexed to inflation.

While leaving the income tax slabs untouched Jaitley increased the health and education cess on income tax to 4 per cent from 3 per cent. A standard deduction of Rs 40,000 from the taxable income would be allowed. But this now includes the existing annual transport allowance of Rs 19,200 and medical reimbursement of Rs 15,000. As a result the net gain for the taxpayer is just Rs 5800 as a result of the standard deduction.

Indian Railways would receive an allocated budget of Rs. 1.48 lakh crore for the coming fiscal year, up from Rs. 1.31 lakh crore the previous year. Most of this would go towards the targeted renewal of 3,600 km of rail tracks. More than development, rail safety would be the prime focus.

About 4,200 unmanned rail crossings would be eliminated during the next two years, escalators would be provided at stations with a 25,000-plus footfall and Wi-Fi and CCTV's would be set up in all trains.

WHAT THEY SAY...

Arun Jaitley's Budget 2018 may be aimed at elevating the rural and poor sections of society but the reactions, mainly from the working middle class, have not been supportive. Politicians have been critical about various aspects of the budget.

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram tweeted out different areas of the budget that he was 'disappointed' with. He said "Rs. 500 crore for Operation Green amounts to a pittance. There is nothing to indicate that farmers' real income will rise."

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, said that the fiscal arithmetic was at fault as the deficit seems to have increased. "The government says farmers' income will double by 2022. But it's not possible until the agricultural growth is 12 per cent. Until we achieve that ... It is just a hollow assurance," he added.

CPI(M) leader and General Secretary Sitaram Yechury slammed the Government for its fraudulent pro-poor agenda. He said "they are only providing slogans of relief to the people. The only positives are for corporates and international finance."



The Super Blue Blood Moon viewed from Tamil Nadu Science and Technology Centre's Birla Planetarium in Chennai on January 31, 2018. The last time this event occurred was on March 31, 1866 - 152 years ago.

MANOJ C. SINDAGI

Senior citizens happy, salaried class disappointed

AADITYA ANAND

Chennai: Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley left Personal Income tax rates untouched but increased the health and education cess from 3 per cent to 4 per cent.

During 2017 budget, the income tax rate was cut to 5% for individuals having an income between Rs. 2.5 lakh to 5 lakh, Tax exemption for income upto 2.5 lakh, 20% for income between 5 lakh to 10 lakh and 30% for incomes above 10 lakh. These rates continue in this budget.

However Jaitley introduced the standard deduction of Rs. 40,000 which had been removed years ago. But the existing annual transport allowance of Rs 19,200 and medical reimbursement of Rs 15,000 will now become part of the deduction. The taxpayer will get a relief of just Rs 5800 as a result of the standard deduction of Rs 40,000.

Salaried employees were disappointed as they expected a change in the tax rates.

"I expected tax exemption till an income of Rs 5 lakhs," said V. Rakesh, an IT employee. "Only salaried employees are paying taxes in a proper way since they receive salaries after tax deduction; so the government should have exempted the tax till an income of Rs5 lakhs. The new budget is not beneficial for middle class salaried em-

ployees," he added.

Another IT employee V. Narendran said that, "There was a belief that the government would soon do away with direct tax collection altogether and mop up funds through indirect tax collection. I expected a 10 per cent tax slab for income between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh. So I am not happy with the government sticking to previous year's tax rates."

Most of the people belonging to the middle class said that the current tax rates did not help them.

"I expected a decrease in the tax rates but the standard deduction of Rs. 40,000 comes as a slight relief even though it is not going to make much of a change," said R. Subramani, who is doing construction business.

Even though, there is no change in the income tax slab, this budget gave a lot of tax benefits to senior citizens. The Exemption of interest income on deposits with banks and post offices has been increased from Rs 10,000 to Rs 50,000. Also, TDS (tax deductible at source) shall not be required to be deducted on such income, under section 194A. This will include interest from all fixed deposits schemes and recurring deposit schemes.

Deduction for purchasing Health Insurance for senior citizens has been increased from Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 50,000 with respect to any

health insurance premium or medical expenditure. The limit of deduction for medical expenditure for critical illness has been increased from, Rs 60,000 in case of senior citizens and from Rs 80,000 in case of very senior citizens, to Rs 1 lakh in respect of all senior citizens.

The Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana, a government pension scheme, was also extended up to March 2020, under which an assured return of 8 per cent is given by the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC). Also, the existing limit on investment of Rs 7.5 lakh per senior citizen under this scheme was proposed to be enhanced to Rs 15 lakh.

"I welcome these initiatives by the government. Increasing the limit of deduction for medical expenditure to Rs 1 lakh is a great move. It benefits a larger section of the senior citizens," said P. Mahadevan, a retired college professor.

P. Jayaraman, a retired government employee, said "Most senior citizens in our country are dependent on the interest income and it is good to see the exemption of interest till Rs. 50,000."

Rakesh said "Even though I am not happy with the tax rate slab, I am happy that atleast there are a lot of benefits to senior citizens through this budget, particularly the deduction for medical expenditure is a welcoming move."

'Climate change will cut farm income'

ADITHYA NARAYAN

Chennai: Climate change will reduce agricultural income by 18 to 25 per cent, says the Economic Survey of India that was presented a day before the Union Budget.

According to the survey, agriculture contributes to 16 percent of the GDP and employs around 49 per cent people in the country. The survey also states that climate change will involve an increase in average temperature, a decline in average rainfall and an increase in the number of dry days.

According to Manjula Menon, Principal Scientist at the M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation (M.S.R.F), temperature rise had a direct impact on agriculture. "A temperature rise of 1°C at night would impact wheat cultivation."

Another way in which climate change affected agriculture was through a shift in rainfall patterns. The farmer would sow his seeds anticipating a certain rainfall pattern. But unseasonal rainfall (caused due to climate change) will wreak havoc with a shorter than expected spell.

Menon says "We've had instances where rainfall came sooner than expected and flooded the fields du-

ring the flowering stage of the seed resulting in flower drop." She also quoted the Punjab example, when in 2015 hailstorms gave way to a

The lack of institutionalized set-ups is a shortcoming India faces when it comes to beating climate change.

'freakish' Rabi season. She feels adequate irrigation is the solution to the problem of unseasonal rain.

An indirect impact of climate change is water shortage. A chapter in the survey titled 'Climate, Climate Change and Agriculture' says that the impact of climate change would be more pronounced in unirrigated (rain fed) areas.

Menon says "Water scarcity is still the major threat that agriculture faces. We are unable to preserve water and there is run-off too."

Adding to the woe also are the prevailing ways of irrigation.

"Flooding the field while cultivating paddy is not only a waste of water but also contributes to climate change," says Menon. Flooding the field created anaerobic conditions that give rise to methane one of the major greenhouse gases.

The survey suggests sprinklers and drip irrigation as remedies.

"With government subsidies, drip irrigation and sprinklers are catching up," added Menon.

According to Saleem Khan, Senior Scientist at MSRF, "Climate change gives rise to erratic rainfall and this in turn alters crop pattern. This compromises the food security and this is the fundamental impact of climate change on agriculture."

Also, since agriculture gave out methane emissions, it is a cause of climate change as well.

A combination of variables contributes to climate change. "Sea level is one such variable. Tamil Nadu being a coastal state, saline water intrusion affects agriculture," says Khan.

Depletion of groundwater brings in saline water, affecting wheat and groundnut cultivation in the process.

"Adaptation is the best method to beat climate change," says Khan.

Developing flood tolerant, heat tolerant and saline tolerant crops are the hard adaptation methods. Developing saline tolerant crops involves taking a specific gene from mangrove (a plant that grows under saline conditions) and incorporating it into paddy.

Khan also quotes the Saudi example where heat tolerant plants are already under cultivation.

The lack of institutionalized set-ups is a shortcoming India faces when it comes to beating climate change. "Most of the climate change bodies in India have come up only very recently like in 2007 and 2008," says Khan.

"We have answers for agriculture and climate change. But to run a climate model, we don't have the required technology," Khan added.

However the biggest hurdle that the country faces is the region specific nature of climate change. The effects vary from place to place.

But Menon feels that climate change doesn't necessarily have to be a bad thing always.

"The bright side is that the changing crop patterns caused due to climate change can be exploited. Eg: cultivating coconuts on the hillside."

Set for summer: Chennai's reservoirs full after inflows and rainfall

AASHA SRIRAM

Chennai: The reservoirs that feed the city have been filled up to 44% of their total capacity, after inflow from the Krishna river. This will ensure uninterrupted water supply for residents in the city for some time, say experts.

"Andhra Pradesh released 20 cusecs. The Poondi and Chembarambakkam reservoir levels have increased significantly. Last year, Chennai had 1 tmcft (one thousand million cubic feet) of water, whereas, now there is 5 tmcft," said N. Selvaraj, an activist

"However, the city's requirement is 11 tmcft of water. Since water levels have increased in all four reservoirs, water scarcity will not be as bad as last year," he added.

Last summer, all four reservoirs (Red Hills, Chembarambakkam, Poondi and Cholavaram) in the city had dried up. Additionally, the city received deficit rainfall of 62%. Now, due to increased water levels in reservoirs, the supply has improved.

"We usually supply 830 mld (million litres of water per day). Now, we supply 640 mld. The city requires around 1,200 mld. This year, we may still face water problems, but not as much as last year," said a Chennai Metro Water Supply and Sewage Board official.

"We had very few sources of water last year and had to get water from the Porur Lake. But, since the reservoirs are filled to almost half of their capacity, the water needs of the city should be taken care of," he



Red Hills Reservoir filled to the brim after the 2017 monsoon

ARVIND PRASANNA A.

added.

Others pointed out that the water in the reservoir needed to last until the next spell of rain.

"The rainy season in Tamil Nadu is between October and December. Last year, the monsoon was minus 9% (deficit), but it was better in 2016. The average rainfall expected during the monsoon is 144 cm, depending on thunderstorm activity, sea breeze, and moisture in the atmosphere. This summer season, we may see intense heat spells, with light showers," said Dr. S. Balachandran, Scientist, Director of Regional Meteorological Centre.

If Andhra Pradesh released more water, most of the city's water needs could be met by Metro Water alone, said Selvaraj.

"The Andhra Pradesh Govern-

ment should be giving Chennai 12,000 mcf of water per year, but that is subject to change depending on the water scarcity the state faces. When neighbouring states are also facing a water crisis, they cannot supply water to us. We have to establish a self-sufficient resource for water," he says.

As of February 1, this year, Chembarambakkam had 1693 mcf; Red Hills had 1368 mcf; Poondi had 1387 mcf and Cholavaram had 451 mcf, according to CMWSSB data.

This makes 4899 mcf against a total capacity of 11,257 mcf.

On the same day last year, Chembarambakkam had 339 mcf; Red Hills had 305 mcf; Poondi had 724 mcf and Cholavaram had 69 mcf, according to CMWSSB.

MSP hike norms not clear: experts

ADITHYA NARAYAN

Chennai: Finance minister Arun Jaitley's announcement that farmers would get a minimum support price that was one and a half times the cost of production has been welcomed by experts.

S.Ganapathi, president of the South Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) welcomed Mr. Jaitley's move fixing the Minimum Support of Price (MSP) for Kharif crops at 1.5 times the cost of production saying "Agriculture has been one of the major concerns for all of us. The MSP is now linked to the market price. This brings solace to the farmers."

Manjula Menon, Principal Scientist at M.S.Swaminathan Research and Foundation (MSSRF) said "This is a welcome move, however it lacks clarity as to what part of the cost of production will be used for fixing the MSP."

"The cost of production involves six components. However big a



Vijay Jawandhia, Farmers' Activist

step it was towards doubling the farmers' income," she said but wondered why only Kharif crops were taken into consideration for MSP and Rabi crops that generated substantial yield were left out.

Vijay Jawandhia, farmer leader from Maharashtra, felt the same way. "The procedure to be fol-

wed when fixing MSP has been vague. They haven't mentioned what all crops fall under this and how they'll go about it. During the press conference that followed the budget presentation, the Finance minister said he would consult with the NITI Aayog before giving out further details."

Jaitley also proposed an e-platform that would link the farmer and consumer directly and thus cutting out the middlemen.

Manjula Menon hailed the decision saying "There has been instances where the tamarind grown by a farmer fetched him just Rs.50 while it was sold in Chennai for Rs. 140."

The Rs.90 difference was the cut that went to a string of aggregators, local traders and large traders that existed between the farmer and the consumer.

Jaitley dismissed it as an election gimmick as the existing MSP for red gram was Rs.5000 while farmers had to still sell at the

old price of Rs.4200.

Jaitley also questioned Jaitley's move to boost the agricultural exports to the tune of \$100 billion. "What is the point of exporting when there is no value in international market?"

Highlighting the need to increase the import duty and set it at a rate that stands above the MSP, he said "60% of edible oil and 30 lakh tonnes of pulses are being imported. If anything, Make in India has to be applied in agriculture."

While stressing that productivity needed to be improved to realize the target of agricultural exports worth \$100 billion, Manjula Menon said that the 100 % tax exemption for agricultural production companies was a much needed relief.

"There used to be a 30% tax on these companies which was a huge burden. They should be seen as social enterprises and not as business enterprises," added Menon.

Manjula Menone also said that

the allocation of Rs.2000 crore for the development of agricultural infrastructure would go a long way in helping the farmers.

"Better infrastructure means greater holding capacity. And this will ensure supply during off seasons and thus add value to the produce. It also helps reduce wastage."

While lauding the 100% deduction on agricultural production companies, Jawandhia said that e-marketing wasn't a solution.

He also mentioned that increasing the expenditure on agriculture doesn't necessarily translate into better income for farmers.

"Once a farmer defaults on a bank loan, he can't get more bank loans. What use is Kisan card for such a farmer?" added Jawandhia.

"The government has allocated Rs.1 lakh crore rupees for one crore people to allocate the 7th Pay Commission, while it has allocated the same amount to be spent on 60 lakh crore farmers," said Jawandhia.

A boost for small, medium industries

AISHWARYA S

Chennai: The government is set to give a major boost to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) this fiscal year with the introduction of credit and schemes for innovation that would generate employment in this sector which is one of the major contributors to the economic growth of the country.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, in the budget for 2018, allocated a total of Rs. 3794 crore for credit support, capital and interest subsidies and innovations of MSMEs.

According to Jaitley, demonetization and GST contributed massively towards creating a large database of M S M E s , which can potentially assist the government in identifying and meeting the working capital requirements of these industries.

As a further incentive to these enterprises, corporate tax of 25 per cent, initially available for companies with a turnover of Rs. 50 crore, has now been extended to companies with a turnover of up to Rs. 250 crore.

However, according to Hemal Zobia, Partner, Deloitte India, the four per cent 'Health and Education Cess' levied on personal income tax and corporation tax and the 10 per cent 'Social Welfare Cess' on the import of goods that would replace the existing 3 per cent Education Cess would curtail the benefits of the lower corporate tax.

Sanjay Jalona, CEO & MD, LTI (L&T Infotech) said that despite reduction in corporate tax, this cess would increase the tax rate for larger corporates by 0.34 per cent.

Nevertheless, the government, to maximise output, has also assigned a sum of Rs. 3 lakh crore under MUDRA to encourage Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) to provide more loans to MSMEs.

Ritesh Agarwal, Founder & CEO of OYO, an app for booking hotel

rooms, said that with a network of 3500 hotels in the MSME sector, the budget for this financial year would facilitate the growth of OYO's partners. Not only will this targeted allocation enable SMEs to generate employment, it will also create thousands of new entrepreneurs.

In his speech, Jaitley also proposed amendments in the Employees

Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, reducing women employees' contribution from 10-12 per cent to 8 per cent for the first three years of their employment in order to thrust more and more women into the workforce.

While 'much was expected from the budget it provided only a few direct tax positives', for the automobile sector, according to Gaurav Karnik, Tax Partner, Automotive sector, EY India, the textile industry received an outlay of Rs. 7184 cr.

Customs duties on mobile phones were also raised to 20 per cent and that on certain spare parts of mobiles and TVs to 15 per cent as incentives for the Make in India initiative.

The government also planned to enhance the use of Fintech to promote MSMEs in the future by examining policy and institutional measures required for creating an environment conducive for the growth of Fintech companies.

With the implementation of the Make in India and the Start-up India programme and promotion of hybrid instruments for attracting foreign investments for start-ups and venture capital, this budget aimed to pave the way for a more focused developmental approach that would enhance the entrepreneurial strength of the economy.

According to Anupam Pahuja, Managing Director and Country Manager, PayPal India, the focus on MSMEs is a big positive, considering the role played by it towards job creation and accelerating exports.



Corporate tax of 25 per cent, initially available for companies with a turnover of Rs. 50 crore, has now been extended to companies with a turnover of up to Rs. 250 crore.

Eklavya schools for tribal children

AINDRILA PAUL

Chennai: The government will establish Eklavya Model Residential Schools to provide quality education to tribal children in their own environment.

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his budget speech said by 2022 every block with more than 50 per cent Scheduled Tribe population and at least 20,000 tribals would have an Eklavya School. These schools will provide training in sports and skill development and will have facilities for preserving local arts and culture.

However the budget allocation has been cut for Kendriya Vidyalayas and Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya chain of schools.

Jaitley said that the government was committed to providing quality education to children and allocated Rs 85010 crore for the sector starting April 1st.

The existing three per cent education cess will be replaced by a four per cent Health and Education cess. An estimated revenue of Rs 11000 crores is expected to be generated from the cess.

The finance minister has proposed setting up 24 new government medical colleges by upgrading existing district hospitals in the country.

Jaitley emphasised how technology will be the biggest driver in improving the quality of education. "We propose to increase the digital intensity in education and move gradually from 'black board' to 'digital board'. Technology will also be used to upgrade the skills of teachers through the recently launched digital portal DIKSHA," he said.

Sardar Taranjit, Managing Director of JIS Group said "I welcome heartily the government's plan and focus to move classroom black boards to digital boards. I also welcome the emphasis to be given to training of untrained teachers and allocation of 1 lakh crore for education research. Its also very commendable about the plans if coming up with 24 new Medical colleges. Also commendable is the plan of at least one medical college every three constituencies."

The Union Government is planning to treat education "holistically". It's working towards integrating school education from

pre-school to Class 12.

Emphasis has been also laid on teacher training to improve the quality of education. An integrated B.Ed. programme for teachers and an amendment of Right to Education Act to provide training to more than 13 lakh untrained teachers has been announced.

Jaitley unveiled a new scheme called Revitalising Infrastructure and System in Education (RISE). It will promote investment in research and infrastructure of premier education institutions.

RISE will be financed by a re-structured Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA). HEFA will lend low cost funds to government educational institutions so that they don't have to depend on grants for their expenses. The government is planning to spend Rs 1 lakh crore over the course of next four years through HEFA.

The Prime Minister's Research Fellows (PMRF) Scheme was announced. It would provide fellowships to thousand bright B.Tech students and allow them to pursue Ph.D in IITs and IISc.

The budgetary allocation for IITs has been reduced from Rs8,244.8 crore to Rs6,326 crore in 2018-19.

Allocations to IIMs as well as the University Grants Commission have been cut.

Manek Daruvala founder and director of T.I.M.E. said, "This budget continues with the recent trend of tinkering at the edges of the problems that confront Indian education. On the one hand, the proposal to start Eklavya schools and new architecture schools and government medical colleges will have a certain positive impact in the areas that they are targeting. The proposal to help train untrained teachers is a very welcome move."

"At the same time, it is disappointing that the government has done nothing to provide better tax relief to parents for the school fees they pay for their children's education. Similarly, one had hoped that the budget would do something to help students with education loans who are unable to get a job immediately after they complete their course. A limited moratorium period towards repayment of the loan would be a huge relief."



Nothing much for common people

AHANAD CHAUDHURY

Chennai : The Union Budget 2018 has come under criticism because of an increase in the salary of the President, Vice President and Governors and increased cess of 4 per cent on income tax without any relief for the salaried people.

Nilava Nandi, a 24 year old employee from TCS (Tata Consultancy Service) said, "My salary doesn't increase in two years even after working my life out there in the office for hours. Yet, the people sitting in the Government enjoy a salary hike."

"Also, the customs duty on imported goods has increased. So mobiles TV and electronic items will be costlier for the general public."

Manishankar Ray, a student of MBA at a private engineering college said, "There is nothing much for common people in this budget. There is no change in tax rate. There have been some benefits announced for senior citizens."

"By far, I think the healthcare program has been the largest one. I think there will be more availability of WiFi on trains. One good aspect is that busy railway stations are going to get escalators. But the

middle class have been neglected."

Sayanti Krishnan, project coordinator, Aquakraft said, "They are making a mess with the tax slabs and I do not appreciate it at all."

Mathai Thomas, a Chennai based Cost Accountant, said "For farmers, it has been stated that the minimum support price (MSP) will be 1.5 times the cost of production; this shall benefit a lot of farmers as they should be able to earn income for their toil and not go to distress sales."

Ranjan Sanyal, a student from the Madras School of Economics, said, "Arun Jaitley highlighted the gains from the introduction of GST well and the broadening of the tax base, as a consequence of demonetization. This can be seen as a short time accomplishment."

"This year he has also focused much more on the rural sector economy, standing by their initial election campaigns. The other incentives generated by the Government may not be as beneficial as it may seem, as in the contribution of the Government in EPF (Employment Provident Fund) and reduction of women's contributions in EPF."

However, small shop owners

and workers around the city gave an entirely different picture about their take on Budget.

Ansari M, a part time worker at a shoe shop near Adyar, said, "I did not see the budget presentation because it means nothing for the common man. It has never been for us. First came the demonetization and then the GST struck us. What does the common man do?"

Pooja Sriram from NIFT Chennai said, "We barely have an idea about the budget. We didn't even know it was coming out. Of course, we have access to the internet and other social media platforms but honestly, we aren't that bothered."

A gold broker at RK Nagar said, "I will return home at night and probably glance through it. There's no point in wasting time during work and switch to watching Union Budget presentation on the TV. Ultimately, it's of no use to the common man. We have to earn our living on our own."

Raajan Srinivas, a start up owner, said, "The Government should eliminate Angel tax because it has reduced the investment in early stage start ups. The word 'startup' was not even mentioned once in the entire Budget speech."

Health insurance, budget inadequate: Experts

ARVIND PRASANNA A

Chennai: Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's Union Budget 2018 has bunched two initiatives under 'Ayushman Bharath' programme as part of the Education, Health and Social Protection Budget.

The two initiatives are intended to "build a New India 2022 and ensure enhanced productivity, well-being and avert wage loss and impoverishment."

As part of the first scheme, over 1.5 lakh Health and Wellness centres across the country will provide comprehensive healthcare including coverage of non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services. In addition, these centres will provide free essential drug and diagnostic services.

The scheme will also involve the private healthcare sector and phi-

lanthropic institutions to widen its effective reach. An outlay of Rs.1200 crore has been allotted to this flagship programme.

Jaitley explained the second initiative of Ayushman Bharath.

"We will launch a flagship National Health Protection Scheme to cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) providing coverage upto 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization."

But according to experts, the inclusion of the private sector could be detrimental to the overall scheme. They criticised the lack of funds to strengthen the public health system.

"We need to look at the details but surely this vast outlay could have been used to strengthen the public health system and improve

government medical and nursing colleges? Employ more people, pay better salaries? Why transfer funds to private hospitals?" asked former Health Secretary Keshav Desiraju on his Twitter.

Former finance secretary Arvind Mayaram also weighed in on the insurance scheme. "Universal health insurance through private hospitals has not worked for the poor anywhere. The biggest beneficiaries are the private hospitals and insurance companies. There is no substitute for public health care. More money should have been pumped in to strengthen it," he tweeted.

However, government officials in the health sector have taken a cautiously optimistic view.

"The scheme is similar to some

of the existing insurance schemes under the state government. It could be a good scheme, but until we know more details like which diseases and treatments it covers, we can't judge its effectiveness," explained Dr S. Arunan, Chief Civil Surgeon, at the Stanley Medical College. The budget allocated Rs.600 crores to provide nutritional support to the poor and malnourished affected by tuberculosis. Each beneficiary will receive Rs.500 per month for the duration of their treatment.

To "enhance accessibility of quality medical education and healthcare", 24 new Government Medical Colleges and Hospitals will be set up. This will be accomplished by upgrading the existing district hospitals in the

country. "This would ensure that there is at least one medical college for every three Parliamentary Constituencies and at least one Government Medical College in each State of the country," Jaitley said.

In addition to this, the already ongoing life insurance schemes Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Beema Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) will be expanded to include all poor households and SCs/STs. Presently, about 5.22 crore families benefit from insurance coverage under the PMJJBY while over 13 crore 25 lakh people are insured under PMSBY.

Besides these, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana will be used to undertake micro-insurance and unorganised sector pension schemes.

NDA government zeroes in on social welfare, poverty eradication

ARVIND PRASANNA A

Chennai: The NDA Government has come out with a series of anti-poverty initiatives in the Union Budget 2018 speech presented by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on Thursday.

The Prime Minister's Ujjwala Yojana which aims at providing free LPG connections for 5 crore poor women has been expanded and will now be geared to provi-

ding for over 8 crore beneficiaries. "Our Government has launched Prime Minister Saubhagya Yojana for providing electricity to all households of the country," said Jaitley, allocating Rs.16, 000 crore under this scheme to cover four crore poor households.

Moving on to Swachh Bharath Mission, the finance minister stated that the government had already constructed 6 crore toilets. Furthermore, 1.88 crore additional toilets

will be constructed using the allotted outlay of about Rs. 8000 crore in 2018-19.

The next scheme, Prime Minister's Awas Yojana will aim to provide affordable housing for the poor. An Affordable Housing Fund (AHF) will also be set up in the National Housing Bank funded from priority sector lending and fully serviced bonds.

"We have fixed a target that every poor of this country may

have his own house by 2022," said Jaitley.

Under Prime Minister Awas Scheme Rural, 51 lakh houses in year 2017-18 and during 2018-19 amounting to over 1 crore houses will be constructed. In urban areas the assistance has been sanctioned to construct 37 lakh houses.

Loans for Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) are expected to grow by 37 per cent from Rs. 42, 500 crore in 2017-18 to about Rs.

75,000 crore by March 2019. The National Livelihood Mission will be allocated a budget of Rs. 5750 crore for 2018-19.

"In the year 2018-19, for creation of livelihood and infrastructure in rural areas, the total amount to be spent by the Ministries will be Rs. 14.34 lakh crore, including extra-budgetary and non-budgetary resources of Rs. 11.98 lakh crore," the Finance Minister explained.

Jaitley said that this expenditure

will create employment of 321 crore persons and 3.17 lakh kilometers of rural roads besides boosting agricultural growth.

The Ground Water Irrigation Scheme, Prime Minister Krishi Sinchai Yojana - Har Khet Ko Pani will provide water supply to 96 irrigation deprived districts and was allocated Rs. 26, 000 crore. Another scheme to boost agricultural growth is the Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan

(GOBAR-DHAN) which will focus on converting cattle waste and solid waste in farms to compost, fertilizer, bio-gas and bio-CNG. Economic and Social advancement of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes have been given core attention this year. Under this, an amount of Rs. 56, 619 crore has been allotted to 279 programmes focusing on SCs while the 305 programmes focusing on STs were allotted Rs. -39,135 crore.

No Aadhar, no LPG

AHANAD. CHAUDHURY

Chennai: Oil companies have denied that people across the state have been prevented from booking of gas cylinders for not registering their Aadhaar cards with the LPG agencies.

There have been allegations that these people who had not registered their Aadhaar were prevented from booking cylinders even though the last date for linking the Aadhar card had been extended to March 31.

Indane Gas, the largest domestic LPG provider in Chennai, is said to have blocked several connections of customers who have apparently not provided their Aadhaar details.

S Kumar, Chief Area Manager of Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), told The Hindu that only customers who hadn't yet submitted their Know Your Customer (KYC) forms had been blocked from getting refill.

K Srinath, manager at a Hindustan Petroleum outlet on Arcot Road said, "The Government has made it compulsory for all to link their Aadhaar details immediately. It is not in our hands.



The last cylinder left with Mr. M Ganesan

I cannot disobey the system and supply cylinders to the hundreds who come here every day. If they do not link the Aadhar details, we cannot unblock them."

M Ganesan, a customer of Indane Gas, said "The report clearly mentions that the last date has been extended to 31st March. I have filed several complaints but that is of no use. I don't know what I will do after this last cylinder is over. I have sent several letters but I haven't received any reply."

Earlier this year, the Minister of Railway and coal, Piyush Goyal had asserted that since the government made Aadhaar mandatory, some 3.5 crore fake connections and 1.6 crore ration cards had been unearthed.

In October 2014, the apex court had referred all Aadhaar cases to a five-judge Constitution bench to be formed by November.

The top court had also issued a notice to the Centre on a petition challenging mandatory linking of Aadhaar with mobile connections.

Mumtaaz Sinha, a resident of Adyar said, "It is strange how things are going on so well in other states like Hyderabad. I have been running to the Indane Office for the past two weeks and nothing has been finalized."

Another customer, Raja M said, "I am yet to receive my Aadhaar card so I have submitted a KYC form. I think the KYC form is going to help me until I receive my Aadhar card and link it to the LPG gas connection. If this does not work out, I will buy a kerosene stove."

ANJANA KANKANALA

Chennai: The CSI Emmanuel Church, built by the Church of South India (CSI) built on government property in Anna Nagar West in 1980, has been accused of encroaching and asked to move. The church, however, doesn't want to move after having been around for so many years.

Ida Joseph, caretaker of the church, says, "where was the Government when we were building the church? They didn't have a problem then. We have put in our lives into this church and watched it grow every year."

Over 500 people come to the church every week and people feel that the Government cannot shut down the church now.

A number of other encroachments like the Joshua Matriculation School, a pawn shop and other shops also sprang up on this government property.

In 2014 the government notified all these owners to vacate.

The owner of the school and his family, died in a car accident, and



The CSI church at Anna Nagar that has been accused of encroachment

ANJANA KANKANALA

the school was demolished. The school had students of low-income backgrounds, so most of them shifted to government schools.

People say the Government cannot put pressure on the church as it may lead to a religious uprising.

Shankar Prasad, a Chennai based lawyer who specializes in property

disputes, says, "This is a difficult situation for the Government. The church has violated the Tamil Nadu Encroachment Act; but the government should have stopped the construction at the very beginning. With the BJP in power, there are already so many accusations that it encourages Hindutva, so it will definitely

become a religious problem."

Residents of the area, however, find the church to be a major hindrance and even a nuisance.

Rohini Manohar, a resident near the church says, "the church was built on the main road connecting Anna Nagar East and West. Because of this church, we now have a diversion in the road and it has become very narrow. On Sundays, the area gets flooded by cars and bikes and it inconveniences the residents living around the church."

A similar case took place 30 years ago when MGR was hospitalized. A roadside hawkker, as a token of loyalty and in hopes that MGR would recover, built a small temple on the pavement in front of the Madras High Court.

Since it was public property, a Public Interest Litigation was filed by 'Traffic' K.R. Ramasamy, a social activist, for the removal of the temple off the pavement. Following this, in November 2014, a divisional bench of the Madras High Court ordered that the roadside temple be demolished.

No reservation charts: Commuters hassled

AINDRILA PAUL

Chennai: The Southern Railways decision to discontinue pasting reservation charts on trains has caused inconvenience to non-smartphone users and the elderly commuters.

The Railways stopped pasting charts on a trial basis as a part of a Go Green initiative in five metro cities Chennai, Kolkata, New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru last October. It has decided to continue with the decision for another three months.

Thirty-two year old Pawan Kumar was returning to his hometown, Ayodha in Uttar Pradesh where he is a farmer, said he had to chase any TTE (Travelling Ticket Examiner) in sight to find out the status of his unconfirmed second class ticket. Being unfamiliar with technology, he wasn't able to log in to the IRCTC website to verify the status of his ticket.

"I am an illiterate farmer. What do I know of smartphones. I am returning from my annual pilgrimage from Rameswaram where they are still putting up



Hyderabad Express in Chennai Central without reservation charts

AINDRILA PAUL

reservation charts. This is the first time I have had trouble getting a seat. The TTE is always surrounded

by forty or so people. It's pretty difficult to get relevant information out of him," he said.

Division Commercial Manager Ravikumar said "We have discontinued putting up charts in Central, Tambaram and Egmore. Initially it was supposed to be a three month long trial run but since we haven't received any complaints per say, we will extend the trials for three more months."

"Around sixty to seventy percent of the Southern Railway commuters rely on the website to check their ticket status so we don't think this will cause any major disruption."

Every day over one and half lakh people access the Chennai Central Railway Station, while more than seventy Mail and Express train arrive and depart from it.

The North and East bound trains have 25 coaches, of which twelve are second class reserved coaches and six are upper class coaches.

Originally the three page long reservation charts were supposed to be stuck on both sides of a coach and lots of paper is expended every day.

Venkatesh Subramanian from Passenger Marketing department said "The government wants to slowly move to a paperless system.

Earlier for last minute reservation the public was asked to fill up forms now people prefer to do it online. We still display the waiting list chart on a centralised notice board but the confirmed list is not put up."

"Reservation closes three hours prior to departure and the chart is given to the TTE. Based on the carrying capacity of the coach if any vacancy arises after the chart preparation, the public can enquire at the current reservation counter or online."

Shortage of TTE staffing adds to the woes of last minute commuters. A TTE normally takes care of a minimum of five coaches but due to understaffing or emergency leave it's common for a single TTE to examine around ten coaches.

Sixty-seven year old Libu R who owns a bookstall in Guwahati anxiously kept asking his grandson to check his PNR status. He said "It's difficult for us old people to get used to technology at this age. It's a smart move to save revenue by the Railways but it is causing major confusion among last minute commuters and people unfamiliar with the web."

ANDAL CONTROVERSY



Vairamuthu's speech on Andal sparked off a controversy

Entire episode is sexist: TM Krishna

AFFEEFA

Chennai: Tamil society has been divided by the controversy that erupted over lyricist Vairamuthu's comments referring to the seventh century Azhwar saint-poet Andal as a devadasi.

The comments were in his article Tamilai Andal, published in a Tamil daily. The article was based on his speech at the Andal temple in Srivilliputtur earlier in January. Vairamuthu claimed that he had only quoted a line from the work of two Indian professors from Indiana University which stated that "Andal, herself a devadasi, lived and died in Srirangam temple."

Andal, the only female Vaishnavite saint-poet who lived in the seventh century, is worshipped as a goddess. "Andal's contributions to Tamil literature are impeccable and rich. Her contributions to works like Theruppavai and Naalaayira Divya Prabandham, are songs of devotion to God through rich literature and are sung during the holy season of Margazhi," said Sampath Kumar, a senior journalist. Devotees who worshipped Lord Vishnu and Andal were outraged at Vairamuthu's remarks and called for his apology.

Devadasi tradition was once prevalent in India. The practice is to devote oneself to serve God. The tradition was that maiden girls were offered to serve God and claimed themselves to be "married to God and not mortals or earthly beings." However it is said that such girls were sexually exploited by the rich and the powerful. "Devadasis", who were proclaimed as 'servants of God' were considered as sex workers.

Bharatiya Janata Party leader H. Raja said the lyricist's remarks were offensive to the Goddess Andal, who is considered an avatar of 'Bhudevi'. Raja said that the lines that Vairamuthu quoted should have been fact-checked as there was uncertainty as to whether it was an Indian university or an American university. Meanwhile, dancer Nrithya Pillai said "calling one a devadasi is not an insult, but considering it an abuse is insulting."

Nrithya Pillai, who hails from a

community with devadasi lineage, considers the controversy to be degrading and a "public shaming" of her ancestors, who were devoted devadasis.

Carnatic musician, writer and activist, T.M. Krishna wrote on social media that "in order to protect our false sense of morality, piety and sanctity, we repeatedly deride and shame the devadasi. Those who have taken offence to what he said have shown scant respect to the devadasi community. The reactions imply that devadasis are lowly beings, outcasts sans morals or any ethical moorings."

"The reactions seem to be coming from the feeling 'how can such a pure divine soul such as Andal be referred to as a devadasi.' This is so very problematic. Does Andal become lesser if she was a devadasi?"

"The fact that Mr. Vairamuthu apologised for his comments only reveals his own disdain for the devadasi community," he said, calling the entire episode, "casteist and sexist."

Meanwhile, Sadagopa Ramana Jeyar, head of Sri Manavala Mamunigal Mutt at Srivilliputtur, started another controversy with his threats of violence.

"No one should talk about a mother or a god on a stage that has been set up on some road anywhere in the world. If they do, we must go there... For so long, us saamiyaars (godmen) have been sitting quietly. But we can also throw glass... We can pick up soda bottles... We have the courage for anything," he was quoted as telling a gathering of believers.

Later he apologised to goddess Andal, for his emotional rant. Senior Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader and Member of Parliament, TKS Elangovan, asked Jeyar to apologise to the people and not the deity.

V. Maitreyan, an MP of All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has condemned Vairamuthu's speech pointing that it was "wrong to bring Andal to an earthly level."

Political observers saw the BJP leader H Raja's criticism as an attempt by the party to use the controversy as a tactical move to take root in Tamil Nadu.

Still not free from open defecation

AINDRILA PAUL

Chennai: The Greater Chennai Corporation declared Chennai open-defecation free but the canals, beaches, and railway tracks across the city continue to witness defecation and improper human sludge transportation.

Under Swachh Bharat Mission the declaration is mandatory.

Over 500 shanties in Todhunter Nagar slum in Saidapet along Tank Bund Road have constructed toilets with tin sheets and pipes which directly shift the contents of the toilet into the Adyar River. Those without such an arrangement go and defecate in an enclosed abandoned area nearby. A public toilet lies neglected right beside the river choked with human waste and debris.

Suman (26) who lives with her family of four kids and husband on Besant Nagar beach says, "Every morning from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. we go to the Broken Bridge to defecate. Sometimes we go to the nearby public toilet, where they charge Rs 5 per person but most of the time there is no water."

"A lot of residents of the fisherman community live in concrete houses and have bathrooms but they are used to defecating out in the open," she adds.

As per corporation records as of 2017, as many as 932 modular

toilets, 664 community toilets and 5529 individual household toilets have been constructed. But installation of these bio-toilets has been futile because most of these toilets remain non-functional, unhygienic and locked up.

According to a survey conducted last year by the Indian Institute of Human Settlement (IIHS) most septic tanks constructed under household and public toilets in Chennai were faulty.

Asma from IIHS says, "Masons build faulty chambers under toilets which lets human waste leak into underground water table, contaminating it. Cleaning of septic tanks should be mechanized instead of being done manually. When any part of the sanitation value chain is broken it's equal to open defecation."

"De-sludging operators often sell human sludge to farmers who use them as manure for crops. Once it enters the food stream it causes intestinal diseases and stunting in cognitive development."

IIHS works towards educating masons, de-sludging operators, civilians and constructing sewage treatment plants in Coimbatore, Trichy and Chennai.

In the Swachh Survekshan, Chennai came down to 235th rank in 2017 from 35th rank on the list of cleanest cities in 2016.

Plot regularisation woes

ARVIND PRASANNA

Chennai: The tedious layout regularisation process followed by the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) and Greater Chennai Corporation has made it difficult for residents to get clearance to build on private plots.

These rules were implemented in July 2017 but later in October 2017 they were amended with simplified procedures. The scheme, which now comes under Section 113-C of the Tamil Nadu Town and Country Planning Act included over 65,000 applicants who were under Section 113-A.

The new scheme was meant to benefit those applicants who had been rejected under Section 113-A, and also aimed at simplifying the process by giving more leeway for new constructions on 'individual plots'. However, according to the residents, nothing much has changed.

"The officials still ask the framework for the entire layout and then to get an encumbrance certificate (EC) for it. When we do present them with a layout, they ask us to change it for some reason or the other. Preparing these documents takes time and repeating this a few times stalls everything else," said a resident who owns a plot in Oragadam explained.

"The plot has been lying vacant for a few months now. We've had to go to the offices multiple times and our layouts have never been approved. We don't understand the delay, since people get clearance for the same layouts before this scheme came into practice," said U. Janaki Raman (40), owner of a plot in East Tambaram.

Licensed surveyors are in favor



A plot of land lying empty off the Ambattur-Redhills Road

ARVIND PRASANNA

of a simplified process for the regularisation of 'individual plots'.

The surveyors have suggested that the Corporation and CMDA approve plots with the mandatory documents without immediately insisting on a layout.

"The planning permission should be given if the applicants submit documents showing the ownership of the property, patta under the name of applicant or previous owner, EC for the individual plot, a document showing that a plot abutting the road gains access from public road, and checking if the structure on the plot doesn't block access for the neighbours and surrounding plots.

Moreover, most of the civic amenities including roads, streetlights, metro water and drainage are already developed near most of these individual plots," explained a licensed surveyor.

The Licensed Surveyors Association has also noted that the drop in applications for constructions in the city was as high as 50 percent.

"The existing system of layout regularisation has been a deterrent for people looking to build houses in plots in and around the city. Even those who have applied have not received approval, at this rate the applications should be piling up somewhere and the officials keep delaying the process," said another licensed surveyor.

However, the CMDA and corporation officials blame the surveyors. "Only a small fraction of the licensed surveyors are trained and the rest are reluctant to do layout frameworks," a corporation official explained.

Engineers and private contractors agreed that the rules for layout regularisation were too confusing to accommodate civilian applications.

"Asking for proper layouts is fine, but they need to demand such things with consideration. If the surveyors are not trained, then they'll have to take proper measures to ensure it doesn't cause problems to the public," explained a civil engineer who wished to remain anonymous.

Expo showcases Northeast

AISHWARYA S.

Chennai: Packed with intricately woven and handcrafted organic pieces from the north-east, the Crafts Bazaar in Egmore brought artists and vendors from the Seven Sisters to this southern city, who came, carrying with them a flavour of their rich cultural and ecological beauty and diversity.

Organised annually by the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation, Ltd., the exhibition that flagged off on January 24 this year was set to continue till February 6. Run by the Purbashree Emporium in the city it provides a means of income to many artists and weavers in the north-east.

The 20-year-old 'flower girl' from Assam, Chitra Basumaty dropped out of school two years ago and learnt the art of sun drying bamboos, corn and palm leaves, coconut husk and kernels, and pani-meteka (water hyacinth) to turn them into artificial stalks and flowers to decorate a room.

After losing her father, when the household burden fell on Chitra, the eldest of three sisters in the family, she found herself at her neighbour's house, an aunty who often toured the country with a group of north-eastern artists selling these flowers. She practised for a year and experimented with bamboo, painting stems and



Handicrafts showcasing the Northeastern ethnicity was a major attraction at the Expo. AISHWARYA S.

shaping petals like the flowers she had seen in the forests surrounding her village of Ratanpur in Golaghat district.

When she knew she had enough stock to make a solid sale, she tracked down the Purbashree Emporium in Guwahati, a three hour bus ride from Ratanpur and presented her project. Like so many artists before her, she was given an official letter by the government to exhibit the flowers at expos organised by this handicrafts

organisation in Guwahati, Calcutta, Delhi, and Chennai.

This is Chitra's first time away from home, but for the young florist it is an adventure, even the part where she must sleep, sell, eat, and live in her small stall as hotels are unaffordable for this band of travelling salesmen.

"I don't like the food here, nor do I like being away from home for such a long time but I have no choice," she said.

Vendors leave for expos in

October and return home only when the shows close in April the following year. Many women in the villages of Assam and Tripura weave bamboo baskets, lamps, table mats and wall hangings. These were collected by one person and sold in these handicraft festivals, said Bishwajeet Biswa, from Tripura who has been running a stall of bamboo artefacts since the last 13 years. He has on display along with woven bamboo, pen stands made by chiselling the stems

of this tree in various shapes.

Some of the show pieces like idols of Gods or carvings of bunches of flowers require nearly 2-5 days of work. Only after the piece of wood takes proper form and the colours set in can it be displayed for sale.

"The government takes 12 per cent commission from our sales even when we are in loss," said Chitra as she explained that this year the flower sale in the city had been average. While people are eager to buy flowers during the festive season, now, after GST, people are reluctant to make purchases even at discounted rates.

"Earlier, prices used to be low but now they have learnt the tricks of the trade and pushed up the prices," said Bharti who often visits Purbashree to shop for handloom sarees. But Chennai-ites are artefact lovers and usually visit expos on weekends, she added.

"Anyone in Chennai would throw such plants away but these people are very creative and are using natural resources wisely," she conceded.

According to Radha, another local, the Crafts Bazaar is only a stopover for the vendors. Their main destination is Valluvar Kottam in Kodambakkam, a government run space with an auditorium that hosts nearly all handicraft exhibitions in the city.



Venkata Raaman standing beside a photograph of the 'blue moon moth' tale ARVIND PRASANNA A

Shooting insects is his hobby

ARVIND PRASANNA A

Chennai: An exhibition titled 'Poochi Art' which showcased the macro-photography of S. Venkata Raaman was organized by Wandering Artist at Raja Annamalaipuram from January 16 to January 31.

Venkata Raaman, alias 'Poochi' (Tamil word for insect) specializes in insect photography. The exhibition put on display some of the photographer's best photos from his 25-year career, showcasing his diligence and skill in documenting the world of insects.

Venkat's first book, 'Insects: Guardians of Nature' was launched in September 2017 and features vibrant photographs of insects.

"The book was an interesting exercise in showcasing the beauty of insects. There is no scientific information in the book, maybe barring the name of the insect. I've consciously avoided giving this information with the idea to arouse the reader's interest and curiosity about the insect world," Venkat explained.

Venkat doesn't have a favorite among his pictures. "Each one has its own charm which can either be brought out directly through photography or using some digital processing," he asserted.

"I tell people to use photoshop as much as possible, unless they're newspaper photographers. But this kind of photography is art and experimenting with different methods for artistic output is an integral part," Venkat explained when asked about his methods.

"When you're out photographing insects, timing and focus are critical," said Venkat before pointing to a photo of a bee landing on a flower while a smaller bug sat by the petals.

"This one was a complete

accident. I was actually focusing on this small one when this guy landed, I immediately adjusted my focus and started clicking away," he explained.

Some of the photographs on display were taken on film.

"So this is a photo of a blue moon moth taken at Top Slip in 1998. This was taken using a film camera, I later digitized it and it turned out to be even more detailed than a fully digital output," Venkat said.

Though his interest in photography began at an early age, it wasn't until 1988 that Venkat got fascinated by insect photography, before which he was a sound engineer by profession. He prefers using small lens cameras since they are the least invasive.

"These insects are unpredictable; they go about everywhere. Most of these pictures are precisely timed, for that you need to understand the behavior of the various insects. Some of these photos took me hours to capture," he added.

On being asked about his future work, he said "I am planning on bringing out a pocket guide for insect spotting next. This will also have photographs and some preliminary information about the insect, which will help people identify the ones they find. After that, I will author a longer, more technically geared book which will be an instruction manual on insect photography."

"To me the pictorial representation of the insect is more important than anything else and the main purpose of my photos is to ignite people's curiosity about this small, often overlooked world. Most of my pictures come from in and around Chennai," Venkat said.

"And people are particularly surprised when they see these pictures and realize that Chennai has so much biodiversity"

Opportunities at 44th Trade Fair

AFFEEFA

Chennai: The 44th Tamil Nadu Tourism Trade Fair at the Island Grounds offers educational and entertainment opportunities for the public.

People can inform themselves of the policies, urban and rural projects of various departments of the government. Also, there are stalls set up for self-help groups, NGOs and other small scale and large scale traders and business groups. The fair is the best place to introduce innovative ideas and projects for budding entrepreneurs.

Also, the extensive and creative stalls put up by each department is informative and educational.

"People who are ignorant of various schemes and programmes implemented by government can walk in and experience everything through well-designed cardboard models of roads, city plans, ports," said R. Ramanan, a resident of Chennai.

One of the exciting features of the fair is the giant wheel. People can also ride on a toy train that covers most of the fair ground. These attract families who would like to end an hectic day's work by relaxing at the fair and the Marina beach nearby.

"3D Theatre and amusement rides are the other entertainment units that attract a lot of visitors," said one of the officials. The security system is strong with a women's cell and police officers stationed almost near every entrance and exit till 10 pm.

Small scale trade vendors, bamboo weavers and traditional jewelers have set up stalls attracting customers, mostly women.

The stalls put up by the Forest Department, Department of Sericulture, Agricultural Department, Fisheries Department, Public Works Department and the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, to name a few, also attract elders and students, who get to learn a lot with a guided tour by department officials.

S. Udayakumar, Junior Inspector, Sericulture, felt the need for such state exhibitions "especially when people cannot make out the difference between original silk and the forged material."

"The pure silk thread, when balled up, will transform into powder," he said, explaining the process of silk thread production from cocoons to weaving. "You have got to look for the Trademark on silk clothes, which most people are not aware of."



MATT CARDY/GETTY IMAGES

Super Blue Blood Moon

APOORV PERTI

Chennai: A celestial trifecta called the Super Blue Blood Moon took place, for the first time in 150 years, on January 31, 2018. The rare event, which began at around 5:20 pm and ended at 8:40 pm, saw a blue moon, a super blood moon and a total lunar eclipse occur at the same time.

A blue moon is basically the second full moon in a calendar month; a full moon rises once every 28 days, so two full moons in a month happens once in a blue moon.

A super blood moon means that the moon is the closest to earth than usual and its coincidence with a total lunar eclipse means the earth will cast a reddish shadow on the moon.

Since ancient times, the moon and various astronomical events associated with it have been linked to endless superstitions and myths across the world.

Many regions in South America, particularly Peru, consider an eclipse to be an omen; people

usually stay indoors till the eclipse passes. The Japanese believe that lunar activity can alter the courses of rivers and even the sea causing major flooding and disaster.

Closer to home, most Indian superstitions, in regard to lunar activity, revolve around fertility and childbirth.

But Laura Taylor, a tourist from London, said "according to an old Welsh tradition, if a member of any family dies during a blue moon, three more will fall one after the other."

She added that the gypsies in England believed a person would go insane if she or he slept facing a blue moon.

Closer to home, most Indian superstitions, in regard to lunar

activity, revolve around fertility and childbirth. V. Balan, a member of the Chennai Astronomy Club, said "a blue moon can improve fertility in women and the chances of a woman getting pregnant will be higher that night."

He added that another superstition was that if a woman stared at a blue moon for too long, she could end up getting pregnant.

Sourav Sen, an analyst at Nielsen India, said "any food prepared during the day of an eclipse should be thrown out and not consumed. Eating anything during the eclipse could lead to severe indigestion."

As the event was an once-in-a-lifetime experience, scores of people turned up at the Birla Planetarium on the Tamil Nadu Science and Technology Centre (TNSVC) campus in Kotturpuram, to view the moon's changing faces.

For people who may have missed that rare sight, the next total lunar eclipse will occur on July 27, 2018 and the next blood moon eclipse will take place on January 21, 2019.

Dollu Kunitha at Alandur Metro

ANJALI VENUGOPALAN

Chennai: The Alandur metro station had some unusual visitors this Saturday – dancers dressed in faux tiger skin swinging and singing to beats on the drums they played. They were dancing the 'Dollu Kunitha', a folk dance form originating in Shimoga, Karnataka. It was a part of the Uroor Alcott

Kuppam Vizha, a festival that seeks to take art to all spaces, and is entering its fourth year now.

H K Boodhiyappa, who manages the troupe and also teaches the dance form in several countries, said, "According to the legend, Dolleshwara, a demon, wanted to be liked by people and hence asked for a boon from Shiva after doing tapasya. Lord Shiva promised to make him a good dancer but

Dolleshwara was not confident and so Shiva said that he would enter his body and dance through him."

Dancers from Trichy also performed Karagattam, in which dancers carry pots on their heads.

It's a 300 year old art form usually performed in temples in Madurai and Ramnathapuram regions in Tamil Nadu, according to Som Sundar, director of Tamil Nadu Rural Arts Development Centre, a private organization that teaches folk arts.

An official of Chennai Metro Rail Limited said that the dance performances were organised to attract passengers.

Metro stations in the city have had a number of programs like drawing and rangoli competitions to attract people and create awareness about the Metro.

Many of the audience members were not Metro passengers but had come because they found out about it through other means.

Bharath Kumar, a software engineer said he came to know about it through the Chennai Metro Facebook page.

He said, "I wanted to introduce my seven-year-old daughter to

other dance forms as she is already learning Bharatanatyam."

Commenting on the trend of taking art into public spaces, R Jagannath, program coordinator of South Zone Cultural Centre which falls under the Ministry of Culture said that "we have to take art to where the people are."

Pazhani Chettyar, a rice merchant from Koyambedu, said that he regularly came to performances like this to release stress. He rued the fact that his sons were not interested in art forms like this and preferred going to the cinema instead.

Kavya, a college student said that she only came to accompany her mother and father.

A dancer, who had come from Trichy, said "It would have more fun if response was better."

He said that Trichy had much better scope for the art form, with competitions for folk arts in which other prizes can go up to Rs. 5 lakhs.

The CMRL official said that there were more programs like this in the offing. He said that an organic food festival had been planned for March at Metro Station.



H.K. Boodhiyappa and group performing Dollu Kunitha at Alandur Metro Station. ANJALI VENUGOPALAN

K4 Station is 'smart'

ANJANA KANKANALA

Chennai: The K4 police station located on Third Avenue in Anna Nagar has been ranked fifth in the list of the best police stations released by Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

Based on a survey conducted by the Quality Council of India, the station met the criteria under the "SMART" category; "sensitive and strict," "modern with mobility," "alert and accountable," "reliable and responsive," and "trained and tech-savvy."

M. Saravanan, Inspector (Law and Order) said, "We were assessed on a variety of things. The survey team didn't just talk to our police and survey the station, they spoke to the locals in the area that comes under our jurisdiction."

Apart from the SMART criteria, other parameters for selection were maintenance, management of seized vehicles, speedy disposal of cases, control over narcotics, and the approachability of officers.

"We made sure to have a waiting area with fans, lights, and

drinking water so people can be comfortable," Said Saravanan.

When asked about what made the station stand apart from others, Saravanan said it was the relationship the policemen had with the locals. "It is very important to have a good understanding with the locals in the area. We have contacts in all the areas and we regularly meet with them to discuss any issues. We even have a Whatsapp group so people can instantly update us with grievances."

The station is said to have been specially mentioned for its speedy disposal of cases. When asked about how their system works, Benazir Begum, Sub-Inspector said, "when a person files a First Information Report (FIR), we immediately narrow down on the suspects and nab them. After interrogation, we produce the accused before the court. We work as fast as we can so that cases do not pile up. Even in accident cases, we help the victim to complete the formalities in the hospital."

There have been no murder cases in the areas under their

jurisdiction in the last five years. Benazir said that the police had regular seminars for senior citizens on how to prevent incidents like chain-snatching. They went to schools in the area and taught students about "good touch" and "bad touch" and had regular briefings for locals on how to register FIRs.

"It is our duty to keep the citizens safe. As a woman," Benazir adds, "I have never felt weaker than the male officers. Everyone is treated equally, irrespective of gender. There are 40 police officers in the station and six of us are women. We do the same things like the male officers like patrolling, handling burglaries and emergencies."

The R.S. Puram police station in Coimbatore ranked first. Panjagutta police station in Hyderabad ranked second, while Gudamba station in Lucknow and Dhupguri station in West Bengal ranked third and fourth respectively. They were all assessed based on their performance and the SMART parameters.