



Four-sighted Budget'18

Decoding the EWIE - Education, Women, IT & Technology and Employment

On February 1, 2018, as the Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley read out budget 2018-19, the country waited with bated breath like a curious child, for a sack of goodies to be opened. The bag opened and the goodies were rolled out. Of course, some to the taste of the common man and some not. Nonetheless, it was a progressive budget

with an eye on development and innovation, and focus on: Education, Women, IT & Technology and Employment. For all those who sat with these-goodies-are-not-my-kinds, don't lose heart. A little scrutiny and it is easy to spot that this budget is foresighted and youth oriented one with focus on exponential growth and modernisation. It is a progressive budget where

few policies which do not seem to make much change in short term will surely pave the way for a long term accelerated development of the nation and lead India towards becoming a superpower by 2030. Don't believe it? This decoding the EWIE league of budget 2018-19, will instill some hope in one thing guaranteed.

Education



FinMin Gave

With the vision to give impetus to holistic education without any segmentation from pre-nursery to class XII, Rs 1 lakh crore has been allocated to education sector. The ultimate aim is to integrate all the education schemes for better implementation and execution. This will help reduce the existing learning gaps which exist under present system. The budget will be primarily used to promote digital edu-

cation, eLearning and encourage the teaching methods focused on learning outcomes for making education engaging and interactive.

In my bag of goodies

Digitisation of resources is good and replacing black boards with digital boards is even better. With an impetus to eLearning, now entire India can dream of self-paced learning anywhere, anytime. But what about the exorbitant fees and unregulated fee hikes parents are subject to? What about the quality of educators who have the responsibility of shaping the future of learners? What about the age-old education and examination system which promotes rote learning rather than real learning? What we have got is awesome, yet some more tax relief to parents for school fees and some more programmes for improving the training of educators could have replaced smiles with large happy grins. There is now more hope for public-private partnership in education Pan India, especially in the remote locales.

Expert speak

Harish Doraiswamy, Vice President, Qualifications, Schools & Vocational, Pearson India hails it as a 'well-balanced budget'. He is confident that the promotion of digital platforms and setting up of finance agency for higher education will ensure superior outcomes.

IT & Technology



FinMin Gave

With focus to promote 'Make in India' and encourage Indian IT start-ups, primarily the ones involved in manufacturing and servicing of IT and IT-enabled goods, the customs duty on mobile phones has been increased to 20% and to 15% for batteries and chargers. More budget has been allocated to the development of digital infrastructure especially in rural areas. There will be more automated highways, more broadband connections and more smart airports dotting the

landscape of India.

In my bag of goodies

With the removal of Long Term Capital Gains Tax exemption and not many sops for IT skills development industry, experts consider it a mixed baggage. Some feel that the increase in customs duty will disturb the electronics goods ecosystem. The recent spurt in IT sector and growth of technology-based and data mining-based start-ups show that we should be happy as 'Make in India' tiger is roaring and soaring towards world leadership. But the government definitely needs to improve local manufacturing of parts for consumer electronics, if we wish to win markets. Apart from easy loans and FDI, more budget could have been allocated for incentivising research-based manufacturing.

Expert speak

Kunal Bahl, Co-founder & CEO, Snapdeal, opines, "We commend the focus on growing the digital footprint, providing better physical infrastructure, and improving not just the ease of doing business but also the ease of living in the country. The enhancement of digital infrastructure with more broadband access in rural parts, unique ID to companies, record allocation to building national highways and railways, and multi-fold increase in airports will go a long way in broad-based growth in the economy."



Women

Fin Min Gave

In an effort to make the lives of women easy and empower them to run households efficiently, 8 crore free gas connections is in offing under the 'Ujjwala Yojna'. With a vision to enhance economic independence of women, loans to women self-help groups have been increased to the effect of 37%. To encourage women entrepreneurs, easy loans for those who wish to launch their start-ups have been sanctioned to the amount of Rs 3 lakh crore under 'Mudra Yojna'. Even the EPF contribution of new female employees has been reduced to 8% for increasing take-home salaries of women. Through this, the government also envisages to encourage institutions to employ more women.

In my bag of goodies

It's a mixed bag of goodies for women. Easy loans and free gas connections are welcome. The purpose of reducing EPF contribution to draw many women into workforce may not really break the glass ceiling because the reasons for women not being in labour force are far more widespread and beyond than a mere monthly kitty contribution.

Expert speak

Priya Krishnan, Founder & CEO, KLAY Schools says, "The government's decision to reduce a woman's contribution to EPF is a notional change. This still doesn't address the issue of subsidized high-quality childcare for every woman, especially working mothers."



JOBS Employment

FinMin Gave

In order to create jobs across all sectors mainly IT, manufacturing and promoting start-ups, enhanced infrastructure spending, more rural markets, and tax sops for MSME and labour-intensive sectors including textiles, leather have been announced.

In my bag of goodies

The tax sops and ease of business sounds good and so does the predicted increase in Foreign Direct Investments. The pay roll tax sops, encouragement to co-working spaces and fixed term employment contracts are surely welcome moves. But with a clear skill gap between education and employment, that the nation is facing now, we surely looked for

more focused programs to reduce the same. While the industry laments the lack of employability of youth, youth laments the lack of proper industry skills mapped training at the level of higher education. Government needs to allocate more funds for setting up vocational training centres for different courses in every college and university to make our youth industry ready through on-job trainings.

Expert speak

"This is myopic as this will just create 'numbers' and not sustainable jobs and inclusive labour market strategy," said K.R. Shyam Sundar, a labour economist and professor of XLRI Jamshedpur. "Nor is there much to incentivise private sector investment," he added.