

'Budget will focus on edu, jobs & increasing capital investment'

As finance minister **Suresh Khanna** is set to present his fourth budget, he is confident that it will take Uttar Pradesh closer to its goal of becoming a trillion dollar economy. In an interview with **Rajiv Srivastava**, he speaks on focus areas of the budget, UP's industrial growth and the common man's issues like price rise and bringing petrol and diesel within the ambit of GST. Excerpts:

You are about to table your fourth consecutive budget this year? How far will you be able to stay true to people's expectations?

■ The Yogi Adityanath government has been making concerted efforts to maintain financial discipline and to stop wastage in expenditure. The government is giving attention to the people's wishes, especially the unserved category. The government is functioning as per the people's wish.

Will Global Investors Summit-2023 have any impact on the budget?

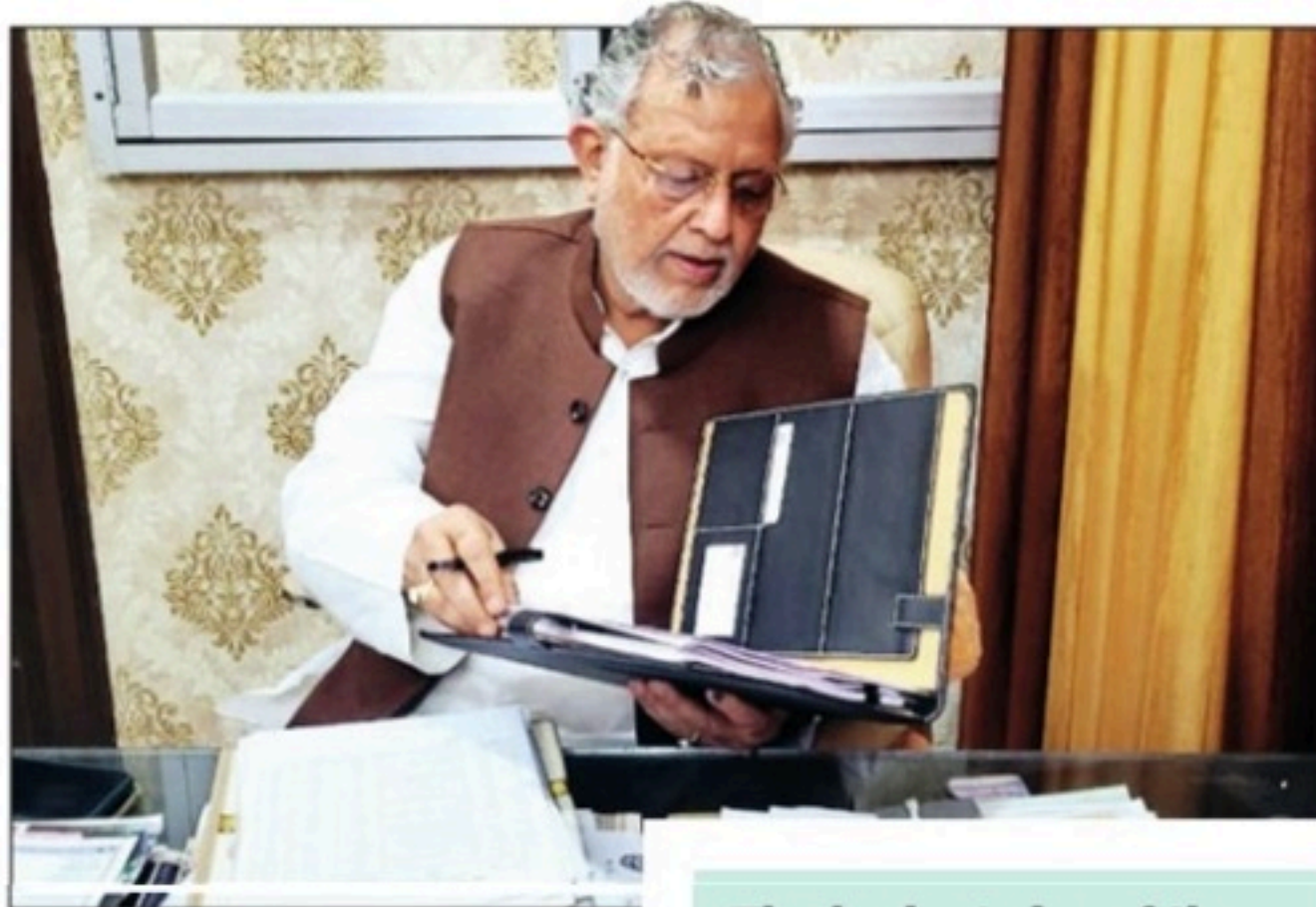
■ Those who have signed MoUs with the government want proper facilities. What has been promised to them will be delivered. Basic amenities like infrastructure and power supply will be ensured.

It has been seen in the last several years that UP's budget size has grown by 10-20% only. What would be the expected size of this year's budget?

■ The budget size will go up this year too. Ever since the Yogi government has come to power, the state has seen an increase in gross state domestic product (GSDP).

GSDP came down during the pandemic. Have we touched the pre-pandemic level?

■ Coronavirus pandemic was an unforeseen occurrence. We are now better placed than where we were before the pandemic. Our GSDP in 2015-16 was below Rs 12 lakh



crore and now we are at Rs 20.4 lakh crore. We are moving in the right direction. We are taking steps which will increase the purchasing power of the people. Once this happens, there will be a rise in demand. This will give an opportunity to investors who are planning to invest in the state. Centre's GST share to UP and financial assistance have gone up.

What about the price rise?

■ Go through any price index, journal or statements by economists, you will realise that there has been no increase in wholesale price.

If there is a price rise at retail level, shouldn't the state government control it?

■ A few things are not directly under the government's control. There is no use of sloganeering. One needs to understand how the economy works.

But you all too indulged in sloganeering when in opposition...

■ There are certain things which are not in our control. Around 80% of petroleum products are imported. This is the reason why Prime Minister Narendra Modi is talking about 'Atmanirbhar

The budget size of the current fiscal was ₹6.48 lakh crore and total estimated GSDP is over ₹20 lakh crore. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has set an ambitious target of making UP a trillion dollar economy. How will it be achieved?

■ The efforts of the government to make UP a trillion dollar economy can be testified by the fact that when most state governments could not meet their daily expenses during the coronavirus pandemic, the UP government gave salaries and pension to employees and met other expenditures. The government even paid instalments against loans. Moreover, the intent shown by some big players to invest in UP is only because of the conducive atmosphere that has been provided to them. Soon, the first groundbreaking ceremony will also be held. All this will ultimately lead us to the goal of a trillion dollar economy.

Bharat'. This is why the PM lobbied in the United Nations to ensure that 2023 is observed as the 'International Year of Millets'. This will help in reducing dependency on petroleum products like diesel and fertiliser as millets require less water and keep land fertile. This will change the scenario.

Will this budget ensure equal distribution of funds among districts to bring them to the level of West UP districts?

■ Our focus will be on generating more employment and increasing capital investment. Any budget which has more capital investment is treated as a good budget. This will be our focus area. We will also lay stress on education and health.

What according to you should be the focus area?

■ There is a need to focus on the Bundelkhand region.

You have been saying this for the last six years. What is new in it?

■ We have also been working in this direction. In a pre-budget meeting with the Centre, we had proposed a new city in Bundelkhand which should be an industrial town. Land and manpower is cheaper in Bundelkhand as compared to other regions. Now that we have connectivity with Bundelkhand Expressway getting operational, it would start giving results.

Which sector do you think requires more focus?

■ UP can be compared with any country now. UP only lags on the technology front.

Will the budget focus on the IT sector?

■ Definitely. Focus will also be on link expressways in Bundelkhand just like Purvanchal expressway.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that if states agree, GST can be introduced on petrol and diesel. What is UP's view?

■ Whatever is done will be in the interest of the state. These decisions are taken by the GST Council. I have not received any such proposal but have read her statement in newspapers.

Which one serves the state's interest better -VAT or GST?

■ State's interest is in increasing revenue.

Does this mean that UP is not averse to GST on fuel?

■ I have already said that we will do whatever is best for the state.

