

MOST PROPOSALS CENTRE AROUND PM'S CONSTITUENCY

Budget boost for UP with Varanasi in spotlight

From high-speed rail corridors to waterways, state gets big-ticket projects ahead of next year's polls

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Lucknow, February 1

WITH ASSEMBLY elections a year away, Uttar Pradesh featured in several big-ticket announcements in the Budget that was presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday. PM's parliamentary constituency Varanasi was in the spotlight as most of the proposals were centred around it.

Rail and waterways

In a strong push toward infrastructure, two out of the seven high-speed rail corridors proposed in the country will be from Varanasi, one connecting the ancient holy city with National Capital Delhi, and the other to Siliguri in West Bengal.

In her Budget speech, Sitharaman said the high-speed rail corridors were "growth connectors". "The completion of these corridors will ensure fast, safe, and convenient rail travel from

Delhi to not just Kashi (Varanasi) but also to the Purvanchal region of Uttar Pradesh. It will boost the state's connectivity along with industrial investment and tourist inflow," said an official of the UP government.

"Furthermore, the acceleration of religious and cultural tourism will generate new employment opportunities in local businesses," the official added.

Another significant infrastructure proposal for UP, especially Varanasi, included the development of an inland waterways repair ecosystem in the district. It is one out of two "ship repair ecosystems" in the country, with the second one proposed for Patna.

While the initiative is expected to strengthen the waterway-based transportation system on the Ganga River, officials said that the establishment of this ship repair ecosystem will provide local access to maintenance and repair of cargo vessels and ships, reducing both time and cost, and boosting local employment opportunities as well.

In 2018, PM Narendra Modi had inaugurated the Multi-Modal Terminal (MMT) on the Ganga in Varanasi, the first of the three Multi-Modal Terminals being constructed on the river. The MMTs are a part of the government's Jal Marg Vilas project that aims to develop the stretch between Varanasi and Haldia



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath watches the Union Budget, in Lucknow on Friday. AN

(West Bengal) for navigation of large vessels weighing up to 1500-2000 tonnes. The objective behind the scheme is to promote inland waterways.

For building capacity, the Union Budget also announced the establishment of training institutes as Regional Centres of Excellence for skill development in the inland waterways sector.

Tourism

The UP government's push for tourism got a boost with Union Finance Minister announcing Hastinapur in west UP and Sarnath near Varanasi to be among 15 archaeological sites to be developed across the country. "I propose to develop 15 archaeological sites, including Lothal, Dhola-Sira, Rakshigunj, Adi-

neelur, Sarnath, Hastinapur, and Leh Palace into vibrant cultural destinations. Immersive storytelling skills and technologies will be introduced to help conservation labs, interpretation centres, and guides," she said.

Officials said that the selection of Sarnath and Hastinapur would further boost tourism not just in Varanasi but also neighbouring parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh, as well as the Mathura-Meerut region of western UP.

Sarnath, located near Varanasi, is a sacred site of Buddhism and a major historical site in the country. It is home to the Dhamekh Stupa, the Chaukhandi Stupa, and the Lion Capital Ashoka Pillar, from which the national emblem of India is derived. Whereas, Hastinapur in

Meerut district has been linked to the Mahabharata and Harappan periods.

Sarnath, where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon, will be developed in a manner that enhances the visitor experience. Improved visitor facilities, curated walkways, interpretation centres, and technology-enabled storytelling will help visitors gain deeper insight into Sarnath's spiritual and historical significance," said UP Tourism Development Minister Jayveer Singh, adding that Hastinapur will be developed as a comprehensive heritage destination.

"As the capital of the Kurukshetra, Hastinapur holds immense archaeological and cultural importance. Scientific conservation, improved amen-

ties, and structured interpretation will enable visitors to connect with its Mahabharata legacy and its role in India's civilisational journey," he said.

The Budget also proposed to develop City Economic Regions in tier-2 and tier-3 cities and temple towns across the country. While the Budget proposes allocation of Rs 5000 crore per CER over 5 years, Varanasi, along with cities like Agra, Kanpur would be the top contenders from Uttar Pradesh.

Electronic chips

Uttar Pradesh is also expected to be a major beneficiary of the "India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 1.0" announced in the Union Budget, with the state having already announced its semiconductor policy in 2024.

Further, UP will also be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the Centre's decision to establish one girls' hostel in one district as the state has 75 districts.

Referring to the Budget as a "road map" for "developed" and "new Bharat", CM Yogi Adityanath thanked both PM and Sitharaman, and said, "Right from seven high-speed rail corridors to setting aside Rs 12 crore for capital expenditure to strengthening health infrastructure and introducing new income Tax Act, this budget has been formed keeping all sections of society in mind..."

LEADERS REACT

"Union Finance Minister Smt. @nsitharaman presented the Union Budget 2026-27, which is a visionary, inclusive and development-oriented Budget that will realise the resolve of a 'developed India'. This Budget will not only fulfill the aspirations of 145 crore countrymen but will also pave new avenues for the welfare and upliftment of farmers, youth, women, entrepreneurs and common citizens. This is the 'New India', which builds development through infrastructure and trust through development."

YOGI ADITYANATH, CHIEF MINISTER

"There is neither any mention nor concern for the common people. The Union Budget is disappointing and condemnable... Not granting tax relief to the public in this Budget despite the inflation rising rapidly is tax exploitation. Ten types of concessions have been given to the rich for their work, business and travel, but the plate of hopes of the people struggling with unemployment is empty. The middle class is feeling cheated..."

AKHILESH YADAV, SAMAJWADI PARTY PRESIDENT

"Regarding the various schemes, projects, promises, and assurances presented in the Budget... it seems that while their names may be grand, it would be better if their realization on the ground was not small... Have last year's claims and assurances been fulfilled, or did they remain mere formalities? Has there been any real change in people's lives?"

MAYAWATI, BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY CHIEF