

# NORTH EAST BUSINESS MIRROR

Vol.No. 03 ■ Issue - 43 ■ North East Business Mirror ■ Thursday, 05 February 2026 ■ Edition - Guwahati

■ Pages - 6 ■ Price ₹ 3

## Budget 2026 to focus on defence, capex, infrastructure & fiscal discipline

**New Delhi:** As Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman gears up to table the Union Budget 2026-27 in Parliament on February 1, economists say the emphasis this year will be on defence, infrastructure, capex, power, and higher growth in affordable housing, apart from balancing social welfare with fiscal prudence. Besides, policymakers will also balance growth priorities with fiscal discipline amid heightened global uncertainty. The Budget is likely to strike a deft balance of sustaining growth momentum and maintaining fiscal consolidation.

It also needs to address near-term challenges emanating from unprecedented geopolitical flux, said economists. The

government has been steadfast on the path of fiscal consolidation, with the fiscal deficit easing from Covid induced high of 9.2 per cent to 4.4 per cent for FY26E (estimated). According to experts, government will largely maintain its “fiscal rectitude and do not expect major deviation from this path”.

FM Sitharaman will present the 15th Budget of the PM Modi government on February 1. This will also be the second full Budget since the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power for a third consecutive term in 2024. Sitharaman is also the first woman finance minister of the country to present the Budget in Parliament for



the ninth consecutive time. While the FY26 Budget was more tilted towards stimulating middle-class consumption with tax reliefs, the FY27 Budget's approach to stimulating consumption will be selective, they added. Accord-

ing to economists, the budget is likely to focus more on capital expenditure, especially in sectors deemed to be strategically important owing to prevailing geopolitical compulsions, said Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd in its

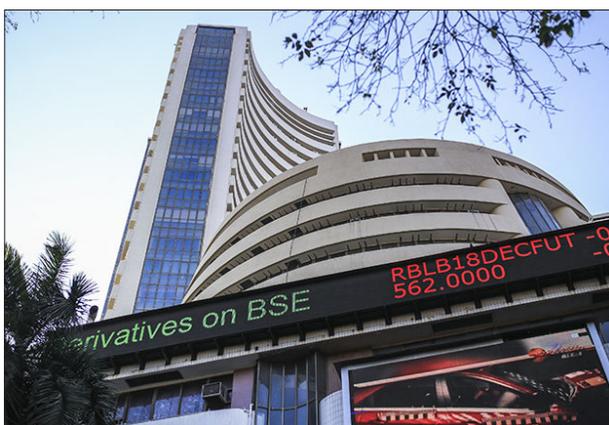
‘India Strategy’ report.

Meanwhile, investors are likely to be focused on the debt metrics, deficit outcome and scheduled borrowings for the next year Budget to align with strategic objectives. The size of borrowings will be an important consideration for the bond markets, said a note by DBS Bank. Notably, the ‘Economic Survey 2025-26’ presented a comprehensive assessment of the economy, projecting FY27 growth at 6.8-7.2 per cent from 7.4 per cent this year, higher than street estimates. Moreover, India's stock exchanges will hold a regular live trading session on the Union Budget 2026-27 on February 1, despite being a Sunday.

### India-Australia economic ties at all-time high: Australian official

**New Delhi:** Economic relations between India and Australia are at their strongest ever, with bilateral trade growing rapidly and more opportunities ahead, Zoe Woodley, First Secretary for Economic, Energy and Climate Change at the Australian High Commission said on Wednesday. Speaking to IANS on the sidelines of an interaction here, Woodley said trade ties between the two countries are at an all-time high, driven by the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA). “Australia and India are now working to upgrade the existing ECTA into a more comprehensive SECA agreement to further deepen economic engagement,” she said. Woodley highlighted that since ECTA came into force, trade from India to Australia has increased by nearly 200 per cent in just a few years

## Sensex, Nifty end flat after two day rally



**Mumbai:** Indian equity markets closed almost flat on Wednesday, snapping a twoday rally, as a sharp fall in information technology (IT) stocks weighed on the benchmark indices. Investor sentiment turned cautious after fresh concerns about advances in artificial intelligence (AI) hit global software stocks. At the closing bell, the Nifty rose 48.45 points, or 0.19 per cent, to settle at 25,776.00. The Sensex gained 78.56 points,

or 0.09 per cent, to end at 83,817.69. Nifty traded in a tight range today, broadly between 25,680 and 25,820, indicating continued consolidation, according to experts. “The index defended the 25,650-25,700 support zone, but faced supply near 25,800-25,850, where selling pressure capped the upside,” an analyst stated.

“A sustained breakout above this resistance could lead to further upside towards 26,000+,” an expert

added. The biggest drag on the market was the Nifty IT index, which plunged 6 per cent. The fall came after software stocks on Wall Street declined sharply. The weakness followed the launch of a new productivity tool for in-house lawyers by AI startup Anthropic.

Investors fear that rapid development of such AI tools could reduce demand for traditional software services and hurt profitability across the IT industry. Among the Sensex stocks, Infosys, TCS, HCLTech and Tech Mahindra were among the top losers. Banking stocks such as Axis Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank also ended lower. On the other hand, shares of Eternal, Trent, NTPC, Power Grid and Adani Ports were among the top gainers. In the broader market, performance was relatively better. The Nifty Mid-Cap index rose 0.63 per cent, while the Nifty SmallCap index gained 1.27 per cent.

## Silver, gold prices plummet amid aggressive profit booking

**Mumbai:** Gold and silver prices saw a meltdown this week, amid dollar strengthening and aggressive profit booking from investors after an unprecedented rally in metal. MCX gold February futures dipped 9 per cent while MCX silver March futures slid down 25 per cent on Friday. Currently gold futures stand at Rs 1,49,075, while silver futures at Rs 2,91,922 per kg. The price of 10 gram 24-carat gold was at Rs 1,65,795 down from Rs 1,75,340 of previous day's close, according to data published by the India Bullion and Jewellers Association (IBJA).

The bearishness in precious metals came as US President Donald Trump nominated Kevin Warsh as the next Federal Reserve chair which fuelled a recovery in the US dollar. Analysts said Warsh would be less supportive of lower interest rates due to his hawkish stance on inflation control and emphasis on Fed independence, which prompted selling among precious metals traders.

“US dollar strengthened, real yields rose and leveraged positions in gold and silver



viewed as overextended debasement hedges unwound swiftly. This resulted in violent liquidation, erasing billions in market value and flushing out weak hands in a classic euphoria-to-exhaustion phase rather than signalling a structural bear market reversal,” analysts noted. However, they maintained that structural supply deficits and industrial demand continue to underpin the bullish bias. “Relentless central bank gold accumulation, silver's structural supply deficits amid surging industrial demand from green energy, EVs, AI and electronics” support the long-term positive outlook, they said.

## Kotak Services Fund launched, NFO opens on February 4

**Mumbai:** Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Ltd. has announced the launch of the ‘Kotak Services Fund’, an open-ended equity scheme focused on India's

services-led growth. The New Fund Offer (NFO) will open on February 4, 2026, and close on February 18, 2026. The fund seeks to tap opportunities across consumer ser-

vices, financial services, IT, healthcare, telecom, logistics, power, and oil and gas. India's services sector contributes around 55 per cent to the country's Gross Value Added

and employs nearly 31.5 per cent of the workforce. Nilesh Shah, Managing Director, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Ltd., said India's services economy is

undergoing a structural shift driven by rising incomes, digital adoption, and urbanisation, creating long-term opportunities for investors. Fund Manager Rohit Tandon said

the sector offers a balance of stability and growth across consumption- and export-driven businesses. The minimum investment during the NFO is Rs.1,000.

## Renault India welcomes Union Budget push for manufacturing, localisation and sustainable mobility

**Guwahati:** Following the presentation of the Union Budget 2026–27, Renault Group India has welcomed the government's continued focus on strengthening India's manufacturing ecosystem and promoting sustainable economic growth.

Commenting on the Budget, Mr. Stéphane Deblaise, CEO of Renault Group India, said the proposals send a "strong and reassuring signal of policy continuity and intent" for manufacturing-led development in the country. He noted that the Budget, anchored in the Kartavya pillars for Viksit Bharat, reflects a clear commitment to building resilience, competitiveness and technological depth across key strategic sectors.



Deblaise highlighted the transition to the India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 as a significant step, particularly its focus on equipment, materials, full-stack Indian intellectual property and supply-chain strengthening. According to him, these measures closely align with the evolving

needs of the automotive and manufacturing industries.

He also pointed to initiatives aimed at reducing critical import dependencies, including efforts related to rare earth magnets and the continuation of customs duty exemptions on capital goods used for lithium-ion cell manufacturing. These steps, he said, would boost confidence for deeper localisation and support the growth of sustainable mobility in India.

The Renault India CEO further stated that public capital expenditure of ₹12.2 lakh crore, along with enhanced logistics corridors, is expected to provide fresh momentum to responsible and long-term growth of the Indian economy.

## INDIAWOOD 2026 gears up to power India's growth in woodworking and furniture production: From innovation to scale

**Kohima:** INDIWOOD 2026 is set to return to the Bangalore International Exhibition Centre (BIEC) from February 26 to March 2, positioning Bengaluru once again as a global hub for the woodworking and furniture manufacturing industry. Organised by Nürnberg Messe India and supported by EUMABOIS, the 26th edition will be the largest in the event's history.

The biennial exhibition will host over 1,000 brands from more than 50 countries, attract upwards of 90,000 industry professionals, and cover 85,000 square metres of exhibition space—registering a 15 per cent increase over the previous edition. The scale of participation reflects growing global confidence in India's manufacturing capabilities and aligns with the country's



Viksit Bharat vision focused on advanced manufacturing and exports.

Managing Director of Nürnberg Messe India, Sonia Prashar, said the event highlights India's rising stature as a trusted manufacturing destination and a key link in global supply chains.

The upcoming India–EU Free Trade Agreement, described by policymakers as the "mother of all deals", is expected to further boost

the sector by easing tariffs, expanding access to European markets, and enabling smoother inflows of advanced machinery.

INDIAWOOD 2026 will showcase automation-led manufacturing, Industry 4.0 solutions, sustainable materials, and skill development initiatives, alongside the co-located India Mattresstech & Upholstery Supplies Expo, strengthening the industry's integrated ecosystem.

## Budget 2026 sticks to fiscal discipline, but higher borrowing raises market concerns

**Mumbai:** Reaction to the Union Budget 2026 from economists remained measured, with a mix of reassurance on fiscal consolidation and caution over borrowing levels. Upasna Bhardwaj, Chief Economist at Kotak Mahindra Bank, said the government has continued to prioritise fiscal discipline, broadly aligning with market expectations.

According to Bhardwaj, the fiscal deficit target for FY27 has been set at 4.3 per cent, while net market borrowing also remains in line with estimates. "The government has continued to focus on fiscal consolidation. The FY27 fiscal deficit at 4.3% and net borrowing is in line with our expectations," she said, in-

dicating continuity in the Centre's medium-term fiscal roadmap.

However, she flagged concerns over the scale of gross borrowing announced in the Budget. The gross borrowing figure of Rs 17.2 trillion came in sharply higher than anticipated and could have implications for financial markets. "The sharply higher than expected gross borrowing of Rs 17.2tn is expected to weigh heavily on market sentiments," Bhardwaj noted.

She added that the absence of bond buybacks or switches contributed to the unexpected upside in gross borrowing, taking markets by surprise. "No buybacks or switches have led to the surprise upside to the gross



borrowing," she said.

Overall, while the Budget reinforces the government's commitment to fiscal consolidation, the borrowing mix and magnitude may pose near-term challenges for bond markets and investor sentiment.

## Union Budget 2026 lays foundation for infrastructure-led expansion, says Aon

**Mumbai:** Reacting to the Union Budget 2026, Rishi Mehra, Chief Executive Officer, India and Head of Strategy, Human Capital, Asia Pacific at Aon, said the Budget represents a bold move towards building structural resilience while laying the foundation for long-term economic growth.

Mehra said a key highlight is the government's focus on "crowding in" private capital through the proposed Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund. He noted that the initiative addresses a critical gap in the risk landscape by providing the credit stability required to support large-scale infrastructure projects and long-gestation investments. He also highlighted strategic measures such as the infrastructure and logistics push, development of rare earth corridors, and the creation of dedicated chemical parks. According to Mehra, these initiatives are vital for reducing import dependency, strengthening domestic supply chains, and enhancing India's strategic autonomy in key sectors.

The allocation of a substantial ₹12.2 lakh crore towards capital expenditure further reinforces the investment-led growth agenda, he said, enabling Indian enterprises to scale operations while managing volatility more effectively. Mehra added that the upcoming reforms in the financial sector will be crucial in aligning the system with India's next phase of growth and supporting capital formation.

He described the Budget as a pivotal moment in India's economic journey, stating that the combined measures have the potential to transform the country into a global manufacturing and infrastructure powerhouse.

## New cancer therapies bring fresh hope for patients in Assam

**Jorhat:** Advances in cancer treatment are offering new hope to patients in Assam, reducing the need for long-distance travel and improving survival outcomes, doctors said at a medical awareness programme held here on Friday.

Medanta – The Medicity organised the cancer awareness and medical interaction



programme in North Lakhimpur, where DrKunjahariMedhi, Senior Director, Medical Oncology and Haemato Oncology at Medanta's Cancer Institute, highlighted the growing role of immunotherapy and targeted therapy in cancer care.

Assam continues to report cancer rates higher than the national average, with tobacco-related cancers common among men and breast and cervical cancers widely affecting women. Citing global estimates, doctors noted that nearly one in five people is likely to develop cancer during their lifetime, underlining the need for awareness and access to modern treatment.

Speaking on recent advances in cancer treatment, Dr Medhi said immunotherapy and targeted therapy allow doctors to personalise care based on the biology of each tumour, improving effectiveness while reducing the severe side effects associated with conventional chemotherapy. He added that while challenges remain, these therapies are helping shift cancer care towards long-term survival and better quality of life.

The programme was attended by senior members of the Indian Medical Association, including DrManik Mohan Baruah, president, and Dr Nikhil Kakoti, secretary of the IMA Lakhimpur branch.

Earlier, Dr Medhi held outpatient consultations in North Lakhimpur, with similar OPD services conducted in Dibrugarh on February 1. These efforts follow Medanta's recent Bhoomi Poojan in Guwahati for a 400-plus bed super-specialty hospital. Medanta has also launched a dedicated helpline for the Northeast at 8904395588.

## Union Budget reinforces agriculture's central role in Viksit Bharat vision: Godrej Agrovet

**Guwahati:** Reacting to the Union Budget, Sunil Kataria, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer of Godrej Agrovet Ltd, said the proposals place strong emphasis on productivity, resilience and inclusive growth, once again reaffirming agriculture as a key pillar in India's journey towards Viksit Bharat.

Kataria said the targeted focus on livestock, fisheries and allied sectors signals a clear policy shift towards diversified and income-resilient farm systems. He welcomed the introduction of loan-linked capital support for veterinary education, hospitals, diagnostics and breeding infrastructure, noting that the move would expand capacity and improve access to high-quality services across rural India.

He said future science-led interventions in cattle genetics and breeding could play a crucial role in accelerating livestock productivity and boosting farm incomes. Kataria also appreciated the government's push towards technology-driven agriculture, particularly the introduction of a multilingual AI platform, which he said would enable customised, risk-aware advisory services at scale amid evolving climate and market conditions.

Highlighting fiscal measures, he welcomed the extension of tax deductions to primary cooperatives supplying cattle feed and cotton seed to federal cooperatives and government organisations, saying it would strengthen formal input supply chains and improve farmer realisation.

According to Kataria, the Budget's calibrated approach integrating productivity, innovation, inclusion and institutional support lays a strong foundation for a future-ready agricultural ecosystem and reinforces agriculture's role as a long-term contributor to India's economic growth.



# SAIL records highest-ever sales with 16 pc growth in FY26 so far

**New Delhi:** Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), one of the country's largest steel-making companies and a Maharatna public sector enterprise, on Tuesday announced it has achieved its highest-ever cumulative sales during the April to January period of the current financial year. The company recorded total sales of 16.6 million tonnes during this period in FY 2025–26, showing a strong growth of 16 per cent compared to 14.3 million tonnes in the same period last financial year, according to the

official statement. This marks the best sales performance in SAIL's history for these months. SAIL also delivered its best-ever sales figures for the month of January.

"The company achieved record dispatches from plants, expanded door delivery volumes and enhanced warehouse sales, underscoring its strong focus on customer-centricity and logistics efficiency while deepening market penetration," it added. In January 2026, the company sold 1.84 million tonnes of steel, which is more than



10 per cent higher than the 1.68 million tonnes sold in January last financial year.

The strong sales performance helped the company

reduce its inventory by around 0.25 million tonnes. It also led to a significant reduction in borrowings, improving the company's financial position.

## US tariffs on Indian goods among lowest after trade deal



**New Delhi:** With the new trade deal with the US in place, India is now among the nations with one of the lowest tariff rates being imposed by the Donald Trump administration compared with other Asian economies such as China, Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Vietnam. The US tariff on Indian goods comes close to those being levied on America's closest allies, which include the United Kingdom (10 per cent), the European Union (15 per cent), Switzerland (15 per cent), Japan (15 per cent), and South Korea (15 per cent). Some of the countries facing the highest tariffs from the US include Brazil (50 per cent), Myanmar (40 per cent), Laos

(40 per cent), China (37 per cent), and South Africa (30 per cent).

India and the United States have agreed to a trade deal under which Washington will slash its tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the current 50 per cent in exchange for New Delhi halting Russian oil purchases and lowering trade barriers, US President Trump said. The American leader announced the deal on social media following a call with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, noting that India would now buy oil from the US and potentially Venezuela. Prime Minister Modi said he was delighted that "Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff

of 18 per cent".

"Wonderful to speak with my dear friend President Trump today. Delighted that Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 per cent. Big thanks to President Trump on behalf of the 1.4 billion people of India for this wonderful announcement," PM Modi said. The Prime Minister said that when two large economies and the world's largest democracies work together, it benefits the people and "unlocks immense opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation". The US has decided to scrap the punitive 25 per cent duty on all imports from India over its purchases of Russian oil.

PM Modi also committed India to "BUY AMERICAN at a much higher level," in addition to buying more than \$500 billion worth of US energy, including coal, along with technology, agricultural and other products, Trump said on social media. "They will likewise move forward to reduce their tariffs and non-tariff barriers against the United States to ZERO," Trump said of India.

## SpaceX acquires xAI to launch space-based AI data centres: Elon Musk

**Mumbai:** US-based entrepreneur Elon Musk said that his aerospace firm SpaceX has acquired his AI startup, xAI, and shared plans to scale AI compute in space by launching large constellations of satellites that act as orbital data centres. "Launching a million tonnes per year of satellites generating kilowatts (kW) of compute power per tonne would add 100 gigawatts of AI compute capacity annually, with no ongoing operational or maintenance needs. Ultimately, there is a path to launching 1 TW/year from Earth," said Elon Musk in a statement.

The SpaceX founder said that space-based AI is the only viable long-term path to meet the vast power needs of advanced AI, arguing that near-constant solar power in orbit can deliver compute at far lower cost than terrestrial data centres. The cost-efficiency alone will enable companies to advance training their AI models and processing data at unprecedented speeds and scales, the tech leader said.

## Trade deal with US protects interests of farmers, fishermen: Piyush Goyal

**New Delhi:** Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Tuesday that the trade deal finalised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the US is the best among the neighbouring countries and will protect the interests of the country's farmers, the dairy sector, and fishermen. Addressing a press conference, he said that the Prime Minister had used his friendship with US President Donald Trump to clinch a very good deal for India, giving priority to national interest.

The trade deal will benefit the labour-intensive sectors of the economy, such as textiles, leather, seafood, and gems and jewellery, as it opens up significant opportunities for exports to the US. The engineering goods sector, which includes auto components and other goods, will also benefit from the deal, he added. The minister further stated that the MSME sector, which creates the highest number of jobs in the economy, would also benefit from the trade deal as the reduced tariff would make exports from the sector more competitive. Goyal said that PM Modi had

clinched the deal, which was stuck in lengthy negotiations at the official and ministers' level that were not producing results. He contended that it was essential to finalise the trade deal as Indian exports of labour-intensive products such as seafood and textiles to the US were hit due to the higher punitive tariff of 50 per cent imposed by the Trump administration.

"On behalf of 140 crore Indians, I want to thank PM Modi because this deal will bring a lot of opportunities for India's economic growth, for farmers, poor, fishermen, women, and youth," he said. Goyal launched a scathing attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, accusing him of misleading the country and lacking concern for India's development. "Leaders with negative thinking, like Rahul Gandhi, are misleading the country. They have no concern for the nation's progress. The Congress government reduced India to the fragile 5 economies, and if Rahul Gandhi has his way, he will take the country back to the same stage," he alleged.

## Shyam Steel Group's Shri Lalit Beriwal says, Budget 2026–27 lays strong foundation for Vikshit Bharat

**Guwahati:** Shri Lalit Beriwal, Managing Director of Shyam Steel Group, has welcomed the Union Budget 2026–27 presented by Hon'ble Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, stating that it lays a strong foundation for a more connected, technologically empowered, and inclusive India, aligned with the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of Vikshit Bharat by 2047. Commenting on the Budget, Shri Beriwal said that the continued thrust on capital expenditure, raised to 9 per cent with public capex increased to ₹12.2 trillion for 2026–27, along with focused investments in railway network expansion, express highway connectivity and construction-led growth, will significantly strengthen India's infrastructure backbone. He further highlighted that infrastructure development proposals for tier II and tier III cities will accelerate growth across the steel, cement, and other building material sectors, while generating large-scale employment opportunities in urban and semi-urban areas, thereby helping address unemployment concerns.

Shri Beriwal also welcomed the emphasis on the waterways development sector, the announcement of seven additional Dedicated Freight Corridors, eco-friendly and sustainable passenger corridors, semiconductor corridors, chemical parks, rare earth corridors, and textile parks. In the context of rapid digital transformation, Shri Beriwal said the government's focus on Artificial Intelligence-driven tools and skill-to-employment frameworks aligns well with the evolving needs of modern manufacturing. He added that the steel industry stands to benefit from smarter processes, enhanced productivity and improved operational efficiency through greater technology adoption. Another key highlight of the Budget, according to him, is the continued support for women-led enterprises and empowerment initiatives, which nurture entrepreneurship and reflect India's commitment to inclusive and balanced socio-economic development. Overall, Shri Beriwal stated that the Union Budget 2026–27 reinforces infrastructure momentum, sharpens the country's technological focus, and promotes inclusive development, laying a strong foundation for India's next phase of industrial and societal progress.

## Amazon, IIT Roorkee join hands to turn farm waste into sustainable packaging solutions

**Mumbai:** Amazon India has announced a research collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee to develop innovative packaging solutions made from agricultural waste, aimed at reducing dependence on virgin wood pulp and curbing stubble burning.

Under the project, crop residues such as wheat straw and

bagasse will be converted into high-quality pulp to produce strong, lightweight paper mailers comparable to conventional paper packaging. The initiative seeks to divert agricultural waste from burning, reduce imports of virgin wood pulp, and create additional income opportunities for farmers by building a market for crop residues.

The collaboration with IIT Roorkee's Department of Paper and Packaging Technology will begin with laboratory-scale research and testing over a 15-month period. Subject to successful results, Amazon will support industrial trials, process validation, and commercial production by mid to late next year.

Amazon India Vice President

of Operations Abhinav Singh said the initiative supports a circular economy by repurposing nearly 500 million tonnes of agricultural waste generated annually in India. IIT Roorkee Director Kamal Kishore Pant said the project aligns with national sustainability missions and addresses both stubble burning and material dependence.

## GCPL welcomes MAT credit relief in new tax regime, says move to boost corporate cash flows

**Guwahati:** Godrej Consumer Products Limited (GCPL) has welcomed the Union Budget provision allowing companies to set off up to 25 per cent of their tax liability against accumulated Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) credits under the new tax regime, terming it a positive step for corporate India.

Commenting on the announcement, Sudhir Sitapati, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Godrej Consumer Products Limited, said the move would significantly ease the transition to the new tax structure for companies carrying legacy MAT credits.

“We particularly welcome

the MAT credit set-off being allowed up to 25 per cent of the tax liability under the new tax regime. This move improves cash flows and makes the new tax regime smoother for companies with accumulated credits,” Sitapati said in a statement.

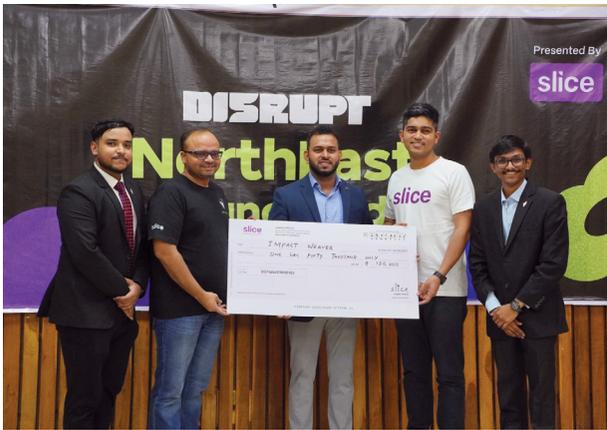
He added that the policy change would help unlock capital that was otherwise tied up, enabling companies to channel funds into reinvestment and expansion. According to him, improved liquidity is expected to support growth, especially in consumption-led categories that form the backbone of India’s fast-moving consumer goods sector.

The MAT credit relief is



likely to encourage more companies to shift to the new tax regime, aligning with the government’s broader objective of simplifying taxation while supporting investment and economic growth.

## slice backs early-stage founders at IIT Guwahati, boosts Assam’s startup ecosystem



**Guwahati:** slice Small Finance Bank (slice SFB) has extended support to early-stage startups at IIT Guwahati, strengthening Assam’s growing startup and innovation ecosystem. As part of its continued engagement with young founders, the bank awarded non-dilutive startup grants to two ventures—Picapool and Impact Weaver—during Disrupt, the startup pitching platform of UDGAM, the annual entrepreneurship festival organised by the Entrepreneurship Cell of IIT Guwahati.

The selected startups were recognised for developing technology-driven solutions addressing real-world challenges. Picapool is building a collaborative commerce platform that allows users with similar purchasing needs to pool demand and access better prices. Impact Weaver, an Assam-based venture, focuses on creating technology-led solutions and partnerships to improve social impact and the effectiveness of social investments in the region.

slice said its participation at UDGAM reflects its strategy

of engaging early with academic institutions, particularly in the Northeast, to help convert campus ideas into viable ventures. Addressing students and founders, slice Chief Technology Officer Nitin Basant highlighted the importance of early capital, mentorship, and ecosystem access for young entrepreneurs.

The initiative coincides with slice completing one year since its merger with North East Small Finance Bank. The bank has entered its second year as slice SFB and plans to open Assam’s first digital bank branch in Guwahati, underlining its long-term commitment to the region.

Guwahati is fast emerging as a key startup and fintech hub in the Northeast, driven by increasing digital adoption, a young talent pool, and growing institutional support. Initiatives like slice’s early-stage backing are expected to encourage more local entrepreneurs, strengthen access to capital, and boost confidence in the city’s startup-friendly business environment.

## India’s employee medical costs likely to rise 11.5% in 2026, growth pace moderates: Aon report

**Mumbai:** Employee medical plan costs in India are projected to rise by 11.5% in 2026, remaining above the global average of 9.8%, according to the latest Global Medical Trend Rates Report released by Aon. While costs continue to climb, the report notes a moderation in growth, supported by stabilising healthcare utilisation across markets.

The report highlights that cancer and cardiovascular-related conditions remain among the most significant drivers of medical costs globally and in India. In the Asia-Pacific region, including India, improved access to advanced diagnostics and therapies is enhancing patient outcomes but also increasing utilisation, placing added pressure on healthcare systems and employer-sponsored medical plans.

Key factors influencing India’s medical trend rate include the growing use of advanced prescription and specialty medicines, particularly biologics, a rising chronic disease burden, higher healthcare utilisation, and wider adoption of medical technologies. Constraints such as shortages of quality healthcare infrastructure and skilled professionals are further pushing up service costs, while higher claims are driving insurance premiums upward.

Looking ahead, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and cancer are expected to remain the leading cost drivers in 2026, broadly in line with 2025 trends.

## Axis Max Life bets on Arunachal SIP push, sees Northeast insurance sector expansion

**Guwahati:** Axis Max Life Insurance Limited, formerly Max Life Insurance Company Limited, has strengthened its Northeast growth strategy by hosting Arunachal Pradesh’s first-ever state-level workshop on the State Insurance Plan (SIP). Appointed by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India as the Lead Insurer (Life) for Arunachal Pradesh, the company is driving a coordinated push to deepen insurance penetration in the state.

The workshop was attended by Shri Satyajit Tripathi, Member (Distribution), IRDAI, along with senior officials from the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, including Karluk Ronya, Director, Accounts and Treasuries, and Nabam Rajesh, Deputy Director, Panchayati Raj. Axis Max Life was represented by its top leadership, including Managing Director and CEO Sumit Madan, Director and Chief



Business Officer (Partnership Channels) Anurag Gupta, and other senior executives.

During the event, Axis Max Life unveiled the State Insurance Plan Report 2025, which charts the roadmap towards IRDAI’s goal of “Insurance for All by 2047.” The workshop also focused on rolling out the “Bima Trinity” — Bima Sugam, Bima Vistar and Bima Vahak — with an emphasis on affordable products, digital access and women-led distribution to reach remote and un-

derserved areas. The company plans a statewide awareness drive under the SIP framework.

Most Northeast insurance operations are anchored in Guwahati, making the city a critical control centre for regional expansion. Increased insurance activity in Arunachal Pradesh is expected to boost policy volumes, agency networks and backend operations managed from Guwahati, reinforcing its position as the key insurance market hub for the entire Northeast.

## DSP Mutual Fund unveils Multi-Asset Omni Fund of Funds powered by DSP Netra



**Guwahati:** DSP Mutual Fund has announced the launch of the DSP Multi Asset Omni Fund of Funds, an open-ended fund-of-funds scheme designed to simplify investing for individuals who find it challenging to track markets or manage asset allocation across cycles. The New Fund Offer (NFO) will open on February 5, 2026, and close on February 19, 2026.

The fund is powered by DSP Netra, the fund house’s in-house market intelligence framework that analyses market data, valuations and long-term historical patterns to assess risk and margin of safety across asset classes. Based on these signals, asset allocation is dynamically adjusted as market conditions evolve.

At a time when markets are witnessing frequent shifts in leadership, interest rate cycles and global uncertainty, the scheme aims to offer a structured way for investors to remain diversified without relying on forecasts or

reactive decisions. The fund will invest across equity-oriented schemes, debt-oriented schemes and commodities-oriented schemes such as gold and silver ETFs, seeking to balance growth potential with risk management.

A key feature is its flexibility to invest in funds and ETFs across multiple AMCs, allowing it to adapt to changing opportunities. Equity exposure can be reduced to as low as 25% during periods of high volatility. The fund is expected to invest 25–75% in equity, 15–50% in debt and 10–50% in gold and silver ETFs, depending on market conditions.

In Guwahati, the interest in multi-asset products has been steadily rising as local investors look for professionally managed solutions amid volatile equity markets. Distributors noted that a diversified fund-of-funds structure could appeal to retail investors in the city seeking long-term stability without active portfolio monitoring.

## Montra Electric Delivers Rhino EV Tractor Trailer to UltraTech Cement Ltd.



**Kohima:** Montra Electric, part of the Murugappa Group, achieved a milestone by delivering the country’s first PM E-DRIVE certified heavy-duty electric truck—the Rhino 5538 EV 6x4 tractor trailer—to UltraTech Cement Limited in Kolkata this January.

Chairman Arun Murugappan flagged off the N3-category certified vehicle, unlocking up to ₹9.6 lakh in incentives per truck under the INR 10,900 crore scheme’s ₹500 crore e-truck allocation. This boosts economics for fleets in logistics, mining, and infrastructure by cutting fuel costs and emissions.

Union Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy praised it as key to net-zero goals and “Atmanirbhar Viksit Bharat.” Murugappan highlighted its role in decarbonizing freight. The truck offers 380 HP, 2000 Nm torque, 282 kWh LFP battery, 198 km range, and six-minute swaps for high-utilization routes.

## Axis Max Life takes 'Bharosa Tum Ho' campaign forward, puts spotlight on everyday family protectors

**Guwahati:** Axis Max Life Insurance Limited has rolled out the next chapter of its flagship brand campaign, 'Bharosa Tum Ho', reinforcing trust as its emotional core while shifting the narrative towards individuals as the primary protectors of their families.

Formerly known as Max Life Insurance Company Limited, the insurer said the refreshed campaign uses simple, human storytelling to portray brand ambassadors Rohit Sharma and Ritika Sajdeh as a relatable couple navigating shared life responsibilities, rather than as celebrities. The approach strengthens Axis Max Life's positioning as a trusted partner across savings, protection and retirement solutions.

Rahul Talwar, Director and Chief Marketing Officer, said trust is built through action, highlighting the company's claims settlement performance in a post-GST environment where protection has become a core financial priority. He added that the campaign now evolves from reassurance to personal responsibility with the inclusion of South Indian actor AlluSirish, bringing together cricket and cinema to make conversations around protection more culturally resonant.

The campaign is anchored by two films—one depicting the emotional journey of welcoming a child and redefining modern fatherhood, and another blending sport and cinema in an entertaining



narrative around financial protection.

A seven-week integrated media outreach is being rolled out across television, digital platforms and social media during the January–March quarter to boost brand recall across customer life stages.

Axis Max Life is a joint venture between Max Financial Services Limited and Axis Bank Limited, and reported a gross written premium of ₹33,223 crore in FY2024–25.

## Samantha Ruth Prabhu, Rishabh Pant named global ambassadors as 'Good Game' launches in India with Rs 1 crore prize

**Guwahati:** Good Game, billed as the world's first as-live global gaming reality show, has officially launched in India with the aim of finding the country's first Global Gaming Superstar. Actor and entrepreneur Samantha Ruth Prabhu has joined cricketer Rishabh Pant as a global brand ambassador, alongside popular gaming creator Ujjwal Chaurasia. The show has announced a prize money of ₹1 crore, among the highest for a reality show winner in India, along with an opportunity to represent the country at a global level.

The platform plans to invest up to ₹100 crore annually and is inviting brands and sponsors to associate with the show, which is expected to reach at least 500 million young viewers across India. Designed as a com-



petitive reality format, Good Game brings together esports, mainstream entertainment and real-world performance, testing contestants on gaming skills, creativity, screen presence and performance under pressure.

Founder Rai Cockfield said the initiative aims to bridge entertainment and gaming while opening global opportunities

for Indian talent. Samantha Ruth Prabhu said the show reflects how ambition and creativity are evolving among young Indians today.

The launch is expected to resonate strongly in markets like Guwahati, where interest in online gaming, content creation and digital entertainment has grown rapidly in recent years. With a large youth population and rising smartphone and internet penetration, the Guwahati market is emerging as a key audience base for gaming-led content, making such national-level platforms relevant for aspiring gamers and creators from the Northeast.

Registrations for auditions are open to Indian citizens above 18, with in-person auditions scheduled in Mumbai and Delhi in February and March 2026.

## JK Cement commissions Buxar plant, crosses 31 MTPA capacity; enters top five grey cement makers

**Mumbai:** JK Cement Ltd. on Thursday announced the commissioning of its new grey cement plant in Buxar, Bihar, taking its total production capacity to 31.26 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) and making it India's fifth-largest grey cement manufacturer.

The new facility, spread across 100 acres, has a production capacity of 3 MTPA and marks a significant milestone in the company's expansion journey. With this addition, JK Cement has crossed the 30 MTPA threshold, strengthening its national footprint and long-term growth strategy.

Commenting on the development, Dr. Raghavpat Singhania said the commissioning of the Buxar plant represents a strategic step towards expanding JK Cement's presence while

contributing to Bihar's development vision. He added that the company remains focused on building world-class manufacturing capabilities to support India's infrastructure growth and local communities.

Strategically located on the Patna–Buxar highway, the plant enables faster and more efficient distribution across Bihar and adjoining regions, with deliveries possible within 24 hours across the state. JK Cement had entered the Bihar market last year through supplies from its Prayagraj plant.

Madhav Krishna Singhania said the local manufacturing



facility would help the company serve customers more effectively in a high-growth market with strong infrastructure momentum.

The project involved an investment of around ₹500 crore. Construction began in March 2025, with commercial production starting on January 29, 2026. The plant is expected to generate substantial direct and indirect employment and attract ancillary industries, boosting the local economy.

## Call to reform pension taxation to boost post-retirement income: IAC-Life

**Guwahati:** The Life Insurance Council–Insurance Awareness Committee (IAC-Life) has called for reforms in the taxation of pensions, arguing that the current framework places a disproportionate burden on pension earners with fixed incomes.

Venky Iyer, Co-Chairperson of IAC-Life, said taxation has a "harder impact on income for pension earners," limiting their post-retirement financial security. He pointed out that there is scope to align pension taxation with other fixed-interest instruments by taxing only the interest or gains, rather than the entire pension amount.

According to Iyer, such a move would directly enhance post-retirement income for pensioners while also encouraging long-term savings through life insurance-based solutions. "This approach would increase post-retirement income for pension earners and mobilise long-term savings through life insurance solutions," he said.

The committee has also proposed the introduction of a standard deduction for pension earners who do not commute their pension corpus. This, Iyer noted, would help ensure tax parity across all pensioners, regardless of how their retirement benefits are structured.

The suggestions come amid broader discussions on retirement security and the need for a more equitable tax regime for senior citizens, as policymakers examine ways to strengthen long-term savings and financial stability for India's ageing population.

## Sunfeast Wowzers dials up indulgence with 'Cheesier' new youth-focused campaign



**Guwahati:** As indulgence-led snacking continues to evolve, young consumers are increasingly seeking products that deliver intensity, personality and share-worthy experiences beyond taste alone. Responding to this shift, Sunfeast Wowzers from ITC Ltd. has unveiled its latest campaign, 'Wowzers Cheesy Nahi Cheesier', promising to deliver a heightened 'wow' in every bite.

The new communication highlights Wowzers' signature 28-layer cracker enrobed in an indulgent cheesy crème, positioning the snack as not just cheesy in flavour but "cheesier" in experience. Conceptualised by Ogilvy, the campaign film is set in a vibrant, high-energy environment and captures spontaneous snack moments among friends, reflecting contemporary youth culture.

Leaning into the growing

popularity of ASMR-inspired content, the TVC focuses on immersive sound and rhythm to bring alive the product's crunch and cheesy payoff, reinforcing its sensory appeal. With this approach, the brand aims to move beyond conventional product claims to build a stronger cultural connect with young consumers.

Commenting on the campaign, Suraj Kathuria, Head of Marketing, Sunfeast at ITC Limited, said youth today prefer snacks that are bold, expressive and sensorial, adding that the new film brings the product's layered crunch and indulgence to life in a culturally relevant way. Ogilvy South's Chief Creative Officer Puneet Kapoor said the idea stemmed from the team's own experience of the brand's multi-sensory appeal, translating that authenticity onto screen.

## Coffee emerges as a key enabler of intentional, productive mornings

**Guwahati:** In an increasingly fast-paced world, productivity is being shaped less by speed and more by how intentionally people begin their day, with coffee emerging as a central part of modern morning routines. Once seen merely as a quick caffeine fix, coffee has evolved into a purposeful ritual that helps individuals reset their minds, build focus, and ease into the day with clarity and balance.

Instant coffee, in particular, is gaining prominence as an enabler of this shift, allowing consumers to maintain their morning ritual even amid demanding schedules. Rooted in Tata's long-standing legacy in coffee built on decades of expertise and trust, Tata Coffee Grand aligns with the growing "start your day right" philosophy by combining convenience with the richness and aroma of freshly brewed coffee.

Designed to suit diverse morning moments—whether before an early workout, during a quiet planning break, or while transitioning into work mode—



the brand supports a smoother and more focused start to the day. Its flavour-locked decocction crystals are aimed at retaining the coffee's natural richness and freshness, ensuring consistency in taste and experience.

As mindful habits and "morning reset" routines gain traction, coffee is increasingly viewed not just as a beverage but as a contributor to mental readiness. By blending quality with ease of preparation, Tata Coffee Grand reflects a broader shift toward productivity that feels intentional rather than rushed.

## India launches first AI-enabled state university pilot at CCSU Meerut

**Guwahati:** The Government of India has announced the launch of the country's first AI-enabled state university pilot at Chaudhary Charan Singh University (CCSU), Meerut, marking a major step towards integrating artificial intelligence into higher education and skilling ecosystems.

The announcement was made by Jayant Chaudhary, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Minister of State for Education, at Google's AI for Learning Forum in New Delhi. The initiative is a collaboration between the Ministry of Skill Development and Entre-

preneurship (MSDE), Google Cloud and CCSU, aligned with the Prime Minister's vision of a technology-driven Viksit Bharat 2047.

Under the pilot, CCSU will function as a national living laboratory for AI-first education, implementing personalised AI tutors, AI-driven skill-gap analysis and intelligent document processing to streamline administration. Learnings from the project are expected to benefit CCSU's affiliated colleges and be scaled across India's 45,000 colleges and over 1,200 universities.

Speaking at the forum, Chaudhary stressed the need

to bridge the gap between degrees and employability, stating that AI can connect classroom learning with industry requirements and democratise access to skills beyond metropolitan centres.

The Minister also highlighted alignment with the ₹60,000-crore Model ITI Scheme and called for greater teacher enablement, including extending AI support to Kendriya and Navodaya Vidyalayas. Google leaders reiterated their commitment to supporting population-scale, responsible AI adoption in education, positioning India as a model for inclusive AI solutions for the Global South.

## TAFE launches MASSEY DYNASTAR contest Season 3 to spotlight farm innovations nationwide

**Guwahati:** Tractors and Farm Equipment Limited has announced the launch of Season 3 of the 'MASSEY DYNASTAR Contest 2026 - #Sabe Bade Allrounder Ki Talaash', expanding its national search for innovative ideas that can transform agriculture and rural enterprises across India.

Building on the success of the previous two editions, the third season has been positioned as the biggest yet, inviting farmers, entrepreneurs, students, startups, academicians and rural innovators to showcase original, practical ideas using Massey Ferguson tractors. This season widens its scope by allowing innovations powered by any Massey Ferguson tractor across agriculture, allied activities and rural businesses.

Shortlisted participants will gain national recognition and an opportunity to present their concepts before an expert jury comprising industry specialists and senior leaders from TAFE. The winner will receive a Massey Ferguson 254 DYNASMART tractor, valued at approximately ₹8.2 lakh, along with additional cash rewards.

Participants can submit entries online in video or text format, in English or any Indian regional language. Submissions must demonstrate feasible applications that enhance farm-



ing practices, create business opportunities, or drive social and economic impact. The contest is open to Indian citizens above 18 years, with finalists presenting their ideas at a Grand Finale event.

In Guwahati, the initiatives like MASSEY DYNASTAR are increasingly relevant for the Northeast, where mechanisation, smallholder innovation and agri-based entrepreneurship are gaining momentum. Dealers and agri-input stakeholders in Guwahati expect the contest to encourage local innovators to adapt tractor-led solutions suited to regional crops, terrain and emerging rural enterprises.

Registrations and detailed terms are available on the official Massey Ferguson India website.

## V-Guard Q3 revenue rises 10.6% to Rs 1,403.51 crore; profit slips on one-time labour code impact

**Mumbai:** V-Guard Industries Ltd, a leading consumer electricals and electronics company has announced its unaudited financial results for the quarter ended December 31, 2025, reporting steady revenue growth despite pressure on profitability due to a one-time exceptional expense.

The company's consolidated net revenue from operations for the third quarter of FY 2025-26 stood at ₹1,403.51 crore, registering a year-on-year growth of 10.6 per cent compared to ₹1,268.65 crore in the same quarter last year. However, consolidated profit after tax (PAT) declined by 5.2 per cent to ₹57.06 crore from ₹60.22 crore a year ago, mainly due to an exceptional charge linked to the new labour codes.

For the nine-month period ended December 31, 2025, V-Guard reported consolidated revenue of ₹4,210.51 crore, up 4.2 per cent year-on-year, while PAT fell 11.9 per cent to ₹196.20 crore.

Commenting on the performance, Mithun K. Chittilappilly, Managing Director of V-Guard Industries Ltd, said growth in the quarter was driven largely by strong volume performance in the electrical segment, even as commodity prices remained elevated. He added that an incremental charge of ₹22.11 crore was recognised following a reassessment of employee benefit obligations after a notification from the Ministry of Labour and Employment on the new labour codes.

## Wedding Season boosts Godrej home locker sales; 20% growth expected on rising security demand

**Guwahati:** The Security Solutions business of Godrej Enterprises Group has projected robust growth in its home locker segment during the ongoing wedding season, with sales expected to rise by nearly 20 per cent, driven by increasing consumer preference for secure, long-term gifting and asset protection solutions.

The wedding season has emerged as a key consumption period for home security products, as families invest heavily in gold, jewellery, cash and important documents. With gold prices at elevated levels, the risk associated with storing valuables has increased, prompting households to prioritise secure in-home storage as part of wedding planning. Weddings, the company noted, often mark a phase of asset creation, making security a critical consideration.

Aligned with this trend, Godrej's Security Solutions business offers a wide range of home lockers that are significantly stronger than conventional cupboards. Designed to safeguard valuables from theft, fire and unauthorised access, these lockers blend with modern home interiors and cater to both compact urban homes and larger family residences. The products also address risks from insiders who may have easy access to homes during large social gatherings.



Pushkar Gokhale, Business Head, Security Solutions, said the wedding season has become strategically important, as secure storage is increasingly integrated into jewellery and asset purchase decisions.

Beyond metros, demand is rising in Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns, which now contribute close to 30 per cent of the company's home locker business. Supported by a network of nearly 5,000 channel partners nationwide, the company is expanding availability and outreach to tap this growth.

In Guwahati, jewellers and electronics retailers report growing interest in home lockers during the wedding season, reflecting higher gold ownership and rising disposable incomes in Assam and the wider Northeast. Consumers in the city are increasingly viewing lockers not just as safety products but as essential household investments, positioning Guwahati as an emerging growth market for organised security solutions.

## Meta launches third edition of 'Scam Se Bacho' campaign with I4C, SEBI to tackle rising online fraud



**Mumbai:** Meta has launched the third edition of its flagship anti-scam awareness initiative Scam Se Bacho, strengthening its efforts to curb the growing threat of digital fraud in India. The renewed campaign is being rolled out in collaboration with the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

The campaign was kicked off with an educational film featuring veteran actor Neena Gupta along with digital creators Sukriti Chaturvedi, Yuvraj Dua and Shreyas Mendiratta. Using humour and familiar, real-life situations, the film highlights common scam formats such as fake job offers demanding upfront fees, "digital arrest" scams impersonating law enforcement agencies,

and fraudulent investment schemes promising guaranteed or overnight returns. The messaging focuses on how scammers exploit urgency, authority and misplaced trust.

SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey said financial scams are increasingly leveraging digital platforms to create false legitimacy and urged citizens to invest only through SEBI-registered entities. Neena Gupta, speaking on her association with the campaign, said awareness and verification are crucial, as modern scams often appear friendly and convincing.

The year-long campaign will include regional creator partnerships and continued public education initiatives, while encouraging users to report fraud by calling the national cybercrime helpline 1930.

## Bajaj General Insurance Introduces Fetal Flourish Insurance

**Pune:** Bajaj General Insurance has launched 'Fetal Flourish', a pioneering insurance rider designed to support fetal health. Available at an affordable premium of INR 1,025, it covers 16 specialized in-utero interventions and caters to women aged 18-45 years with high-risk pregnancies.

This innovative offering complements existing policies such as "My Health Care Plan" and "Health Guard", addressing a critical need in prenatal care by providing financial assistance for procedures like amniocentesis and fetal surgeries. The aim is to ease the financial strain on families, enabling them to concentrate on their children's well-being.

Dr. Tapan Singhel, MD & CEO, highlighted the importance of supporting families during complex pregnancies, stating that Fetal Flourish embodies a commitment to protecting life from its earliest stages. The policy offers coverage up to INR 2 lakh per maternity event, with a nine-month waiting period.

With 17% of women in India giving birth after the age of 35, this initiative significantly enhances maternal healthcare, merging modern medical practices with essential insurance coverage.