

**INFRASTRUCTURE PUSH**
**The challenge is in making the plan to boost investment in infrastructure work**

For an economy that is tottering, a big bang announcement from the government can sometimes work to turn around sentiment. The unveiling by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday of a mega push to infrastructure investment adding up to Rs. 102 lakh crore over the next five years belongs in this category. Projects in energy, roads, railways and urban infrastructure under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) have been identified by a task force. About 42% of such identified projects are already under implementation, 19% are under development and 31% are at the conceptual stage. The NIP task force appears to have gone project-by-project, assessing each for viability and relevance in consultation with the States. Considering that the NIP will be like a window to the future, a constant review becomes paramount if this is not to degenerate into a mere collation and listing of projects. A periodic review, as promised by the Finance Ministry, is necessary. The government's push on infrastructure development will not only enable ease of living — such as metro trains in cities and towns — but also create jobs and increase demand for primary commodities such as cement and steel. From this perspective, this push to invest in infrastructure is welcome.

Identifying the projects to be put on the pipeline is the easy part. Implementing and commissioning them will be the more difficult one. There are a few hurdles that the NIP task force needs to watch out for. First, the financing plan assumes that the Centre and the States will fund 39% each while the private sector will chip in with 22% of the outlay. Going by the present fiscal situation, it will be no small challenge for the Centre to raise ₹ 39 lakh crore, even if it is over the next five years. The financial position of States is even more perilous. Second, the ₹ 22 lakh crore expected from private investment also looks steep considering the lack of appetite for fresh investment by the private sector in the last few years. In fact, this factor has been a major drag on economic growth. Given the scale of investment, debt will play an important role and it remains to be seen if banks have gotten over their apprehensions on infrastructure financing as a major part of their bad loans originated there. Finally, cooperation from States becomes very important in implementing infrastructure projects. The experience on this count has not been very happy till now. While these are genuine obstacles that the task force needs to manage, these should not detract from the need for a concerted effort to invest in infrastructure. The key will be following up and reviewing the pipeline at regular intervals.

<b><u>Words</u></b>	<b><u>Kind</u></b>	<b><u>Meaning</u></b>
Boost	Verb	Improve, raise, uplift, enhance, augment, amplify
Totter	Verb	Teeter, weak, unsteadily, wobble, shuffle
Announcement	Noun	Declaration, pronouncement, herald
Unveil	Verb	Reveal, disclose, divulge, evince, betray

Implementation	Noun	Execution, contrivance, prosecution
Conceptual	Adj.	Psychological, relating to mental concept
Asses	Verb	Evaluate, judge, gauge, rate, estimate, appraise, weigh up
Viability	Noun	Ability, tangibility, palpability, practicability
Relevance	Noun	Applicability, beazing, connection, materiality, pertinence
Paramount	Noun	Most important, predominant, cardinal, foremost, overriding, pre-eminent
Degenerate	Verb	Deteriorate, decline, sink, worsen, decay
Collation	Noun	Collection, assembling, amalgamation
Ease	Verb	Facilitate, relieve, alleviate, mitigate, soothe
Perspective	Noun	Outlook, view, stance, slant, interpretation, vantage, point
Hurdles	Noun	Obstacle, difficulty, problem, barrier
Assume	Verb	Presume, suppose, presuppose, conjecture
Chip in	Verb	Contribute, donate, handover
Outlay	Noun	Expenses, expending, expenditure
Perilous	Adj.	Dangerous, gnarly, chancy, dicey
Apetite	Noun	Craving, longing, yearning, hankering
Drag	Verb	Haul, pull, draw, tug, heave, trail, trawl, tow, strel, Yank
Apprehensions	Noun	Anxiety, angst, nervousness, fret, fraught
Genuine	Adj.	Authentic, real, actual, veritable, unfeigned, sterling
Obstacles	Noun	Obstruction, hurdle, barrier, impediment, deterrent, curb
Detract	Verb	Belittle, diminish, lessen, discount, devalue, denigrate

#### A PERSISTING VARIANCE

##### Even better performing States have not fared well in achieving gender equality

The NITI Aayog's Sustainable Development Goals Index for 2019, released on Monday, does not reveal any surprising information. The South's Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka are joined by Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Goa as the best performers while the northern/north-central and north-eastern States have been laggardly in achieving the U.N.-mandated

goals by 2030. Poor performers such as Uttar Pradesh have shown discernible advances in the indices — measured between 2018-19 — especially in adopting cleaner energy and improving sanitation. But the regional divide is stark in basic livelihood goals such as “eradication of poverty”, and “good health and well being” or even in measures such as “industry, innovation and infrastructure”. This points to variances in both State governance and in administrative structures and implementation of welfare policies. The South, led by Kerala and Tamil Nadu, has done much more in orienting administrative institutions to deliver on basic welfare, leading to actions on health care, education, poverty eradication and hunger, with a governance structure tuned to competitively monitoring actions on these fronts. The converse is true of northern States — Bihar and Uttar Pradesh — where outcomes have remained relatively poor despite there not being much of a difference in the governance structure. The obvious answer to the puzzle could be the presence of historical socio-political movements that have resulted in greater circulation of elites in power and which have addressed issues related to welfare more thoroughly in the South — Kerala and T.N in particular. Yet even these States need to go further in reaching the UN’s SDGs and achieving the living standards of both the first world and other developing nations.

The western States, especially Gujarat and Maharashtra, are also better off in economic growth and industry, indicating a diversified economy, higher employment ratios, skilled labour and better entrepreneurial culture. A major fault-line in India is in achieving gender equality, where barring middling performers such as Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir, the rest of the country falls short. Low sex ratio (896 females per 1,000 males), poor labour force participation and presence in managerial positions (only 17.5% and 30%, according to the report), high level of informality of labour, a major gender pay gap (females earn 78% of wages earned by males in regular salaried employment), lack of adequate representation in governance (14.4% in Parliament, but 44.4% in local government) besides high crime rates against women and girls are among the major national level indicators that have contributed to this. States need to climb a mountain to achieve gender equality, but immediate steps such as enhancing women’s participation in governance through parliamentary reservations would go a long way in addressing several of the issues faced by them.

<b><u>Words</u></b>	<b><u>Kind</u></b>	<b><u>Meaning</u></b>
Persist	Verb	Persevere, continue, carry on, keep on
Variance	Noun	Difference, variation, dissimilarity, discrepancy
Accomplish	Verb	Achieve, fulfill, make good, succeed
Fare	Verb	Manage, get by, make do
Sustainable	Adj.	Able to be upheld, defended
Reveal	Verb	Disclose, evince, divulge, inform on give away
Tidings	Noun	Information, tip off, low down
Flabbergast	Verb	Surprise, mystify, nonplus, astound, astonish
Mandate	Verb	Instruction, directive, authority, approval
Laggard	Adj.	Slow, sluggish, sluggard, indolent

Discernible	Adj.	Visible, detectable, noticeable, clear
Ameliorate	Verb	Improve, raise, better, look up
Sanitation	Noun	Conditions, relating to public health
Stark	Adj.	Share, utter, complete, perfect, down right
Eradicate	Verb	Get rid of, eliminate, suppress
Privation	Noun	Poverty, indigence, impoverishment
Innovation	Noun	Change, alteration, revolution, transformation
Monitor	Verb	Observe, watch, keep track of, keep an eye on, track
Converse	Verb	Talk, speak, chat, parley, discourse, chew the fat / rag
Outcome	Noun	Result, consequences, repercussions, upshots
Obvious	Adj.	Clear, plain, apparent, conspicuous
Puzzle	Noun	Enigma, mystery, paradox, riddle, conundrum
Elite	Noun	Best, pick, cream, nobility
Diversity	Verb	Branch out, vary output, variegate
Skilled	Adj.	Expert, adept, past master, accomplished
Bar	Verb	Prohibit, debar, preclude, interdict
Adequate	Adj.	Sufficient, enough, ample, requisite, mediocre
Riddle	Verb	Confuse, addle, befog, befuddle, floor
Bigotry	Noun	Prejudice, bias, partiality, partisanship, discrimination sectarianism
In a jiffy		Very soon, anon, before long, in a wink, in a blink
On the tenterhooks		Anxious, fraught, fret, worried
At the end of one's tether		Desperate, hopeless
Enshrine	Verb	Set down, set out, spell out, express
Gesture	Noun	Signal, indication, gesticulation
Manoeuvre	Noun	Operation, exercise, activity, movement
Baffling	Adj.	Confusing, flooring, confounded

#### SPECIAL VOCAB

#### IDIOMS

Talk turkey – Discuss, something, honestly and frankly  
 Excuse / pardon my French – an apology for using offensive words  
 French leave – Leave taken without permission  
 At sixes and sevens – in dis-order  
 Damp squib – complete failure  
 Damp a dozen – very common  
 Line one's pocket – make money illegally  
 Follow – suit – act in a like manner  
 Fall flat – become ineffective  
 Go dutch – share the expenses  
 High price – unexpected high price  
 High brow – intellectual