

While developed countries struggle, India is maintaining growth momentum, says FM

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Replying to a three-day debate on the state of the economy in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman countered the charges of the Opposition and said the Centre has addressed issues of inflation, unemployment, and inequality.

Ms. Sitharaman said India registered the highest growth rate in the world in the second quarter of this financial year.

In her 90-minute reply, she said the second-quarter growth was very high, it is the highest globally and the country is now the second most sought-after manufacturing destination in the world.

"We continuously maintain that momentum of being the fastest-growing economy," Ms. Sitharaman said. She added that all sectors are growing significantly.

Countering the charges that the growth in the manufacturing sector is negative, she said through schemes such as Make in India, the manufacturing



Nirmala Sitharaman speaking in the Rajya Sabha. PTI

sector is also significantly contributing to the economy and its share to the GDP is 13.9%.

'Sustained growth'

"The Purchasing Managers Index [PMI] in November was 56. It is in the expansionary territory, so sustained growth is indicative of the growth," she added. Buttressing the arguments of BJP members during the debate, Ms. Sitharaman said while all developed countries are struggling with a decreasing manufacturing output, India is moving forward.

She reiterated the points raised by BJP MPs and said the country is the fifth largest economy now after nine years of Narendra Mo-

di government.

"The activities are all across the economy. It's not as if one sector is doing well... All sectors are growing and growing significantly for us to notice it," she added.

On tax collection and distribution of revenues, she said direct tax collection grew by 21.82% till November 9 and GST collections touched ₹ 1.6 lakh crore pointing to steady economic growth. On unemployment, she said the rate of unemployment declined to 10% from 17.8% in 2017-18 due to various measures taken by her government. She said 13.5 crore people have come out of 'multi-dimensional' poverty in the last five years. On curbing inflation, she said the Centre has taken a slew of measures and the consumer price index (CPI) came down to 4%.

On the third day of discussions too, the BJP members and the Opposition members portrayed different pictures of the economy. Opposition members argued that the human development indices are at a historic low during the regime of Mr. Modi.

Centre-approved board praising Tagore put up at Santiniketan to mark UNESCO world heritage tag

Bishwanath Ghosh
KOLKATA

Visva-Bharati University has finally replaced the controversial plaques commemorating UNESCO's world heritage tag to Santiniketan with a board approved by the Centre.

It was in mid-September that Santiniketan, founded by Debendranath Tagore and home to Visva-Bharati, the university set up by his son Rabindranath, was accorded the heritage status. Soon, plaques came up marking the site, but bore only the names of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is the Chancellor, and (the then) Vice-Chancellor Bidyut Chakrabarty.

The move kicked up a storm and put the administration on the back foot. It claimed that the plaques were temporarily erected to demarcate the heritage area, and they carried the names of the Chancellor



Earlier, plaques marking the heritage site had names of PM and V-C but not Tagore's.

and the Vice-Chancellor purely for authentication.

In late November, texts in Hindi and English, drafted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and approved by the Union Ministry of Education, were sent to Visva-Bharati for correction and for Bengali translation. The university then formed a committee for the purpose and on Wednesday night a trilingual board came up.

The ASI text not only mentioned Rabindranath Tagore but also showered

him with superlatives that the committee had to tone it down. "Tagore's name, for example, was prefixed with the word 'great'. Now Tagore himself wouldn't have approved of it," a source told *The Hindu*.

The new board states, "Santiniketan continues to stand as a beacon of intercultural dialogue and artistic expression, nurturing the spirit of innovation and harmony. It remains a testament to Rabindranath Tagore's vision of an abode where the world makes its home in a single nest, resonating with the timeless pursuit of knowledge and unity in diversity."

Footnote

To possibly avoid controversy, it has a footnote: "The text on this board is the officially approved statement of the UNESCO recognition of heritage status as endorsed by the Ministry of Education."

SC asks Centre to give details of inflow of 'illegal' migrants

The Bench was hearing a series of petitions by indigenous Assamese groups challenging Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955; the court ordered the Home Secretary to file an affidavit before Monday, says not everyone can settle in India

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said there was a "feeling" that an "unlimited influx" of "illegal" migrants from Bangladesh not only changed demographics but also posed a burden on resources meant for Indian citizens.

"On one hand, we do not have an open border through which anybody from Bangladesh can come and settle anywhere in India. At the same time, if we do not take action to curb illegal migration, then it causes all these problems in India... The feeling in India that infrastructure is limited, education is limited, public hospitals are limited... We cannot allow an unlimited influx," Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, heading a Constitution Bench, observed.

The Bench is hearing a series of petitions by indigenous Assamese groups challenging Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955.



India is one entity. People from no one State can say that our culture is being affected because of influx from another State

D.Y. CHANDRACHUD
Chief Justice of India

The groups have argued that the special provision, brought in shortly after the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, became a "beacon" for 'illegal' immigration into India to settle in Assam, gain Indian citizenship, deprive the local people of their political and economic rights and destroy the Assamese cultural identity.

Section 6A divided immigration from Bangladesh to India into three time periods. Those who entered India before January 1, 1966, were deemed Indian citizens. Those who came in between January 1, 1966, and March 25, 1971, were registered as Indians provided they fulfilled cer-

tain conditions. People who crossed over to India after March 25, 1971, were illegal migrants and were to be deported as per the law.

To file affidavit

The Supreme Court ordered the Home Secretary to file an affidavit before Monday on the "estimated inflow of illegal migrants into India, including but not confined to Assam, after March 25, 1971", steps taken by the Centre to deal with the illegal immigration and details on the extent of, and timelines for, the border-fencing.

Chief Justice Chandrachud said India was not an authoritarian country that

would just pick up illegal immigrants and deport them. The CJI said India followed due process of law as there was a genuine fear that innocents would be picked up.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for a respondent party in the case, indicated that legislative policies such as Section 6A "created problems". "It becomes 'us versus the others'," he said.

The court asked the Centre why Section 6A, which gave illegal migrants the benefit of Indian citizenship, was made applicable only in Assam and not in West Bengal, which shared a larger portion of the border with Bangladesh.

"Why did you single out Assam? Did you have any cogent data to show that the illegal immigration to West Bengal was minimal compared to Assam, so that you left the former State alone... Possibly the extent of illegal immigration to West Bengal may have been more significant

than in Assam," Chief Justice Chandrachud addressed Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the State of Assam.

The court asked the government to give details about illegal immigration, post March 25, 1971, into the West Bengal part of the border.

The Chief Justice noted that grievances about demographic changes and destruction of the local cultural identity due to illegal immigration from a foreign country cannot be compared to complaints by people of one State about how migrants from another State within the country were "changing their culture".

"There is a huge inter-State migration in the IT sector. People cannot say because of this our culture is being changed. India is one entity. People from no one State can say that our culture is being affected because of influx from another State," Chief Justice Chandrachud clarified.

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No fait accompli

Restoration of Statehood and polls in J&K should not be delayed further

It has been more than five and a half years since an elected government collapsed and Governor's rule was imposed in Jammu & Kashmir amidst the suspension of the elected Assembly – a step that heralded dramatic changes in the erstwhile State. Subsequently, Article 370 that provided for special status for the erstwhile State was removed, the State bifurcated with the region encompassing Jammu and the Kashmir Valley made into a new Union Territory and Ladakh hived off into another. The constitutionality of these changes is still under question and the Supreme Court has reserved its verdict on it. But this has not deterred the Union government from bringing about legislation that will change the make-up of the UT's prospective Legislative Assembly beyond the completion of the delimitation exercise. On Wednesday, the Lok Sabha passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023. These Bills do not necessarily bring about any significant change. The first increases the total number of Assembly seats from 107 to 114, with reservation of nine seats for Scheduled Tribes (a first), besides empowering the Lieutenant-Governor to effect some nominations. The second seeks to replace the term "weak and underprivileged classes (social castes)" in the J&K Reservation Act, 2004, enacted by the State legislature, to "Other Backward Classes" as declared by the UT.

Propriety would have demanded that even these changes could have waited for the Supreme Court's verdict, which is due soon, on the legality of the abrogation of special status besides the bifurcation of the erstwhile State and the procedure adopted to do so. Without the involvement of elected representatives from J&K in the process, the changes proposed in the Lok Sabha would only seem to be acts that are presented as *fait accompli* to the UT's citizens. This should also be taken together with the fact that the last five and a half years have seen the suspension of political and civil liberties of politicians; arbitrary arrests and detentions; communication shut-downs; a chilling effect on the media; and, more recently, long power cuts. Any change to the political life of J&K, citing its status as a region affected by separatism and terrorism, should not be done in a way that the citizens feel alienated. The first order of business in J&K has to be the restoration of the democratic process by holding popular elections and the restoration of its Statehood.

† This should help not just fill a glaring void in public life in the region in the immediate but also set the stage for addressing the long-pending issues that have led to the persistence of militancy.