

Assam Budget: Planters, traders say subsidy, incentive proposals to boost tea sector

GUWAHATI, JULY 11: Several associations in the tea sector, including those of planters and traders, have welcomed the subsidy, incentive and tax relief announcements in the Assam Budget 2026-27, noting that such measures will boost the industry.

The measures proposed in the budget, which was tabled in the assembly on Friday, will help the tea industry retain its global market share and strengthen socio-economic development of workers, they said.

State Finance Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, in his maiden budget, announced a subsidy of Rs 3 per kg for export-oriented and premium-quality Assam CTC tea for the first time.

In case of orthodox and speciality tea, the production subsidy will be enhanced from Rs 10 per kg to Rs 15 per kg, with premium Matcha tea to be added to these categories.

To provide relief to small tea growers, the minister proposed to enhance the agricultural income tax exemption threshold from Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh of annual agricultural income.

At the same time, the tax will be restored for larger assesses with effect from April 1, 2026, and the additional revenue generated shall be dedicated exclusively to the welfare of tea garden communities, Baruah said.

The finance minister also said that the government will strengthen support to tea growers through Assam Tea Industries Special Incentives Scheme (ATISIS), besides other measures like enhancing healthcare facilities and promoting tea tourism.

The Guwahati Tea Auc-



tion Buyers Association (GTABA) described the decision to introduce the Rs 3 per kg export subsidy for premium CTC tea as a landmark initiative.

GTABA secretary Dinesh Bihani said this is the first dedicated export incentive for premium Assam CTC tea, announced in the state budget and is expected to enhance the competitiveness of Assam tea in international markets.

"It will help exporters remain competitive in the global market at a time when the industry is facing increasing competition and rising logistics costs. It will also improve price realisation across the value chain," he said.

Bihani also said that the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre (GTAC), India's largest CTC tea auction house, is expected to benefit significantly from this initiative. Geographic Reference

Planters' body Tea Association of India (TAI) said the budget has provided a fillip to the tea industry in all spheres.

"The tea sector has been a backbone of the state economy and an ex-

tremely important sector from the employment generation perspective. The hon'ble finance minister has made several proposals for the tea industry and the workforce associated with it in his budget proposals," TAI secretary general PK Bhattacharjee said.

Lauding the subsidies for both orthodox and premium CTC tea, he added that the strengthening of the ATISIS 2020 will help the industry further.

The lowering of VAT from 14.5 per cent to 5 per cent on piped natural gas shall reduce the cost of production of the tea estates connected with piped natural gas, he said.

Bhattacharjee said the proposal to launch the Assam Tea and Golf Trail, a unique tourism initiative integrating Assam's globally renowned tea estates with its golf courses, will create a world-class experiential tourism circuit.

He further said that the proposal to strengthen tea garden hospitals by improving infrastructure, diagnostics, medicines, medical equipment, and

deployment of dedicated doctors and healthcare personnel, along with the proposal to strengthen last-mile healthcare delivery, are encouraging.

Continuing compensation of Rs 15,000 under the Wage Compensation Scheme for pregnant women of tea garden areas of Assam shall ensure better maternal care and nutrition, the TAI official said.

He also welcomed proposals for social welfare activities inside the tea gardens such as construction of Mahaprabhu Jagannath Community Hall-cum-Skill Centres, construction of houses under PMAY-G, model high schools in tea gardens, concrete roads in labour lines, etc.

"TAI, along with the entire Tea industry, hereby lauds the government of Assam for one of the most progressive and forward-looking budgets for the tea industry in Assam. The combined impact of all the measures should augur well for the industry both from its existential and viable aspects," Bhattacharjee added. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, JULY 11:

Ram Temple Construction Committee Chairman Nripendra Mishra on Saturday said the alleged donation theft at the Ayodhya temple was a disgraceful blot (kalank), and everyone felt utterly humiliated because of it.

He expressed confidence, however, that the temple management system would be improved to avoid a repeat of such incidents.

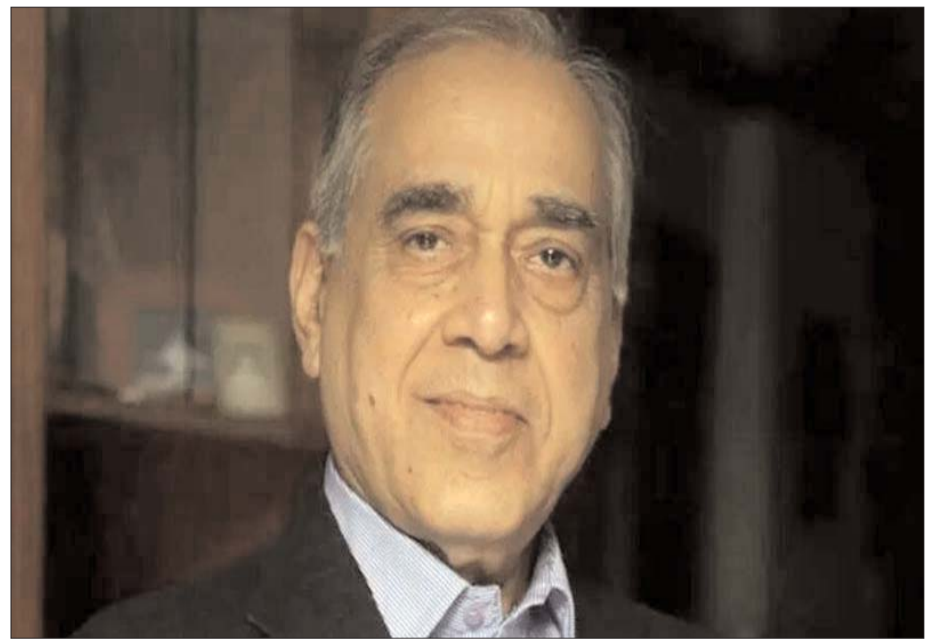
Mishra arrived in Ayodhya on Friday for the first day of the Ram Temple Construction Committee's meeting.

"This (alleged donation theft) is a disgrace, and we all are not just apologetic but feeling humiliated and let down by it," Mishra told reporters ahead of the second day of the committee's meeting.

"This is (now) an issue pertaining to temple management, and the management would surely be improved to guard against a repeat of this (alleged donation theft)," he said.

Mishra, who was among the first to raise the demand for the appointment of a temple trust CEO, said a high-level committee has been set up to suggest a suitable name.

There are speculations that the trust may be open to appointing a woman



CEO, but Mishra didn't comment on it.

"You are aware, a (retired) judge is heading the committee for the appointment of a CEO. It will submit its recommendations to the trust, which will take a call on the issue," he said.

After accepting the resignations of temple trust general secretary Champat Rai and trustee Anil Mishra amid the donation theft controversy, the trust will meet again on July 22 to decide on the measures to improve the temple management system.

Mishra said he had no idea about the (agenda of the) July 22 meet.

Before beginning the

second day of the Ram Temple Construction Committee's meeting here, Mishra said, "Yesterday, I reviewed the ongoing construction work. The work on the old temple, which is being developed as a memorial, is nearly finished.

The only thing remaining is the arrangement for the flame that will burn 24x7.

"The second aspect involves the main memorial structure, which is expected to be finished by the end. Thus, the final phase of the temple construction work will be over by July 30."

He, however, added that

a few other projects, like the construction of a 4-kilometre-long boundary wall and work on the auditorium outside the temple complex, may be completed by November-December.

"Additionally, there is the Ram Katha Museum, which involves 20 galleries. The storyline for the museum has been finalised. The final shape regarding the type of video content will be decided in our meetings this time," he said.

Krishna Mohan, the interim general secretary of the trust, also attended the committee's meeting on Friday. (Agencies)

OPPO Reno16 Series Goes on Sale; OPPO Bubble Also Now Available at INR 7,999

NEW DELHI, JULY 11:

OPPO India today announced the first sale of its latest smartphone lineup, the OPPO Reno16 Series, comprising the Reno16 and Reno16c, along with the OPPO Bubble trendy camera companion. Starting today customers can purchase the Reno16 Series and OPPO Bubble through Amazon, Flipkart, leading mainline retail outlets, and the OPPO E-store, along with a host of attractive offers.

Customers purchasing the OPPO Reno16 Series can avail a range of exciting launch offers, including up to 10% cashback on Credit Cards with selected banking partners and on UPI transactions, along with zero payment schemes for up to 18 months from leading fi-

nanciers. Buyers can also benefit from an INR 5,000 exchange bonus through leading trade-in partners and receive 180 days of screen damage protection at no additional cost*.

Moreover, customers will get 50% off on the OPPO Enco Buds3 Pro+ with every Reno16 Series purchase. Those opting to bundle their Reno16 Series smartphone with the OPPO Bubble can also avail 18-month zero down payment schemes or a 10% instant cashback offer.

Designed for a generation that expects their smartphone to be more than just a communication device, the OPPO Reno16 Series seamlessly combines a professional-grade camera, AI-powered creative studio, productivity companion,

and personal assistant. Featuring India's first HoloVerse 3D Design, a 50MP AI Portrait Camera with a 3.5Å—Telephoto Lens, Natural Tone Imaging, and All-Focal-Length 4K 60fps HDR Video Recording, the Reno16 Series empowers users to capture, create, connect, and express themselves effortlessly.

The latest lineup also introduces a suite of advanced AI experiences, including AI Remix Collage, Pop Cam, Popout 2.0, AI Recompose, AI Perfect Shot, AI Eraser, AI Unblur, AI Best Face, and AI Studio, alongside the newest intelligent features powered by ColorOS 16, delivering smarter productivity and personalised assistance.

Joining the Reno16 Series is OPPO Bubble, OPPO's first smart camera compan-

ion, priced at INR 7,999. Equipped with a 1.73-inch AMOLED preview display, wireless remote functionality, magnetic attachment, and IP54 protection, OPPO Bubble is designed to elevate mobile photography and content creation by making it easier than ever to capture creative perspectives.

Additionally, the recently launched OPPO Enco Air5 continues to be available at INR 3,299 through the OPPO E-store, Amazon, Flipkart, and leading mainline retail outlets.

Pricing and Availability The OPPO Reno16 Series and OPPO Bubble will be available from July 9, 2026, across Amazon, Flipkart, leading mainline retail outlets, and the OPPO E-store.

India seeks review of proposed tariff, cites flaws in USTR's report on forced labour probe

NEW DELHI, JULY 11:

India has asserted that trade issues with the US should be resolved through bilateral trade negotiations rather than unilateral measures, urging the USTR to reconsider its proposed 12.5 per cent tariff, citing inconsistencies in its Section 301 investigation into forced labour concerns.

Participating in the public hearing, Joint Secretary in Department of Commerce Brij Mohan Mishra submitted that in light of India's genuine engagement on forced labour issues, it strongly expresses its concerns at the USTR's (US Trade Representative) determination.

India takes the elimination of forced labour seriously as a constitutional obligation, and as a matter of international law and principle.

"India would like to highlight its concerns with the USTR's report and findings against India," he said.

The USTR has not satisfied the relevant legal standards under Section 301(d) of the Trade Act. A mere absence of a forced labour import prohibition without evidentiary basis of other statutory requirements cannot be construed as unreasonable under Section 301, he added.

The USTR determination does not provide a rationale for countrywide tariffs and impermissibly clubs 46 economies (including India) into a single category, according to the written transcript of the hearing, held on July 8 and published on the USTR website.

The USTR's Section 301 investigation report concerns the failure to impose and effectively enforce a prohibition on the importation of goods produced with



forced labour.

India has stated that the adopted methodology is particularly flawed as the determination is based on case studies of a handful of economies and relied on broad trade patterns.

The report, he said, relies on broad data and it presupposes that an economy's imports flagged for this stuff involving imports made with forced labour are exported to the US without providing any sector- or country-specific evidence and actual linkages with forced labour.

In relation to India, there is inadequate and insufficient evidence that lack of forced labour import ban causes an unfair competitive advantage to the detriment of the American industry, he said.

"In conclusion, it is submitted that the USTR reconsider the imposition of tariff in light of the identified inconsistencies in the report in the Federal Register notice. We ask any trade problems be addressed within the framework of the India-US bilateral trade negotiation, not through unilateral measures such as this investigation," he added.

India remains willing to engage constructively with the USTR through consultation and dialogue on any specific concern.

Making submissions on behalf of Agricultural and Processed Food Products

Export Development Authority (APEEDA), Shreyans Gupta, First Secretary in the Embassy of India in Washington, DC, said that the export promotion body objects to the USTR's observations on the import of rice allegedly made with forced labour into India and the alleged impact on such imports in distorting the competitive conditions for the export and domestic sale of rice produced in the US.

It is important to note that India's imports of rice are very small and that caters to targeted demands of specific and niche rice varieties.

Gupta said that the overall value of rice imported into India in relation to the value of rice exported from India to the US is not even three per cent.

He added that there are regulatory checks in place that prevent exports from India of imported rice that have been produced with forced labour.

Export of rice from India to the US is allowed only from the rice mills and processing units registered with the agriculture ministry.

"For these reasons, the present investigation against India may be rescinded without prejudice," Gupta said requesting exemption for Indian rice from the proposed duty if the proceedings continue.

Industry chamber Ficci has submitted that the proposed additional tariff de-

serves careful reconsideration.

"An additional tariff will increase costs not only for Indian exporters, but also for US manufacturers, importers, retailers, and ultimately, American consumers," the chamber said adding higher tariffs will raise costs for businesses that already follow compliance standards.

It urges that the proposed additional tariffs be reconsidered in light of India's legal and regulatory safeguards, the extensive compliance mechanisms adopted by Indian industry, and the potential implications for legitimate trade and resilient US-India supply chains.

CII too has submitted that the proposed 12.5 per cent additional tariff is neither supported in the evidence presented, nor likely to advance the stated policy goal.

The USTR report does not establish that India's policy framework burdens US commerce, the chamber said.

The USTR launched two separate Section 301 investigations on March 11 and 12, 2026, covering 60 economies over concerns related to forced labour and excess industrial capacity.

On June 3, the USTR issued its findings in the forced labour investigation and proposed additional tariffs on imports from these economies.

The proposal includes a 10 per cent tariff on imports from Canada, Ecuador, the European Union, Indonesia, Mexico, and Pakistan, and a 12.5 per cent tariff on imports from 54 other economies, including India and China.

The measure remains a proposal and has not yet been finalised.

NEW DELHI, JUL 11:

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has notified revised retail prices for essential medicines, including a price fixation for Calcium and Vitamin D3 Tablets and a revision for Anti-Rabies Immunoglobulin injection.

The regulator has also capped retail prices of 39 commonly used medicines used for hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and other therapies.

According to the official document, NPPA has fixed the retail price of Calcium and Vitamin D3 Tablets at Rs 8.93 per tablet inclusive of Goods & Services Tax (GST). In a separate notification, the authority has revised the rates for Anti-rabies Immunoglobulin Injection to Rs 119.48. The revision is part of NPPA's periodic review to ensure availability and affordability of critical care medicines.

The third notification, confirms that NPPA has capped the retail prices of 39 medicines including formulations used in the treatment of hypertension, diabetes,



heart disease and other chronic conditions. The ceiling prices have been fixed under the provisions of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013.

The price fixation and capping come amid the government's continued push to make essential medicines more affordable and to check excessive pricing in the market. NPPA has directed manufacturers and marketers to ensure that the revised prices are implemented immediately and that the new Maximum Retail Prices (MRP) are printed

on packs along with the mandatory declaration.

Industry officials said the inclusion of Calcium-Vitamin D3, widely prescribed for bone health and deficiency management, and Anti-Rabies Immunoglobulin, used in post-exposure prophylaxis, in the notified list will directly benefit patients and hospitals.

The capping of 39 medicines covering major lifestyle and cardiac drugs is also expected to bring relief to households managing long-term treatment costs. NPPA noted that the revised

prices have been arrived at after considering market data and input costs

All three notifications have been issued by NPPA and will be applicable to manufacturers, importers and retailers across the country. Retailers have been asked to ensure that stocks with old MRP are cleared as per DPCO norms.

With these revisions, NPPA has now regulated prices of several key therapeutic categories in 2026, aiming to balance patient affordability with industry viability. (Agencies)