

FISCAL POLICY STRATEGY STATEMENT

A. FISCAL POLICY OVERVIEW

1. The experiences of last few years confirm the view that prudent fiscal policy and high rate economic growth comprise a 'virtuous circle'. Sound fiscal policy and other economic reforms measures have enabled the country to more fully tap its potential. The advance estimate for growth of GDP at factor cost at constant (1999-2000) prices in 2005-06 is pegged at 8.1 per cent up 0.6 percentage points over 7.5 per cent in 2004-05. The growth trend for the last three years appears to suggest the beginning of a new phase of cyclical upswing in the economy from 2003-04. This upswing has been accompanied and enabled by a reduction in fiscal deficit from 5.9 per cent in 2002-03 to 4.1 per cent in RE 2005-06. During the same period, revenue deficit has declined from 4.4 per cent to 2.6 per cent. This improvement in deficit indicators has been achieved through improvement in tax: GDP ratio and moderation in growth of non developmental revenue expenditure, in the backdrop of sluggish growth in non-tax revenues and pressures on account of expenditure requirements for social sector flagship programmes of the Government. The tax reforms during this period have laid the foundation of a more rational and widespread tax net, conferring benefits to almost all sectors and classes and simultaneously augmenting the resources available to the Central Government. The improvement in the external sector, in terms of growth in exports, share in international trade, external indebtedness, etc. has been impressive. However, the task of fiscal consolidation remains incomplete and efforts would need to be sustained to meet the FRBM end-year targets. This roadmap envisages a revenue –led correction along with re-prioritization of expenditure to augment allocations for improvement in the social and physical infrastructure, particularly in the rural areas.

B. FISCAL POLICY FOR THE ENSUING FINANCIAL YEAR

2. Budget 2006-07 is being presented in the backdrop of an impressive performance and a positive outlook for the economy, driven by a new industrial resurgence; a pick up in investment; and rapid growth in exports. The achievement on the inflation front has been significant as the inflationary potential arising from, inter alia, continued high international energy prices have been contained through a mix of prudent fiscal and monetary policy measures. This indicates robustness in the economy that was not readily visible in the earlier periods.

3. The fiscal policy emphasizes increased spending on social sectors, including rural employment, education and health. Along with larger allocations for infrastructure facilities like rural roads, housing and rural electrification, it is expected that the untapped potential of the rural areas will be realized and the growth would become all encompassing and inclusive. The Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes are expected to provide gainful employment resulting in a direct attack on poverty and simultaneously creating rural infrastructure, especially for efficient water management. It is needless to emphasize that an inclusive growth is the best guarantee for sustainable growth, which is the best antidote to poverty. The increased provision for education (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Mid-day Meals) and health care (National Rural Health Mission) will allow deprived sections of the society to participate in and enjoy the fruits of economic growth. The 'Bharat Nirman' schemes have also been provided additional funds. The infrastructure facilities in the urban centres in the country have been put under severe stress. National Urban Renewal Mission is intended to tackle the problem of urban infrastructure in identified centres.

4. Sustained high rate of growth in tax collections would result in higher fiscal devolution to States. The States are also expected to receive further assistance under the TFC award, especially the States, which pursue fiscal consolidation measures. The adoption of VAT system by 25 States/Union Territories was a path breaking development in the area of tax reforms. The initial trend in revenue collection in the VAT implementing States has been quite impressive with the growth in the first 7 months in States put together, exceeding the compound annual rate of growth over the last five years in these States.

GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY TO PURSUE FISCAL CONSOLIDATION

Tax Policy

5. The role of a sound tax policy in a prudent fiscal policy in the developing economy like ours can hardly be over emphasized. With the sluggishness in non-tax receipts of the Government arising from unavoidable factors, the burden of fiscal corrections is expected to be mainly on tax revenues. However, the measures to increase the tax: GDP ratio must not hurt the growth momentum. The measures consistent with such objective would comprise a rational and stable tax rate regime, expansion in the tax payer base by inclusion of hitherto exempted sectors such as agriculture, etc. increase tax compliance and improvement in the efficiency of tax administration. Measures would also need to be taken to recover arrears of tax revenues and prevent further build-up of such arrears.

Indirect Taxes

Customs

- High growth rate of imports keeps customs revenue buoyant despite reduction in tariff rates. In continuation of the reforms process and in-line with the declared policy of Government of removing protectionist measures and moving towards mean Asian levels of customs tariffs, the peak rate of custom duty for non-agricultural imports is being reduced from 15 per cent to 12.5 per cent.
- In order to make available input materials at competitive rates to domestic manufacturers, steeper duty reduction is being made for capital goods and raw materials such as minerals, chemicals, plastics, metals.
- The issue of inverted duty structure is being addressed in the context of the impact of free trade agreements on domestic manufacturers. In general, customs duty structure has been further rationalized so that input tariff rates have been made lower than the output tariff rates.
- As a result of the proposed changes, simple average tariff for non-agricultural goods is being reduced from the present level of 14.45 per cent to 12.12 per cent.
- Exemptions of various kinds tend to cause economic distortions. The Committee set up to review the exemption notifications has submitted its report. All the existing exemption notifications have been reviewed and ten exemption notifications are being withdrawn.
- In the 2000 Budget an enabling provision was inserted to levy a special additional customs duty at the rate of 4 per cent on all goods imported in India to partly compensate for the internal taxes which apply to sale, purchase or transportation of goods in India. This 4 per cent levy was imposed on Information Technology Agreement bound items and on specified inputs used

for the manufacture of electronics or information technology items. This additional customs duty of 4 per cent is being extended to cover all imported goods with specified exceptions.

Excise Duty

- The policy of expanding the tax base, rather than increasing the rate and moving towards CENVAT rate is being continued.
- In continuation of Government's intention to bring as many goods as possible to CENVAT rate of 16 per cent, duty on two items that presently attract 24 per cent duty i.e., aerated water and small and environment-friendly cars, is being reduced from 24 per cent to 16 per cent.
- Excise duty on four items is being raised from 8 per cent to 16 per cent. Excise duty of 8 per cent or 16 per cent is being imposed on a number of items.
- To give boost to food processing industry, excise duty on a number of items is being reduced to 8 per cent or nil.
- Cess leviable on domestically produced petroleum crude oil under Oil Industries (Development) Act, 1974 is being increased from Rs.1,800 PMT to Rs.2,500 PMT.
- Duty on clearances of goods under Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) from Export Oriented Units, Software Technology Parks, Electronic Hardware Technology Parks, etc. is being rationalized.
- Several of exemptions on goods manufactured without the aid of power and on unbranded goods are being withdrawn.

Service Tax

- Taxing both the manufacturing and services sectors uniformly is critical to ensure allocation-efficiency and to prevent distortions in consumption. The policy of moving towards the fully integrated Goods and Services Tax (GST) by convergence of rates between excise duty and service tax in a phased manner is being continued. As a further move in this direction, service tax rate is being raised from 10 per cent to 12 per cent.
- Existing notifications have been reviewed and six exemption notifications are being withdrawn.
- In line with the Government's declared policy of broadening the tax base, the scope and coverage of services leviable to service tax is being widened by adding more services.

Direct Taxes

6. The strategy to achieve an increase in the direct tax essentially comprises the following elements-

- (i) Minimizing distortions within the tax structure by expanding the tax base and reducing the tax rates to moderate levels; and
- (ii) Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the tax administration so as to substantially increase the deterrence level to encourage voluntary compliance.

7. The Union Budget 2005-06 was a watershed in direct tax reforms. The tax rates, both for personal income tax and corporate income tax were rationalized by adjusting the tax slabs and lowering the tax rates, respectively. These adjustments were complemented by appropriate measures for base enhancing like reduction in depreciation rates, introduction of a new levy for comprehensive taxation of fringe benefits in the hands of the employer, reduction/elimination in personal deductions like standard deduction, exemption of interest income under section 80L and rebates for women and senior citizens. Further, a number of initiatives were also taken to strengthen the effectiveness of the tax administration. The progress towards modernization of the income-tax department was accelerated during 2005-06. The outcome of these initiatives have been remarkable.

8. The policy proposals in the Union Budget 2006-07 are intended to provide a fresh impetus to the gains in the year 2005-06 by introducing new initiatives in base expansion. These are:-

- (i) Partly neutralize the erosion in the tax base on account of various tax incentives by increasing the Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) rate to 10 per cent from the existing level of seven and half per cent;
- (ii) Expanding the MAT base by plugging leakages on account of innovative accounting practices; and including long term capital gains arising from transfer of securities chargeable to Securities Transaction Tax;
- (iii) Eliminating the tax exemption under section 10 (23G) granted to Infrastructure Capital Funds/Companies in respect of their income by way of long term capital gains, dividends and interest from investments in infrastructure facilities, hotels and hospitals;
- (iv) Eliminating the tax exemption under section 80P granted to cooperative banks in respect of their profits and gains from the business of banking or providing credit facilities to its members;
- (v) Restricting the scope of the tax exemption under section 54EC granted for roll over of long term capital gains in specified bonds;
- (vi) Providing for scheduler taxation of anonymous donations received by charitable trusts/institutions;

9. The Fringe Benefit Tax is also proposed to be rationalized so as to mitigate the hardship arising on account of the presumptive nature of the tax. Similarly, the rates of Securities Transaction Tax are also proposed to be increased by 25 per cent across the board, to reflect the sharp increase in the stock prices during the last one year, in particular. Further, a number of other measures are also proposed to rationalize and simplify the provisions of the Income-tax Act.

10. In the field of direct tax administration, the year 2006-07 will mark the year of completion of the ambitious project to establish a single nation-wide computerized network. This will significantly enhance the department's capacity to render taxpayer service across regions. This will receive a further impetus with the launching of a scheme to provide assistance to small and marginal taxpayers through tax return preparers.

11. The income-tax department will further consolidate its programme to build an effective taxpayers information system, which will significantly enhance the deterrence level. The department will carry forward its recent initiative to collect information through non-intrusive methods based on Tax Deduction at Source (TDS) and Banking Cash Transaction Tax (BCTT) returns and Annual Information Returns. The department proposes to prescribe a new set of transactions in respect of which Annual Information Returns will be required to be furnished.

12. The quality of information received during the year 2005-06 through the TDS returns and Annual Information Returns has not been satisfactory particularly on account of lack of information relating to PAN. This has significantly constrained the department from making more efficient use of the information so collected. Therefore, it is proposed to increase the number of PAN-allottees by seeking delegated powers to suo-moto allot PAN and also direct new class of persons to apply for PAN. This will substantially enhance the ability of the tax administration to effectively harness the information collected.

13. The income-tax department has also undertaken an extensive exercise for business process re-engineering (BPR). The process for hiring consultants to undertake this exercise has already been launched. The recommendations of the consultants are expected to be received by the end of 2006-07.

Contingent and other Liabilities

14. The assumption of contingent liabilities by the sovereign is considered a necessity during the initial stages of development so as to promote private investment in areas of national priority in view of limited availability of long-term funds. However, with the growth of financial markets and developments relating to credit rating, project evaluation, availability of commercial guarantees and general stability in respect of economic policies, requirements for government guarantees are expected to decline in a gradual manner. FRBM Rules envisage a cap of 0.5 per cent of GDP on the quantum of guarantees that the Central Government can assume annually. Within the ceiling prescribed under the Rules, Central Government extends guarantees to loans from multilateral agencies, FCI for cash credit limits and bonds issues and some other loans raised by PSUs. It has also been decided to extend guarantees to the borrowings of India Infrastructure Finance Company to raise long-term funds to finance viable infrastructure projects facing difficulties in accessing long-term debt.

Government Borrowings, Lending and Investments

15. The Central Government policy towards borrowings to finance its fiscal deficit remains unchanged. It emphasizes (i) greater reliance on domestic borrowings over external debt, (ii) preference for market borrowings over higher cost and market distorting instruments carrying administered interest rates (iii) elongation of maturity profile of its debt portfolio and consolidation of the same, and (iv) development of a deep and wide market for government securities to improve secondary market tradability. As part of policy to elongate maturity profile, Central Government has been issuing securities with maximum 30-year maturity. With a view to passively consolidating its securities portfolio, greater reliance is placed on re-issues rather than on fresh issues. FRBM Act prohibits participation of RBI in the primary government securities market with effect from April 1, 2006 except under specified circumstances. This restriction would imply discontinuation of possibility of devolvement during primary issues to RBI and private placement of securities with RBI. It may, however, be mentioned that there has neither been any devolvement of primary issues or private placement with RBI during 2005-06. Government does not envisage any difficulty in raising the necessary resources to finance the estimated market borrowings during FY 2006-07 under the changed circumstances.

16. The stock of contingent liabilities in the form of guarantees given by the Government has increased from Rs.90,028 crore at the end of 2003-04 to Rs.1,07,957 crore at the end of 2004-05. The number of guarantees during the same period have increased from 508 to 510. The net accretion of Rs.17,929 crore during the year 2004-05 amounts to 0.57 per cent of the GDP for that year, which is an excess of 0.07 per cent over the ceiling of 0.5 per cent of the GDP prescribed under Rule 3(3) of the FRBM Rules, 2004. This minor deviation is mainly on account of guarantees given in favour of Food Corporation of India for procurement operations to ensure food security. An explanatory

ಬೌದ್ಧವಿಧವು (ಉದಾಹರಣೆಗೆ 2005-06 ರಲ್ಲಿ) ಉಳಿತಾಯ ಖರ್ಚು ಹಾಗೂ ಮೇಲ್ವಿಚಾರಣಾ ವ್ಯಯಗಳನ್ನು ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಮತ್ತು

17. ಉಳಿತಾಯ ಖರ್ಚು ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ

18. ಉಳಿತಾಯ ಖರ್ಚು ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ

19. ಉಳಿತಾಯ ಖರ್ಚು ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ

ಉಳಿತಾಯ ಖರ್ಚು ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ

- ಉಳಿತಾಯ ಖರ್ಚು ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ
- ಉಳಿತಾಯ ಖರ್ಚು ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ
- ಉಳಿತಾಯ ಖರ್ಚು ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ
- ಉಳಿತಾಯ ಖರ್ಚು ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ = ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ ಕಡಿಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕೊಡುವಂತಹ ಯಾವುದೇ ಯೋಜನೆ

note to this effect has been incorporated in the Statement on Guarantees given by the Government in the Receipts Budget 2005-06.

17. The window of market Stabilization Scheme to assist RBI in its monetary policy objectives is being retained in terms of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Central Government and RBI.

18. The role of Central Government as a financial intermediary for State Governments/UTs, CPSUs, etc. has been declining over a period of time. The decline is consistent with the development of financial market in the country and spirit of economic reforms that envisages greater market scrutiny and discipline on the one hand, and desirability of affording the freedom to States to choose as to how and from whom to borrow or the other. The recommendation of the TFC in respect of discontinuation of Central Government intervention in loans to State Governments is premised on the same logic. Central Government would, of course, continue to extend necessary help to fiscally weak States in raising resources.

19. The Government has decided to utilize the disinvestment proceeds in respect of CPSUs to create a National Investment Fund (NIF) to be managed by professional fund managers. As such, these receipts will not be reckoned as resources for the purposes of financing the fiscal deficit. The income from investments under NIF will be used to finance social infrastructure and provide capital to viable Public Sector Enterprises without depleting the corpus of NIF.

Initiatives in Public Expenditure Administration

- Shift in emphasis from outlays to outcomes. There is an urgent need to improve the quality of implementation and enhance the efficiency and accountability of the delivery mechanism so as to ensure that not only are budgetary provisions spent within the year to achievement of actual intended outcomes. Government presented an Outcome Budget in respect of its Plan Expenditure in August 2005 for the first time as a step to identify, monitor and assess actual outcomes. Outcome Budgets for 2006-07 are being shortly presented by individual Ministries/Departments.
- Emphasis needs to shift from mere releases to actual expenditure. Proliferation of specific purpose funds tends not only to fragment the Consolidated Fund of India receipts but also create a disjoint between actual expenditure and reported expenditure. A review of all corpus funds and reserve funds would be undertaken and the 'Public Account' will be cleansed of old balances that have lost their original intended purpose.
- A revised and updated "General Financial Rules" has been implemented. The thrust of revised Rules is on greater delegation of authority to administrative Ministries in managing their financial affairs.
- The monitoring of utilization certificates and unspent balances with the implementing authorities is being continued. Delays in receipts of utilization certificate are broadly indicative of poor implementation strategy, diversion of funds or simple delay in utilization of funds for intended purposes. It also provides for interest free loans to the implementing agencies with the interest burden being borne by the Central Government. Quite often, given the poor fund management skills available with the implementing agencies, the return on such parking of funds is lower than the cost of borrowed funds to the Central Government, resulting in a 'Pareto inferior' situation. Strict enforcement and discipline in this regard will continue.

- In a significant move towards sound cash management system, a quarterly exchequer control based expenditure management system is being implemented in respect of fourteen Demands from Grants, viz. (i) Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (ii) Department of Fertilisers (iii) Department of Food and Public Distribution (iv) Department of Health and Family Welfare (v) Department of Elementary Education and Literacy (vi) Department of Secondary Education and Higher Education (vii) Department of Women & Child Development (viii) Department of Rural Development (ix) Department of Economic Affairs (x) Department of Revenue (xi) Indirect Taxes (xii) Direct Taxes (xiii) Indian Audit and Accounts Department and (xiv) Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- In a bid to improve transparency and accountability, Ministries are expected to release a summary of their monthly receipts and expenditure to general public (through their website, etc) and in particular, disclose scheme-wise funds released to different States. Special drive will be taken up to clear arrears in taking appropriate action on Audit Reports.
- The efforts to merge schemes targeting the same set of beneficiaries as also to remove schemes which have outlived their utility the portfolio of Plan Schemes of the government has increased in size and complexity over the years. Under many schemes, the budgetary outlays are so small as to be practically ineffective in achieving the intended objectives. It is expected that a thorough review of Plan schemes would be undertaken well in time before the commencement of the XI Five Year Plan so as to (i) merge schemes with similar objectives/beneficiary class; (ii) review the schemes with sub-critical size; (iii) redesign schemes to improve the asset creation role of plan expenditure, along with their appropriate reflection in the central Government accounts. All schemes would be subjected to evaluation before being carried forward into the XI Plan. Besides, XI Plan would be sought to be so designed as to restore the Plan expenditure in the ratio of 2:1 for revenue and capital expenditure.
- Review of user charges will continue with a view to increase non-tax revenue and reduce the operational losses of Commercial Undertakings. Besides further improvements are expected as return on investment improves and temporary fiscal concessions are phased out as a result of improved performance of Public Sector Enterprises

Policy Evaluation

20. Last three financial years have been marked by a great degree of fiscal consolidation. The performance in RE 2005-06 shows an improvement over BE 2005-06 achieved by revenue receipts being on budgeted path and further moderation in the non-plan expenditure than earlier targeted. Budget 2006-07 marks a return to the path of fiscal correction outlined in FRBM Rules, 2004. Continuation of the policy measures already implemented in the domain of tax policies, expenditure management, etc. and fresh initiatives being launched in these areas form the basis of projections included in the FRBM Statements. Fiscal policy measures to achieve the right economic environment to unleash the full potential of the Indian genius must essentially be a continuum and provide a challenge to be achieved and then sustained.