More funds will definitely help in better policing

Though policing is basically a subject in the state list, the union government has been giving its share in expenditures such as that for modernisation, coastal security, anti-naxal operations and anti-terrorism establishments. Maharashtra has been getting its due for these things. But I feel there is scope for a rise. Modernisation of security forces is a continuous process. We need money for procuring modern gadgets, surveillance equipments and protective kits. Funds for these things come from centre for all the states and they are allocated to individual states. We have also been getting money for building coastal police stations and buying police boats. These needs keep growing as the security threats are on rise. Identifying the gravity of the issues such as terrorism and naxalism, centre has been allocating money to the states affected by these issues. More funds will definitely help in better policing.

Congenial environment for encouraging private investment in higher education

Education is and would continue to be a proactive force for our country’s economic development. In the domain of higher education, public universities will continue to be the country's backbone. Hence, there is a need for the government to enhance investment in the public system. The government should create a congenial environment for encouraging private investment in higher education. Also, fast track clearances and tax benefits for private investment should be encouraged. The UoP had taken a step of creating an international student’s center. Every year, close to 65,000 international students come to the country out of which about 27 per cent come to Pune. If India is to attract more foreign students, there needs to be special efforts to create the right environment here for such students. There needs to be a congenial process for the acceptance of the students. There is a need for special cells who would look after things like police registrations. The center should take steps towards creating an international students hub here, through the help of UoP and other colleges in the city.

Pune, as a city, had been sidelined in last year’s budget. On asking if he was expecting any allocation of funds into the city, he said, “I am not expecting anything at the moment. However, Pune has the potential to be identified as a special education zone.

We expect good allocation for the judicial sector

Last year, the judiciary had seen budget allocation of Rs 1000 crore. The budget to set up gram nyayalaya or rural courts was increased from Rs 39 crores to Rs 145 crores, while that for upgrading court infrastructure was also increased from Rs 108 crore to Rs 467 core. Ahmedkhan Pathan, member of Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa said, “It was a good sign that the amounts allocated for judiciary sector had increased multi-fold. This year, we expect similar allocation. However, it needs to be focused on increasing the number of courts and the judges, instead of concentrating on parallel justice delivery systems like mediation and lok adalats,” He pointed out that out of the requirement of 100 judges in Maharashtra this year, only 42 were recruited, which means that the remaining posts will remain vacant. India needs five times more judges than there are today to do away with the huge pendency. “Out of the funds allocated last year by the Centre, less than 50 per cent have been utilised in the state. This proves the apathy of the state government in improving the judicial system and judicial infrastructure,” he said. Lawyers also pointed out the need of fun for legal literacy among the common public.

The public transport system needs to be improved

The city has been leading in revenue collection for the country. The Information Technology sector has ensured that the Income Tax office gets good amount as tax from IT professionals. The service tax and other tax also contribute a lot. However, there is not much of support provided by union government to improve and upgrade the infrastructure of the city.

The population of the city has reached 35 lakh and it will continue to increase but there is lack of civic amenities.
The public transport system needs to be improved and union government should help the public transport company to procure 3,000 buses for the city. The union government should also push for mono rail in the city as immediate alternative for public transport system as the metro rail project will take time.

The union government should allocate funds for improvement of city roads. There should be special funds for construction of high transit mass transit road. The union government should also help the local civic body to resolve the water issue in the city as there is ample water but it has to be managed properly.

The FM has to match up to people's expectations

I think the budget might have been prepared long time ago, but the alteration needs to be brought out in the way it will be presented. UPA certainly loses from what has happened to it in the recent elections. The Finance Minister is facing a tough job. He has to show that he can match up to the expectations of people. He doesn't have numbers to support him. I mean NDC's have come down. All the figures that showed economy is growing is reflecting the reverse now. He might have to take decisions that might be unpalatable. I don't think he can bring the economy back in one shot, it will take a year or two. I feel he will announce some sops, exemptions to boost the corporate sector. He should remember that it is not just individuals who have to be thought of but also the corporate sector. Also benefit should be extended to small industries so that they can come up as well. Regarding the implementation of the Direct Tax Code, I feel he will have to defer it. UPA does not have the numbers to go ahead with it. They are on tenter-hooks. The FM should try to merge the present income tax law with the Direct Tax Code in such a way that the transition is smooth.

Quantum jump expected in budget for health care

One can expect a quantum jump in the budgetary allocation for health care in the Union budget 2012-13. The Planning Commission had appointed a High Level Expert Group (HLEG) in October 2010 to prepare a blueprint for reaching the goal of 'Universal Health Coverage by 2020. The HLEG has recommended use of general taxation as the principal source of health care financing to reach this goal. The HLEG has recommended that fees should not be levied of any kind for use of health care services under the UHC.

For this purpose, it has recommended that public health expenditure in India should be increased from the current 1.2 per cent of GDP to 2.5 per cent of GDP in the 12th Five Year Plan. The recent report of the Steering Committee on Health for the 12th FYP has accepted this recommendation and it has also clearly recommended cashless universal health care for all.

This would mean an additional budgetary availability of Central Government funds of more than Rs 80,000 crore annually, an amount more than 10 times the additional budgetary allocation for the National Rural Health Mission during the 11th Five Year Plan. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has said that in the social sector the 12th FYP would focus on health care.

It is because of this background that in the 2012-13 Union budget, one expects a quantum jump in the budgetary allocation for Health Care. Without such a jump, the pronouncements by the PM would remain empty slogans.

Demand for making land lease for defence clusters

Private sector defence- industries in the city do not have much to expect from the budget. The prime reason cited by few is that the budget does not really have anything to offer for the private players in defence sector. "The defence budget as such revolves around procurements, acquisitions, R&D and salaries and fixed expenses. There is not much in the defence budget for the private sector industries working for defence," said one of the entrepreneurs.

D S Kamlapurkar, former president of city-based Defence Electronics Manufacturers' Association (DEMA) said, "The budget does not have a mechanism so that anything can be expected for the private sector in defence. DEMA has represented the private industries at the highest levels demanding for deemed export status to defence supplies, additional depreciation for R&D expenditures- both of which can help the private players to recycle and invest their own money into R&D and other development. We have also been demanding for making available land on lease for defence clusters- which however is outside the scope of the budget."

Better pension schemes for unorganised sector

For the last six years, the annual budget has been promising several sops for the unorganised sector. However, promises are never kept. We hope atleast this year, things would change and the finance minister can make some announcements. We have been demanding good pension schemes for the unorganised sector and although it has been promised year after year, it is yet to implemented. For anganwadi workers although the honorarium has been increased to Rs 3000 there are no other benefits. They should be given retirement benefits. Even as other states
have their own welfare boards there is nothing done for the state. Health, nutrition are the other areas which need focus and the ASHA workers need good honorarium.

**Debt relief schemes to be considered**

The most important thing that the government should take into consideration is the Debt Relief and Loan Waiver Scheme (DRLW) of 2008. Today, the farmers are burdened by debts, both from banks and other institutions, which has been leading to a spurt in farmer's suicides over the years. A farmer does not have petrol or diesel to irrigate his land with. Electricity is a farmer's largest expenditure. However, the government has completely ignored this fact. The government needs to make electricity available to farmers on cheaper rates. Also, there is a need to produce food grains at subsidised rates. There needs to be a change in policies which ensure that a lot more money is allocated for providing electricity to farmers.