



Not just tax cuts, but a bigger role

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Allow me to begin at the end. I do not seek any tax cuts from the Budget. No tax break, no tax holiday, no concessions.

The credentials of the economists at the helm, weaving the threads of the budget together are impeccable - perhaps the best that India has seen. And we, in public relations, are happy to pay a fair share in our success to the government - be it 8 per cent service tax or 10 per cent or what the government might deem just.

Public relations will thrive so long as our economy and the corporate sector is doing well. And that it is. The Indian economy is on a healthy roll. It has turned the year with an 8.2 per cent growth rate. The private sector has graduated to a position where its share of GDP and total investment stands at around 75 per cent.

An AT Kearney-sponsored FDI Confidence Survey 2004 ranked India the third most attractive investment destination after China and the US. Foreign institutional investors have brought in \$8 billion and foreign direct investment has risen by 54 per cent.

Foreign exchange reserves have crossed \$116 billion. The services sector too is on the upswing, having climbed a few notches each year, closing 2001-02 with a growth rate of 6.8 per cent; 2002-03 with 7.1 per cent and 2003-04 with 8.7 per cent.

This is not to say that I am not asking the government to focus on our domain. Quite the contrary. I am requesting the government to give us our due. But I am looking at the Budget and beyond.

Public relations will gain its rightful place only if the government were to utilise this powerful medium for meaningful communication on matters of critical importance. Exploiting the power of professional public relations to carry the message of public health programmes, education initiatives, water supply and sanitation programmes, infrastructure development, etc

It is this which can bring alive the true meaning of public relations. This is being witnessed worldwide, particularly in the United Kingdom, and it would be wise to emulate a good example.

The Finance Minister's 2004 speech did not mention the words public relations. We would not be unhappy if he repeated the same. But the budget points the direction ahead and also provides the budgets to the departments to walk in that path - and communicate the direction being taken.

For we all know that a successful government programme can turn overnight into a perceived failure if it is not communicated right.

I am hoping that the Budget would show the true mettle of the economists at work. Men that think out of the box and far ahead. So as I began, I am not expecting or seeking tax cuts. I am seeking much, much more

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