

PM sets targets for 115 backward districts

Narendra Modi

At the Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told all Ministries to report on the initiatives taken up by them for 115 backward districts and also to come up with an action plan for these districts.

This is part of a concerted effort by the government to focus attention on these districts.

Officials in-charge

Last November, the NITI Aayog had appointed officials of the ranks of Additional Secretary and Joint Secretary as *prabhari* or in-charge to coordinate the efforts of the Centre and the States.

“The Prime Minister was categorical that all Ministries should look into ways to contribute to development of these districts. He wants us to compile all the initiatives we have taken in the past and also what we plan to do in future,” a senior Cabinet Minister said.

The Prime Minister will also start his visits to these districts from April 14.

Speaking on Friday at a conference organised by the NITI Aayog on the transformation of these 115 most backward districts in the country, Mr. Modi said that they should not be seen as just poor or backward but as sites of potential transformation.

Among the 115 districts, 35 are affected by Left-wing violence.

The districts were identified on the basis of indicators of education, health, nutrition, basic infrastructure, rural household electrification, and access to potable water and individual toilets.

Jharkhand on top

Jharkhand tops the list, with 19 backward districts, followed by Bihar with 13 districts; Chhattisgarh is at the third spot with 10 districts. NITI Ayog is developing a real-time monitoring mechanism of key performance indicators and will rank the districts on a continuous basis.

While selecting the districts, maximum weight was given to data of landless households dependent on manual labour.

The other criteria were nutritional level of children below five years of age and their drop-out rate from schools.

The government is also expecting electoral benefit from the plan because these districts also have a high population of tribes and Dalits, a section the BJP is hoping will stick with it in the Lok Sabha elections to be held in 2019.

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