

GRAND PLANS FOR THE FARM SECTOR

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Agriculture Issues and related constraints

In full strength: President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and others on their way to the central hall of Parliament for the joint session. Sandeep Saxena

The Centre plans to invest Rs. 25 lakh crore in the farm sector in the coming years to boost agricultural productivity, President Ram Nath Kovind said on Thursday.

Addressing the joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament, the President said that a committee of Chief Ministers was being set up to look into structural reforms in the field of agriculture. With regards to drought-hit areas, Mr. Kovind said the government was aware of the crisis and was assisting farmers and tackling drinking water shortages with the support of State governments and village *sarpanchs*.

Listing the BJP-led government's decisions in its first 21 days, the President began by highlighting the expansion of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, an income support scheme, to all landowning farm families. Earlier, the scheme was only open to small and marginal farm families owning less than two hectares of land. The expansion of the scheme in keeping with a BJP poll promise would increase its annual budget to Rs. 90,000 crore (from the previous Rs. 72,000 crore estimate), said Mr. Kovind, adding that Rs. 12,000 crore had already been disbursed in the past three months.

Pension scheme

Other initiatives include the contributory pension scheme for farmers above the age of 60, a Rs. 13,000-crore scheme to fund treatment of common diseases in cattle, the Grameen Bhandaran Yojana to provide village-level storage facilities for farm produce and the plan to create 10,000 new farmer producer organisations. A new department for fisheries development is expected to usher in a new blue revolution, the President said.

With regard to higher education, the President said the government was "striving to increase the number of seats in the country's Higher Education System by one-and-a-half times by 2024." This would create two crore additional seats, he said.

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