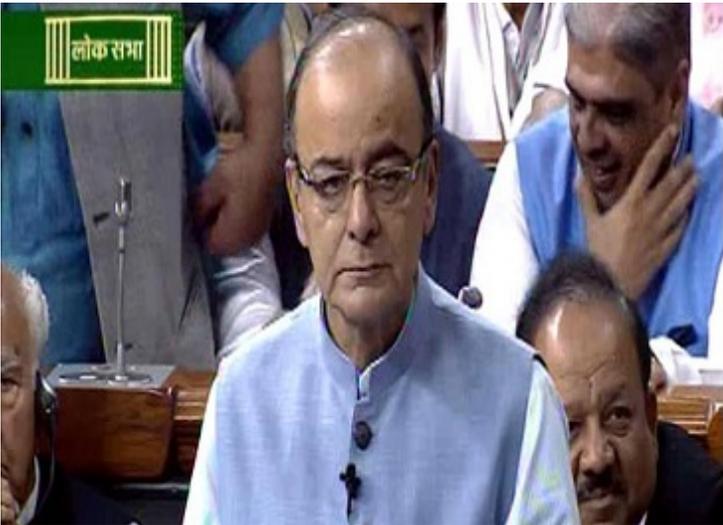


Budget 2016 focus on agriculture and farmers' welfare

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Major focus on agriculture and farmers' welfare, a new health protection scheme etc are major highlights of the General Budget 2016-17 presented in Lok Sabha today by Union Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley

The Finance Minister said the agenda for the next year will be to 'Transform India' in this direction. He highlighted that the budget proposals are built on this transformative agenda with nine distinct pillars which include: Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare; Rural Sector; Social Sector including Healthcare; Education, Skills and Job Creation; Infrastructure and Investment; Financial Sector Reforms; Governance and Ease of Doing Business; Fiscal Discipline and Tax Reforms.

Mr Jaitley announced that the Government will reorient its interventions in the farm and non-farm sectors to double the income of the farmers by 2022. He said total allocation for Agriculture and farmers' Welfare is Rs 35,984 crore. Stating that the 'Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana' has been strengthened and will be implemented in mission mode, he said 28.5 lakh hectares will be brought under irrigation under this Scheme. He also underlined that the implementation of 89 irrigation projects under AIBP, which have been languishing will be fast tracked.

The Finance Minister announced creation of a dedicated Long Term Irrigation Fund in NABARD with an initial corpus of about Rs 20,000 crore. To achieve all these, a total provision of Rs 12,517 crore has been made through budgetary support and market borrowings in 2016-17. He also said, simultaneously a major programme for sustainable management of ground water resources has been prepared with an estimated cost of Rs 6,000 crore and proposed for multilateral funding. The Minister said at least 5 lakh farm ponds and dug wells in rain fed areas and 10 lakh compost pits for production of organic manure will be taken up by making use of allocations under MGNREGA.

Mr Jaitley said the Soil Health Card Scheme will cover all 14 crore farm holdings by March 2017. He said 2,000 model retail outlets of fertilizer companies will be provided with soil and seed testing facilities during the next three years.

The Finance Minister announced that the allocation under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana has been increased to Rs 19,000 crore and it will connect remaining 65,000 eligible habitations by 2019.

In the budget special focus has been given to ensure adequate and timely flow of credit to the farmers. Against the target of Rs 8.5 lakh crore in 2015-16, the target for agricultural credit in 2016-17 will be an all-time high of Rs 9 lakh crore. To reduce the burden of loan repayment on farmers, a provision of Rs 15,000 crore has been made in the BE 2016-17 towards interest subvention.

The Finance Minister informed that for effective implementation of Prime Minister Fasal Bima Yojana, Rs 5,500 crore have been provided in the Budget 2016-17. He said to make dairying more remunerative to the farmers, four new projects will be taken up: First the 'Pashudhan Sanjivani', an animal wellness programme and provision of Animal Health Cards ('Nakul Swasthya Patra'); Second, an Advanced breeding technology; Third, Creation of 'E-Pashudhan Haat', an e market portal for connecting breeders and farmers; and Fourth, a National Genomic Centre for indigenous breeds. These projects will be implemented at a cost of Rs 850 crores over the next few years.

Mr Jaitley also announced a new health protection scheme which will provide health cover up to Rs One lakh per family for economically weak families. For senior citizens of age 60 years and above belonging to this category, an additional top-up package up to Rs 30,000 will be provided. In order to make quality medicines available at affordable prices, 3000 stores under Prime Minister's Jan Aushadhi Yojana will be opened during 2016-17. He said that a 'National Dialysis Services Programme' will be started to provide dialysis services in all district hospitals.