

## Rural development may get more funds this budget

Rural development may get substantially more funds in this budget - about Rs.500 billion from Rs.410 billion last year.

'We have already got Rs.410 billion in the last year's budget. This year we expect to get Rs.500 billion,' Rural Development Minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh told IANS in an interview.

According to ministry sources, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has recently said this year would be the year for rural development.

Allocations for rural development in the national budget have been rising steadily in India. In 2004-05, it was Rs.160 billion, which went up to Rs.247 billion in 2005-06 and Rs.310 billion in 2006-07. It is Rs.410 billion in the current fiscal.

'The allocation for the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY or national rural self-employment scheme) alone should be around Rs.25 billion,' the minister told IANS.

'My target is to ensure employment or self-employment to at least one member from each of the below poverty line (BPL) families.'

SGSY is aimed at taking long-term care of those not covered by the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS).

'Besides covering BPL families, SGSY will also extend to 30 percent of above poverty line families.'

Meanwhile, the Central Guarantee Council, with about 25 members including social activists Aruna Roy and Jean Dreze, is meeting Feb 6 to discuss the results of NREGS.

This flagship scheme of the ruling United Progressive Alliance-led government to help the rural poor completed two years on Feb 2.

Immediately after the assessment, the government plans to extend the scheme to all districts in the country. So far it is implemented in 313 districts of India.

There are other areas of rural development that requires higher expenditure, the rural development minister said.

These include Indira Awas Yojana (housing scheme for the poor) 'where we expect to spend Rs.50 billion this year'.

Similar raises have also been sought for the Pradhan Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojana (Prime Minister's rural roads scheme) and drinking water and sanitation schemes.

'We expect the government to give us Rs.3 trillion in the 11th plan (2007-12).'

*Faraz Ahmad* ( © IANS / India eNews)