

ET takes a look at some of Centre's big-ticket schemes to see if they have brought the promised 'achhe din' for common man

# Modi Sarkar Scores High on Social Welfare

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**New Delhi:** Two years ago, the Narendra Modi government faced the opposition's barbs of being a "suit-boot ki sarkar" or a government of the well-heeled. As it turns three, the BJP-led NDA government has turned the rhetoric around by putting its stamp on social welfare schemes while reaching out to the poorest of the poor.

ET takes a look at some of the Centre's big-ticket social welfare schemes – some old and recast, others completely new – to examine whether they have brought the promised "achhe din" or good days for the common man.

## FOR THE DIFFERENTLY-ABLED

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) had always been helping the differently-abled, providing assistive devices to visually impaired and physically disabled through Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids/Appliances (ADIP) scheme. But under the Modi government the scheme has become a sought-after initiative, with members of Parliament cutting across party lines beseeching the little-known DEPwD to hold special camps in their constituencies.

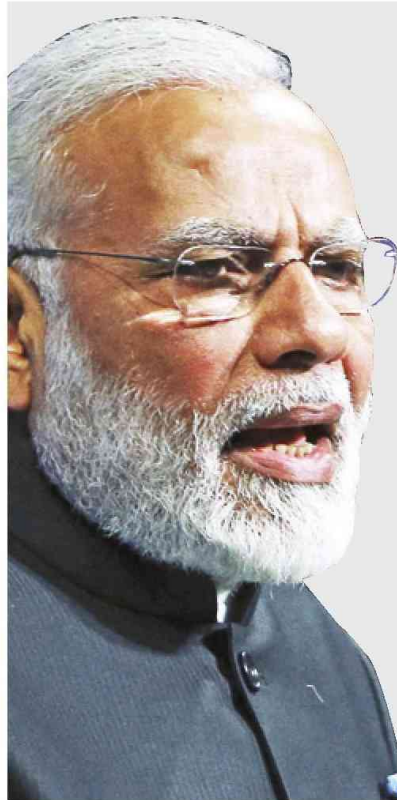
In the past three years, the government has held 4,718 camps benefiting 6.40 lakh beneficiaries under this scheme, up from a mere 37 camps in 2012-13 and 2013-14.

Awanish Awasthi, who spearheaded the turnaround of the scheme between 2014 and 2017 as joint secretary at DEPwD at the time, told ET, "The scheme was already there. We used to release funds to NGOs to provide assistive devices. But the approach to the scheme changed. The biggest factor was ALIMCO (Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India) products became better and more products were added." With a new minister at the helm of affairs, the scheme has become the government's way of reaching out to the people. Thaawar Chand Gehlot has brought a humble touch to the scheme. The government, along with the district administration, publicises the camp in advance. Buses ferry the differently-abled to the camp site on the day. Gehlot now breaks bread with the beneficiaries.

**CHALLENGE:** The government faces the tough task of keeping the supply in sync with growing demand, holding survey camps and meeting the expectations of the people even as it has rolled out a special scheme to help elderly people below poverty line with assistive devices.

## THE EMPLOYMENT CHANGE

From Modi's critique in Parliament that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) was a "living monument to UPA's failure" to the biggest-ever allocation of ₹48,000 crore in the Budget, the NDA government has travelled a long way on the



## FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE

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path of rural employment.

Aparajita Sarangi, the joint secretary in charge of the scheme in rural development ministry, said there have been several course corrections since 2014. "The first initiative was to bring down advisories of the government. There were so many circulars, some contradicting each other. We found that 1,039 advisories had been issued since the scheme's inception. We have now brought it down to a 64-page document." The ministry worked overtime to bring down the number of registers maintained at the gram panchayat level from an average of 22 to 7.

"The biggest initiative has been job card verification. In September 2016, there were 13.04 crore job cards. More than eight crore job cards have been verified and 93.75 lakh cards have been deleted. This has brought about greater transparency in the system," said Sarangi.

The scheme has seen a marked improvement. As per the ministry's data, the average wage rate per day per person has gone up from ₹132.7 in 2013-14 to ₹161.75 now. Earlier, about 25-35 lakh works got completed every year, but in 2016-17, 52.4 lakh works were completed.

**CHALLENGE:** Delay in wage payments is a major concern. As per the government's estimates, 52% of the wages are going beyond 15 days' delay. Of this, 20% is between 15-30 days' delay. The government is planning to concentrate on 17 states which account for 95% of the transactions under the scheme.

## FUELLING HOPE

When Modi launched the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) on May 1 last year, not many predicted that this initiative would be a game changer in the social sector. The promise was to provide five crore LPG connections to BPL households over three years. A flagship programme, PMUY aims to edge out smoke from the kitchens of Indian households by providing clean cooking fuel. The reach of the programme is such that it was touted as one of the reasons for BJP's sweeping win in Uttar Pradesh Assembly election. The government has already provided 2.10 crore LPG connections covering 694 districts. The maximum connections have been provided in UP.

**CHALLENGE:** The government has given LPG to first-time users in rural households. It has fuelled safety concerns. Though the government runs a safety clip at every camp where free connections are distributed, fire incidents are reported.

## HOME SWEET HOME

Apna Ghar, Apni Chhat (Own home, own roof) – this was Modi's poll promise when he rode to power in 2014. The target is very high, Housing for All by 2022, the 75th year of India's independence. The scheme has two components – rural and urban. Under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin), the allocation has been increased from ₹15,000 crore in 2016-17 to ₹23,000 crore in 2017-18. Under PMAY (Urban), 17,73,533 affordable houses have been approved for 2,008 cities and towns in less than two years compared to 13,82,768 sanctioned for 1,061 cities in UPA's 10-year reign. An investment of ₹96,266 crore has been approved so far for construction of houses for urban poor as against ₹32,713 crore during 2004-14.

**CHALLENGE:** Private participation has been poor. Certain elements of PMAY (Urban) – including in-situ redevelopment of slums – are completely dependent on private players. This has been a big area of concern for the government.

## THE DIRECT TOUCH

Direct Benefit Transfer or DBT is an attempt to change the mechanism of transferring subsidies directly to bank accounts of beneficiaries, linked with unique Aadhaar ID. Launched by Congress-led UPA on January 1, 2013, it has been taken forward by the NDA government. All scholarship schemes across ministries, MNREGA and LPG subsidy are all transferred directly to bank accounts. The government has been quickly adding more schemes under DBT – the number has shot up to 220 from 134 in 2016-17. The target is to cover 534 schemes, including about 300 cash schemes, over 200 in-kind schemes under DBT, by March 2018. **CHALLENGE:** Protection of personal data remains a challenge. Several government websites have inadvertently put out personal data – Aadhaar numbers and linked bank accounts – on their websites.