

Uttar Pradesh budget seeks to empower farmers, youth and women

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LUCKNOW: The spotlight was on farmers, youth, women, rural development and economically vulnerable sections of the society as Yogi Adityanath government presented its fifth budget, probably last before the next state elections, on Monday.

Despite financial constraints due to Covid-induced lockdown and the over state revenue falling short of the target this fiscal, the government tried to give all-is-well message to the people of the state by tabling a paperless budget of Rs 5.5 lakh crore, which is Rs 38,000 crore more than previous year's size.

Immediately after the budget, the CM tweeted, "In the middle of a global pandemic, this budget inspires hope and gives wings to UP's possibilities." Later, addressing a press conference, he said, "It would totally transform the ease of living and ease of doing business." He also congratulated finance minister Suresh Khanna for his 'all-inclusive' budget

In his over 100-minute speech, Khanna said that the theme of this year's budget was 'Empowerment Through Self-Reliance'. The four previous budgets of the Yogi government were dedicated to industrial development, women empowerment, farmers and the youth.

As expected, the government has opened its purse string for farmers, dedicating a special plan 'Atma Nirbhar Kirshak Smavit

Yojana' for doubling their income by 2022. Besides, Rs 600 crore was allocated to a special insurance plan for farmers who meet with an accident. Khanna announced that those working in the agriculture farms whether farmers, co-croppers or farm labourers would be insured under the chief minister insurance scheme

The budget also provides Rs 700 crore for a free water scheme for farmers and Rs 400 crore for crop loans. Farmers would also get a big chunk from Rs 3,100 crore earmarked for pension yojana.

In an outreach to labourers, it launched a special scheme of migrants and a new health scheme for unorganised workers, besides allocating Rs 5,500 crore to MNREGS, which emerged as a saviour for lakhs of migrants who came back to UP at the onset of the pandemic. Besides, Rs 15,000 crore was earmarked for Jal Jeevan Mission (rural).

In a major push to infrastructure development, Rs 7,689 crore was allocated for the proposed Ganga Expressway between Meerut and Prayagraj. All other under-construction expressways too were given decent allocations while the proposed RRTS between Delhi and Meerut got Rs 1,350 crore. Proposed airports and Jewar got Rs 2,000 crore.

While there were a slew of announcements for youth, including free tablets for eligible students enrolled under Abhyudaya scheme, the government went all out to impress women with expansion of several existing schemes.

The total proposed expenditure on education is Rs 92,107 crore, which is 16.8% of the total budget.

The government also allocated Rs 650 crore to the development of Ayodhya. Other religious places like Kashi, Vrindavan, Chitrakoot and Naimisharanya, too, were allocated funds for facelift and development. "With the development of a world class international airport in the name of Lord Ram in Ayodhya, I am confident that the footfall in this pious birthplace of Lord Ram, would be more than any other destination in the world," Yogi said.

In view of the ongoing pandemic, the government also allocated Rs 33,423 crore to the health sector, which is more than 6% of the total budget. The proposal includes the setting up of a world class virology lab and research centres on diabetes and kidney ailments.

"I don't want patients from the state to go out of Uttar Pradesh for their treatment," the CM reiterated.

Allocation for urban development, power and housing sectors were routine. Legislators, however, got their area development fund back, though with a rider. There was no new tax and also no free vaccine, as speculated.