

Govt to discuss rural funds with states

Looks To Address Woes Of Non-Cong States

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New Delhi: The Union rural development ministry has decided to ape Planning Commission's discussion with states for annual finances to send a stronger message about Centre's authorship on welfare schemes, a move aimed at addressing the long-standing gripe of Congress that states were cornering all the credit.

The ministry has asked states to prepare for "annual plan discussion for RD schemes" from 2012, a consultation to finalize their budget for each scheme funded by it. It would be an elaborate process with issues of discussion being intimated to the states, seeking response. They would form the basis for official-level meetings which would then be capped by ministerial-level discussions in March.

Presently, the Centre funnels money to states on the basis of estimates provided by officials.

With states making a bee-line outside Krishi Bhavan to seek their share of funds for job guarantee scheme, rural roads, rural drinking water and sanitation campaign among others, it is hoped the process will correct the perception on who funds these big-ticket schemes implemented by states.

With Rs 88,000 crore, the



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highest civilian expenditure of any Union ministry, Congress is cross that it does not get the credit for rural focus. While these schemes are part of a concerted attempt to woo the politically crucial rural poor, states have long outwitted the Centre with imaginative steps like changing the names of schemes. Congress's anger was most visible in UPA-1 when party chief Sonia Gandhi publicly exhorted workers to call the states' bluff on flagship scheme MGNREGA.

RD minister Jairam Ramesh has taken a leaf out of Planning Commission's book where states face the high-powered panel each year to seek allocation of resources. The annual ritual leaves little doubt on who funds a state's budget. The ministry, however, has couched its political in-

tent in the need for "lending seriousness and depth in the implementation of programmes".

Key schemes funded by the Centre include MGNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana, Indira Awas Yojana, Total Sanitation Campaign and old age pension. The high expenditure makes the states dependent on RD ministry for their performance on welfare front. However, the Centre's role rarely exceeds the funding part and though monitoring is its mandate, it is known that Centre will not stop funds for violations for fear of earning the wrath of beneficiaries.

However, the annual discussion will include the aspect of budget allocation, issues about implementation of schemes, problems of states as its mandate.