

PM Modi launches direct cash benefit scheme for farmers

PM-KISAN Farmers with less than two-hectare land holdings to get ₹6,000 yearly

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GORAKHPUR: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hit out at the Opposition for remembering farmers just before elections as he launched the ₹75,000 crore Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) cash transfer scheme for small and marginal cultivators.

The scheme was announced in the interim budget on February 1 ahead of national polls due this summer. ₹6,000 would annually be transferred in three instalments into bank accounts of farmers with less than two-hectare land holdings.

Modi contrasted the scheme with farm loan waivers. He said the waivers, unlike the scheme, benefit a select few as he initiated the electronic transfer of the first instalment of ₹2,000 each into the bank accounts of 10.1 million farmers under PM-KISAN. Modi said the earlier farm loan waiver schemes only benefitted "Congress workers" and added the PM Kisan scheme will benefit all farmers.

"Loan waivers would have been easy and convenient for us too. We could also have distributed lollypops for political and election benefits, but we cannot commit such a sin. Loan waiver benefits only a select few," said Modi in UP's Gorakhpur.

Farm loan waiver was among the Congress's key promises as it wrested power from the BJP in December in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, which account for 65 out of 545 Lok Sabha seats.

Modi insisted PM Kisan was not just an "election promise" and warned the farmers against rumours that the money being given under the scheme will be taken back. "This is your money



■ Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns after taking a holy dip at Sangam during Kumbh Mela on Sunday.

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and it will not be taken back."

Modi said the first instalments under the scheme have been deposited into the bank accounts of farmers directly and those left out will get them soon. "There are no middlemen in this scheme and it is being implemented with complete transparency," Modi told a gathering after interacting with a select group of farmers from different states via videoconferencing. Modi, who also launched several other projects worth ₹10,000 crore in Gorakhpur and Eastern Uttar Pradesh, said his government was working to provide all possible resources to help farmers double their incomes by 2022.

The Opposition parties linked the scheme's launch to the national polls to oppose it.

In a series of tweets, former Union finance minister and Congress leader P Chidambaram said the BJP government "will officially give a bribe" of ₹2,000 per agricultural family to get their votes. "Nothing can be more shameful in a democracy than 'Bribe for Votes'. The greater shame is that the Election Commission [EC] is unable to stop the 'bribe for votes'," he said.

The EC can stop a scheme only after the model code of conduct

comes into forces. The code prevents a government from announcing schemes that may influence voters in the run-up to elections. It comes into force only after a poll schedule is announced. The EC is expected to announce the dates for national elections in the first week of March, according to people aware of the developments.

Former UP CM and Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Akhilesh Yadav criticised the scheme calling it a poll sop. "The farm crisis is a national crisis and needs a national solution, no poll-sop can implement change at this scale—we stand with farmers and promise to bring about a #GoldenRevolution for all farmers regardless of caste, creed or religion," he tweeted.

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati, whose party is contesting the national elections in Uttar Pradesh in alliance with SP, attacked Modi for launching the scheme just before polls. She called the scheme an "insult" to farmers. Mayawati added a farmer's family will get ₹17 daily under the scheme and called the scheme an election year stunt which "the people have seen through".