

SANCTION HOUSES UNDER PMAY IN RURAL AREAS

Centre to raise budget for MGNREGA work

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IN THE wake of the floods in Kerala, the Centre is set to increase labour budget for works under the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) and sanction houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) in the state on a priority basis.

On Saturday, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the flood-ravaged state, the PMO issued a statement that under MGNREGA, 5.5 crore person days was sanctioned in the labour budget for 2018-19.

"Any further request for incurring person days would be considered as per requirement projected by the state," it said.

On the housing for all scheme in rural areas under PMAY-G, the PMO stated, "Villagers,

whose Kutchha houses have been destroyed in the devastating floods, would be provided Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin houses on priority irrespective of their priority in the Permanent Wait List of PMAY-G".

The Ministry of Rural Development has sanctioned Rs 1,800 crore under MGNREGA for 2018-19 for 5.5 crore person days of work, as against Rs 1,911 crore given for 6.19 crore persons days of work in 2017-18. Ministry officials said this would be increased depending on works the state has to take up.

"Last year too, during the cyclone in Tamil Nadu, we increased MGNREGA labour budget depending on request from the state. This (Kerala), of course, is a disaster on a much larger scale. Soon as the state comes up with a revised labour budget, we will approve it immediately," MoRD Secretary Amarjeet Sinha said.

Under MGNREGA, which provides 100 days of paid employment to anyone who de-

mands it in rural areas, the number of days can be increased to 150 to compensate for loss of farm income in times of rural distress or natural disasters such as drought or floods.

Ministry officials said that in addition to providing additional paid employment, PMAY houses for Kerala would be sanctioned on a priority basis. "We follow a strict criteria of wait-list where housing permission is prioritized for the homeless, SC/ ST or women-headed households," an official said. "In case of Kerala, irrespective of the priority list, money would be released so that construction of houses that were slated for next year or 2020 could be advanced..."

Officials said a decision on whether PMAY funds will be extended to cover even the vast number of pucca houses destroyed by the floods has not yet been taken. It will depend on the state's proposal to the Centre, they said.