

# Show how schemes improve lives: PMO tells ministries

**REVIEW** Decision after August review meeting of the projects by PM Modi

**Moushumi Das Gupta**

moushumi.gupta@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** The Prime Minister's Office has asked ministries in charge of key infrastructure projects and schemes to not just ensure the completion of these between August and March next year — the next parliamentary elections are due shortly after — but also showcase how these have changed lives for the better, according to the minutes of a August review meeting of the projects by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The unprecedented outcome monitoring points to one of the main election plans of the Bharatiya Janata party-led National Democratic Alliance government in next year's elections. On August 2, the PM reviewed the status of rural and urban infrastructure projects, and other schemes across ministries — highways, houses for eligible families, railways.

The decision to focus on outcome based monitoring comes amidst frequent criticism from opposition parties that many projects and schemes have failed to deliver on the ground.

According to the minutes, the deadlines set by the PMO come with "action steps", which aim to

**➤ This is the first time that there has been a shift in focus from input based evaluation to output, outcomes and performances. It was missing earlier and was a bane of lot of policies and schemes in the past.**

RAJIV KUMAR, NITI Aayog vice chairman

not just assess measurable outcome of schemes, like spending or asset creation, but their impact on beneficiaries' life and living standards. For instance, all ministries have been told to carry out a study about the "positive impact on the environment" of various schemes of different ministries by October 31.

Besides, ministries have been directed to conduct internal workshops about the "good governance, innovation and efficiency increase which has been implemented in ministries and the benefits these have brought for improving the life of a common man."

The PMO has also told all ministries to balance the budget in terms of "regional coverage" and that it should be "outcome oriented."

Amitabh Kant, CEO of federal think tank NITI Aayog said such outcome-based monitoring has

led to reforms in many key sectors including education and health.

"Such monitoring helps to check if what is said in review meetings about a scheme is actually getting translated on the ground. This also ensures that the Centre, states and districts works in tandem," he said. Kant was among the about two dozen officers who attended the August 2 meeting chaired by Modi.

Public policy experts, however, are of the view that an outcome based monitoring won't be of much help as long as the government does not address gaps in implementation.

"This government is in a hurry to get the various schemes and programs off the ground. It has opened up far too many programs, some of which have episodic impacts. The reason is poorly designed policies and schemes, which makes their

implementation problematic," said Sebastian Morris, professor of economics at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He said the real failure is the top down approach of the government where inputs from those with their feet on the ground, stakeholders, civil society are not encouraged.

"This is despite the success of the Jyoti Gram Yojna in Gujarat, since the problems at the national level cannot all be projected but require innovations in design and the right organisations, besides coordination across multiple departments," Morris said. Among the infrastructure ministries, the main focus areas of the government are roads, housing, railways, aviation, and ports.

For instance, the rural development ministry has been directed to expedite provision of land to 3.94 lakh landless eligible beneficiaries by December while the housing ministry has been told to finalise the national urban rental policy and model tenancy act by October.

Rajiv Kumar, NITI Aayog's vice chairman said this kind of outcome-based monitoring helps in improving not only delivery of service but speedy implementation on the ground.