

Quotes on UNION BUDGET 2023-24



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India is on the cusp of growth and following the trail for \$5 trillion economy in next two years requires extraordinary plan and investment. The economic growth depends on social, physical and commercial infrastructure development and above all, availability of clean water takes precedence in all.

The Union Finance Minister while presenting the Budget for 2023-24, has announced a few measures and scheme relevant to water sector. The flagship scheme of Jal Jeevan Mission, which is to be concluded next year as per initial planning, has been given and enhanced budget of INR 70,000 Crore (\$854 million), an increase of INR 10,000 Crore (\$122 million) from the last year allocation. This scheme is transforming rural water supply situation and in over three year's period since its launch, it has already added 78.3 million additional households with functional tap water connections. The task to connect the remaining 83 million rural households in a year time seems very challenging, and we expect that the period of Jal Jeevan Mission needs to be increased to achieve the objective of providing direct water supply in every household in the country.

The Finance Minister also announced a central assistance of INR 5,300 Crore (\$64.6 million) to the drought prone central region of Karnataka to be given to Upper Bhadra Project for creating infrastructure for sustainable micro irrigation and filling up of surface tanks for drinking water purposes. This investment will help easing of water scarcity challenges which Karnataka is facing for a long time.

Another scheme to improve socio-economic conditions of the particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) under the Pradhan Mantri PVTG Development Mission will have an allocation of INR 15,000 Crore (\$183.1 million) that will be made available to implement the mission in next three years under the Development Action Plan for the scheduled tribes. Apart from building other basic facilities, clean drinking water and sanitation will also be part of the scheme, helping poor tribal population to have access to clean drinking water and organised sanitation facilities.

However, the total budget allotment has been slashed across multiple sectors and schemes of the central government, there is no particular allocation announced for wastewater treatment and reuse facilities which was widely expected. There should have been targeted plan and investment to reduce water distribution losses in India, which is a big challenge in water sustainability.

The technology adoption in water sector is quite inadequate compared to other developing nations. India having the second largest population and wide spread water stress and unsustainable water usage, we need to have specific plan to invest in technological solutions in water management and wastewater recycling and reclamation projects, while making targeted efforts in reducing water consumptions in agriculture and industrial productions.

With water scarcity looming large over urban India and big challenge of untreated wastewater being discharged into water sources, there has to be concrete framework, robust planning and adequate financial support to tide over the challenges water sector in India is facing and will face in coming years.