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‘Social sector spend fell in past 5 years’

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Kolkata:

The government has reduced social sector spending over the past five years, except for a handful of projects such as Swachh Bharat Mission, said developmental economist **Jean Dreze**.

The Belgian-Indian economist claimed even the “flurry of schemes” launched in the runup to Lok Sabha polls were inadequate to cater to the demand for social sector spending. “Large cuts in social sector spending were witnessed even during the first Union Budget. While the government tried to justify some of the cuts, they had to give a relook into the budgetary allocation under heads like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), where the allocation was almost halved,” Dreze said.

At an interactive session organised by Pratichi Trust in Kolkata, Dreze said such cuts translated into attempts to restrict National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

According to Dreze, a former member of Sonia Gandhiled National Advisory Council, there was a perception in a section of media at the Narendra Modi government’s inception that India had gone overboard in welfare expenditure. “In the last five years, it seemed the government was trying to save money. No major initiative was taken except Swachh Bharat Mission,” he said and alleged an attempt to devalue initiatives taken by earlier governments.

“The government has put big money in PM-Kisan scheme. But restricting that to farmers will leave agriculture-related workers out of its ambit,” he said.