NEWS TODAY

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1. BISP ALL SET TO INITIATE PILOT PHASE OF NEW POVERTY SURVEY AFTER RAMZAN

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The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is all set to initiate the pilot phase of new poverty survey after Ramzan followed by national roll out in January 2017.

To make new poverty survey accurate and dynamic, two different approaches ï desk approach (self registration) and door-to-door approach ï will be utilised in the pilot phase districts. The second approach will be used in 12 pilot districts while the desk approach will be used in the rest of four pilot districts, an official of BISP told APP on Sunday.

ñIt has been decided in principle that whole of the country will be covered equally in the upcoming survey and no area will be left out,ò he informed.

The National Socio Economic Registry (NSER) updation would be another milestone for the BISP, he said said, adding that it had geared up all its efforts for NSER update.

Keeping in view all the factors like low accessibility and difficult terrain and security situation, modern techniques would be used in the upcoming survey, he stated.

No political interference would be allowed and the BISP would make sure that no deserving person was left out in new poverty survey, he pledged.

The BISP chairperson is visiting the pilot phase districts in a bid to devise an effective strategy for resurvey in consultation with local government, administration and other stakeholders and to create awareness among masses regarding resurvey, he further commented.

(Daily Times, Nawaiwaqt and Jinnah also carried the story)

2. IMF REVIEW UNDER EFF

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Unlike previous reviews under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) which were generally marred by concerns over non-fulfilment of the prescribed criteria, the 11th review under the facility was successfully completed without any reticence or ifs and buts. Speaking at a joint news conference in Dubai on 12th May, 2016, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and IMF Mission Chief to Pakistan Harald Finger announced the successful conclusion of the 11th (second last) review of 36-month programme worth dollar 6.4 billion, paving the way for the disbursement of dollar 510 million to Pakistan as the government had met all the performance targets in the third quarter of the current financial year. The IMF Mission Chief confirmed that "after productive discussions, the mission and the Pakistani authorities have reached staff-level agreement on the completion of the 11th review under the EFF arrangement. The agreement is subject to approval by the IMF Management and the Executive Board. Upon completion of this review, SDR 360 million (about dollar 510 million) will be made available to Pakistan." Finger acknowledged the authorities' strong programme performance in the third quarter and welcomed the government's plans to continue with fiscal consolidation in the coming fiscal year, further expanding the tax net, strengthening the fiscal responsibility framework, addressing financial losses in the PSEs, continuing to pursue energy sector reforms and accelerating competitiveness in the business climate. "Completing these reforms will help consolidate macroeconomic stability and create conditions for higher growth and jobs' creation," he asserted.

Dar, as usual, was more upbeat about the performance of the economy. He said that successful completion of the 11th review was indicative of the strong commitment of the government to implement difficult structural reforms. The country met all of the end-March 2016 criteria, including those on SBP's net domestic assets, net international reserves, and foreign currency swap/forward position by significant margins. Quantitative criteria on government borrowings from the SBP and budget deficit for end-March were over-performed. *Likewise, indicative targets of cash transfers through the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and power sector arrears were also met.* FBR had not only achieved its third quarter collection target of Rs 715 billion but had exceeded it. GDP growth rate for the current year was expected to be around 5 percent, fixed investment had increased, electricity and gas supplies continued to improve, external sector outlook was stable, foreign exchange reserves stood close to dollar 21 billion, ratio of FBR taxes to GDP had gone up significantly and inflation remained contained to less than 3 percent during July-April of the current fiscal year.

The successful conclusion of the 11th review under the EFF in Dubai is definitely welcome news for the country. We are quite optimistic that Pakistan would be able to receive dollar 510 million after the approval of the IMF management and its Executive Board which would be merely as formality as the country was able to meet all the performance criteria and indicative targets prescribed under the programme. The inflow of dollar 510 million into the country would not only increase foreign exchange reserves held with the SBP but also pave the way for inflows from other sources. Thankfully, no waivers were involved this time which would have constrained the government to offer explanations to the IMF staff and seek backdoor connections to get a positive nod from the Executive Board of the Fund. Another positive aspect of the present review was the commitment of the government to continue the reform process even after the conclusion of the present programme. This commitment is highly encouraging as reforms in various areas of the economy including expansion of tax net, energy sector reforms and ensuring competiveness in trade and business would continue to promote macroeconomic stability and put the country on a sustainable path of development. However, while welcoming the statements of both the Mission Chief and Ishaq Dar on the occasion, we would urge upon the authorities of Pakistan to beware of certain latest developments in the economy and take appropriate steps to rectify the situation before it gets late. For instance, exports, of late, have dropped significantly, home remittances are stagnating, inflation is up and there is lot of uncertainty in the country due to the Panama Papers which could scare away foreign investors. It cannot also be denied that most of the governments find it very difficult to follow the reform process, especially in the area of fiscal policy, when the election time draws nearer which is going to be the case insofar as Pakistan is concerned. Hopefully, the government is well aware of the need to continue to tread on a difficult path and remove all the obstacles that could pose a threat to macroeconomic stability and sustainable growth of the economy in the medium to long-term. Furthermore, it needs to be stressed and remembered that the achievement of revenue targets has entailed withholding refunds, foot dragging on payment obligations, presumptive taxation and a minimum tax at 8 percent of the turnover on most of the services sectors that has the potential to run some of the businesses to the ground. These measures are not sustainable and need to be addressed in the FY17 budget.

3. NAWAIWAQT

خواتین کو بی آئی ایس پی کارڈ فراہم کرنے کے بہانے لوٹنے والا گروہ گرفتار

گروہ میں خاتون بھی شامل ہے، بے نظیر انکم سپورٹ پروگرام کے جعلی رجسٹریشن فارم برآمد

48 گروہ گرفتار بقیہ

4. POVERTY AND SOCIAL SAFETY NETS LINKAGES

By Rashid A Mughal

Published in Pakistan Observer

ONE of the daunting task for the countries in Asia and Africa is the reduction of poverty, which in spite of all the efforts of affected and vulnerable countries, continues to affect major portion of their population. In Pakistan, though the official data released indicates the Poverty level has gone down, but the same is being challenged by independent researchers and NGO. In Thar (Sindh) the people are dying due to poverty and lack of basic human necessities, like health care, clean water, food and power besides education facilities.

Although significant achievements have been made on many of the MDG targets worldwide, progress has been uneven across regions and countries, leaving significant gaps. Millions of people are being left behind, especially the poorest and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location. Targeted efforts will be needed to reach the most vulnerable people. Despite enormous progress, even today, about 800m people still live in extreme poverty and suffer from hunger. Over 160m children under age five have inadequate height for their age due to insufficient food. Currently, 57 million children of primary school age are not in school.

Almost half of global workers are still working in vulnerable conditions, rarely enjoying the benefits associated with decent work. About 16,000 children die each day before celebrating their fifth birthday, mostly from preventable causes. The maternal mortality ratio in the developing regions is 14 times higher than in the developed regions. Just half of pregnant women in the developing regions receive the recommended minimum of four antenatal care visits. Only an estimated 36 per cent of the 31.5 million people living with HIV in the developing regions were receiving ART in 2013. In 2015, one in three people (2.4 billion) still use inadequate and unhygienic sanitation facilities, including 946 million people who still practise open defecation. Today over 880 million people are estimated to be living in slum-like conditions in the developing worldôs cities.

In the developing regions, children from the poorest 20 per cent of households are more than twice as likely to be stunted as those from the wealthiest 20 per cent. Children in the poorest households are four times as likely to be out of school as those in the richest households. Under-five mortality rates are almost twice as high for children in the poorest households as for children in the richest. In rural areas, only 56 per cent of births are attended by skilled health personnel, compared with 87 per cent in urban areas. About 16 per cent of the rural population do not use improved drinking water sources, compared to 4 per cent of the urban population. About 50 per cent of people living in rural areas lack improved sanitation facilities, compared to only 18 per cent of people in urban areas.

Women remain at a disadvantage in the labour market. Globally, about three quarters of working-age men participate in the labour force, compared to only half of working-age women. Women earn 24 per cent less than men globally. In 85 per cent of the 92 countries with data on unemployment rates by level of education for the years 2012ï2013, women with advanced education have higher rates of unemployment than men with similar levels of education. Despite continuous progress, today the world still has far to go towards equal gender representation in private and public decision-making.

Large data gaps remain in several development areas. Poor data quality, lack of timely data and unavailability of disaggregated data on important dimensions are among the major challenges. As a result, many national and local governments continue to rely on outdated data or data of insufficient quality to make planning and decisions. A World Bank study shows that about half of the 155 countries lack adequate data to monitor poverty and, as a result, the poorest people in these countries often remain invisible. During the 10-year period between 2002 and 2011, as many as 57 countries had none or only one poverty rate estimate. In sub-Saharan Africa, where poverty is most severe, 61 per cent of countries have no adequate data to monitor poverty trends. In todayÕs rapidly changing world, real-time information is needed to prepare and respond to economic, political, natural and health crises. However, most development data have a time lag of two to three years. Recent innovations are helping to circumvent this problem.

Knowing where people and things are and their relationship to each other is essential for informed decision-making. Comprehensive location-based information is helping Governments to develop strategic priorities, make decisions and measure and monitor outcomes. Once the geospatial data are created, they can be used many times to support a multiplicity of applications. A geodetic reference frame allows precise observations and ÒpositioningÓ of anything on the Earth and can be used for many social, economic and environmental purposes, such as precision agriculture and monitoring changes in sea level rise.

Pakistan, which has been governed by civil and military regimes, since its independence (1949), could not develop a good political system. After its independence, the country saw an unstable democratic regime (1947Ð 1958), with frequent governmental changes. During the first military regime (1958Ð1969), the high GDP growth, and foreign aid, only benefited the élite industrial society. During the democratic period (1972Ð1977), the governmentÕs measures, including the nationalisation policies and restrictions on industrialists, created a considerable uncertainty, resulting in a fall in private investment and flight of capital. During the second military regime (1977Ð1988), again, the growth rate remained high, due to foreign aid and remittances, which fuelled the private and public consumption expenditures. Again the country saw a democratic era during the 1988Ð 1999 period, with frequent changes in government, deteriorating law and order conditions and a poor economic situation. The military take-over, in 1999 continued till 2008.

Economic growth remained high during the 2003Ð2006 period during which the external factors played a major role in shaping the economic landscape of Pakistan. In addition to political instability, Pakistan has faced poor governance, natural disasters, conflicts and terrorism. These are serious impediments in the way of growth and poverty-reduction efforts. It is hoped the rulers will practically demonstrate their determination to tackle this hydra-headed issue, facing the country.

ð The writer is Former Consultant, International Labour Organisation and International Organisation for Migration, Director (Emigration), Protector of Emigrants.

5. FG TARGETS 8 MILLION PEOPLE FOR ITS 2016 SOCIAL INTERVENTION SPENDING

The federal government would be directly impacting the lives of more than eight million Nigerians in different social investment 2016 budget spending that would provide succour and be a ready-made palliative to ordinary Nigerians.

This disclosure was made on Saturday night by the Senior Special Assistant for Media and Publicity to the Vice President, Mr Laolu Akande, in an interaction with the press in Abuja.

He gave new details and a breakdown of the interventions and palliatives, some of which he said would be starting in a matter of weeks thus:

The direct payment of N5,000 monthly to one million extremely poor Nigerians for 12 months as provided for in the 2016 budget for which N68.7B has been appropriated.

The direct provision of very soft loan -cash for market women, men and traders, including artisans and Agric workers. This would be for a total of 1.76m Nigerians, without the requirement for conventional collateral. Some of the traders will likely get about N60,000.

A total sum of N140.3B has already been appropriated for this in the budget

Payment of between N23,000 to N30,000 per month to 500,000 unemployed graduates who would be trained, paid and deployed to work as volunteer teachers, public health officers and extension service workers among other responsibilities.

They would also be given electronic devices to empower them technologically both for their assignments and beyond.

Similarly, 100,000 artisans would also be trained and paid.

N191.5B has been set aside for this in the passed budget.

At least 5.5 million Nigerian primary school children -ie starting first in 18 states ï three per geopolitical zone, would be fed for 200 school days under the free Homegrown School Feeding Programme.

N93.1B has been appropriated for this in the 2016 budget.

100,000 tertiary students in Science Technology Engineering & Maths ï STEM, plus Education will partake in the N5.8B already provided for this education grant in the budget. This payment would also be paid directly to the students.

When added together this year alone, more than 8 million Nigerians would be benefiting from the Social Investment budget.

Akande, who works from the Office of the Vice President, said that the 500billion Naira social investment programmes of the Buhari administration is a ready-made palliative to lift Nigerians from poverty and economic hardship.

ñLong before now the Presidency has made adequate arrangements in the 2016 budget to ensure that Nigerians are lifted from poverty and hardship,ò the spokesperson stated.

This will not only assuage the current pains arising from the new fuel pricing regime, but will provide ongoing social safety nets for over 8 million Nigerians this year alone, according to Akande.

He added that this is beside the jobs that would be created by the infrastructural projects that would be restored and the new ones that would soon be taking off.

ñThe Buhari presidency is keen to ensure that Nigerians are lifted and that if necessary on an ongoing basis, palliatives measures would always been considered to address the conditions of the people.ò

http://www.channelstv.com/2016/05/15/fg-targets-8-million-people-for-its-2016-social-intervention-spending/