

2.6 Million Poor to Get Debit Cards for Food

The Punjab government has decided to issue debit cards to 2.6 million poorest of the poor this year to enable them meet their food requirements. The Direct Cash Subsidy Programme will cost Rs15.90 billion as in the first phase 1.2 million beneficiaries of the Pakistan Income Support Programme (PISP) belonging to Punjab will be issued debit cards instead of smart cards after due scrutiny within a month. This was decided in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Direct Cash Subsidy Programme headed by Education Minister Rana Mashhood which evolved a mechanism for issuing cards to implement this plan for lessening the burden of increasing price hike during the last one year. Ministers Bilal Yasin, Abdul Waheed Chaudhry and Ms Hameeda Waheedud Din, MPAs Dr Ayesha Ghaus and Mian Muhammad Rafiq, IT University Vice-Chancellor Dr Omer Saif, PISP Secretary Haseeb Athar, DG Abdul Rehman Abid, and officers from Nadra and other relevant departments were in attendance. Rana Mashhood said that those excluded from the data should be provided with a chance to appeal before their relevant tehsil office for correction and inclusion of their names in the plan. The meeting also finalized the roadmap for disbursement to the remaining 1.4 million new beneficiaries in the second phase. It was decided that a coordination committee headed by the chief secretary would collaborate with the PISP to reconcile the matters relating to PISP's devolution to the province after 18th amendment. The meeting also formed a sub-committee comprising MPA Dr Ayesha Ghaus, Food Secretary Aslam Kamboh, and Director (Food) Muhammad Usman Younas to work out solutions pertaining to the reservations about case management and complaint processing besides determining the new criteria for beneficiaries.

Dawn - October 15th, 2013

Equal Participation: 'Women Farmers Can Help Tackle Food Insecurity'

The role of women in promoting modern agricultural practices can tackle food insecurity and malnutrition affecting 58 per cent of the country's population," University of Agriculture, Faisalabad Vice Chancellor Iqrar Ahmed Khan. He was speaking at a seminar, Improving Female Farmers' Skills to Enhance Food Production, organized by the Department of Rural Sociology at the UAF. The VC said agriculture was directly linked with poverty and hunger alleviation. He lauded women farmers who, in addition to looking after their households, worked in the farms. "The Punjab has a rich culture and traditions which must be promoted at university level." This, he said, could give the rural population a better understanding of how to use knowledge to improve goods and services. Khan said he was of the view that Pakistan was facing threats from food insecurity and depleting natural resources. "In this scenario, greater efforts, on the part of all stakeholders, are needed to fight the crises... We need to ensure women play their role," he said. The VC said the UAF and the International Centre for Development and Decent Work (ICDD) had launched a provide livelihoods to farmers. Farmer Rukhsana Zafar said women farmers could increase their income manifold by applying latest agriculture practices. "Increased production will not only help them but will also ensure food security," she said. Department Chairman Ashfaq Ahmad Maan said the country could not progress without contributions from women. Agriculture Development Bank's (ADB) Kanwal Mukhtar said the bank was offering several types of loans to farmers. Dr Arshad Waseem said Pakistan's population would reach 204 million by 2015. He said tunnel farming could help farmers

increase their profits by Rs300,000 to Rs500,000 per acre annually. Dr Fawad Ahmad, Naveed Farah, Rashid Waseem, Dr Yaqeeb, and Izhar Ahmad Khan also spoke on the occasion. The seminar was a part of the four-day Rabi Festival at that UAF. The event is meant to serve as a platform where farmers, researchers, teachers, industrialists, entrepreneurs, policy makers and students can interact. It went on till October 27th.

The Express Tribune - October 26th, 2013

Earthquakes in Pakistan

Baloch Militant Attacks Affecting Quake Relief

Baloch militants continued their attacks against security forces and government officials engaged in relief operation, badly affecting relief activities in earthquake-stricken areas of Awaran and Kech districts. Official sources said that Army and Levies personnel were attacked by militants in Mashkay and Awaran areas. The attack in Mashkay area left one man dead and two others injured. Sources indicated that armed men opened indiscriminate fire on a vehicle carrying Levies personnel in Jhaljaho area of Mashkay tehsil. They intercepted the vehicle in the area, badly beat up Levies personnel after snatching their weapons and then escaped. In another attack in Mashkay, militants fired rockets and bullets on army personnel distributing relief goods among earthquake-hit people. Baluchistan Assembly Deputy Speaker Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo said that militants fired two rockets at an army relief camp in Mashkay, but one of the rockets exploded in a house. As a result of the rocket explosion, one man was killed and two others were seriously injured. Another rocket exploded away from the camp. No casualty was reported in the second attack. In some areas, sources said, militants set relief goods, including tents and food items, on fire. These were distributed among earthquake-stricken people. PDMA Baluchistan Director General Hafiz Abdul Basit said that 620 trucks carrying foods, tents and other stuff had reached affected areas and these had been distributed among earthquake-affected people.

The Dawn - October 10th, 2013

Khattak Expresses Solidarity with Quake Victims

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Pervez Khattak has said his province and Balochistan were facing similar challenges of terrorism and natural calamities and said the two governments were striving to resolve the problems faced by people. Mr. Khattak said his government was looking to the federal government to initiate talks with the Taliban and emphasized that negotiations should be opened immediately because any further delay could adversely affect the peace efforts. "We are in a state of war." He said that negotiations provided a better way of resolving issues relating to terrorism. Mr. Khattak said the security forces as well as the public had been suffering for a decade now and a large number of people had lost their lives in acts of terrorism. The KP chief minister said he was visiting Balochistan to express solidarity with the victims of earthquakes that hit Awaran and other areas. He claimed that Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf had a very clear policy on issues, including terrorism. All the problems could be resolved through dialogue. Mr. Khattak also called on Balochistan Governor Mohammad Khan Achakzai and exchanged views on issues of mutual interest.

Dawn - October 25th, 2013

Burdened Economy: 'Pakistan Has Spent \$200b on Afghan Refugees'

Pakistan cannot afford to host Afghan refugees any longer and has spent more than \$200 billion in the last 30 years on them, said Minister for States and Frontier Regions Abdul Qadir Baloch. Baloch said international humanitarian organizations should assist in providing protection and ensure the timely and safe return of refugees to their home country. Addressing a press conference in Peshawar on Friday, he said initially Pakistan was hosting five million refugees and even today there are more than three million registered and unregistered refugees in the country, most of who are living in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The minister further mentioned the government's two-year extension to refugees on the request of UNHCR, the United Nation's Refugee Agency. Baloch said the government will continue to provide protection to Afghans in Pakistan, but "the government of Afghanistan must improve the conditions of its country so refugees can start repatriating. They can only return if there is durable peace in Afghanistan," Baloch said. He also directed law enforcement agencies to not arrest or harass Afghans as long as they possess their old registration cards, since the new cards may take two months to be issued. Baloch said he would order action against any police official found harassing refugees without a reason. "Refugees often get involved in different types of crime as they are legally not allowed to work in Pakistan. This also worsens law and order problems for the country." he said. Baloch said the Refugees Affected and Hosting Areas programme has been initiated by the government. "Donors have pledged \$600 million for the project, but so far only \$15 million has been given." The minister said various development projects, including the supply of clean drinking water, construction of educational institutions, hospitals and parks, would also be initiated in areas where refugees have lived and are still living.

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