

Food Bill: Experts seek proper selection, revamped PDS

NEW DELHI, Sept 8: Proper selection of beneficiaries by the states and a reformed mechanism of public distribution needs to be put in place if the ambitious food security bill has to achieve its target of mitigating hunger from the country, experts said.

While N C Saxena, sitting member of National Advisory Council which had been instrumental in drafting of the bill, banked on schemes like Aadhar in plugging the PDS loopholes, former member Harsh Mander called for focusing on exclusion of the ineligible first, rather than selecting the eligible.

Saxena underscored the need for reforming the PDS mechanism and said while many states have improved, a number of them have a long way to go. "States like Odisha, Chhatisgarh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat are doing well. Big states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar along with the northeastern states and Delhi, are not up to the mark," he said.

"A person in Faridabad districts of Haryana was found possessing more than 500 ration cards. These things have to be done away with if we want to ensure that nobody goes to bed hungry. Aadhar can help in streamlining the PDS mechanism, and weeding out the ineligible," Saxena said.

The food security bill, an ambitious project of the UPA and touted as a game-changer ahead of the next Lok Sabha polls, was recently cleared by both the Houses of Parliament. Mander also pointed out that the real issue will be the identification of beneficiaries and the next Government at the Centre will need to work towards striking a synergy among the states.

"Implementation of the food bill will very much depend on the next Government. Identification of those to be entitled with foodgrains is a real challenge and I believe, that rather than who should get, the focus of the states should be on who should not. Exclusion of ineligible is more crucial than selecting the actual beneficiaries," he said.

Mander also expressed displeasure over the non-inclusion of NAC suggestions dealing with vulnerable sections like destitute, homeless, children outside school and migrants, in the version of bill passed by Parliament. He, however, said although not much talked about, the issue of malnutrition has somewhat been addressed in the bill through universal maternity entitlement. "93 per cent of the workforce is out of the formal sector. The bill gives special attention to women belonging to this section as it entitles Rs 1,000 per month to them for the first six months after the child birth," he said.

Besides revamping of the PDS system, both Saxena and Mander stressed on strengthening procurement mechanism in the states to ensure that the farming community can also reap the benefits from the law and get good value of their produce. "In many states like UP, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal, governments are not directly involved in rice procurement and it is purchased by rice mills. Due to this, farmers don't get a good value for their harvest."

"This loophole needs to be plugged both for the betterment of farmers, as well as to meet the foodgrain requirements of the governments," Saxena said. Mander also advocated a decentralised mechanism of foodgrain procurement to ensure that benefits of the law trickle down to the farming community too and they get fair value of their produce.

Saxena also brushed aside apprehensions about country's storage capacity, saying the focus should be more on making the foodgrains available to the needy, rather than storing them in godowns. "We need 60 m.T. Of foodgrains for the food security bill and our storage capacity is 55 m.T. What is the problem? If we keep the foodgrains in godown, they will not only rot there, but the prices will also increase," he said. (PTI)

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GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR, DIRECTORATE OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY DEPARTMENT JAMMU. (Chairman Divisional Level Recruitment Committee).

Subject: Short listing of candidates for Recruitment of Class IV Posts in Animal Husbandry Department, Jammu (Divisional Office). An advertisement for recruitment of candidates for Class IV posts in Animal Husbandry Department, Jammu (Divisional Office) was issued on 03.08.2013. In compliance with the provisions of the Public Service Commission Act, 1956, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, Directorate of Animal Husbandry Department, Jammu, has decided to hold a written examination for recruitment of candidates for Class IV posts in Animal Husbandry Department, Jammu (Divisional Office) on 15.09.2013 at 10:00 AM. The details are as follows:

Table with columns: No., Category, Name of Applicant, Percentage, D.O.B., Address, Tehsil, District, 10th (Age), Weightage of 10th, 10+2 (Age), Points for 10+2, Total Points, Category, Remarks. The table lists numerous candidates and their details across various districts and categories.

Ensure safety of senior citizens: Centre tells States

NEW DELHI, Sept 8: The Centre has directed states to ensure safety of senior citizens by urgently reviewing existing policing arrangements for them and prepare plans to face current and future challenges for their protection.

The Home Ministry has asked all states and Union Territories to prepare a database of old persons living alone, identify crime-prone areas inhabited by them and issue guidelines in this regard. The Ministry also issued directions regarding policing arrangements.

Enquiries should be held to fix responsibility for lapses whenever serious incidents of crime against the elderly take place and suitable action should be taken on it, the advisory said. The Home Ministry asked states to take note of the fact that in recent decades, support mechanism of family and responsibility of the young to look after the elderly has weakened due to underlying societal changes such as emigration of the young, lower fertility levels, increased life expectancy and the appearance of the nuclear family.

"Police should maintain and regularly update the database about the elderly and obtain feedback about security arrangements in force for them," the Home Ministry advisory said. Holding rich senior citizens as most vulnerable, the Centre told the states and UTs to fast-track security clearance process of their personal and security staff and organise special drives for verification of the antecedents of servants, drivers and other domestic help as also of tenants.

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The Home Ministry asked the states and UTs to ensure that senior police officers periodically inspect records of the elderly in police stations to ensure they are regularly updated. It also asked states to ensure that beat staff along with community or NGO members regular visit residences of senior citizens living alone. Senior police officers should also periodically interact with older persons living alone and set up senior citizens' special cell at state and district police headquarters to coordinate and monitor their safety, besides setting up a 24x7 senior citizens' toll free helpline.

The advisory came in the wake of growing incidents of brutal attacks on senior citizens living alone, particularly in metro cities. (PTI)

ISRO to unveil Mars Orbiter Mission on Sept 11

BANGALORE, Sept 8: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will unveil its most ambitious Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) here on September 11.

The mission, carrying five pay loads, is scheduled for launch during October 21-November 19 using the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle-C25 (PSLV-C25), according to official sources.

"The spacecraft, with all the pay loads, has completed the Thermo-Vacuum Test that extensively tests the spacecraft under simulated space environment. PSLV-C25 launch campaign has also commenced at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota. The first stage with the strap-ons has been assembled," sources added.

The launcher is likely to be ready for integration by October 10. After leaving the earth's orbit in November, the spacecraft will travel in space for about ten months before finally entering the Red Planet's orbit.

The spacecraft will be placed in an elliptical orbit, the nearest point of which from Mars' surface will be 500 km and the farthest point will be 80,000 km.

The 1,350-kg spacecraft will carry five instruments/pay loads totalling a mass of 15-kg selected by the Advisory Committee for Space Sciences (ACCOS), to study the Martian surface, atmosphere and mineralogy. Checking for methane, mapping the Martian surface and sending data from the orbital imaging pay load are among the important activities of the mission. (UNI)

EPFO may approve 8.5% interest rate for 2013-14

BANGALORE, Sept 8: Retirement fund body EPFO is likely to announce an interest rate of 8.5 per cent on provident fund deposits for 2013-14 to its over five crore subscribers, the same as provided for last fiscal.

According to sources, the preliminary estimates indicate that the payment of 8.5 per cent rate of interest will leave no deficit for the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) and could rather leave some surplus for the body.

"In all likelihood, the interest rate on PF deposits for this fiscal will be fixed at 8.5 per cent," a source said. The source further said if the interest rate is to be increased to 8.75 per cent for the current fiscal, it would result in some deficit, which might not be acceptable to the finance ministry.

The body is likely to call a meeting of its apex decision making body, the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) headed by the Labour Minister, on September 23 to approve the interest rate.

During the meeting, the trustee would reconstitute the EPFO's advisory body—Finance and Investment Committee (FIC), which recommends the rate of interest to the CBT. After the reconstitution of CBT by EPFO in June, the other sub-committees of EPFO like FIC, were dissolved and were required to be reconstituted.

As per the practice, the EPFO would have to place the proposal before FIC after which it is considered by the CBT for taking a final call on the matter. Once approved, the proposal is put before the Finance Ministry for its concurrence. The source said the CBT will meet again after reconstituting FIC sometime before Diwali (which falls on November 3) to approve the rate of interest for this fiscal.

EPFO paid 8.5 per cent interest rate to its subscribers in 2012-13, which was higher than 8.25 provided in the 2011-12 fiscal. (PTI)

Kareena open to do intimate scenes if script demands

MUMBAI, Sept 8: Actress Kareena Kapoor Khan says that marriage has not changed her perception towards roles in films and she is open to do intimate scenes if the script demands. "Marriage has nothing to do with the kind of roles or such things... I fail to understand why people associate love or marriage with your career," Kareena said in an interview here.

Kareena had done some intimate scenes in Vishal Bhardwaj's 'Omkar' with Ajay Devgn and was also a kissing scene with Aamir Khan in '3 Idiots'. In Prakash Jha's recently-released film 'Satyagraha', there was a romantic sequence between Kareena and co-star Ajay Devgn. However, Kareena reportedly refused to do the scene.

"It was all media reported, whatever the script requires, I do it. But in a film like 'Satyagraha' I feel it was not required. It was not a romantic film that we need to have it (kissing and intimate scene)... It was more about the fight of a common man against the system," Kareena said.

When asked if her husband actor Saif Ali Khan had seen 'Satyagraha', she said, "No. He does not watch films much." Saif and Kareena tied the knot last October after a five-year courtship. "I don't feel overburdened by responsibilities. My priority has always been my family. I have always balanced my personal and professional life and I will continue to do so," she added. Kareena is happy with the response she is getting for her latest film 'Satyagraha'. "I am trying to add variety in my work and 'Satyagraha' is not a regular film. I am happy with the kind of response we are getting for the film. It shows that things are changing today and people are ready to accept film with good content," she said. (PTI)

Cash on chopper DGCA cancels licenses of two pilots

NEW DELHI, Sept 8: Acting for the first time on an election-related complaint, the DGCA has suspended licenses of two pilots for making an unauthorised sortie in poll-bound Nagaland early this year which was intercepted by an EC team for carrying Rs one crore cash.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has taken action on the complaint of 'Election Expenditure Monitoring' cell of EC after its surveillance team on February 16 seized the cash from a helicopter allegedly being used by a candidate of Nagaland Peoples Front (NPF) after it landed at Assam Rifles helipad in Longleng district of the State. The cash is still in possession of the Commission and the political party has recently approached a competent court to get the money released.

The DGCA has found the two pilots, Captain K N G Nair and Captain Sunil Kumar (copilot), in violation of air safety norms and for not possessing mandatory and valid Air Defence Clearance (ADC) to fly on Phomching-Longleng-Phomching route on the said date and also failing to report the incident to the DGCA or the local Air Traffic Control (ATC).

The Bell 412 helicopter VT-AZB operated by Global Vectra Helicorp Ltd Mumbai was on a wet lease contract with charterer King Rotors and Air Charter Private Ltd for a period of one month from February 2013. (PTI)