

Tax amnesty scheme being given final shape: official

The government said on Wednesday that the proposed tax amnesty scheme to broaden the tax base is being given final shape to seek the federal cabinet's approval next week ahead of introducing it. This was stated by Secretary Finance Younas Dagha during a brief interaction with media persons after he came out from a meeting of Finance Committee of the National Assembly to attend some other urgent matter. Responding to a question, he said the visit of IMF mission is expected between April 27 and April 30.

The secretary finance stated that a Pakistani delegation will attend the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meeting scheduled in Colombo on May 15, 2019 with the compliance report by the country. To a question about the presentation of the budget for the next fiscal year, Dagha said that though exact date has not yet been finalised, last week of May 2019 is under consideration for the purpose as various budgetary targets are under discussion at various levels of ministry before their finalisation.

Earlier, the secretary finance told the committee that there was a 23 percent increase in loan disbursement to farmers during July-February 2018-19 as compared to the same period of last fiscal year with disbursement of loans to agriculture sector increased to Rs 720 billion from Rs 513 billion. He added that borrowing by the industry has increased from Rs 442 billion in the last fiscal year to Rs 572 billion in the current fiscal year.

However, some members of the committee pointed out that most of the loans in agriculture sector have, in fact, been rolled over rather than new borrowing. On the request of members, the committee sought a proper brief with specific details regarding lending to the sector with quantum of increase to new borrowers in farming sector.

Representatives of the State Bank of Pakistan informed the committee that private sector institutions under indicative regime are being encouraged to lend to the agriculture sector and annual indicative target of financing to the agri sector was increased from Rs 700 billion to Rs 1 trillion.

The committee was briefed by chairman Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) regarding the work plan assigned by the Special Committee on Agriculture Products for uplifting the agriculture development.

The chairman told the committee that Pakistan is behind the other SAARC countries as well as the world in agriculture research and development and stated that his organisation has been provided considerably less that sought budget for the current fiscal year. He requested the committee to help in getting the supplementary budget of Rs 1,352 million approved.

Syed Naveed Qamar said that nothing is being done for research and stated that chairman PARC instead of telling the committee about day-to-day affairs and operation of the organisation should inform as to what is being done for development of agriculture as "the entire economic growth depends on agricultural output".

The chairman informed the committee about ongoing projects as well as new projects under the Prime Minister's initiatives in agriculture sector and challenges in terms of quality to export of agricultural products.

The committee recommended to Ministry of National Food Security & Research and PARC for preparing a comprehensive presentation along with their recommendations for improvement of research and development in agriculture sector. The committee further recommended to Ministry of National Food Security & Research that working papers should be prepared in line with the given agenda by the Special Committee on Agriculture Products.