

Two lakh soldiers deployed for Pakistan's first census in 19 years

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Islamabad: Pakistan on Wednesday launched a countrywide census, in what is first such exercise in nearly two decades, amid massive security for which some two lakh soldiers have been deployed.

Chief Statistician Asif Bajwa inaugurated the process of 6th census from Attock district in Pakistan's largest province of Punjab.

Some 119,000 officials including 84,000 enumerators are taking part in the census with 200,000 troops providing security and monitoring the process to ensure authenticity.

The exercise to record the national population has been launched amidst security fears and concerns about the political fallout.

Pakistan last conducted a census in 1998, which recorded a national population of nearly 180 million. Pakistan now has about 200 million people, becoming the sixth most populous country in the world.

The first phase of housing and population census will continue till April 15, followed by a 10-day break and then the second phase will begin from April 25 and continue till May 25.

Bajwa said that in the first phase the census will be completed in 63 districts of the country, including 16 in Punjab, 8 in Sindh, 13 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, one in tribal region, 15 districts in Balochistan and 5 each in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan.

In the second phase, census will be conducted in 21 each districts of Punjab and in Sindh, 18 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 17 in Balochistan, Islamabad Capital Territory, and five each in PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Bajwa urged the people to enthusiastically participate in the census process and cooperate with the officials.

Under the constitution, census should be held every 10 years to determine the exact population and allocation of resources among provinces on the basis number of people, but it had been delayed due to security concerns and political wrangling.

It has become political issue as Punjab province, the country's largest, fears that its share in the national resources may diminish as population of other provinces might have increased.

The smallest province of Balochistan fears that local Baloch may become a minority due to the presence of Afghan refugees who are believed to have got citizenship in droves through fraud.

The final outcome of the census would be known by July and it may lead to demarcation of constituencies ahead of general elections next year.

The census will show the exact number of people living in Pakistan, which houses one of the largest Muslim population of the world.

- (With PTI inputs)