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India's Rajasthan state stamps 'I'm poor' outside 150,000 households for easier identification

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An Indian state has begun marking "I'm poor" and "I'm extremely poor" outside households which fall under the category of below poverty line (BPL) for easier identification. The Rajasthan government said the stamping on the exterior walls would allow them to process state-funded subsidies quicker. BPL families are those that live on \$1.25 a day (£0.99) as per the criteria set by the Indian government.

As many as 150,000 houses have been marked in bright red letters against a yellow background following a controversial decision by the state, ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

While the state authorities say this will prevent those who are not under BPL from misusing the state-sponsored public distribution system, others have called it a humiliating step. In some houses, the markings were made in the local language multiple times. It was also written on the walls that the families living in the houses receive subsidised food grain from the government.

State and federal governments in India offer various schemes to financially support the poor. In some cases, socially backward communities are also granted special concessions in the government-run public welfare systems.

"We have to suffer this humiliation for 10 kg of wheat. It has become difficult to hold our head high," Santra Devi of Kundera Dungar village told the Hindustan Times.

Another resident of a village named Dausa told News 18: "All the people passing by see this and make fun of us. We feel ashamed. It is as if the government is trying to provoke us.

The step has drawn widespread condemnation from political observers and opposition parties. They say the Rajasthan government has only insulted the people by this kind of identification methods.

"It's a sick joke. If the state government provides them ration under the Food Security Act, it's their legal right and not a charity from the government. It proves the BJP governments (in Delhi and the states) are anti-poor," Manish Tewari, spokesperson for the opposition party Indian National Congress, told reporters.