

Dear Investor,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we are pleased to present **MCB Pakistan Sovereign Fund** accounts review for the half year ended December 31, 2021.

Economy and Money Market Review

The fiscal year started on strong note with government's renewed focus on reviving growth, as new finance minister announced several incentives in fiscal year 2022 (FY22) budget to spur growth. This was in addition to lagged impact of monetary easing (6.25% drop since start of covid lockdowns), low inflation and incentives on capital investment at lower rates (TERF), which further supported to growth premise. However, the sharp recovery in domestic demand, coupled with rising international commodity prices, led to a strong pick-up in imports and a commensurate increase in the current account deficit. Widening deficit also reflected on the exchange rate as the rupee depreciated by 10.4% against USD during first half of fiscal year ending June 2022 (1HFY22).

The country posted a current account deficit of USD 9.1bn in 1HFY22 compared to a surplus of USD 1.3bn in the corresponding period last year. This was the largest CAD since FY18, when country witnessed a deficit of USD 8.7bn in first half of the fiscal year. The deterioration came in primarily on the back of higher imports which grew by 56.9% in 1HFY22 compared to export growth of 29.0%. Trade Deficit increased by 86.0% to USD 21.2bn compared to USD 11.4bn in same period last year. The unprecedented increase in imports mainly came from historic high prices of our commodity basket including crude oil, palm oil, coal coupled with one time vaccines imports. As per our estimates, prices contributed more than two-third of the increase in import bill.

Foreign exchange reserves of central bank saw an increase of USD 0.4bn as Pakistan received USD 2.75 billion from the IMF under its new SDR allocation and USD 3bn from Saudi Arabia for reserve support. The inflows helped in stabilizing forex reserves despite the huge current account deficit and due repayments.

Inflation remained a concern as rising commodities continued to create challenges for policy makers. Headline inflation represented by CPI averaged 9.8% in 1HFY22 compared to 8.6% in 1HFY21. The rise mainly came from higher food prices, elevated energy costs (both electricity and fuel) and second round impact of PKR depreciation, which keeps the prices of imported commodities high. Core inflation as measured by Non Food Non Energy also depicted an upward trend as it increased to 8.5% in December 2021 compared to 6.9% in June 2021. The SBP increased policy rate by a cumulative 275bps to 9.75% in this half to counter inflationary pressures and slow aggregate demand.

On the fiscal side FBR tax collection increased by 32.5% in 1HFY22 to PKR 2,920bn compared to PKR 2,204bn during same period last year. This exceeded the target of 2,633bn by 287bn. The improved tax collection was primarily on the back of higher custom duty and sales tax collected due to higher imports. Secondary markets yields have increased significantly in the half as SBP started the monetary tightening cycle. The recent depreciation in rupee along with persistently high commodity prices will add pressure to inflation and we expect average FY22 inflation to clock at 11.7% above the range of 9-11% forecasted by SBP. Bond yields for tenors of 3 years, 5 years and 10 years witnessed a rise of 1.7%, 1.5% and 1.2%, respectively during the period.

FUND PERFORMANCE

During the period under review, the fund generated an annualized return of 9.64% as against its benchmark return of 8.74%. At period-end, the fund decreased its exposure in cash to 52.9% from 57.2%.

The Net Assets of the Fund as at December 31, 2021 stood at Rs. 708 million as compared to Rs. 738 million as at June 30, 2021 registering a decline of 4.07%.

The Net Asset Value (NAV) per unit as at December 31, 2021 was Rs. 55.91 as compared to opening NAV of Rs. 53.32 per unit as at June 30, 2021 registering an increase of Rs. 2.59 per unit.

Economy & Market – Future Outlook

The policy makers have moved their focus from growth to macroeconomic consolidation in view of elevated current account deficit and higher inflation trajectory. The SBP took a number of measures to curtail aggregate demand and imports including monetary tightening, raising cash reserve requirement and discouraging auto financing by banning financing of imported vehicle while capping financing requirement to PKR 3mn for locally assembled cars. These steps have started yielding results with imports receding from their historic high and currency depicting relative stability.

We expect GDP to grow by 4.6% this year slightly lower than the government target of 4.8%. We expect Agriculture, Industrial and Services Sector to grow by 5.0%, 4.1% and 4.6% respectively. Industrial Sector growth is likely to remain robust but below government target due to some demand compression as a result of monetary tightening. Agriculture sector growth on the other hand is likely to exceed government estimates due to expected bumper wheat and cotton crop. The Covid Vaccination roll out has been quite successful which is anticipated to unleash Services growth as this segment was the most affected by the pandemic.

The persistently elevated international commodities prices especially petroleum, palm oil, coal, fertilizers and steel, has led to a strong pick-up in imports and a rise in the current account deficit, which we expect to close the year around USD 16 billion (4.3% of GDP). This would be the largest current account deficit since fiscal year 2018, when the country posted CAD of USD 19.2 billion (6.1% of GDP). Responding to a high CAD, we expect PKR to depreciate further to end the fiscal year near PKR 183 against a dollar.

Successful continuation of the IMF program will be a key prerequisite to keep the financial account in positive zone. The SBP is expected to continue to discourage unnecessary imports and use flexible market determined exchange rate and appropriate monetary policy setting to ensure sustainable external account position. The remittances along with bilateral and multilateral flows would also be crucial in managing our external position.

The expected rise in energy tariffs, currency depreciation and higher international commodities prices will lead to increase in inflation in this year. We expect inflation to remain in double digits for rest of the fiscal year to average around 11.7% for year. SBP has increased policy rate by a cumulative 275bps to 9.75% to counter inflationary pressures and ensure that growth remains sustainable. It has indicated that its goal to achieve mildly positive interest rate on a forward-looking basis was now close to being achieved. However, the recent surge in international oil prices poses upside risk to the equation. We expect interest rates to rise around 10%-10.5% by the end of fiscal year.

From capital market perspective, particularly equities, the recent correction in stock prices have opened up valuation. The market has priced in expected interest rate increase and currency depreciation. Market cap to GDP ratio has declined to 14.4%, a discount of 57% from its historical average. Similarly, risk premiums are close to 5.9%, compared to historical average of 1.9% signifying abnormal returns for long term investors. We believe a micro view of sectors and stock will remain important and investment selection should focus on companies which trade at a deep discount to their intrinsic value. The market is currently trading at PER of 5.5x, while offering a dividend yield of 8.2%.

For debt holders, we expect Money Market Funds to continue to seamlessly mirror policy rates throughout the year. On the other hand, government bonds yields may continue to remain at elevated levels given expected increase in interest rates. We remain cautious at the current levels of bond yields and would continue to monitor the data points to capitalize on opportunities.

Mutual Fund Industry Review

The Net Assets of the open end mutual fund industry increased by about 7.0% during the half to PKR 1,090bn at the end of 1HFY22. Total money market funds grew by about 19.9% since June 2021. Within the money market sphere, the conventional funds dominated as they grew by about 33.9% to PKR 382bn while Islamic funds declined by 2.3% to PKR 178bn. In addition, the total fixed Income funds increased by about 0.9% since June 2021, as the conventional income funds declined by 3.7% to PKR 121bn. Equity and related funds declined by 8.1% as market witnessed a decline in the half eroding AUMS as concern over macroeconomic and geopolitical factors kept investors at bay.

In terms of the segment share, Money Market funds were the leader with a share of around 51.4%, followed by Equity and Equity related funds with a share of 25.2% and Income funds having a share of 22.7% as at the end of 1HFY22.

Mutual Fund Industry Outlook

The recent increase in interest rates along with prospect of further monetary tightening would increase flows in the money market funds. The money markets funds by virtue of its short duration would be the ideal for investors with a short term horizon and low risk profile. However recent correction in stock prices have opened up valuations and long term investors would look to add equity exposure at these attractive levels. Our operations remained seamless and given our competitive edge due to aggressive investment in digital access and online customer experience, the environment provides an opportunity with growing number of investors available online.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Board is thankful to the Fund's valued investors, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan and the Trustees of the Fund for their continued cooperation and support. The Directors also appreciate the efforts put in by the management team.

On behalf of Directors,

Muhammad Saqib Saleem
Chief Executive Officer
February 08, 2022

Nasim Beg
Director/Vice Chairman
February 08, 2022