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Govt reviewing NAB laws for bureaucrats, businessmen

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet on Tuesday decided in principle to review those NAB laws or procedures which scared businessmen and deterred bureaucrats to sign files and take independent decisions. The cabinet met here with Prime Minister Imran Khan in the chair.

Speaking to reporters after the cabinet meeting, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Information and Broadcasting Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan said it was a widespread impression in the country that the overall business activities were in low gear, economy was stagnant, businesspersons and investors were scared and bureaucrats were reluctant to sign files due to certain procedures in the NAB law.

“In order to encourage the businessmen and build their confidence, the federal cabinet has decided to review those laws and procedures of the NAB which are used for arm-twisting,” Dr. Awan said. She said the prime minister met the country’s top businesspersons a number of times and during all the meetings the businesspersons raised this issue.

She said it was the need of the time to restore the confidence of business community and speed up the economic process. However, Dr. Awan made it clear that the NAB restructuring or reformation would not be such to encourage or protect corruption, as the PTI government had zero tolerance for corruption.

The government’s chief spokesperson said the federal cabinet had allocated Rs5 billion to help low income families to obtain interest-free loans. She said the prime minister had also directed that merit and transparency be ensured in the disbursement of loans.

A licensing authority is being established under the National Highway Authority (NHA) to issue internationally acceptable driving licenses. The federal cabinet approved the Christian Marriage and Divorce Bill, 2019 "as per the religious norms of the Christian community".

The Federal Cabinet also approved Pak-Turkey Strategic Economic Framework to forge stronger cooperation between Pakistan and Turkey. Prime Minister Imran Khan will head the high-level cooperation committee from Pakistan side, while the Turkish side will be headed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The framework has nine joint working groups that will be headed by minister of economic affairs from the Pakistan side. All sectors of economy will be covered by the joint working groups and 71 actionable items have been included in these.

The items including Free Trade Agreement (FTA), Technology Transfer, capacity building, and defense cooperation. This framework will help connect Pakistan with Central Asia, Russia and the West. Defence and close cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan is also a part of the TORs (Terms of Reference) of the working groups.

This will ensure that Pakistan is not only connected via the east through Gwadar but also with Western and Eastern Europe via Turkey with this framework.

The prime minister told the cabinet about the challenges faced by the government when it came to power. He said economy that was on the verge of default was revived and now it was in sustainable mode.

The current account deficit has been brought down by 30 percent and in one year it had reduced from \$19.8 billion to \$13.5 billion. The meeting also took into consideration the investment-friendly policies to encourage foreign investors, especially overseas Pakistanis.

Approval was also given for the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2019. Awan said some things had previously been left unaddressed and having ironed those issues out, approval was granted to the Bill.

"The social, cultural and religious values will be kept intact and within such a framework we will provide protection to victims of such violence," she said. Approval was also accorded for e-meters to be introduced for electricity and gas, said Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan.

Replying to a question, she said COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa had a pivotal role in the Afghan peace process and his continuity in the office was a right step because the country needed continuity in policies in the context of regional policies.

Talking about the Indian Held Kashmir, she said the government had decided to take the issue of genocide and grave human rights violations in the occupied valley to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) since the situation there constituted a strong case for the world highest court.

The government also solicited nation's support, especially of the media for highlighting the IHK situation ahead of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi address at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) summit on September 27 in New York.

She said Modi's address was slated for a day before Prime Minister Imran Khan's and urged the media to aggressively pursue the agenda of shedding light on the plight of Kashmiris. The prime minister will address the UNGA on September 27.

The special assistant further revealed that if India did not lift curfew in the IHK then Pakistan will pursue the matter "within the legal framework" on international forums.

She briefed the media about Imran-Trump conversation on phone and said the prime minister briefed Trump on how Modi was heading towards a genocide in the valley and how under a constant curfew humanity was being subjected to utter abasement, how Muslims were being held hostage and how he aimed to conduct an ethnic cleansing.

"The PM briefed him [Trump] on how after landlocking the Kashmiris, all their basic rights had been butchered," she said.

She said the prime minister reminded the entire nation, the opposition, the government and all cabinet members that Kashmir was our first line of defence and that Azad Kashmir is a gateway to occupied Kashmir.

"The way Modi is pushing them [Kashmiris] against the wall in order to fulfil his wishes, everyone is urged to keep raising their voices on this injustice and cruelty. All our voices, our actions, our efforts and energies should remain tied to this cause and we should present to the world the true face of India," said Awan. "We need to pursue this more aggressively until the voices of those oppressed Kashmiris reach the relevant forum," she added.