

Cabinet approves merger of all media regulatory bodies

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet on Thursday approved formation of the Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority (PMRA) that envisages merger of all bodies regulating media, including the print and electronic media.

In a separate meeting that was also attended by Chief of the Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, the government approved a new visa regime under which nationals of about 60 countries would be granted visa on arrival at Pakistani airports.

Against the backdrop of the tragic incident in Sahiwal in which three members of a family were killed in a police operation, Prime Minister Imran Khan decided to revamp Punjab police on the pattern of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police.

Media body

With the formation of PMRA, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Pemra) and the Press Council of Pakistan (PCP) would be merged into the new organisation.

At a press conference, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said that not only the electronic media, but also print and “cyber media” would come under the umbrella of PMRA.

Citizens of 60 countries to be granted visa on arrival

He said the government believed that there should be one regulatory authority to look after all the media, and the same laws should apply across the board.

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The minister, however, said the government would take the opposition and all bodies representing journalists on board while making rules for the new regulatory body.

Some critics claim that after putting electronic media in crisis by cutting down the rates of their advertisements, the government wants to rein in the print media.

Visa on arrival

Mr Chaudhry said the government had decided to relax the visa rules for 60 countries whose nationals would be given Pakistani visas on arrival. “Such a massive change in the country’s visa regime has never taken place in the past,” he added.

He expressed the hope that the step would help increase foreign investment and improve ties with other countries. “We are going to open Pakistan to foreign journalists, businessmen, tourists and investors,” he added.

In a separate decision, the cabinet approved application of the Pakistan Essential Services (Maintenance) Act, 1952 to all classes of employment under the Pakistan International Airlines Company Limited, Pakistan Security Printing Corporation and Security Papers Limited. The step has been taken to improve performance of the organisations.

The cabinet also approved a summary allowing a 10 per cent increase in the pension of senior citizens.

The meeting also approved the reconstitution of Pemra's council of complaints in Lahore and Balochistan.

For the Prime Minister's Naya Pakistan Housing Project, the cabinet approved supplementary grant for release of funds to the Pakistan Mortgage Refinance Company Limited, equal amount of \$58 million obtained from World Bank as first tranche of credit line of \$140m for the company.

For revamping of Punjab police, Mr Khan decided to revisit the Police Act and turn 100 police stations in the province into "model police stations".

The prime minister also decided to provide full support to the families of those who were killed in the police "encounter" in Sahiwal.

Syed Irfan Raza