

Senate body recommends amendment to Foreign Exchange Regulation Act

With an aim to prevent Hundi, Hawala and other illegal foreign exchange transactions, a parliamentary body on Monday recommended amendment to the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) 1947 to increase punishment from two years to five years along with a fine of Rs 3.5 million for involvement in money laundering. The Senate Standing Committee on Interior, which met here with Senator Rehman Malik in the chair, recommended to increase punishment from two years mentioned in Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) 1947 to five years along with fine of Rs 3.5 million.

State Minister for Interior Shehryar Khan Afridi said that present government was taking effective measures for combating Hundi, Hawala and other illegal foreign exchange transactions as well as to comply with recommendations of Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Afridi said the government was making a new standard operating procedure (SOP) for regulating functioning of private security companies. Under the new SOP, the government will check that private security guards employed by different companies are properly trained, equipped with proper guns, security cleared and physically fit, he said. He said that security companies will be asked to appoint retired personnel of armed forces and civil armed forces to ensure provision of proper salary to security guards.

He said that security companies charge over Rs 30,000 to Rs 35,000 per month from different companies or individuals to whom they provide services while they pay only Rs 12,000 to a security guard per month.

The minister said that Hajj, religious pilgrimage and private security companies had turned into lucrative business in the country. "Nowadays the people are either making efforts to obtain Hajj quota or licence of private security company," he said.

The committee also discusses issues related to delay in issuance of passports to overseas Pakistanis. Malik said the data was uploaded in the foreign countries while printing of the passport takes place in Pakistan. That, he stressed, caused considerable delay in the issuance of passports. The Ministry of Interior has been directed to provide a report in this regard.

The committee while taking up a point of public importance regarding "Protection of Street Children in Islamabad" raised by Senator Sitara Ayaz, observed that the primary objective of that was to raise attention of the government towards increasing number of children begging at traffic signals, streets and markets in Islamabad.

Ayaz urged the government for implementation on the ban on child labour and strict compliance with children's human rights. She stated that street children were commonly used for terrorist activities and urged the government to fulfil its responsibilities towards child welfare.

The committee urged a complete ban on professional begging and child labour be enforced. He stated that traffic police must report all begging activities at traffic signals, adding that as per UN's demand, the government must establish welfare institutions where street children could be provided education and skills.

Malik directed the Ministry of Interior to launch a crackdown on the beggars and ensure implementation of ban on child labour and begging in Islamabad.

Afridi appreciated the committee's move towards elimination of begging and child labour across the country, particularly Islamabad, and assured the committee of full support in this regard.

About delay in renewal of arm licences, Afridi informed the committee that Ministry of Interior has begun issuance of computerised arms licences through National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) from December 20, 2010. He said that manual arms licences were computerised from October 14, 2011. After computerisation of arms licences, the government decided to renew the arms licences through NADRA instead of National Bank of Pakistan. He added that the decision was declared void by Lahore High Court and Peshawar High Court and that the matter is pending in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He said that the federal government has started coordination with the provincial governments in order to devise an effective policy in this regard.

He said that arms licences issued by Ministry of Interior in non-prohibited bore (NPB) category were renewed in routine. Renewal of arms licences issued in prohibited bore (PB) was stopped on December 26, 2017. However, renewal started again after withdrawal of suspension/cancellation of PB arms licences on December 13, 2018, he said, adding NADRA had started renewal of PB arms licences at all designated NADRA centres from January 4, 2019.

The committee reviewed a report presented by IG KPK police on the matter of rape/ killing of a three-year-old girl.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Alam Khan Shinwari and SSP Mansehra briefed the committee about the tragedy and said police were behind the culprits and were working day and night to identify the culprit behind the rape and murder of minor girl Faryal.

DIG Shinwari assured the committee that police were very close to the culprits and hopefully would reach the real one in a couple of days.

The committee stressed the need for strict action against perpetrators of that heinous crime and was of the view that such individuals were not fit to be called humans. The minister of state for interior was of the view that a very strong recommendation must be made on that forum so that strong action was taken against such criminals. He said it was important to send a strong message that Parliament and the government were on the same page on this issue.

He recommended that perpetrators of this crime must be hanged publicly. The committee recommended that stakeholders must revisit their decision regarding public hanging and must ensure that such criminals must be publicly hanged. It was further recommended that trial of such cases must not take more than 90 days.

The meeting was also attended by Senator Javed Abbasi, Senator Mian Muhammad Ateeq Shaikh, Senator Muhammad Shafiq Tareen, Senator Kulsoom Parveen, Senator Kauda Babar, Senator Sitara Ayaz, Senator Dilawar Khan, besides senior officials of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and mayor Islamabad.

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