

**PM hints at extension in amnesty scheme deadline**

KARACHI: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday hinted at an extension in the deadline for the Asset Declaration Scheme which is slated to end on June 30.

The prime minister was interacting with members of the business community on a special PTV News telethon via video link.

Businessman Aqeel Karim Dedhi had asked Mr Khan whether he would consider an extension in the deadline. "I think the number of people interested in the scheme could be much higher if there was some clarification on what the purpose of this is, whether people have to deposit cash by June 30, whether this deadline can be extended by a couple of months.

"For instance, if you could register first and make the 4 per cent penalty payment, but deposit cash in the bank later?" he asked.

The prime minister said that although it appeared leaving things until the last minute was a Pakistani trait, he was "considering it, because there's a lot of pressure, and lots of people are saying that there is too little time and they want to register".

He said he was discussing with [Federal Board of Revenue Chairman] Shabbar Zaidi and [Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance] Abdul Hafeez Shaikh what process they could adopt to make it easier for people to register and after June 30, take advantage [of the scheme].

"In the next 48 hours, we will bring a programme," said Mr Khan.

On Tuesday, while talking to a private news channel he had reiterated that the deadline would not be extended and warned that the government would have no other option but to pursue the tax evaders if they failed to benefit from the scheme.

The government's tax amnesty scheme is aimed at whitening of undisclosed sales and assets, including foreign assets, at nominal tax rates. It was approved by the cabinet after much deliberation and was announced by Mr Shaikh.

In a video message on May 30, the prime minister had said the scheme was a "chance for [the people] to declare their benami properties and bank accounts" so they could become a part of the tax net.

He revealed that only one per cent of Pakistanis pay taxes. "No country can serve its people if its citizens don't pay taxes."

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