

Economic crisis: NAB has no role: chairman

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman former Justice Javed Iqbal on Sunday dispelled the impression that anti-graft body is harassing the business community, or it has any role in rupee devaluation, saying those making such political statements must stop as efforts to stamp out corruption will continue. Speaking at a presser here, he said that there had been talk for the last few days that NAB is responsible for the prevailing economic situation in the country. He dispelled the notion that NAB had anything to do with rupee devaluation, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreement.

"Till date, NAB has not taken a step that is destructive for the country's economy. NAB and the economy have functioned together and will continue to function together. NAB and corruption cannot run together," he added.

He said that the anti-graft body will summon any trader for questioning and instead a questionnaire will be given to the accused person in order to ensure that the businessmen can continue their businesses without any fear.

However, he conceded that the bureau may have lapses, and added that it is trying to control them. To stimulate both the economy and business activity, he added, strong policy making, dedicated manpower and financing were required. He claimed that NAB's job was to protect the business community.

In an obvious reference to allegations by opposition members that NAB's accountability drive is politically motivated, he said, "The governments come and go, they keep changing...from day one, I said that if NAB has any affiliation, it is with the country, not with any government. Those who think the government or anyone can dictate to NAB live in a fool's paradise".

Justice Iqbal recalled that when the first complaints about the business community being fearful of NAB had surfaced, he had visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry to present the watchdog's stance and found that there was not a single complaint lodged against NAB there.

He said he had announced the formation of a director-headed desk to resolve businessmen's complaints, which were also to be forwarded to him, and that he would not leave the office until a complaint was resolved.

"It has been nearly three months, but we have not received a single complaint," he said, wondering how the bureau should resolve complaints if there are none.

Justice Iqbal said that regional offices of the bureau had also been told that the director general of each region were to themselves resolve any complaints of businessmen. He further added that if they felt this did not fall under their mandate they were to contact the NAB chairman. While noting that no complaint had come into any of the regional offices, he said that 24-48 hours had been given to resolve any complaint.

"We have never harassed any big businessmen nor has there been any policy to harass them," he reiterated. He claimed that the two of the biggest industrialists in the country, Arif Habib and Mian Masha, had written to the regional NAB office in Lahore appreciating the work the bureau was doing.

The chairman continued, "We have never interfered in the telegraph transfer of the business community. If this question is being put to a public office holder how they are sending and bringing in millions of rupees then it is the accountability watchdog's responsibility, keeping in mind the law to inquire about it."

"Those keeping a public post are being questioned about money laundering and will continue to be questioned about it. However, I will never call up a business to NAB. If someone has any grievances they should inform me," he said.

Speaking about the grey list, he said, money laundering is one of the reasons why Pakistan is on the FATF's grey list. "When Pakistan's issue is on the international level, NAB will not care about these few people. The blame game is one thing, but the interest of the country is another thing."

"NAB will always give importance to the interest of the country. We have to get Pakistan out of the grey list and to make Pakistan's image better on an international level, Iqbal asserted.

"If the accountability watchdog was on such good terms with the government, why would we have so many difficulties in getting the budget approved? On one hand, we have those who are on NAB's radar whose lawyers take millions in fees and then there are our prosecutors who just take Rs100,000 or so," he added.

ZULFIQAR AHMAD