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### **NAB won't pursue tax evasion cases: chairman**

LAHORE: National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Javed Iqbal has assured businessmen that the Bureau will not pursue tax evasion cases against them but warned of strict action against those involved in money laundering.

The NAB chairman held out this assurance while presiding over a meeting with noted business leaders of the provincial capital at the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) here on Thursday. Negating the notion that some businessmen are being grilled on the wishes of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, Iqbal said: "If anyone of you thinks that NAB is affiliated with the current government, this is one hundred per cent an incorrect impression."

He said the anti-graft watchdog is acting on complaints but it will not be a cause of disruption in their businesses. Defending the NAB's recent actions against the traders, the chairman claimed they never liked to overstep its jurisdiction and that the reason for it being "over active" was because the watchdog had received a lot of money laundering cases from the Supreme Court.

"Instead of taking up tax evasion cases against businessmen, the NAB refers them to the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) for an appropriate action. I am presenting myself to you for my own accountability. Review the past two years and tell me at what stage and what mistakes we made," he asked.

He said when he took over as NAB chairman in October 2017, he had asked for a list of all cases taken up previously, adding that he had already assured traders that tax evasion cases would be taken back. However, Iqbal clarified that there was a big difference between money laundering and tax evasion.

Explaining why the Bureau is pursuing cases against some businessmen, Iqbal said: "If cases are solely about tax evasion, they must not have been referred to us from courts."

He said that NAB had never interfered with bank default cases unless a bank had referred them to the authority, which, he said, happens when their settlement negotiations with parties are unsuccessful.

"Do you think after 35 years of judicial service, I would take any step for anyone's pleasure?" he questioned.

"NAB should be given the credit it deserves," he requested.

About plea bargains, the NAB chief said: "There can be no plea bargain without my approval."

APP adds: He said the bureau had constituted a committee, having representation of all stakeholders, for resolving business community issues.

He said the representatives of chamber of commerce and industry, across the country would be included in the committee.

He said special desks had already been established in NAB headquarters and regional offices to facilitate business community. No complaint to desks was received in last four months and 28 days by the business community. The desks had been directed to resolve businessmen's complaints within 24 hours. Failing which, the chairman would himself resolve their issues within a three-day period.

Senior Vice President Saarc Chamber of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik and Senior Vice President of Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Lahore, Director General NAB, Lahore, Shahzad Saleem were also present.

He said NAB had not pursued any case of tax evasion and no plan to pursue in future as well, and such cases were being referred to FBR.

NAB does not take direct action in bank default cases but State Bank refers cases to NAB. Banks take action against businessmen in case of default, he added.

He said he was reviewing the case of Iqbal Z Ahmed personally. Business community was playing a pivotal role in economic prosperity of the country. He said NAB was pursuing the cases of people who were penniless in 1980, but today they owned multistory buildings. From where they got the money. They were summoned in NAB with respect and dealt with politely during investigations.

NAB was taking action against the people who remained in government for 35 years, he added.

He said the "untouchables" of past were behind the bars as nobody was above the law. Media should confirm news about NAB before airing or publishing it.

Chairman replied to the queries of businessmen and industrialists. Business community also expressed its satisfaction and lauded the role of the NAB chairman.