

SHC issues notices to federal authorities on plea against petroleum price hike

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court (SHC) on Thursday issued notices to the federal authorities on a petition against the recent price hike in petroleum products.

The two-judge bench headed by Justice Abdul Maalik Gaddi directed the secretaries of petroleum, finance and law, justice and parliamentary affairs as well as the chairman of the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) to file their replies till Jan 14.

The petition was filed by the Pasban Democratic Party through its president and contended that the federal government had made an increase of 4.2 per cent on Dec 31 in the prices of petroleum products. He maintained that the present government had so far increased the prices of petroleum products 16 times and decreased only twice. Terming it unjustified, the party said it was tantamount to increasing the financial miseries of citizens.

The petitioner also argued that the government was charging a “fat tax” of Rs65 per litre on the petroleum products and maintained that the policies of the government had made the lives of the people miserable by shifting its burden on the masses.

The counsel for the petitioner submitted that the respondents might be called along with the criteria summary and calculation of national and international parameters to increase the prices of petroleum.

He also asserted that a formula to increase and decrease the petroleum products should be tabled before parliament where representatives of people might authorise Ogra to increase and decrease the petroleum prices under the approved criteria/formula through enactment.

The lawyer maintained that the country was already facing an acute shortage of gas and electricity as the gas supply for domestic consumers had been reduced to negligible quantity whereas thousands of factories were about to close down and jobs of workers were also at stake.

In these circumstances, the government was duty bound to make a policy to control the situation and refrain from extravagance. But the government was shifting its burden on people, the lawyer argued and asked the SHC to take judicial notice in the larger interest of public as the courts were guarantors of fundamental rights of the citizens. He maintained that due to such increase in the prices of petroleum products, people were deprived of their fundamental rights as enshrined in the Constitution.

The petitioner also contended that the recent increase would push up the inflation for industrial production, which was already under pressure because of higher electricity and gas rates and energy shortfalls.

He submitted that such increase of petroleum prices and imposition of GST and other taxes was contrary to Article 77 of the Constitution read with Articles 4, 5, 9 and 25.

The petitioner pleaded to set aside the current practice of fixing petroleum products' prices, declare the recent increase in petrol, diesel, kerosene oil and LPG illegal as well as GST and other taxes.