

Law protecting business community from NAB may be extended

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Accountability and Interior Division Mirza Shahzad Akbar on Monday said the presidential ordinance that excluded the business community from the ambit of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) might be extended beyond four months of its constitutional term.

Mr Akbar, while speaking to journalists in the Islamabad High Court (IHC), said that the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO), 1999 had been amended through the presidential ordinance aimed at streamlining the affairs of NAB. He dispelled the impression that the process of the accountability had been slowed down and said that the government believed in across-the-board accountability.

It may be mentioned that the National Accountability (Second Amendment) Ordinance, 2019 — matters pertaining to “federal or provincial taxation, levies or imposts” — has been excluded from the ambit of the accountability law and the existing “trials shall stand transferred from the relevant Accountability Courts to the criminal courts” dealing with such offences. The ordinance has not only taken care of the business community, but, to some extent, of politicians and bureaucrats as well, as it redefined the terms “misuse of authority” and “acts done in good faith”.

Shahzad Akbar dispels impression that accountability process has slowed

Talking about the post-arrest bail of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who has been released due to ailment, Mr Akbar said that the government had sought explanation from the legal team of Mr Sharif since his doctors did not provide his medical reports to substantiate their claim that the former prime minister is still seriously ill.

He said that the medical team of Mr Sharif provided some certificates about his health to the Punjab government instead of reports related to the ailments he was suffering from.

Earlier, Mr Akbar administered the oath to the newly elected office-bearers of the Islamabad High Court Journalists Association.

He said that the government has a very clear stance on the freedom of expression which could never be compromised. He further said that the free flow of information could not hinder in the present age and it was part of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's (PTI) manifesto.

‘Toothless’ body

On Dec 28 last year the PTI government made drastic changes in the country's accountability law which virtually made NAB a ‘toothless’ body because it can now only take up cases involving corruption or corrupt practices exceeding an amount of Rs500 million.

The amendments hit the core of the accountability law that was first promulgated in 1999 by then military dictator retired Gen Pervez Musharraf soon after ousting then prime minister Nawaz Sharif in a coup.

The powers of NAB were curtailed keeping in view frequent complaints of the bureaucracy and the business community. There were complaints from the two groups that due to NAB's actions, bureaucrats, businessmen and industrialists had suffered a lot, with the result that officials became reluctant to sign files and businessmen were unwilling to make any investment or take new initiatives.