

Private people still involved in official work at tax offices

KARACHI: Private persons are still actively involved in official work at Karachi-based tax offices despite serious admonition by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

According to details, the issue was highlighted through a complaint lodged at Pakistan Citizen Portal (PCP) last month in which the complainant has contended that Karachi-based tax offices-RTOs and LTUs- hired private staff to do official work.

The complaint stated that these private workers were also given access to confidential information of taxpayers by allowing them to use logins and passwords to IRIS. It also alleged that confidential information of taxpayers was being used for nefarious purposes.

Reacting on the complaint forwarded through PCP, the FBR has taken serious notice and directed the chief commissioners to initiate an inquiry on the matter and identify such officials and ensure disciplinary action against them.

Furthermore, the board ordered the chief commissioners to ensure discontinuation of such practice and take undertaking from the commissioners involved in it to avert the same in future.

Later, the commissioners admitted the involvement of private persons in official work by submitting undertakings and assured their superiors not to carry out such practices further.

However, the sources said that private persons were still actively doing official work, allegedly harassing the taxpayers for undue gains with impunity. They said that these private persons, being allegedly patronized by top tax officials, were involved in identifying taxpayers for audit under section 177 of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 for nefarious purposes.

Moreover, sources said that such practice was firstly introduced in Pakistan customs where these private persons, who were known as (Lappos), were involved in making deals with importers, clearing agents, etc and acted like front-men for customs officials and collected millions on behalf of customs officials. They are paid by these officials from own pockets.

Now, such practice is said to have strongly entrenched in tax offices especially at RTOs where these private persons are assisting tax officials to fulfill their malicious desires, sources maintained.

When contacted, some tax officials, who requested to remain anonymous, confirmed that such practice was at its peak in tax offices despite FBR's measures.

"Although the names of the tax officials, who are involved in harassing taxpayers through these private persons, have been communicated to the top FBR officials in Islamabad, no action has been taken against them because these unscrupulous tax officials are said to have connections with top guns in concerned ministry," they said.

They said that 'corruption free Pakistan' came atop in the manifesto of incumbent government but they did nothing in this regard, which was now reflecting in TI corruption index and urged Prime Minister Imran Khan to look into the issue and take measures in personal capacity else the country's ranking would go further down.