

### **Govt won't let GIDC issue hurt businesses**

KARACHI: Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance Abdul Hafeez Shaikh on Monday said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government aimed to resolve the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) issue without impacting any business houses and it was working to give autonomy to financial institutions like the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

"Pakistan's economy has started showing signs of recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. PM Imran is set to announce a second relief package for the people and businesses in a few weeks," Shaikh revealed while speaking at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX).

"The government wants to resolve the GIDC issue amicably with industries and businesses. We (Prime Minister Imran Khan and I) have ensured that we will not do anything intentionally that puts an additional (financial) burden on the underperforming business houses immediately," he added. The government knew it was the time to support businesses to help improve economic activities as the economy was on the path of recovery from the Covid-19 challenges, the adviser stated.

Industries owe Rs400 billion worth of GIDC to the government. They collected the amount through the sale of textile, cement, fertiliser and other products to end-consumers, but did not transfer the money for a couple of years.

A court has ordered the businesses to pay the outstanding dues to the government in 24 monthly installments. Industries have recently received gas bills carrying the first installment of GIDC dues. Businessmen, however, informed the PM on Saturday that they were unable to pay the dues as their industries had been closed for about three to four months because of the Covid-19 crisis.

The PM adviser added that the government was working to give autonomy to financial institutions including the SBP, Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) and Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP). "The autonomy will enable them to work independently in their respective domains without interference from the government," he said.

Giving autonomy to such financial institutions has remained a condition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under its ongoing loan programme of \$6 billion for Pakistan. Shaikh said economic and business activities had started showing signs of recovery as Pakistan's revenue collection, export earnings and inflow of workers' remittances all were on an upward trajectory.

"Secondly, companies and sectors of the economy like cement, fertiliser, tractor manufacturing and oil marketing have also reported a smart recovery in their respective sales in the past two months," he said. "The relief package worth Rs1.24 trillion given by the government enabled households and business houses to not only survive during the challenging times but also helped them recover from the crisis."

The relief package benefited 16 million households, including daily-wage earners and those who lost their jobs during the crisis. "The prime minister is set to announce a second package to provide relief to people from the impact of Covid-19," Shaikh said.

Government's policymaking revolves around two things - people and businesses. "We will do whatever we can for the people and businesses, particularly the export sector," he declared. "Countries who invested in people after World War-II are heading the world today. No country can progress without attracting foreign investment and increasing exports."

He urged industrialists and businessmen to search for new markets around the world. "Growth in exports and dollar earnings are a must to become a rich nation," he said.

The adviser emphasised that Pakistan's relationship with Saudi Arabia stood sound. "The kingdom has always come forward to help Islamabad in tough times," he said.