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## IMF package: Opposition senators ask govt to take parliament on board

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ISLAMABAD: Opposition in the Senate Friday called on the government to bring transparency in loans being obtained from foreign lenders and also apprise Parliament of the proposed International Monetary (IMF) package.

Finance Minister Asad Umer was castigated for sparing time to appear in talk shows but overlooking the legislature and not prepared to be answerable to Parliament while it had almost completed 90 days in power. Senators from across the aisle, paid glowing tributes to the great national poet and philosopher Allama Muhammad Iqbal and called for giving more space to his poetry and lectures in syllabi and translating his thoughts into actions.

Again, the government faced embarrassment on non-availability of minister concerned, when the opposition was to move a calling attention notice, pertaining to the Aviation Division.

Senator Azam Musakhail, one of the movers, declined to move the notice, saying if it is of any use to do so in the absence of the minister and officials concerned in the gallery. He alleged the ministers were not serious about the House business. To this, Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani asked the Senate staff to send a notice to the aviation secretary and a copy of the same be sent to the prime minister too.

PPP Vice-President Senator Sherry Rehman, speaking on a point of public importance, demanded transparency on the terms of loans being obtained from international lenders, including the IMF and details of plans for buffering the poor and vulnerable from the escalation in gas and other prices that the government had effected.

She alleged, "The government is refusing to explain the terms of loans it is seeking from several international lenders and is providing no plan for buffering the poor and vulnerable from the aftershocks of their policies that is hitting them now".

"The most pressing issue at the moment is the economic deficit the country is facing. There are many people whose stoves are not burning due to the alarming inflation in the country, which is nearing double digits. The working class continues to suffer as they try to make both ends meet. There appears to be no subsidy or relief package for them," she regretted.

This government, she pointed out, came in on the back of big promises, but it was clear they had no intention of doing anything but talking about media optics of austerity like leaving big government houses while quietly living in them. She referred to Prime Minister House and the President House and Governor Houses.

“They are willing to make appearances on television shows but do not want to be answerable to Parliament. They need to shake off this nonchalant approach to governance. Why is no relevant minister ever bothered with parliamentary answers but has so much time for television shows, she asserted.

She wondered what this government had done apart from its continued witch hunt of opposition. All the tall claims of security savings and breaking begging bowls were not manifested in the decisions made by this government since it came into power.

Former interior minister PPP Senator Abdul Rehman Malik while speaking on a matter of public importance, said that he had urged the House to discuss the letter Prime Minister Imran Khan had written to India Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He added that he was astonished how the letter, which circulated across the world and published in every paper, could not be discussed in this august house. Malik expressed grave concerns over unannounced hike in price and sought reply from the government as to how or if the prices were being controlled.

He said that the entire country was in a dire need of setting up mechanism and a specific system to control the prices and added unfortunately manufacturers, vendors and distributors fix the prices according to own will after every hike in petroleum price and fall of Pakistani rupee.

Malik said there was no check and balance on the increase of the price and this failure on the part of the provincial and federal government needs to be rectified. He asked the government to bring a law to make a national price regulator to ensure price control.

He insisted, “Unfortunately we could not draw any mechanism or formula for price control when currency value declines and petrol price increases. The government must inform the House whether any such mechanism is followed to fix the price of petrol as far as I know before the 18th Amendment, magistrates used to set the criteria for evaluating the prices. When the government increases the petrol price it leads to increase in inflation across the country.

Senator Malik strongly condemned the unprovoked fire across the Line of Control (LoC) by Indian forces and asked the government of Pakistan to go to the United Nations against Indian brutalities against poor Kashmiris and unprovoked fire across the Line of Control (LoC).

Earlier, Minister for Communications Murad Saeed brushed aside the impression created by opposition senators that the government had started saying it never talked of creation of 10 million jobs after coming into power and said that the government was making progress as per the promise made to the nation.

PTI had in its election manifesto mentioned and repeatedly announced that its government would provide jobs to 10 million Pakistanis and 5 million houses be built in five years. However, the opposition has targeted the PTI-led government and claimed it was now looking for excuses.

Senator Usman Kakar of PkMAP raised the issue of alleged kidnapping of a 13-year-old girl in Sargodha 20 days ago but the police was refusing even to register the case. The chair referred the matter to the committee concerned with a direction to take it up early.

Senate chairman also called on the government to submit a report on the alleged forcible entry of the police and unidentified persons into Karachi Press Club and harassing media persons there and searched it too. It was raised in the House by the National Party Senator Hasil Khan Bizenjo.