



Opposition assails govt for seeking IMF assistance

ISLAMABAD: Two main opposition parties the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz(PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) on Tuesday lashed out at the government for seeking a bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on tougher conditions and an unprecedented hike in the foreign currency rates against the rupee.

The leaders of the two parties, which ruled the country in the last decade, warned that the country was heading towards a major disaster `due to incompetence of the rulers` who, according to them, lacked economic vision and had no clue at all about the economy.

PPP senator Raza Rabbani said the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government had taken another U-turn by deciding to approach the IMF.

He said Finance Minister Asad Umar had given an undertaking on the floor of the National Assembly and the Senate that if such a decision was taken it would first be debated in parliament, but this was not done.

`These actions of the government are condemnable,` he said.

Mr Rabbani said the shortsighted economic policies of the government had put the working classes and the masses under heavy taxation and a sharp rise in all utility bills and in the price of CNG (compressed natural gas). The exchange rate, he said, had taken the dollar and the UK Pound to a new height only a day after the stock exchange came crumbling down.

`It is unfortunate that during the visit of the IMF team, when preliminary negotiations were taking place, on a query raised in the Senate the government again misled parliament that no such decision is in the offing, the PPP senator regretted.

`The government has already raised the prices of gas by 140 per cent and CNG which is touching Rs100 higher than petrol for the first time in history. This escalation in prices has created a situation where the back

The PPP senator said the IMF team in its report had suggested that there should be a further increase in the prices of oil, gas and petrol, and obviously this would be part of the conditionalities attached to the bailout package.

`The IMF team has also suggested privatisation of public utilities which will entail a retrenchment of industrial labour, which is unacceptable, he declared.

A spokesman for PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, in a statement, said the PTI government had pushed the country towards several crises. He said the prime minister after the failure of donation drive had started a move for price hike and loan from international donor agencies.

`The rulers are totally ignorant of economy and due to their incompetency the country and the people are suffering,` he added.

Speaking at a news conference at National Press Club, PML-N spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb termed the increase in the dollar rate a `wellconceived conspiracy` to provide benefit to `a particular group of investors`.

`To which investors you want to provide benefit with the increase in dollar price? It will be better if Finance Minister Asad Umar discloses the names himself, otherwise I will do it,` she said.

Recalling that PTI chief Imran Khan in the past had announced that he would commit suicide before seeking assistance from the IMF, she asked the prime minister to apologise to the nation, instead of seeking bailout package from the IMF. `The PTI promises paradise to the people and put them in the hellfire of price-hike,` she said.

Ms Aurangzeb alleged that the present government had no plan to provide relief to the masses and run the affairs of the state. She claimed that it was during the PML-N government that the Pakistan Railways witnessed a massive uplift and an increase in the number of passengers.

The PML-N spokesperson, who had served as information minister in the previous government, asked the government to tell the nation about the conditions attached to the IMF package. She said that in the first 50 days of the government, inflation had reached the highest level and stock market investors had lost billions of rupees.

Ms Aurangzeb also lashed out at the PTI government for carrying out `political victimisation` of the opposition and arresting her party president Shahbaz Sharif, claiming that Mr Sharif had been arrested in a project that had never been initiated and not a single rupee had been spent on it.

She was of the view that the criteria which the government had set for the arrest of Shahbaz Sharif demanded that Prime Minister Imran Khan and Defence Minister Pervez Khattak should also be arrested as inquiries against them were also pending in the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). She said the PML-N could not be browbeaten by the threats being hurled by the prime minister.

Ms Aurangzeb asked Mr Khan to declare the assets of his sister and other party leaders, including Aleem Khan, Zulfi Bokhari and Chaudhry Sarwar, and announce the date for auctioning of the assets, if he believed in accountability.

She urged Speaker Asad Qaiser to convene the National Assembly session on opposition`s requisition as per rules or be ready to face protest outside parliament. She warned that the opposition members would hold daily sessions of the assemblies on the road, if the government did not convene the session.

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