

### **President urges NAB to plug financial leakages**

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has termed corruption the biggest hurdle in national development and urged anti-corruption institutions to plug financial leakages to execute the dream of a pro-people 'Naya Pakistan'.

He was addressing a seminar held at the Presidency on Sunday to commemorate the International Anti-Corruption Day.

Others who spoke at the event included National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman retired Justice Javed Iqbal, who said the bureau had always been disliked for its anti-corruption role and added that the incumbent government should not feel embarrassed if it came under scrutiny.

President Alvi said that no society could claim to be corruption-free as the menace existed everywhere with varying levels. He said the absence of rule of law cast negative impact on society and that impartiality, competence and strategy were must for the institutions mandated to eliminate corruption.

He said an investigation into somebody's assets was an Islamic as well as worldwide practice to probe white collar crimes.

Watchdog's chief asks government not to feel embarrassed if it comes under scrutiny

The president, who earlier inaugurated a commemorative postal stamp and a fifty-rupee coin inscribed with anti-corruption messages, said the non-implementation of laws begot corruption and lawlessness.

He said he wanted to see a more powerful NAB and urged the institution to also excel in the prosecution to enhance the conviction rate. The president said corrupt people were not respected in society and hoped the country would witness drastic changes if the institutions kept going after corrupt elements.

Dr Alvi said it was unfortunate that the people had looted and laundered billions of dollars from Pakistan where the children were begging in streets and the government was vying for funds to create breathing space for national economy.

Highlighting the bureau's performance and defending actions taken during his tenure, the NAB chairman said the bureau had always been disliked for its anti-corruption role. Ironically, he said, everyone desired elimination of corruption but without any questioning to him. To strive for a corruption-free country, he said, NAB had to look "at the case, not the face".

However, he acknowledged the incumbent government respected the autonomy of NAB unlike the past when "many talked of clipping the bureau's wings". The NAB chairman said his institution would neither take any dictation nor would victimise or favour any party or group.

He said that as NAB investigated the transactions by the previous government, the incumbent government too should not feel embarrassed if it had to go through the scanner.

He asked what the harm was if NAB questioned the spending of \$95 billion (in health and education sector) when the condition of government hospitals, schools and colleges had not improved.

Mr Iqbal said the bureau had the legal right to question anyone for any corruption as the country was not a “Mughal empire”. During the last one year, NAB had succeeded in making those sitting at the helm of affairs realise that they would be made accountable for their deeds, he added.

The NAB chairman drew comparison between the life of the poor and those who dramatically changed their lifestyles from owning a bike to buying properties in Dubai. He asked why NAB was debated for hours in parliament when it never wanted to indulge in politics.

He said NAB’s conviction rate had risen to 70 per cent and it was immaterial for the institution whether someone under investigation was a former prime minister.

He said the institution had also recovered Rs13.64bn last year and gave the amount to the victims.

The country representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime read out the message of the UN secretary general and said that around \$2.7 trillion or 5pc of global gross domestic product went to corruption annually.

On Transparency International’s corruption index, Pakistan ranks 117th among 180 nations included in the survey, scoring 32 out of 100. But TI also includes Pakistan among the countries where the poor are pushing back.

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