

Senators slam hike in gas prices

Page No.03 Col No.05

RECORDER

REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The government's decision of 'massive' hike in gas prices came under severe criticism in the Senate on Tuesday with senators from opposition parties feared that the move will further burden the poverty-stricken people.

The senators also described the government's decision as an attempt to bypass the Parliament as the decision was taken a day earlier the government presented supplementary budgetary proposals for the current financial year in National Assembly.

The senators alleged that while both Houses of the Parliament had been summoned to meet, the government attached no importance to them and resorted to gas tariff increases in the darkness of night.

On a point of public importance, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Senator Sherry Rehman diverted attention of the House towards the government's decision to increase gas prices by 143 percent, saying that the PPP rejects the move and the government instead of putting burden on the masses, should provide relief to the people.

She said that the PTI had been criticizing but when it came into power, it has restored to taking unpopular decisions. "I find it difficult to understand how the government felt like it could blatantly bypass the Parliament on such a decision when both Houses of the Parliament are in session," she asked, adding that the massive hike in gas prices will not only affect the industries but also the people.

She pointed out that gas is a basic requirement and increasing its price will further burden the already poverty-stricken masses. She also demanded that the issue be placed before the Parliament for a thorough discussion and hoped that the PTI government will start respecting the Parliament.

Sherry also sought policy statement by the foreign minister with regard to government strategy on Kashmir, Palestine and Rohingya Muslims in the upcoming UN General Assembly session in New York.

PML-N Senator Abdul Qayyum sought a clarification from the Prime Minister in the Senate on controversies created by some of his team members with regard to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

He further said that the Senate should also be briefed on the government's plans with

regard to Afghan Transit Trade, saying that US Ambassador in Kabul has recently stated that Pakistan is considering opening land routes for Indian trade with Afghanistan and Central Asian States.

He alleged that the government seems to be 'paralyzed and confused,' adding that nation still awaits a clear economic policy. He said that the government instead of cutting down the administration expenses is planning to massively slash the PSDP.

Another PML-N Senator Javed Abbasi also grilled the government for increasing the prices of gas despite making tall claims of having a competent team of experts while issuing statements from a container in 2014. "Countries cannot be run by selling eight buffaloes and old cars," he said while referring to the recent auction of cars of the Prime Minister Secretariat.

PPP Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar asked the government to give a clear-cut policy statement before the House whether or not it is going to avail the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package.

He said that on one hand the government is putting extra burden on the masses through price hike while on the other, it is planning to approach IMF for the bailout package. He said that it is being claimed on international media that Pakistan is going to avail \$9 billion loan. He also asked the government to explain in the House whether or not it is in a 'backdoor' talk with the IMF.

Responding to the concerns expressed by the senators, Leader of the House Shibli Faraz said that the government has inherited the economy in a very bad shape, adding that gas prices were not rationalized by the past governments for political reasons.

He said that the PTI government will speak the truth to the nation even at the political cost and would be addressing basic issues, which had not been addressed in the past and there would be reforms in various sectors.

PPP Senator Dr Sikandar Mandhro pointed out that around 171,237 posts in the federal government and its autonomous organizations are currently vacant, which become almost 18 percent of the total sanctioned strength of the departments and bodies.

He said that in a bulletin about employees of the federal government and its autonomous bodies for 2016-17, the Establishment Division had put the total sanctioned strength at about 1.13 million while 966,606 employees were working against these posts.

He called for formation of a special committee on the shortfall of vacancies with regard to Sindh and Balochistan, adding that quota of the two provinces was not followed on the appointments.

Chairman Senate Sadiq Sajnrani referred the matter to the House Committee on the

Establishment

Division.

Responding to concerns of various senators, Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Ali Mohammad said that the government has already announced formation of a special committee in National Assembly to probe into the allegations of riggings in the general elections.

However, with regard to giving representation to the Senate, the chairman asked the government to inform the House on Wednesday (today).