

GOVERNMENT TO CHASE TAX-EVADERS: ASAD

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September 25, 2018
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ISLAMABAD: Federal Finance Minister Asad Umar on Monday said the government would chase the tax thieves and warned non-tax payers to start paying taxes.

“We will take practical steps instead of spending five years by giving mere statements as was done by the last government,” Asad Umar said while responding to the points raised by the Opposition Leader in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif in his budget speech.

Asad said the government had constituted a task force to bring back the looted money stashed abroad illegally. He lamented that the PML-N government did not take any action against the looters, money launderers, who had stashed the looted money abroad. The PTI government in its first cabinet meeting had decided to bring the looted money back, he said. The minister said a special assistant had also been appointed for the purpose.

Asad said the increase in gas prices would not have any impact on prices of fertilizers. He said the government had decided to give Rs6 to 7 billion subsidy on fertilizers. “We lowered the tax on the LPG, which is used by the poor from 30 percent to 10 percent, while there will be just 10 percent increase in gas prices for the low income class,” he said. Responding to Shahbaz Sharif’s offer of ‘Charter of Economy’, Asad said Parliament and its finance committees were a natural platform to develop a consensus on national issues. He pointed out that Rs70 billion additional indirect taxes had been imposed on luxury cars, expensive mobile sets and various imported items, which were not used by the poor. Asad Umar also rejected claims of Shahbaz Sharif about circular debt saying it had surged to Rs1,100 billion.

He said the PTI government would spend Rs725 billion as development budget compared to Rs661 billion spent in the previous year. Responding to the observations of Shahbaz Sharif on the Kashmir issue, he asked as to why their government had not implemented the proposals which the opposition leader was floating now.

“When the-then prime minister Nawaz Sharif visited India to attend the oath-taking of Modi, he was ready to meet the Indian businessmen but refused to see the Hurriyat leaders,” he said, adding, “Almighty Allah willing, the people of Occupied Kashmir will get their right of self-determination.”

He said the PTI government wanted good relations with neighbouring countries and asked if relations with India could improve when Nawaz Sharif was not ready to mention the name of Kulbhushan Jadhav in his speeches.

He blamed the former government for the dearth of Urea fertilizer during the Kharif crop, thus increasing its price by Rs1,750 per sack. Urging the opposition to avoid politics on the CPEC issue, he said reasonable interest was being charged on the CPEC projects with a ratio of 75 percent debt and 25 percent equity.

Responding to the opposition leaders' allegations of slashing the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), he said the government would increase the PSDP by 10 percent.