

FBR accused of trying to protect corrupt officials

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has been accused of trying to protect its officials, who are involved in causing huge revenue loss through facilitating bogus refunds, by delaying inquiry against them. A three-member sub-committee of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance constituted to analyze the list of all inquiries initiated by the FBR against its corrupt officials met here on Thursday under the chairmanship of Senator Mohsin Aziz. The meeting was displeased over pending inquiries and warned that it will send cases to National Accountability Bureau (NAB) if inquiries are not completed and a severe action is not taken against the involved officials.

Aziz told media person after the meeting that the committee has already decided to refer a couple of cases to the NAB for investigation as spectrum of corruption was not limited to the bogus refunds alone and it reflects that a whole chain was working to facilitate bogus refunds. He said that range of inquiries pending in the FBR and the quantum of amount involved have been mind-boggling for the committee members as well which, of course, was not possible without collusion with taxpayers. He cited the example of 265 missing containers in this regard.

Earlier, Minister of State for Finance Rana Muhammad Afzal not only acknowledged the prevalent corruption in the FBR but also stated that the quantum of corruption taking place at Karachi Port is in knowledge of everyone. He was of the view that action should be taken against the corrupt officials of FBR.

The FBR officials stated that in a bogus refund order of Rs 70 million, the responsible official was demoted to lower scale as a punishment. Former Member Admin FBR Shahid Jatui, who was invited by the committee, claimed that he ordered hundreds of inquiries against the officials of the FBR after it was exposed to him that they were involved in corrupt practices. The corruption, he said, is rampant in FBR at all levels and suggested to the committee that cases of bogus refunds should be referred to the NAB.

However, incumbent Member Admin FBR Tasneem Rehman accused him of ordering inquiries against his opponent as being member admin. She also said that inquiry officials have been appointed and inquiries are in process in most of the cases. She stated that transfer of inquiry officials will further delay the process.

The chairman of the committee directed the FBR to complete all the pending inquiries as on November 15, 2015 within three months and inform the committee of the action taken against the officials. He said that the committee recommends serious action against those who have caused huge loss of revenue so as to make them example for others.

Aziz said the committee also recommended that a separate department should be created for speedy trial of those officials who had caused huge revenue loss by making bogus refunds, etc. The justification that action was not taken against the responsible officials owing to load of work encourages them to benefit from the FBR's weaknesses. Everything seems to be stuck at inquiry stage, Mohsin Aziz added.

The chairman of the committee stated that there is a chain involved in payment of bogus refunds from registration of bogus person to payment of refunds and the problems will not resolve if the entire chain is not identified and awarded exemplary punishment. Aziz noted that the missing of 265 containers could not have been possible if there was no involvement of FBR from top to bottom level.

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