

## Forgiving non-taxpayers

Shabbar Zaidi

The former FBR head also spoke about influentials forcing him to drop cases against people close to them or those who were politically "important".

The economist further said that he "mistakenly" sent a notice to a landowner in Multan. "I asked him to reconcile his wealth with his agricultural income."

In response, 40 parliamentarians "barged into my office", led by then-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, he said.

Zaidi said ex-lawmaker Sardar Nasrullah Khan Dreshak, during the meeting, told him that the people in his office were "MNAs from South Punjab, and the government cannot continue without them".

"I have seen a lot of governments [...] leave him [...] you're a kid now," Zaidi quoted Dareshak as telling him.

The ex-FBR chief went on to say that he tried bringing the tobacco industry people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the frontier regions into the tax net, but he faced strong opposition from then-NA speaker Asad Qaiser.

"You cannot do this ... you cannot enter our areas," Zaidi quoted Qaiser as saying.

Zaidi said he was asked to let go of the landowner's case.

Moreover, he claimed he faced opposition from former National Assembly speaker Asad Qaider when he tried to bring the tobacco industry in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into the tax net.

Zaidi also claimed that he had updated the FBR's property valuation table to bring it up to par with the market valuation, adding that when he did so, "all DHA (Defence Housing Authority) offices [of property dealers] became empty, meaning the whole business [of real estate] shut down".

He claimed former army chief Gen (retd) Qamar Javed Bajwa subsequently called him and said that he was getting complaints from people associated with the DHA real estate market about what Zaidi had done and the commercial activity coming to a halt.

"I said, 'Sir what should I do'. So he said, 'Bring it down'."

## Tonnes of gold smuggled into Pakistan annually

Shabbar Zaidi claimed that about 4 to 4.5 tonnes of gold is smuggled into Pakistan annually. "Not even a single tola of gold is imported [in Pakistan]. Where does this gold come from?" he questioned.

"Jewellers had agreed to pay taxes but they cannot show the invoice of gold so how could they pay taxes?"

He said that the jewellers are using smuggled gold.

The former FBR chairman said that India curbed the smuggling of gold by relaxing import policies and ensuring implementation of them.

Zaidi said that he faced resistance from retailers when he tried to bring them under the tax net. "Retailers are a market mafia and when we take action against them, they go on a shutdown strike."

He added: "None of our governments is powerful enough to fight with [retailers]. The tax system cannot be fixed unless you bring them under the tax net."

The traders in Karachi, he also said, had "thrashed" him. "They [retailers] said that no one in the market would pay tax."

The ex-FBR chairman added that the traders are not willing to involve in any kind of documentation.