
Govt to probe 'powder-laced' letters to judges

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ISLAMABAD:

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Thursday that an investigation will be conducted into the 'powder-laced' letters sent to judges of the superior judiciary. Chairing the meeting of the federal cabinet, he said the matter would be taken up with a sense of responsibility and emphasized there should be no politics on the matter. "The government, with a sense of responsibility, will probe the matter," said the prime minister. The premier also recalled that an inquiry commission was formed after consultation and consent of former chief justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani to probe the issue of the letter sent by six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), but the former CJP later recused himself and the apex court took suo motu over the issue. The premier stated that Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb will discuss the new bailout programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and expressed hope the new programme will help stabilise the national

economy. “Of course, the conditions of the IMF programme will not be easy,” said the premier will hinting at possible tough conditions of the Fund. “With the new IMF programme, international institutions will have more trust in us and we will be able to move forward on the agenda of development and prosperity with more confidence,” he said while speaking with the participants of the cabinet meeting. Referring to the digitization of FBR, the prime minister said experts to assist with the process will be finalized this month. The prime minister hoped that after the IMF board meeting, the last tranche of the existing standby agreement worth \$1.1 billion would be disbursed to Pakistan later this month. The premier also said that a strategy had been formulated for outsourcing of airports, adding that a delegation of a Turkish company was arriving in Islamabad on April 6 which would negotiate the outsourcing process with the Pakistani authorities. Referring to his meeting with Chinese engineers and experts in Dasu, the premier said that complete security will be provided to Chinese nationals living in Pakistan. PM Shehbaz said he recently chaired a meeting of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in which details of various sectors including finance, investment, exports, information technology, agriculture, power and petroleum were discussed. Earlier, threatening letters containing a suspicious powdery toxic substance were sent to eight judges of the Islamabad High Court, Supreme Court jurists, including Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa, as well as those of the Lahore High Court.

The DIG (Operations), summoned by the IHC CJ during the hearing of the cypher case, informed that four SC judges — CJP Isa, Justices Athar Minallah, Jamal Khan Mandokhail, and Aminuddin Khan — had received similar letters on April 1. Additionally, letters were also received by SC's Justices Mansoor Ali Shah and Shahid Waheed posted by someone identifying themselves as Gulshad Khatun, according to sources. The DIG Operations informed the court that all the envelopes contained letters as well as the powdery substance and they had been sent to the laboratory for an analysis. Copies of the letters, suspected to contain anthrax powder, have also been handed over to the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) for investigation. Furthermore, the police department has written to the relevant postmaster general on the issue of the stamps “not being discernible”. The police officer further revealed that LHC judges had also received similar letters. On Wednesday, the IHC chief justice, along with seven other judges of the high court, received letters suspected to be laced with anthrax. This incident occurred just after the apex court initiated suo motu proceedings in response to allegations made by the six IHC judges against intelligence agencies.