

## **FTO was to End Businessman Exploitation**

The Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO), Dr. Shoaib Suddle, has pledged to eliminate the scourge of tax maladministration so that the business community could be able to do business in a conducive atmosphere. He was speaking at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry here on Monday. The LCCI President Zafar Iqbal Chaudhry, Senior Vice President Ijaz A. Mumtaz, former Presidents Iftikhar Ali Malik, Mian Muzaffar Ali and former Vice President Aftab Ahmad Vohra also spoke on the occasion. Dr. Shoaib Suddle said that the office of the FTO was bound and would continue diagnose, investigate, redress and rectify any injustice done to a taxpayer through maladministration of officials of customs, income tax, federal excise and sales tax promptly, fairly and justly. He said that when tax functionaries do not behave as the law requires they need to be checked. He said that he would ensure that the taxpayers were treated with respect, dignity and due consideration by those whose duty is to collect tax for the state. He said that FTO is empowered to do much more than merely respond reactively to complaints of tax maladministration. He can, proactively, recommend changes to address systemic issues afflicting the organization and management of the taxation machinery. Such identification of systemic issues is vital not merely to bring about improvements in the tax system as a whole, but to reach many more people than does the disposal of individual complaints. He said that since June 2008, the office of the FTO has disposed of over 800 complaints including over 200 up to four-year old cases pertaining to 2005-08. The bulk of the complaints (about 66%) received pertain to Income Tax, about 20% to Sales Tax and the remaining relate to Customs. Presently, no complaint that is more than six month old is pending with the FTO. He said that the target is to clear all complaints filed in 2009 by 31st March 2010. "We have also set ourselves a target of clearing over 60% complaints filed in 2010 with 60 days." He said although the figures show that quite a significant number of taxpayers are making use of the office of the Federal Tax Ombudsman to get their grievances redressed, it does appear that many taxpayers are reluctant to do so as they feel intimidated by a perceived threat of retaliation by departmental authorities. In this context, the LCCI can play a critical role in reassuring the potential complainants not to get intimidated, as any attempted intimidation would itself constitute maladministration of the gravest kind.

The Federal Tax Ombudsman sought the LCCI help for constitution of an Advisory Committee for institutional partnership with stakeholders including Chambers of Commerce in the country. Speaking on the occasion, the LCCI President Zafar Iqbal Chaudhry said that the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry would work hand in hand with Federal Tax Ombudsman's office to eliminate all the anti-business policies. He said that the issue of refund of sales tax was troubling the business community a lot therefore measures should be taken to solve it on priority basis. He said that the LCCI in consultation with its members would prepare a detailed presentation and research paper for creating conducive business atmosphere in the country.

The LCCI President said that the Lahore Chamber would continue to support the government efforts aimed at removing tax-related irritants for the sake of taxpayer friendly administration in the country.

He appreciated the Federal Tax Ombudsman for providing inexpensive and speedy justice to the tax payers.