

PIA affairs

This refers to the news 'Supreme Court issues notice to secretary defence in the PIA case' (Jan 1). The SC's observation - why the secretary defence and a serving pilot have been made chairman and managing director of PIA respectively - is the real issue. To be fair, there is no need to appoint a chairman of PIA who also acts as the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority board. What is required is a qualified, non-pilot MD, who has full authority to take major decisions, to head PIA. At present, the MD PIA and the DG CAA are treated as two politically appointed officers, serving under the Ministry of Defence, whose main purpose is to serve the interests of their political masters. They are hardly allowed to work independently. It will be interesting to obtain their travel data to know how people's tax money is being spent.

The main issue, however, is the Ministry of Defence's control over PIA and CAA. In most countries, CAAs work under ministries of transport, civil aviation or communications. There is a need to go through the report prepared by Arthur D Little and NatWest on PIA in 1995. Their recommendations included a separate ministry of aviation and splitting CAA into four companies so that its commercial and regulatory roles could be separated. Both CAA and the Ministry of Defence opposed the report. But after a compromise was reached, a ministry of aviation was set up. The said ministry was abolished after Benazir's government was dismissed. It was revived by the Nawaz government in March 1999 and abolished by Gen Musharraf after the October 1999 coup. The Supreme Court may take notice of the above-mentioned issues that are resulting in mismanagement and inefficiency in these organisations. We need to appoint professionals to manage the affairs of both bodies.

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