

## [Row over robotic systems deepens as CM hits back at health minister](#)

[Faiza Ilyas](#) Published November 10, 2023

KARACHI: The conflict over the recent cancellation of a multibillion rupee tender of robotic systems further widened on Thursday when Chief Minister retired Justice Maqbool Baqar took a strong exception to the statement released a day earlier by Health Minister Dr Saad Khalid Niaz in which he had accused the former of ‘interference’.

The day also saw a statement on behalf of the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) emphasising that investment in high-cost machinery without first bringing improvement in the primary healthcare system would be a waste of resources.

In a rebuttal, the chief minister stated that the budget for the robotic systems was approved by the last government and that the caretaker government was not authorised to end or stop any projects approved by the previous assembly and the government.

“Dr Saad wants to divert these funds to his favourite schemes and is trying to hide his illegal actions by raising allegations [against the chief minister],” the statement released by CM House claimed.

PMA urges govt to focus on primary healthcare

The health minister, it pointed out, had failed to improve the performance of facilities under his department and was highly offended “when he was made accountable” and that the minister issued “irresponsible and baseless statements” which needed to be clarified.

“The chief minister keeping in view the poor and pathetic condition of health facilities decided to convene four meetings to review their performance [in a similar manner] he reviewed [performance of] the management of schools, colleges and revenue offices.

“Surprisingly, the health minister had three review meetings concerning his department cancelled. Finally, when the fourth meeting was held, he did not attend it, so that his performance could not be evaluated.”

It also alleged that the health minister was trying to post his favourite secretary of health so that he could carry forward his ‘personal agenda’.

“The caretaker health minister Dr Niaz instead of focusing on the performance of the health facilities was wasting his time and energy to settle his personal scores with his counterpart doctors/professors and did not spare the prestigious Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation (SIUT) from his criticism,” it said.

The chief minister also censured the minister for the language he used against him.

“It was deplorable and reflects his mindset. A professional doctor, professor, civilised person, or a minister cannot use such derogatory language and it is beyond comprehension and shocking.”

Justice Baqar also justified what Dr Niaz had described as ‘interference’ in his departmental affairs.

“As a matter of fact, the chief minister has always supported the ministers and their departments so that they can perform their best for the public. However, the caretaker chief minister issues necessary instructions from time to time for the efficient performance of the departments.”

‘Insufficient funds for govt hospitals’

A day earlier, the health minister had released a detailed statement explaining his differences with the chief minister that led to his boycott of the meeting held on Wednesday at CM House.

The disagreement pertained to a tender for purchasing four robotic systems for the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC), Gambat Hospital and Liaquat University of Medical Sciences Hospital. The health minister had cancelled the tender last month on the grounds that the robot-assisted procedures were too costly and should not be used for routine surgeries.

In his statement, he questioned the government’s decision to purchase costly robots when it didn’t have sufficient funds to increase budgets of government hospitals. “Daily over 8,000 patients report at JPMC and CHK and their total budget is below Rs15bn, which isn’t sufficient to meet their needs.

“No robotic surgery is being conducted at the city’s most reputed private hospitals. Even the Aga Khan University Hospital is conducting the surgery for the gallbladder for Rs250,000 whereas the government is spending Rs400,000 to Rs450,000 on the same procedure through a robotic system,” he stated, adding that the costly treatment through costly robots didn’t make any sense.

The decision to stop the purchase, he emphasised, was taken in the light of expert surgeons’ opinions. He pointed out that irregularities were also noted in the purchase of robotic systems bought in the past.

“In the financial year 2023-24, an amount of Rs5,497m was allocated for purchase of the robotic system. In 2013-14, a single robot was purchased for Rs370m for Civil Hospital Karachi.”

The health minister maintained that he needed support from the chief minister and not ‘interference’.

Meanwhile, the PMA in a statement emphasised the need for improving the primary healthcare system in the country instead of investing in high-cost machinery for tertiary care without an improvement in the former.

“We acknowledge that tertiary care and investment in technology is important. But, our first priority should be to improve the primary healthcare system — the backbone of Pakistan’s health sector that caters to 70-80 per cent of patients.

“Unfortunately, this system is too weak, forcing patients to seek treatment at tertiary health facilities. The burden on tertiary care centres will decrease if the primary healthcare system including basic health units and rural clinics is improved,” it says.

Published in Dawn, November 10th, 2023

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1787981/row-over-robotic-systems-deepens-as-cm-hits-back-at-health-minister#:~:text=KARACHI%3A%20The%20conflict%20over%20the,had%20accused%20the%20former%20of>

# Sindh CM, health minister clash over robotic surgery systems

As controversy spiralled, medical associations, as well as surgeons and physicians, expressed support for Dr Saad

By M. Waqar Bhatti

November 10, 2023



Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (R) Maqbool Baqar presides over a meeting of the health department at CM House on November 8, 2023. — X/@SindhCMHouse

KARACHI: The medical fraternity Thursday came in support of caretaker Health Minister Dr Saad Khalid Niaz, who cancelled a multibillion-rupee contract for procurement of four more robotic surgery systems, locking him in a serious rift with the caretaker Chief Minister Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Baqar. On the other hand, the chief minister's house raised serious questions about the performance of the minister and accused him of using deplorable language against the chief minister.

As the controversy spiralled, medical associations, as well as a large number of surgeons and physicians, expressed their support for Dr Saad, who suggested that instead of buying robotic surgery equipment worth Rs4.27 billion for the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Center (JPMC), Liaquat University Hospital, Jamshoro, and Gambat Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS), the money should be spent on providing basic health facilities and prevention of diseases.

Dr. Akram Sultan, Director Health Services, Sindh, said all the medical associations, including PMA, PIMA, Young Doctors Association (YDA), Society of Surgeons Pakistan and others will hold a joint press conference at the Karachi Press Club (KPC) on Friday (today) to support Dr Saad Khalid Niaz and expose the mafia behind taking kick-backs

in the procurement of expensive equipment, which was useless in countries like Pakistan.

Commenting on the ongoing row, the PMA supported Dr Saad's stance and stressed the need for improving the primary healthcare system in the country instead of investing in high-cost machinery for tertiary care without an improvement in the former.

"As an organization that promotes healthcare advancement, the PMA acknowledges that tertiary care is important, but it believes that the government's focus should be on the primary healthcare system," PMA's honorary Secretary General Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Shoro said.

"Strengthening the primary healthcare system will ensure that people receive timely and adequate medical attention without the need for expensive tertiary care. Primary healthcare system is the backbone of the health sector and caters for 70- 80% of healthcare in Pakistan. Unfortunately, it is weak, and we need to focus on improving it before investing in tertiary care," he said in a statement.

Shoro maintained that Pakistan's, especially in Sindh, primary healthcare system lacked basic facilities, and equipment, which forced people to seek treatment at the costly tertiary care centers.

"The PMA has recommended that the Sindh government invest in primary healthcare centers, rural clinics, and basic health units. Providing basic health facilities, such as diagnostic labs, clinics and trained medical staff, will help alleviate the burden on tertiary centers," said the PMA.

"PMA is committed to working with the government to improve the healthcare system in Sindh. Our message is clear — let us focus on improving the primary healthcare before investing in expensive equipment."

The PIMA also raised the same points and was found in agreement with the PMA.

The Society of Surgeons Pakistan, in a separate statement, supported Dr Saad.

Meanwhile, a statement issued by the CM House said the caretaker health minister had issued "irresponsible and baseless statements", which needed to be clarified.

"Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice Baqar visited different offices, schools, and health facilities with the objective of improving their performance," it said.

"The CM, keeping in view the poor and pathetic condition of health facilities, decided to convene four meetings to review their performance as he reviewed the management of schools, colleges, and Revenue offices."

Surprisingly, the statement said, the health minister had three review meetings concerning his department cancelled. Finally, when the fourth meeting was held, he did not attend it, so that his performance could not be evaluated.

“The health minister was trying to post his favourite secretary of health, so that he could carry forward his personal agenda,” said the CM House statement.

“The caretaker health minister Dr Niaz, instead of focusing on the performance of the health facilities, was wasting his time and energy to settle his personal scores with his counterpart [doctors/professors] and did not spare the prestigious SIUT from his criticism.”

The language Caretaker Health Minister Dr Saad Niaz has used against the Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (R) Maqbool Baqar is deplorable and reflects his mindset, it said. “A professional doctor, professor, civilised person, or a minister cannot use such derogatory language and it is beyond comprehension and shocking,” the statement said.

“The caretaker chief minister wants to improve the condition of health facilities, so that they can provide the best health care to the needy people of the province.

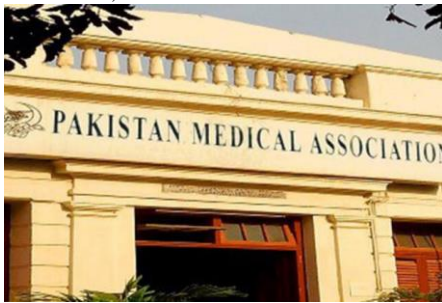
“As a matter of fact, the CM has always supported the ministers and their departments so that they can perform their best for the public. However, the caretaker chief minister issues necessary instructions from time to time for efficient performance of the departments,” added the statement.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1127645-sindh-cm-health-minister-clash-over-robotic-surgery-systems>

# PMA urges Sindh govt to invest in primary healthcare system

**Abid Khan**

09th Nov, 2023.



PMA urges Sindh govt to invest in primary healthcare system

- He said improving healthcare system will ensure timely medical attention.
- Dr Ghafoor Shoro said primary healthcare system is backbone of health sector.
- He said govt first improve basic system instead of investing in high-cost machinery.

KARACHI: Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) has emphasized the need for improving the primary healthcare system in the country instead of investing in high-cost machinery for tertiary care without an improvement in the former.

Hon. Secretary General, Pakistan Medical Association (Centre), Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Shoro, said as an organization that promotes healthcare advancement, PMA acknowledges that tertiary care is important, but it believes that the government's focus should be on the primary healthcare system. Strengthening the primary healthcare system will ensure that people receive timely and adequate medical attention without the need for expensive tertiary care.

He said primary healthcare system is the backbone of the health sector and caters 70- 80% of healthcare in Pakistan. Unfortunately it is weak, and we need to focus on improving it before investing in tertiary care.

Dr Shoro said Pakistan's and specially in Sindh primary healthcare system lacks basic facilities, and equipment, which forces people to seek treatment at costly tertiary care centers. The current infant mortality rate for Pakistan in 2023 is 55.777 deaths per 1000 live births and 154 women die for every 100,000 live birth, Vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue, acute watery diarrhea, cholera,

skin diseases, and malnutrition are rising. maternal mortality and pregnancy-related deaths are more prevalent in Sindh Investing in high-cost machinery without first addressing this issue would be a waste of resources.

PMA has recommended that the Sindh government invest in primary healthcare centers, rural clinics, and basic health units. Providing basic health facilities, such as diagnostic labs, clinics, and trained medical staff, will help alleviate the burden on tertiary centers.

PMA is committed to working with the government to improve the healthcare system in Sindh. Our message is clear – let us focus on improving primary healthcare before investing in expensive equipment.

Secretary General, PMA, believes that prioritizing the primary healthcare system should be the government's top priority. By improving primary healthcare, the burden on tertiary care centers will decrease, ultimately leading to better health outcomes for the people of Pakistan.

<https://www.bolnews.com/latest/2023/11/pma-urges-sindh-govt-to-invest-in-primary-healthcare-system/>