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CCP in a state of flux

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KARACHI, April 2: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) is in a state of flux as the Ordinance that validated its existence expired on March 27. "The offices and staff are in place but stripped of its authority to make laws, the Commission has no legal status," said an official of the Commission on Friday.

The CCP was looking up at the President, who has two days to re-promulgate the Ordinance before the joint session of the Parliament meets on Monday.

Between Nov 27 and until the CCP ordinance is re-promulgated or the Bill passed by the Parliament, the country would be without an anti-trust law.

Conspiracy theorists are drawn to the conclusion that the creation of vacuum has facilitated the cartelisation, abuse of dominance and deceptive business practices.

"Even if the President were to re-

promulgate the Ordinance in the two days with retrospective effect, any cartels formed since Nov 27 will have strong case for survival," says this CCP official. Mr Khalid Mirza, chairman of the CCP, told *Dawn* that he hoped that the President would re-promulgate the Ordinance within the available two days. The last time CCP Ordinance was promulgated on Nov 26, 2009, which lapsed four months later on March 27. Many blame the Standing Committee of Senate which they allege sat on the bill till its demise.

"The National Assembly had passed on the bill to the Senate, which in turn handed it to the Standing Committee that was supposed to deliberate on the bill, recommend changes and hand it back to the Senate by March 22," says one such detractor. It wasn't done, ostensibly in support of the cartelists.

But Senator Ahmed Ali, chairman

of the Standing Committee of Senate for finance, revenue, economic affairs, statistics, planning & development, was furious over the suggestion that his committee had dragged its heels over the passage of the bill. "It (the bill) was with the National Assembly for three months, but no one questions that; the opponents who point fingers at the committee just wanted us to sign and forward it in haste," he told *Dawn*.

Was three weeks given to the Standing Committee not a sufficient time to deliberate and form a decision on the bill? Mr Ahmed Ali replied that the Parliamentarians had more pressing matters on their mind.

Members of the committee, such as Ishaq Dar and others, were fully engaged in the preparation of the constitutional package. "How could the committee ignore them and announce a decision?" he asked. He said he was a firm opponent of cartels and argued

that even if, say two members of the committee could be alleged to have vested interest in deliberately delaying the passage of the bill, they could scarcely override the decision of the majority; the Committee comprises 12 members.

Without naming Mirza, the chairman of the standing committee said that they had strong inclination to bring a privilege motion against the person for trying to put pressure on the senators. "The committee stopped short of taking the step because in doing so, it would have appeared biased in the matter," he said.

Meanwhile, speaking at a roundtable on "Importance of Competition Laws for Consumers Protection" held on Friday in Islamabad, Mr Mirza said that competition laws were in the best interest of the country and expressed his "full confidence on the parliament and other top institutions of the country."