

# OpenVoiceNews Pakistan

Transparent. Unbiased. Yours.

## A Deep Betrayal of Trust: Unpacking the £190 Million ARU Scandal in Pakistan

July 14, 2025

— Categories: Crime



In one of Pakistan's most damning corruption scandals to date, former top government officials are facing serious allegations for engineering a covert and unlawful financial deal that cost the nation approximately £190 million approximately Rs. 50 billion. At the center of this unfolding crisis is Mirza Shehzad Akbar, the former Chairman of the Asset Recovery Unit (ARU) and Adviser to the Prime Minister on Accountability, whose role in authorizing and executing a secret agreement has raised grave concerns about institutional integrity, national interest, and unchecked executive power.

The scandal traces back to a confidential deed signed on 6 November 2019 by Shehzad Akbar, marking the beginning of what investigators now call a deliberate scheme to reroute frozen assets, originally seized by the United Kingdom's **National Crime Agency (NCA)**, away from the Pakistani state treasury. These assets, seized under the UK's **Proceeds of Crime Act 2002** during investigations against property developers Ali Riaz Malik and Mubashara Malik, were meant to return to Pakistan for public use. However, rather than being deposited into the State Bank or a transparent government account, the funds were redirected to a Bahria Town account falsely labeled as belonging to the "State of Pakistan."

Evidence has surfaced that co-accused Zia Mustafa Naseem, a legal consultant for the ARU, also signed the secret agreement and played a crucial role in facilitating the transactions. Even more troubling is the fraudulent use of the Supreme Court Registrar's name and a misrepresented account, which investigators say was deliberately disguised to bypass scrutiny from state institutions such as the **Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)**, **Federal Board of Revenue (FBR)**, and **State Bank of Pakistan (SBP)**.

Akbar's overseas travel records show two trips to the UK in 2019 February and May 2019, where he reportedly met with British officials, including the Home Secretary, to lay the groundwork for this covert financial arrangement. These meetings, held outside official channels, were never disclosed to Pakistan's cabinet or oversight bodies. By the time the matter was brought before the cabinet in December 2019, the agreement had already been executed weeks earlier. This deliberate concealment is now viewed as a gross abuse of authority and a betrayal of constitutional duty.

Court documents and source accounts indicate that the ARU had entered into preliminary talks with Bahria Town and UK officials as early as March 2019, months before the fund transfer. Statements from former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his then-Principal Secretary Azam Khan confirm that high-level discussions had occurred, suggesting tacit approval and direct political involvement. Rather than promoting accountability, this government used backdoor diplomacy and legal loopholes to sidestep institutions tasked with ensuring transparency.

While Akbar is being pursued by the **National Accountability Bureau (NAB)** and has been declared a proclaimed offender, proceedings are now underway to request **Interpol Red Notices** for his extradition. This move, though necessary, is only the first step in addressing a broader institutional failure. Sources within NAB and other agencies have confirmed the

recovery of key documentation that further links political figures, including the former Prime Minister, to the scandal.

The implications of this case go far beyond individual misconduct. The scandal reveals a systemic erosion of trust in public institutions. With the massive £190 million windfall redirected into a private housing developer's account rather than funding schools, hospitals, and infrastructure, millions of Pakistanis have been denied basic services for the sake of elite interests. At a time when the country faces economic uncertainty and international skepticism, such revelations deepen the crisis of governance.

This is not simply a case of poor judgment; it represents a coordinated effort to exploit power for personal and political gain. The PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) leadership, which has long claimed to champion anti-corruption efforts, now finds itself mired in its legacy of deception and mismanagement. While its leaders continue to present themselves abroad as defenders of democracy, their actions have done lasting damage to Pakistan's reputation and stability.

The road to recovery will require more than prosecutions. It demands a recalibration of how power is exercised and who is held accountable when it is abused. For too long, public institutions have been manipulated for political cover, and accountability has been selectively enforced. If Pakistan is to restore public faith in its governance, this case must serve as a precedent: no individual, no matter how high-ranking, should be above the law.

The betrayal of £190 million wasn't just financial, but a betrayal of the people. And the time has come for those responsible to face justice, not through political theater or selective targeting, but through transparent legal processes that prioritize national interest over political expediency