

**Cabinet approves new authority to build housing units**

ISLAMABAD: In order to make its flagship housing programme a successful endeavour, the government on Tuesday decided to form a new housing department called Naya Pakistan Housing Authority and initially build 130,000 housing units for the deserving people in the federal capital and Balochistan.

The government also decided to announce a tax amnesty scheme next week and planned a massive crackdown on electricity and gas thieves to overcome losses worth billions of rupees.

The decisions were taken at a meeting of the federal cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan at PM Office.

The cabinet approved the signing of memoranda of understanding with the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom under which Pakistan would get information about properties and assets of its nationals in the two countries.

Government plans crackdown on electricity, gas thieves

“Under the Naya Pakistan Housing Programme, the formation of Naya Pakistan Housing Authority has been approved in the cabinet meeting to provide 130,000 housing units to the poor in the federal capital and Balochistan in one year,” Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said at a post-cabinet meeting press conference.

He the government had decided to launch the tax amnesty scheme after recent talks with the International Monetary Fund. “Finance Minister Asad Umar is currently in Washington to hold talks with the IMF and the tax amnesty scheme will be formally launched after his return,” he added.

When asked whether the scheme would be introduced through an ordinance or a money bill, the minister said Prime Minister Khan had formed a committee and the law minister would take decision about it.

Mr Chaudhry said the government decided to tighten the noose around gas and electricity thieves and the action would start from bigwigs, including opposition leaders Hina Rabbani Khar of the Pakistan Peoples Party and Rohail Asghar of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. He said Prime Minister Khan had ordered stern action against those involved in power and gas theft.

He said that 43 per cent of unaccounted for gas (UFG) was being stolen in the country and a number of “big” gas thieves had been held. “The cabinet was informed that stealing of 7.3pc UFG had been stopped that would save Rs3 billion,” he said, adding that 93pc UFG was being stolen in Karak and 48pc in overall Balochistan. “The problem of gas theft has also been reported in Lahore and Islamabad.”

The minister said that due to the action taken against the thieves a reduction of over Rs40bn in losses had been reported in the power sector. “Not only power thieves, more than 500 officials of electricity departments are also facing cases,” he added.

He said the cabinet had also approved the establishment of a media university on a public-private partnership basis and the government would only provide land for the purpose.

Syed Irfan Raza