

Khaleeq Kiani

World Bank president to visit Pakistan in November

ISLAMABAD: World Bank President David Malpass will visit Islamabad in the first week of November to finalise enhanced financial support for institutional reforms and growth agenda.

The Ministry of Finance on Thursday said World Bank's country director in Pakistan Patchamuthu Illangovan and his team called on Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh to apprise him of the upcoming visit of Mr Malpass to Islamabad.

The delegation conveyed "a strong desire from the World Bank management to work with Pakistan to drive institutional reforms and support the growth agenda of the government through any technical or financial assistance required from the bank", said a statement.

The visit follows Prime Minister Imran Khan's meeting with the WB president during his recent visit to the United States. Mr Illangovan is understood to have highlighted the problems being faced by the existing projects and slowdown in the project planning and process in the wake of a long political transition and its aftermath, even though a few financing agreements worth \$950 million were signed with the World Bank last month.

David Malpass will finalise enhanced financial support for institutional reforms, growth agenda

Another project of about \$1.5 billion is now coming up for approval by the World Bank board, but some of the projects faced significant challenges. Informed sources said that one of the projects facing problems was the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Corridor (KPEC) worth about \$450m being described by the Planning Commission as "road to nowhere".

This is mainly because of the absence of a matching communication infrastructure in Afghanistan up to Tajikistan due to which authorities in Islamabad are reluctant to push through an expensive project which has apparently no economic return in the immediate future. On the other hand, the World Bank board had approved the project a couple of years ago and also put a question mark on its own project processing authorities. The bank's local team is also reportedly explained the changing landscape in Afghanistan that could be seen as window of opportunity.

In the meanwhile, about three major projects, including those of Karachi water and sanitation and urban livelihood, worth over \$1.6bn are being designed for the World Bank financing with additional support from the Asian Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Agence Francaise de Development. The total portfolio of these projects goes beyond \$2.6bn.

Dr Hafeez Shaikh told the WB delegation that Pakistan was pursuing a growth-oriented programme for institutional reforms and economic revival and "the technical and financial assistance from the World Bank is vital for achieving various development goals in different sectors" of the country's economy.

Mr Illangovan told the PM's adviser that the World Bank could work on any financial arrangement looking at the objective need and assessment of the policy matrix as the bank was very supportive of the institutional reforms being undertaken by the Pakistan government in different sectors of the economy.

He also briefed Dr Shaikh on the ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Finance on two policy-based lending operations to provide budgetary support to Pakistan which would be finalised by December this year.

Issues related to the World Bank's ongoing portfolio of \$9bn as well as firming up of Pakistan's delegation to attend annual meetings of the IMF/World Bank Group in October also came under discussion.

Dr Shaikh welcomed the World Bank president's upcoming visit to Islamabad and expressed the hope that it would lead to opening of greater avenues for more productive engagement between the bank and Pakistan.