

In a twist, revenue portfolio taken from Hammad

ISLAMABAD: The government in a surprise move on Wednesday deprived newly-appointed federal minister Hammad Azhar of the revenue portfolio which he had been holding for the last 10 months as minister of state.

The portfolio was taken back only a day after he had been made full-fledged minister as a reward for his performance during the last month's budget session of the National Assembly.

According to a fresh notification by the cabinet division, Mr Azhar has now been made Minister for Economic Affairs.

A source in the finance ministry told Dawn that by becoming a full-fledged minister for revenue, Mr Azhar had virtually become overall in-charge of the finance ministry, overshadowing the powers of incumbent Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance Dr Hafeez Shaikh.

Mr Azhar, who served as minister of state for revenue for 10 months in the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government and presented the federal budget last month, was made a full-fledged minister for revenue through a notification issued by the cabinet division on July 8. He was made revenue minister after Prime Minister Imran Khan praised him for presenting the budget and defending it in the National Assembly. "He [Mr Azhar] has now earned the federal ministership for himself," Mr Khan had said.

After Mr Azhar's appointment as minister for revenue, Hafeez Shaikh no longer held the portfolio of adviser on revenue. A slight change in the cabinet division's July 8 notification is said to be a setback for Mr Azhar and good news for Mr Shaikh who has become an overall in-charge of the finance ministry.

The cabinet division said its previous notification appointing Mr Azhar as minister for revenue "may be treated as withdrawn".

The source said Mr Azhar as minister for revenue had the authority to sign each and every file and approve or disapprove any decision related to the finance ministry. And Mr Shaikh, who had served as federal minister for finance during the last PPP government, lost his powers and had been compelled to serve under Mr Azhar.

After Mr Azhar got more authoritative role, Mr Shaikh was said to have expressed reservations over the withdrawal of revenue portfolio from him.

According to the latest situation, Mr Azhar has become Minister for Economic Affairs and Mr Shaikh holds the portfolio of Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue with the status of a federal minister.

Interestingly, the decision to remove Mr Zahar from the revenue division has been taken at a time when a large-scale reshuffling in the Federal Board of Revenue is on the cards.

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter