

### **Portfolio of Hammad changed within 24 hours**

ISLAMABAD: As a second thought within 24 hours, Prime Minister Imran Khan took the decision to change the portfolio of newly-elevated Federal Minister Hammad Azhar owing to strong protest of Adviser to PM on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh for making a move to clip his powers.

The government has withdrawn the earlier notification for appointment of Hammad Azhar as Federal Minister for Revenue and now given him the slot of Economic Affairs, considered less important than Finance and Revenue.

However, Hammad Azhar in his tweet on Wednesday stated: "I am grateful to PM Imran Khan for my elevation as federal minister and for entrusting me with the portfolio of Economic Affairs. I shall InshAllah continue to give my best for realisation of our goal as of a Naya Pakistan."

It's also being discussed among some circles in Islamabad that there is a possibility of elevating the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Chairman Shabbar Zaidi as Adviser to PM on Revenue and someone within the bureaucracy may be appointed on the slot of the FBR chairman. When the portfolio of Revenue Division was handed over to Hammad Azhar through a notification after taking oath on Monday, it was simply meant that more than 70 percent of IMF programme and its implementation was excluded from the domain of Dr Hafeez Shaikh with one stroke of pen. The IMF programme of \$6 billion under 39 months Extended Fund Facility (EFF) mainly revolves around Revenue Division as the Fund itself conceded that the ongoing IMF programme mainly focused on revenue mobilisation. If the Revenue Division is excluded from the domain of Dr Shaikh then he will simply remain responsible for issuing of notification of electricity prices on quarterly basis and gas prices on bi-annual basis. The monetary and exchange rate is already under the jurisdiction of the State Bank of Pakistan.

There is complete confusion and lack of cohesion in the working of the government as the decisions were made without well thought out strategy after which it had to face a lot of criticism. The inexperience and lack of coordination has remained hallmark of last 11-month rule of the incumbent regime.

Prime Minister Imran Khan had praised the performance of Hammad Azhar and had announced to elevate him from Minister of State to Federal Minister because of his performance during the proceedings of approval of budget for 2019-20.

Top official sources in background discussions with this correspondent commented that the mistake was committed which needed to be redone within 24 hours so the government withdrew its notification. Now newly elevated Federal Minister Hammad Azhar has been given portfolio of Economic Affairs Division.

The government had already clipped the powers of Finance Minister as it had excluded Statistics Division and Privatisation from its domain. The Statistics Division was handed over to Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms.

Just ahead of the budget in last April, the government had ousted former finance minister Asad Umar unceremoniously and appointed Dr Hafeez Shaikh on the slot of Adviser to PM on Finance. During the parleys with the IMF team in the town, the government brought key changes in the economic team and ousted then SBP governor Tariq Bajwa and former FBR chairman Jehanzeb Khan. Later on, former secretary finance Younas Dagha, a competent officer, was removed when he refused to succumb before the pressure of the IMF team. All these abrupt changes demonstrate that there is no thinking involved in decision-making process at highest level.

The prime minister has also been pleased to approve that Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh shall cease to hold the portfolio of Economic Affairs Division with immediate effect, the Cabinet Division notification said. Dr Shaikh was again handed over the portfolio of Revenue Division.

Teresa Dabán Sánchez, IMF resident representative in Pakistan, when contacted, said IMF has nothing to do with appointment of any official in Pakistan. “The appointments, allocation of responsibilities and other management issues related to senior officials and civil servants are entirely the decision of the Pakistani authorities,” she said.

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