

**Senate informed: no political leader except Shibli, Qamar met IMF country head**

Minister of State for Revenue, Hammad Azhar Thursday informed the Senate that not a single political leader except Leader of the House in Senate Shibli Faraz and PPP's Naveed Qamar came to meet with the IMF country head as he wanted to meet political parties' leaders. He was speaking in the Senate during Question Hour in response to a proposal of thrashing out a charter of economy by opposition senators including Mushtaq Ahmad of Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl's (JUI-F) Talah Mehmood to steer the country out of economic crisis.

"The government would welcome such initiative and the opposition should come forward to help us out as we want to make the country economically stable, but the lukewarm response shown by the parties to meet the IMF country head shows that opposition is not interested in the economy," he added. About ongoing negotiations with the IMF, he said ten rounds of talks with the Fund would be over within a day or two and a good announcement is expected to be made afterwards, adding the Parliament would be told about the negotiations, although it never happened in the past.

"Once technical level talks are over, uncertainty will change into certainty, having good impact on the economy," he added. He also informed the House that the Internal Audit Wing (IAW) of the Federal Bureau of Revenue would be made autonomous to doing way with the issue of conflict of interest within the department.

During the Question Hour, Azhar said that findings of Egmont Group, an informal network of 159 financial intelligence units, had been incorporated in Anti-Money Laundering Act (Amendment Bill) to be tabled in the National Assembly soon. The minister explained that after this legislation, Pakistan would become part of the group, which had visited Pakistan and shared its findings with the government. "We will be able to get related data from the group, which will provide technical help and will be handy in forensic audit," he said.

He said that after this arrangement, Pakistan is confident of becoming part of the group to deal with money laundering cases by digging out information, benefiting from the group. The minister, in reply to a question, noted that remittances this year would increase to \$22 billion, breaking the stagnant mode of the previous years. He added that exports had increased to \$25 billion and the government is committed to enhancing them further to strengthen economy.

He said work on NFC Award is under way and the government is committed to providing due share to the erstwhile FATA. He emphasised that discussions are moving forward steadily in the right direction. To another question regarding inflation, the minister said inflation rate in April reduced to 8.8 percent from 9.4 percent in March. He said the inflation rate in the first eight months of PTI government was the lowest as compared to the corresponding periods of the last two governments.

Minister for Planning, Development and Reform Khushro Bakhtyar told the House that Gwadar would be connected with the national grid at a cost of Rs 17.5 billion. He added there is consensus among all the stakeholders regarding Gwadar master plan. He said regional equalisation strategy is the agenda of government to bring less developed areas at par with rest of the country and added that in next PSDP, Balochistan would be given its due share, which was ignored by the previous governments.

**ZULFIQAR AHMAD**