

The devil is in the details!

ISLAMABAD: A key official, who has been involved in IMF talks, said the Fund's statement on agreement does not share the details of conditionalities, and warned, "the devil is in the details".

Talking to The News on condition of not being named, the source said the IMF press release makes a generalized statement and offers no details, no numbers. He said the details of the agreement when made public will let the people know what has actually been agreed upon and how seriously it would hurt the people.

The official source was contacted to know how different the conditions of the agreement are from what the IMF was discussing with the Pakistani team led by former finance minister Asad Umar. Sources said a lot has changed in these discussions from the IMF side after the Prime Minister Imran Khan changed his economic team.

There are complaints about the IMF doing/asking "more" after the departure of Asad Umar and his team. Additionally, a top finance ministry official missed the critically important last three days of the talks held between Pakistan and IMF last week. As reported by The News on Sunday last, the officer opted out of the talks when he was stopped from arguing Pakistan's case with IMF. Some of the sources have already termed the agreement as a "sell out". As reported in the print media on Tuesday, former finance minister Asad Umar said on Monday that he would speak next week to explain the difference between the terms and conditions he had negotiated with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the bailout package and those accepted by the new economic team of the government.

This he had said after being unanimously elected chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Umar also called the next meeting of the committee on May 22 to seek briefing from the Ministry of Finance on two of the most burning issues — a bailout package from the IMF and an update on compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

He said it was the right of the parliamentary committee to be briefed on the IMF programme, adding as the finance minister it was his commitment to placing all details of the fund's programme before the standing committee. He said he had repeatedly stated that he would not comment on the IMF programme during the course of negotiations but would make full disclosure once the deal was signed.

According to the official source, who has been part of the IMF negotiations, the IMF statement on the agreement does not offer anything about the conditions which remain hidden as yet from the people, media and even Parliament. The IMF on May 12 announced that it has reached staff level agreement on economic policies with Pakistan for a three years extended fund facility.

The IMF statement though said the Pakistani authorities and the IMF team have reached a staff level agreement on the economic policies that could be supported by a 39-month Extended Fund Arrangement for about US\$6 billion, it did not offer the details of the conditions that Pakistan has to meet. It is said that no numbers except one the next budget will aim for a primary deficit of 0.6 percent of GDP have been shared in the IMF statement.

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