

ZAHEER ABBASI

NA body irked by absence of Hafeez, Baqir

ISLAMABAD: Absence of Advisor to Prime Minister on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh and Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Reza Baqir from a meeting of a parliamentary panel was strongly flayed and the Finance Ministry was directed to convey the parliamentarians' concern to them.

As soon as the meeting of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance presided over by MNA Asad Umar started its proceedings, the opposition members pointed towards empty chairs, which were kept for Advisor to PM on Finance Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh and Governor SBP Reza Baqir. This led to a soft confrontation between treasury and opposition members. Nafeesa Shah was the one who pointed out the absence of the advisor on finance and Aisha Ghaus Pasha said the governor SBP was also missing from the committee.

Nafeesa Shah said, "The finance minister's chair always remains empty. This government's promise was to do things differently and why is it not doing things differently now?"

The chairman of the committee stated that former finance minister Ishaq Dar, who was widely known as deputy prime minister, rarely turned up in the committee and same was the case with his [Asad's] predecessor Miftah Ismail.

Aisha Ghaus Pasha said she wanted to have the report of sub-committee on inflation to be taken up as it is very important and it would be pointless to be taken up in the absence of the advisor on finance.

The secretary finance tried to pacify the members and stated that they could not attend the meeting because of being abroad for official engagements and he would convey to them the committee's concerns.

Some members of the committee stated that this chair has been empty for the last six years and the finance committee is not the preference of even a single minister.

The committee also deferred some legislation due to absence of the governor SBP who was required to submit a report personally and brief the committee on the Eradication of Riba Bill, 2019, and Islamabad Capital Territory Prohibition of Interest on Private Loans Bill 2019.

Qaisar Sheikh of PML-N wanted to know why an elected member was not made finance minister. He said when he was chairman of the committee, the then finance minister Dar wanted to remove him from the chairmanship because he was kept asking for his presence.

Umar said that political point-scoring on the absence would disallow the committee to go through the agenda.

Hina Rabbani Khar said it was unfortunate that absence of advisor pointed out by the committee members is being dubbed as political point-scoring. As chairman of the committee, Asad Umar directed for submitting details of last six years meetings of the committee, which were attended by the finance ministers, to the next committee meeting.