

### **Where is FBR chairman?**

ISLAMABAD: Some policy level differences have emerged among the top policy-makers of the economic team after which the FBR Chairman Shabbar Zaidi preferred to get 15 days leave from January 6 to 19, 2020.

The FBR's Member Inland Revenue (IR) Policy Seema Shakil is also on leave because of her health-related problem. Despite making repeated attempts, no one was ready to talk on record about the reasons for sudden decision of the FBR chairman to get two weeks vacation.

However, top official sources confirmed to The News in background discussions that although there was a routine version of the FBR high-ups that the FBR chairman took leave due to his health and personal engagements, but insiders say that differences did emerge in the start of this calendar year during a meeting related to textile issues among the top policy-makers of the country. In that meeting, some unpleasant words were reportedly exchanged.

Then Adviser to PM on Finance and Revenue Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh also visited the FBR headquarters and showed displeasure over the slow pace of installation of Point of Sale (POS) software that was highlighted by The News few days back.

"After some bitter exchanges, the FBR chairman preferred to get two weeks vacations to take some rest" said the sources. He might prefer to leave his existing position of the FBR chairman but nothing could be confirmed with authority at this stage.

The FBR chairman's cellphone was found switched off from last few days and even his Twitter account seemed dysfunctional for unknown reasons -- whether it was done with his consent or due to any other reason.

However, when contacted, FBR high-ups stated that the FBR chairman was not feeling well due to some health problems. The incumbent chairman, who had taken charge of his portfolio around eight months back in May 2019 after removal of former chairman Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan, felt that he was not feeling well and he had expressed it before his FBR colleagues. So he was advised by his close confidants that he should get himself checked up from the doctors in Karachi from whom he felt comfortable. Nothing has been found unusual as he got vacations on health grounds and due to his personal engagements, said an FBR official.

The incumbent FBR chairman took immense pressures when he conceded to FBR's annual target of Rs5.5 trillion on the eve of the last budget. The previous FBR team, especially former chairman FBR Jehanzeb Khan and former member Dr Iqbal were arguing with the IMF that the FBR target should be contained at Rs4.5 to Rs4.6 trillion as any figure beyond Rs5 trillion would prove impossible.

But the newly inducted chairman had accepted this challenging target of Rs5.5 trillion that required 44 percent growth to materialise it in the current fiscal year. Now the target of Rs5.5 trillion was slashed down to Rs5.238 trillion, but the shortfall in December 2019 stood at Rs115 billion. So far, the FBR had collected Rs2,083 billion in first six months of the current fiscal year. Now the FBR will have to collect Rs3,155 billion in second half (Jan-June) period in order to achieve the revised downward target of Rs5,238 billion on June 30, 2020.