



PM entrusts finance minister with task of running ECC affairs

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan has declined to lead the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet and has delegated the responsibility to Finance Minister Asad Umar who will lead the reconstituted economic decision-making body.

A senior government official told Dawn that the cabinet division had moved a summary to the prime minister seeking his approval to head four major cabinet committees, which included those on restructuring, privatisation, energy and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

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The prime minister, however, appointed his finance minister as chairman of the ECC, which has 12 other members — six of them are yet to be appointed though. The official said the decisions of the finance minister-led ECC would have to be endorsed by the federal cabinet to give them legal cover.

Other members of the ECC would include ministers for law and justice Farogh Naseem, petroleum Ghulam Abbasi, planning & development Khushro Bakhtiar and railways Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, besides the prime minister's advisers on commerce and textiles Razak Dawood and institutional reforms and austerity Dr Ishrat Husain. In addition, six more ministers — communications, national food security, power, privatisation, statistics and water resources — will also be appointed members of the ECC according to the notification.

The official said there are no set standards and rules directing who should head the ECC or other sub-committees of the cabinet. Different prime ministers have made varying decisions in the past. He explained that it was the prime minister's prerogative under the Rules of Business, 1973, to appoint as many committees of the cabinet as he or she desired and to assign any subcommittee of the cabinet to anyone of their cabinet colleagues.

Former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi had decided to head the ECC himself after replacing the finance minister at the time, Ishaq Dar. Mr Abbasi's decision had brought back the direct control of the prime minister's office — over federal ministries and divisions — that it had enjoyed when Shaukat Aziz was prime minister under retired General Pervez Musharraf's dictatorship.

Former prime minister Yousuf Raza Gillani initially continued with the arrangement when he inherited the government. Syed Naveed Qamar was finance minister at the time. The authority was subsequently transferred when Shaukat Tarin took the reins of the ministry.

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif had delegated all economic and financial powers to Ishaq Dar who reportedly headed, at one time, more than four dozen committees, including those on legal, constitutional and political affairs.

Meanwhile, the first meeting of the reconstituted committee has been called on Wednesday to take up a few major issues including an increase in consumer gas prices by an average 30 per cent. The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority had determined the rise, but the caretaker government declined to pass it on to the consumers even though it was legally required to do so

within 40 days of the proposal. The government contended that this increase was a major policy decision, which ought to be made by the new elected government.

According to the agenda, the ECC will also take up the issues of the liabilities of the Pakistan State Oil, rising circular debt in the power sector, and the predicted shortage of fertilizers, an official said.

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