

Rs30bn Sdgs Plan Being Moved From Cabinet Division

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan has decided to transfer the Rs30 billion Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Achievement Programme (SAP) from cabinet division to the parliamentary affairs division, for effective inclusion of parliamentarians in disbursement of funds for small development schemes, it emerged on Friday.

The decision was taken by PM Khan after he received a request from the ministry of planning, development and special initiatives led by Asad Umar for SAP's control, to streamline operation and management of public sector development programme (PSDP). It was argued that the cabinet division was an inappropriate choice of previous governments to deal with development schemes.

A senior government official told Dawn that instead of giving the control of disbursement of Rs30bn every year to the planning ministry, however, the PM directed that the SAP should be transferred to the parliamentary affairs division led by the newly inducted adviser to the PM Senator Babar Awan.

The official said the prime minister had directed the cabinet division to immediately move a summary to the federal cabinet for formal transfer of the subject of SAP along with staff, posts and budget to the parliamentary affairs division.

Currently the SAP with an allocation of Rs30bn is placed with the cabinet division under the direct control of the prime minister. About Rs22bn has so far been authorised for disbursement for community-driven schemes, mostly on recommendations of the party parliamentarians, in various constituencies across the country. The PM office earlier used to oversee the SAP funds' utilisation in constituencies of the parliamentarians through a 15-member steering committee.

Informed sources said the planning and development ministry as custodian of the development programme wanted to bring the SAP under its direct control, but some members of the cabinet and parliament had reservations over the ministry's control over these funds.

One argument was that the planning and development minister and the deputy chairman of Planning Commission were too engaged with the larger perspectives of development and had insufficient availability for elected members.

Another argument was that the parliamentary affairs division was mostly responsible for engagements with the parliamentarians and would be better placed for an interface with elected representatives of the people for development schemes, particularly under the SAP. However, even this division would be required to consult the prime minister office to process development schemes under SDGs.

A major part of the PSDP had already been removed from planning ministry's domain and placed under the ministry of finance.

This year the finance ministry operated and managed about Rs150bn worth of seven major programmes out of Rs700bn PSDP schemes. The Rs150bn allocations mainly covered Rs53bn for security enhancement, Rs72bn for merged tribal districts and Rs32bn fund for temporary displaced persons that has now been reduced to Rs17bn to create space for security enhancement.

The PTI parliamentarians as well as those belonging to its allies had been complaining about insufficient development activities in their respective constituencies to show performance to their voters since the inception of current government.

Although a total of Rs526bn out of Rs701bn federal development programme has been authorised for disbursement, almost half of it remains unutilised. The development programme is now further hampered by the lockdown and there are indications that no more than Rs550bn could be spent on ground this year. The government is already working on expenditure-control mode to spare funds for Covid-19 relief and minimise the fiscal deficit estimated to go beyond 9.5pc of GDP.

Early this year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had asked Islamabad to spend at least Rs6.2 trillion on SDGs over a decade to deliver on its global commitments.

Courtesy: Dawn news

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