

## **Reforms Commission fails to complete task: Ishrat**

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Dr Ishrat Hussain, Chairman of National Commission for Government Reforms (NCGR), has acknowledged that the body has failed to complete the task assigned to it by the outgoing government. He also wished to be replaced with new Chairman along with new members for continuing the work done so far.

Official sources told *Business Recorder* that the heavily paid NCGR, in its last meeting held on December 3, 2007 in Islamabad, also constituted committees to convince the caretaker Prime Minister and Chief Ministers that the work done by the Commission should be endorsed by them, which appears to be very difficult when general elections are scheduled for February 18.

Moreover, it is not in the ambit of the present set-up to undertake important policy issues. Dr Ishrat, according to sources, said that the outgoing government was committed to implement the reforms agenda, but due to unavoidable circumstances there was no further progress.

He said that the Commission could now utilise the window of opportunity available to it as there is a caretaker government. But Secretary, Finance, disagreed with him, saying that the caretaker set-up would not be in a position to take such vital decisions, sources added. Shahid Kardar, a member of NCGR, was of the opinion that more than anything else, this matter should be viewed as a moral issue, whether the caretaker set-up was morally eligible to take such key decisions.

Shafqat Ali Shah Jamot opined that it was not a realistic option and the Commission should preferably wait for the new government to get approval on the continuity of the reforms agenda.

Punjab Chief Secretary argued that it would be futile to wait for the new government, and added that the Commission should go ahead and get endorsement of its proposals by the steering committee.

Sources said that Jamot, while sharing this information with the Commission, said that most of the opposition parties were wary of NCGR with the opinion that the members were getting very attractive pay packages. Farooq Rahmatullah, however, brushed aside the apprehensions of Jamot, saying that the Commission should complete the task assigned, without bothering about the 'ifs' and 'buts'.

Sources said that Establishment Secretary Tariq Bukhari, ex-officio member of NCGR, argued that the Commission should present its proposals to the caretaker set-up and let it take the decision from the present government as to whether it wanted to evade or take certain vital policy decisions on the reform agenda. According to sources, Asif Riaz Bokhari, Director-General, Civil Service Reforms Unit (CSRU), opined that the Commission should take its proposals to the steering committee, and let it decide on the reforms' continuity during the interim period.

They said that Cabinet Division Secretary Masood Alam Rizvi wished that, if not the entire Commission, at least the Chairman should continue for another year, to ensure reforms continuity.