

## PTA member's appointment withdrawn under LHC pressure

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LAHORE: The Cabinet Division has finally withdrawn the notification of appointment of Farooq Awan as Member Finance Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and assured the Lahore High Court (LHC) that the appointment will be made in a transparent manner in accordance with the rules and the PTA Act.

The written assurance was

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submitted by Secretary Cabinet Division Ms Nargis Sethi in a contempt of court case.

A contempt of court application was filed with Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah on re-appointment of Farooq Awan as Member Finance, PTA by the Cabinet Division on March 1, 2013.

The contempt application was filed by Khawaja Saad Saleem on whose writ petition the same judge earlier ordered the removal of Farooq Awan from the post of chairman PTA on Jan. 15, 2013.

According to the documents available with The News, the Establishment Division through its office order (PF No (344)/E-5(PAS) dated March 1 2013) appointed Farooq Awan as Member Finance, PTA on deputation.

Later, in another notification (No (344)/E-5(PAS) dated March 11 2013) it withdrew the appointment. In a reply to the LHC, the cabinet secretary

prayed that the contempt notice issued against her may kindly be dismissed.

The sources said the government actually wanted to reappoint Farooq Awan as chairman PTA to complete the auction of 3G Spectrum in its last days in power, but the attempt was foiled by the LHC.

In her reply, secretary Cabinet Division that Farooq Awan was reappointed as Member Finance PTA by the Establishment Division and not by the Cabinet Division.

It was also learnt that the Cabinet Division had been opposing the reappointment of Farooq Awan but the Establishment Division and the prime minister overruled it.

Farooq Awan became a close trustee of the prime minister when he made all long distance telecom operators (LDIs) agree to sign a multibillion dollar controversial International Clearing House (ICH) Agreement under which call rates to Pakistan for overseas Pakistanis were drastically in-

creased and a cartel of operators was formed amid allegations of payment of huge kickbacks to those in the power corridors.

The US government has recently ordered all US telecom operators to hold payments to Pakistani LDIs resulting in the loss of over 100 million dollar to the national revenue and other international telecom regulators would follow suit.

The agreement resulted in the drop of incoming calls to Pakistan from 1.5 billion per month to 0.5 billion resulting in the loss of millions of dollars to the national revenue and exponential increase in grey traffic, as almost one billion minutes shifted to grey traffic every month.

Awan first issued a Policy Directive to the PTA when he was Secretary Ministry of IT from January to July 2012 on establishment of ICH and then moved as the chairman PTA to ensure the implementation of ICH agreement in letter and spirit.