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Nadeem Mahbub Named Acting HEC Chairman by Government

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The federal government has appointed Nadeem Mahbub, Secretary of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MFEPT), as the acting chairman of the Higher Education Commission (HEC). The appointment, effective July 29, 2025, follows the conclusion of Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed's term and will remain in place for three months or until a permanent chairman is named. The decision was made under Section 8(3) of the HEC Ordinance, 2002, and approved by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in his capacity as the controlling authority, according to an official notification reported by ProPakistani and The Express Tribune.

Mahbub, currently serving as an HEC member, assumes the interim position at a critical time for Pakistan's higher education sector. The HEC is responsible for regulating over

270 universities across the country and manages a budget for the 2025–26 fiscal year that includes approximately Rs. 39.48 billion allocated for development and ongoing schemes. With the selection of a permanent chairman delayed, Mahbub's role will involve maintaining policy continuity and overseeing key programs such as scholarship management, research development, and academic quality assurance.

The delay in appointing a permanent chair has raised concerns in the academic community. The selection committee, chaired by Federal Minister for Education Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, has yet to finalize an advertisement for the post, as reported by The Express Tribune. Similar transitional arrangements in the past, such as the short-term appointment of Ahmed Farooq Bazai in 2021, were criticized for contributing to administrative uncertainty within the HEC. Mahbub's appointment is seen as an attempt to ensure institutional stability while the selection process continues.

In recent years, the HEC has faced scrutiny over governance and resource allocation. Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, in August 2024, publicly criticized the commission's performance in implementing development projects. Despite these challenges, the HEC remains central to Pakistan's education policy, with ongoing initiatives such as the Pak-Austria Fachhochschule project and international collaborations. Mahbub is expected to focus on keeping strategic programs like the National Research Program for Universities (NRPU) on track, reinforcing the commission's mandate during the interim leadership period.