

## Govt 'shelves' decision to reduce age threshold for elderly allowance

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The government has shelved the decision of the previous government to lower age threshold for elderly allowance to 65 years.

The populist decision, which drew flak from all quarters, of former government of Sher Bahadur Deuba, had not entered into implementation even though it has already been two months since the decision was taken.

Sources close to the government told Republica that the decision has been put on hold, considering the additional financial burden that it puts on the government. Implementation of the decision to lower threshold for elderly allowance would have added a liability of Rs 13 billion to the government. The decision would have made an additional 500,000 eligible for the allowance.

Another controversial decision of distributing additional grants of Rs 100,000 to quake victims made by the previous government is, however, not in the meeting minutes of the cabinet decision, according to Chiranjibi Paudyal, an information officer at the Office of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers (OPMCM).

Cabinet meeting minutes published on the website of OPMCM does not include the decision.

Though the erstwhile Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport, Bir Bahadur Balayar, had informed media persons about both decisions after the cabinet meeting of January 24, Chief Secretary Lok Darshan Regmi did not write the decision of such grants on the meeting minutes, officials say.

Talking to Republica on Friday, Finance Minister Yub Raj Khatiwada said that they have not received any such decision made by the previous government.

Asked why the decision of distributing additional grants to quake victims was not written in meeting minutes, former minister Balayar said he has also heard that the chief secretary has not included it in the meeting minutes. "The chief secretary did not receive my phone when I called him repeated times to get an update about the decision. I will let you know after talking to Regmi," Balayar added.

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Breaching the general practice of seeking prior approval of the finance ministry before announcing decisions that put additional financial burden on the state, the Deuba-led cabinet had decided to increase grants for quake survivors and reduce age threshold for elderly allowance without calculating the financial burden.

In the white paper on country's economic status issued on Friday, Finance Minister Khatiwada criticized the past governments for making the treasury empty through fiscal indiscipline and providing budget for several decisions made on whims or to serve political interests. "Several decisions of the previous governments put long-term financial burden on the state. The government is not in a position to implement such decisions," reads an excerpt of the white paper.

Source : My Republica, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2018