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Govt seeks consensus on military courts extension

Baqir Sajjad Syed | Updated April 04, 2019



A court room is seen in this file photo. — AFP/File

ISLAMABAD: Struggling to table the bill for the extension of military courts term, the government on Wednesday conceded that it would not be able to renew the legislation for the tribunals without the opposition's support in parliament.

The National Assembly is reconvening next week (April 12), but as of now the government does not appear to be in a position to table the bill for granting a second extension to the courts, the legal term of which ended on March 30 due to the two-year time frame stipulated in the 28th Constitution Amendment through which they got the first extension in 2017.

Editorial: *Extending military courts, again?*

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, while talking to reporters after a seminar at a university here, said it would be futile to lay out the bill as long as there was no consensus. “The bill will be introduced if and when the consensus is achieved. It’s a constitutional amendment,” he maintained.

Foreign minister says tabling the bill is useless without opposition’s support

Constitutional amendments can only be adopted through two-thirds of the votes in favour of the bill in both lower and upper houses of parliament, separately.

Asked if there were any signs of flexibility on the part of the opposition on the issue, Mr Qureshi said that the opposition first needed to agree to talk. The government had earlier invited opposition leaders for a briefing on the National Action Plan (NAP) on March 28. However, the leaders of both main parties in opposition — the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party — opted out of it, forcing the government to put it off.

“We had invited the opposition on NAP and we invite them again,” said Mr Qureshi, expressing the hope that opposition leaders would reconsider their decision about not attending the briefing, and that an opportunity could be created.

Talking about his earlier communication with opposition leaders on the issue, he said that they were reluctant, but not negative about the issue. “I can understand their reluctance,” he added.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, meanwhile, said whilst talking to Dawn that NAP had been adopted as a strategy for fighting extremism and terrorism through consensus among the political parties, and that the government wanted future decisions related to NAP to continue to be taken through the unanimity of all parties. “The extension of the tenure of military courts is useful, but subject to the consent of the opposition,” he said. “We are trying to build that consensus.”

Earlier, on Monday, the army reiterated its support for NAP. The ISPR, in a statement on the corps commanders’ meeting, said: “The forum also expressed its resolve to support government and all stakeholders in the implementation of the National Action Plan.”

Military courts were set up as part of NAP, point two of which provided for the setting up of special courts, headed by the officers of the armed forces, initially for a period of two years for speedy trials related to suspected terrorists.

Earlier, before this interaction with the press, Mr Qureshi while addressing a seminar at the National University of Science and Technology said that Pakistan hoped that following the general elections in India, its new government would adopt meaningful dialogue with this country, adds APP.

Terming the world's silence over atrocities in India-held Kashmir 'remorseful', he explicated that this country had always expressed serious intentions about engaging India in bilateral dialogue but the Indian government drew back. "They have general elections in the near future and Pakistan bashing increases their vote bank," he observed.

Talking about other issues, the minister said that the incumbent government was 'not oblivious to' the needs of Balochistan and had taken 'great' initiatives in health, education and infrastructure, including Gwadar airport. He also maintained that Pakistan's political-economic diplomacy was overcoming hurdles and attracting foreign direct investment, especially in terms of CPEC where special economic zones are being built for third parties.

Also addressing the ceremony, Mishaal Malik, spouse of JKLF leader Yasin Malik, said that human rights violations by India's armed forces were a matter of routine, adding that global pressure was required on the subject. She emphasised that the release of captured Indian pilot Abhinandan was a powerful peace gesture by Prime Minister Imran Khan but India did not reciprocate the move.

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