

Islamabad Anti-Terrorism Court rejects Imran Khan's bail extension plea

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Online Desk: An Islamabad Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) rejected on Wednesday PTI chairman and former prime minister Imran Khan's request for an extension in his interim bail. The plea was made in a case pertaining to a protest outside the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) following its decision in the Toshakhana case. The verdict was announced by Judge Raja Jawad Abbas Hassan on the grounds of non-appearance in court.

Earlier today, the court rejected Imran's request for exemption from appearance on medical grounds. "Imran Khan should appear in court by 1:30pm," the ATC judge said in an order announced at 1:20pm. The PTI chief has been convalescing in his Zaman Park residence in Lahore ever since he was wounded in an assassination attempt during a pitstop his caravan made in Wazirabad while they were marching on Islamabad. During today's hearing, Imran's lawyer Babar Awan told the court that Imran tried to travel to Islamabad but could not. Previously, the court had granted the PTI chief the last opportunity to appear on February 15.

The case was filed against Imran after PTI workers took to the streets and held demonstrations outside ECP offices across the country. The reference alleging that Imran had not shared details of the gifts he retained from the Toshakhana and proceeds from their reported sales was filed by lawmakers from the ruling coalition last year. On October 21, the electoral body had concluded that the former premier had indeed made "false statements and incorrect declarations" regarding the gifts.

The Toshakhana is a department under the Cabinet Division that stores gifts given to rulers and government officials by heads of other governments and foreign dignitaries. According to Toshakhana rules, gifts/presents and other such materials received by persons to whom these rules apply shall be reported to the Cabinet Division. The watchdog's order had said Imran stood disqualified under Article 63(1)(p) of the Constitution. Soon after the verdict was announced, the PTI leadership had asked people to take to the streets. Clashes were also reported between the police and protesters in Islamabad, Peshawar and Karachi.

At the outset of the ATC hearing today, Imran's lawyer Babar Awan said that he wanted to present some arguments in the case and then proceeded to read out the FIR registered against his client. "The case against Imran was registered on the violation of Section 144," he pointed out, arguing that in the view of the ATC, this was not a terrorism case. "The court has already approved bails of other persons named in the case," Awan contended. He requested that terrorism charges from the FIR should be removed.

At that, the judge said that the court was currently hearing Imran's bail plea. "Is the violation of Section 144 also punishable?" Imran's lawyer asked here, adding that the additional sessions judge had granted Imran interim bail till Feb 27. "I request the court to extend my client's bail till then as well. Imran tried to travel but he couldn't," he said. Awan went on to say that Imran "has never run away from court or the country" and appealed for a last chance. "I am ready to submit surety bonds worth Rs10,000." The lawyer then requested the court for time to consult Imran regarding the matter after which the hearing was adjourned. Meanwhile, the PTI said on its official Twitter account that Imran will hold a press conference at 6pm today.