

Pakistan security forces withdraw from around Imran Khan's home

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Online Desk: Pakistani security forces withdrew from around Imran Khan's home on Wednesday, putting a halt to clashes that had erupted after police tried to arrest the former prime minister for not showing up in a case against him related to selling state gifts. Police and other security personnel were seen leaving the Lahore neighbourhood where Khan's home is located. Earlier, security forces had fired tear gas and water cannons at hundreds of Khan's supporters who had cordoned off his home in an effort to prevent his arrest.

The violence had added to the instability in nuclear-armed Pakistan, which is struggling with an economic crisis and awaiting an International Monetary Fund bailout. It was not immediately clear if the security forces had ended their court-ordered operation to arrest Khan. After they withdrew, Khan was seen standing outside his home, wearing a gas mask and talking to supporters.

A lower court in the capital Islamabad had last week issued an arrest warrant against Khan for defying orders to present himself in court to defend charges that he unlawfully sold state gifts given to him by foreign dignitaries while he was prime minister from 2018 to 2022.

In a tweet, Khan said he had signed a "surety bond" that would guarantee his appearance in the court by a March 18 deadline, and senior aide Fawad Chaudhry said Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, had asked the court to stop the police from arresting him. According to a list shared by Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb last year, the gifts given to Khan included seven expensive wrist watches, including one valued at 85 million Pakistani rupees (about \$300,000).