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Lahore Court Flags Pattern in Deadly Police Encounters

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The Lahore High Court has voiced alarm over a troubling trend in police shootouts that consistently result in fatalities among detainees, sparking concerns about the legitimacy of such encounters.

The Lahore High Court has questioned the recurring pattern of fatal police encounters in Punjab, where only detained suspects are shot while

officers remain unscathed a trend now drawing serious judicial scrutiny.

During a recent hearing, Lahore High Court Chief Justice Aalia Neelum voiced grave concerns over what appears to be a troubling pattern in law enforcement tactics. Her remarks followed the petition of Farhat Bibi, whose son, Ghazanfar Aslam, was allegedly killed in a staged police shootout. She is now pleading for the safety of her remaining son, Ansar Aslam, currently incarcerated in Sheikhpura jail, fearing he may face the same fate.

Chief Justice Neelum pointedly questioned why bullets in these so-called “encounters” consistently strike only the accused. “Why is it that the accused are always the ones hit, while police vehicles and officers never seem to suffer damage?” she asked in court. The question has fuelled public debate and legal speculation about the credibility of such operations.

This is not an isolated case. Over recent years, Pakistan’s police forces particularly in Punjab have come under fire for a rise in extrajudicial killings, often labeled as “encounters.” While authorities claim these incidents are the result of suspects resisting arrest, the growing number of deaths under similar circumstances suggests otherwise. Human rights advocates have long argued that some of these operations are staged to eliminate suspects without due process, often bypassing the justice system entirely.

The petitioner’s legal team argued that there was no evidence proving Ghazanfar Aslam posed a threat, nor was there any transparent investigation following his death. They warned that unless proper

oversight is enforced, others in custody including Ansar Aslam remain vulnerable to similar abuses.

This judicial intervention signals a shift in tone from the judiciary, which has at times been criticised for its hands-off approach toward police conduct. It also raises questions about internal accountability within the Punjab Police force and whether meaningful reform will follow.

While Pakistan's current political focus remains divided across multiple domestic concerns, this case puts the spotlight firmly on the country's law enforcement culture. It remains to be seen whether the Punjab Police will be held accountable, or if this too will be another entry in a long list of unprosecuted tragedies.

Chief Justice Neelum's remarks have sent a clear message: the courts are watching.