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## Standoff Continues Over Suspension of 26 PTI Lawmakers in Punjab Assembly

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The ongoing dispute over the suspension of 26 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Members of Provincial Assembly (MPAs) remains unresolved after another round of talks between the Punjab government's treasury committee and opposition lawmakers. The core issue revolves around differing views on what qualifies as legitimate protest versus disruptive conduct within the assembly. Both sides claim progress, but a concrete resolution is still elusive.

The suspension stems from an incident on June 27, when the Speaker of the Punjab Assembly, Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan, invoked Rule 210(3) of the Rules of Procedure of the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, 1997, citing “disruption, ruckus, and chanting indecent slogans” during a speech by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. Following this, some treasury lawmakers moved to disqualify the suspended MPAs under Articles 63(2) and 113 of the Constitution of Pakistan. The Speaker later gave the suspended PTI members a chance to present their case under Article 10-A, which guarantees the right to a fair hearing.

The negotiation committees from both sides have met multiple times, with the latest talks reportedly agreeing in principle to conduct assembly business according to the decisions of the Business Advisory Committee and Rule 223 of the 1997 Rules of Procedure. However, the treasury insists that the restoration of the suspended members hinges on the Speaker's final decision. Conversely, the opposition refuses to attend any assembly sessions until all 26 suspended MPAs are reinstated.

Sources familiar with the negotiations revealed that the opposition declined the treasury's request for documented assurance on five compliance conditions designed to curb disruptions. The treasury side emphasizes the importance of respecting speakers and maintaining order, condemning any abusive or violent behavior during assembly proceedings. The opposition, while disavowing violence, insists that protest remains a fundamental right within democratic norms, pointing out that existing assembly rules do not eliminate lawmakers' ability to voice dissent.

Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Mian Mujtaba Shujaur Rehman confirmed that while some conditions were mutually agreed upon, assembly rules prohibit interruptions during speeches, including those by the Chief Minister and opposition leader Malik Ahmad Khan Bhachar. Bhachar, however, stopped short of confirming any commitment to forego protests or slogans during speeches.

Observers note that the opposition appears to have been afforded a "face-saving" exit amid mounting criticism of the suspension, but lawmakers remain firm in exercising their right to protest. Both parties have described the third round of talks as "successful," though substantive agreement remains pending.

This standoff underscores ongoing tensions within the Punjab Assembly and the broader political landscape, where parliamentary decorum and democratic freedoms continue to clash. The resolution of this dispute will be critical to restoring functional governance and maintaining the integrity of legislative processes in Punjab.