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Islamabad High Court Takes Federal Government to Task Over Aafia Siddiqui Case Negligence

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The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has launched contempt proceedings against Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his entire cabinet, following their continued defiance of a court order requiring an explanation for their lack of cooperation in the legal case of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist imprisoned in the United States. The court's rebuke reflects growing concerns over the current administration's pattern of legal evasion and disregard for due process.

In a stern three-page order, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan directed the IHC office to initiate a contempt petition against the entire federal cabinet, citing its failure to respond to a previous judicial directive. The court had instructed the government to present clear reasons for its unwillingness to aid a U.S. legal motion involving Siddiqui. “The government has not responded with the reasons despite being directed to do so; it is in contempt,” the judge wrote, adding that all ministers, including the prime minister, are now required to submit formal replies within two weeks.

Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani national with a background in neuroscience, has been incarcerated in the United States since 2010, convicted on charges of attempted murder of U.S. personnel in Afghanistan. Her case has long stirred public sentiment in Pakistan and raised concerns about human rights and legal oversight. Despite this, Islamabad’s current leadership has appeared hesitant, if not deliberately obstructive, in its involvement in her legal battle overseas.

The federal government, instead of complying with the IHC’s May 16, 2025, order to revisit and amend a decade-old petition concerning Siddiqui, chose to challenge the directive in the Supreme Court. As of now, the Supreme Court has not scheduled a hearing. The move has raised eyebrows, especially as the delay signals a possible strategy to stall judicial accountability.

Justice Khan, who was due to begin his summer leave on July 21, made it clear in the last hearing that he would continue overseeing the case, given its national importance. However, the case was mysteriously omitted from the IHC cause list. Undeterred, Justice Khan proceeded with the hearing regardless and issued a strongly worded order later that day.

In a pointed critique, Justice Khan questioned the motives of IHC Chief Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar and what he termed the “demolition squad” introduced into the court following the 26th Constitutional Amendment. This amendment, which has faced criticism for centralizing judicial appointments and limiting independence, appears to have fostered an environment where politically convenient decisions are prioritized over judicial integrity.

Justice Khan’s remarks further revealed internal obstructions within the court system itself. He explained that despite clear plans to preside over the case, bureaucratic red tape and lack of cooperation from the chief justice’s office interfered with proper scheduling.

“Whether that was by design or oversight, I cannot say for sure,” he stated, “but given the

government's stiff opposition to do what is right and to stand by the daughter of the nation at this critical juncture, I may be forgiven for thinking that it was the former.”

This latest development highlights what critics describe as a troubling pattern within the current government, a failure to uphold national interest when it comes into conflict with international or bureaucratic pressures. For many observers, the treatment of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui's case is emblematic of a broader unwillingness among Pakistan's ruling elite to act decisively in defense of its citizens abroad.

As the contempt proceedings unfold, public pressure is likely to mount on the administration to explain its legal stance and justify its apparent inaction. The case could very well become a litmus test for the government's credibility and its respect for the rule of law, both at home and on the international stage.