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Lahore ATC Rejects Omar Ayub Bail Pleas

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The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Lahore has rejected interim bail petitions filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and opposition figure Omar Ayub Khan in three separate cases linked to the May 9, 2023 riots. The court also refused his request for exemption from personal appearance, citing his continued absence from proceedings.

Presiding Judge Manzar Ali Gill issued the rulings on Saturday, dismissing Ayub's pleas in cases related to attacks on Jinnah House, Askari Tower, and the Shadman Police Station. All three incidents were part of widespread unrest following the arrest of PTI founder Imran Khan on May 9, which led to violent demonstrations across Pakistan.

The court noted that Ayub had not appeared before it despite earlier directives. His legal counsel had argued for exemption, citing “compelling circumstances,” but the judge ruled that his presence was mandatory, particularly given the serious nature of the charges.

The cases fall under terrorism and vandalism provisions, with prosecutors alleging that Ayub played a role in instigating or facilitating the incidents. The ATC stressed that accused individuals must cooperate fully with investigations and attend hearings unless legally excused.

Ayub’s legal troubles have mounted in recent months. In July, the Faisalabad ATC sentenced him to 10 years in prison in a separate May 9-related case. The court ruled that convicted persons must surrender before filing appeals, a position consistent with Pakistani legal procedure.

Following his conviction, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) disqualified Ayub from holding public office. The disqualification came as part of a broader crackdown on PTI leaders involved in the May 9 unrest, many of whom face multiple legal challenges across different jurisdictions.

The Jinnah House attack, one of the cases at issue in Saturday’s ruling, involved an assault on the residence of a senior military commander. The Askari Tower case pertains to the storming and damage of a commercial building in Lahore, while the Shadman Police Station case involves alleged arson. Authorities say these incidents collectively caused significant property damage and disrupted public order.

Ayub has denied all charges, maintaining that the cases are politically motivated. His legal team has vowed to challenge the ATC’s decisions, but it remains unclear when or if he will return to Pakistan to face the proceedings in person.

The court has scheduled further hearings for later this month, with prosecutors indicating they will push for swift trial dates. Legal observers say Ayub’s absence could complicate his defense and lead to additional warrants.