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Supreme Court Case Backlog Continues to Grow

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Despite the appointment of seven new judges in recent months, the number of pending cases in the Supreme Court of Pakistan continues to rise, data released on Thursday shows.

According to the Supreme Court's official website, a total of 57,089 cases were pending as of August 6, up from 56,892 cases just last week, highlighting the ongoing backlog. This rise comes even after six judges were elevated in February and another from the Lahore High Court in April.

When Chief Justice Yahya Afridi took charge, the court faced 59,435 pending cases, with 16 permanent and two ad hoc judges serving at the time. Although some progress was observed with figures dropping to 55,702 cases in March the overall number has risen again, pointing to deeper systemic issues.

Judicial experts suggest multiple factors are contributing to this slow progress. While Chief Justice Afridi has expedited criminal cases, especially those involving death sentences, other types of cases continue to accumulate.

A senior lawyer commented that if the Court could reduce pendency by 3,000 cases annually, it could significantly clear the backlog in the next three years. However, this depends on consistent management and judicial coordination.

One notable challenge has been internal divisions within the judiciary, particularly following the 26th Constitutional Amendment, which led to the formation of new constitutional benches. These benches have dealt with complex cases involving civilian trials in military courts, judicial transfers to the Islamabad High Court, and reserved seat allocations.

Despite hearing these high-profile cases, the constitutional benches are yet to issue detailed judgments, delaying legal clarity on several important constitutional matters. Although minority opinions have been published in the military courts case, the majority verdict remains pending.

Efforts had previously been made to address the backlog through the Case Management Plan 2023, introduced by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah. However, reports suggest that this plan is no longer being actively implemented.

The current judicial term is also affected by the summer vacation, limiting court proceedings and contributing to the rise in pending cases.

As Pakistan's top court continues to face a mounting caseload, legal experts stress the need for improved case management and judicial reforms to ensure timely justice delivery.