

Senate passes bill imposing three-year jail term for unauthorised protests

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Senate has passed a bill that imposes jail sentences of up to three years for holding or participating in unauthorised protests in the capital city. The law aims to regulate rallies and ensure they are held in government-approved areas only. The bill was passed with a majority vote in a session chaired by Senate Chairman Yousaf Raza Gilani. According to the new legislation, peaceful protests will be allowed in designated areas like Sangjani, but participants of unauthorised gatherings could face prison time. Opposition parties, including members of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), opposed the bill, accusing the government of attempting to prevent their rallies in Islamabad. PTI Senator Ali Zafar voiced concerns, saying the law was aimed at stopping an upcoming PTI protest. However, Senator Irfan Siddiqui defended the legislation, stating that it is designed to provide better facilities for peaceful gatherings, not to suppress political expression.

Federal Minister Azam Nazir Tarar added that the government would allocate specific areas for protests and ensure media coverage at these locations. The bill will now move forward for further approval before becoming law. Earlier on Tuesday, the Senate Standing Committee on Interior had approved the bill, titled “Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Bill 2024” and presented by Senator Saleem Mandviwalla. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan had urged the people of the country to attend the party’s rally in Islamabad on September 8. He called on supporters to defy any obstacles that might be created to prevent them from participating in the event. Talking to reporters during the hearing of the £190 million case inside the Adiala Jail, Imran said that he condemned terrorism because it was harming the country. He denied a report that he had directed the party leaders, who had gone into hiding, to resurface. Imran said that the PTI rally in Islamabad would take place as per schedule. “Now, there will be a gathering in Islamabad on September 8. I am asking the entire nation to come out on September 8. Do not tolerate any obstruction on that day,” he said.