

## Khawaja Asif says PTI 'siding' with terrorists after party opposes 'Azm-e-Istehkam' op

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ISLAMABAD:

Defence Minister and senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Khawaja Asif on Sunday accused Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of siding with terrorists against the military. The development comes a day after the Apex Committee of National Action Plan, chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, approved "Operation Azm-e-Istehkam" to eliminate terrorism and extremism across the country. The meeting, held in Islamabad on Saturday, included key federal cabinet members such as the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Defence Minister, Interior Minister, Finance Minister, Law Minister, and Information Minister. Chief ministers from all provinces and Gilgit-Baltistan, services chiefs, provincial chief secretaries, and other senior civilian, military, and law enforcement officials also attended. The forum conducted a

comprehensive review of the ongoing anti-terrorism campaign and internal security situation. It examined the progress of the National Action Plan's multi-domain principles and highlighted areas where implementation was lacking. Emphasis was placed on addressing these shortcomings as a priority. During a National Assembly (NA) session chaired by Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Sunday, Asif was given the floor to speak on the budget. His remarks prompted protests from the PTI-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), who chanted slogans against the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) operation and the killing of Pashtuns. He added, "The voice of minorities in Pakistan is being silenced. There are killings in Swat, Sargodha, and Faisalabad. Bloodshed in the name of religion cannot be allowed." He explained that the decision for Operation Azm-e-Istehkam was made in an Apex Committee meeting, which included PTI members and the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P). The Apex Committee of National Action Plan, chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved "Operation Azm-e-Istehkam" to eliminate terrorism and extremism across the country yesterday. Asif noted, "We will discuss Operation Azm-e-Istehkam in this house. If PTI has objections, they can raise them then. Today, they are demonstrating in support of terrorists and against the army." Confirming the launch of Operation Istikham-e-Pakistan, Asif mentioned that the Apex Committee had approved the continuation of previously incomplete operations, and this decision will be brought to the cabinet and then to the

parliament. During the NA session today, PTI and SIC walked out of the parliament in protest after being denied the opportunity to speak on the floor. During a media talk following the walkout, PTI asserted that the military must seek confidence through parliament before initiating operations.

Operation Azm-e-Istehkam aims to eradicate extremism and terrorism decisively and comprehensively. It will coordinate and align efforts across multiple fronts to address the threats, while intensifying efforts to curb terrorist activities through regional cooperation within the political and diplomatic spheres. The operation will bolster the armed forces' renewed and vigorous efforts with full support from all law enforcement agencies. Effective legislation will be enacted to close legal loopholes that hinder the prosecution of terrorism-related cases, ensuring exemplary punishments for offenders. This campaign will be complemented by socio-economic measures aimed at addressing the genuine concerns of the populace and creating an environment that discourages extremist tendencies. The forum reiterated that the fight against extremism and terrorism is Pakistan's own battle, crucial for the nation's survival and welfare. It was decided that no one would be allowed to challenge the state's authority without repercussions. The forum also reviewed measures to ensure foolproof security for Chinese nationals in Pakistan. Following the prime minister's approval, new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were issued to enhance the security framework for Chinese citizens in the country.

