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## Government decides to 'ban' PTI

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ISLAMABAD:

Just days after the Supreme Court resurrected PTI, the PML-N-led ruling coalition decided on Monday that a reference will be sent to the top court seeking a ban on PTI, adding that the government will also initiate Article 6 (high treason) proceedings against ex-PM Imran Khan, ex-President Dr Arif Alvi and ex-deputy speaker Qasim Suri for dissolving the National Assembly back in April 2022. In a press conference, Federal Minister for Information & Broadcasting Ataulah Tarar announced that the ruling alliance has also decided to challenge the recent decision of the Supreme Court through which it declared that the PTI is entitled to have reserved seats in the assembly, saying the government would file a review petition against the ruling. Additionally, the information minister announced that the ruling parties have decided to take strict legal action

against individuals campaigning from abroad, as well as lobbyists involved in conspiracies targeting Pakistan. Moreover, the government's spokesperson said that the federal government will also swing in action against all those who were involved in pushing the country on the brink of default by allegedly sabotaging an IMF deal, further promising legal action for using cipher – a diplomatic cable – for personal and political interests by the then PTI leadership. The information minister's press conference has come on the heels of a decision by the Supreme Court through which it ruled that PTI is a political entity as well as entitled to have reserved seats in the assembly. The court while setting aside the decisions of the Peshawar High Court and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) also allowed the lawmakers to file an affidavit before ECP within 15 days, showing their affiliation with a political party of their choice. The federal government, which expressed its reservations on the top court's ruling, has now revealed its plans by promising legal action against the major opposition party. The route of the legal action, however, goes through the Supreme Court as the federal government will have to file references before it seeks a ban on it as well as initiating Article 6 proceedings against the ex-rulers. "Federal government will file a case to ban Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf," the information minister announced in a press conference held at PTV Headquarters, Islamabad. While announcing the coalition government's next plan of action, the minister said that "the government and its coalition partners have decided

to file a review against the [SC] decision” in the reserved seats matter. On the reserved seat decision, the government’s spokesperson reiterated that PTI was giving relief even when it hadn’t sought anything from the apex court. He said a question would be raised through the review petition if those who have been given relief had even asked for it, further asking why a political party was given a relief that it wasn’t entitled to. Tarar said that PTI did not conduct intra-party elections and the MNAs concerned did not even say it before the Supreme Court that they were the members of PTI yet, the court provided them relief even when the individuals were not present before the court. During the press conference, the minister alleged that PTI has long been involved in anti-state activities, saying the constitution empowers the federal government to seek a ban on such a party by sending a reference to the Supreme Court. He reiterated in the press conference that the government would be justified in banning PTI over its alleged involvement in matters ranging from obtaining prohibited funding to sabotaging the IMF deal and from resettling the Taliban in Pakistan to the May 9 riots. He revealed that the prohibited funding proceedings were continuously being stayed for the last six years. Tarar said that the reference pertaining to Article 6 (high treason) “against the then President Arif Alvi, the then Prime Minister Imran Khan Niazi and the then Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri will be sent to the Supreme Court after the approval of the federal cabinet.” He said that PTI leaders had “unconstitutionally” dissolved the assemblies back

in April 2022 during a no-confidence motion against ex-PM Imran Khan. In the press conference, Tarar further recalled that writing a letter to IMF was part of PTI's anti-state agenda, vowing that the country would not be allowed to be played with anymore. "If the country is to be taken forward, the evil elements must be banned," he said. He also alleged that it was PTI, which attacked the state institutions, saying "the national defense was attacked in personal interest on May 9." Tarar alleged that the entire family of the PTI founder Imran Khan was involved in the May 9 attacks, saying the three sisters of the PTI founder were present outside the Corps Commander House when the other PTI leaders were allegedly inciting people to reach certain locations for bringing so-called revolution. "Founder PTI promoted politics of anarchy and violence," Tarar alleged, saying he has damaged the defense institutions of the country. The government's spokesperson also blamed the then PTI government for bringing back the Taliban in Pakistan. On one hand, he said, he said, shelter was given to the "terrorists" and, on the other hand, they allegedly attacked the GHQ and other state institutions. He said that PTI had practically ended the National Action Plan – a plan to eliminate terrorism and extremism from the country. Apart from it, Tarar said that PTI created "drama of cipher", saying the then ambassador to US said that there was no threat yet the PTI leadership insisted that there was – a reference to PTI's stance that the US was behind the no-confidence motion or regime change in Pakistan. While playing leaked audio in

the press conference, Tarar alleged that Imran Khan was himself saying in it that they only have to play with the cipher. Now, he said, PTI and its leadership are busy targeting the Chairman of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in an attempt to build pressure on NAB to withdraw from the Tosha Khana case, in which Imran and his spouse were arrested after they were acquitted in Iddat case. Though the government had previously envisaged imposing a ban on PTI but had shelved the plan. Back-to-back legal victories of PTI and Imran have now pushed the government to once again go after PTI and its leadership.