
Azm-e-Istehkam not military operation but anti-terror campaign: DG ISPR

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ISLAMABAD:

The military on Monday clarified that operation Azm-e-Istehkam is not a military operation but a counter-terrorism campaign, saying a strong lobby does not want the National Action Plan (NAP) to succeed. “Comparing Azm-e-Istehkam to past operations like Zarb-e-Azb and Rah-e-Nijat is not appropriate,” DG ISPR Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry told a news conference in Rawalpindi. “Our problem is that serious issues in the country are also politicised. Azm-e-Istehkam is an example of this,” he added. “The government has also said that Operation Azm-e-Istehkam is a coordinated counter-terrorism campaign, not a military operation,” General Sharif said responding to a question about the proposed operation. The chief military spokesperson insisted that a narrative is being created to make Operation Azm-e-Istehkam controversial.

During a press conference on Monday, a journalist asked General Sharif about comparisons being made between past operations 'Rah-e-Nijat' and 'Zarb-e-Azb' and Azm-e-Istahkam, and concerns raised in political circles about the possible displacement of local people. The DG ISPR said the June 22 statement by the Apex Committee of National Action Plan clearly stated that the civil and military leaders reviewed the progress on counter terrorism efforts and agreed that there was a need for a comprehensive counter-terrorism campaign in the country. Referring to the same statement, he said that political parties would be consulted and legislation would be enacted for the counter-terrorism campaign in the country. However, he said that a narrative has been created that the operation will displace people and should be opposed. "This is a matter of our survival, and we turn even serious matters into a joke due to politics," he lamented" Citing the example of smuggling, he said that an important goal of Operation Azm-e-Istehkam is to break the nexus between terrorism and crime. He mentioned that terrorists are operating in the country through benami properties, smuggling, and non-custom paid vehicles. He asked, "Why is Azm-e-Istehkam being made controversial? A strong lobby wants the objectives of the National Action Plan and Azm-e-Istahkam not to be achieved." "Why has a big mafia, a political mafia, an illegal mafia stood up from everywhere that we will not let this happen? They want to make it controversial based on lies." The military spokesperson presented slides detailing the objectives of

the National Action Plan, the actions taken so far, and other information, stating, “We are conducting four to five intelligence-based counter-terrorism operations every hour.” The DG ISPR said that extremists involved in attacks on law enforcement agencies and ‘digital terrorists’ share the common goal of targeting the military and its leadership. When a journalist asked the DG ISPR how the institution is dealing with criticism against the army chief, the institution, and the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). General Sharif said that ‘digital terrorism’ is active on social media against the military and its leadership. He stated, “Just as a terrorist tries to impose his will through weapons, similarly, a digital terrorist tries to impose his will by spreading anxiety through mobile phones, computers, lies, fake news, and propaganda.” The spokesperson for the Pakistani military said that there is very little information available about any ‘digital terrorist,’ but both extremists and digital terrorists share the common goal of targeting the military. “Digital terrorists are attacking the military, its leadership, and the relationship between the military and the public based on fake news.” He stated that only laws and punishments can stop digital terrorists. “Continuously, obscene talk and fake news are spread against the military and other institutions’ leadership.” He warned that if digital terrorists are not stopped, they will get more space. “We cannot allow those illegal elements who want to make this country a soft state.” Earlier, a journalist asked whether the recent sit-in by Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) at Faizabad has

any connection with the Pakistani military or the establishment. The military spokesperson responded that the central issue is Palestine, and the government and military's clear stance is that this is genocide and unacceptable. He said, "The government and institutions were trying to resolve this issue with sensitivity, without violence, through dialogue." However, he added that "propaganda started that the institution itself had arranged it. If tomorrow Jamaat-e-Islami sits or any other protest happens, will it also be claimed that the military organised it?" "There is no accountability for fake news in the country. The facts are in front of you that this is a sensitive issue. If you solve it amicably, further speculations are made. All kinds of conspiracy theories circulate about this." Meanwhile, he cited the example of a sit-in in Chaman, a Pakistani city bordering Afghanistan, where there was local opposition to the requirement of passports for cross-border movement. He claimed that illegal trade is promoted at the Afghan border. The sit-in at the Chaman border, ongoing for nearly ten months over the issue of cross-border movement, was called off on Sunday after the organisers' demands were accepted. According to the government, movement from Chaman will now be based on ID cards and Afghan Tazkira, and those without a Pakistani ID card will be able to travel on an ID card token.