15-DAY RESTRICTION: TOP COURT BARS AVIATION ADVISER FROM WORK

News / Personalities



Just as the federal government is mulling over the privatisation of the national air carrier, the **top court has restricted** Shujaat Azeem from carrying out his duties as special assistant to the prime minister on aviation affairs.

While hearing multiple petitions challenging his appointment, the three-judge apex court bench, headed by Chief Justice Anwar Zaheer Jamali, also summoned Captain (retd) Azeem on January 11.

The petitions have been filed by Mahmood Akhtar Naqvi and Pakistan Airline Pilots Association, seeking contempt proceedings against the prime minister over the appointment.

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In 2013 also, the Supreme Court had expressed concerns over the appointment of Azeem as an adviser to the PM, because of his earlier court martial by Pakistan Air Force.

In view of the court's concerns, Azeem had stepped down from his post. However, he was reappointed after the retirement of former chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.

On November 12, the court while taking up pleas against Azeem's appointment had given two options to the federal government: either to de-notify him or defend his appointment in court.

On Friday, Attorney General Salman Aslam Butt requested 15 more days for filing a response over the contempt petitions.

When the bench asked him to ensure Azeem would not use his authority during this period, the AGP sought time to consult with the PM.

After half an hour, Salman told the judges he could not contact the prime minister. On his own behalf, however, he assured the bench that Azeem would not take part in the process regarding the privatisation of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

However, the court insisted that he disassociate himself from the aviation affairs as well.

When the AGP argued that court-martialled officers could be appointed after five years of conviction, Justice Amir Hani Muslim said this condition was specific only for the elected members and not for advisers.

He also asked the AGP to place the original file of his court martial case.

Earlier, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) secretary stated in his reply that the aviation division did not deliberately conceal Azeem's conviction. The fact, he claimed, was not mentioned in earlier replies, because of an oversight and misunderstanding as the replies focused on his appointment.

The reply recalled the secretary had tendered an unconditional apology and left himself at the court's mercy over his inability to offer a plausible justification on the alleged concealment of Azeem's court martial.

The court was requested to treat the omission of the fact from the earlier replies as an unintentional error.

The summary for Azeem's appointment had been moved and initiated by the cabinet division.

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