

Imran Khan Handed 10-year Prison Sentence Just Days Before Elections in Pakistan

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Former Pakistani Prime Minister and chairman of the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, Imran Khan, and former Foreign Affairs Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi were sentenced to ten years in prison for allegedly violating the Official Secrets Act, Pakistani TV channel GEO reported on January 30.

Imprisoned since August 2023 after being convicted and sentenced to three years on corruption charges, 71-year-old Khan pleaded not guilty to charges of leaking state secrets that dealt a new blow to his chances of contesting Pakistan's general elections in February.

According [to](#) Al Jazeera, the charges relate to a confidential cable called a cipher sent to Islamabad by Pakistan's ambassador to Washington last year, which Khan is accused of making public. Khan's defence disputed the accusation, stating that the former prime minister had already claimed that the cable's contents appeared in the media from other sources.

For Khan, the cable is proof of a conspiracy by the Pakistani military and the US government to overthrow his government in 2022 after he visited Moscow shortly before the start of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine. Washington and Pakistan's military deny the accusations.

The verdict was announced by special court judge Abdul Hasnat Zulqarnain during the hearing at Adiala Jail in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi, in the presence of leaders of both parties.

Syed Zulfiqar Bukhari, a spokesperson for Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, told

the media outside the courts that PTI will challenge the court's decision.

"This was pretty much a writing on the wall," he said, adding that the trial against Khan was held in an "unlawful manner."

This is the second time that Khan has been indicted on the same charges, after a higher court quashed an earlier indictment on technical grounds, saying the correct procedure was not followed. A new trial, conducted in prison for security reasons, is expected to begin on February 1, in the presence of his lawyers, family and some selected journalists.

Khan has already had dozens of lawsuits filed against him, denounced by his defence as an attempt to banish him from politics. Although a higher court suspended the corruption sentence, he remains in prison on other cases, including a charge of instigating violence following one of his arrests.

Elections in Pakistan are to be held on February 8, and this decision against the PTI leader can prove to be decisive in the upcoming elections. However, a 10-year sentence is unlikely to be carried out and will likely be rejected - if not cleared - in Pakistan's High Court or Supreme Court.

Pakistan's pro-US establishment expects this, but the verdict was important to try to demoralise Khan and his supporters ahead of the highly contentious elections. It is telling that the court conducted the trial without allowing any media or public access and reportedly rejected the defence's request to cross-examine the prosecution's witnesses and experts, making it obvious that the proceedings were a sham.

Khan's sister, Begum Khanum, told the media outside the courthouse that it was a "very painful day for Pakistan."

"We only got five minutes for cross-examination in the court. This is such an important case and this is how it was handled? If they cannot give us justice, we will get justice ourselves," she added.

Although Khan has remained jailed for many months, he remains highly popular and still managed to engage with his supporters through ingenious means, such as communicating via audio clips generated by artificial intelligence (AI).

It is recalled that a 4-minute video was posted on Khan's X account on January 21, in which the AI-generated voice of the former prime minister speaks about civilian deaths in Gaza and the war in Ukraine, sending a warning to the international community that "the world is heading towards a grave international crisis."

The AI video also mentioned how Pakistan is struggling with internal conflict, especially since "the entire state machinery" is violating laws to keep him and the PTI out of the electoral process. Little would he have predicted that just over a week after the AI video, he would be sentenced to a decade in prison.

AI is proving to be a useful political tool for the PTI as Khan remains imprisoned, a media ban on PTI is enforced, and its leaders are stopped from holding public rallies. As the PTI is finding ingenious methods to overcome the difficulties, the pro-US establishment of Pakistan has taken drastic measures to imprison him for ten years. However, as said, the sentence will unlikely be carried out as the deep and evident corruption will be one step too far for

Pakistan's High and Supreme courts.

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