

PAKISTAN'S SUPREME COURT FINDS PRIME MINISTER GILANI GUILTY OF CONTEMPT; APPEAL PLANNED; OPPOSITION CALLS FOR RESIGNATION

In a case that has been simmering for months, Pakistan's Supreme Court today found Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani guilty of contempt of court for failing to carry through with investigation of corruption charges against President Asif Ali Zardari. Gilani's "sentence" was brief, lasting only about 30 seconds until the court adjourned. Dawn's description of what is likely to come next suggests that appeals of various sorts will take months to play out, but the largest opposing political parties are calling for Gilani's immediate resignation.

From the Express Tribune:

The bench found Gilani guilty of contempt of court for refusing to reopen corruption cases against the president, but gave him only a symbolic sentence of a few minutes' detention in the courtroom, while he did not receive any jail term.

"For reasons to be recorded later, the prime minister is found guilty of contempt for wilfully flouting the direction of the Supreme Court," said Justice Nasirul Mulk.

A seven-member bench, headed by Justice Nasirul Mulk announced the verdict and convicted him for violating Contempt of Court Ordinance 2003 section 5 and the charges framed against him were for

willfully disobeying the court's orders and ridiculing it.

The court cited article 63 (1) (g) of the Constitution and observed that the premier might face consequences under it.

The long process ahead for appeals is described in Dawn:

Senator (R) Iqbal Haider said, "The fact remains that the PM has been found guilty of contempt of court and was sentenced under Article 63 (1) (g) of the Constitution of Pakistan. His sentence, no matter how short it was, has serious repercussions. The prime minister has been labelled as a convict."

"Gilani will certainly file an appeal and will remain in his position till the final appeal is dismissed. At the same time, it is very important to understand that the dismissed appeal can also be filed for further review, providing the government with more time to drag the case," added Haider.

According to Haider, if the review is also dismissed by the court, the matter will then be taken to the National Assembly of Pakistan. The debate will be initiated to assess the verdict and the speaker of the assembly, on the basis of unanimous decision, can file a reference in the Election Commission of Pakistan."

"The Election Commission of Pakistan, reviewing all the charges and verdicts against the PM, will issue a notification for de-seating him entirely, however, I must also say that this notification can also be challenged by Gilani," he added.

Opposition political parties were very quick to call for Gilani's resignation:

Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) on Thursday demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani after he was convicted of contempt of court.

"Prime minister should immediately resign. He should step down without causing further crisis," PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif said live on Geo News, also calling for fresh elections. "The court's verdict is based on truth and reality. It must have punished the prime minister with a heavy heart, but the prime minister himself is to be blamed."

"The prime minister himself invited this situation," he added.

Sharif said the PML-N will decide its future course of action if Gilani attends parliamentary sessions after the sentence.

PTI chief Imran Khan, holding a press conference stated that Gilani, in light of the Supreme Court order, is no longer the prime minister of Pakistan. "He has lost all moral authority, so he should quit office from today."

If Gilani doesn't resign, the PTI will bring out a 'tsunami march' which will be the biggest show in the history of Pakistan, the party leaders threatened and added that the media will be briefed about the march after the completion of the legal process in the Supreme Court.

It appears, then, that Gilani has legal standing to prolong for several months the process that could eventually lead to him being removed from office. Also, there appear be multiple steps at which he could be proclaimed fit to remain in

office. The question remains whether he can do so under what seems likely to be very strong political opposition.