

Centre to file review petition in SC against Karachi anti-encroachment operation

KARACHI: Amid criticism from the business community coupled with serious concerns raised lately by political parties — both in government and opposition in the Sindh Assembly — the federal government on Tuesday decided to file a review petition in the Supreme Court against the ongoing anti-encroachment operation in Karachi that has seen thousands of shops and commercial facilities razed within a month, official sources said.

Meanwhile, the prime minister is arriving here on Sunday on the governor's request. He will meet representatives of traders, stockbrokers and prominent citizens to discuss various matters, including the anti-encroachment drive.

The decision to file a review petition came from the top when Sindh Governor Imran Ismail flew to Islamabad and held a one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan and pleaded the case of the Karachi traders and political parties. The meeting between the two, which lasted for over an hour, discussed the progress of the anti-encroachment operation led by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) and its repercussions.

PM Imran Khan expected to arrive in city on Sunday

“Mr Ismail argued that the operation against encroachments has proved quite effective, but at the same time its modalities need to be reset,” said a source privy to the discussion at the PM-governor meeting. “He referred to complaints of the traders who were tenants of the KMC and their business facilities were regularised over the years but since they were raised on encroached land, they faced the demolition.

“Similarly, there are thousands of people whose employment depended solely on the businesses demolished, thus leaving financial future of thousands of families in limbo.”

The prime minister, the source said, agreed to the concerns raised by the Sindh governor and issued directives to the attorney general to file a review petition in the Supreme Court, asking the apex court for new guidelines or rules that could cause minimum damage to people's businesses and thousands of jobs attached to them.

The decision by the federal government came days after a series of protests by traders and concerns raised by political parties, which said the drive was creating a serious human crisis. From the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party in Sindh to its opposition parties — Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan and from Jamaat-i-Islami to former mayor Mustafa Kamal-led Pak Sarzameen Party — fears have been raised by all political stakeholders over the collateral damage caused by the KMC's anti-encroachment drive.

The Supreme Court in October 2018, while directing the deputy commissioners, Rangers and cantonment board officials to extend required support, gave a month to Karachi Mayor Wasim Akhtar to remove encroachments from Empress Market and its neighbouring areas in Saddar that led to the launch of the drive.

On the other hand, the KMC with the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) is also busy removing encroachments and illegal structures on court orders on a petition of former city nazim Advocate Niamatullah Khan seeking action to get 162 amenity plots vacated by “land mafia and political parties” in the city.

The petitioner had accused, without naming anyone, political parties of setting up offices on 127 amenity plots and parcelling out 35 other plots and some parkland for residential and commercial purposes over the past four years.

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