

# Swat valley: Sharia Regulation approved by Pakistan Parliament

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The National Assembly (NA, lower house of the parliament) of Pakistan approved the Islamic sharia law regulation, which is called Nizam-e-Adl Regulation 2009, with majority within two hours on April 13 without any debate. This regulation will be implemented in Malakand division, especially in Swat valley, of North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Taliban are controlling the major parts of tribal agencies, Swat valley and its neighboring districts. They also have a strong presence in many other part of the province, which has common boarder with Afghanistan. President Asif Ali Zardari signed the regulation as NA passed the resolution. However, Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a regional party, boycotted the session. Its leader Altaf Hussain said, "We do not accept Taliban sharia."

When the President Zardari decided to present the regulation to the parliament before signing it, Taliban threatened the parliamentarians saying that any member of NA who will oppose the regulation will be an apostate and would be declare non-Muslim.

Spokesman of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Swat, Muslim Khan, said a day before that the assembly member who will oppose the bill would contest the next election 'if he remained alive.'

The frontier province is run by Awami National Party (ANP), which is a secular party. Unfortunately the same party is making deal with Taliban. On Feb. 16 of this year, the povincial government of NWFP had made a truce with Taliban fighters and accepted their demand to impose Shariah and establish Qazi (Islamic judge) courts in Swat valley, once a princely state. Some analysts suggested that despite government's claim, the deal is giving more breathing space to the militants who have been challenging the writ of the government and now de-facto ruler of the area. .

The liberal Muslim and religious minorities have great concerns about the deal which have giving the legitimacy to the authority of Taliban. Many say it is a move to the Tabanization of the country. Many Christian leaders show their dissatisfaction to the deal and the role of the parliament and the president to give legal cover to the deal.

Swat valley is under the control of Taliban leader Mullah Fazlullah, who is maintaining his power through brutality and illegal FM radios. After the peace deal, the army has halted its 2-year long operation against the militants in which about 1,500 militants, soldiers and civilians had died. According to many members of NA claimed that the military operation was failed to control the Taliban in the region.

In the first phase seven Shariah courts were established on March 16. Apart from that civil judges and 500 lawyers were asked to leave the area because their services are not needed under the Islamic laws and there is no guarantee for their safety.

President was supposed to sign the regulation to give a legal cover o the peace deal agreement and to the Qazi courts. The president came under internal and international pressure not to sign the deal after a video came in public in which a 17-year-old-girl was being flogged by Taliban of Swat.

Therefore, few days ago, Maulana Sofi Muhammad, the arbitrator of the deal and father-in-law of Swat Taliban's leader Mullah Fazlullah, threatened the government that he would withdraw his support of the deal. Interestingly, the ANP's provincial government is seeking the support of that person who says the democracy is un-Islamic. The provincial government also threatened the federal government that if the president will not sign the deal ANP would withdraw its support from the national coalition government.

A local leader of ANP in Swat, Afzal Lala, admitted that the deal was a compromise and the government has surrendered to the Taliban. In addition, another leader from the same party Hashim Babar said the government has made the peace deal from the position of defeat.

Now the leaders of the religious parties are demanding for the same sharia regulation for rest of the country. Even a Federal Minister of State Ayatt Ullah Durani demanded for Qazi courts in Balochistan province as well.

The government signed four (4) agreements with Taliban in NWFP during the rein of former president General (retd.) Parvaiz Musharraf. On Nov. 3, 2007, a peace deal was also signed with the Taliban of Swat by the same regime. Before this new deal, the present government had also signed an agreement with Taliban in Swat. However, Taliban never respected any agreement and each time they had broken the agreement after stopping military operation against them, getting money and weapons and after freeing the Taliban from jails. After each agreement they regrouped and became stronger.

According to the latest media reports, after taking control of Swat, Taliban have already taken the control, of Swat's neighboring city Buner. People of Buner and other adjacent districts are leaving their areas for their safety.

Iqbal Haider, a former federal law minister raised a question that the present peace deal in Swat at what cost?

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