

President approves Sharia laws for Malakand

By Syed Irfan Raza

Monday, 16 Feb, 2009 | 02:54 AM PST |

DAWN.COM



Approval of the president is compulsory for the promulgation of any such law in the area. - File photo.

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zadari, who termed the victims of militancy 'national heroes,' has given go ahead to the provincial government of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) to allow militants to enforce Sharia laws in entire Malakand Division including Swat, Dawn has learnt.

A source close to President Zardari said the president, in a recently held meeting with a delegation NWFP government, agreed to the demand of radical clerical leader Sufi Muhammad Khan, leader of Tehrik-e-Nifaz e Shariah-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) in Swat Valley regarding imposition of Islamic law in the area.

The president's approval was sought because under the law the provincial government cannot make any amendment in the existing laws in Malakand without his approval,' the source said.

The provincial information minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain claimed that President Zardari had promulgated an ordinance required to make amendments in the law and enforce Sharia laws in Malakand.

He told media that following promulgation of the ordinance, the Awami National Party (ANP) provincial government was holding talks with the militants and holding a grand jirga which will also be attended by the chief of (TNSM) Sufi Muhammad Khan.

However, the president has said a number of times in the recent past that government will not hold dialogues with those who were not ready to drop their weapons in troubled areas.

When contacted, President's spokesman Farhatullah Babar neither confirmed nor denied the promulgation of any such ordinance by the president saying the official version of the Presidency will be issued after the grand jirga. However, he confirmed that no law could be amended in the area without the approval of the president.

Analysts said the government had bowed its head before the militants in Swat by agreeing to amend the law of the land and enforcement of 'self-styled' Sharia of a militant organisation like TNSM.

The TNSM's main demand is the replacement of regular courts with Islamic courts. There are reports that over 70 Sharia Courts have already been established in Swat.