

Lawyers in Pakistan's capital strike to protest 'unfair' transfer of judges



Riot policemen carry their gear as they walk past the Supreme Court building in Islamabad on July 25, 2022. (AFP/File)

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ISLAMABAD: Lawyers associated with the capital's bar associations and councils have gone on strike today, Monday, to protest against the president's move to transfer three judges from different high courts to the Islamabad High Court (IHC).

President Asif Ali Zardari on Saturday approved the transfers of Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar from the Lahore High Court, the Sindh High Court's Justice Khadim Hussain Soomro and Balochistan High Court's Justice Muhammad Asif to the IHC, invoking anger from the capital city's district and high court bar associations.

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Zardari went ahead with the transfers despite opposition from five of 10 IHC judges. In a letter addressed to the chief justices of the Supreme Court and high courts on Friday, the judges said the decision was unfair to the existing senior judges of the IHC.

They also cited speculation and news reports that the government wanted to appoint Justice Dogar as the IHC's chief justice, saying that it would be a "fraud on the constitution."

"This decision is unfair to the judges serving in the IHC as it clearly affects their seniority," Asad Manzoor Butt, president of the Lahore High Court Bar Association, told Arab News.

Butt supported the Islamabad High Court Bar Association's call for notification of the judges' transfer to be canceled.

"We will travel to Islamabad to consult with the Bar leadership and extend our support to them," he said.

Pakistan's constitution empowers the president to transfer a judge from one high court to another after the concerned judge consents to the decision. The president can approve the transfer after consulting the chief justice of Pakistan and the chief justice of both high courts.

The Islamabad Bar Council (IBC) said on Sunday that the capital city's lawyer bodies will pursue all legal and constitutional avenues to challenge the move and safeguard the "judicial independence of Islamabad."

It said an All-Pakistan Lawyers' Convention will be held under the IBC on Monday to formulate a future strategy to challenge the transfers.