

Pakistan plans reforms in militancy-hit tribal regions

28/11/2015 16:40 by admin

Islamabad: A high level committee in Pakistan has been working on reforms to bring the country's tribal regions to the national mainstream as violent extremism and terrorism has badly disrupted the lives of the people.

The reforms include an important suggestion to merge the tribal areas into the northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province so they have representation in the provincial assembly, Xinhua reported.

Presently the federally administered tribal areas (FATA) do not have representation in the provincial assembly.

However, the national assembly and the senate have members from the tribal regions. Another proposal is that a FATA elected executive council should be formed to elect chief executive like provincial chief ministers.

The idea behind the government's move is to remove the sense of deprivation among the people of FATA as the activities of armed groups have damaged their traditional system of "jirgas" or council of elders.

Jirgas had long been the only accepted way to settle disputes among the tribesmen. However, hundreds of tribal elders were killed in target attacks allegedly by the Pakistani Taliban and other militant groups, disrupting the tradition.

There are high hopes for revival of the traditional jirga system as a series of major military operations have cleared all tribal regions of the Taliban and other militants and the writ of the local authorities has been established.

Now the government plan to put in place reforms could bring the tribal regions at par with the other parts of the country.

Adviser to the Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs is heading the special committee, which is now in the process of consultations with the tribal people and different segments of the society to seek their input and evolve a larger consensus on the reforms.

Separately, lawmakers from the tribal areas have submitted a private bill in the national parliament that mainly suggests FATA merger into the KPK, giving the tribal areas a status of a province or forming an elected council of FATA in the pattern of provincial assemblies.

Support for the proposed reforms has substantially grown as a vast majority in the tribal regions wants improvement in the image of their areas tarnished due to activities of armed groups there.

These groups had been blamed for terrorism across the country and even on the other side of the border into Afghanistan.

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