

## **Pakistan SC dismisses review plea against Asia Bibi's acquittal**

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Bibi, who faces threats from Pakistan hardliners, is now free to leave the country. "On merit, this petition is dismissed," Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosar said in court, while dismissing the review petition.

### **Pakistani protesters burn a poster image of Asia Bibi, who has spent eight-years on death row accused of blasphemy and acquitted by a Supreme Court in Pakistan (File/AP Photo/Pervez Masih)**

The Supreme Court of Pakistan Tuesday dismissed a petition challenging the acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who was convicted and sentenced to death under charges of blasphemy.

A three-member bench, headed by Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, dismissed the review petition filed by Qari Muhammad Salaam, Dawn reported. Bibi, who faces threats from Pakistan hardliners, is now free to leave the country.

Security was tightened in Islamabad where the court is located. Paramilitary Rangers were deployed in addition to the regular police to deal with any unsavoury situation. Bibi's lawyer, who fled to the Netherlands after receiving death threats for defending her, returned home last week to represent her in the case. Bibi has been in hiding since the Supreme Court acquitted her in October.

In the petition, it has been argued that the Supreme Court's acquittal of Bibi did not meet the standards of jurisprudence as well as Islamic provisions and the "normal principle of justice with reference to application in blasphemy laws".

The lawyer of the complainant Qari Muhammad Salaam argued that Bibi's acquittal is a matter concerning the Muslim clergy and religious scholars should also be called to present their point of view to which the chief justice retorted, "The verdict was given on the basis of testimonies; does Islam say that one should be punished even if they are found not guilty?" "Prove to us what [you believe] is wrong with the verdict," he said.

Acquitting her of all charges in October last year, then chief justice of Pakistan, Mian Saqib Nisar, had said, "Tolerance is the basic principle of Islam."

"If our religion of Islam comes down heavily upon commission of blasphemy, then Islam is also very tough against those who level false allegations of a crime," the judgement said. The Supreme Court, while overturning the death sentence handed to Bibi by The Lahore High Court, had said that the prosecution has "failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt."

Hours before the Supreme Court announced its decision today, Shafeeq Ameeni, acting head of the hardline Tehreek-e Labaik movement, which led the protests last year, issued a new warning to the court not to rule in favour of the "blasphemer".

On June 14, 2009, Asia is alleged to have made some "sarcastic and defamatory remarks" against Prophet Muhammad during an argument with three Muslim women. The three women had allegedly refused to drink water from a container that had been used by a Christian. A few days later, a mob accused her of insulting Islam's Prophet Muhammad, and that led to her initial conviction.

A trial court had sentenced Bibi to death in November 2010, under section 295-C of Pakistan Penal Code. The offence

carries a mandatory death sentence. The Lahore High Court upheld the verdict in October 2014. Asia, who had pleaded not guilty, had appealed against her conviction.

The 47-year-old mother of two was on death row for eight years before the Supreme Court, in October last year, acquitted her of all charges, sparking nationwide protests and death threats from hardline groups who demanded her execution.

- (Inputs from PTI)