Pak orders freeze of Azhar's assets, imposes travel ban

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
Islamabad, May 3

PAKISTAN HAS ISSUED an official order to freeze the assets of and impose a travel ban on JeM chief Masood Azhar after the UN declared him a 'global terrorist'.

Pakistan-based Azhar is also banned from selling or purchasing arms and ammunition.

The UN sanctions committee on the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda on Wednesday announced the designation of Azhar, leader of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), over its ties to Al-Qaeda.

The JeM has claimed responsibility for the Pulwama suicide attack that killed 40 CRPF soldiers and led to a spike in military tensions between India and Pakistan.

The Security and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) ordered all non-banking financial institutions and regulating authorities on Thursday to block all investment accounts of Azhar.

The SECP ordered that all companies should scan their data and inform the SECP within three days about the necessary action being taken against the accounts of Azhar.

An official of interior ministry said that Azhar was already on the Fourth Schedule of the Anti-Terrorist Act (ATA) and could not travel without permission of the police. He was also barred from having any weapons due to the listing under the ATA.

His name was also already on the list of proscribed persons maintained by the National Anti-Terrorist Authority (NACTA).

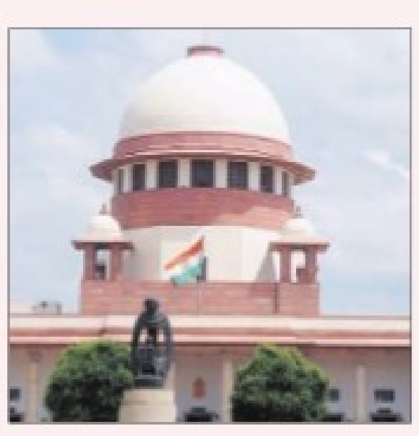
According to foreign office spokesman Mohammad Faisal, Pakistan would fully cooperate with the international community.

Pakistan's foreign ministry, in a notification issued Wednesday said: "The Federal government is pleased to order that 2368 (2017) be fully implemented" against Azhar.

The government directed officials to take actions 'as appropriate for the implementation of sanctions' against the JeM chief, according to the notification.

The UN designated Azhar as a 'global terrorist' after China lifted its hold on a proposal by the US, the UK and France to blacklist him. — PTI

SC agrees to hear VVPAT review plea by next week



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, May 3

THE SUPREME COURT on Friday agreed to hear next week a review plea filed by 21 Opposition leaders seeking further increase in random matching of VVPAT slips with EVMs in the ongoing general elections.

The apex court had on April 8 directed the Election Commission to increase random matching of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips with electronic voting machines (EVMs) in five polling booths per assembly segment from one booth.

The top court, however, had not agreed to the demand of 21 Opposition leaders for counting of at least 50% of VVPAT slips with EVMs in every assembly segment.

Opposition leaders, led by Andhra Pradesh chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu, had sought the review of the apex court's order, saying the 'increase from 1 to 5 is not a reasonable number and does not lead to satisfaction desired by this court'.

The plea was mentioned for urgent hearing before a bench comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Deepak Gupta.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for petitioners, told the bench that the review plea be listed for hearing next week.

The bench accepted Singhvi's submission and said the matter will be heard next week.

The plea said: "The petitioners submit that the aforesaid increase to a mere 2% is not sufficient and will not make any substantial difference to the situation that existed prior to the passing of the impugned order.

"Therefore, even though the petitioners have succeeded on the merits of their contention, their success does not redress their grievance or cause any meaningful change to the situation that they were originally aggrieved of."

Referring to earlier observations of the apex court, it had said that the 2% increase in random matching of VVPAT slips with EVMs would not achieve the purpose of raising "public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process".

The plea has opposed the Election Commission (EC) argument, which was accepted by the court, that as the elections were nearby and hence it would not be viable to increase the number of random matching of VVPAT slips with EVMs.