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Bilawal calls for judicial reforms, removal of ‘black laws’ enacted by dictators

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Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Tuesday called for the urgent abolition of laws enacted during the country’s dictatorial regimes, branding them as “black laws” that are a hindrance to democratic progress. Addressing the Balochistan High Court Bar, Bilawal emphasised the need for comprehensive judicial reforms and a renewed focus on merit-based

appointments within the legal system. “Ending the dictatorship-imposed black laws is essential for Pakistan’s democratic evolution,” Bilawal said. He highlighted the sacrifices made by past generations for the restoration of democracy, adding that these outdated laws continue to hold the country back. “Our struggle for democracy spans generations, and it’s time to remove the remnants of dictatorship from our legal framework.” Bilawal praised the resilience of Balochistan’s lawyers in their ongoing battle against authoritarianism. “Balochistan’s lawyers have always stood firm against dictatorship, and their fight for justice has been a beacon for the entire nation,” he said. He also acknowledged the challenges faced by the province, including terrorism and political instability, noting that legal reforms were necessary to stabilise the region. Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari outlined a broader agenda for judicial reform, calling for the creation of a constitutional court to handle critical cases and ensure swift justice. He criticised the existing judicial system, particularly the delay in case resolutions and the high number of unfilled judicial positions. “There are around 24 vacancies in the Lahore High Court and 13 in Sindh, but no progress has been made in filling these positions,” PPP Chairman said. “The backlog of cases continues to grow, diverting the judiciary’s focus from its core responsibilities.” Bilawal also highlighted the importance of revising the process for appointing judges. He expressed concern over the lack of dialogue among judges and the judiciary’s internal challenges. “We need a system

where judges communicate effectively, and cases are resolved efficiently. The current situation is unsustainable, and reforms are urgently needed,” he said. Addressing the concept of judicial independence, he warned against viewing any institution as beyond reproach. “We must end the perception of ‘sacred cows’ within the judiciary and other institutions. No institution should be immune from criticism or accountability,” he said, urging the legal community to take an active role in holding the judiciary accountable. Bilawal also raised concerns about the reliance on military courts to handle terrorism-related cases, arguing that their existence reflected the inefficiency of the civilian judicial system. “Military courts continue to emerge as the go-to option because of claims that the judicial system is unable to deal with terrorists effectively,” he said. “This narrative needs to change, and we need to empower the civilian courts to take on these cases.” The PPP chairman further criticised Pakistan’s laws on contempt of court, questioning whether it was fair to punish individuals for expressing dissent against judges. “Is freedom of expression truly upheld when someone is sentenced to life imprisonment for speaking out against a judge? What does that say about the state of free speech in our country?” he asked. He went on to reference historical challenges, including the struggle against former military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, and the efforts of his mother, the late Benazir Bhutto, in her fight for democracy. “My mother’s political struggle was aimed at restoring the constitution. Her journey for the restoration

of democracy spanned three decades, and today, we continue that fight,” he added. Bilawal also mentioned past political manoeuvrings, referencing the collusion between former Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, General Kayani, and General Pasha, which he said undermined Pakistan’s Charter of Democracy. “If the 1973 constitution had been restored to its original form, what would have happened to the status quo? Our democracy was manipulated through backdoor deals,” he remarked. Bilawal concluded his address by stressing the need for a stronger judicial framework, one that is not reliant on individual leaders but instead rooted in robust institutions. “We need to build a system where justice is delivered not overnight but in due time, and it should not depend on the appointment of a single chief justice. Strengthening institutions is the only way forward,” he said. He further urged for the establishment of constitutional courts at both federal and provincial levels to ensure timely and impartial justice for all citizens. “The creation of constitutional courts will not only speed up the delivery of justice but also allow existing judges to focus on constitutional matters without distractions,” he said. “If these reforms are not implemented, the legal community and the bar associations must step up and hold the judiciary accountable.” PPP chariman ended his speech by reaffirming his commitment to judicial reform, pledging to continue pushing for the elimination of dictator-era laws and the strengthening of Pakistan’s legal system.