

## PML-N and PPP reach agreement on constitutional amendments



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Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) President Nawaz Sharif and Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari have held discussions during which the two leaders reached an agreement on constitutional amendments. Bilawal called on Nawaz Sharif at the Punjab House, where the former Prime Minister welcomed the PPP leader. The two leaders also exchanged views on the country's political situation. The discussion primarily focused on judicial reforms and constitutional amendments. They decided to present these amendments in Parliament following

further consultation, with the timeline for this process to be determined in consultation with other political parties. Maryam Aurangzeb, Rana Sanaullah, Pervez Rashid, Irfan Siddiqui, and Ahsan Iqbal attended of the meeting from the PML-N. Meanwhile, the PPP delegation included Yousaf Raza Gillani, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Khursheed Shah, Murtaza Wahab, Murtaza Javed Abbasi, Naveed Qamar, and Palwasha Khan. Nawaz Sharif is scheduled to attend a dinner in honour of a Saudi delegation later tonight. According to an earlier working paper for the 26th Constitutional Amendment, one of the key proposals includes the establishment of a parallel Federal Constitutional Court, alongside the Supreme Court. The Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court will serve for three years, with retirement set at 68 years of age. Additionally, the amendment proposed that any member of parliament voting against party instructions will have their vote disregarded. The proposal also suggested that the authority to appoint the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court be transferred to the Prime Minister, based on recommendations from an eight-member committee of the National Assembly. One of the most notable amendments includes changes to Article 48 of the Constitution, which would prevent any court, tribunal, or authority from inquiring into advice sent by the Prime Minister or Cabinet to the President. Meanwhile, an amendment to Article 63 would ensure that votes cast against party instructions will no longer be counted. Another major proposal in the

working paper involves changes to Article 78, which advocates for the creation of the Federal Constitutional Court. Additionally, amendments to Article 175 suggest that judges of the High Courts and Sharia Courts will be appointed by a commission, with the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court heading this commission. The commission will consist of the two senior-most judges of the Constitutional Court, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the two senior-most Supreme Court judges. Further, the commission will include the Minister of Law, the Attorney General, a senior advocate, and two members each from the National Assembly and Senate. For the appointment of judges to the Federal Constitutional Court, the commission will no longer involve Supreme Court judges, instead consisting of three additional judges from the Constitutional Court. Additionally, the working paper specifies that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court will be appointed by the National Assembly's committee, which will nominate one of the three senior-most judges. This committee will also be responsible for recommending the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court from among its three senior-most judges. The amendments also propose that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court be referred to as "Chief Justice of the Supreme Court" instead of "Chief Justice of Pakistan." The Federal Constitutional Court will consist of seven judges, with one judge from each of the four provinces and one from the federal capital. Two expert judges will also be included in the court. Moreover, the amendments

stipulate that no person holding dual nationality can be appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court or Constitutional Court. Judges of the Constitutional Court will retire at 68, and any judge transferred from the Supreme Court will serve for three years. The term of both the Chief Justices of the Supreme Court and Constitutional Court will also be limited to three years. These sweeping changes come as part of the government's broader effort to reform the judiciary and streamline the constitutional framework. The proposed amendments have sparked considerable debate, with coalition partners expressing concerns over the secrecy surrounding the drafting process. The government, however, insists that the amendments aim to strengthen judicial independence and enhance the rule of law in Pakistan. If passed, these changes could significantly reshape the country's legal landscape, including how judges are appointed and how parliamentary votes are counted.