

NA approves five-year tenures for all armed services chiefs



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The National Assembly on Monday approved a legislative amendment to extend the tenures of all armed services chiefs from three to five years. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif presented amendments to the Pakistan Army, Navy, and Air Force Acts, which were passed by majority vote amidst intense protests from opposition members. This amendment will extend the tenure of the Chief of Army Staff and heads of other military branches to five years, standardising service durations across all branches. Earlier, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar also presented proposals

to increase the number of judges in the Supreme Court and Islamabad High Court, which were subsequently approved by the House. Tarar presented the Supreme Court Practice and Procedure Ordinance for parliamentary approval, proposing an increase in the number of Supreme Court judges to 34. As the bill was introduced, the opposition erupted into chaos, raising slogans and protesting. Despite the disruption, the minister briefed the assembly on the provisions of the bill, highlighting the backlog of thousands of pending cases at the Supreme Court's registry, which necessitates the increase in judicial capacity. Additionally, the law minister introduced the Islamabad High Court Amendment Bill 2024, explaining that the number of judges in the High Court would be raised from nine to 12. The amendment bill proposes changes, including a provision allowing appeals against decisions made by constitutional benches under Article 184(3) to be heard by a larger constitutional bench within 30 days, if possible. This amendment applies retroactively to cases before the 26th Constitutional Amendment. Further additions, including Sections 7-A and 7-B, mandate that cases will follow a "first-in, first-out" basis for hearings. Another key change requires that proceedings for every case, matter, or appeal in the Supreme Court be officially recorded, with transcripts available to the public upon request. The amendment specifies that court proceedings will be recorded, and official copies will be accessible to the public for a nominal fee of Rs50 per page. Verified copies of these records can be used for

legal purposes, thereby increasing transparency in judicial processes. Immediately after the law minister and the defence minister presented the bills, the National Assembly proceeded with voting despite ongoing noisy protests from the opposition and approved the amendments. During the voting session, opposition members disrupted proceedings, chanting slogans, surrounding the Speaker's dais, and tearing copies of the bill in protest. The uproar escalated, with some members engaging in physical altercations. These legislative moves reflect the government's focus on judicial reform and the standardisation of military leadership tenures, addressing institutional demands and fostering continuity.