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## PTI leaders' independent candidacy reveals new crisis for party leadership

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ISLAMABAD:

A new controversy has erupted within Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as senior leaders Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Omar Ayub Khan's independent candidacy for the National Assembly has come to light, placing the party leadership in a difficult position. Following the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) recognition of 39 PTI-affiliated National Assembly members, a list of those who contested elections as independent candidates has been revealed. It has been disclosed that Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Omar Ayub submitted their nomination papers as independent candidates for the elections held on February 8 this year. The current PTI leadership also did not declare party affiliation in the nomination papers submitted to the election commission. Recently, the Supreme Court allowed members who won elections as independents

and joined the Sunni Ittehad Council in the National Assembly time to join PTI. Barrister Gohar and Omar Ayub preferred to remain independent rather than join the Sunni Ittehad Council in the National Assembly. The central leadership, who joined the Sunni Ittehad Council, also did not declare party affiliation in their nomination papers. Other National Assembly members who did not declare PTI affiliation in their nomination papers include Ali Muhammad Khan, Shehryar Afridi, Sheikh Waqas Akram, Hammad Azhar's father Mian Azhar, Jamshed Dasti, and Riaz Fatyana. Notable figures from PTI who did not declare their affiliation include Sunni Ittehad Council's leader Sahibzada Hamid Raza, Atif Khan, and Sanaullah Masti Khel. Ali Asghar Khan, Mubarak Zeb, Muhammad Aslam Ghumman, Usman Ali, Zahoor Ahmed, and Aurangzeb Kuchi are also among those holding independent status in the National Assembly. Meanwhile, the ECP has approached the Supreme Court for clarification, writing a letter to registrar regarding the submission of party affiliation certificates by 41 PTI MNAs. Earlier in the day, the ECP officially recognised 39 members of the National Assembly as part of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. The commission uploaded the notification on its website, according to a spokesperson. "In pursuance of the order of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, dated July 12 2024, the following returned candidates against general seats of the National Assembly are declared to have been returned as candidates of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)," the notification read. After the apex court ruled the

decision in favour of PTI, the electoral watchdog in a press release confirmed its commitment to comply with the court's directive but instructed its legal team to identify any implementation obstacles promptly. The commission stated, "The ECP will continue to perform its duties in accordance with the Constitution and the law, without yielding to any pressure." The apex court's majority verdict overturned the Peshawar High Court judgment dated March 25 and also declared the Election Commission of Pakistan order dated March 1 unconstitutional, lacking lawful authority and having no legal effect. The apex court declared that the denial of an election symbol does not affect the constitutional and legal rights of a political party in any manner to participate in an election and to field candidates whereas the ECP is under a constitutional duty to act, construe and apply all statutory provisions accordingly.