

~~Opposition to challenge Election Act Amendment Bill in Supreme Court~~

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ISLAMABAD:

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar has announced the opposition's plan to challenge the newly approved Election Act Amendment Bill—which prevents independent candidates from joining political parties after a specified post-election period—in the top court. In a statement delivered on the floor of the National Assembly (NA), Gohar criticised the bill, asserting that it undermines democratic principles. The National Assembly (NA) passed the Election Act Amendment Bill with a majority vote earlier today, despite strong protests and objections from opposition parties. “This parliament is indeed supreme, but the authority to interpret lies with the Supreme Court,” Gohar maintained. He emphasised the PTI's commitment to challenging what he described as a “politically motivated” piece of legislation. The chairperson highlighted that PTI had submitted four petitions to the Election Commission Pakistan (ECP) regarding reserved seats, claiming that their electoral symbol was unjustly removed in a conspiracy to defeat the party. “Our nomination papers were submitted, but our electoral symbol was taken away, yet we won with a two-thirds majority,” he stated. PTI lawmaker Ali Muhammad Khan echoed Gohar's concerns, arguing that the bill was being used to attack the apex court. “The Supreme Court granted us this right through its decision. How can you deny us this right after the Supreme Court's verdict?” Khan questioned, expressing his belief that the bill contains elements of “political fascism”. A representative of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) Sahibzada Sibghatullah, also condemned the bill as an “assault on the Constitution” and the top court. He argued that the bill was bulldozed through the assembly based on a majority, labelling it as an attack on democracy that pits parliament against the judiciary. The session, chaired by NA Speaker Ayaz Sadiq, witnessed heated debates and disruptions as the government moved forward with its legislative agenda. The newly passed Election Act Amendment Bill 2024 imposes restrictions on independent candidates, barring them from joining any political party after a specified period post-election. The bill further states that candidates who do not submit an affidavit of party affiliation to the returning officer will be considered independent. It seeks to amend previous legislation that allowed independents to affiliate with political parties after elections. During today's session, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Affairs Standing Committee Rana Iradat Sharif presented a report on the Election Act Amendment Bill. The bill was introduced for approval, accompanied by a motion that the assembly overwhelmingly supported, despite vociferous opposition.