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## NA approves Election Act Amendment Bill amid opposition dissent

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The National Assembly (NA) passed the Election Act Amendment Bill with a majority vote on Tuesday, despite strong protests and objections from opposition parties. 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 Idrat 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. The motion was introduced by Bilal Azhar Kayani, a member of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), which sparked dissent from the opposition. Members of the opposition expressed their discontent by surrounding the speaker's dais, tearing up copies of the agenda, and chanting slogans. Ali Muhammad Khan presented amendments to the bill, which was opposed by the Minister of Law, Azam Nazeer Tarar. The Minister argued that the legislation was in line with the Constitution and not unconstitutional, as alleged by the opposition. "This legislation is entirely constitutional and does not violate any principles," he asserted. Ali Muhammad Khan, a representative of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), countered by claiming that the bill was intended to undermine the judiciary and obstruct their political rights. "This legislation is a deliberate attempt to block our path and attack the judiciary," he stated. He further accused the government of denying political representation to the SIC. The opposition leader insisted that the bill was a targeted effort against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, questioning the Election Commission Pakistan's (ECP) "impartiality". "The Supreme Court has affirmed PTI's status as a legitimate political party, yet this bill discriminates against our members," Khan said, as he emphasised the opposition's rejection of the bill and intent to challenge it legally. The assembly then proceeded to a clause-by-clause vote on the bill, amidst

continued protests and loud chanting from opposition members, who accused the government of using the bill as a weapon against the judiciary. The opposition's amendments were defeated by majority votes, as the bill gained approval despite the charged atmosphere in the chamber. The session ended with Speaker Sadiq calling for order as opposition protests continued. Under the new amendment bill, parties failing to submit lists of candidates for reserved seats within the stipulated time will be ineligible for those seats. The bill also stipulates that candidates failing to declare party affiliation before the returning officer will be considered independents, with the amendment retroactively effective from the Election Act 2017.