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Crackdown on PTI Intensifies as Court Sentences Dozens of Khan Allies

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Pakistan's political environment took a decisive turn this week after an anti-terrorism court handed down severe prison sentences to over three dozen members of Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI), the party founded by former Prime Minister Imran Khan. In what critics call a coordinated campaign to dismantle PTI's leadership, the court sentenced high-profile figures including Malik Ahmad Khan Bhachar, opposition leader in the

Punjab Assembly, as well as federal lawmakers Ahmed Chattha and Bilal Ejaz, each to 10 years in prison. These convictions stem from the protests that erupted on May 9, 2023, following Khan's brief arrest.

One of the most shocking verdicts was issued against Dr Yasmin Rashid, a 76-year-old senior PTI leader and former provincial health minister. Rashid, currently undergoing cancer treatment, was sentenced to a decade in prison despite her deteriorating health and lack of direct evidence linking her to any violence. Her case has sparked strong condemnation from human rights organisations and independent observers who question the credibility of the trials and the government's unwillingness to uphold humanitarian considerations.



The May 9 demonstrations, while involving acts of vandalism at some military and government sites, have been heavily politicised. Authorities labelled the events as a “coordinated attack” on national security, providing legal grounds for a sweeping crackdown on PTI supporters. However, PTI and independent voices argue that the state has used this justification to stifle political opposition and neutralise Khan's growing public support. The trials, conducted under anti-terror laws, have raised serious questions about due process and judicial independence in a country where military influence continues to dominate civil affairs.

As Pakistan approaches another turning point in its fragile democratic journey, the harsh treatment of PTI leaders sets a dangerous precedent. Sentencing elderly and ailing political figures to long prison terms on disputed charges undermines the very principles of justice the state claims to uphold. While the military-backed regime attempts to portray these actions as necessary for stability, the message it sends to citizens is one of suppression rather than unity. Without a clear commitment to

constitutional order and political inclusivity, Pakistan risks alienating not only its own people but the broader international community. The longer this crackdown continues, the harder it will be to repair the credibility of democratic governance.

