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Pakistan's PM faces calls to negotiate with Taliban terrorists

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Pakistan's Prime Minister has agreed to hold a national conference on ways to combat terrorism after the leader of the main opposition party, the Pakistan Muslim League-N, said the government should negotiate with the Pakistani Taliban militants to improve security.

The decision by Yousuf Raza Gilani, the head of the Pakistan People's Party, came just days after a pair of suicide bombers killed 42 people at a famed Sufi shrine in Lahore, the capital of Punjab province, where the PML-N party is in power.

The agreement to hold a national conference represents a rare moment of consensus between the two parties, which have clashed over how to address the problem of growing violence in Punjab, the country's richest and most populous region.

Officials in the ruling PPP have called on the provincial government to crack down on militant groups once supported by the country's intelligence agencies but now allied with the Pakistani Taliban against the state.

Members of the provincial government have resisted – a move analysts say is driven by its reliance on banned militant groups to deliver key votes during elections.

The opposition leader, Nawaz Sharif, added a new twist to the debate on Saturday by calling for the government to negotiate with Pakistani Taliban militants "who are ready to talk and ready to listen".

It was unclear exactly with which groups Mr Sharif expected the government to talk. There are numerous militant organizations in Pakistan, and they often overlap.