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## Civil society, JUI-F exchange harsh words over domestic violence bill

**Our correspondent**

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The civil society activists and Jameet-e-Ulema-e Islam Fazal-ur-Rehman (JUI-F) workers exchanged harsh words with each other during a protest organised by the civil society to express concern over the delay in the approval of Domestic Violence Bill (DVB) in the Parliament.

In a charged environment, the two groups chanted slogans against each. Meanwhile, the security officials tried their best to keep distance between them to avoid any violent situation. The police at the check posts also stopped any movement towards the Parliament House. They even arrested a women's rights activist Aqsa Khan at a security picket near Radio Pakistan. She was taken to Secretariat Police Station where she was released afterwards.

'Bai Hiai Band Karo' (Stop the vulgarity), 'Amrica ka jo yaar hay, ghadar hay ghadar hay' (Those who are friends with America are traitors) and 'No to Domestic Violence Bill' were the slogans by JUI-F workers whereas civil society responded with 'Mullah Gardi Band Karoo' (Stop Mullahism), 'We want justice to Women' and 'Pass the Domestic Violence Bill.' The civil society gathered in front of Parliament House to demand the early approval of DVB and also to condemn the non-serious attitude of certain MNAs towards women issues.

They condemned the remarks of JUI-F leader Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman in the Parliament against women rights activists. He called them 'westernised women' in his speech after the bill was presented in the Assembly on Thursday. The cold war between two mindsets became public when civil society gathered in front of the National Assembly. They were holding placards and chanted slogans to demand quick approval of DVB. They stopped the cars of Parliamentarians to register their protest and requested them to join them. Senator Zafar Iqbal, MNA from PML-Q Tahira Aurangzeb and MNA from MQM Shiekh Salahuddin also joined them to show solidarity.

A group of women rights activists including Farzana Bari, Samar Minallah, Arifa Mazhar and Fauzia Saeed went into the Parliament to draw support of MNAs and senators. They managed to enter the meeting room of Parliamentary Committee where Farzana Bari raised the point that non-serious attitude of Parliamentarians has disappointed women of the country.

In protest, Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman left the meeting and JUI workers came out from the Parliament to confront civil society. On one hand, the JUI workers said that they have no objection to the bill, but it

should first be scrutinised by the Council of Islamic Ideology whereas on the other, they kept on chanting slogans saying 'No to Domestic Violence Bill.'

JUI women workers said that the bill will promote vulgarity in the society and will disturb the family system that is the basic unit of the society. "We want to protect the basic family unit," said Fariha Saleem from JUI. She said that the country has many other big issues to deal with and domestic violence is a trivial thing as compared to bad governance and Balochistan issue.

Some of them denied that any such thing as domestic violence happens in the society. "If government finishes unemployment and controls inflation, the domestic violence will finish from the society," said another JUI worker Anna Abbasi. "Our religious leaders are our guardians," she pointed out.

They said that western countries have these laws, but still they are unable to control the violence. "We do not want western liberalisation," they added and also criticised the dresses of women participating in the civil society protest.

The civil society activists said that JUI workers are confused over the issue and are giving the impression that domestic violence is allowed in Islam. "When a husband beats his wife, what America has to do with that," said eminent human rights activist, Tahira Abdullah responding to a slogan 'Friends of America is a traitor.' She said that she has no expectations from JUI-F but the way JUI was joined by MNAs from PML(N) and PPP has shocked her.

Samar Minallah expressed concern over the mindset that considers women issues as trivial. "It is sad that people sitting in the Parliament considers women issues funny," she said adding that this irresponsible behaviour at such high level effects the mindset towards women in the whole society.

Seemi Kamal from Aurat Foundation said it is unfortunate that the JUI people are opposing legislation on domestic violence in such way. Farzana Bari condemned the deferral of the long-pending Bill due to patriarchal, anti-women mindset of some of our male parliamentarians and demanded immediate passage of the Bill at the Joint Sitting. The Bill was presented in the Parliament on Thursday, but was deferred as JUI(F), PML(N) and PPP members expressed their reservations and asked for more time to review the contents of the Bill. Moved by MNA from Pakistan People's Party Yasmeen Rehman, the bill only applies in the Islamabad Capital Territory as after 18 Amendment all women related legislation is the domain of provinces.