

Saturday, April 7, 2012



CIVIL society activists and JUI-F members protest against each other outside the Parliament House on Friday. — Online

Civil society and JUI-F engage in a shouting match

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD, April 6: Dozens of civil society activists and workers of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) on Friday narrowly escaped a scuffle in front of Parliament House over delay in the passage of Domestic Violence Bill.

At about 11:00am civil society activists gathered outside the main gate of the parliament.

Meanwhile, Farzana Bari along with three other females tried to enter the room where Parliamentary Committee on National Security was meeting but they were stopped. Bari said they wanted to participate in the meeting as observers but they were sent back.

When Maulana Fazlur Rehman reached there, the activists chanted slogans against him. After a while, male and female workers of JUI-F came out of the parliament house and started shout-

ing slogans against the bill and those who were in favour of it. Police officials kept both groups away.

JUI-F women-wing member Faiza Saleem told *Dawn*: "Law is already clear about the domestic violence against women. So the bill should be sent to the Islamic Ideological Council (IIC) for deliberation."

Farzana Bari, however, alleged: "MNA Attiya Inayatullah had told me that since we chanted slogans against Maulana, he was angry and would not allow the bill to pass. If the IIC was to decide the passage or otherwise of bills, we should better send the Parliament packing."

MNA Maulvi Agha Mohammad said, "There are eight females in the parliamentary committee and they are working on the bill, those females (human rights activists) have been trying to pressurise them. We believe in negotiations but after hearing slogans against our

chief, we have closed all doors of negotiation."

Human rights activist Fauzia Saeed said: "I cannot understand why JUI-F has always been relating the bill with the US agenda."

Earlier, some parliamentarians joined the protest of civil society activists. Safdar Abbasi (PPP) said the bill should be passed in principle. Sheikh Salahuddin (MQM) said his party was in favour of the bill and would raise voice at all forums.

Human rights activist Tahira Abdullah commented: "We expected it from JUI-F but we were shocked to see the PPP and PML-N's attitude over the bill. Shaheed Benazir Bhutto's soul must be in agony as her party was violating her principles. The bill was tabled in 2008 but even after four years of extensive discussions, it could not be passed."

Domestic violence bill gets new look

By Ayesha Shahid

ISLAMABAD, April 6: Angry outbursts by woman activists against the lawmakers' reluctance to debate the bill on curbing domestic violence has worked.

A multi-party committee sat down on Friday to reconcile the differing views that caused the joint session of the parliament to defer the consideration of the Domestic Violence Protection (Prevention and Protection) bill the previous day, and sharp protests from women and civil rights organisations.

That exercise - to produce a broadly agreed piece of law - should have been done before rather than after tabling the bill. Still, nothing would be lost if a meaningful law results from it.

"This morning the discussion on the bill, clause by clause, was done with open minds by all present, in an effort to improve and remove any legal contradictions or gaps," said ANP MNA Bushra Gohar on emerging from the committee meeting. "The process is as important as the outcome in such an important legislation."

She stressed that the fact the National Assembly had passed the very bill, now being reviewed, in 2009, must be recognised.

"A great deal of consultations took place at that time to accommodate the views of all sides to strengthen the bill," she recalled. "After the 18th Amendment many of the areas covered in the bill became provincial subjects. Therefore, there was a need to review it."

Friday's committee meeting was chaired by Minister for Religious Affairs Khurshid Shah and attended by parliamentarians from a range of parties, including Yasmeen Rehman, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Attaur Rehman, Zahid Hamid, Saad Rafique, Begum Attiya Inayatullah, Azra Pechuho, Nafisa Shah and Bushra Gohar.

After JUI and Maulana Fazlur Rehman's vehement opposition to the bill on Thursday, Ms Yasmeen Rehman revealed that the committee first addressed his objections.

"Maulana sahib clarified that he is not against the rights of women but that we shouldn't act on Western ideas and ensure that everything is done within Islamic ten-

ets and Shariah," said Ms Rehman.

The supporters of the bill addressed these concerns and then the committee members started going over each clause of the bill to address any objections so the bill can be unanimously passed when

the next session resumes.

The Domestic Violence Protection (Prevention and Protection Bill) passed by the National Assembly in 2009 lapsed after 90 days when the Senate returned it with some objections. It had to be retaken in a joint session to be made into law.

The Senate passed a version of this bill unanimously in February this year but that is applicable to Islamabad only.

Some changes were made to the bill by Begum Attiya Inayatullah, Azra Pechuho and Yasmeen Rehman before it was introduced to the joint session. The bill fundamentally takes domestic violence out of the domain of only the private sphere and makes it a crime.

"This is a very soft bill, it gives a minimum punishment of three months and maximum of three years, but it is important that it is passed," explained Farzana Bari, a women rights activist. The

bill addresses violence against men, women and children in the domestic violence and will also protect domestic help.

When asked why the process of clause by clause analysis had not already taken place before the bill was tabled, Ms Rehman said no one was receptive to calls of looking at the bill and raising objections until the bill was actually presented and then it was deferred to iron out any objections.

"We have already been through almost half the bill at the committee meeting and even though we couldn't get anyone to listen before - now thankfully everyone has come together on one table."

The other objectors to the bill were members of PML-N, but according to Ms Rehman, their objections were more procedural than conceptual. And they are being addressed and more will be

addressed when the committee meeting continues on Monday.

"Hopefully, a consensus will develop. This bill has been making rounds for almost 10 years, so what's another 24 hours if that's what it takes to build consensus," she said.