

■ WOMEN PROTECTION ACT

Rain fails to dampen civil society campaign against FSC

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Islamabad

Heavy rain and chilly weather failed to dampen the resolve of civil society to continue their campaign against the Federal Shariat Court (FSC)'s decision to revert Women Protection Act's clause 11, 25, 28 and 29 back to Hadood Ordinances.

On the call of Insani Huqooq Itehad (IHI), a network of NGOs, civil society organisations and human right activists based in Islamabad, a large number of civil society representatives gathered before the Parliament House. They were holding placards inscribed with slogans against the laws and chanted slogans against the decision taken by the FSC.

The protesters urged the government to abolish all parallel judicial systems in the country and demanded immediate repeal of discriminatory laws including Blasphemy Law. They

asked the government to dismiss Sherani. Representatives of Christian community from Islamabad slum areas also joined the protest.

The number of protesters kept on increasing despite the heavy rain. "We requested the government to give us permission for a marquee but the administration did not issue No Objection Notice till the end," said Waseem Wahga from Aurat Foundation.

Talking to 'The News', Human Rights Activist Marvi Sarmad termed the decision an effort of FSC to expand its jurisdiction and undermine constitutional jurisdiction of Supreme Court of Pakistan. "We stand with the Supreme Court and consider FSC an unconstitutional and illegal body." She said that according to reports, the government is preparing its petition to challenge the decision of FSC in Supreme Court. "Besides that, the civil society is

also preparing its petition, but we will first wait for the government to challenge this decision," she said adding that civil society welcomes any such move.

Marvi said that the government has three months whereas the civil society has six months to file its petition. "We have made all our demands a part of this campaign. We are not going to budge until we get the results."

Talking about the future plans of civil society regarding Blasphemy Law, she said that civil society will wait till Tuesday that is the day for private member bill. "There are chances that two bills, one by Sherry Rehman demanding amendment and the other by Bushra Gohar demanding repeal, will be moved in the assembly. The civil society will formulate its future strategy in case these bills fail to be tabled on Tuesday," she added.

Expressing her disappointment over the recent statement

given by the government that they don't plan to make amendment in Blasphemy Law, Farzana Bari said that civil expected strong stance by the government over this issue. "The initial statements by governor Punjab gave us hope that the government will take stand against Blasphemy law. We did not know that they will give up so quickly," she added.

The protest was part of nation wide campaign planned by the civil society against the recent decision of FSC in which the court has declared section 11, 25 and 28 of the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendments) Act 2006 as violation of the constitution because these provisions annul the overriding effect of the Hadood Ordinances of 1979.

Interestingly, the religious parties also plan to launch a nationwide campaign in the favour of Blasphemy Law from today (Friday).