

Saturday, April 7, 2012

Clashing mindsets

# Showdown between activists of women rights, religious party

Hot words exchanged over domestic violence bill which was deferred on Thursday



**TOE-TO-TOE:** Civil society members chant slogans in favour of the bill, with JUI-F supporters voice their opposition. PHOTOS: MUHAMMAD IYAZ

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A protest demo by civil society activists against the deferral of the domestic violence bill on Friday turned ugly when activists of the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazal (JUI-F) confronted them near Parliament.

Bad blood had been brewing between the two groups after the joint session of Parliament on Thursday after JUI-F President Fazlur Rehman accused NGOs of encouraging western moral values and trying to break the Islamic family mold by introducing the domestic violence bill. In response, the civil society activists chanted slogans condemning the maverick Maulana as he left the Parliament house, calling him

“enemy of the women”.

Rehman and his followers felt insulted by this, leading to the confrontation on Friday. Party members walked out of parliament house after some of their activists entered the house to “observe” the committee meeting, but were asked to leave by the committee under parliamentary rules.

JUI-F central committee member Dr Abid Rauf Orakzai deemed the refusal of protester’s demands to sit in on the meeting as “an obstruction to the working of parliament”. He further commented that the parliamentarians have bigger issues such as unemployment, NATO issues and electricity shortages to deal instead of domestic violence.

Incidentally, PPP former

**The govt does not want to upset the right by passing the bill as it could affect Nato route restoration negotiations**

senator Safdar Abbasi, who was asked by the civil society members to join them and show his support, revealed that the government does not want to upset different parties by passing a bill with a divided vote, which could affect negotiations on the restoration of Nato supply route issue.

Reason and understanding went out the window as both groups began chanting slogans against each other, with JUI-F chanting “Death

to western hearts and NGOs”, with women’s rights activists responding, “Down with those who bully in the name of Islam”. As matters got intense, the police interjected to relax both groups.

Outspoken rights activist Tahira Abdullah said, “This is the JUI’s attempt to deliberately provoke police action.” Abdullah was also very disheartened by being accused of having “western agenda”, as were other protesters who pressed that their actions and intentions are at the heart of every Pakistani’s wellbeing.

Similarly, JUI-F members took grave offence to being called bullies in the name of Islam. JUI-F member Faiza Saleem tried to explain their stance, saying that they are

**“Domestic violence usually begins when the wife tries to become the head of the household**

JUI-F member Zakia Abid

not against the bill as long as it is approved by the Council of Islamic Ideology.

Zakia Abid of the JUI-F said that she and the other women members are literate and educated but they don’t want the freedom associated with this bill as it will “abolish the sanctity of marriage and the dominance of the husband”.

When asked what “dominance of the husband” means when he is violent, she answered that domestic violence

usually begins when the wife tries to become the head of the household. However, she noted that sometimes men act out of impulse and not reason, and then only can they be brought to justice by the peaceful teachings of Islam. “This bill tries to bring these issues into the courtroom, which will be inefficient and disruptive for society.”

Abid Rauf Orakzai later announced to that on Monday, JUI-F will hold a protest at the same venue with 10,000 to 20,000 women, in contrast to the 60-odd women on Friday.

The police abstained from using force and kept the two parties at bay, before city administration officials came to help them convince both groups to disperse peacefully.