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Senate passes two women bills

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 12: The Senate on Monday unanimously passed two landmark bills providing for deterrent punishment for anti-women practices and acid crimes.

Both the bills amend the Pakistan Penal Code 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898 and have already been passed by the National Assembly.

The prevention of acid crime bill provides for imprisonment of not less than 14 years and a minimum fine of Rs1 million for those who disable, disfigure or deface any person by throwing some corrosive substance.

According to the statement of objectives, throwing acid on women was becoming more common and recurring day by day. The main cause of it is the absence of proper legislation on the subject. It said criminal-minded people were constantly using it as a dangerous and devastating arm against women.

The moving spirit behind the bill, Neelofar Bakhtiar, while speaking after the passage of the bill, said the legislation was not women-specific and would



WOMEN parliamentarians and activists stage a rally after the two women bills were passed by the Senate on Monday. — Photo by Ishaque Chaudhry

be applicable irrespective of the gender of victims. However, she pointed out that 60 per cent of the victims were women, 20 per cent men and 20 per cent children. The prevention of anti-women practices bill prohibits several practices and customs in vogue in the country which are not only against human dignity but also violative of human rights and contrary to Islamic injunctions.

Under the amendments introduced in the law, those who give a female in marriage or otherwise compels her to enter into marriage as badal-i-suth, wanni or swara or any custom or practice under any name, in consideration of settling a civil dispute or a criminal liability, will have to face imprisonment which may extend to seven years but not less than three years and liable

to a fine of Rs500,000. Same sentence has been prescribed for those who coerce or compel a woman to enter into marriage and those found guilty of arranging or facilitating marriage of a woman with the holy Quran.

Whosoever by deceitful or illegal means deprives any woman of inheriting a property at the time of opening of succession will be punished with imprisonment extendable to 10 years but not less than five years or with a fine of Rs1 million or both.

The passage of the bills was hailed by women rights activists as a great success. However, they called for setting up of an implementation commission to achieve the results. The women activists chanted slogans in favour of the landmark bills on the premises of the parliament house where they had gathered in a large number along with some victims of acid throwing. The rights activists were seen embracing Ms Bakhtiar and other women, and vowing to continue their struggle to get other pending women legislation, including the domestic violence bill, get passed.