

## Women MPs have not lost quota law hope

Twelve years is not too long a time to give up hope, say women MPs as fresh attempts are in the offing to clear passage for a bill that sets aside 33 percent seats in parliament and the state legislatures for them.

The Women's Reservation Bill is likely to be tabled in the Rajya Sabha Tuesday.

'It is true that attempts in the past could not fructify, but every government has tried its level best to evolve a consensus on the issue. The fresh attempt from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will certainly deliver. I hope so,' Jhanshi Botcha Lakshmi, a lok Sabha member from Bobbili in Andhra Pradesh, told IANS.

A Congress MP, Lakshmi admitted to 'several bottlenecks' in getting the bill passed but said the government was making 'all possible efforts' to remove them through consensus. She called for tabling and passing the bill on a priority basis.

'All parties should join hands to see the bill through,' she added.

The bill was first tabled in parliament in September 1996, and since then has gone through several ups and downs but never got to see the light of the day. Every government that tried to push the bill through ended up burning its fingers.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Kiran Maheshwari said the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government was not serious about bringing forward the bill, even though her party had assured support for it in whichever format it was brought in the house.

'Though it is part of UPA's common minimum programme, the government is least bothered about the bill. The current bout of hype, when the government has only a few months left, only exposes how non-serious it is about the women's cause,' Maheshwari said.

She said the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) had tried its best to table the bill in parliament, but did not get support from the opposition leaders.

'As a result, our government could not push the bill through. It is a different situation now, when our party has agreed to support the bill. It is too late when the bill is being brought in the Rajya Sabha,' she added.

The women MPs of the Left parties favoured the immediate tabling and discussion of the bill.

'It's a shame for the nation that an attempt to empower women gets scuttled every time. It is proving to be an endless wait, and must be over now. The leaders, irrespective of their party, have to be serious about the bill now,' said P. Satheedevi, a Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) Lok Sabha member from Badagara, Kerala.

Monday afternoon, she joined a protest demonstration outside the parliament complex organised by several leftist organisations including the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW).

Lok Sabha MP C.S. Sujatha of CPI-M, who also participated in the demonstration, said: 'Since its inception, the left parties have seconded the Women's Reservation Bill. The UPA government is now bringing the bill, and we hope this time the attempt does not go waste. Though the bill should have come much earlier, the government must ensure smooth passage for it in both houses of parliament.'

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