

Indian Rajya Sabha passes Women's quota Bill 10.03.2010

History was created in the Rajya Sabha when it voted on 9.3.2010 by an overwhelming majority a Bill to reserve 33 per cent of the seats in Lok Sabha and Assemblies for women after the Government pushed ahead with it, ignoring possible threats to its stability and after eviction of troublesome MPs opposed to it.

Fourteen years after the first attempt was made in the Lok Sabha and repeated failures subsequently, the Constitution Amendment Bill was adopted in the mandatory division with 186 members voting for it and one voting against.

In the 245-member House with an effective strength of 233, the Bill required the backing of at least 155 members and the UPA had the clear support of 165 in the run up to the event.

The Bill seeks to reserve for women 181 of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha and 1,370 out of a total of 4,109 seats in the 28 State Assemblies.

Ruling UPA constituent Trinamool Congress, which has two members, kept away from voting, while the BSP, which has opposed the Bill in its present form, walked out before voting.

The JD(U), whose president Sharad Yadav is a staunch opponent of the Bill, appears to have backed the Bill with most of its 7 members voting for it in response to the call by its senior leader Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who intervened in the discussion, described the occasion as a "momentous" and the legislation as a "historic and great" step in the empowerment of women.

"It is not not an anti-minority or anti-SC/ST Bill. But it only carries forward the emancipation of women," he said in his brief speech allaying apprehensions of opponents like the SP and the RJD that the Bill was aimed against Muslim, OBC and Dalit women.

Last-ditch efforts by opponents of the Bill, SP chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, the RJD chief Lalu Prasad, who have threatened to withdraw support, and the JD(U) chief Sharad Yadav, failed to persuade the Prime Minister and the UPA Chairperson from not going ahead with the legislation in its present form.

The Bill had the backing of all the UPA constituents, the BJP, the Left parties and a number of small parties like the AIADMK and TDP.

The measure will now go to the Lok Sabha where too the ruling UPA has the numbers to get it passed with support from the BJP, the Left and other small parties backing it, notwithstanding opposition from the SP, the RJD and a divided JD(U).

Ms. Sonia Gandhi expressed confidence that the Government's stability was not under threat over passage of the Bill.

The Trinamool Congress, the largest constituent of the UPA after the Congress, kept away from voting. Its two members did not vote.

“The Prime Minister promised us yesterday that an all-party conference would be convened today. But they never told us,” Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee told reporters.

In an unprecedented action for the House of elders, seven MPs belonging to SP and the RJD and an expelled the JD(U) member were suspended for the rest of the Budget session for their unruly behaviour on Monday.

They were physically evicted by marshals after they squatted on the floor of the House for a couple of hours refusing to leave the House.

A discussion on the Bill, which the BJP and the Left parties had insisted for giving their support, was possible only after the eviction of the suspended MPs and the walk out by colleagues from their parties.

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