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Women senators unhappy

BY SUHAINI AZNAM

KUALA LUMPUR: Their voices had been heard.

For some four hours, the men in the 65-member Dewan Negara stood down to allow 12 women senators the opportunity to vent their objections to five clauses in the Bill.

The clauses, the women said, would make it easier for men to practice polygamy and institute divorce, even while it was couched seemingly to protect women and enhance their interests.

Nevertheless, the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) (Amendment) Bill 2005 was passed, with the 12 throwing in their lot under protest.

During the debate, Datuk Dayang Mahani Tun Pengiran Ahmad Raffae of Sabah called it a Bill that "seemed to increase the burden on women".

"I apologised to my daughter that I, as a legislator, am powerless to do anything else. It is against my conscience. I give my support on condition that the amendments will be taken into account," she said.

Datuk Dr Norraesah Mohamad appealed to policy makers "to look at the spirit of the law."

"Sixty per cent of the population are Muslim Malays, of whom half are women," she said. "Yet the bias against women is well known. When the sense of security is absent, the law is weak."

Datuk Azizah Abdul Samad questioned why joint matrimonial assets should be claimed by both parties.

"It's the husband who wants to remarry, not the wife."

Datuk Hazizah Mohd Sultan reminded the House that "we don't want other religions to look down on us".

After the sitting, a beaming Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz emerged from the House to take a call from Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"He is very concerned about women," Nazri said.



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