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Global News Blog

# Women reservation bill: India sets quota for female lawmakers

The women reservation bill passed Tuesday night in India's upper house of parliament, setting the stage for women to hold one-third of all legislative seats.



India's ruling Congress party supporters celebrate the passing of the women's reservation bill in the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of parliament, in Ahmadabad, India, Tuesday.

Ajit Solanki/AP

By Stephen Kurczy Correspondent / March 9, 2010

Boston

The women reservation bill passed today in India's upper house of parliament, as politicians overwhelmingly voted to amend the Constitution to reserve one-third of all seats in national and state legislatures for women.

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Female lawmakers and activists shouted "we have made it" outside parliament soon after it passed Tuesday night in New Delhi.

While proponents say the bill will increase women's participation in politics and contribute to one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, critics say it favors wealthy women and encourages powerful men to substitute daughters and wives as political proxies.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the 186 to 1 vote was a "historic step forward toward emancipation of Indian womanhood."

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The vote came a day after International Women's Day, which saw more than 70 demonstrations globally to protest for women's empowerment in jobs and government.

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The bill was proposed more than a decade ago, but has faced strong opposition from male-dominated political parties worried about losing seats.

It now goes to the lower house, where it is likely to pass, according to the Associated Press.

Critics have called the women reservation bill "anti-Muslim" and "anti-Dalit" because the few Muslim or Dalit (low-caste) men who are in parliament could be bumped by women. Those women are likely to be non-Muslims or of a higher caste, meaning that Muslim or Dalit representation could disappear entirely.

The bill has fractured a coalition led by the ruling Congress party, as the influential Trinamool Congress party abstained from voting to protest Congress's handling of the bill, according to Reuters. The Trinamool Congress party relies on Muslims' votes and heads to the polls in West Bengal next month.

India is already ahead of many other countries in terms of women's participation in politics. At least one-third of the seats on local councils, known as Panchayats, are reserved for women. India has a history of strong female politicians, from former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to her daughter-in-law, Sonia Gandhi, the current head of the Congress party.

By contrast, women make up only 16.8 percent of the US Congress and 22.9 percent of statewide executive offices across the country, according to the Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics.




Worldwide, women comprise only 18.8 percent of parliament members, shy of the 20 percent target set by the UN Economic and Social Council, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). In Rwanda – the world's most egalitarian government – women make up 56.3 percent of the lower house and 34.6 percent of the upper house, according to the IPU.

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50% Reservation for Women is more logical  
There should not be any other reservation.  
There will be only two groups men and women.  
That will help in solving many problems including female foteicide.  
A female child shall be as important as a male child.  
There will be no dowry deaths and many socio economic and political evils shall be removed in one stroke.

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