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Islamabad celebrates Malala's Nobel

Activists praise youngest-ever laureate's commitment to education, rejection of militancy

By Kashif Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: On a chilly Tuesday afternoon, scores of people gathered outside the National Press Club for what looked to be a demonstration. But this was no ordinary protest, even though the participants were holding placards and shouting slogans.

"Over the last 20 months, Pakistani women have brought home an Oscar, an Emmy, Gold medals and now the Nobel Prize," read one of the banners at the event.

Members of civil society came together to pay tributes to Malala Yousafzai, the 17-year-old schoolgirl from Swat who has done the country proud by becoming the youngest Nobel laureate in the history of the prestigious awards.

"Malala is a symbol of the struggle that women and girls have waged, against all odds, in a decidedly hostile environment," said poet and writer

Harris Khalique.

Women, young and old, continue to outshine the men of Pakistan in every field, showing their resolve to progress and better themselves, he said.

The ceremony, organised by the Aurat Foundation, included the cutting of a cake to celebrate Malala's Nobel. Participants also released white birds, a symbol of peace, to mark the occasion.

Poet and activist Kishwar Naheed, Tahira Abdullah, Naeem Mirza, Alia Mirza, Irfan Mufti and others also paid tributes to Malala, saying that the award for the girl who had been a symbol for girls' education in the country had done the whole country proud.

The gathering was unanimous in its view that by raising her voice against militants, Malala had sent a clear message to the world that Pakistanis were thirsty for education and peace-loving people.

Kishwar Naheed called Malala the pride of the nation. "She is the youngest ever recipient of the Nobel Prize... this is a big achievement for us," she said.

Mr Khalique and Ms Naheed also recited some verses in Malala's honour. Mr Khalique shared a poem he wrote when Malala was shot in October of 2012.

"Malala, there is already little light;
Let not the flame of life go out.
The words you have written in blood;
Let them not be erased"

Social activist Irfan Mufti said that through her commitment to the cause of education Malala has shown terrorists that there is no space for them in this country.

"She was a committed girl, who raised her voice against armed ruffians," he said.

Tahira Abdullah said she had spoken to Malala's family and thanked those in attendance on their behalf, saying "I spoke to her family on the phone and they have thanked all Pakistanis for this outpouring of love and happiness for her," she said.

Talking to *Dawn*, Aurat Foundation's Naeem Mirza said that the current century was an age of women's empowerment.

"The shackles of slavery have been broken. Now, women are playing their role; from parliament to the police department and from the education sector to media and in almost all fields... By clinching the Nobel at such a young age, Malala has made us proud," he said.



CIVIL society activists celebrate award of the Nobel prize to Malala Yousafzai. — White Star