

Thursday, December 17, 2015

# Parliamentarians stay away from APS vigils

By Aamir Yasin, Ikram Junaidi and Kashif Abbasi

ISLAMABAD / RAWALPINDI: Parliamentarians did not participate in the vigils and events held in the federal capital to observe the first anniversary of the attack on Army Public School (APS), Peshawar, while the local administration in Rawalpindi cancelled all events that were to be held as tributes to the victims.

Many people gathered outside the National Press Club (NPC) on Wednesday to pay homage to the APS victims and survivors and a vigil was also held in Fatima Jinnah Park.

However, despite issuing passionate statements saying they stood with the families of the victims, not a single parliamentarian participated in any such event in Islamabad.

Zulfiqar Ahmed, a student participating in the vigil outside NPC, told Dawn he was disappointed in the politicians for not participating in such events.

"Maybe they did not participate because of the security threats, maybe they did not want to put their lives in danger," he speculated.

The chief operating officer of the Aurat Foundation, Naeem Mirza, however, pointed out that the same politicians had attended campaign rallies.

"They spent tens of millions of rupees on rallies during the elections, but could not be bothered to attend a single rally held in support of the victims and against terrorism," he

said.

He added that military operations against terrorism were not achieving the desired results because of a lack of political will and said no political measures had been taken to eradicate extremism.

"Some arrests have been made but these half hearted measures will not change the situation," he said.

Traders from F-10 and the Islamabad Bar Association also held a vigil for victims of the attack at Fatimah Jinnah Park.

Schools under the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) organised events to observe the first anniversary of the attack, as did the Capital Development Authority (CDA) which held an event at the CDA Model School.

Students performed plays, made speeches and pledged to honour the memory of those who were killed, by helping to eradicate terrorism. They said they were not afraid of terrorists and will keep on studying.

Teaching and non-teaching staff of FDE-run schools, who have been protesting for the regularization of their services and the payment of their salaries for the past month, also held a vigil in memory of the victims during their sit-in at D-Chowk, and held a Quran Khwani for them as well.

Meanwhile in Rawalpindi, all the events planned as a tribute to the victims and survivors of the APS attack were cancelled by the local administration.

District Coordination Officer (DCO) Sajid Zafar Dall said the events in the garrison city

were cancelled because schools had been closed on Wednesday amid threats of similar attacks.

The local administration had planned events at universities, schools and at the Rawalpindi Arts Council (RAC) but had to cancel them when the Punjab government declared December 16 as 'Shuhda Day' and directed that schools remain closed.

A senior local administration official said an event was planned at RAC to which the commissioner, the DCO and others had been invited, but had to be cancelled at the last minute. "Without the schoolchildren, holding the function was not possible," he said.

However, local administration did host events in other places, and a school in Gujar Khan and a road in Kahuta were renamed after APS victims.

The Rawalpindi Arts Council held a mehfil-i-mushaira featuring poems by women poets. MPA Lubna Rehan Pirzada was invited as the chief guest while renowned poet Fakhira Batool presided over the mushaira.

Well known poets, like Farkhanda Shamim, Naurin Talat and Farah Deeba, recited poetry they had penned for APS students.

Ms Pirzada said the mothers of the APS victims were dealing with their loss with courage, for which they should be saluted. She expressed solidarity with the victims' families.

The Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB) also held a candlelight vigil at The Mall near Shah Baloot Park