

100th Women's Day marked with variety of events

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Islamabad

Seminars, rallies, exhibitions and press conferences marked the celebrations of 100th International Women's Day (IWD) in Islamabad.

Civil society activists from all parts of the country and people from all walks of life participated enthusiastically in these activities and expressed their resolve to continue their struggle for equal status of women.

The main event was a rally organised from Insani Haqooq Ittehad (IHI) that started from Clock Chowk near Kalsoom Plaza, and ended at Parade Chowk in front of the Parliament House where participants made speeches and presented their Charter of Demand.

The participants were carrying placards and 'Doves of Peace' prepared by the school children and teachers of Khaldunya High School. They were also wearing badges with digits '83100' which symbolised the '100th 8th March of International Women's Day.

The protestors sang motivating songs throughout the rally and chanted slogans such as 'Kesa chaheya Pakistan - brabar hon jahan sabh insane,' 'Ham sab ka ek he naara - Aman hey haq hamara,' and 'Ham aman phelaney nikley haien - Aao hamarey saath chalo.'

The speakers said that women are rendering remarkable services in every sphere of life but still are deprived of equal opportunities and face violence especially in rural areas. "Women are still fighting for their rights as the mindset of society for women is still the same," said women rights activist Farzana Bari. She demanded the government to take steps to end religion extremism, which is affecting the cause of women's rights.

Highlighting the theme of the event, Coordinator IHI Wasim Wagha said that March 8 is not a day to protest but a day to celebrate women's status as an equal and concerned citizen and not a mere marginalised and discrimi-



ISLAMABAD: Activists of the Women Councillors Network chanting slogans during a rally to mark International Women's Day. — Hanif Khattak

nated gender. He said that Women's Charter of Demand presented today was a significant expression of this fact. "All demand made in the charter were in fact socio-economic, political issues which the peoples of Pakistan are suffering from, including the religious intolerance, sectarian violence," he said.

The charter also demands separating religion from state functions, gender equality, balance between administration and justice systems, freedom for press, cultural and educational institutions, provincial autonomy, agricultural reforms, banning weapons and keeping the peaceful borders.

Speaking on the occasion former minister for human rights Mumtaz Alam Gilani said that Islam is a religion of peace and advocated women rights in the era when girls were buried alive. He said that the PPP government is committed to work for the welfare and empowerment of women

rights, adding that all pending bills regarding women in National Assembly would be passed soon.

Others who spoke on the occasion also included Rehana Hashmi, Naushaba Arif and Rabia Aslam. Naushaba Arif, while appreciating the present government for women friendly policies, strongly demanded that the 'Domestic Violence Bill' which pending in the parliament shall immediately be passed and made a law. Arifa Mazhar read famous poem 'mein ad-hon.'

Rabeeha Hadi from Aurat Foundation read out Women's Charter of Demand as prepared by the members of Insani Haqooq Ittehad. Pattan's theatre group 'Lok Nattak' presented theatre performance on the issue being faced by the women flood affectees. The women activists also sang women's 'tarana' 'Darya ki qasam, maujooon ki qasam - yeh tana bana badley ga'.

Earlier, young singer Areeb Azhar and his group enthralled

the participants with their music and motivating songs on women's rights.

Among other prominent activities, Women's Action Forum organised a seminar titled 'Impact of Conflict Situation on Women and Children, Socio-Cultural and Psychological Effects,' in which speakers deplored the situation of country where Governor Punjab and Minister of Minority affairs have been gunned down. They demanded of the government to take strict action against the murderers.

They expressed grave concern over the deteriorating law and order situation in the country. They said that the intelligence agencies need to explain the negligence, as to why their security was not vigilant and so ineffective.

The seminar was organised by Nomad Gallery in collaboration with Unifem in which notable women including Planning Commission of Pakistan, Member Social Sector, Saba Gul Khattak, and National Commission on the Sta-

tus of Women (NCSW) member Nasreen Azhar, Unifem Country Director Alice Shackelford and Sister NGO Executive Director Rehana Hashmi participated.

The participating women condemned the intolerant mindset which indicates a climate of fear and insecurity in which people cannot even discuss improvement in procedures pertaining to blasphemy law to prevent its misuse.

The speakers of the event believe that it was the extremist mindset of the people of country that has barred the progress and empowerment of the women. "The destruction of schools in the Northern Areas by militants continues as does the growing social frustration and economic pressures," said Nomad Gallery Director Nageen Hayat.

She said that the limitation on education for girls is one of the key factors that stand in the way. "While enrolment at schools has gone up over the decades, today less than 40 per cent of women in the

country are literate. In areas such as Fata, this figure drops down to about three percent," she added.

She, however, said that despite the oppression, women in Pakistan are resilient and have taken many strides forward, excelling in academic, sports and in courage. "In spite of discriminatory laws and tribal customs which have weighed them down heavily with regard to empowerment and equal opportunities," she added.

Meanwhile, a prize distribution ceremony for the women who participated in the competition of rock climbing was also organised by the Government of Denmark to mark the International Women Day.

The Government of Denmark in joint collaboration with the Adventure Club Pakistan carried out the national climbing competition to mark the International Women Day, bringing a focus to the need of mainstreaming gender into all important parts of society

development, adding a special focus on grooming sports talent among girls.

The competition had four categories; In the category of under-14, Eeman Nadeem scored first position, followed by Iqra Jilani (2nd) and Maham Mujahid (3rd). In the category of under-16, Palwasha Rodriguez took the leading position, Hamna Kiran (2nd) and Aleeza Sana came 3rd. In under-19, Aneesa Rashid was awarded with first position, Nazish Taj (2nd) and Rushna Zamir (3rd). In the last female category of 19+, a special record was made by Nazia Parveen from Fatima Jinnah Women University, who along with winning the first position of the category also set a unique record in the overall competition with lowest time to climb, beating the male categories as well. Irum Nisa came 2nd and Kiran Nisa took 3rd position in the same category.

The three-day national competition had more than 150 climbers from various parts of the country, including most of the educational institutions and clubs from Rawalpindi and Islamabad participate in the competitions under various age categories. The climbers were supported and watched by large crowds of spectators, who had joined these energetic young people in their daring efforts to climb vertical cliffs and hard routes in the Margalla Hills.

During the award ceremony, the Danish Ambassador, Uffe Wolffhechel, congratulated all of the winning students and stated that "Denmark strongly believes in supporting activities that contribute to positioning Pakistan on a more competitive global footing. This competition is an illustration of the fact that Pakistani girls and women have a huge potential, which needs to be recognised and further promoted. Pakistan has so much of untapped talent that we would like to bring focus to this potential among the international community".

The civil society ended the IWD activities with a torch-bearing rally that took place in the Busy Super Market.