



**WOMEN'S DAY:** Scores of women, some coming from different parts of the country, attended a National Women's Day event at the National Library Auditorium Saturday afternoon. — Dateline photo by Sohail Shahzad

National Women's Day marked with hope and concerns

## Rain fails to dampen women's spirits

■ MUNIR AHMED

ISLAMABAD — The National Women's Day celebrations went on despite continuous downpour Saturday.

A large number of women and gender-sensitive men turned up Saturday to make two separate events a big success.

The morning event was organized by ILO, whereas the Insani Haqooq Itihad (IHI) arranged their event in the afternoon at the National Library auditorium.

The government declared February 12 as the National Women Day last year after it was approved by the parliament with the support of its allied political parties.

The morning event titled 'Women of Courage' began with a song dedicated to the women followed by screening of a documentary.

The documentary has been produced by the ILO project 'Promoting Gender Equality for Decent Work', funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Fatima Ali, a broadcast journalist, was the lead interviewer. The crux of the documentary is that women can work in all professions. It is just that they need to be courageous enough to challenge the social barriers, and be willing to work hard.

Featured in the documentary were interviews with women from different professions.

The documentary included interviews of a business

woman running a rent-a-car service, a driver, a chef, a member of the Elite Force, the neglected circus acrobats, a lower-middle class Christian textile shop owner, a village teacher in a special children's school and some others.

The common aspect in the journey of all these women was opposition from their families and neighbourhoods at the initial stages. But their determination proved them right and they turned out to be successful. Their financial stability earned them more respect and independence. All the interviewees acknowledged the support of the male members in their respective families.

Sadaf Mubin, a chef in a hotel, while narrating the story of her success in the documentary said that it was not a welcome move for her family and relatives when she entered the profession. "When I took it as a challenge and insisted on going ahead, and showed my keen interest in cooking for customers in a hotel, everyone in the family raised eyebrows," she said.

"Many questions were asked, but I had no answers. With the passage of time, I proved their notions and suspicions wrong," Mubin added.

Safia, a young woman running a rent-a-car business, had also a similar story of opposition from her family. But she said: "I believe that a woman makes her environment herself. I created such an environment that was safe for me and the colleagues of mine besides giving a respectful environment to my clients

and investors."

Rehmatun Nisa, a teacher in a village school for special children while narrating her experience of working with special children said that earlier on, it was quite difficult. But she kept on going and finally managed to overcome all the odds.

Nisa noted that those who were against her job now ask her to get their daughters and sisters employed in her school or elsewhere. "Financial empowerment does make a difference. It is the courage alone that helps you conquer the world."

Tahira, a former driver with UNICEF said that she was the first staff driver there. "It was odd for others, but to me it was a decent work as it could be for any male driver."

"There is no harm in doing any kind of work but one has to do it with respect. I was able to manage my home and job together with the support of my husband and children."

Shamin Sardar, a textile shop owner, said that women were not weak but men made them so by saying 'you can't do it'. "Women should trust themselves and begin with whatever they want to do and finally it is the hard work that makes one a success in any field."

Mitho, a circus acrobat said she never felt that she was working with boys. "If the women are confident enough, no one can cheat on them."

Mitho, along with her colleagues, also performed

on the occasion. Wijdan, a local singer sang a song. Ghazala Habib from the Planning Commission delivered an in depth briefing on the laws affecting women.

The afternoon event, arranged by the Insani Haqooq Itihad, mainly focused on the 'impact of religious extremism on women'.

Speaking on the occasion, Justice (Retired) Nasira Iqbal said that all committees mandated to suggest amendments had no women representation. How could the legislation be gender friendly, she asked.

She said that the research and study reports have been presented to the government on the laws affecting women, but the government did not take any notice; even the 18th Amendment failed to address the genuine concerns. She urged the government to have women on board in the Election Commission of Pakistan and other national forums.

"The 'democratic' government could not get the Domestic Violence Bill through the Senate what to talk about other governments."

The speakers including MNA Bushra Gohar, Rukhshanda Naz and Dr Farzana Bari also spoke on different aspects of the various laws and their implications on the lives of women.

They urged the government to challenge the Federal Shariat Court decision on the women protection act, and take necessary measures to curb the parallel judicial system in the country that are impacting women.