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Social welfare

## Women try to save crisis centres

No funds allocated in budget for centres formerly run by Centre

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LAHORE

The Benazir Bhutto Women's Crisis Centres provide essential services to victims of abuse and violence and the Punjab government must make sure they do not close down for lack of funding after the devolution of the Ministry for Women's Development, said women's rights activists and politicians on Wednesday.

The Punjab government has not allocated funds for these centres in the budget. At internal meetings, officials have argued that there is already a network of public darul amans (shelters) in the province and so the centres, which are run in partnerships with NGOs, are not needed.

A crisis centre is the first stage of contact for a woman before admission to a shelter.

They assess a woman's needs and the risks she faces. After full assessment, she can get access to legal advisers and counsellors. She is then referred to a shelter, which can be a darul aman public shelter or a private shelter.

The crisis centres provide services to women not available at darul amans, said prominent women at a press conference at the Lahore Press Club. "These centres are as important as the 1122 service," said Justice (retired) Nasira Javid Iqbal. "They provide psychological and medical aid, relocation and counselling."

She said that police stations were not welcoming to women. She said that there should be action to save these crisis centres before June 30, the end of the fiscal year. There are 25 crisis centres in Punjab including 12 in

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MPA Amna Ulfat of the PML-Quaid) said that the government-run women's shelters were inadequate. "There is nothing in darul amans for homeless women. Saying that they are enough is very disturbing to women," she said.

Shamsa Ali of Tehreek-i-Insaf said that all political parties should work together to save the centres from closure. "There will be no healthy kids in Pakistan if

there are no healthy women," she said.

Sajida Mir of the PPP said that the state had failed to protect women. "There is no follow-up or record maintained of violence-stricken women," she said. "Where are they planning to spend the Rs1.5 billion supposed to be spent on gender equity?"

She said that a female station house officer should be appointed at each police station to handle complaints from women. She said there was also limited female participation in governance. "How many women are there in the cabinet who have a considerable role?"

Shameela Aslam of the PML-N said that the crisis centres were founded in 1988 under her party's government and Tehmina Daultana, a current PML-N MNA, founded

the first centre in Punjab. "So the Punjab government not against the centre chief minister has assured he will provide a better substitute for these centres," she said.

She said that the government had been running the centres, which had temporary staff and buildings. She said that there were 320 of 380 cases of violence in Punjab had been solved.

Rifat Sultana Dar of the PML-N said that the country's women were out of touch with their own people.

"The policymakers care about the pain of a mother who has been kicked out of her home after baseless allegations of adultery against her husband. There should be more crisis centres to provide legal aid," she said.