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Bid on Malala's life

'Can we let bigots kill our children?'

Rights activists gather to show their angst, solidarity with the symbol of resistance

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When Swat fell under Taliban rule, Malala Yousufzai stood courageously as men many times her age cowered. Her diary for the BBC, a graphic illustration of the actions of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) brutal reign in Swat made her a hero for millions. Yet, only a few hundred came out of their houses to show support for this brave little girl.

Filled with shock and anger, scores of rights campaigners, writers and political activists staged a protest outside National Press Club in the posh F-6 Sector on Wednesday, condemning the attempt on the life of 14-year-old National Peace Award winner girl.

The TTP claimed responsibility for the attack and vowed to try again if she survives, saying she spoke against them and their policies.

"The cowards targeted a little girl. They want to infuse fear into society. Should we be afraid? We cannot let our children, our future generations, be killed this way," said Abdul Qadir, a participant in the demonstration, while adding that the state should come forward to fulfil its responsibility to protect law-abiding citizens.

The protest was not littered with the usual familiar faces. There were many new faces, all of whom came out to condemn the attempt on the life of the inspirational teenager from Swat. They included students from Khaldunia High School and members of left wing parties and student organisations. The protesters marched up to Super Market.



SOLIDARITY: Tahira Abdullah recites a poem in honour of Malala's bravery at a protest against the attack on the young girl in Swat on Tuesday outside the press club. MYRA IQBAL

Dr Farzana Bari, an academic and head of the Quaid-e-Azam University Gender Studies Department, demanded that the government declare October 9 as a national day. "We will remember this day as a symbol of courage shown by a young girl who spoke against brutality and faced every threat courageously," said Dr Bari.

She added that progressive parties and civil society will hold a "million march" in mid-November. "We oppose every act of terrorism and barbarism and we support women's right to education, for which Malala stood too," she added.

Volunteers for the planned march were being enlisted at the protest. Not everybody gets a chance to speak in gatherings of hundreds of protesters, so two young girls used written words instead.

Holding up a placard inscribed with a message "Save

Our Right to Education", they stood at the front of the protest.

Other participants were carrying placards and banners to send individual messages across. One such message read, "GHQ, stop Talibanisation of the state and society".

Alia Amirali, secretary of the National Students Federation, said the attack on Malala did not just involve the Taliban, but all those who created such terrorist elements that were now threatening society.

Dr Hassan Nasir of the Awami Party Pakistan (APP) said the terrorist attack on the courageous girl once again showed that it was not just a matter of a certain terrorist group. "It is the [radical] mindset that needed to be changed. Malala challenged that very mindset. Was this her fault?" he asked.

Dr Nasir added that there was a need to review the

character of a state that failed to protect and take care of people's rights.

The APP activists also held a demonstration in Talagang to condemn the attack. APP Punjab chapter president Ayub Malik declared the attack "barbarism" and "an attack on humanity". He said Malala kept receiving death threats but the government did not take any step to ensure her safety.

Additionally, in separate statements on Wednesday, the French government and a religious party also condemned the attack on Malala.

"This [murder] attempt against a defenceless girl illustrates the cowardice and cruelty of the Taliban, who have claimed responsibility of the attack," said a statement issued by the French Embassy. The statement called upon the Pakistani authorities to track down the people involved in the attack and bring them to justice.