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From candle to candle



ISLAMABAD: People and relatives of slain Shahbaz Bhatti lay flowers and light candles where he was consumed by bullets of terrorists, showing that no guns can stop his message from spreading. SHABIR HUSSAIN

Protest, candle lit vigil

Civil society expresses solidarity with Christian community

By Mahtab Bashir

ISLAMABAD: The Christian community and civil society members on Thursday gathered at Super Market (F-6) under the banner of Insani Huqooq Ittehad (IHI) and staged a peaceful protest demonstration against killing of federal minister for minorities affairs Shahbaz Bhatti.

Terming the assassination of Bhatti a cruel act, the protestors demanded that government immediately arrest his killers. They also raised slogans against terrorism and demanded due status to minorities.

Addressing on the occasion, Senator Prof. Saeeda Iqbal said the protest was an effort to

show solidarity with minorities. She said Bhatti raised voice for oppressed Christian community, but fanatics silenced his voice. "Bhatti's blood would not go in vain," she said, adding, he was a dedicated worker of PPP. "We would execute Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's mission under the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari and make all out efforts to eliminate extremism and terrorism from the country," Iqbal said.

Human rights activist Tahira Abdullah said state had failed to safeguard the rights of minorities and even high profile personalities who raised their voice for minorities were being assassinated in a broad day-

light. "Government has failed to establish its writ and extremism is on the rise," she said.

Abdullah said rulers were in deep slumber and failed to protect the lives of even high profile persons then how could it (government) provide protection to an ordinary man. "Not only political figures are being killed by the fanatics but non-political persons like Dr Farooq Khan was also murdered while prominent scholar Javed Ahmed Ghamidi is hiding himself abroad," she said.

Abdullah said it was the right time that religious parties' workers break their silence and condemn such assassinations.

"They can be seen agitating everywhere against Raymond Davis and in favour of Aafia Siddiqui, but they don't have courage to condemn killings of Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti or Dr Farooq Khan," she said.

Shazia Masih, a protestor, said minorities were neither safe in the country nor they were given the opportunity to excel in life. "Even if any member of our community gets educated, they say him to work as labour or become a sweeper," she lamented.

The speakers said religious hatred motivated Bhatti murder. Bhatti's assassination underlines "protection of life and freedom to religious

minorities," they said. They urged the government to take concrete steps to halt extremism in Pakistan. "If the country became a killing field of democratic and liberal people who exercise freedom of conscience and expression it would legitimise the criminals trying to takeover the country," they said. The protestors condemned the use of religion as an instrument to threaten people.

The protest demonstration was followed by candle light vigil. The participants lit candles amid heavy rain and thunderstorm. Few of lanterns were also seen in the hands of civil society members.