

Saturday, March 31, 2012

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Islamabad

CANDLELIGHT VIGIL

Re-opening of acid victim Fakhra's case demanded

A large number of civil society representatives and human right activists gathered near the Super Market and held a candlelight vigil to demand re-opening of the case of an acid victim, Fakhra Younus.

The protesters were joined by a large number of general public who first gathered to watch but became so involved with time that they performed 'Ghaibana Namaz-e-Janaza' for Fakhra at the end of vigil. The prayers were offered by one of the onlookers, Zahoor Ahmed Panezai, from Balochistan, whereas the slogans were led by a young boy from AJK Afraz Hamza.

Fakhra committed suicide on March 17, almost a decade after she was attacked with acid in the year 2000. She jumped from the sixth floor of a building in Rome, Italy, where she was undergoing multiple corrective surgeries.

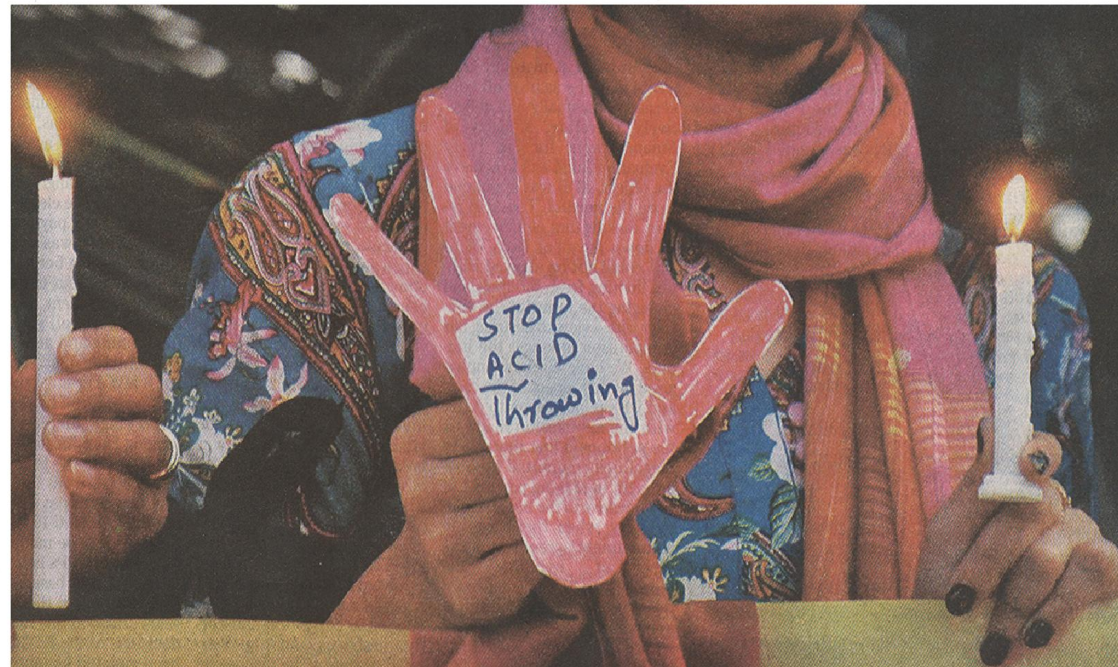
It had been reported that former MPA Bilal Khar, son of former Punjab governor and Pakistan People's Party leader Ghulam Mustafa Khar, allegedly attacked Fakhra Younus with acid in 2000 after she had left him. In her suicide note, Fakhra blamed Khar for her extreme step.

In the press statement read out by Waseem Wahga from Aurat Foundation, the civil society expressed deepest grief over Fakhra's suicide. "We are outraged at the failure of the state and the system to protect her or to provide her justice, making a travesty of her fundamental constitutional rights as a citizen of Pakistan," it said.

Waseem said that if the self-claimed pro-women government fails to act as her 'wall' (guardian), the civil society would not hesitate to go ahead with an appeal in the respective court.

In a statement, they demanded that in the view of her reported dying declaration, which constitutes new evidence, the Fakhra Younus-Bilal Khar acid-crime court case should be re-opened, irrespective of the time limitation.

It says that the recent legislation



ISLAMABAD: An activist holds a cardboard hand with 'Stop Acid Throwing' written on it at a candlelight vigil organised by civil society in memory of Fakhra Younus. — Online

on acid crimes cannot be effectively implemented unless the parliament enacts the follow-up Acid and Burn Crime Bill 2012. "We demand that the government table and pilot it speedily as a Treasury Bill thereby demonstrat-

ing ownership."

The statement appreciated MNA Kashmala Tariq's tabling a resolution on the subject in the National Assembly but strongly condemned the news that her draft document was changed

to remove Bilal Khar's name at the demand of at least four MNAs, including PPP's Nafisa Shah and PML-N's Anusha Rahman, Ayaz Amir and Zahid Hamid.

"Dr. Fehmida Mirza, the first

woman speaker, agreed to this questionable demand, thereby demonstrating yet again that feudals will be feudals and will collude to stick together, irrespective of gender, party ideologies and manifestos. We feel that Kash-

mala Tariq should have disassociated herself from the revised draft Resolution," mentions the statement.

They suggested that media should name, portray and highlight the male perpetrators, rather than the female victims or survivors, in all crimes of "honour" killings, rape or gang-rape, acid or burn crimes, 'swara', 'sang chatti', 'wulwar', stripping and publicly parading women, forced conversions and marriages, Quran marriages, Jirga and Panchayat-sanctioned "punishments" etc.

"The judiciary is overburdened with human rights cases, thus we demand that the police and other law enforcement agencies be made responsible and accountable for prevention, effective investigation and prosecution of crimes against girls and women," they said.

Speaking on the occasion, Arifa Mazhar from Sangi said that there is no one above law. She expressed disappointment over the omission of Bilal Khar's name from the resolution and stressed that the formulating the implementation mechanism of law is as important as passing the legislation.

Valerie Khan from Acid Survivors Foundation demanded said that this is the right time to pass the Acid and Burn Crime Bill 2012 if the government wants to save other women from becoming the victim of acid crime.

Rakhshanda Perveen from Sachet said that the Fakhra's case is a glaring example of the fact that justice delayed is justice denied. Eminent human rights activist Tahira Abdullah said that it is vital to end feudal system for the implementation of law in the country.

Film-maker Samar Minallah expressed disappointment over the way the family background of Fakhra was discussed on the media. She said that Fakhra was the respectable wife of Bilal Khar. "The biggest hurdle in the way of the protection of women is that laws are not applied on the influential. Their respect is more important than a poor woman who commits suicide," she opined.