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Civil society stages protest against girl's rape

Staff Report

ISLAMABAD: Members of the civil society on Tuesday staged a protest against the rape of a five-year-old girl in Lahore.

They vowed to continue the protest until the Punjab police apprehend the rapists.

The protest was called by three NGOs namely, Insaani Haqqoq Itehad, Aurat Foundation and Ending Violence against Women and Girls.

Prominent parliamentarians and civil society activists including Naeem Mirza, Tahira Abdullah, Alia Mirza, television artist Jamal Shah, Wasim Wagma and Farkhanda Aurangzaib took part in the protest.

They were carrying banners and placards inscribed with slogans against the police and criminals.

They demanded the government ensure strict punishment for the rapists.

The protesters also demanded that legislation should be made to award a harsher punishment to rapists than the law currently stipulates.

The protesters, numbering over 100, contended that the government had failed to tackle rape crimes in the city. They demanded death penalty for the rapists. While seeking urgent steps to bring the perpetrators to immediate justice, the representatives of the civil society said, "As a society, we must introspect the erosion of our values and our repeated failure to ensure the security of our women and children.

We must identify the causes and find solutions to such criminal depravity in the society."

They asked people to pledge "energy and effort to ensure that such aberrations staining our moral fibre as a society are prevented".

The speakers termed the incident "a slap on the Pakistani society" that reflected a sense of insecurity. They also declared the country's criminal justice system useless in punishing those frequently involved in such incidents.

They stressed the need for reforming the criminal justice system in the country to avert such incidents in the future. The participants announced that they would protest everyday at F6 Markaz at 4pm until the Punjab police arrest the culprits.



WPC condemns rape of 5-year-old girl

ISLAMABAD: The Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) on Tuesday condemned the unfortunate incident of a sexual assault on a 5-year-old girl in Lahore last week. The WPC urged the authorities and the judiciary to ensure that the culprits are immediately arrested and prosecuted. They said the accused should be strictly punished to provide justice to the innocent victim and her grieved family and to curb such incidents that reflect the mindset destroying the foundations of the society. Such unfortunate incidents were increasing at an alarming rate despite various legislations passed in the parliament, which was a serious concern in light of the existing security situation in the country, the WPC added. The WPC said an effective methodology needed to be implemented to engage the civil society, media and parliamentarians to create public awareness on such issues, educating them on measures to ensure their safety and inform them of their basic legal rights as the citizens of the country. Such steps would help the government fight the crime and provide security to people, they added. The WPC said it was their responsibility to continue to work towards fulfilling the international commitments on social development and effectively ensure that the voice of the people of Pakistan was heard. The WPC said to achieve these targets, it was very important that the smooth transition of the democratic process continued and through the effective policy of reconciliation, national policies were carried forward by the future governments. **ONLINE**

RIUJ for caution on reporting of rape cases

ISLAMABAD: The Rawalpindi-Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ) appealed to the media not to overplay the issue of a five-year-old rape victim. In a statement on Tuesday, it was said certain ethical lines about the coverage of rape cases should be followed, particularly if a minor is involved. The newly-elected body of the RIUJ led by its President Afzal Butt appealed to political parties not to politicise the issue by visiting the victim. Instead, they should raise pressure for the arrest of the accused in the parliament, he added. "Such cases need to be covered with utmost care and family consent must be sought," the statement said.

The statement said the media hyped the issue, which perhaps did not help the child's case but, on the contrary, added to her family's trauma. The RIUJ said some of the newspapers had even published the photograph of the victim while some channels, including the state-owned PTV and print media also disclosed her name. All

this was the violation of the ethical code. The RIUJ believes that all editors and director news must play their role and programming heads must also handle the story with care. The case should not be used for "ratings", the statement said. The RIUJ wondered whether TV channels had any SOPs or not, regarding the coverage of such heinous crimes. How much coverage was required for such stories and how they should be treated whether it's a 5-year-old from Lahore, 13-year-old from Faisalabad or 14-year-old from Sanghar.

The RIUJ appealed to the Pakistan Broadcasters Association, PBA, All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), Council of Pakistan Newspapers Editors (CPNE) and Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and all director news of TV channels and professional editors to urgently agree on certain SOPs for the coverage of such events. The RIUJ suggested that the news channels and print media must keep in mind the impact of such sto-

ries on a society, particularly on children. Merely putting a parental guidance (PG) sign and asking children not to watch such programmes may not help much, the statement said. Instead, the coverage should be reasonable. Secondly, the selection language should also be kept in mind. Thirdly, everyone including the police should know that a five-year-old child could not record her statement or tell her stories.

The statement said the news should not be missed and there was also no doubt that it was a heinous crime, however, the problem was with the coverage like in Sikandar's case. The statement asked whether the family's consent to air their story was sought as they were the victims and for them it was an unending trauma. It also asked whether showing the child's visuals time and again was necessary. The RIUJ said they would soon call a meeting of senior journalists, editors and owners from the print and TV channels to address the issue of the coverage of such sensitive cases. **ONLINE**