



CIVIL society activists take out a rally in Islamabad on Wednesday to mark International Human Rights Day. — Photo by Tanveer Shahzad

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Capital celebrates International Human Rights Day

By Ikram Junaidi, Kashif Abbasi and Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: A number of events were organised to mark International Human Rights Day on Wednesday where speakers spoke about various instances of human rights violations at the national and international level.

Circumstances of groups such as the Hazaras in Pakistan and internally displaced persons (IDPs) needing state protection were discussed. Speakers also congratulated Malala Yousafzai who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on Wednesday.

Speaking at a seminar organised by the Potohar Organisation for Development Advocacy (PODA) titled 'Reaffirming Freedom of Religion or Belief', a member of the Hazara community Wilayat Hussain narrated how he was forced out of Quetta. The widespread killing of Hazaras in Balochistan forced him to move his family to a rented house in Islamabad.

"We are loyal to the country, we are patriotic, but the state has failed to protect our rights," he told Dawn.

Speaking on the occasion, the ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation in Pakistan Lars-Gunnar Wigemark said: "We are concerned about the plight of the Hazara community. They are clear victims of systematic violence."

The ambassador reiterated the European Union's commitment to promotion of human rights in Pakistan in collaboration with the government and citizens.

Fatima Atif, a social activist from the Hazara community, highlighted the plight of fellow Hazaras. She demanded of the government to take action against those involved in creating sectarian strife in the country.

Executive Director, PODA, Sameena Nazir said this year Human Rights Day has assumed more significance in view of the Nobel Peace Prize being bestowed upon Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani who had raised her voice for girls' education.

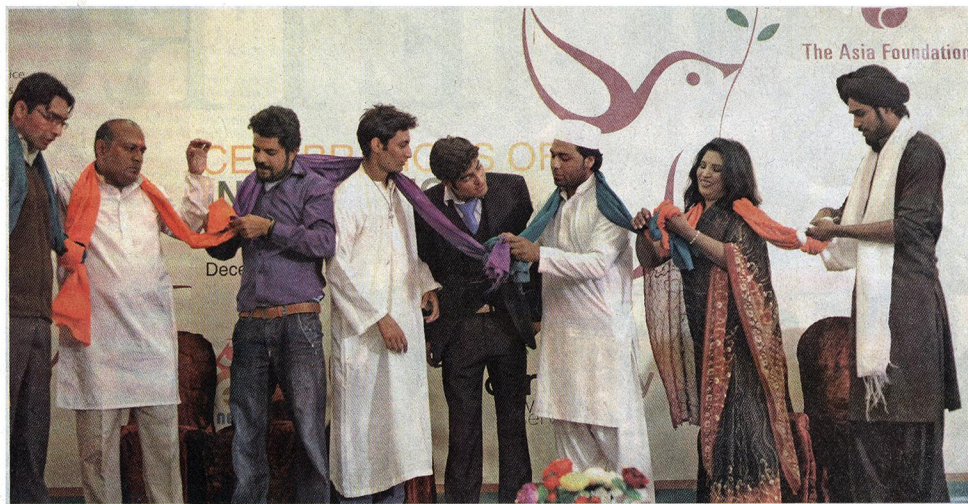
Poet and journalist Harris Khaliq presented a critical analysis of fundamental human rights as constituted by Pakistan and journalist Wajahat Masood discussed Pakistan's blasphemy law in the context of universal principles of freedom of religion.

Another seminar titled "The Challenges of Protecting Human Rights in Conflict Areas" was conducted by Human Rights Cell of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) at a local hotel on Wednesday.

Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly Syed Khurshid Shah discussed the steps taken by his party for the protection of human rights.

He said while one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) from South Waziristan await attention politicians are busy fighting one another.

"We should be proud of Malala Yousafzai who did not care for her life and stood up for human rights," he said.



A SCENE from a play staged on International Human Rights Day in Islamabad on Wednesday. The other picture is of a special Kashmir stall set up by the Youth Forum for Kashmir at Jinnah Super Market. — White Star

"It is unfortunate that human rights violations are taking place in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other parts of the country. East Pakistan showed us that people cannot be ruled through enslavement," he said.

Khursheed Shah added that human rights violation against Sikhs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Christians in Punjab and Hindus in Sindh should be stopped.

PPP leaders Qamar Zaman Kaira, Rubina Khalid, Chaudhry Manzoor Ahmed, Nafisa Shah and others also participated in the seminar.

The Asia Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights also marked the International Human Rights Day with an event.

Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Parliamentary Affairs Barrister Zafarullah Khan, speaking at the event, said the government had taken concrete steps to ensure protection of human rights in the country in line with national and international commitments.

He said ensuring the well-being of vulnerable segments of the society, including women and minorities, is a national duty. He pledged to provide equal opportunities to all without discrimination.

Executive Vice President, Asia Foundation, Suzanne Siskel said while it was appreciable that in 2013 Pakistan witnessed its first civilian to civilian

transition, the country has witnessed growing intolerance.

Embassy of the Netherlands' First Secretary Nana Stolze said this year's Nobel Peace Prize had been given to a Pakistani Malala Yousafzai which is a remarkable feat.

"Education is important to democracy and for economic development," she said.

A public solidarity event titled 'Apno Ki Yaad-in the memory of our own' was held outside the National Press Club to mark the International Human Rights Day.

The memorial was simultaneously organised by a number of non-governmental organisations in various districts across Pakistan to commemorate women from those areas who had lost their lives to violence.

Speaking at the event Rabeeha Hadi, Director Advocacy, Aurat Foundation, said despite the passage of The Criminal Law (Third Amendment) Act, 2011 which deals with the anti-women customary practices like wanni, swara etc, forced marriages and child marriages, these practices still continue unabated in the country.

She said a total of 7,450 cases of violence against women were reported during the nine months of 2014 which is suf-



ficient to realise that violence against women is on the rise.

The event was collectively organised by Aurat Foundation, South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK), Strengthening Participatory Organisation and Sungi Development Foundation.

Asiya Nasir, Member National Assembly, Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam-Fazl condemned the forced conversions of minority women and girls and their forced marriage to Muslims.

"Women rights should be valued, respected and implemented as 'human rights'," Ms Nasir added.

Mushaah Hussain Mullick, chairper-

son Peace and Culture Organisation, and wife of Kashmiri Hurriyat leader Yasin Malik, visited a special Kashmir stall set up by Youth Forum for Kashmir at Jinnah Super Market.

The stall was set up to remind visitors of the links between Pakistan and Kashmir and draw attention to the atrocities being committed against Kashmiris.

"I appeal to all human rights organisations, The United Nations and Amnesty International to play their role for the release of Yasin Malik and other Kashmiri leaders," she said, adding that her husband is facing solitary confinement in a cold cell.