

Myra Imran

Islamabad

Achievements of women were celebrated and issues they face were highlighted at variety of events organised to commemorate International Women Day on Sunday.

Despite rain and cold, a large number of women from all walks of life participated in these events and presented their charter of demand to the government and people of Pakistan. The day-long activities started with an event organised by Ministry of Law justice and Human Rights and ended with rallies, seminars, mime performances, poetry recitation and motivational speeches organised by different civil society forums.

Meanwhile, Minister of State for Information and Technology and Telecommunication Anousha Rehman inaugurated 'Women Development and Empowerment Centre (WD&EC)' for the marginalized women of the capital and adjacent areas.

The centre located at Lehtar Road was established by Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal (PBM) which offers advanced computer courses besides mastering skill trainings of beautician, embroidery, sewing and cooking.

A well-equipped IT lab, sponsored by Telenor Pakistan, has also been set up in the centre with 20 computers where highly trained staff would impart advance courses training to the girls.

Addressing the ceremony, the federal minister said that women comprised 50 per cent of our total population. "Pakistani women are highly talented and committed so the government is taking appropriate steps to open opportunities for them."

She said that a project of 'ICT for girls' is also on cards in which girls, who did not continue their studies after Matriculation, could continue enhancing their skills.

Speakers at different forums demanded effective implementation of pro-women laws.

They urged the National Assembly to pass legislation on rape and sexual assault recently

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Events highlight women's achievements, issues

approved by the Senate and appreciated Punjab government for the approval of Child Marriage and Restraint Act.

In an event entitled 'Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture it,' women parliamentarians from Senate and National and Provincial Assembly talked about the factors that hinder the implementation of pro-women laws. They termed social mindset as the biggest hindrance in the way of implementation and urged women to raise voice for their rights.

Organised by AWAZ project — a consortium of Sungi, South Asia partnership Pakistan,

Strengthening Participatory Organisation and Aurat Foundation — the event featured impressive mime presentation, poetry recitation by Aliya Mirza and Haris Khaleeq.

There was also screening of the video of a poem 'Kaun Kehta Hay Mine Khudmukhtar Nahi' by Aliya Mirza. Panelists included Senator Rubina Khalid from PPP, MPA Tehseen Fawad from PML-N, MPA Nusrat Sehar Abbasi from PPP, Meraj Khan from Qomi Watan Party, Anchorperson Asma Sherazi and Chief Operating Officer Aurat Foundation Naeem Ahmed Mirza.

Speaking on this occasion, Senator Rubina Khalid said that change will come with change in the social mindset. She stressed media to play constructive role in building positive social mindset.

Meraj Khan from Qomi Watan Party said that domestic violence bill in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa is with the law department. "It took us long to explain the legislation to the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUIF) members as they had many reservations and when it was approved from there, it got stuck with the law department," she

said. Tehseen Fawad from PML N said that Domestic Violence Bill would soon be passed from the Punjab Assembly. "The bill has already been presented in the Provincial Assembly and would most probably be passed in the month of March," she said.

Charter of demands presented at the end of the event demanded involvement of women in political parties at decision making level, local bodies' elections, amendment in Political Party Act to reserve 10 per cent seats for women on general seats, women friendly policing, Domestic Violence Act in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and at federal level, strengthening of shelters for women, education and health facilities for women and legislation for women home-based workers.

In another charter of demand presented in a rally organised by Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls Alliance, Insani Huqooq Itihad, Women Action Forum and Child Rights Movement, the participants demanded effective national legislation, policies, implementing procedures and required financial and human resources for the fulfillment of women's rights besides providing one acre land to the poor and landless rural women.

The charter called upon the government to give consultative status to the institutional mechanisms working for Gender Equality such as National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) in policy-development, planning or law-making. The charter demanded implementation of international commitments and suggested that human rights of women and girls in situations of conflict and natural disaster should be addressed through a transformative and comprehensive ap-

proach to gender equality and gender based violence in humanitarian assistance and protection.

It demanded that the provincial and federal government should ensure the implementation of the notified SOPs for the Darulamsans and Crisis Centres and allocate them proper budget to ensure implementation of the actions outlined in SOPs.

The charter demanded the government to re-establish gender crime cells in police/jails and equip them with properly trained staff on the issues of violence against women besides suggesting review of the medico legal curricula for medico legal officers trainings and setting up of proper forensic labs to ensure timely safeguarding the evidence in cases of violence against women.

In another event organised by Awami Workers Party (AWP), working-class women, political workers, students and ordinary citizens gathered to celebrate International Women's Day at the Aabpara Community Centre.

Dismissing the instrumental use of women by major political parties for votes, the AWP conference declared that only the replacement of capitalism and patriarchy could guarantee equality and rights for women, as well as an end to class, imperialist, national and all other forms of oppression.

Speaking on the occasion, AWP chairman Fanoos Gujjar said that Pakistani society is amongst the most patriarchal in the world, and while this social order has deep historical roots it has been strengthened immeasurably over the past few decades by the state of Pakistan, the legal, policing and other branches of which actually victimise rather than protect women.