

Women have something to cheer about!



ISLAMABAD: People from different walks of life participating in a rally to mark International Women's Day. — APP

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Rallies, workshops, seminars, roundtable discussions and launch of literary material on women's resilience marked International Women Day on Tuesday.

People from different sections of society participated in these events where women's rights activists and role models cherished the extraordinary work done by Pakistani women at national and international level besides highlighted the need to take assertive measures for bringing women in the mainstream. They agreed that work environment could become conducive for women only with change in the social mindset.

Women of strength shared their inspiring stories, government representatives talked about the details of the initiatives taken by the government and women rights activists highlighted alarming statistics about current situation of women. Women participants encouraged each other with experience sharing, feminist songs and poems.

The day started with roundtable discussion on rights of women with disability and ended with a torch bearing rally organised on the

call of Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Alliance.

Organised by National Forum of Women with Disabilities (NFWWD) in collaboration with Aurat Foundation and US Embassy in Islamabad, the roundtable discussion was aimed at raising the voice for the rights of women with disabilities and engage women leaders with disabilities in social and political reforms through active participation at strategic and policy level.

The event was participated by a large number of women with disability. Among them 25 women were from Azad Kashmir who developed disability after 2005 earthquake. "This is the first time that I am participating in any such event. I definitely gives us hope that life did not end with disability," said Zahidunnissa who became paralyzed due to an injury she suffered in 2005 earthquake.

NFWWD Chairperson Abia Akram shared that 10 per cent population in Pakistan suffers one or the other form of disability and more than half of this population is that of women who are segregated from the society.

Joint Secretary from Ministry of Law and Justice Huma Chughtai shared with the par-

ticipants that with the effort of Advisor to Prime Minister Ashtar Ahsan and Women Parliamentary Caucus, the government has decided to include separate column for persons with disability in the census form. Night Siddiq from Election Commission of Pakistan shared that the Commission has formed a special working group to suggest measures for maximum participation of persons with disability in the next elections.

The event also featured launch of 'Brilliant and Resilient - Pakistan Version,' a story book of women leaders with disability written with an aim to celebrate the achievements of women with disabilities in Pakistan.

Launching of Trainees Manual for Women Empowerment Centers (WECs) of Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM) took place in Auditorium of National Library of Pakistan. Speaker Balochistan Assembly Raheela Durrani graced the occasion as a chief guest while Managing Director PBM Barrister Abid Waheed Sheikh was also present on this occasion.

While paying tribute to the women, Speaker Balochistan Assembly said that women of Pakistan has really come forward and proven their worth

on this occasion.

The seminar was addressed by District Coordination Officer Sajid Zafar Dall, Assistant Commissioner Rawalpindi Cantt Dr Satish Javed, District Officer Human Resource Management, Rawalpindi Nazia Perveen Sudhan, Social Activist Fatima Lodhi and Executive Director SSDO Syed Kausar Abbas.

Sajid Zafar Dall said that women are making their mark in every field and the time has come to finish quota system as women of Pakistan are now capable, equipped and confident enough to compete with men in all professions.

The day ended with a torch bearing rally participated by women and men belonging to different sections of the society. The rally was held on the call of Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Alliance.

The participants were carrying placards inscribed with slogans in support of equal opportunities for women. The rally started from Super Market and ended in front of National Press Club.

The slogan-chanting crowd sang feminist songs until they reached the press club where women rights activists shared with the media a position paper prepared by EVAWG Alliance for the forthcoming Commission on the Status of Women conference.

Later, women rights activists such as Nasreen Azhar, Farzana Bari, Abia Akram, Rehana Hashmi and Farkhanda Aurangzeb addressed the rally and stressed for measures to improve mechanisms for protection and empowerment of women. They expressed support for Women Protection Bill passed by the Punjab government while also pointing out certain gaps in the bill. At the end, they shared the position paper of civil society prepared for the Commission on the Status of Women conference.

The position paper appreciated the enactment of pro-women legislation in recent years and announcement of Action Plan for the Improvement of Human Rights in Pakistan. The paper termed establishment of national commissions for women and human rights a positive step. It also praised increase in number of women possessing Computerized National Identi-

ty Cards (CNICs) and the fact that more women have taken part in the political process. However, the paper expressed concern that in specific areas, women were prevented from voting and participating in elections.

The paper expressed concern that women have not been included as stakeholders in crucial decision-making processes such as the National Action Plan (NAP), negotiations on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and annual budget-making process.

The paper also expressed concern over girls' and women's health, education and skills training issues. The paper says that overall, social

services, support and protection for girls and women remained inadequate, and much more so for those who are living with disabilities (PLWDs), the elderly, widows, single women, refugees, internally displaced women, women from religious minorities, the transgender population, and above all, women-headed households.

The paper highlights the fact that the laws which are pro-women and girls, lack teeth and enforcement while a patriarchal, misogynist, discriminatory, obscurantist, anti-women and girls narrative and worldview is still inadequately countered, thereby hindering the empowerment of women and girls.