

## **NGOs ordered to vacate Swat: Civil society condemns TTP's stance**

**\* Human rights activists condemn TNSM's ban on district courts**

**\* WAF convener says Taliban in Malakand using 'un-Islamic' technology**

By Ali Usman

LAHORE: The civil society and human rights activists on Monday condemned the Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)'s orders to all non-government organisations (NGOs) to leave Swat.

They said the order proved that the TTP did not want the locals to prosper or be able to voice their needs. They also slammed the Tehreek Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) chief Sufi Muhammad's ban on district courts and the lawyers' presence in Malakand's sharia courts. 500 lawyers have been left unemployed in Swat. The TNSM established sharia courts in Malakand and Sufi Muhammad banned lawyers from appearing in these courts, while the TTP ordered all NGOs working in Swat to vacate the area. The TTP said NGOs were just another name for 'obscenity and vulgarity'.

The civil society and human rights activists said the government should uphold its supremacy instead of surrendering to the gun-totting militants. They said surrendering such settled areas to militants would only encourage them to 'expand their empire'. They also showed reservations on the Taliban shutting down a family planning centre that had been working under the Population Welfare Department in Dir.

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) Punjab Vice-Chairman Dr Mehdi Hasan said areas of the Malakand Division were being made 'no go' areas. He said the militants' objectives were to control the society and implement their self-interpreted version of Islam and sharia. He said the militants would stop at nothing to achieve their purpose, adding that they would eliminate anything trying to stop them. "They blow up girls' schools because they do not support

their objective. The same is the case with the NGOs. They're working for the welfare of the people but that isn't in the militants' favour," he said. He said free and fair justice was every man's need, but a parallel system of justice could not be created in a country. He said the government should look into the matter and take control of the situation.

Technology: Women's Action Forum (WAF) Convener and ASR Resource Centre Executive Director Nighat Saeed Khan said the militants in the Malakand Division had used Western equipment – cellular phones, rockets, and vehicles - but termed every such technology 'un-Islamic'. She said the TTP's order to the NGOs and the removal of lawyers could prove to be an extremely dangerous move. She said the militants were creating their 'own areas' and would move to other districts if not stopped immediately.

She said it was shocking that the ANP had supported the 'peace accord' with militants. She said: "The militants are now even allowing the children to get polio drops. Doesn't that make their intentions clear?" She said the lawyers should also clarify their stand on the Swat situation, as it was their profession that had been banned.

South Asian Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK) Executive Director Mohammad Tahseen said a deal with gun-totting terrorists could only result in such activities. He said the government should arrest such people instead of handing over districts to them.