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### **Time to curb domestic abuse**

THE Council of Islamic Ideology has gone against the tide by expressing its disapproval of the rising incidence of domestic violence in Pakistan. Its concern is valid because this problem has so far not been adequately addressed by the law. One hopes that action on this issue will not be long in coming. It is true that of late steps have been taken to enact pro-women laws and to correct lacunae in existing gender-related legislation. But these efforts have been rather limited in scope. Currently, the law recognises criminality against women — such as rape and honour killings — only in the public domain and has done little to tighten the noose around domestic violence. Conservative estimates show that more than 70 per cent of women in Pakistan suffer from some form of domestic abuse. Verbal and emotional abuse apart, many women are subjected to physical violence at the hands of their husbands and in-laws, while others are burnt and tortured to the point where many die or are disfigured for life. It testifies to the low status of women in our society that they are treated as commodities in the possession of men. Hence the conventional view is that the treatment meted out to women in the privacy of their home is not a matter of public concern. It is left to the families to devise methods of addressing the problem.

Unfortunately, we can assume that, as has been the case for most legislation pertaining to the welfare and protection of women, a law to curb domestic violence will meet much resistance. True, efforts have been initiated to introduce legislation, and both the PPP and the MQM have sought to introduce bills relating to the prevention of domestic violence in the assemblies. But unless our male-dominated legislatures do not recognise such abuse as a pressing issue, one can be sure that efforts to address it will be met with disinterest. For a law on domestic violence to be enacted and to prove effective, it is necessary that the legislators recognise the equal status of women and accept the principle that employing violence against them amounts to violating their human rights. Were lawmakers to sympathise with the plight of thousands of women across the country who continue to accept their fate in silence, the seeds of change could be sown. The state must take note of such abuse and implement strict measures to curb it. It also must be emphasised that besides legislation there is the need to create social awareness about the rights of women, especially their need for protection against violence. Otherwise, the public will continue to tolerate violence against women which is deeply ingrained in the mindset of Pakistan's patriarchal society.