

Editorial

## A Jirga's Rash Edict

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IT is disappointing to hear that a jirga in the Upper Dir region of the NWFP has banned the registering of honour crimes on the pretext that they are part of local culture. In vowing to uphold their tradition, tribal elders have also warned of strict action against anyone who registers an FIR against an honour crime, adding that they would be equally harsh against those who "misused" the custom to settle feuds or financial disputes. That jirgas feel that they have the right to pass such sweeping edicts - which only serve to harm the people they claim to represent - is disturbing. The government should take notice of the matter and rectify the situation before more harm is done. It is imperative for the area's elected representatives to talk to jirga members on the illegality of this edict.

Irrespective of how honour-related crimes are seen by locals, jirga members need to be made to realise that these are contrary to the law of the land and by passing arbitrary orders forbidding people from reporting a crime, they are in violation of the law and can be held legally answerable for that. Law enforcement agencies in that area will also need to make their presence felt by urging citizens to step forward and report on crimes, assured that their complaints will be dealt with according to the law. It should be handled as firmly as the matter of women being barred from voting during the last local body elections in Dir - a move that was also supported by local political parties. Then the Supreme Court had issued a strict warning to ensure that women were allowed to exercise their right of franchise. Now too, the government will have to exhibit strong will if it is to prevent such regressive steps. At the heart of the matter, however, is successive governments' inability to integrate this region into the national mainstream - which is why much of the

area is steeped in backwardness. The absence of the intelligentsia in such matters is deeply felt. Until they step forward and begin to engage the tribal society in an enlightened dialogue, things are not likely to change easily.

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**P.S.**

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