

# CM's rally ranks molested

**OUR CORRESPONDENT**

**Joynagar (South 24-Parganas), Dec. 22:** Hours after the chief minister asked people to rise in protest against atrocities on women, supporters of his party's women's wing were stripped and molested.

The Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti members were returning last night from Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's rally at Fatuli, on the southern fringes of Calcutta, when their trekker was stopped and looted near here. Along with jewellery, the miscreants robbed the women of their saris.

Three SUCI activists have been arrested in connection with

the incident. The CPM in South 24-Parganas has called a dawn-to-dusk bandh tomorrow.

Circle Inspector of Baruipur Sanjiv Bhattacharya said the members of the samiti left the rally venue around 6.30 pm. A private bus reserved for the rallyists dropped them at Jiban Mondal Hat, 80 km from Calcutta.

From there, the team of 25 women hired a trekker to head home in the Kotulpur area of Joynagar, about 2.5 km away. There were a couple of local villagers in the vehicle as well. They had barely travelled a kilometre when the driver found the road blocked with trees. When the women got down to see what

was amiss, it was 8.30 pm.

Within moments, a gang of 12 armed and masked men surrounded them. They aimed their revolvers at the women and asked them to hand over their jewellery and money. The valuables bagged, the miscreants grabbed at their saris. The molestation continued for 45 minutes. The driver of the trekker was beaten up.

"They snatched my earrings and Rs 700 from my handbag. Then they caught hold of my sari. All the while they pointed revolvers at us and we could not even shout for help," said Chandrabati Mondal. She was too "ashamed" to recount what followed.

Local committee member of

the CPM Madhu Pramanick, who was returning from the same meeting on a motorcycle with wife Subhra, was looted as well. As one of the miscreants held a revolver to Madhu's head, others zeroed in on his wife.

The women, who still had more than a kilometre to go to reach home, barely managed to cover themselves with the clothes rejected by the goons.

In a replay of the usual blame game in the district's politics, the CPM accused the SUCI of looting and molesting its supporters and the party promptly denied the charge.

"It is the handiwork of the SUCI. They knew our women

supporters will pass that way," said Jogesh Ghosh, the secretary of the CPM's Joynagar-Kultali zonal committee. Shankar Deb Nath, an SUCI leader, denied any role of the party in the incident.

Superintendent of police D.K. Ganguly said district secretary of the samiti Chandana Bhowmik led a deputation to him and lodged a complaint that mentioned "outrage of modesty".

What happened last night was reminiscent of the February 6 incident in Nadia's Dhanotola in which passengers of two buses returning from wedding receptions were looted and the women raped. Several CPM leaders are facing trial in the case now.

21 DEC 2003

# 'Male-female ratio in the country alarming'

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, OCT. 20.** "I am yours. Don't kill me," is the silent plea of a girl-child for survival. If a woman going in for female foeticide could hear this cry of an unborn girl, she would change her mind. This message should be put up in the form of posters at sex-determination sonography clinics in every State that reports female foeticide," the Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Sushrma Swaraj, said here today.

Her second suggestion was a message to men saying, "*Kuware reh, jaoge* (You will remain unmarried)" if girl-foetuses are continued to be destroyed in the womb.

Ms. Swaraj was releasing a brochure "Missing" on Mapping the Adverse Child Sex Ratio in India. The brochure is a joint effort of the Registrar-General of India, the Department of Family Welfare and the United Nations Population Fund. "The soul-stirring cover showing a little innocent girl with just one word: 'Missing' is the strongest message I have seen on a small brochure. When girls

go missing in a society it shows that compassion is missing," she remarked.

The Minister announced the appointment of teenager Sanya Mirza who had won the Junior Wimbledon championship, as the brand Ambassador for the Government's 'Save the Girl Child' campaign. Every year, a girl achiever would be the brand Ambassador for the campaign.

India has reported a child sex ratio of 927 girls to 1000 boys in the 2001 census, against a world average of 1045 women to 1000 men. In some States including Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, some districts of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and recently Karnataka, the sex ratio has declined to about 900 girls per 1000 boys in the 0-6 age group. In some districts, the ratio has plummeted to less than about 850 to 1000 boys.

Sharing her concern and alarm at the missing girls, Ms. Swaraj said the desire for a son is the biggest impediment in the stabilisation of population. Law and monitoring alone could not have the desired impact

unless the problem was tackled on many fronts and in a vigorous manner. The need is to stir the souls — through religious leaders, poets and artists — of all those who are a party to this. She regretted that States such as Punjab and Haryana that deify little girls as goddesses and worship them on the eighth day (ashtami) of Navratri, were willing to kill them the following day on account of gender discrimination.

Earlier, making a power-point presentation of the state of the missing girls, the RGI, J.K. Banthia, said even the 1991 census had brought out that there was something wrong in the society as there was a deficit in women.

"The 2001 census showed that this is spreading like cancer. A stage may soon come when it would be extremely difficult to make up for the missing girls," he said.

The UNFPA Representative in India, Francois Farah, said eliminating females just because they are females before or after birth was the ultimate manifestation of gender violence and discrimination, abuse of human rights and infringement on values of equity, equality, justice, dignity and quality of life for all.

5-11  
19/12

# This one is for the Islamic peoples

The people of Iran... have shown that they deem participation in public affairs to be their right, and that they want to be masters of their own destiny. This conflict is observed not only in Iran, but also in many Muslim states. Some Muslims, under the pretext that democracy and human rights are not compatible with Islamic teachings and the traditional structure of Islamic societies, have justified despotic governments...it is not so easy to rule over a people who are aware of their rights, using traditional, patriarchal and paternalistic methods. Islam is a religion whose first sermon to the Prophet begins with the word "Recite!" The *Quran* swears by the pen and what it writes. Such a sermon and message cannot be in conflict with awareness, knowledge, wisdom, freedom of opinion and expression and cultural pluralism.

The discriminatory plight of women in Islamic states, too...has its roots in the patriarchal and male-dominated culture prevailing in these societies, not in Islam. This culture does not tolerate freedom and democracy, just as it does not believe in the equal rights of men and women, and the liberation of women from male domination...because it would threaten the historical and traditional position of the rulers and guardians of that culture.

One has to say to those who have mooted the idea of a clash of civilizations, or prescribed war and military intervention for this region, and resorted to social, cultur-

From the lecture given by Shirin Ebadi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize 2003, on receiving the award at Oslo, December 10

al, economic and political sluggishness of the South to justify their actions, that if you consider international human rights laws, including the nations' right to determine their own destinies, to be universal, and if you believe in the priority and superiority of parliamentary democracy over other politi-



Together we fight

cal systems, then you cannot think only of your own security and comfort, selfishly and contemptuously. A quest for new means and ideas to enable the countries of the South to enjoy human rights and democracy, while maintaining their political independence and territorial integrity...must be given top pri-

ority by the United Nations...

The decision by the Nobel Peace Committee to award the 2003 prize to me, as the first Iranian and the first woman from a Muslim country, inspires me and millions of Iranians and nationals of Islamic states with the hope that our endeavours and struggles for the realization of human rights and the establishment of democracy in our respective countries enjoy the support and solidarity of international civil society...

If human rights fail to be manifested in codified laws or put into effect by states, then, as rendered in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human beings will be left with no choice other than staging a "rebellion against tyranny and oppression". A human being divested of all dignity, a human being deprived of human rights, a human being gripped by starvation, a human being beaten by famine, war and illness, a humiliated human being and a plundered human being is not in any position or state to recover the rights he or she has lost. If the 21st century wishes to free itself from the cycle of violence, acts of terror and war, and avoid repetition of the experience of the 20th century ...there is no other way except by understanding and putting into practice every human right for all mankind, irrespective of race, gender, faith, nationality or social status. In anticipation of that day.

With much gratitude —  
Shirin Ebadi

CONCLUDED

# Hawks hover around Ebadi's head

**Oslo/Tehran:** Iranian democracy activist Shirin Ebadi received the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize on Wednesday, saying it would inspire Iranians and women around the Muslim world to seek their rights and denouncing leaders who use Islam as a pretext for dictatorship.

The 56-year-old lawyer, author and activist, Iran's first female judge and the first Muslim woman to win the Peace Prize, appeared at the award ceremony without the headscarf that Iran requires women to wear in public.

That gesture and her earlier act of allegedly shaking a man's hand in Tehran led Islamic hardliners back home to hand her a warn-

ing that she would have to pay for her actions.

"Ms Ebadi has questioned Islamic precepts by unveiling herself," fumed a statement from student members of the Basij, a radical volunteer militia attached to Iran's Revolutionary Guards. "She has also provoked the religious sentiments of students by publicly shaking the hand of a man at Amir Kabir university, which has provoked several weeks of tensions at the university."

The Basij group is believed to have been behind an attack on Ms Ebadi last week, when around 50 hardliners stopped her giving a speech at Al-Zahra women's university in Tehran by chanting slo-



Shirin Ebadi with her Nobel citation on Wednesday.

gans, including "Death to Ebadi" and "Shirin the American, ask for pardon".

The radical 'Ya-Lessarat' weekly also plastered Ms Ebadi on its front page, with

the headline 'Monafeqin (hypocrites) have no place at university'.

As an audience of hundreds, including members of the Norwegian royal family and Academy Award winning actors Michael Douglas and Catherine-Zeta Jones, rose to give the laureate a standing ovation, she said, "It inspires me and millions of Iranians and nationals of Islamic states with the hope that our efforts...enjoy the support, backing and solidarity of international civil society."

"My selection will be an inspiration to the masses of women striving to realise their rights, not only in Iran but throughout the region," she said. Agencies

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2003  
11 DEC 2003

# 'Women on top don't help those at the bottom'

By Seema Kamdar  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Mumbai:** Political life's looking up for women—or so it appears from last week's poll results from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. For the first time in the history of independent India, three women who turned up trumps at the polls—Vasundhara Raje, Uma Bharti and Sheila Dixit—are all set to be sworn in as chief ministers.

Considering that Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are states where the woman's place is considered to be in the kitchen rather than the cabinet, these victories would appear to be significant. But most political observers are reluctant to get gung-ho, cautioning that the triple victory does not necessarily symbolise a larger victory for women.

Political science expert Nawaz Mody's reaction is tempered. While she terms the election results "a major development", she does not think the triumph of these three—two of whom come from privileged backgrounds—will trigger a women's wave in politics. Agrees writer Vrinda Nabar, "It's easy to be self-congratulatory about women winning, but I don't feel especially enthused about the kind of women who are getting into politics. The victory of these women is an accident of circumstance rather than a sign that women are on the move."

Apart from the commonality of gender, the three CMs present a study in contrasts, traversing personality and party bandwidths—the rustic Uma Bharti with her saffron agenda, the royal Vasundhara Raje who wooed voters in convent Hindi, and the urbane

Sheila Dixit, never at a loss for the quotable quote.

"There are women and there are women," observes playwright Vijay Tendulkar. "They have won for different reasons. While royals like Ms Raje are always an asset to politics, Uma Bharti is accidentally a woman. She has the makings of a man. There is a Bal Thackeray in her."

Mr Tendulkar says that the fact that

only using them."

Sharing this perception is Maharashtra's veteran socialist and Janata Dal (S) leader Mrinal Gore. "The point is whether these three can make a difference to the lives of common women," she says. "The BJP is not known to have too much sympathy for such issues."

The track record of women in power has shown that apart from the panchayat level where women directly impact the quality of life, merely having a woman on top does not lead to empowerment at the grass-roots. When Benazir Bhutto was Pakistan's prime minister she did nothing to rescind the Shariat and Hudood anti-women laws. And Ms Nabar points out that when Indira Gandhi was prime minister, it didn't really affect the ground reality, although many expected it would.

"We'd like to believe that women make a difference. But that isn't really happening," points out Ms Bhave. An equally sceptical Mr Tendulkar provides a parallel. "Those in power never do anything for anyone of their kind," he says. "What has the Shiv Sena done for the Marathi manooos?"

Public prosecutor Rohini Salian, who has grabbed the bull by the horns in many a criminal trial, says that the new women chief ministers have to prove their mettle. And although she concedes that it is difficult for women "suppressed down the ages" to suddenly sprout wings, she says a woman politician should be clear about why she's contesting. "If she is a mere decorative piece, it serves no purpose," she declares, ending on an optimistic note, "There is no doubt that if more women with guts and a sense of purpose come forward, they will inspire others to follow in their footsteps."



Uma Bharti



Sheila Dixit



Vasundhara Raje

**They have won for different reasons. While royals like Ms Raje are always an asset to politics, Uma Bharti is accidentally a woman. She has the makings of a man. There is a Bal Thackeray in her.**

—Vijay Tendulkar

the three women have won is no cause for surprise. "The only surprise is that their parties chose them," he says trenchantly. Activist Pushpa Bhawe offers an explanation. "In a sense, one must accept that rightist parties like the BJP and Shiv Sena have been increasingly fielding women," she says. "But this is a surface phenomenon. These women may speak the feminist lingo but they are being fielded by political parties that are essentially patriarchal and are

2003

# West Bengal's lajja

The ban order against Nasreen's book is neither democratic, nor a recipe for social order

YOU have to applaud the irony when a communist government bans a book for its potential to outrage religious feelings. On Friday sale of Taslima Nasreen's latest book, *Dwikhandito*, was finally prohibited, with the government order invoking fears that it could "promote enmity, ill-will and hatred between different groups on grounds of religion". Maintenance of communal harmony must be an abiding pursuit for every administration, but some questions have to be asked: is banning books like *Dwikhandito*, and more famously *The Satanic Verses*, really the way to go about it? Isn't clamping down on the right to freedom of expression too high a price to pay for appeasing a few outraged readers? And in any case, may not the actual act of banning a text provoke communal tension?

Publication of a Nasreen book is always fraught with calls for censorship. Yet, what is alarming is that in this case demands for suppressing the book have been driven by fellow writers. Some have been alarmed by passages detailing relationships with some of Bengal's leading novelists and poets. Others have cited extracts

ments of Muslims. In the first instance, there are legal provisions for affected parties to seek remedy. They have the option to file defamation suits, as poet Syed Hasmat Jalal has already done. In the second, two points merit assertion. One, allowing a text to remain in the public domain in no way amounts to an official endorsement of critiques of any religion or its adherents it may contain. Nasreen herself has attempted to charge the issue by claiming that a previous instalment of her autobiography (*Dwikhandito*, or *Divided in Two*, is the third part) was more "anti-Islamic". But that book provoked no tension. It may have got plenty of bad reviews, but that's where the matter stayed. Mahasweta Devi has wryly commented that this ban will in fact boost sales of Nasreen's book. Certainly, there's nothing like a good cause — freedom of expression — to make even bad art sell. Two, as *The Satanic Verses* episode showed, a ban can in fact itself create tension. By seeming to appease the forces of orthodoxy, bans can stifle larger movements for reform and open debate.

The West Bengal government's move therefore is most unfortunate.

1 DEC 2003

# SC cracks whip on rape cases

R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, Nov. 30: Whether or not the Union government enacts a law providing death sentence for a rape criminal, the Supreme Court has ruled that courts should not award "inadequate" sentence to such criminals who are actually "animals in human forms".

"The punishment should be the maximum prescribed under the criminal law," the court said.

A division bench of Justices Doraiswamy Raju and Arijit Passayat increased the sentence of a criminal convicted for raping a woman at the "advanced stage of pregnancy" from 46 days' imprisonment imposed by Karnataka High Court to the maximum punishment of five years.

The judges observed that trial courts should impose "appro-

1-2  
9  
appropriate" sentence keeping in mind the facts of the case, especially in cases of "heinous" crimes like rape. The "public confidence in the efficacy of law" would be undermined and an inadequate sentence to an offender convicted for such crimes would "do more harm to the justice system", they said.

Justice Passayat said: "A rapist not only causes physical injuries but more indelibly leaves a scar on the most cherished possession of a woman that is her dignity, chastity, honour and reputation."

"The deprivation of such animals in human form reaches the rock bottom of morality when they sexually assault children, minors and like the case in hand, a woman in the advanced stage of pregnancy."

Allowing an appeal of the Karnataka government against

the judgment of the high court, the court said: "Undue sympathy to impose inadequate sentence would do more harm to the justice system to undermine public confidence in the efficacy of law and society could not long endure such serious threats."

"Protection of society and stamping out of criminal proclivity must be the object of law which must be achieved by imposing appropriate sentence," the bench said, adding that "it is the duty of every court to award proper sentence having regard to the nature of the offence and the manner in which it was executed or committed".

"It is expected that courts would operate the sentencing system so as to impose such sentence which reflects the conscience of the society and the sentencing process has to be stern where it should be", espe-

cially in cases of rape, the bench said.

"The social impact of the crime, for example, where it relates to offences against women like the case in hand, dacoity, kidnapping, misappropriation of public money which have great impact and serious repercussions on social order and public interest, cannot be lost sight of and per se require exemplary treatment," the court said.

"Any liberal attitude by imposing meagre sentences or taking too sympathetic a view merely on account of lapse of time or considerations personal to the accused only in respect of such offences will be result-wise counter-productive in the long run and against societal interests which need to be cared for and strengthened by the required string of deterrence in-built in the sentencing system."

# No takers for gender talks

MONOBINA GUPTA

New Delhi, Nov. 13: India's proposal to discuss the declining sex ratio at the first-ever conference of Saarc health ministers here from tomorrow has been shot down.

"During our discussion on the agenda, officials of other Saarc countries told us that female foeticide is a country-specific problem and not a problem of the entire region," Union health minister Sushma Swaraj said.

"We will, however, have references to the problem in our discussions," she added.

Among the countries that are part of the South Asian regional forum, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have a sex ratio to the advantage of females. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have low sex ratios with India placed at the bottom of the ladder. According to the 2001 census, India has 927 girls per 1,000 boys.

Ministry officials said Pakistan will have no record of female foeticide since abortion is illegal there. However, unlike in India, the sex ratio in Pakistan is improving.

In Bangladesh, according to studies, fertility decline seems to have coincided with a growing tolerance for daughters. "There is no increasing distortion in the sex ratio among children. Infant mortality rates show similar improvements among boys and girls," says a study.

A study by Unesco on gender parity in education recently revealed that Bangladesh has achieved

gender parity in primary education while India is still struggling to reach that level.

It pointed out that the use of sex-selective abortion of females is widespread in India, China, South Korea and Taiwan. "There is, however, no convincing evidence of substantial use of prenatal sex detection followed by abortion of female foetuses in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam," the study said.

India, however, is doing much better than either Pakistan or Bangladesh in the gender-related development index, which includes employment and job opportunities.

This year's human development report of the United Nations Development Programme ranks India in the 103rd position, while Bangladesh occupies the 112th position and Pakistan 120th.

What India is failing to grapple with, officials said, is the problem of female foeticide,

which has hit even affluent states like Punjab, Delhi and Haryana hard. The continuing skewed sex ratio and the unhindered practice of female foeticide have made policymakers sit up but they seem to have made little progress in curbing the practice.

Continuing trends have also shown that education is not a constraining factor for female foeticide. "In fact foeticide is flourishing among the better educated and the well-heeled," said Meera Siva of the Voluntary Health Association of India.



Swaraj at a media conference in Delhi on Thursday. (AFP)



US legislation banning late  
abortion runs into controversy

WOMEN  
VIEW  
11-12

## A woman has full right to terminate her pregnancy

A woman should have full and complete autonomy over her body and there can be no argument on that. The new US legislation banning late abortion is another attempt by the pro-life lobby to infringe upon this fundamental and inalienable right. To argue that the foetus also has rights is specious. The foetus is essentially a biological parasite, and, therefore, the right to either prolong its life or terminate it vests with the mother. In many cases, the woman simply may not have a choice. Her pregnancy could have been the result of rape, she may not have the economic resources to bring up a child, she may just not be mentally prepared for motherhood or she may have no access to appropriate contraception. In any of these cases, she has the absolute right to make an informed choice to terminate the pregnancy, the only condition being that she should not endanger her health. In poorer countries like India, where there is little access to either information or medical services, abortion is often the only family planning choice available to a woman.

Denying a woman an abortion that she seeks is tantamount to forcing her to have a baby she does not want — a gross injustice to the child which will not receive the love and attention any child deserves. In the case of the foetus being found to suffer from severe mental and physical deformities, it would be the ultimate injustice to the woman to deny her an abortion. The birth of such a baby would severely compromise the quality of life for both the mother and child. The pro-life argument is more a backlash against women's sexuality and their right independently to make choices which impact their lives. Any assertion of a woman's autonomy is perceived as a threat to a patriarchal social order and immediately comes under attack. It stems from the regressive notion that a woman's basic function is procreation.

COUNTERVIEW

## Fascism in the name of 'pro-choice'

The passage of partial-birth abortion is a major victory for George Bush and his enthusiastic band of pro-life campaigners. However, should we step away from the rather contentious pro-life, pro-choice debate, we could make a meaningful case in favour of non-intervention in foetal termination. Human life, the way it has existed over millions of years, celebrates diversity in its full glory. Human beings in all their varying sizes, colour and deformities have co-existed. There is no one-size-fits-all policy as far as the human mind and body is concerned. It is this diversity that has shaped us over many millenniums. Pro-choice threatens to eliminate that diversity. Even if foetuses were to be only killed for medical reasons, like the Down's syndrome or any other mental or physical deformity, the world would be poorer for it. Human beings should have a right to live even if they do not conform to the human ideal in respect of height, weight and beauty. Anything else would be reminiscent of the Nazi way where only perfect humans were meant to live and others condemned to die. Abortion is an artificial way of ensuring the survival of the fittest, a theory repugnant to modern society's conscious promotion of pluralism.

Life comes with no guarantees of perpetual perfection. Assuming that a healthy child is born, but soon after develops/shows some incurable problems, would the answer be to kill that infant? Where would Stephen Hawking, who developed motor neuron disease, be in this kind of perfection-driven world? Helen Keller, despite her disabilities, contributed immensely to the world. Today, a Beethoven wouldn't have been allowed to be born. Disability of any kind in the foetus cannot be a good enough reason to snuff out its life. Instead of millions being wasted on abortions every year, it may be worthwhile to invest that money in finding cures for various genetic afflictions. If a cure for Down's syndrome was to be found, so many unborn babies would be able to live, a basic right which is often denied to them.

8 NOV 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Dhaka beats Delhi in school gender race

Women T. 6



Two girls learn to count at a child care centre. (AFP)

## MONOBINAGUPTA

**New Delhi, Nov. 6:** There's one lesson India can learn from Bangladesh: how to move towards gender parity in primary education.

According to the Education For All (EFA) global monitoring report released by Unesco today, Bangladesh has achieved a gender parity index of 1.01 per cent, while India trails with 0.83 per cent. Gender parity means providing equal access to primary education to both girls and boys.

On the eve of the EFA summit in Delhi next week, the report reveals that a majority of coun-

tries, run by governments of all hues, are way behind achieving the goal set by them at the EFA summit in Dakar two years ago.

"Governments across the world need to make serious policy changes if they are to meet the Dakar summit's objective of achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005," says Prof. C. Colclough, author of the Unesco report.

"The Indian government is doing a lot but it still needs to do more in order to achieve gender parity," he adds.

The report shows that the number of out-of-school children continues to be very high

despite an increase in enrolment. "A fifth of the children in South and West Asia — numbering more than 32 million — are not in schools. Two-thirds of them are girls," it says.

The report stresses that Bangladesh is one of the few countries that have been able to reverse gender disparity in education. Its gender parity index has gone up from 0.52 to 1.01.

"Huge gender disparities, however, still continue to exist in favour of boys in Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka," stresses the report. On the scale of disparity, Pakistan is followed by India and Nepal.

One of the factors driving Bangladesh towards gender parity is the government's initiative. "The government in Bangladesh has taken an active role in establishing satellite schools which help disadvantaged children, especially girls, to enter schools," says the report.

From 200 satellite schools established initially, the number grew to 2,000 last year. "They were managed by women teachers who were selected by the local committees but paid by the government," underlines the report. The Bangladesh government plans 20,000 satellite schools.

7 NOV 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# Docu-film portrays agony of custodial rape victims

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Chennai:** She sat facing the media after watching a docu-drama on the ordeal she had faced less than two years ago. Moist eyes, a sweet smile, pondering on the future.

Rita Mary was a teenager when she rushed out of home to sell an anklet and was trapped into prostitution in 2001. When she tried to escape with the help of four truck drivers, she was sent to jail on charges of prostitution, only to be gang-raped by the jail wardens and finally ending up in a mental hospital. While such rapes are common in Delhi and some parts of the country, in Tamil Nadu, Rita's case was an eye-opener to such crime taking place in the Gingee sub-jail. But not all are as lucky to escape or recover from such an ordeal as did Rita.

At a screening of the documentary by R. Revathi, "Ungalil Oruthi" (one among you), organised by NOW in Media (Network of Women in Media, Chennai), the sheer courage emerging out of desperation to get out of the situation was highlighted. The screening of the film was followed by interaction with Rita herself, Tamil Nadu's additional director general of police Thilagavathi who investigated the case, director Revathi and producer 'Kalaipuli' Thanu.

The 30-minute film was a delicate portrayal of the victim, a co-

prisoner, the brothel owner, activist Lucy who discovered the case and others, to sensitise the audience about the scar that such incidents leave on the victims.

But what surprised and moved the audience at the South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce on Saturday was an elderly lady, a journalist, who got up to disclose that she, too, was a victim of custodial rape, expressing her empathy

night in jail, she would shut up saying: 'That is when Rita died'. It took me days to finally get from her what had happened. While investigating the case, for the first time, I came to realise what a powerful lobby this flesh trade was. There would be an exchange of girls between Dindugal and Mumbai, Kolkata and various places up north. It's a high-tech network with a lot of money and misery involved.

If Rita has come out of the ordeal, it is because her mother stood by her like a rock," Thilagavathi added.

"At one point of time, I was not sure whether I should do the film. It was such a torture. I was not sure whether the film would affect Rita. She had just come out of the mental trauma that she went through. I talked to her for a long time before I finally made the film. There were many scenes which I shot but did not use," said Revathi (27), a former television jour-

nalist who shot the film through a television camera.

Rita (20), who is now sitting for her ESLC (8th Standard exam), said: "If I am recovering now, it is because of my mother and Lucy." And her mother addressed the audience, saying: "All of you have done so much for. Please also get her a job."

Perhaps, Rita is not the only victim of the Gingee sub-jail. According to Revathi, there were many such cases of women prisoners being sent to the mental asylum.



A still from 'Ungalil Oruthi'

and admiration for the courage that Rita had shown. She promised all possible support to Rita financing her education and marriage.

It was thanks to Lucy that Rita's condition was brought to the notice of Thilagavathi. "I tried to look at the case from every angle," said Thilagavathi, who had only Rita and the conversations of the wardens overheard by a co-prisoner as evidence to prove the rape.

"She (Rita) would talk like a poet. She would tell me everything. But just when we came to that dark

# Rich, educated and they will kill for sons

ARUN ANAND  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 25. — Here's a story from the heart of upper middle class India. And, it lays bare our lowest prejudice. Ravi (name changed) is an executive for a multinational company. His wife taught in a public school. The past tense is important. For this mother died — after she had undergone eight abortions.

She died two days after giving birth to her fourth child, a son. The couple had two daughters, aged 23 and 21 and one son, aged 10. Another son was "required". So, she became pregnant nine times and gender determination tests the first eight times showed she wasn't going to bear a son. Thus eight abortions. She was ninth time "lucky". But doctors had told the couple that she was running a grave risk, that

childbirth after serial abortions was highly unadvisable.

This educated, affluent couple however thought the risk was worth it for a second son, and they are, frighteningly, not the only ones.

A nation-wide survey conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Population Fund shows that income and education do not correlate with absence of prejudice against the girl child. In the overall scary scenario of declining gender ratio (the number of women per 1,000 men), the new trend is of "modern" India, subscribing to the same "values" as its poorer counterpart.

The terrible tragedy of the school teacher is from Rajasthan. The case study was done by Society for Child Development, an NGO. Its findings are replicated across the country. In the worst affected states, where gender ratios are declining the most



sharply, the most affluent districts are leading contributors to this social malaise. This holds true for Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Delhi. We experienced a

decline in the sex ratio at a much faster rate than many of the poorer district.

The UN study shows that in Rajasthan the gender ratio in economically better off districts like Ganganagar has declined from 894 in 1991 to 852 in 2001. In poorer districts like Churu and Jalore, the gender ratio has improved from 904 to 912 and 909 to 924 during the same period.

In Mumbai, Pune and Mumbai suburbs — affluent Maharashtra areas — the ratio has declined from 942 to 898, 943 to 906 and 930 to 910, respectively, between 1991 to 2001. In a relatively less developed district like Akola, the sex ratio has improved over the same period from 929 to 936.

States with some of the highest per capita incomes in India, such as Punjab and Delhi, have reported the worst declines in the gender ratio.

One reason for this trend, a National Commission on Population spokesperson said, is poor enforcement of the law banning pre-natal diagnosis.

The ban has to be enforced by the state governments. In 16 states, only 343 cases were registered last year.

West Bengal topped the list with 116 cases followed by Delhi where 71 cases were registered. In Punjab where none of the districts has a gender ratio of more than 850, only 40 cases were registered last year while in Haryana, where some of the districts have a gender ratio of less than 800, the state government could only find six violations.

The first six months of the current year show a further deterioration. Not a single case has been registered in Delhi. Punjab has registered six cases and Haryana has five.

# SC nod to arrests without woman cop

OUR LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Oct. 16: The Supreme Court has ruled that a woman accused can be arrested without a woman constable present, but only in certain circumstances.

A division bench of Justices N. Santosh Hegde and B.P. Singh yesterday said this was a "slight" modification from the earlier position of law that a woman constable must be present while arresting a woman accused.

The court emphasised that "all efforts should be made to keep a lady constable present".

"But in circumstances where the arresting officer is reasonably satisfied that such presence of a lady constable is not available or possible, and the delay in arresting would impede the course of investigation," a woman accused could be arrested "without the presence of a lady constable", the bench said.

The arresting officer, however, would have to "record the reasons" before or immediately after such an arrest, the court clarified. The judgment also modified another position of law that "no female person shall be detained or arrested after sunset and before sunrise".

The court said a woman accused could be arrested "any time of the day or night" without a woman constable present "for lawful reasons, depending on the circumstances of the case".

The judgment was passed in the case of alleged custody death of Junious Adam Ilamarti in Maharashtra. His wife, Jarina Adam, was said to be illegally locked up when she went to the police station to enquire about the custody of her husband.

The Maharashtra government appealed to the apex court against a Bombay High Court decision that strictly directed a woman could not be arrested without a woman constable present and in "no case (should be)

arrested or detained after sunset and before sunrise".

The apex court agreed with the objective of the high court decision, but added "we think a strict compliance of the said direction, in a given circumstance, would cause practical difficulties to the investigating agency and might even give room for evading the process of law by unscrupulous accused". The bench, however, took serious note of policemen's misbehaviour with Jarina. It ordered that

the compensation of Rs 150,000 awarded to the woman be recovered from the errant officials.

"While it is necessary to protect the female sought to be arrested by the police from police misdeeds, it may not be always possible and practical to have the presence of a lady constable when the necessity for such arrest arises. Therefore, we think this direction issued requires some modification without disturbing the object behind the same," the bench said.

18 OCT 2003

# Swiss national raped in Delhi

16/10 By Our Staff Reporter

ND 1  
NEW DELHI, OCT. 15. A 35-year-old Swiss Embassy employee, who was on her way back home after watching a movie at the International Film Festival at the Siri Fort in South Delhi, was abducted in her car from the parking lot of the complex by two young men and raped in the moving vehicle on Tuesday. Barely an hour later, two miscreants physically assaulted a documentary film-maker in the same parking lot.

Around 10 p.m., the Embassy employee came out of the auditorium and went to the parking lot adjoining Gate No. 4 to get her car, parked about 100 yards from the gate.

According to the victim — a Swiss national — she was about to get into the vehicle when two men appeared from behind. One of them occupied the driver's seat while the other pushed her inside and sat beside her. The culprits drove the vehicle out of the parking lot and on the way the one in the rear seat forced himself upon her. She offered resistance and sustained minor injuries on the neck.

After criminally assaulting her and robbing her of a ring, the culprits released her and abandoned

<sup>by men</sup>  
the vehicle near Safdarjung Enclave.

The victim, who was driven around the city for about half-an-hour, reported the matter to the police at 11.30 p.m. following which she was taken to a hospital for medical examination.

She told the police that the one who assaulted her spoke fluent English and was well-dressed. His accomplice, who was at the wheel, talked to him in Hindi. Investigations revealed that the duo had apparently met the victim at the film festival.

About an hour later, two miscreants attacked a documentary film-maker while she was about to start her car in the same parking lot. One of the culprits held her by her neck, while the other unlocked the door.

When the victim screamed for help, the assailants beat her up. She fell on the road and sustained a serious head injury.

The assailants fled when some guards and visitors rushed to the spot after hearing the victim's screams. She was taken to the Apollo Hospital where she is said to be recuperating.

The Delhi Lieutenant-Governor, Vijai Kapoor, the Delhi Police Commissioner, Radhey Shyam Gupta, and other senior police officers visited the spot today.

# Prize of peace

## Blow struck for reform in Muslim world

*SFB*  
*19/11*  
*women*

**S**hrin Ebadi wasn't the only person taken by surprise on being awarded this year's Nobel Peace Prize. She had figured nowhere in the list of probables where the names of heavyweights like Vaclav Havel, Jacques Chirac and Pope John Paul did the rounds. In retrospect it's an excellent choice, since the others are establishment figures who have already accomplished whatever they set out to do. The Pope was widely seen as the frontrunner, but his case must have been compromised by the astounding positions the Vatican has been taking lately on AIDS, to wit, condoms don't do anything to prevent its spread. That can't have sounded good to the mostly liberal Nobel committee. Instead they chose to award a true liberal heroine. Ebadi had been a judge once but was stripped of her judgeship by Iran's Islamic revolution because, according to the ayatollahs who took power, women are irrational. Since then the judiciary has been packed with hardline conservatives as a means of checking the reformist parliament that Iranians have voted overwhelmingly for. Ebadi started practising as a lawyer and took up cudgels on behalf of both the democratic cause and women's and children's rights in revolutionary Iran.

She was in the forefront of investigating a series of murders of writers and intellectuals in 1998 and 1999, and also recorded a videotape of a vigilante with links to hardline leaders confessing to violent attacks on reformist students. For her pains she was thrown into jail for three weeks and forbidden from practising as a lawyer. She has, however, become a prominent spokesman for reforming Iranian laws which are strongly biased against women — legally, a woman is considered equivalent to half a man. It ought to be noted, however, that the condition of Iranian women has gradually improved, thanks no doubt to the persistent pressure for women's rights kept up by Ebadi and her compatriots. Ebadi, who is an expert in Islamic law, believes passionately that Islam and democracy are compatible, and Iranian reformists have taken heart at the award, while hardliners have gone into a sulk. Awarding Ebadi is a happy choice as by doing so the Nobel committee actually influences ongoing events, giving prominence to those who would otherwise have struggled in obscurity. Conservatives among Indian Muslim leaders, who have held up reform of Muslim personal law in the name of minority identity, ought to take note: the message both Ebadi and the Nobel committee are sending is that Islam, democracy and equal rights are all compatible.

THE STATESMAN

14 OCT 2003

# Radicals blast first Muslim woman laureate



**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
TEHRAN | OCTOBER 11

WHILE reformers have hailed the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to an Iranian human rights lawyer as a boost for democratic reforms, powerful hard-liners denounced it as an act of interference in Iran's internal affairs that supports secularism over the religious ideals of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Shirin Ebadi, a human rights and democracy activist, won the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize yesterday for efforts that include promoting the rights of women and children in Iran and worldwide. She is the first Muslim woman to win the award.

"It's against the ideals of the 1979 Islamic Revolution," said Hamid Reza Taraq, a former lawmaker and member of the hard-line Islamic coalition society.

"The Norwegian Nobel Committee has turned into a political tool in the hand of foreigners to interfere in the internal affairs of our country," Taraqi said.

At a news conference yesterday in Paris, Ebadi appeared without a head scarf. State-run radio and television, made passing mention of the award yesterday.



# Infosys jolted by another sex suit against Phaneesh

HT Correspondent  
Bangalore, October 4

TECH MAJOR Infosys, which has been on a recession-busting recovery path, appeared to have suffered a major blow with yet another woman filing a sexual harassment case against the company and its former director, Phaneesh Murthy.

The company briefly announced on Saturday night that one Jennifer Griffith, a former employee at its Fremont branch in the United States, had filed the lawsuit on Friday in an American court which "generally alleges that Mr Phaneesh Murthy sexually harassed Ms Griffith while she was employed at Infosys".

The announcement said the lawsuit is yet to be served on the company and Infosys is still "reviewing the complainant's allegations". The only details about Jennifer Griffith the company gave

were that she worked with Infosys when the alleged harassment happened.

The lawsuit comes less than six months after Infosys reached a \$3 million out-of-court settlement with Reka Maximovitch, who in June last year filed a similar sexual harassment case against the company and Phaneesh Murthy.

More important, the second lawsuit comes a week before Infosys is scheduled to announce the results of its second quarter results which are expected to be impressive. The company's statement said: "Based on its present knowledge of the facts, the lawsuit will not, in the opinion of management, have a material effect on the results of operations of the financial position of the company."

It was because of this sensitive timing of the second lawsuit — just before its Q2 results are due — that the company's top brass, such as Narayana Murthy or Nandan Nilekani, did not offer any comments on the case, a company spokesperson said.

Phaneesh was not immediately available but a spokesperson in Chennai expressed surprise when informed of the second lawsuit. Infosys had recently formulated a "whistleblowing" mechanism, by which employees can complain against superiors over wrongdoings, including sexual harassment.



Phaneesh Murthy  
Dogged by controversy

# Women's Bill: Googly for Sonia

**HAIMA DESHPANDE**  
SOLAPUR, AUGUST 21

**T**HIS one is a tough cookie for Sonia Gandhi. The Mahila Congress is apparently keen on knowing how serious the party is on the women's reservation policy and for that wants Chief Minister Sushilkumar Shinde's wife Ujwala to be fielded as a candidate from Solapur in the forthcoming polls.

Shinde is far from shocked. Obviously, he is keen to retain the seat within the family. Representations for the same have been made to the AICC general secretary in charge of Maharashtra affairs, Vayalar Ravi, by Shinde's supporters. "The demand is being made by grassroots women workers from Solapur and the party high command may not ignore it," said a party functionary.

In fact, Ujwala Shinde has her own support group and is independent of her husband's identity. She has been interacting with partymen, particularly women, and has established a



**Mahila Congress asks her to nominate Shinde's wife from Solapur if serious about Bill**

considerable mass base for herself. Her USP is her simplicity, say women associated with her.

Cutting across sections in Solapur, Congress women are keen on the CM's wife taking on the additional responsibility of a Member of Parliament. If Sonaji has to become the PM, she needs women like the CM's wife standing shoulder to shoulder with her and voting in her favour. Time has come for the Congress to seriously consider the candidature of the CM's wife and prove to the women of the party that they are serious about implementing reservation for women,"

said Mehbooba Akhtari, a Mahila Congress worker.

The occasion of the demand was the 60th birth anniversary celebrations of Rajiv Gandhi at the Hutatma Smruti Mandir in Park Chowk.

Solapur Mayor Nalini Chandile said: "Ujwala Shinde is the epitome of Congress culture. Now that the party high command is talking about reservation, the sterling contribution of Ujwala Shinde should not be ignored because she is the CM's wife." Even the Maharashtra president of Mahila Congress Rajni Patil has supported the demand. "She is deserving," she said.

However, the lady in question seems unfazed by all the attention. "I have been associated with politics as my husband has spent his lifetime there. There are no immediate plans," Ujwala told *The Indian Express* during a breakfast meeting at the CM's farmhouse at Takli.

The ball is now in Sonia's court and the decision will spell the party's direction on the reservation policy for women.

# Cong's Dalit CM gets BJP match

**HUBERT VAZ**  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 21

**N**OT many raised their eyebrows when BJP decided to pick popular Dalit leader Vijay Bhai Girkar as its Mumbai chief.

With the Shiv Sena making a bid to form an alliance with Dalit outfits and the Congress going into the next Assembly polls headed by a Dalit Chief Minister, Girkar, former minister for social welfare and tribal development in the erstwhile BJP-Sena government, seems to be the BJP's most natural choice. Outgoing city president, Vinod Pawde, admitted that Girkar was crucial for the party's success. "The Shiv Sena already has its 'Shivshakti and Bhimshakti' agenda. Now, the BJP with a popular Dalit leader in the city, will counter all moves by the Congress-NCP and quash their prospects," he said. Incidentally, the NCP too has a popular backward class candidate as the Deputy Chief Minister: Chhagan Bhujbal.

Girkar, who has his eye on quite a few seats in Mumbai, said: "My being a Dalit has no special significance. I have always been popular in the Dalit community, as well as among the SC/ST and OBC, as I handled that portfolio as minister."

Maharashtra's Dalits, who number around one crore, are said to comprise 13 per cent of the state's population. They form the bulk of voters in many constituencies as their turnout is higher compared to other classes. In Mumbai, Dalit-dominated constituencies include Sewri, Ghatkopar, Kurla, Govandi, Mankurd and Worli.

# SC gives landmark ruling on women's rights

## Husband or father-in-law is not entitled to intestate Hindu woman's property

By Rakesh Bhatnagar  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Setting at rest the long-drawn controversy over inheritance of property belonging to a Hindu married woman who dies intestate or issueless, the supreme court has ruled that her husband or father-in-law would have no claim over it if she had acquired such an estate from her mother's side.

In a ruling of utmost importance to married Hindu women's rights in their parents' properties, the supreme court said that such cases were covered by Section 15(2)(a) of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956. The provision relates to the rules of succession in the case of Hindu women. The relevant section envisages: "Any property inherited by a Hindu woman from her father or mother shall devolve, in the absence of any son or daughter of the deceased (including the children of any pre-deceased son or daughter), not upon the other heirs but upon the heirs of the father."

The term "other heirs" specified in Section 15(1)(a) of the Act says the property of a Hindu woman dying intestate shall devolve ac-

cording to the rule specified in Section 16 of the Act. First, the property would devolve upon the sons and the daughters (including the children of any pre-deceased son or daughter) and also the husband (hers).

Thus, the court explained that if a Hindu woman inherited property from her father or mother, neither her husband nor his heirs would get such property but it would revert to the heirs of her father or mother.

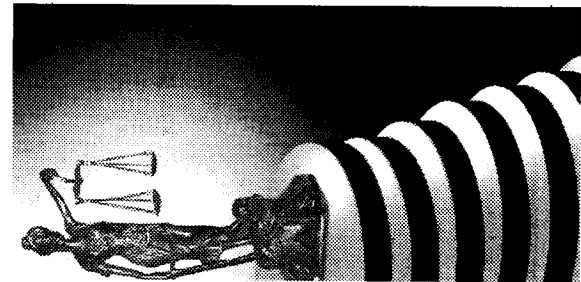
The judgment is a fallout of a 30-year dispute over the inheritance of some property left by one Rajathiammal, who died intestate and issueless. She had inherited movable and immovable property from her maternal aunt's side as her own mother had died.

Her father, Venugopal Chettiar's children i.e. her own brothers through his first and second marriages, made claim

on the properties left behind by their married sister who died without leaving a will and issueless.

They lost to another set of litigants not belonging to her mother's side before the Cuddalore trial court in Andhra Pradesh and later the high court. A supreme court bench of Justices M.B. Shah and Dr. A.R. Lakshmanan, however, set aside the judgments and held that since Rajathiammal had inherited the property from her mother, Section 15(2) of the Act would be applicable in this case. Therefore, the properties acquired by her from her mother would go to the heirs of her father and, therefore, her sisters and brothers who are the sons and daughters of Chettiar would be entitled to her estate.

The court said Section 16 of the Act "evolves a new and uniform order of succession of property (by a Hindu woman) and



regulates the manner of its distribution.

Section 15(2) also carves out an exception in cases of a woman dying without leaving a will (intestate) and issueless or children of a pre-deceased son or daughter. In such a case, the rule prescribed is to find out the source from which she has inherited the property. If it is inherited from her father or mother, the apex court explained, it would devolve under Section 15(2)(a) of the Hindu Succession Act. If it is inherited from her husband or father-in-law, it would devolve upon the heirs of her husband as specified under Section 15(2)(b).

The provision says that in a case where the property is inherited by a woman from her father or mother, it would devolve upon the other heirs, but of her father. This would mean that if there is no son or daughter, including the children of any pre-deceased son or daughter, then the property would devolve upon the heirs of her father, the court said, adding: "The result would be, if property is inherited by a woman from her father or her mother, neither her husband nor his heirs would get such property, but it would revert back to the heirs of her father."

# Crime against women on the rise in S Asia

Shahid Pervez in New Delhi

Aug. 3. — Some of the worst forms of discrimination and violence against women continue to plague much of South Asia. "Violence against women in the region is as endemic as it is diverse," says a recent United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) report on the progress of South Asian Women 2003.

Discrimination against women in South Asia begins even before birth with abortion of female foetuses a common occurring. Every sixth death of a female infant in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh is caused due to "neglect and discrimination", says the UNIFEM report.

India has registered an in-

crease in crimes against women at a rate higher than overall crimes in the society. "Caste-based violence often takes on a gendered face," the report said. There has been a sharp rise in cases of sexual harassment, cruelty and domestic violence against women in the country. Cruelty and torture perpetrated by the husband and his family, according to the National Crime Records Bureau figures of 2002, constitutes 36 per cent of all reported crimes against women, followed by molestation (26 per cent) and kidnapping (14 per cent).

In Pakistan, the custom of *watta satta* is practiced under which a brother and a sister could be married to another set of siblings. The problems in one marriage might thereby have an impact on the other

one. "The custom works more like an exchange of property," notes the UNIFEM report. Then there is the tradition of *karo-kari* (honour killings). Men resort to killings to avenge "family honour" when a woman violates socially and culturally determined tribal and family norms.

In Bangladesh, *fatwas* or religious decrees are used by communities to crack down on women perceived to have indulged in "sexually-deviant behaviour". Fatwa-driven punishment meted out to girls and women have ranged from lashes to social boycott. The country also reports the trend of acid throwing on women.

In Nepal, the custom of *deuki* (forced temple prostitution) is prevalent, whereby young girls are "dedicated" to

the temples. This custom exists in India under the tradition of Devadasi and Jogini. Witch hunting aimed against women with perceived deviant behaviours also continues in both these countries.

Also, there is trafficking of women and children across South Asia for a variety of purposes such as sexual exploitation, prostitution, forced or bonded labour, organ transplant, illegal adoption, forced marriage, and entertainment. Thus, despite presenting "some of the finest examples of women empowerment", notes the report, South Asia remains a disturbed region for women recording a Gender Development Index value of 0.535, which is 99 points lower than the average for developing countries.



4 AUG 2003

## SMS divorce

**CYBERJAYA (MALAYSIA):** A row over a Malaysian court ruling that Muslim men can divorce their wives via SMS through their mobile phones has outraged women's groups and puzzled the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad. Mr. Mohamad, who has positioned his country to take advantage of the hi-tech information revolution, said on Tuesday he did not like the idea of divorce by the popular short messaging system (SMS). "Nowadays we can even divorce our wife by sending messages," he said at a meeting. "I am not so keen on that but they say it is perfectly legal, perfectly Islamic. I think that if people want to divorce their

wife, they should resort to a much more personal approach than that," he said. "We hope of course that instead of sending messages, you should look at the beautiful wife that you're going to divorce... maybe she would cry a bit and you would change your mind." Women's groups have had stronger words for the decision last week by a Sharia court that a man's pronouncement of divorce via SMS was valid. The Women's Aid Organisation Director, Ivy Josiah, said the method was "distant, cowardly, undignified and rude". The Deputy Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, directed the Islamic advancement department to verify the method of SMS divorce. — AFP

women  
Mf

## Jayalalitha's gender benders

25/7

HISTORY IS taking a bow in honour of women, at least in Tamil Nadu's corridors of bureaucratic power. While women activists all over the country agitated over the deadlock on the women's reservation bill, Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha has been quietly restructuring the gender equation in her own regime. Now, there are over two dozen women IAS and IPS officers bossing over crucial departments, commissions and the Wakf Board in the state. But what's tickling the ribs of Adam's descendants is the manner in which to address these power women.

Will the much-tainted 'babudom' now give way to a 'bibidom'? Or will these women, including those forming the all-women police stations, *mahila* courts and the commando force in the state, henceforth make up 'Amma's angels', going full throttle at empowering more of their sex? Without doubt,

their sex wasn't the only consideration while appointing them to their posts — perhaps, in some cases, it wasn't a consideration at all. However, as many women efficiently handling traditionally male bastions have found, a baffling greeting of 'sir' is likely to be the greatest sign of respect that they will get from their male colleagues.

Ms Jayalalitha's feminist edge probably came from her own experiences, having been pushed into films to support her family at a young age, and then having to fight to queen over the AIADMK after MGR's death. But hopefully, her army of women bureaucrats are taking recourse to much more subtle, and less abrasive, methods to get their way than she herself has been known to use. Whatever the case, Amma could well have set the course for a takeover by the 'bibis' of *babudom*.

A

# BJP calls for 33 pc dual-member LS seats

**PRADEEP KAUSHAL**  
RAIPUR, JULY 20

**T**HE BJP has come out with a fresh proposal on the women's reservation issue, saying 33 per cent of Lok Sabha seats be made double-member constituencies to give the Lower House an additional 181 women members over and above the present strength. The BJP national executive adopted a resolution to this effect in Raipur yesterday.

The resolution states: "The BJP is of the view that 33 per cent of seats in Lok Sabha should be made double-member constituencies. One of the two seats

should be mandatorily reserved for women in these constituencies which would change on a rotational basis. This would increase the total number of women members in the Lok Sabha by 181. The same approach can also be adopted in state legislatures."

Party general secretary Pramod Mahajan said later while briefing mediapersons: "We hope the male members of the Lok Sabha, seeing no threat to their seats now, would extend support to the proposal." He said the ill-fated draft legislation ran into difficult situations because "the male members were not prepared to put their constituencies on the suicide list."

The Government may move a

Bill on the lines of the party resolution in the ensuing Monsoon Session of the Lok Sabha. The resolution says: "The national executive of the BJP urges the NDA Government to take necessary initiative in this matter and introduce a suitable constitutional amendment Bill in Parliament at the earliest. This is the best way of realising the long-unrealised dream of reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures."

Mahajan said in reply to questions that the draft resolution has proposed a 20 per cent reservation. However, former Union minister Uma Bharati opposed any dilution of the 33 per cent women's quota agreed to in prin-

## Vajpayee sells liberalisation in swadeshi package

**■ RAIPUR:** Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on Saturday tried to package his economic policies aiming at liberalisation of the economy as "swadeshi" and declared that India would formulate its policies without coming under any pressure. Speaking at the BJP national executive here, Vajpayee said, "Our economy is moving forward fast. The number of people below the poverty line is falling. New industries are coming up. Employment opportunities are increasing. In one sense, the basic goal of swadeshi is being achieved."

— ENNS



ciple by both the BJP and Congress. The executive, thereafter, incorporated her view.

When asked about the protection of interests of SCs and STs, Mahajan said the existing arrangement would apply to seats earmarked for women. When mediapersons cited the lack of space in the House and the financial burden which the additional strength of the Lok Sabha entailed, Mahajan said that was not of much consequence. He said the House could be accommodated in the Central Hall in that case. Even the additional expenses were not much for a House clearing an annual expenditure of three lakh crore of rupees, he added.

W  
J. N. Sarbajit (2)

men

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women  
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20/7

# BJP's nod for double member constituencies

(w)  
parliament

By Neena Vyas 2 copies

**RAIPUR, JULY 19.** The BJP today put its weight behind a proposal to create 181 "double-member constituencies" in the Lok Sabha to give increased representation to women and find a way out of the impasse on the women's reservation bill. But not before a wrangle, for, the party's first attempt was to get by a smaller 20 per cent share for women (about 104 double-member constituencies). Only when some members protested strongly that the percentage of seats for women must be kept at 33 per cent was this accepted.

The BJP has thus given the green signal for a new bill on women's reservation, but whether this will get the required political support remains to be seen. In a resolution adopted on the second day of its national executive committee meeting here, the party stated its commitment to political reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies since its Vadodara national council session in 1994.

It said it fully supported the bill in its present form (reserving 33 per cent of all Lok Sabha seats for women), it had backed the Election Commission proposal that it be made mandatory for political parties to select 33 per cent women candidates, but neither of these proposals were acceptable to all parties. While stating its commitment to political empowerment of women, the BJP pointed out that the "double-member constituencies" proposal would actually increase women's representation in legislatures to 33 per cent unlike in the EC proposal where there was no certainty that women candidates would win.

Under the new proposal, 33 per cent of Lok Sabha seats will have two MPs, one in the general open category and one in the reserved category for women. A similar pattern was recommended for State Assemblies.

The resolution urged the NDA Government to take necessary action and introduce a suitable constitutional amendment bill in Parliament and State legislatures.

20 JUL 2003

THE HINDU



# Shred the Women's Bill

Political parties should put their nominations where their words are *9.6.8 1997*

**A**s a catalyst for exchanging political niceties it is brilliant. With one election after another clogging up the calendar, political parties are perpetually in campaign mode. There is hardly any issue of national import on which they can conduct a civil discussion. The temptation to score easy points is evidently far too strong. How wonderful then that there is a draft bill in Parliament which can be dusted up when bonhomie is desired. The Women's Reservation Bill can be debated over endless cups of tea, only to be tossed aside with solemn promises to work towards a political consensus.

On Tuesday MPs were at it again, conferring on how to usher in more women into legislatures. Thankfully, they seemed to come around to our long-held suggestion that the bill in its current form should be shredded. On the eve of Parliament's monsoon session, we can only hope political parties translate this informal understanding into official policy. The bill in its current form is so deeply flawed that it would wreck the very foundations of parliamentary democracy. For instance, in its pursuit of 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies, it envisages rota-

tion of constituencies. This would sever the critical bond between elected representative and constituent foreseen in the Constitution. Noble aims of ensuring a healthier gender balance in the highest law-making bodies cannot be sincerely achieved through facile, and destructive, legal provisions.

Yet, the meet attended by representatives of the BJP, Congress, CPI(M) and Samajwadi Party was a charade. They may demur, but politicians of all hues have consistently struck a hypocritical stand on women's representation. The merit of that objective is duly lauded, but abundant objections are registered: Religion and caste-based sub-quotas, chances of city women usurping a concession for their rural sisters, spectres of a biwi-bahu raj. To those obfuscatory worries, now we heard equally obfuscatory suggestions: double-member constituencies and decreased percentage of seats/tickets to be allotted to women. Who are our politicians kidding! If they are truly committed to gender equality, let them put their nominations where their words are. Let them voluntarily field more women candidates. Lofty goals should not require legal compulsions.

# Unanimity claimed and contested on Women's Bill

NEW DELHI, JULY 15. The claim was made today by the Bharatiya Janata Party spokesman, V.K. Malhotra, that a "near-consensus" had been reached at a meeting today on increasing the number of seats in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies — by way of having double-member constituencies — to provide 33 per cent reservation for women.

But the Communist Party of India (Marxist) immediately questioned such a claim.

There was no official word on the exact proposals discussed at the meeting of political parties convened by the Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi, to discuss the controversial Women's Reservation Bill eluding a consensus for long.

Leaders of the BJP, the Congress, the CPI(M) and the Samajwadi Party attended the meeting to find a way to end the impasse ahead of the monsoon session of Parliament next week.

The Speaker did not specify the proposals discussed. However, to a pointed question whether there was agreement



The CPI (M) leader, Somnath Chatterjee (right), and the Samajwadi Party supremo, Mulayam Singh Yadav, at the meeting convened by the Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi, on the Women's Reservation Bill, in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

on the proposal of double-member constituencies, he said this was one of the points on which there was consensus. There was unanimity that women should be given reservation

and that it should be achieved through consensus, he said.

But the CPI(M) leader, Somnath Chatterjee, denied there was any agreement. "I wish to categorically say that there was

no occasion for me to accept the proposal except to state that as and when they are presented in proper form, the same will be considered on merits." Mr. Chatterjee and the Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, Shivraj Patil, made it clear that they were against dilution of 33 per cent reservation for women. Both the CPI(M) and the Congress appeared to keep the door open for the new proposals, saying that when they came up formally they would react. Mr. Chatterjee said the Bill had been pending for a long time and the credibility of Parliament as an institution had been seriously called into question because of the "unreasoned delay and procrastination" on the part of the ruling party.

The Samajwadi Party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav — who along with the Rashtriya Janata Dal — had opposed the Women's Bill said today that his party could consider the double-membership proposal since it did not decrease the number of seats for men. "We have also agreed to reserve 20 per cent seats for women if the Election Commission's formula of allowing political parties to give reservation to women was accepted by all." He also said that if the Election Commission proposal with 20 per cent was accepted, his party would not insist on reservation for women from the Other Backward Classes and the minority communities.

Later, the Lok Sabha Secretariat, in a press release, said that "different proposals" were considered at the meeting which included the passing of the Bill in its present form, the Election Commission's proposal requiring all parties to put up the minimum agreed percentage of women candidates in elections, to having double-member constituencies and increasing the strength of the House.

"All leaders endeavoured to reach a common ground. Mr. Malhotra was requested to convey to the Government to prepare the draft of a Bill which could, as far as possible, be acceptable to all parties." — PTI

## 'Centre buying time'

By Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 15. Women's groups have opposed the reservation of seats in Parliament and the State Assemblies based on "double-member constituencies" that emerged as a likely proposal at today's meeting on the Women's Reservation Bill, initiated by the Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi.

Describing it as "abdication" of the BJP's responsibility to put the Bill to vote in Parliament, Brinda Karat of the All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) said the Centre was "just buying time" to conceal its opposition to the Bill.

The Joint Action Front for Women coordinator, Ranjana Kumari, said the BJP had tried to "scuttle" the Women's Bill because the logistics of the "double-member constituencies" concept would never work and it would be a huge burden on the national exchequer to maintain two elected representatives from one constituency.

Rejecting the concept, she said the BJP had clearly backed out from its commitment to

give reservation to women as promised in its election manifesto. "The Samajwadi Party can bring in any number of amendments to the Bill if it is allowed to come up for a debate," she said asking the SP chief, Mulayam Singh Yadav, to move a resolution in the House to allow 20 per cent seats for women.

The women's groups have rejected the proposal on two grounds. First, the Lok Sabha has passed a resolution to freeze the present number of seats and to postpone delimitation until the next elections and, second, instead of redressing the present system of gender injustice and discrimination, the proposal further marginalises women and reduces them to "add-ons". The organisations that have criticised the proposal include the Guild of Service, the Muslim Women's Front, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Joint Women's Programme, and the Mahila Dakshata Samiti.

Meanwhile, these groups will organise a rally in the Capital on July 25 to mobilise support for their cause. They have written to all Members of Parliament to send "letters of commitment" to them as a token of support for the Bill.

# Cursed if you do, try otherwise

19/6  
 THE high incidence of dowry-related violence despite the Indian Penal Code's anti-dowry provisions, stringent enough, as Delhi High Court said, to the extent of being misused, reveals that the root of the problem is not the law. The National Commission for Women and its legal agencies have frequently been called into play, again to such an extent that many cry over their misuse.

The recent case of Nisha Sharma, who created a stir

by declaring that she wouldn't marry a man who insisted on dowry, is an indication of the real problem. In the photographs taken before she became a "rebel" and splashed across most newspapers, she could be seen in the foreground with her father, with the background full of

55-7  
 A dowry in any form is bad. Instead educate your daughter, teach her what self-esteem and enlighten her with the values of sacramental marriage, says TEHMINA ARORA

**Statistics show that not all brides are as fortunate as Nisha (Sharma). According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 6,995 dowry deaths were reported in the year 2000 alone. Among the 23 mega-cities, the share of Delhi was as high as 19.9 per cent. Apart from the dowry deaths, 45,778 incidents of torture by husbands or in-laws were reported. Though the number dropped by 28 per cent across the country, Madurai reported an increase of 195.9 per cent and Hyderabad, 200 per cent.**

**Yet, girls like Nisha continue to agree to be sold in the marriage market. They let their parents arrange for dowry, often much beyond their capacity - some parents have to part with their life-long savings, some sell their property, others take loans and slog for the rest of their lives to repay them. Across India, women are plagued with the dilemma of giving in to the demand for dowry, risking further abuse. Or, they have the choice of saying "no" to dowry and risk a lifetime of humiliation that comes with singhhood.**

**One of the reasons for this tendency is the callous role that society and the brides' parents and relatives play. Considerable social pressure is attached to parents who have unwed daughters or who shelter a married**



NISHA SHARMA: She didn't say no to dowry till the groom's demands became impossible to be met.

cardboard boxes containing TV set, music system, washing machine and other "gifts" for the prospective couple. The assortment of durable boxes containing TV set, music system, washing machine and other "gifts" for the prospective couple. The assortment of

consumer durables were to "give them a head start in life". And we all know, Nisha, a hero in her own right today, had not said

for additional dowry was made just before the marriage, and because her family couldn't afford it, the "fortunate" that the demand prospective groom's parents

daughter at home. Therefore the custom of dowry is sugar-coated with parents happily providing for the couple by way of expensive receptions, paying for honeymoons and that "little extra" that helps them maintain the lifestyle they had been accustomed to. And later, when insatiable demands of the husband's family continues, the woman's parents willingly send her back to "her home," despite the hostile situation, succumbing to that absurd norms of society that places such a high premium on marriage.

Such a behaviour is taught by our scriptures. *Manu-shastra*, for example, states in 5:154: "The wife should treat the husband as god, (even) if he is characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities". This social set up coupled with the attitude that women are a weaker and vulnerable sex coerces women into accepting the ill treatment meted out to them.

Such things make it necessary for parents to weed out the custom of dowry in all of its subtle forms if they want their beloved daughters to be in a safe home. The best dowry any parents can give their daughter is a good education, healthy self-esteem and the values of sacramental marriage. Society needs to wake up to its responsibility of building and nurturing responsible human beings for even now it is the village that raises the child.

(The author is a freelance contributor.)

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PAR SCORE 85-95  
 by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL  
 TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

DIRECTIONS: Make a 2 to 7 letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right. 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words are in The Official Scrabble Players Dictionary (Merriam-Webster) and CSW Official Scrabble Words (Chambers). JUDD'S SOLUTION TOMORROW

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V <sub>1</sub>	L <sub>1</sub>	O <sub>1</sub>	L <sub>1</sub>	A <sub>1</sub>	T <sub>1</sub>	E <sub>1</sub>	RACK 1 = 62
B <sub>2</sub>	U <sub>2</sub>	T <sub>2</sub>	T <sub>2</sub>	E <sub>2</sub>	R <sub>2</sub>	Y <sub>2</sub>	RACK 2 = 63
A <sub>3</sub>	R <sub>3</sub>	T <sub>3</sub>	L <sub>3</sub>	C <sub>3</sub>	L <sub>3</sub>	E <sub>3</sub>	RACK 3 = 68
C <sub>4</sub>	A <sub>4</sub>	R <sub>4</sub>	D <sub>4</sub>	L <sub>4</sub>	A <sub>4</sub>	C <sub>4</sub>	RACK 4 = 66
JUDD'S TOTAL							259

PAR SCORE 165-175

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K <sub>1</sub>	O <sub>1</sub>	V <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>2</sub>	U <sub>1</sub>	H <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>3</sub>	RACK 1
M <sub>2</sub>	O <sub>1</sub>	Y <sub>1</sub>	A <sub>1</sub>	A <sub>1</sub>	H <sub>1</sub>	W <sub>4</sub>	RACK 2
L <sub>1</sub>	E <sub>1</sub>	N <sub>1</sub>	N <sub>1</sub>	F <sub>1</sub>	C <sub>2</sub>	G <sub>2</sub>	RACK 3
F <sub>1</sub>	O <sub>1</sub>	L <sub>1</sub>	F <sub>1</sub>	R <sub>1</sub>	T <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>	RACK 4

PAR SCORE 165-175

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## Consensus eludes women's bill again +

10-1 By Our Staff Correspondent 16/6

**NEW DELHI, JUNE 16.** Even as an all-party meeting convened by the Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi, once again failed to arrive at a consensus today on giving reservation for women in the State Assemblies and Parliament, Mr. Joshi claimed that the political parties had come closer on the issue though total unanimity had yet not been achieved.

"The minds of most political parties on the issue are open and it may be possible to achieve a consensus," he told reporters after the meeting

that lasted more than three hours. Though most parties stuck to their known stands, they did show signs of a willingness to consider alternatives. The opposition to reservation again came from the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Lok Dal which rejected the women's reservation bill in its present form.

Mr. Joshi said he had received four alternative suggestions which would be studied and discussed with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, to reach an agreement on tabling the Bill — in the present or amended or in a new form — in the monsoon session of Parliament.

**THE HINDU**

16 JUN 2003

## No takers for 33% reservation for women

**Mamata picks Ranjit Panja**  
 KOLKATA, June 16. — Miss Mamata Banerjee's decision to depite Mr Ranjit Panja as the party representative for the all-party meeting convened by the Speaker on the women's bill has created controversy in the party.

Party leaders felt MP Mrs Krishna Bose, who had been vocal in her comments on the women reservation issue, should have been asked to attend today's meeting. Mrs Bose told The Statesman: "I would have been too glad to attend the meeting. But, unfortunately, my party didn't even inform me that the meeting had been convened by the Speaker".

Mrs Bose said she would have presented her party's views, though she had something more to tell about women reservation. She made it clear that she wouldn't have parroted Miss Banerjee's stand on the issue.

"I was vocal about reservation in 1996. I continue to maintain that reservation for women cannot be passed the way it has been planned. That way, I do have views which may not be accepted by my party...", she said. She hinted she had not been considered by her party because of her views on the subject. And this from a MP of a party which has a woman chairperson! — SNS

### Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 16. — One-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and in the state Assemblies for women as contained in the Women's Reservation Bill, in all likelihood, is going to be dumped. If the Bill is to see the light of the day as an Act of Parliamentary Legislation, it has to be redrafted by bringing down the quote for women from 33 per cent to 15 per cent in its present form. Alternatively, 20 per cent with proviso for reservation within reservation for women belonging to the SCs/OBCs and Muslims.

There was no consensus at the meeting chaired by Lok Sabha Speaker Mr Manohar

## 51-5176 33% reservation for women

Joshi on reserving seats for women. The Congress and the CPI-M wanted 33 per cent quota for women as contained in the Bill. The Samajwadi Party and some other smaller parties declined to support the move.

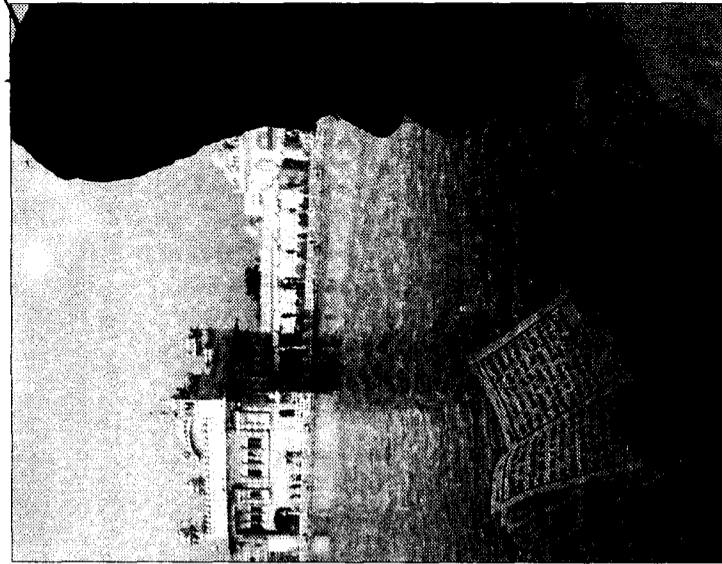
The government appears to be in a dilemma. The BJP, represented by Prof VK Malhotra, maintained an ambiguous approach by not insisting that the Bill be adopted in its present form. Prof. Malhotra said the government was amenable to suggestions and amendments suggested by other parties.

Mrs Sushma Swaraj, minister for parliamentary affairs who spearheaded the Bill for passage on the last working day of Parliament's Budget Session, did put up a

brave face in the meeting on behalf of the government saying that the Bill should be passed in its present form. Mr Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M) said after the meeting that the government did not want the Women's Bill to be passed and that there was serious differences over the Bill within the BJP.

The options suggested to the Speaker were to reduce the quota from 33 to 15 per cent, rejection of rotational reservation of LS seats for women, or make double membership by increasing the number of LS seats by one third and state legislature seats by the same margin.

Outside Parliament, a group of women courted arrest protesting against the Bill not being passed.



A granthi reads a prayerbook in the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar on Monday. — AFP

# Gender justice

By Ram Puniyani

WOMEN 189 10 11/6

**T**WO CASES of dowry harassment came to light recently, though in contrasting backdrops. Nisha Sharma, a Hindu girl, refused to marry because of last-minute demands for additional dowry. Farzana, a Muslim girl, refused to accompany her husband because he demanded dowry at the time of leaving the bridal home. The RSS' publications *Organiser* and *Panchajanya* compare these two incidents and bring in their usual anti-Muslim projection to the events. While the *Organiser* commends Nisha who has "become a role model" and received other marriage offers, according to *Panchajanya*, Farzana has still to find a way out of the stifling tentacles of Islamic practices perpetuated by the medieval-minded clergy. And it revives the demand for a uniform civil code as the panacea for this ailment of "Islamic society".

Are these comparable situations? Is it that so far all was quiet on the dowry front and these two cases have come as a reminder of this abominable practice? An anti-dowry campaign has not been on the agenda of the RSS, which has more "serious" issues such as temple-building at Ayodhya and "Hindu pride" to address. Is the RSS family serious about the issues of gender justice as such or is it a convenient stick to beat the minority community with?

Most of the civil codes are gender unjust and so merely parroting uniformity has no meaning. The proper campaign has to be for gender-just civil codes, and this has to be implemented through social reform. Also, though needs to go into what the social conditions are under which communities can accept reforms for gender justice.

The demand for a uniform civil code emerged from women's liberation movements, and it was soon realised that gender justice rather than uniformity was the nucleus around which the laws should be formulated. As far as suppression of women's rights was concerned, the clergy in all the religions were more or less equally guilty. Where do mat-

ters differ in different religious communities? One need not go into the fate of the Hindu Code drafted by B.R. Ambedkar but it has to be conceded that in the first three decades after India became a republic, a good deal of progress was made by the Hindu community in its struggle for gender justice. It is no one's case that all is well amongst Hindus as far as the treatment of the girl child and equality of women are concerned.

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***The proper campaign has to be for gender-just civil codes and this has to be implemented through social reform.***

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But the last two decades have, in general, seen an intimidation of rights movements due to the rise of fundamentalism of different hues.

The rise of Hindu fundamentalism has also been accompanied by the ghettoisation of the minorities. The pitch and intensity of communal riots have gone up in the last two decades and in the process, the Muslim community has suffered the most. Estimates show that 80 per cent of the Gujarat riot victims belonged to the Muslim community, which formed 11.6 per cent of the State's population. The minority psyche is greatly shaped by this insecurity and it affects the social norms of even those who are not directly affected by the violence. Added to this is the international phenomenon where American imperialism is out to demonise Islam and Muslims by all means possible so that it can gobble up the world's oil resources.

Muslim women have been struggling for reforms in their civil code for many decades. Every cycle of violence is a big setback to their movement. Communal violence has been blatantly intimidating the minorities and the communalised state apparatus has been aiding the Sangh Parivar in conducting pogroms. Can such an intimidated community go in for reforms? There are contradictory tendencies in every community and society. The same Muslim communi-

ty, which is associated with burqa-clad women, has girls riding two-wheelers, trying to make their living as teachers or journalists.

How does communal violence affect the social psychology? By now, the likes of Bal Thackeray and Narendra Modi have perfected the art of portraying the victim community as the one that started the riots and the soldiers of Hindutva, the *Hindu hriday samrats*, as merely rushing to the

"defence" of the majority community and thus conveniently becoming the victors in the elections which follow.

It is a difficult time for the Islamic community world over. At the global level, Samuel Huntington's thesis has come in handy for the imperialistic ambitions of the United States, and at home the RSS has been developing expertise in Muslim demonisation for decades. It is interesting that the RSS progeny are subservient to the U.S. imperialists.

While it is unfair to compare Farzana and Nisha the incidents do have many lessons. While Nisha boldly stands to defy patriarchy and its manifestation in the form of dowry, Farzana is no less when she refuses to join her husband on the same ground. These acts of individual valour reflect the stirrings amongst the young to break the shackles of male domination. But the comparison ends here. Both the girls have to live in different milieus. While Nisha's milieu is not adorable in the least, Farzana is a double victim, that of patriarchy and of minority-bashing and the resultant ghettoisation.

While condemning the force of mullahs, one must also recognise the challenges faced by the liberals among Muslims. On one hand, there is tremendous pressure on them to withstand the onslaught of a crippling anti-Muslim propaganda, which has become part of "normal"

social discourse, and, on the other, they are stretching all their strength to battle the obscurantism promoted by the mullahs and their ilk.

The practices of the Muslim community have been shaped by a world dominated by the colonialists of the past and imperialists of the present. They have suppressed the democratic aspirations of Islamic societies. Beginning from the formation of Israel, the overthrow of the Mossadeq regime in Iran and the training of jihadi youth through the conduit of Pakistan, the world's big powers have created a situation wherein popular dissent gets expressed through the worst form of Islamic obscurantism.

Where does the Muslim community go from here? Can it bear the dual burden of Hindutva attack from outside and the grip of mullahs from within? Farzana has to be nurtured and supported in her decision to boycott the marriage cemented by dowry. It is difficult to think of reforms in a ghetto and it is difficult to bring in reforms in a community, the religion of which is demonised not only nationally but internationally as well. Come what may, against all odds, Farzana has to be nurtured.

The goal of bogus defenders of women's rights has to be understood in its proper perspective. As an ideology, which is deeply seeped in patriarchy, Hindutva has no place for women's rights. Time and again, its ideologues have defended the violation of the "being" of the women of the "other" community. It has no interest in protecting the rights of minority women, but we have to do it, irrespective of who raises the issue. One of the major needs in the direction is to ensure that ghettoisation is checked.

The Muslim community has to rise to the occasion and against all external and internal odds, choose the direction of progress and justice. It has to join the progressive elements of other communities and close ranks with them to ensure that the Hindutva onslaught from outside and the mullahs from inside are not able to intimidate its dynamics of progress and reform.

Women  
19-10

## OFF WITH DOWRY

2/6

OFTEN LEGISLATION WITHOUT social sanction is ineffective, even meaningless. Dowry is a classic example. Despite a tough law against it, women continue to be battered, brutalised and burnt. What is more, the number of dowry deaths has risen from about 2,500 a decade ago to 7,000. It clearly reveals a disturbing trend, and who knows, how many more cases of such humiliation, harassment and homicide go unreported in a community which is obsessed with marriage as it is with dowry. It is in this context that the courage of the two tormented women — one in New Delhi and the other in Chennai — in saying 'no' at the altar gains importance. Driven to despair by the grooms' families insisting on "excessive" dowries, the brides turned around and walked away. Yet, one does not fail to notice that it was not the dowry by itself that forced the hard decision, but the fact that it was demanded, and that too a lot more than what had been agreed to. A social hypocrisy, to say the least.

Unfortunately, dowry enjoys a kind of sanctity difficult to explain in logical terms. Why would a woman who may be educated and holding a plum job want her parents to give her a dowry? Would that not reduce her status to something horrible, and the marriage to a form of barter? Yes, indeed, it would, but the choice is between a dowry-driven existence, where a woman may lose her very self-esteem, and a matrimonial life with little respect and a lot more shame. Sadly, India's refusing-to-die patriarchal system thrives not only by subjugating women, but also equating their dignity and honour with wealth. If a bride were to bring along goodies, she gets attention, even admiration, in a household

bent on bettering its economic prospects through marriage vows. Obviously, a woman herself becomes a party to this evil, seduced as she is into believing that a dowry will fetch her joy and peace. What can be seen as an extension of this line of thinking is a woman's perception of what she considers to be her right: a share of her parents' property paid in the form of dowry. That it does not always remain under her control or for her benefit is another issue, but India's spreading consumerist culture has certainly blurred the ramifications of dowry.

So, probably the best way to address the problem of dowry is to tackle unrestrained greed at one level, and at another, patriarchy. Equal opportunities at home and at work between the sexes may lead to a greater understanding of a woman's rights, a deeper sense of compatibility and, above all, to a more dignified life for her. Many personal laws allow her equal inheritance — except in some cases — but often parents tend to give more to a son in the hope that he will take care of them in their twilight years, a belief that perhaps pushes some couples to abort the female foetus. Also, this is one way of keeping alive the patrilineal system. While no easy answers to a malaise such as dowry can be found, especially now that it is so rooted in the psyche of an average Indian, what can make a difference is a resolve to fight it at two stages. One, matrimony need not be a compelling goal for a woman, and one must understand that without this sense of compulsion, dowry may well lose a bit of sheen. Two, it is a truly egalitarian society which places a woman and a man on the same pedestal that can hope to burn out dowry.

- 7 JUN 2003

HU IN MOSCOW / 'U.N. ROLE IN WORLD AFFAIRS VITAL'

# Russia, China call for shaping multi-polar world

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, MAY 27. Russia and China have denounced the use of force and unilateral action in international affairs in apparent reference to the U.S.-led war in Iraq and called for enhancing the role of the United Nations in building a multi-polar world.

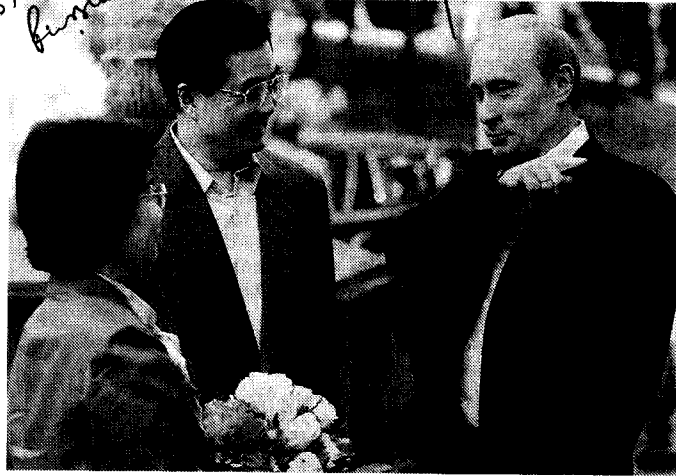
The logic of force and the policy of unilateral action are creating new factors of instability in the already disturbed world, Russia and China said in a joint declaration signed by the Presidents of the two countries, Vladimir Putin and Hu Jintao, after talks in the Kremlin today.

The Chinese leader arrived in Moscow on Monday for a three-day visit, during which he will also attend a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and celebrations of the 300th anniversary of St. Petersburg.

In a clear rejection of one-nation supremacy in international affairs, the Russian and Chinese Presidents called for building a multi-polar, fair and democratic world order based on the universally recognised principles of international law.

Speaking after talks with China's President, the Russian leader said the multi-polar world must take into account the interests of all participants in international relations and must be based on comprehensible, clearly-defined and easy-to-apply international rules.

The Russian-Chinese declaration urged the international community to resolve disputes through dialogue and cooperation, to uphold the central role



The Russian President, Vladimir Putin (right), speaks with the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, and his wife, Liu Yongqing, prior to a dinner at Mr. Putin's residence outside Moscow, on Monday. — AP

of the U.N. in the present-day world, (and) to promote diverse models of development.

The U.N. must be given a central role in the post-war reconstruction of Iraq. Proper settlement of the Iraqi problem, which is one of the most complicated problems in the world today, is only possible within the framework of the U.N. on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the two countries stated.

Russia and China demanded that their interests in Iraq be taken care of.

The legitimate rights, interests and concerns of neighbouring states and other interested parties must be taken into consideration in the process of post-war settlement and reconstruction in Iraq, they said. Re-

flecting their shared concern that the U.S. may try to keep post-war Iraq under its control, the leaders stressed the need to guarantee the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Iraq, respect the will and independent choice of its people, as well as its right to control the country's natural resources.

Russia and China vowed to attach strategic priority to their bilateral relations no matter what changes take place in the world. China's Defence Minister arrived in Moscow today for a four-day visit to discuss far-ranging defence cooperation between the two countries and attend a Defence Ministers meeting of the SCO.

28 MAY 2003

29 MAY 2003

THE HINDU



More patrols on the cards

# Jakarta turns up Aceh heat

*Gr B 27/5 56 Air Gudon*

**Banda Aceh, May 26 (Reuters):** Indonesia plans to step up a military offensive against separatist rebels in Aceh a week after declaring martial law in the province and sending in thousands of troops.

"We have evaluated and decided that the momentum has to be increased," Indonesia's main military spokesman, Maj. Gen. Sjafrie Sjamsuddin, said in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, on the northern tip of Sumatra island.

He said the stepped-up campaign against Free Aceh Movement (GAM) separatists would include more patrols and sweeps, referring to such tactics as vehicle searches and document checks. It could also mean security forces going systematically from one village to the next, Sjamsuddin said.

The military says since its campaign began a week ago, clashes with GAM have averaged four or five a day, with security forces killing 68 rebels and losing three of their own. It says six civilians have died.

An Indonesian Red Cross official said early today that it had removed 82 bodies from conflict areas since the latest round of fighting flared. Rebel sources say scores of civilians and hundreds of government soldiers have been killed. Confirmation of the various claims is not possible, but there has been no visible evidence or independent backing in

Aceh for GAM's count of government dead.

The military launched the offensive after the collapse of a five-month peace deal. About 45,000 members of the security forces face some 5,000 GAM fighters who have adopted hit-and-run tactics. Previous campaigns have failed to crush the rebels, fighting for 27 years in a simmering conflict that has taken at least 10,000 lives.

27 MAY 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# Now famine plagues Aceh

Jakarta Post/ ANN

BANDA ACEH, May 25. — After six days of clashes between the Indonesian Military and Aceh rebels, famine became a real possibility as staple foods ran out in several parts of the province.

Muhammad, a resident of Jeumpa in Bireuen regency, said the regency had been suffering from electricity blackouts since the beginning of the military operation on Monday, and residents had started to skip meals as food was scarce in the isolated area.

"We only have a limited supply of staple foods, and sometimes we share our meals with neighbours who were unable to find food."

He was disappointed that the Indonesian troops posted in the regency failed to protect the food supply and provide security. "About five days ago, suspected rebels took away our identity cards and the military only responded by imposing a curfew at six in the evening," he said, adding that people were desperately in need of humanitarian assistance.

Distribution of food has given the local administration a headache since the full-blown military operation was resumed in the province. Security concerns have prevented truck drivers, who used to deliver basic commodities from the neighbouring provincial capital of Medan to Banda Aceh, from operating.

Jakarta Post correspondents saw three trucks, packed high with vegetables, set on fire en route from Bireuen and neighbouring Pidie, while gunfights were heard in the distance. In Banda Aceh, the prices of staple foods such as sugar, cooking oil and eggs increased by up to 30 per cent and stock was beginning to dwindle.

Gasoline distribution and supply were also disturbed, especially in the areas hardest hit by the conflict, such as North Aceh and Pidie.

To ensure the distribution of food, Aceh Governor Abdullah Puteh said all trucks carrying staple foods would be protected by the military and were instructed to travel in a convoy.

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THE STATESMAN

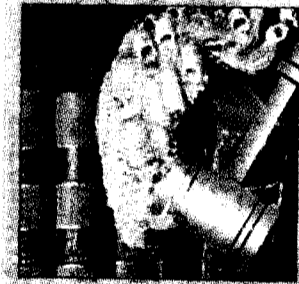
# Dowry shield misused: Court

Women #1-1 24/5

Amitabh Shukla  
New Delhi, May 21

**DAYS AFTER** Nisha Sharma walked off the wedding altar in protest against the practice of dowry, Delhi High Court observed on Wednesday that the anti-dowry provisions in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) were being misused to such an extent that they were striking at the very base of the institution of marriage. The court said the provisions had proved detrimental to the 'good health of society'.

Commenting on the provisions in Section 498-A and 406 of the IPC, Justice J.D. Kapoor said these had been made with good intentions, but their implementa-



## WHAT THE LAW SAYS

**Section 406 Misappropriation of dowry articles**

**Section 498-A Husband or his relative subjecting a woman to cruelty**

**Section 304-B Dowry death**

sions had become handy tools for the police and investigating agencies to hound people with threats of arrest, because matrimonial offences had been made cognisable and non-bailable.

The court recommended that investigations into matrimonial offences be vested in civil authorities like executive magistrates and cognisance be taken only after they make their findings known.

"(Time) has come to take stock and review them as thousands of marriages have been sacrificed at the altar of these provisions," the court said.

The ruling came on an appeal by one Savitri Devi, challenging a trial court decision to frame

charges only against her husband and father-in-law, but not other members of her family.

Aggrieved by the metropolitan magistrate's order, Savitri Devi filed an appeal in the high court, saying she wanted trial of every member of her family.

Dismissing her petition, the court said the petition was "highly misconceived".

In Kolkata, Geetanath Ganguly, executive chairman, Legal Aid Services, welcomed the ruling. But Maitreyi Chatterjee of the Nari Nirjatan Pratirodh Mancha said, "The provisions are misused in very few cases.... Every law has two facets. These provisions have also brought justice to many tortured victims."

"There is a growing tendency among women to rope in each and every relative, including minors and even schoolgoing kids, in such cases," the court remarked.

The judge said the IPC provi-

## Talk Straight at G-8

For the first time ever, India, China and Brazil have this year been invited to participate in the final deliberations of the G-8 countries at Evian in France. The G-8 is an exclusive club of the eight most advanced industrial nations, and the summit discusses global macro-economic issues. The inclusion of China, India and Brazil is apparently in recognition of their positions as the third, fourth and sixth largest markets in the world. While it would be only too easy to interpret the invite as an affirmation of the big power status of the new entrants, the real picture may not be quite as rosy. India is going to Evian not to deliberate on the international economic scene, which is a prerogative that remains with the original G-8, but to offer its views on terrorism. However, this serves India's immediate interests rather well. Indeed, so far we have looked only to the US for help vis-a-vis cross-border terrorism. But the G-8 forum is an entirely new opportunity which India must grasp with all the diplomatic acumen it can muster. 1915

For Atal Behari Vajpayee, the upcoming visit is a unique occasion to explain the nature of the terrorist threat in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, with particular reference to the enormous human costs inflicted on this country. It is a fair bet that the Indian view will be appreciated, especially in the context of the reported Al-Qaida involvement in the Riyadh bombings. The larger point here is that the leadership of the Al-Qaida has found a safe haven in Pakistan. Indeed, only four senior Al-Qaida leaders have been arrested since 9/11 in Pakistan. The Taliban has regrouped and is now emboldened enough to strike at the international security forces posted in Afghanistan. Of equal concern is the fact that Pakistan has allowed most of the terrorist groups to change their names so as to avoid being penalised. One of the major tasks in the war against international terrorism is the destruction of the infrastructure of the Al-Qaida and its allies in Pakistan. While the US may have its own strategy to deal with terrorism in this part of the world, there is no reason why India should not persuade other major industrial nations such as Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia to apply the necessary pressure on Pakistan.

19 MAY 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Quota options

By Yogendra Yadav

*The option of a quota for women in the candidate list of parties is not a 'dilution' of the Women's Reservation Bill but a better way of realising the objectives.*

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IT IS time for a rethink on the Women's Reservation Bill. For all those who found the drama in the Lok Sabha infuriating, it is time for hard thinking. It is also time to look ahead and think of a fresh way out. Let there be no doubts about it. It was not just Mulayam Singh Yadav and co. who blocked the bill on May 6. If the BJP and the Congress were determined, all the opponents could not have blocked it. Coming from a regime that passed POTA in the teeth of widespread opposition, the touching search for consensus, the sudden surge of respect for the minority viewpoint makes impossible demands on one's credulity. The truth is that with the exception of the Left parties, the entire political establishment is responsible for the non-passage of the Bill. Behind Sushma Swaraj's exasperation there was an unmistakable touch of relief. Relief that the Bill was dead, and that her party was not going to be blamed.

Let us also be honest about something else. The now-dead Bill was a deeply flawed piece of legislation. Those who drafted it were absolutely right about the fundamental principles: the abysmally low representation of women in our legislatures can and must be corrected through binding legal provisions. But in their enthusiasm they paid inadequate attention to the mechanism they were proposing for realising their objectives. The Bill proposed reservation of constituencies for women on the lines of that for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, with a provision to rotate them with every election. This would have meant that nearly half of the constituencies would have been reserved for one group or another. Rotation would have meant that at least two-thirds of the sitting MLAs and MPs would not go back to their constituency for re-election. This was an invitation to disaster and would have robbed our system of whatever accountability it has now.

What then do we do? The ruling establishment would like us to forget about the matter till the next Lok

Sabha is constituted. We can do better than that. The apparent deadlock on the Bill can and must be turned into an opportunity by agreeing to an alternative proposal that the political establishment would find difficult to say no to.

This alternative has been around for some time and is known as the Election Commission Proposal. First originating in an article by some social scientists and activists in *Manushi* and subsequently endorsed in principle by the Election Commission, this alternative involves a compulsory quota for women in party nominations. If accepted it would mean that the political parties would be required to field at least a certain percentage of women candidates, but would be free to decide where to field them from. A version of this method was recommended way back in the National Perspective Plan approved by Rajiv Gandhi. This incidentally is the wisdom gleaned from global experience as well. If you care to visit the website of the inter-governmental organization, International IDEA, you would discover that party quota was the route taken by most democracies where women did succeed in securing a decent political representation for themselves. For some reason the original framers of the existing Women's Reservation Bill think that this alternative is a poor and diluted version of their proposal. A close look would show that if formulated carefully to guard against possible misuse, the party quota method can meet the objectives better than the existing Bill.

It is important to understand the alternative being supported here before anyone rushes to reject it. While the basic approach of the Election Commission is robust, its proposal is fairly open ended on details and can therefore be misused to subvert the

objectives of women's reservation. If a fresh alternative is to be worked out along these lines, it is necessary to be vigilant and firm about some of these points of detail. First and foremost, the women's quota must be compulsory and should not be reduced below one-third. It is believed that the Samajwadi Party and some other opponents of the Bill would prefer no more than a 10-15 per cent quota. This needs to be resisted. While there is nothing sacrosanct about the figure of 33 per cent, in the last few years it has come to be associated with the aspirations of ordinary women and the women's movement. Anything less would appear to them to be a defeat. Also, one-third quota would ensure that even if initially the actual representation is a little below this level, the presence of women in legislatures is still substantially above a minimum threshold.

Second, a specific provision should be made to ensure that parties cannot cheat by giving 'losing' seats to women. The simplest way to ensure that is to have a provision that the quota should be calculated at the State level in a parliamentary election and at the district level in the Assembly election. This provision would ensure that Laloo Prasad Yadav cannot fool the law by giving his party ticket to women only from Tamil Nadu! He will have to give one-third of the RJD ticket in Bihar to women. In an Assembly election he will have to do so for each district within Bihar.

Is this a sufficient safeguard? Clearly, 33 per cent of the party ticket to women is not a guarantee of 33 per cent women winning elections. Parties might still try at least initially to give relatively weaker seats within each State and district to women. This may reduce their electoral success ratio and result in their legisla-

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tive presence being lower than 33 per cent. But unless all the parties and the voters conspire, there is no way the final proportion would be less than 20-25 per cent. Even this would represent a manifold increase over the existing average of 8 per cent in the Lok Sabha and 4 per cent for the State Assemblies. In any case, no party that entertains any serious hope of winning a majority can afford to give up one-third of the seats as lost. In the long run, this method may also result in more women than 33 per cent winning the elections. The electoral record of women candidates in India suggests that their probability of winning an election is a little higher than their male colleagues.

In other words, the party quota option is not a 'dilution' of the existing Bill but a better way of realising the objectives. Besides, if this option were to be taken, the demand for a quota within the quota used to block the present Bill would lose much of its force. Under this system, parties can choose to give the ticket to women in those areas where woman leaders of their preferred community are in a position to contest. If the parties do not nominate OBC or Muslim women under this alternative arrangement, they cannot blame the system for it. The alternative proposal has another advantage that it does not require an amendment to the Constitution. All it requires is an ordinary amendment in the Representation of the People Act. The party quota could be made mandatory only for recognised political parties that occupy more than 90 per cent of the legislatures. The political establishment has no justification for not passing it in the remaining life of the current Lok Sabha.

While opposing the Bill, Mulayam Singh Yadav declared in the Lok Sabha that he is not opposed to the idea of reservation for women and that his party would support a quota-based alternative. It is time to make him keep his word.

(The writer is a Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi.)

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## THE SILENT MAJORITY *women*

AS EXPECTED, SECTIONS of the Opposition and some of the partners of the National Democratic Alliance Government have together stalled the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha raising doubts about the seriousness and sincerity of the major political parties in ensuring reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures. And, as usual, the opponents of the Bill have sought to mask their motive of denying women their rightful representation in the highest elected bodies by demanding a quota within the quota for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and Minorities. Actually, the Women's Reservation Bill covers the existing quota for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the demand for a quota within the quota is not valid in this case. And, in the absence of any reservation for Backward Classes and Minorities in the elected bodies, there is no justification for a separate reservation for women belonging to these groups. The argument against the Bill is that without such reservation within the reservation, women from elite sections would benefit the most from the general quota for women. This is little more than a restatement of the known fact that gender inequality is greater among the Backward Classes and Minorities than among the elite sections. Indeed, the argument only underscores the sense of urgency required in correcting such an imbalance.

Of course, the Bill is not without its infirmities. The provision for rotation of constituencies reserved for women could alienate the elected representatives from the voters when they know their constituency would be reserved or dereserved in the next election. The alternative of permanent reservation of constituencies is equally unattractive, as that would deprive men in a reserved constituency the chance of getting elected for all time. In such a context, the demand for a debate on alternative proposals, including the one that stipulates a quota for

women in party nominations, needs to be taken seriously. The shifting of the onus for providing reservation on the political parties holds the added advantage of not requiring a Constitutional Amendment, as an amendment of the Representation of the People Act would do. But any fresh debate should not be used as an excuse for postponing the introduction of a Bill guaranteeing increased representation for women in Parliament and Legislatures.

What is deeply unsettling is that the Bill was stalled despite the support of the major parties. The BJP, the Congress, the Left and regional parties such as the Telugu Desam, the DMK and the AIADMK, all support the Bill. In effect, the lung-power of a small section of the Lok Sabha thwarted the silent majority making a mockery of the Parliamentary system itself. The NDA Government, divided within itself over the Bill, was quite happy to disown the responsibility of ensuring the passage of the Bill. The political will, evident on other issues such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act, when a joint session of Parliament was convened, was sorely missed in respect of this Bill. But, perhaps, the real hurdle to the Bill being passed is actually the under-representation of women in the House, the reason why such a Bill was seen as necessary in the first place. A number of MPs of the Congress and the BJP congratulated the Samajwadi Party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, for successfully scuttling the Bill, though the official stand of their parties was in support of the Bill. This indeed explains why the major parties which approve of the Bill have let the smaller parties dictate the fate of the Bill. So long as they don't have to share the blame for the shelving of the Bill, both the BJP and the Congress seem quite happy to let parties such as the SP and the RJD call the shots. In such a situation, it is better to look for consensus on alternative proposals than endlessly repeat the taking up and stalling of the present Bill.

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# 'Govt. did not help push through women's Bill'

By Mahesh Vijapurkar

*110-11*  
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**MUMBAI, MAY 7.** Political parties barring the Left and the Congress came in for a scathing attack for their "entirely negative role" vis-à-vis the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament on Tuesday.

Brinda Karat and Subhashini Ali of the All-India Democratic Women's Association, at a press conference here said that a historic opportunity of voting a new progressive law was lost. The BJP and the Government emerged out of the episode "incompetent and impotent" by not seeking a vote despite full support, conveyed in writing by the Congress and the Left parties, and there were "enough MPs to give the required two-thirds majority required".

The Janata Dal (United), the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal had lost their "credibility" by their opposition to the Bill. Its leaders used "pretexts" to scuttle the Bill and the development showed that the social welfare platforms of these parties had "a sectarian nature".

Ms. Karat said that "a handful of MPs hijacked the entire Parliament".

The issue was not of disruption of parties but the Government's inability to carry forward its own legislation. The unprecedented support given in writing by the major Opposition party made for "a strong possibility" of enacting the law but the "Government did nothing to ensure it". It was "a betrayal of women and has a grave message for democracy".

The Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi, had publicly stated three days earlier that there was opposition to the long-pending proposal of one-third quota for women and that there was no consensus. The Speaker thus "abandoned the neutrality of his office", she alleged.

Ms. Ali said the Government in the past had pushed through several laws despite their controversial nature. But now it had a majority yet it did not push through the Bill.

This showed that the BJP itself was not committed to the Bill.

## AGITATED WOMEN STORM PM'S HOUSE

# Bill not dropped, says Vajpayee

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MAY 7.** Agitated over the stalling of the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, representatives of the several women groups stormed the Prime Minister's residence this morning and expressed their displeasure in an unscheduled meeting with him.

Giving a patient hearing, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, assured them that another attempt would be made to table the Bill in the next session of Parliament and that it had not been dropped. However, he suggested that women should consider the "alternative" proposal of providing reservation within the political parties.

Describing the deferring of the Bill in the male-dominated Parliament as a "betrayal of women", the delegation told Mr. Vajpayee that their hopes had risen after they had been assured of a smooth passage for the Bill following the all-party meeting. Whatever happened in the House on Tuesday was nothing less than "Parliamentary terrorism". "We wanted an apology from the MPs who had used derogatory language against women in Parliament yesterday and all such remarks be expunged from the proceedings," Ranjana Kumari, coordinator of the Joint Action Front for Women, told *The Hindu*.

Their next plan of action would be to mobilise women to defeat the "anti-democratic and anti-women" forces in the country in the coming elections.



Representatives of women's organisations coming out of the Prime Minister's residence in New Delhi on Wednesday after lodging their protest against non-tabling of the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament. — Photo: V. Sudershan

Ms. Kumari said they had told Mr. Vajpayee that his "lack of conviction" had stopped him from seeing the Bill through despite the necessary two-third majority in the House. The Bill was not even taken up for discussion, what kind of message did such action send across for women, they asked the Prime Minister. When Mr. Vajpayee suggested that women should agree to an alternative proposal for reservation within the parties, the delegation said that neither the Government nor any political party had come forward with the proposal. "We

want 182 seats in Parliament and nothing less," we told Mr. Vajpayee and as far as meeting the Lok Sabha Speaker was concerned, the delegation brought it to Mr. Vajpayee's attention that he was from a party that was openly opposed to the Bill," Ms. Kumari claimed.

The Prime Minister met the delegation, representing 25 organisations, as the women refused to leave the premises despite repeated requests by the PMO staff and the securitymen to seek an appointment. The drama unfolded at 10 a.m. when about 250 women gath-

ered near 7, Race Course Road and began marching towards the house. Taken by surprise, the policemen came towards them, warning them of arrest if they violated the prohibitory orders. While some women offered to court arrest, about 25 of them reached the reception where they insisted on meeting the Prime Minister. The absence of women policemen perhaps made their job easier.

The Joint Action Front for Women has now sought an appointment with the Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi.

Govt. didn't help: Page 11



## Left criticises stalling of Bill

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 7. The Left parties today criticised the Vajpayee Government for its inability to get the Women's Reservation Bill passed in the Lok Sabha despite having the support of nearly three-fourths of the House.

The CPI(M) politburo said the Government had the support of major parties, including the Congress, the Left parties and the Telugu Desam Party. Together with the BJP, their MPs constituted three-fourths of the Lok Sabha.

"Yet, the Government failed to ensure that the Bill was taken up for consideration and adoption. The main responsibility for this lies with the Vajpayee Government which utterly failed to stand by its commitment."

By referring the matter to the Speaker, the party said the BJP was "abdicating its responsibility" as the ruling party. "Those who opposed the Bill have sought to block women's representation by giving out spurious arguments.

Reservation for women through the democratic electoral system would have ensured that women from all strata get representation in the legislatures and Parliament."

The Communist Party of India charged the Government with "lacking political will" to ensure the Bill's passage and said the repeated enactment of the "drama" had turned an important issue into a "farce".

"Yet another postponement of discussion on the Bill has once again shown that the Vajpayee Government lacks political will on the issue," the party central secretariat said.

It demanded that the legislation in the present form be discussed in Parliament and alleged that the Government had raked up the issue only to score "brownie points but buckled down" when some NDA allies and the anti-reservation lobby in the BJP, along with some Opposition parties, created a "rumpus" in the House.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Lenist) said the

FOES JOIN HANDS TO STALL MOVE

## Women's Bill scuttled again

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MAY 6.** The Women's Reservation Bill was deferred yet again in the face of stiff resistance by some Opposition parties and a section of the ruling National Democratic Alliance in the Lok Sabha today. Opposition to the Bill led to the House being adjourned for an hour-and-a-half in the morning after which the Speaker, Manohar Joshi, called an all-party meeting wherein the decision to defer the Bill was taken in view of the absence of unanimity.

Though the Bill was slated for discussion and passing in the post-lunch session, trouble started as soon as the House assembled for the day with members belonging to the Samajwadi Party, the RJD, the IUML and some

NDP allies such as the Samata Party, the JD(U) and the Shiv Sena raising objections. The SP and RJD members trooped into the well of the House demanding withdrawal of the listed 85th Constitution Amendment Bill providing for 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies.

The agitated members made it clear that the Bill in its present form — without provision for a quota within a quota — would "never be acceptable" to them. Their demand was that it should have reservation for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, the minorities and the OBCs.

To the Government's embarrassment, opposition to the Bill came from a number of its allies. Even the Opposition was divided

with heated exchanges between the SP and Congress members over certain remarks made by Shivraj Patil (Cong). This led to several SP MPs accusing the Congress of "joining hands with the BJP". The developments in the House and outside showed strong resistance to the proposed legislation within all parties. Though the Congress and the BJP are publicly committed to the legislation, the leadership's enthusiasm was not shared by their MPs. A number of Congress and BJP members congratulated the SP leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, for having scuttled the Bill.

Opposition to the Bill also saw long-time foes join hands. The concerted action in the Lok Sabha was the result of a lot of overnight planning outside the House. Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Prabhunath Singh and Sharad Yadav are reported to have worked out a joint strategy and calibrated their efforts in the House to prevent the Bill from even being taken up for consideration.

In the House, Mulayam Singh Yadav said his party was not opposed to reservation for women but wanted the Bill, introduced in the House in 1999, to provide reservation to women belonging to families of farmers, labourers and minorities and other backward classes. The Government's move to insert the clause of rotation of seats was fraught with dangerous consequences and would lead to a snapping of the crucial ties between the electorate and their representatives. He was supported by Raghuvansh Prasad of the RJD. Opposition to the Bill also came from Chandrakant Khaire (Shiv Sena), Devendra Prasad Yadav (JD-U) and Prabhunath Singh (Samata Party) who lamented that the

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## OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN *women*

THE UNION GOVERNMENT'S proposal to establish a National Commission for Children — a statutory body with judicial powers — is a clear recognition at the highest quarters that despite an array of laws and national policies which address the specific concerns of children, a great deal still remains to be accomplished in terms of fostering a rights-centred approach to children's issues. The mandate of the new body is expected to be geared to facilitate progress towards translating Constitutional provisions concerning children into practice, reviewing existing legislation and making recommendations to the Government and, above all, ensuring compliance of domestic legislation with relevant international conventions. According to the Human Resource Development Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, some 40 countries already have similar commissions in place and India would be only the second in Asia after the Philippines to constitute an exclusive body for safeguarding the interests of children. While the Government's initiative to protect unarguably the most vulnerable section in any society deserves legitimate credit, it is important that the proposed ombudsman does not merely replicate past experience in relation to the functioning or even the composition of similar commissions. For instance, appointments to existing statutory bodies for the protection and promotion of the interests of women, the minorities and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes — not to speak of the Human Rights Commissions at the national and State levels — have come to be regarded as avenues of patronage for senior functionaries in the Government at the time of superannuation. Unless such a perception is corrected, the legitimacy of statutory bodies in general is bound to be seriously undermined. Moreover, although these commissions are vested with judicial powers similar to a civil court, in the absence of enforcement and punitive authority, in reality, their role has been no more than recommendatory in nature. Although there appears to be a

clear recognition of some of these aspects at one level, indications are that few if any real departures could be expected in relation to the composition of the proposed commission.

While these pragmatic concerns in themselves are serious enough, the moral and sociological dimensions of the problems of this segment of the population are formidable. According to statistics, children account for roughly 38 per cent of the country's total population; of which 53 per cent suffer from severe malnutrition. And, 47 per cent of children below the age of three are said to be underweight and 46 per cent stunted in growth. India also has the dubious distinction of being home to the largest workforce of children in the world. The Government has acknowledged that 3 per cent of children work for wages and 2.6 per cent without wages, adding up to a total of 11.3 million child labourers in the country. Against this backdrop, the recently enacted law postulating basic education as a fundamental right offers little hope of realising the pledge in the Directive Principles of State Policy in Article 39 to protect children from moral and material exploitation. It is hard to see how, in the absence of compulsory primary education for children as a state guarantee, any of the objectives set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, 1959, or the National Policy on Children, 1974, could be realised. Consider also the growing proportions in child trafficking in different parts of the country and the particular vulnerability of the girl child; and the roots of the malaise could yet again be traced to the absence of primary education.

The charter for the proposed commission for children should foremost inspire confidence in our collective capacity to grapple with the varied dimensions of the issues with sensitivity, understanding and imagination. Ensuring its independence and autonomy from political pressures is the other vital prerequisite if the commission is to function as an effective ombudsman.

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## THE SILENT MAJORITY *women*

AS EXPECTED, SECTIONS of the Opposition and some of the partners of the National Democratic Alliance Government have together stalled the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha raising doubts about the seriousness and sincerity of the major political parties in ensuring reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures. And, as usual, the opponents of the Bill have sought to mask their motive of denying women their rightful representation in the highest elected bodies by demanding a quota within the quota for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and Minorities. Actually, the Women's Reservation Bill covers the existing quota for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the demand for a quota within the quota is not valid in this case. And, in the absence of any reservation for Backward Classes and Minorities in the elected bodies, there is no justification for a separate reservation for women belonging to these groups. The argument against the Bill is that without such reservation within the reservation, women from elite sections would benefit the most from the general quota for women. This is little more than a restatement of the known fact that gender inequality is greater among the Backward Classes and Minorities than among the elite sections. Indeed, the argument only underscores the sense of urgency required in correcting such an imbalance.

Of course, the Bill is not without its infirmities. The provision for rotation of constituencies reserved for women could alienate the elected representatives from the voters when they know their constituency would be reserved or dereserved in the next election. The alternative of permanent reservation of constituencies is equally unattractive, as that would deprive men in a reserved constituency the chance of getting elected for all time. In such a context, the demand for a debate on alternative proposals, including the one that stipulates a quota for

women in party nominations, needs to be taken seriously. The shifting of the onus for providing reservation on the political parties holds the added advantage of not requiring a Constitutional Amendment, as an amendment of the Representation of the People Act would do. But any fresh debate should not be used as an excuse for postponing the introduction of a Bill guaranteeing increased representation for women in Parliament and Legislatures.

What is deeply unsettling is that the Bill was stalled despite the support of the major parties. The BJP, the Congress, the Left and regional parties such as the Telugu Desam, the DMK and the AIADMK, all support the Bill. In effect, the lung-power of a small section of the Lok Sabha thwarted the silent majority making a mockery of the Parliamentary system itself. The NDA Government, divided within itself over the Bill, was quite happy to disown the responsibility of ensuring the passage of the Bill. The political will, evident on other issues such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act, when a joint session of Parliament was convened, was sorely missed in respect of this Bill. But, perhaps, the real hurdle to the Bill being passed is actually the under-representation of women in the House, the reason why such a Bill was seen as necessary in the first place. A number of MPs of the Congress and the BJP congratulated the Samajwadi Party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, for successfully scuttling the Bill, though the official stand of their parties was in support of the Bill. This indeed explains why the major parties which approve of the Bill have let the smaller parties dictate the fate of the Bill. So long as they don't have to share the blame for the shelving of the Bill, both the BJP and the Congress seem quite happy to let parties such as the SP and the RJD call the shots. In such a situation, it is better to look for consensus on alternative proposals than endlessly repeat the taking up and stalling of the present Bill.

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women

FOES JOIN HANDS TO STALL MOVE

Women's Bill scuttled again

By Our Special Correspondent

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Though the Bill was slated for discussion and passing in the post-lunch session, trouble started as soon as the House assembled for the day with members belonging to the Samajwadi Party, the RJD, the IUML and some

NDP allies such as the Samata Party, the JD(U) and the Shiv Sena raising objections. The SP and RJD members trooped into the well of the House demanding withdrawal of the listed 85th Constitution Amendment Bill providing for 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies.

The agitated members made it clear that the Bill in its present form — without provision for a quota within a quota — would "never be acceptable" to them. Their demand was that it should have reservation for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, the minorities and the OBCs.

To the Government's embarrassment, opposition to the Bill came from a number of its allies. Even the Opposition was divided

with heated exchanges between the SP and Congress members over certain remarks made by Shivraj Patil (Cong). This led to several SP MPs accusing the Congress of "joining hands with the BJP". The developments in the House and outside showed strong resistance to the proposed legislation within all parties. Though the Congress and the BJP are publicly committed to the legislation, the leadership's enthusiasm was not shared by their MPs. A number of Congress and BJP members congratulated the SP leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, for having scuttled the Bill.

Opposition to the Bill also saw long-time foes join hands. The concerted action in the Lok Sabha was the result of a lot of overnight planning outside the House. Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Prabhunath Singh and Sharad Yadav are reported to have worked out a joint strategy and calibrated their efforts in the House to prevent the Bill from even being taken up for consideration.

In the House, Mulayam Singh Yadav said his party was not opposed to reservation for women but wanted the Bill, introduced in the House in 1999, to provide reservation to women belonging to families of farmers, labourers and minorities and other backward classes. The Government's move to insert the clause of rotation of seats was fraught with dangerous consequences and would lead to a snapping of the crucial ties between the electorate and their representatives. He was supported by Raghuvansh Prasad of the RJD. Opposition to the Bill also came from Chandrakant Khaire (Shiv Sena), Devendra Prasad Yadav (JD-U) and Prabahunath Singh (Samata Party) who lamented that the Government did not consider it fit to consult the allies on the issue. Mr. Khaire said the issue of support to the Bill should be left to individual parties, while Mr. Singh urged the Government not to act in haste. He said a large number of MPs from both the BJP and the Congress were opposed to it.

07 MAY 2003

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## OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN

*women*

THE UNION GOVERNMENT'S proposal to establish a National Commission for Children — a statutory body with judicial powers — is a clear recognition at the highest quarters that despite an array of laws and national policies which address the specific concerns of children, a great deal still remains to be accomplished in terms of fostering a rights-centred approach to children's issues. The mandate of the new body is expected to be geared to facilitate progress towards translating Constitutional provisions concerning children into practice, reviewing existing legislation and making recommendations to the Government and, above all, ensuring compliance of domestic legislation with relevant international conventions. According to the Human Resource Development Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, some 40 countries already have similar commissions in place and India would be only the second in Asia after the Philippines to constitute an exclusive body for safeguarding the interests of children. While the Government's initiative to protect unarguably the most vulnerable section in any society deserves legitimate credit, it is important that the proposed ombudsman does not merely replicate past experience in relation to the functioning or even the composition of similar commissions. For instance, appointments to existing statutory bodies for the protection and promotion of the interests of women, the minorities and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes — not to speak of the Human Rights Commissions at the national and State levels — have come to be regarded as avenues of patronage for senior functionaries in the Government at the time of superannuation. Unless such a perception is corrected, the legitimacy of statutory bodies in general is bound to be seriously undermined. Moreover, although these commissions are vested with judicial powers similar to a civil court, in the absence of enforcement and punitive authority, in reality, their role has been no more than recommendatory in nature. Although there appears to be a

clear recognition of some of these aspects at one level, indications are that few if any real departures could be expected in relation to the composition of the proposed commission.

While these pragmatic concerns in themselves are serious enough, the moral and sociological dimensions of the problems of this segment of the population are formidable. According to statistics, children account for roughly 38 per cent of the country's total population; of which 53 per cent suffer from severe malnutrition. And, 47 per cent of children below the age of three are said to be underweight and 46 per cent stunted in growth. India also has the dubious distinction of being home to the largest workforce of children in the world. The Government has acknowledged that 3 per cent of children work for wages and 2.6 per cent without wages, adding up to a total of 11.3 million child labourers in the country. Against this backdrop, the recently enacted law postulating basic education as a fundamental right offers little hope of realising the pledge in the Directive Principles of State Policy in Article 39 to protect children from moral and material exploitation. It is hard to see how, in the absence of compulsory primary education for children as a state guarantee, any of the objectives set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, 1959, or the National Policy on Children, 1974, could be realised. Consider also the growing proportions in child trafficking in different parts of the country and the particular vulnerability of the girl child; and the roots of the malaise could yet again be traced to the absence of primary education.

The charter for the proposed commission for children should foremost inspire confidence in our collective capacity to grapple with the varied dimensions of the issues with sensitivity, understanding and imagination. Ensuring its independence and autonomy from political pressures is the other vital prerequisite if the commission is to function as an effective ombudsman.

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07 MAY 2005

I DIDN'T OFFER TO EXPEL MPs: SPEAKER

## Women's Bill may be tabled in monsoon session

By Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 9. Already under criticism for the failure to push through the Women's Reservation Bill in the just-concluded session of Parliament, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, today claimed that the Congress and the CPI (M) had turned down the Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi's offer to try to pass the Bill by expelling MPs of the Samajwadi Party who were blocking its passage. Mr. Joshi today flatly denied making any such suggestion.

Taking offence at Ms. Swaraj's blaming them for the Government's failure, the Congress spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, and the senior CPI (M) leader, Somnath Chatterjee, said the Speaker had not made any such suggestion to them.

Ms. Swaraj said she did not see any possibility of the Bill being passed in its present form. However, if a consensus or political unanimity was reached at the all-party meeting called by the Speaker on June 16 she would introduce a "new bill" in the "very first week of the monsoon session", the Minister promised.

Clearly ruling out the possibility of arriving at a consensus on

the Bill in its present form that seeks 33 per cent reservation for women in the State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha and also a 33 per cent reservation for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes within the existing SC/ST reserved seats, Ms. Swaraj, however, said the Centre would pen the draft for the new Bill only after unanimity was arrived at the Speaker's all-party meeting. Although she was not specific, the clear hint was that perhaps a political agreement could be reached on the "alternative proposal" to make it mandatory for political parties to select a specific percentage of women candidates.

Mr. Chatterjee described the Government's attitude towards the Bill as 'amazing' and said it was playing a dubious blame game by holding the Opposition responsible for the "non-passage" of the Bill. "Why is the Government talking of consensus when there was no consensus on the Prevention of Terrorism Act?" The CPI (M) requested the Speaker not to prorogue the House and, instead, call a special session in case the political parties were unable to hammer out their differences on the issue on

June 16.

Mr. Joshi said he had asked the political parties to give their suggestions in writing before the meeting and an attempt would be made on that day to draft an agreement.

Earlier, at a meeting with the representatives of several women's organisations at his residence, Mr. Joshi said women's groups would be consulted before the Bill was placed in Parliament once again.

He told the delegation that he had moved a similar proposal in the Maharashtra Assembly in 1996 when he was the Chief Minister.

Not too happy with the Shiv Sena that has been opposing reservation for women, the delegation members told Mr. Joshi to convince his party and his leader of the need for reservation for women in the State Assemblies and Parliament.

Mr. Joshi told them that as Speaker he was not affiliated to any political party and that personally he supported the Bill. Ranjana Kumari, coordinator for the Joint Action Front for Women, later told *The Hindu* that "we made it clear that we would accept nothing less than 33 per cent reservation."

7 4 2003

MAY 2003

DIVISIONS IN RIVAL POLITICAL CAMPS ON QUOTA

# Lok Sabha to take up Women's Bill today

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MAY 5. The Women's Reservation Bill gathering dust after it was introduced in 1999 is to be placed on tomorrow's agenda in the Lok Sabha for consideration and passing.

The bill is expected to witness wide fissures in the two main political camps, the ruling and the Opposition. From the ruling National Democratic Alliance camp, the Shiv Sena is expected to oppose and the Samata Party appeared to be divided — one of its MPs opposed it in the Business Advisory Committee today, and the Janata Dal (United) has also consistently opposed the bill.

In the Opposition camp, the Samajwadi Party made clear its preference for the "alternative proposal" to make it mandatory for political parties to select a pre-determined minimum percentage of women candidates for Lok Sabha and Assembly seats. The Rashtriya Janata Dal was also opposed to reservations for women unless a backward castes' women's quota was created within the overall women's quota.

On the other hand, the bill in its present form — 33 per cent of all Lok Sabha and Assembly seats to be reserved for women and 33 per cent of the SC/ST quota of seats to be reserved for SC/ST women — has the full support of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Congress, the Left parties, the AIADMK and the DMK, the Telugu Desam Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party as well as a number of smaller parties.

Since the Women's Reservation Bill is to be taken up tomorrow after two other Constitution Amendment bills related to delimitation to make 2001 Census as the base and empower States to levy service tax (to prepare for the Value Added Tax regime) there is a question mark on the availability of time. But as of now, the legislation

which has seen bitter battles inside the House during the 11th and the 12th Lok Sabhas when attempts were made to introduce it will be put to vote tomorrow in the Lok Sabha and on May 8 in the Rajya Sabha.

This was decided at the BAC of the Lok Sabha after a meeting that lasted 90 minutes and witnessed strong opposition from several parties, including the Samata, the Shiv Sena and the SP.

While the Congress Party and the CPI (M) assured full support of their parties for the bill in its present form, the SP president, Mulayam Singh Yadav, wanted more time to put in place a political consensus on the "alternative proposal" for which he had already been given one month's time since the all-party meeting on the issue on March 7, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, said today.

As for the Rashtriya Janata Dal — there was no representative of the party in the BAC today but outside the House, Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said the RJD wanted a backward caste quota within the women's quota, suggesting that without this his party would oppose the bill.

Talking to reporters later, Ms. Swaraj said the decision to bring the bill now was taken when it became clear that no unanimity was possible even on the alternative proposal.

"The CPI (M) in a letter to the Prime Minister made it clear that it would support the Bill in its present form (and not if the bill was diluted as in the alternative proposal)," she said.

The Congress President, Sonia Gandhi, had also earlier written to the Prime Minister assuring him of her party's full support for the bill "which would fulfil the dream of Rajiv Gandhi" who had initiated the panchayati raj bill giving women reservation in all local body elections.

06 MAY 2003



Women

## 'Govt. did not help push through women's Bill'

By Mahesh Vijapurkar

*10-11*  
*QA*  
**MUMBAI, MAY 7.** Political parties barring the Left and the Congress came in for a scathing attack for their "entirely negative role" vis-à-vis the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament on Tuesday.

Brinda Karat and Subhashini Ali of the All-India Democratic Women's Association, at a press conference here said that a historic opportunity of voting a new progressive law was lost. The BJP and the Government emerged out of the episode "incompetent and impotent" by not seeking a vote despite full support, conveyed in writing by the Congress and the Left parties, and there were "enough MPs to give the required two-thirds majority required".

The Janata Dal (United), the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal had lost their "credibility" by their opposition to the Bill. Its leaders used "pretexts" to scuttle the Bill and the development showed that the social welfare platforms of these parties had "a sectarian nature".

Ms. Karat said that "a handful of MPs hijacked the entire Parliament".

The issue was not of disruption of parties but the Government's inability to carry forward its own legislation. The unprecedented support given in writing by the major Opposition party made for "a strong possibility" of enacting the law but the "Government did nothing to ensure it". It was "a betrayal of women and has a grave message for democracy".

The Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi, had publicly stated three days earlier that there was opposition to the long-pending proposal of one-third quota for women and that there was no consensus. The Speaker thus "abandoned the neutrality of his office", she alleged.

Ms. Ali said the Government in the past had pushed through several laws despite their controversial nature. But now it had a majority yet it did not push through the Bill.

This showed that the BJP itself was not committed to the Bill.

08 MAY 2003

women

## AGITATED WOMEN STORM PM'S HOUSE

women

# Bill not dropped, says Vajpayee

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 7. Agitated over the stalling of the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, representatives of the several women groups stormed the Prime Minister's residence this morning and expressed their displeasure in an unscheduled meeting with him.

Giving a patient hearing, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, assured them that another attempt would be made to table the Bill in the next session of Parliament and that it had not been dropped. However, he suggested that women should consider the "alternative" proposal of providing reservation within the political parties.

Describing the deferring of the Bill in the male-dominated Parliament as a "betrayal of women", the delegation told Mr. Vajpayee that their hopes had risen after they had been assured of a smooth passage for the Bill following the all-party meeting. Whatever happened in the House on Tuesday was nothing less than "Parliamentary terrorism". "We wanted an apology from the MPs who had used derogatory language against women in Parliament yesterday and all such remarks be expunged from the proceedings," Ranjana Kumari, coordinator of the Joint Action Front for Women, told *The Hindu*.

Their next plan of action would be to mobilise women to defeat the "anti-democratic and anti-women" forces in the country in the coming elections.



Representatives of women's organisations coming out of the Prime Minister's residence in New Delhi on Wednesday after lodging their protest against non-tabling of the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament. — Photo: V. Sudershan

Ms. Kumari said they had told Mr. Vajpayee that his "lack of conviction" had stopped him from seeing the Bill through despite the necessary two-third majority in the House. The Bill was not even taken up for discussion, what kind of message did such action send across for women, they asked the Prime Minister. When Mr. Vajpayee suggested that women should agree to an alternative proposal for reservation within the parties, the delegation said that neither the Government nor any political party had come forward with the proposal. "We

want 182 seats in Parliament and nothing less," we told Mr. Vajpayee and as far as meeting the Lok Sabha Speaker was concerned, the delegation brought it to Mr. Vajpayee's attention that he was from a party that was openly opposed to the Bill," Ms. Kumari claimed.

The Prime Minister met the delegation, representing 25 organisations, as the women refused to leave the premises despite repeated requests by the PMO staff and the securitymen to seek an appointment. The drama unfolded at 10 a.m. when about 250 women gath-

ered near 7, Race Course Road and began marching towards the house. Taken by surprise, the policemen came towards them, warning them of arrest if they violated the prohibitory orders. While some women offered to court arrest, about 25 of them reached the reception where they insisted on meeting the Prime Minister. The absence of women policemen perhaps made their job easier.

The Joint Action Front for Women has now sought an appointment with the Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi.

Govt. didn't help: Page 11

08 MAY 2003

## Left criticises stalling of Bill

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 7. The Left parties today criticised the Vajpayee Government for its inability to get the Women's Reservation Bill passed in the Lok Sabha despite having the support of nearly three-fourths of the House.

The CPI(M) politburo said the Government had the support of major parties, including the Congress, the Left parties and the Telugu Desam Party. Together with the BJP, their MPs constituted three-fourths of the Lok Sabha.

"Yet, the Government failed to ensure that the Bill was taken up for consideration and adoption. The main responsibility for this lies with the Vajpayee Government which utterly failed to stand by its commitment."

By referring the matter to the Speaker, the party said the BJP was "abdicating its responsibility" as the ruling party. "Those who opposed the Bill have sought to block women's representation by giving out spurious arguments."

Reservation for women through the democratic electoral system would have ensured that women from all strata get representation in the legislatures and Parliament."

The Communist Party of India charged the Government with "lacking political will" to ensure the Bill's passage and said the repeated enactment of the "drama" had turned an important issue into a "farce".

"Yet another postponement of discussion on the Bill has once again shown that the Vajpayee Government lacks political will on the issue," the party central secretariat said.

It demanded that the legislation in the present form be discussed in Parliament and alleged that the Government had raked up the issue only to score "brownie points but buckled down" when some NDA allies and the anti-reservation lobby in the BJP, along with some Opposition parties, created a "rumpus" in the House.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Lenist) said the Government did not care for consensus on other vital issues. But when it came to the Women's Bill it started talking about consensus.

"This is very shocking and shameful".

08 MAY 2003

# Panel to study 'harassment' of women

By Aarti Dhar

DELHI, MAY 12. Even before International Labour Office issued its global report on discrimination at work place, the Union Labour Minister, Sahib Singh Verma, constituted a committee to ascertain the extent to which the Government has been able to remove discrimination at the work place, particularly sexual harassment of women.

The five-member committee, headed by an officer of the rank of Joint Secretary, will have representatives from the trade unions and women's groups. Announcing this after releasing the ILO report here today, Mr. Verma said the committee would submit its recommendations by the month-end and the report would be sent to the ILO. The Government had decided to allow women to work at night after ensuring full security for them.

Mr. Verma said the ILO would now work towards removing geographical barriers to ensure freedom of work to all the countries with excess human resources should be allowed to send their people to other countries and the ILO can do a lot in removing the regional discrimination because we are now talking in terms of the



The Union Labour Minister, Sahib Singh Verma, handing over a copy of ILO's Global Report on "Time for Equality at Work" to the Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, Najma Heptullah, at the U.N. Conference Hall in New Delhi on Monday. The Director (India), ILO, Herman van der Laan, is at right. — Photo: V.V. Krishnan

world being one trade organisation," he said.

While India has been criticised for discrimination in wage classification of skilled and un-

skilled workers that sometimes places women in the unskilled, lower-paying wage category and men in the skilled, higher-paying category, irrespective of

the skill level, the Supreme Court has been praised for issuing guidelines and norms prohibiting sexual harassment at the work place. The Govern-

ment's efforts in checking child exploitation have been appreciated.

Another area where India was found discriminating was in the case of HIV/AIDS patients where breach of medical confidentiality led to dismissal or resignations from the jobs.

Other forms of discrimination could be dismissal without evidence, notice or a hearing, demotion to positions of lower experience and skill, denial of insurance benefits to pay for AIDS-related expenses, reduction in salary or harassment.

The socio-economic and sexual discrimination experienced by women increased their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS with the rates of infection among women showing a rise.

The ILO study revealed that the burden of caring for HIV-infected family and community members fell more often on women and girls, thereby increasing their workload and diminishing their income-generating and schooling possibilities.

Older women workers might have to assume responsibility for orphaned grandchildren, although their skills were not granted any economic value.

## SC declines to stay abolition of tribunal

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 12. The Supreme Court today declined to stay a Madhya Pradesh Government notification abolishing the State Administrative Tribunal. A vacation Bench, comprising N. Santosh Hegde and Shivaraj V. Patil, dismissed an application filed by the High Court Bar Association seeking the stay.

The Bench observed that "when an institution had been statutorily abolished, how could the Apex Court pass an interim order for its revival".

Appearing for the Bar Association, advocate Prashant Bhushan, contended that around 40,000 cases were pending before the tribunal and as it had been abolished litigants were facing severe constraints in getting relief in urgent matters.

He said it would take a long time for the Centre to take a decision on setting up of an alternative body for the redressal of the grievances of Government employees and pleaded that the court stay the notification.

The Bench said the main petition was pending before the Court and it would not be proper to give any interim order at this stage.

# GSAT-2 placed in geostationary orbit

By Our Special Correspondent

HENNAI, MAY 12. The Indian Space Research Organisation's latest satellite, GSAT-2, has been successfully placed in a geostationary orbit and its solar arrays and antenna have been deployed.

This follows a series of critical operations carried out by the Master Control Facility, Hassan, on Sunday and today, ISRO said. GSAT-2 was launched by the

second developmental flight of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle, GSLV-D2, on May 8 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, SHAR, Sriharikota.

Today, the two solar arrays and the west antenna of GSAT-2 were successfully deployed. In the first operation, the solar array on the south side of the satellite was deployed.

The solar array on the north side and the west antenna were deployed later. The two solar arrays together

generate 1400 watt of electrical power. In the third and final phase of orbit-raising operations conducted yesterday, GSAT-2 was successfully placed in geostationary orbit by firing its 440 Newton Liquid Apogee Motor (LAM) for 79 seconds.

The satellite is now located at 36 degree east longitude and drifting slowly, as per plan, towards its final slot of 48 degree east longitude. It is expected to reach its final orbital slot in a week's time.

The LAM was fired for a total

duration of 90 minutes six seconds in three phases on May 9, 10 and 11, imparting a total velocity increment of 1.66 km per second needed to take the satellite from the geosynchronous transfer orbit of 180 km perigee and 36,000 km apogee to its present geostationary orbit. The inclination was also reduced from 19.2 degree with respect to the equatorial plane at the time of its injection into the orbit, to the present 0.1 degree. The LAM, which was developed by ISRO's Liquid

Propulsion Systems Centre, has performed to its specifications.

The satellite carries four c-band transponders, two ku-band transponders and one mobile satellite service payload in addition to four scientific payloads. Functional testing of scientific payloads and the in-orbit testing of the communication payloads will be carried out in the next two weeks.

ISRO today said that all systems on board GSAT-2 satellite were functioning well.

## TENDERS

**DIESEL LOCOMOTIVE WORKS**  
VARANASI - 221004  
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Sealed Global - Tenders are invited for the following items : Sl. No. : 1 ; Tender No. : 090270991 ; Description : Cylindrical Roller Bearing NU-319 C & D No. 907/029 original Specn. of Stores SKF : NU-319E/MA6/C3 FAG : NU-319E/MIA/C3/SO latest Specn. of offer & accepted ECML/C3B20 (P.L. No. 85980936) ; Qty. : 16 Nos. ; Due on : 06.08.03 ; Tender cost : Rs. 150/- or US \$5.00 ; Bid Guarantee : Rs. 3200/- or US \$ 65.00. Sl. No. : 2 ; Tender No. : 100111741 ; Description : Casting support for compressor bearing. GM. Pt. No. 9569408 & Specn. No. DLW/TOT/1351/9564264

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3. The annual turn over of the firm should not be less than 10 crores of rupees.  
4. The firm should have minimum 100 seats of call centres in operation.  
5. The firm will submit the list of corporate houses/clients being served with details.  
Our expectations :-

2003 MAY 2

women

women  
children

## COMBATING PAEDOPHILIA

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THE BILL RECENTLY passed by the Goa Assembly prohibiting paedophilia is by far the most comprehensive and holistic piece of legislation enacted by any State covering a wide gamut of issues pertaining to the overall development and well-being of children under 18 years of age. The foremost objective behind the conception of the Goa Children's Act of 2003 is the urgency of the need to control all forms of commercial exploitation of children including prostitution,

pornography and trafficking for sexual purposes. However, taking a holistic view of the closely inter-related issues involved, the architects of the Goa law have made a conscious attempt to incorporate provisions that take on board the larger dimensions of the problem. Accordingly, persons who reside with children not related to them by ties of blood are required by law to disclose the same to the Director of Women and Child Development. There are also significant incentives for school attendance such as a ban on corporal punishment and provision for participatory evaluation in place of the much-dreaded conventional examinations. Zero rejection is to be the avowed policy of all school managements, including children affected with HIV/AIDS. Both the Government and private sector employers would have to provide maternal and child care facilities. While some of these are novel steps, the law takes advantage of existing measures to enhance the socio-psychological and nutritive health of children, besides prohibiting child labour. On the punitive side, crimes of child abuse are to be treated as non-bailable offences under the Criminal Procedure Code. While most of these measures are part of separate legislation to curb specific forms of child abuse and exploitation, the real merit in the Goa law pertains to the holistic model it provides for combating the exploitative features of an emerging contemporary market-oriented society. To that extent, the new law constitutes an important value addition in the area of legal

jurisprudence in the country.

The background to the Goa legislation can clearly be traced to the State's particular proneness to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and women, given its highly tourism-driven economy that has seen a rapid expansion. An ugly manifestation of this phenomenon — also witnessed in other countries of the Asia-Pacific region — was in the form of high incidence of paedophilia in the mid-1990s with a close nexus between international tourists and local players. Although two of the key accused in the crime have been convicted and are serving a life sentence, many have escaped punishment owing to lacunae in existing laws. Governments are better equipped to deal with tourism-related crimes today with around 12 countries having enacted laws to prosecute nationals at home for offences committed against children overseas. The first World Congress against the Commercial Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm in 1996 called on Governments to criminalise all forms of sexual exploitation of children, involve children in fighting their exploitation and promote cooperation among various sectors. The 2nd Congress held in Yokohama in 2000 laid special emphasis on stricter enforcement of national laws and the relevance of the International Labour Organisation Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

The importance of putting in place legal instruments to deal with emergent and more sophisticated crimes can hardly be exaggerated. But the effectiveness of all such legislation depends ultimately on the extent to which it is enforced effectively. Whereas the Centre and the States have not lagged behind in terms of enacting laws in compliance with international Conventions, their performance has been found clearly wanting with respect to their enforcement. Lapses in this area cannot be condoned especially when they affect the most vulnerable sections of society. A model law is at best a small beginning.

# Permanent reservations

Do the women of India a service and  
shred the quota bill

THE women will never get the ayes, it seems. The naysayers will always shout their well-wishers down and occupy strategic territory in the well of the House. So let us please put an end to this periodic charade. Instead of deferring the Women's Reservation Bill "for the time being", let our political parties for once construct a consensus and declare the proposed legislation dead on arrival. Let us, if only for the sake of propriety, ensure that we won't have to endure ever again Tuesday's depressing spectacle, or those hollow professions about giving women their share of seats in Parliament and state legislatures. Let us, in other words, junk the hypocrisy and acknowledge the patriarchal sentiments that guide India's highest law-making body.

To be sure, Lok Sabha's hour-long flirtation with the merits and defects of the 85th Constitution Amendment Bill proceeded along expected lines. Lok Sabha members have travelled down that road before, and they did not take long in forcing yet another adjournment — after, of course, the usual obfuscatory nods to the need for sub-quotas for OBCs and the minorities, to the mystifying thesis that this is simply

one big conspiracy to fill the legislatures with city-bred, English-speaking women. This rabid rhetoric has become far too familiar to startle. It is, however, the silences that were depressing. Speakers paid no attention to the actual problems in the bill. They did not, for example, dwell on the proposed rotation of constituencies that would erase a legislator's accountability to his or her voters. They did not focus on the consequences of pitting women against women that the bill envisages, on their electoral ghettoisation.

Let's face it. Self-professed proponents of the bill and its hysterical opponents are batting for the same side. If the sub-quota based argument against the legislation is a thin cover for opposition to the entry of women into legislatures in large numbers, the bill in its current form is in itself a great obstacle to its stated objective. Reserving seats for women by rotating constituencies is definitely not in consonance with parliamentary democracy. Various groups have put forth alternative solutions — like parties being forced to allocate one-third of their tickets to women. It is time these proposals were seriously considered.

7 MAY 2003

INDIAN EXPRESS

DIVISIONS IN RIVAL POLITICAL CAMPS ON QUOTA

# Lok Sabha to take up Women's Bill today

By Neena Vyas

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which has seen bitter battles inside the House during the 11th and the 12th Lok Sabhas when attempts were made to introduce it will be put to vote tomorrow in the Lok Sabha and on May 8 in the Rajya Sabha.

This was decided at the BAC of the Lok Sabha after a meeting that lasted 90 minutes and witnessed strong opposition from several parties, including the Samata, the Shiv Sena and the SP.

While the Congress Party and the CPI (M) assured full support of their parties for the bill in its present form, the SP president, Mulayam Singh Yadav, wanted more time to put in place a political consensus on the "alternative proposal" for which he had already been given one month's time since the all-party meeting on the issue on March 7, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, said today.

As for the Rashtriya Janata Dal -- there was no representative of the party in the BAC today but outside the House, Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said the RJD wanted a backward caste quota within the women's quota, suggesting that without this his party would oppose the bill.

Talking to reporters later, Ms. Swaraj said the decision to bring the bill now was taken when it became clear that no unanimity was possible even on the alternative proposal.

"The CPI (M) in a letter to the Prime Minister made it clear that it would support the Bill in its present form (and not if the bill was diluted as in the alternative proposal)," she said.

The Congress President, Sonia Gandhi, had also earlier written to the Prime Minister assuring him of her party's full support for the bill "which would fulfil the dream of Rajiv Gandhi" who had initiated the panchayati raj bill giving women reservation in all local body elections.

129-11  
30/4

## Consensus still eludes women's bill, says PM

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 29.** The Government was serious about bringing a bill on women's political reservation and would do so in this very session of Parliament but a consensus on the subject remained elusive, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said today.

At the Bharatiya Janata Party's parliamentary party meeting this morning, he said the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, was making an effort to evolve a consensus on the long-awaited legislation and that she had his good wishes.

It was pointed out that the Congress wanted the legislation in its original form — 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

But some other parties were veering round to the idea of making it mandatory for political parties to select at least 33 per cent women candidates for the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies.

And there were other parties

who favoured lowering of the reservation percentage to 10 or 15 per cent.

As if to press home its point, a Congress delegation — Manmohan Singh, Pranab Mukherjee and Shivraj Patil — met the Prime Minister this morning to remind him that the party was in favour of 33 per cent reservation for women.

Apparently, Ms. Swaraj is still continuing her talks with party leaders on the issue. And though the BJP is not stating this officially, it seems it would be more than happy if there was a consensus on amending the law to make it mandatory for political parties to select 33 per cent women candidates, with 33 per cent women candidates selected in each State.

At the meeting, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, advised his party's Ministers to reply to queries from members which often go unanswered. Among other issues raised by MPs were Statehood for Andaman and Nicobar Islands and remunerative prices to farmers for vegetables, especially potatoes.

30 APR 2003

THE HINDU



# Talks on for passing Women's Bill: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 24.** The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said talks with political parties were on in and outside Parliament to find a solution to the standoff over the Women's Reservation Bill.

"Talks are going on with political parties in and outside Parliament. We hope that by the end of the current session, something will come out. I am hopeful that our efforts will be met with success", Mr. Vajpayee said in the Rajya Sabha, when several women members wanted to know the fate of the Bill.

Mr. Vajpayee said there was

no difference of opinion on the Bill but political parties differed on the method and quantum of reservation for women. He hoped some decision would be taken by the political parties on the Bill. "If we are not successful, we shall come before you with the reasons behind the failure."

The senior Congress member, Manmohan Singh, said his party had extended full support to the Bill. "We are committed to the passage of the Bill."

The Deputy Chairperson, Najma Heptulla, ~~headed the~~ Bill would be passed before the next Lok Sabha elections.

Earlier, the Opposition in the

Rajya Sabha demanded that the Government should consult and take it into confidence on the dialogue with Pakistan in the wake of Mr. Vajpayee extending the "hand of friendship" to Islamabad.

Senior Congress member, K. Natwar Singh, said the Prime Minister should consult the Opposition at the time of formulating negotiations with Pakistan. He was speaking after the Prime Minister made a statement in the House on his two-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir between April 18 and 19 and was supported by his party colleagues, Suresh Pachouri and the CPI (M) leader, Nilotpal Basu.

Mr. Basu said his party had never opposed the Government on important issues such as Kashmir but it should be taken into confidence.

Though members do seek clarifications on suo motu statements made by the Prime Minister or Ministers in the House, they deviated from the convention, saying they would not seek any clarification from the Prime Minister. Both, Mr. Basu and Mr. Pachouri wanted the Chairman, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, to ensure that it was not made a precedent.

Mr. Vajpayee had made an identical statement in the Lok Sabha yesterday.

# New Imperialism

## Emerging Circles of Unreason

By Shastri Ramachandaran

"It is too soon to say," was Chinese communist leader Chou En-lai's reply, in 1949, when asked about the importance of the French Revolution of 1789. Much the same could be said of the US military take-over of Iraq. Perhaps, Chou was referring not to linear time, but to history as a cycle fraught with complex and overpowering implications that make judgment difficult even while coming to terms with the unfolding consequences.

Now, as in the aftermath of other upheavals triggered by 9/11, the intentions of those who have unleashed unceasing waves of retaliation do not matter. What matters is the logic of a world that is being created by such actions, and the impulses that are giving rise to these actions. The essential message of new imperialism's second war — Afghanistan being the first — is that sovereignty, like history, is bunk.

The opposition to the US action in this instance — by countries such as France and Russia — signals that there are little imperialists too, aspiring to carve out their own spheres of power and influence. They are neither anti-war nor anti-imperialism; they merely disagree with Washington on this particular military mission on the ground that the same strategic, security and economic objectives could be pursued by other means without provoking so much hostility and resistance.

It is an age when those who know history as much as those who don't are condemned to repeat it. When Tony Blair's foreign policy advisor, Robert Cooper, called for a "new imperialism" that allows well-governed western nations to impose order and stability on the globe, few had the insight to see it as a prescription to re-order the post-9/11 world, although the thesis had been published earlier. Setting out the "need for colonisation", Mr Cooper held active intervention to be necessary when dealing with more old-fashioned states outside the post-modern continent of Europe. "We need to revert to rougher methods of an earlier era — force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary to deal with those who still live in the 19th century world."

This is precisely what is happening: The ushering in of a new era by a big imperial power with little imperial powers either following at heel like Britain or negotiating to safeguard their own turf like France and Russia. Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor, as the first enclaves of new imperialism, were the first voluntarily to settle for truncated sovereignty. Then came Afghanistan where the big and little imperialists acted as one in their mission to make a protectorate of this "ungovernable" country with the United Nations as a handy instrument. There were no dissenting voices in the

coalition because western interests, big and large, were well served.

In the case of Iraq, the current target for colonisation, the big imperialist and the little imperialist fell out over the question of who will benefit most from exploiting this new protectorate, in the absence of a UN umbrella. This is evidenced by the fact that now France, Russia and Germany are only too ready to mend their relations with Washington, and unhesitatingly toe the US line. No less significant is that even those western countries opposed to US unilateralism — and in this one conflict — have been equally vehement in criticising any non-western country that claims it has a right to pre-emptive military action. Few of these voices were heard when Australia, which sees itself as a US outpost in the southern hemisphere, asserted, more than once, its prerogative to make pre-emptive strikes against terrorism in East Asia. Such a position underscores a basic unity of purpose: To sustain their collective supremacy, despite the disagreement over methods and differences in approach.

Where does India figure on such an international stage? Nowhere, except when it draws attention to itself by its capacity to stage a sideshow with Pakistan. Politicians in India have portrayed Pakistan as a fit case for unilateral military strikes and Pakistan has been quick to reciprocate the compliment. Such indefensible positions betray poor strategic sense where both New Delhi and Islamabad lend themselves to being pulled up like errant schoolboys, by both the big and little imperialists. During the war against Afghanistan, some in India welcomed new imperialism if only because the West would not like to lose control of Pakistan and it may, for that reason, strip this "failed state" of its sovereignty.

None of the imperialists, whatever the pecking order in their part of the world, are going to let southern or developing countries pursue their legitimate interests unless it can be subordinated to the larger objectives of the emerging imperium. Yet, at this stage of the process, there are opportunities as well as challenges for countries like India, if New Delhi moves beyond its Pakistan obsession.

As during the Cold War, when many third world countries took advantage of the antagonisms between the East and the West, there are possibilities for New Delhi to engage the little imperialist and the big imperialist in pursuit of its own international ambitions. Instead of casting its lot entirely with one or the other, India too should seek out other countries in Asia and elsewhere with whom it can make common cause, or at least have a minimum of 'antagonistic cooperation'. This is necessary to advance its own interests, for new imperialism, like globalisation, cannot be rolled back.



24 APR 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

## SC notice on sexual harassment

NEW DELHI, March 26. — Taking note of the alarming rise in the sexual harassment cases in professional institutions, the Supreme Court today issued notices to a large number of bodies, including the University Grants Commission, to seek their views on enforcing stringent measures to stop the menace.

After hearing the Attorney-General, Mr Soli J Sorabjee, who favoured extension of the court's earlier guidelines to stop the menace in educational institutions and other professional bodies, a Bench comprising Mr Justice S Rajendra Babu and Mr Justice GP Mathur asked the respondents and the Mr Sorabjee to submit their responses to the court within six weeks.

Important among the professional bodies to whom notices issued were Bar Council of India, Medical Council of India, Institute of Chartered Accountants and All India Council of Technical Education

27 MAR 2003

THE STATESMAN

## No Gender Agenda

The prime minister's gracious words on women's rights, laments from women's groups about the dismal status of women, the usual suspects attending seminars resolving to hold yet another meet on the subject — all in the run-up to and aftermath of International Women's Day. Somewhere down the line, we have also patted ourselves on the back for our vibrant panchayati raj system as a means of women's empowerment. True, that was the intention when it began, but as a recent story by our correspondent shows, many state governments' misplaced development priorities are working against women in panchayati raj. The main stumbling block is the outdated two-child norm which many states have adopted although it goes against the provisions of the national population policy. This has led to a situation where women sarpanches have been disqualified for having a third child. Often, the woman has no choice in the size of her family and is under compulsion to produce a third child, usually in a bid to have a son. As the husband of one woman sarpanch put it, there are far greater benefits to having a son than in being a panchayat representative.

A Bhopal-based NGO Mahila Chetna Manch conducted a survey across Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana and found that there was an increase in abortions, desertions by the husband and extra-marital relationships as a result of the two-child norm. In addition, there was far greater use of sex selection techniques in order to produce two sons. At its inception, reservation for women in the panchayati raj system was meant to eradicate social bias against women and educate people on the value of the girl child. Clearly, the very opposite has happened. This is borne out by the increasingly skewed sex ratio not just in the populous northern states but even in the so-called progressive states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu. But the gender angle apart, it must be questioned why the state is infringing upon people's democratic right to determine the size of their families. At a MacArthur Foundation lecture, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen said that restricting reproductive freedom often had fatal consequences for the girl child. Surveys have repeatedly shown that across the socio-economic spectrum, people aspire to restrict the size of their families but are unable to do so without quality medical services and contraceptive choices. When a policy disempowers the very people it is meant to empower, perhaps it is time to review and phase it out.

18 MAR 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

## No Gender Agenda

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

18 MAR 2003

# Rape at Goksadanga

Result of promoting criminality by Marxists

**B**arely a fortnight after women members of a marriage party were subjected to horrendous gang rape in Nadia's Dhantala by allegedly local CPI-M leaders, an activist of CPI-M's women's wing in Goksadanga in Coochbehar met with a similar fate. And true to their form and style the mandarins of Alimuddin Street immediately went into denial. From the state party secretary Anil Biswas to the senior party minister from Coochbehar Dinesh Dakua everyone cried foul. First they "categorically denied" the incident although an "official medical report" had confirmed rape. When the denial didn't work they claimed that neither the victim nor the perpetrators had anything to do with their party. They "disclosed" that the victim was of "questionable character" and the incident was part of the Opposition and media's "slander campaign" against their party. In fact the party comrades who had been accused of committing rape at Goksadanga were hailed "prized assets". Newspapers publishing this "slanderous story" were threatened with defamation. But all this boomeranged when the non-CPI-M Left Front partners accused Anil Biswas and his comrades of trying to scuttle investigations into the case even before it had begun. They asked whether "questionable character" of a woman justified rape and quoted the relevant Supreme Court verdict. In fact they recalled that a similar "deplorable comment" made by a woman CPI-M leader a decade ago about a gang rape victim in Birati. What is worse is that Goksadanga residents are being threatened not to recount the horrendous incident even to the senior LF minister Kamal Guha or members of the Women's Commission. The fear of someone spilling the beans is obvious.

The devious methods adopted by Alimuddin Street to stonewall investigations are not surprising. The three CPI-M leaders involved in this case have already earned wide notoriety for accusations of extortion, cattle and goods smuggling to Bangladesh, running a roaring illicit distillation business and defalcation of funds. But they are also the kingpin of the party's rigging machinery to ensure landslide electoral victories time and time again. Their indispensability to the party, like "killer" Dulal of Dum Dum and "mafia" Bulton of Habra, is well known. This is the reason why the party has not yet expelled Dulal (charged with double murder) and is defensive about protecting the Dhantala and Goksadanga rapists. But this attitude is emboldening its lumpen elements to repeat Dhantala and Goksadanga elsewhere. Keeping the vote rigging machinery intact seems to be all that matters.

17 MAR 2003

THE STATESMAN

# Two more rape cases in state

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA/NADIA, March 12. A 22-year-old woman was allegedly raped by two youths at Patulia in North 24-Parganas' Khardah area on 8 March, while a 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a staff of the Nadia Sub Health Centre on 10 March, police said today.

Police said that two suspects

Maniar Ali (25) and Saifi (27) named in the FIR were arrested today from Khardah.

The 8 March incident occurred around 9 p.m. when the woman was returning to her residence at Patulia.

Mr Jyotipriya Mullick, Trinamul Congress MLA, alleged that Maniar is a member of the CPI-M's local committee.

Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, said he had no knowledge of such an incident.

The Trinamul MLA said he would raise the matter in the state Assembly tomorrow and seek information from the state finance minister.

Mr Asim Dasgupta, who is the local MLA. The 10 March incident occurred at Bamun Pukur in the Nabadweep police station area.

**Trinamul MLA  
Mr Jyotipriya Mullick  
will raise the matter in the  
Assembly on Thursday**

The victim, suffering from an oral infection and fever, had gone to the health centre for a check up.

There, in the absence of other staff members, Mr Sankar Das gave her a tablet and collected blood

from her body. Soon after

medicine, the girl became unconscious when Das allegedly raped her. On regaining consciousness, she found bloodstains all over her body.

The victim lodged an FIR yesterday against Das in the Nabadweep police station. The chief medical officer, health, Nadia has ordered the additional chief medical officer to probe the incident.

The West Bengal Assembly today witnessed panjshrenium

on the alleged rape Nadia. Mr Pundarikaksha Trinamul Congress Member lashed out at the state government saying that CPI-M men have unleashed a reign of terror on poor and innocent women.

"The rape of this minor girl proves how barbaric the CPI-M is," Mr Saha remarked, hinting at the accused's ruling party connections.

**THE STATESMAN**

13 MAR 2003

# Prisoner of gender

5/8 12/7 The costs of a women's bill *women*

If the women's reservation bill finally gets the parliamentary nod — the BJP, the Congress and the Left seem to have agreed to vote for it — curtains will come down on seven and a half years of legislative wrangling. But will the new script — 33 per cent or less seats in Parliament and assemblies reserved for women, possibly on a rolling basis — make for a better ending? In India barbarous and medieval treatment of women still receives familial and, often, social sanction. But caste discrimination is also a shameful social reality and caste-based reservations have been in existence and expanded for five decades. Has it helped? Is the emergence of Laloo Yadav and Mayawati proof that India's so called backward castes are better off socially and economically or is it a demonstration that egalitarianism by fiat in a hierarchical and hypocritical society simply spawns another class of dubious leaders? Even caste-based reservations for jobs and education haven't helped. In North and South India, poor Dalits are still treated as scum whereas a backward caste minority has been made members of white collar India, sacrificing merit and encouraging mediocrity. More women in legislative chambers, similarly, will do a lot for women politicians but little for women in general.

In terms of electoral administration, reserving seats for women is a problem because number divisions in gender, unlike those in caste or religion, do not translate into majority/ minority population counts and do not have sharp geographical concentrations. The rolling reservation of seats — every elections, a different set of constituencies will be reserved for women — is supposed to address this problem. But it will do so only at formidable cost to democratic fundamentals. Once women candidates know that no matter how they perform, they cannot be re-nominated for the seat next time, the incentives to represent their constituency will be even lower than is the case now. In fact, once voters know that, no matter what, their MP will be a one-term representative, their enthusiasm for voting in women-only seats will be affected. Political parties will figure this out before the ink is dry on the new legislation and will do the rational thing — no top class women leader will be nominated for women only seats. A law-mandated class division among women politicians will be created. All this is quite apart from the enormous problems that will come up every electoral cycle in identifying women-only seats as political parties have running battles with the EC. There's also the domino effect. Demands have already been made that within the women's quota, backward caste women be given a separate share. Demands were made earlier that Muslim women, in many ways the most oppressed, be given separate treatment. If these are considered, why not have reserved seats for religious minorities, irrespective of gender, as well. Then Indian democracy will have well and truly lost its claims to attempting to flaunt a modern system of governance.

12 MAR 2003

THE STATESMAN



# Women's Day- a luxury for some

SOUGATA MUKHOPADHYAY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 8. — For 42-year old Morium and 36-year old Rani Begum, International Women's Day doesn't mean a thing. Those are "luxuries for free people", they say.

These women are Bangladeshi nationals who were arrested on charges of infiltration and put in jail. They were released by the court but still being held captive at the Howrah District Correctional Home. They have been languishing behind bars for more than two months and don't know whether they will ever return to their homes, beyond the border.

The reason for their plight is the bureaucratic paraphernalia which shrouds the process of releasing illegal immigrants. It often takes months.

"Currently there are 11 illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators staying at Howrah district jail who have been officially released by the court. That figure is exclusive of



**Bangladeshi women at Howrah jail. — The Statesman**

the children accompanying them. Bombay. We paid a broker Rs 1200 per head for transporting us across. In Bombay we stayed for five months where I worked as a house maid while my husband worked as a construction worker. Then we were told that Bombay wasn't safe anymore for people like us. While returning to Bangladesh we were caught in

last *Sraavan* and went straight to

Mourigram in Howrah and since then this jail has been our address," narrated Rani, a resident of Kalia, Narail district. The infant on her lap cried incessantly as she spoke. "Our group has seven women, six men and eight children. We are awaiting release but that seems a distant dream," said Morium, adding, "We were returning home anyway..."

"We have already informed the BSF about the release of these prisoners. They are supposed to get in touch with their Bangladeshi counterparts for the push back. The BDR is supposed to verify credentials and locate the addresses and relatives of these immigrants. This is a time consuming affair and the Bangladesh government is less than cooperative," said Mr Mukherjee.

"The number of Bangladeshi prisoners has increased manifold over the past few months after certain states increased vigilance on such illegal immigrants," said Mr Gautam Mondal, jailer of Howrah Correctional Home.

# We will go ahead with the women's bill: PM

By Our Staff Correspondent

401  
8/3

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 7.** With the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal continuing to oppose the Women's Reservation Bill, the chances of its passage in the current session appear dim, even as the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, made it clear that the Government would push through the bill with a majority vote if a consensus proved to be elusive.

The all-party meet convened by Mr. Vajpayee here today to discuss the issue — hanging fire for the past five years — failed to arrive at a consensus, with the Samajwadi Party seeking more time to take up the matter with the Congress and the CPI (M). Mr. Vajpayee made it clear that while the minority voice was respected in a Parliamentary system, it would not be allowed to ask the majority to give up.

He told the Samajwadi Party chief, Mulayam Singh Yadav, that the Parliamentary system was run on a majority vote and asked him to discuss the bill with other parties within a fortnight, failing which it would be passed in Parliament with majority vote when the House met after recess. Officially, there was no word on whether the bill would be passed in its present form or with amendments.

While most parties favoured its passage or were willing to support the Election Commission's proposal for reservation by political parties, the two strong voices of dissent came from Mulayam Singh Yadav and the Rashtriya Janata Dal president, Laloo Prasad Yadav.

The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, strongly in favour of women's reservation, suggested that those wanting to discuss the bill further should inform the Government directly about their decision to enable the Centre to make up its mind. There was no need to hold

any more meetings, she said. Congress sources said that though the party was a staunch supporter of the bill it would still want a consensus on it.

The PMK, the Janata Dal (U), the Muslim League, the Samata Party and the TDP did not participate in the meeting while the AIADMK has extended support for the bill in toto. Among the NDA allies, the Shiv Sena has openly opposed the bill but favoured the EC's proposals. The Akali Dal and the Bahujan Samaj Party are ready for both the options. The RJD and the Samajwadi Party leaders had even demanded reservation for the Backward Classes, Dalits and Muslim women, which was turned down by the Prime Minister. Sticking to the earlier stand, Laloo Prasad Yadav wanted the quantum of reservation to be left to the parties, though he was not averse to giving 15 per cent seats to women. Not too happy with the option of passing the bill with a majority vote, he said he did not favour hurrying it through by threatening to pass it on the basis of numbers. At one point of time, he is reported to have said that the post of Prime Minister or President should also be reserved for women.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, said that the meeting had passed off well with most parties favouring the bill and many of them wanting to push it through in the current session of Parliament. "Mulayam Singh Yadav wanted more time to discuss the bill with the Congress and the CPI (M) with whom he was hopeful of arriving at a consensus. The Prime Minister accepted his request and gave him a fortnight," Ms. Swaraj said.

The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, said the Government had tried its best for a consensus, and would even support the Election Commission's proposal, if all parties agreed to it.

THE HINDU

8 MAR 2003

# NDA divided on women's quota bill

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The all-party meeting convened by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on Friday to evolve a consensus on the women's reservation bill ran into hurdles with several NDA constituents, along with the Samajwadi Party and the RJD, rejecting the legislation in its present form.

While the Samata Party, Janata Dal(U), TDP and the PMK stayed away from the meeting, the Shiv Sena and the Akali Dal opposed the bill in its present form and demanded that the Centre consider the Election Commission's proposal making it mandatory for political parties to

give 33 per cent tickets to women.

The government later indicated that it was planning to get the bill passed in the ongoing budget session. However, there was some ambiguity about whether the Centre would bring the pending bill providing for 33 per cent reservation for women in parliament and state legislatures or amend it in accordance with suggestions from various political parties.

Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani said while the government favoured the present bill, it was also open to the EC's proposal, if there was a consensus on it.

While the Congress, the Left parties, the BSP and the AIADMK were in favour of the bill be-

ing passed in its current form, RJD leader Laloo Prasad Yadav and SP chief Mulayam Singh Yadav demanded that the percentage be reduced to 20 and 15 per cent respectively. They also sought a quota within the quota for SC, BC and minority community women.

Both warned the Centre against rushing through with the legislation on the basis of its majority. But the remarks were not taken to kindly by Mr Vajpayee, who told them firmly that "parliamentary democracy functions on the basis of numbers and a minority view cannot be allowed to prevail over the majority view".

● See Speaking Tree and Sacred Space on Page 12

# Rights group urges Africa to end custom of wife inheritance

By Marc Lacey

**Nairobi:** When a Kenyan woman loses her husband, she also frequently loses her home, her land, her cows and all her other household property. What the widow gains, whether she likes it or not, is a new husband, frequently her brother-in-law.

Human Rights Watch issued a report on Wednesday condemning the traditional African practice of wife inheritance, in which a widow is transferred to a male relative of her deceased husband. Typically the new husband takes control of the property with or without the consent of the widow.

The custom, common throughout Kenya, extends far and wide in sub-Saharan Africa. Traditionally, elders say, the practice ensured that the extended family would take care of widows. But critics maintain that it strips women of their property rights and exposes them to sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS.

"Wife inheritance is often portrayed as an act of generosity in that the widow will have a man to 'look after' her and confer the legitimacy of being in a male-headed household," the report said. "But men clearly benefit not just from their inherited wife's labour and childbearing potential but also from the property the deceased husband leaves behind."

The report called on the government of President Mwai Kibaki, which has pledged better treatment of women, to overhaul the legal system so that

women have the same rights to property as men. The report recommends that judges and police officers undergo training on the issue and that a legal aid system be set up to assist destitute victims.

Marriage in Africa has a strong economic component. The potential groom typically agrees to give the family of a young bride cows or other property in exchange for the girl. He may or may not have more than a passing acquaintance with her. The bride then leaves her parents' home and moves near her in-laws.

The report found that widows have little recourse to retain family property after the death of their spouses or as a result of separation or divorce. Taking their claims to the judicial system is costly, and judges, relying more on tradition than law, do not necessarily side with the women.

"It should be remembered that a wife is married into the husband's clan," a Kenyan judge ruled in a 1997 separation case. "The matrimonial home in most cases lies within the clan land. It would therefore not be in keeping with our culture for the husband to be made to vacate the clan land for the wife."

In the Human Rights Watch report, researchers described many women who found relatives descending on their homes immediately after the burial of their husbands.

"My in-laws took everything, even wedding presents," a widow in Nairobi said. NYT News Service

# Immediate decision on women's quota bill needed: Gill

By Our Staff Correspondent

HD-13  
6-3  
**NEW DELHI, MARCH 5.** The Women's Reservation Bill, being debated for more than five years, must be passed in this session of Parliament itself, feels M.S.Gill, former Chief Election Commissioner. "Unfortunately, no progress has been made on this vital issue and in each session it is talked out for the next time. An immediate decision is necessary," he said.

"While we need more Indira Gandhis, Sonia Gandhis, Sushma Swarajs, Jayalithaas and Mayawatis, we cannot afford to choose the path of reservation for this purpose once again," Mr. Gill told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Gill, who was at the helm of affairs when the Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha. He feels that a small amendment in the Representation of Peoples Act, 1920, making it mandatory for all recognised political parties to reserve a percentage of seats for women in all States, would give women their due representation. "The percentage of reservation can be agreed upon mutually in Parliament by all political parties and any attempt to violate this, should result in derecognition of the party," says Mr. Gill who had come up with this proposal about four years ago and most political parties, even those opposed to reservation, had found it acceptable.

Having studied Indian politics during his stint as the Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. Gill feels that India had a history of reservation, which was not applied anywhere in the world. "I have been of the clear view that reservation is not the best solution to having adequate women representation. About 200 seats in a Parliament of 542 are

already reserved for SCs/STs while an equal number would be reserved for women if the Bill is through, that would leave a small number for the rest, upsetting the vibrant character of Parliament," he said.

Admitting that the number of women representatives in State Assemblies and Parliament was woefully inadequate, Mr. Gill says while more women must be given a chance to fight elections for Assemblies and Parliament, they must be fully involved and active in politics.

"The present problem is the result of a failure of the political parties to give women their due, its solution should not be looked for in yet one more Constitutional change," he points out. Reservation will result in unequal competition among the women legislators and Parliamentarians. "It is the political parties who are not giving adequate space to women in the political arena," he says. In the past 50 years, we have amended the Constitution 90 times and America about 20 in 200 years. At this rate we will have to re-write the Constitution in 100 years, he explains.

Concerned over the vibrancy and working health of Parliament and democracy, Mr. Gill believes if his proposal is accepted, women would get a massive ticket representation in the coming elections in several States and it would be the party bigwigs who would go looking for good and effective women candidates instead of the other way round. "It should be the political parties giving more space to women. We cannot straitjacket issues and destroy a firm democratic structure in the process because demand for reservations, at the present pace, will have no end."

THE HINDU

6 MAR 2003

# All-party meet on women's bill for Friday

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 4.** The all-party meeting being called by the Prime Minister to try and evolve a consensus on reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies has been re-scheduled for March 7, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, said here today.

Speaking informally with reporters, Ms. Swaraj, said that she had already begun the process of talking to party leaders individually. On her list of leaders she will be talking to are the AIADMK leader and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalithaa, Bahujan Samaj Party leader and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mayawati, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader and Bihar Chief Minister, Rabri Devi, and other leaders, especially women in other parties, including Jaya Jaitly of the Samata Party, and Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress.

"I am trying to approach the women leaders first," she said and added that she had already spoken to Ms. Rabri Devi.

The meeting will discuss the Women's Reservation Bill which would give 33 per cent reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies by declaring that one-third of all

seats be reserved for women. However, she had earlier made it clear that if there was no political consensus on this, then the Election Commission suggestion that it should be made mandatory for all parties to nominate women against one-third of the total seats they contest (with each State as a separate unit) should be considered.

The idea, she said, was to do something rather than nothing on this vital issue.

**THE HINDU**

**5 MAR 2003**

# Proof of rape in looted buses

ASTAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Feb. 26: The West Bengal Women's Commission today said it had gathered "substantial evidence" to suggest that six women, including four minor girls, were raped or molested when two luxury buses were looted on February 6.

The commission also accused Nadia police of trying to hush up the incident, which happened in Ainsmali village in the Dhantola police station area when the passengers, including 24 women, were returning from a wedding.

The police have so far arrested 17 people, including CPM zonal committee member Subol Bagchi, who teaches in a local school. Most of the looted valuables have been recovered from the house of Saidul Karigul, a former panchayat pradhan of the area. He has been arrested.

The incident happened on the midnight of February 6 when a gang of 20 attacked two packed luxury buses returning from a wedding. They forced the men on to the roofs of the buses, killed one of the drivers and raped or molested some women and minor girls before fleeing with the valuables.

Women's commission chairperson Yasodhara Bagchi alleged that the evidence gathered during an inquiry pointed to a nexus between the accused and the local police. She has demanded "exemplary punishment for the guilty policemen".

Asked why the rape victims had not complained to the police immediately after the incident, she said: "The victims have said

before our members conducting the inquiry that they feared social ostracism. Moreover, some of the victims told us that they had seen some of the rapists mingling with some of the local policemen."

After an independent inquiry, including lengthy interviews with 10 of the victims, the commission today demanded that the arrested persons be additionally charged with rape and molestation.

Bagchi and other key commission members, including former CPM legislator Malini Bhattacharya, also demanded that the government take immediate steps to punish the culprits and arrange for medical tests of the rape victims.

"We don't rule out molestation of more women. They are feeling extremely scared to reveal what actually happened that night," Bagchi said. The commission members urged the government to keep the victims' identity "strictly confidential".

Bagchi claimed that the police tried to suppress information when the commission members visited the area on February 16 and 23.

"The officer-in-charge of Dhantola police station, Subhas Roy, told us repeatedly that he had not received any complaint of rape and molestation from the victims, despite the fact that the helper of a bus, Dilip Ghosh, had specified that the women were raped," she said.

Bagchi said the officers even denied that the victims were dragged out of the buses and severely assaulted.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ▶

## Bus rape

▶ FROM PAGE 1

"We had taken 161 statements from bus passengers and they were all identical," she claimed.

A three-member team from the National Commission for Women summoned state home secretary Amit Kiran Deb and director-general of police D. C. Vajpai to Great Eastern Hotel this morning for a briefing.

The three members — Sudha Malaiya, Nafissa Hussein and former Delhi police commissioner T.R. Kakkar — will leave for the village tomorrow for an "on-the-spot inquiry". Retired judge Kalyanmoy Ganguly will accompany them.

Later, speaking to **The Telegraph**, deputy inspector general of police, CID, Raj Kanojia said police had started a case under the Indian Penal Code last Saturday.

"We had sent a team from our women's cell to speak to the victims. They lodged a complaint of rape and molestation on Friday and we started a case on that day," he said.

27 FEB 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# War on women <sup>wj2</sup>

**W**ARS have almost always been started by men. And it's the women who've paid the price. Atrocities against women have been committed during wars, from the ancient to the modern times. Another war is looming over Iraq and it too like others will be a story of politics, power and money. Wars create economic hardship, worsened by displacement of people, lack of food, water and healthcare. And it's the women who struggle to protect and feed their children and dear ones.

In war, men are killed, maimed, tortured and burnt. But women and children, who have little to do with wars, are often the worse victims — of sexual abuse, rape forced abortion, sexual enslavement and forced pregnancy.

War means horror — the horror of women gangraped before parents, brothers and sisters; the horror an entire village forced see the rape of an elderly woman, losing her dignity and honour with each scream; the inhuman pain of women looking among the dead for their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons; the indescribable feeling of a young girl, who has lost her father in war and seen her mother being shot, waiting at the border to cross into the safety of a neighbouring state; and the irreparable premature loss of childhood of millions of children.

How do you describe the desperation of a woman trying to save her honour? How do you measure the value of her tears? How do you justify a child's loss of innocence? The price of war is terrible and yet it continues to be a part of modern history.

How much has changed from the medieval ages to Nanking 1936, when marauding Chinese soldiers raped and killed hundreds and thousands of Chinese, or, from 1972, when hundreds and thousands more suffered the same fate at the hands of Pakistani soldiers in Bangladesh? Nothing much it seems, for women had to go through the same hell in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Somalia in

the early Nineties.

But not all men have ignored the horrors of war. The "Ordinances of War" promulgated by King Richard in 1385 and King Henry V in 1419 made war crimes, such as rape, punishable by death. By the 19th-20th centuries, more laws had evolved, thanks to The Hague and Geneva Conventions. The 1993 UN Conference on Human Rights, the Vienna Declaration, and The UN 4th World (Beijing) Conference on Women (1995) recognised war crimes such as rape as an "act of genocide and crime against humanity". These laws meant the perpetrators of crime against women could be punished.

The International Crime Tribunal for former Yugoslavia convicted three Bosnian Serbs, Radomir Kovac, Dragoljub Kunarac and Zoran Vukovic, about two years ago for crimes against humanity. The judgment came as a relief not only for the victims, but also for all women because it was the first conviction for rape committed during a war.

But such convictions are exceptions rather than the rule. Laws will remain empty words on paper without the guarantee of their implementation.

Women have always been easy targets, for physical and sexual abuse. Refugee camps guarantee little relief. Women — mothers, pregnant women, need good food, which they rarely get in camps. Poor healthcare facilities and cultural bigotry make it difficult for them to get proper medical aid. But the story of women in war is not only of fear and tragedy. It's about immense courage too. But their voices are yet to be heard fully.

This is an era when women's organisations and rights have gained much prominence. But women's progress will be halted if we don't seriously address the violation of women's rights during wars. Fighting against such atrocities is not only every woman's responsibility but also every man's duty.

*(The author is a freelance contributor.)*

Why is it that  
men wage wars  
and women  
suffer, asks  
FATIMA  
CHOWDHURY

THE STATESMAN

20 FEB 2003



G-10  
16/2

## SINS OF COMMISSION *women*

**S**ilence can be more expressive than words. The long silence of the state women's commission following the atrocities perpetrated on the women in the vehicles forcibly stopped at Dhantala in Nadia says a host of things. The loudest message is simple: the Party is above all. Unfortunately for the women's commission, the police this time were quick to discover the kingpins behind the robbery, murder and assault. They were two local Communist Party of India (Marxist) leaders, in league with known criminals of the area. This was enough to silence the state women's commission, most of the present members of which owe allegiance to the CPI(M), and all of whom have been rewarded with such eminence because of the fiery and intellectually substantial roles they have played in defence of women's rights.

Corruption is of many kinds, and it creeps up unregarded. The inertia of the state women's commission is a symptom of one of the most dangerous kinds, that of the perversion of the intellect. There are just too many instances in history of such perversion among the best-intentioned, the most educated and articulate, to harbour illusions about what this spells — for democracy, civic order, justice, equality and freedom of speech. In this case, the initial silence of the commission, and the statements and decisions that have dribbled out later, show that every single principle upon which the search for justice for victimized women is based has been turned on its head. It is an added — and piercing — irony that some of the leading members

of the present commission have struggled to establish these very principles. No investigating team rushed to the site, either to identify the victims and offer them support or to ensure that medical and police records were correctly made wherever possible. Instead, evidence was left to be lost according to the will of the powers that rule the area. The commission's half-hearted invitation to the women to come and depose before it or decide on a place where they could be interviewed was obviously meaningless. The commission and other women's bodies usually work on the assumption of women's difficul-

ties in speaking up. That is why such bodies do not wait for a formal complaint before investigation. More amazing is the commission's quibbling over the words, molestation and rape. "Possibly rape" can only mean that the commission has not even tried to investigate the crime, and it is covering up its inaction with words that trivialize the sufferings of women — some still in their teens —

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**The initial silence of the state women's commission on the assault on women in Dhantala is proof that the party's interest may override the very purpose of such bodies**

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at the hands of ruthless criminals. Apparently, the women's commission finds it worth its while to devalue women's sufferings upon occasion.

Not one principle has survived. The chairperson, Ms Jasodhara Bagchi, has even said that the commission will not speak to the media, since the media are politicizing the issue. Transparency is suddenly a foreign concept, since justice is no longer the goal. And the politicking villains are of course the media, because there are still voices there which dare to question the presumably non-politic silences of august bodies.

THE TELEGRAPH

16 FEB 2003

women  
19-10

## GENDER AND JUSTICE

IN A WEEK when the country mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished daughters, Kalpana Chawla, who was among the seven astronauts killed in the disaster that struck the space shuttle, Columbia, it is impossible to reconcile the heights women world-over have risen to in all walks of life with the rampant practice in some societies in the Asian region of terminating pregnancies to prevent the birth of girl children. But female foeticide — with the aid of the most advanced scientific knowledge — continues to haunt our collective conscience and, short of a concerted all-round effort to rid society of this pernicious practice, we may well be on the verge of touching a new low in terms of the abuse of modern science. The basis for hope against such a cynical forecast is, however, to be found in growing public vigilantism that has made enormous strides in recent years in checking the spread of negative trends in the health sector.

First, it was hectic lobbying by public health and women's activists with parliamentarians that led to the adoption of amendments to the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act in the winter session of Parliament. The enlarged scope of the new law, above all, brings within its ambit more recent advances such as pre-conception sex-selective technologies. Parallely, there has been a country-wide campaign to create public awareness on the seemingly innocuous manner of preventing the birth of girl children which, in reality, amounts to nothing less than legitimising deep-seated prejudices and discriminatory practices against women. For, it has been a common refrain among many that foeticide is a lesser evil than infanticide and as such sex-selective abortions in themselves do not militate

against the spirit of gender justice. The spotlight was finally turned on the media lap in New Delhi with a fervent plea to constantly strive to expose vested interests in society that attempt to set the clock back with respect to women's emancipation. A particularly notorious aspect of this being the glorification of ultrasound scanning as a technology that affords couples a choice in a domain of human life that hitherto belonged to the realm of providence.

Thus, while the complementary role of the political Executive and the Judiciary has been responsible primarily for placing the social and demographic implications of sex-determination and consequent abortion of female foetuses in the national mainstream, the medical fraternity has clearly been found wanting in summoning the requisite motivation and courage to intervene effectively on the ground. Admittedly, the hurdles at this level are formidable, requiring coordinated action between various departments of the local administration. This, however, does not detract from the need for professional bodies such as the Medical Council of India (MCI) to send out clear signals of a commitment to deal firmly with delinquent physicians and surgeons. But the MCI's code of medical ethics is, as on date, not even harmonised with the law insofar as the revised code of 2002 deems sex-determination an offence only if an intent to foeticide can be proved. There is also a Delhi High Court Order of last March requiring appropriate revision of the code which the body has failed to act upon. Considering that doctors constitute a critical link between lending force to progressive legislation on the one hand and the proliferation of clandestine medical practices on the other, the urgency for the above reforms cannot be overstated.

# Keep in mind the larger questions

The electoral battle in Tripura is not only affecting an exploited people's rights of decision-making, but also the struggle for gender equality, writes **Brinda Karat**

communities, women and youth. Of the 23 people killed by terrorists since the announcement of the elections, 21 are CPI(M) cadre or members of left-oriented mass organizations, of whom one third are women.

For national women's movements, the experience of women in Tripura adds a new dimension to the understanding of the way the politics of terrorism and violence has affected women and, in particular, the most marginalized sections such as the tribal women of Tripura. There is a fair amount of literature that documents women's experience in, what is termed in United Nations language as, "conflict situations" such as war, ethnic strife, terrorist attacks, state terrorism and so on.

The term "conflict", though widely used, could be quite inappropriate in many situations since it assumes an equally participative role of the two sides in creating the conflict. In any case, it is known that in such situations women often become targets of sexual assault; suffer long-lasting mental trauma with serious consequences on their health, including weight loss and insomnia; face homelessness, loss of work and income. In addition, as mothers, sisters, wives or daughters of those who have been killed or reported as "missing", women have not only had to deal with their own grief at the loss of their loved ones but have also had to shoulder economic responsibilities of families.

In Tripura, the impact of violence on women means all this and much more. The added dimension is that in Tripura, which has a vibrant women's movement, women become targets because of their activism and their courageous refusal to surrender to terrorist dictates. While in the rest of the country, women struggle for an increased role in public life, in Tripura, unlettered tribal women are showing, to those willing to listen and learn, a different aspect of that struggle.

In the name of preserving "tribal identity", terrorists have dictated dress codes to tribal women — not to wear *sindoor*, sarees, to wear only the tribal dress, not to fraternize with women of non-tribal communities. Marriages between tribals and non-

tribals Tripura and Anjali Pal did not know each other, but their deaths within days of each other were no coincidence. Premila was a young tribal woman, barely nineteen-years-old, living in the village of Jamircharra in the Dhaloi district of Tripura. Anjali, blind from birth, about the same age as Premila, lived in Phatikrai in north Tripura.

On January 12, Premila was kidnapped, raped and killed by a group of armed men belonging to a banned terrorist group called the National Liberation Front of Tripura. Two days later, Anjali's house was attacked. Her father, a known supporter of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), was shot and killed. Anjali, hearing the gunshots, unable to see, ran out calling to her father. The terrorists trained their weapons on her and she, too, was shot dead.

The thread that connected these two young women, Premila, a tribal and Anjali, a Bengali, was their association with the local units of the Tripura Nari Samity, a constituent of the All India Democratic Women's Association, and their participation in the activities of the organization. There are many such chilling examples of terrorist violence against women in Tripura.

The immediate context of the increased violence by terrorist groups is the forthcoming state assembly elections scheduled in February. The aim is to subvert the electoral process through the spread of terror and intimidation, a repeat of the cynical strategies adopted prior to the Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council elections in 2000. In Kashmir, the agenda of groups backed by the Inter-Services Intelligence was to prevent free and fair elections. In Tripura, the terrorists with similar international contacts, have similar aims, but in addition — and this is the most significant difference — the major target is a political one, the annihilation of the left cadre and in particular, tribal activists.

The largest number of victims of terrorist violence are leaders and cadre of the CPI(M), the main left party in the state, as well as left-oriented mass organizations of different sections of the people like tribal

tribals have been banned by terrorist organizations. A circular was issued against family planning, promising Rs 1,000 to every tribal woman at the birth of a child. Tribal women have been forbidden to associate with any organization that has Bengali members.

In the name of "tradition", the influence of *ojhas* or witchdoctors has been upheld and their right to identify witches is backed with the gun. An activist, Lakshmi Deb Barma, a tea-garden worker and member of a union who refused to accept the terrorist orders to disassociate from the union, was declared a witch by an *ojha* and killed in the dead of night by an NLFT squad.

Month after month, tribal women activists in the Tripura Nari Samity have been in confrontation at the village level, often paying a heavy price. They have been tortured and threatened, their children threatened with death if they did not leave their work with the Nari Samity. The women arrange their own meetings secretly, sometimes at the village wells, sometimes in the village markets, where, amid the crowd, their talk would go unnoticed.

After one such meet of women of different communities, an activist, Shanti of Tajar-kala, was picked up by a terrorist squad and made to stand in cold water for several hours as punishment for talking to non-tribals. Today, she is active in the election campaign.

Among the Bengali community also, a Bengali terrorist group called the United Bengal Liberation Tigers has threatened Bengali women activists in the same way. What a different connotation the term "women's unity" has for activists in Tripura who defend that unity at extremely high personal cost. It is because of their efforts, along with those of other organizations, that the terrorist offensive could be checked and unarmed poor tribal women and men could assert their opposition to the terrorists, isolating them and weakening them.

If there is any state in the country where there is political resistance to divisive politics and terrorist attacks at the grassroots

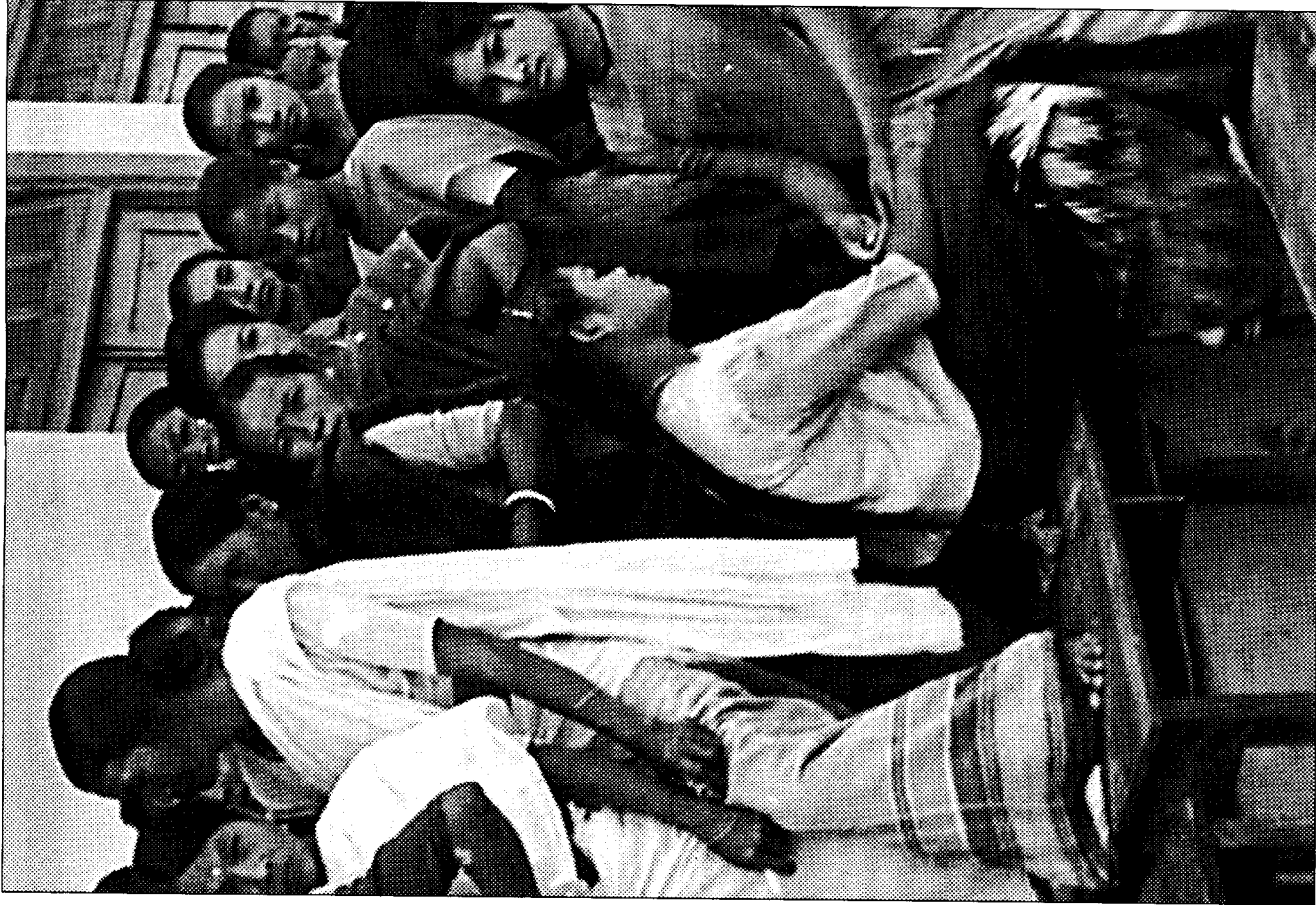
level, from house to house, from hamlet to hamlet, from village to village in the most remote areas where it takes over a day to reach from one village to the next, it is in Tripura, under the leadership of the left. For all its tall claims about its fight against terrorism, the truth is that where the battles are being fought, the Bharatiya Janata Party is nowhere in the picture.

At the same time in Delhi, the BJP-led Central government is not providing sufficient forces on the border with Bangladesh, in spite of repeated requests from the state government. On the borders in Kashmir or in Assam, the number of battalions posted can ensure that one battalion covers from 15 to 28 kilometres of the border, whereas the lack of such forces on the 865 km unfenced Tripura border means that one battalion has to guard a distance of over 95 km. This enables the terrorists to easily move to their 50 or more bases across the border in Bangladesh after committing their ghastly crimes.

As far as the Congress is concerned, to its utter shame and in its desperation to grab power, it has openly allied itself in the elections with the political front of the banned NLFT, a recently formed outfit calling itself the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura. The grotesque nature of the alliance was seen in the recent massacre in Bikramnagar when terrorists attacked a hamlet predominantly of CPI(M) supporters, killing 11 people, four of whom were women and two of whom were children. Three houses which belonged to known Congress supporters were left untouched.

It would be entirely wrong to reduce or limit the issues in Tripura to an analysis of electoral battle between parties. Such an analysis would conceal how the current offensive of terrorist groups and the alliance of a mainstream national party like the Congress with them affects basic issues concerning democratic rights and governance, issues of national unity and integration, peoples participation in decision-making processes, how it affects the rights of deprived and exploited communities, how it affects struggles for gender equality and advance.

**¶ If there is any state in the country where there is political resistance to divisive politics at the grassroots level, from house to house, from hamlet to hamlet, it is in Tripura under the leadership of the left**



Victims of an unequal war

# 'Neo-liberal globalisation a threat to women'

By Our Staff Reporter

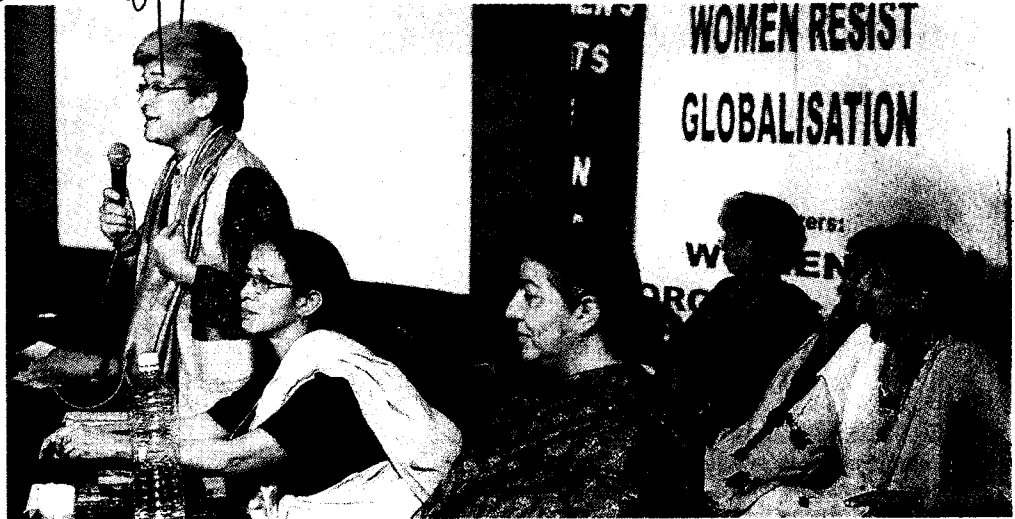
HYDERABAD, JAN. 5. The conference on women at the Asian Social Forum on Sunday agreed that neo-liberal globalisation and militarisation posed the greatest threat to women and men.

The conference, held on the theme "women resist globalisation", was addressed by Gigi Francisco from the Philippines who said that radical democracy and activism from below were the key strategies to create a better world.

Quoting Pablo Neruda — "you can trample the flowers, but you cannot stop the spring from coming" — Kamal Bhasin of Sangat/Jagori, Delhi, expressed the hope of an eternally renewing spring for women. But, Vandana Shiva, Director, Navadhanya, pointed out that the seasons were changing as a result of environmental piracy by corporations aided by the WTO regulations.

Ms. Shiva said the intellectual property rights regime was branding women as criminals. Ordinary rights such as digging a well, retaining seed and growing food were being taken away from women. Food, water and other natural resources were being "disinvested" from women. She called for the unification of dalits, adivasis, women and minorities to take on globalisation.

Subhashini Ali of All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), in her keynote address to the session on 'Women as producers of wealth', said women, waged and unwaged, were producers of wealth. Globalisation sought to deprive women of their control over specific forms of eco-



Nikhat Sayeed Khan, an activist from Pakistan, addressing the 'Conference on Women Resist Globalisation' at the Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad on Sunday. Seated in the foreground is the environmentalist, Vandana Shiva. — Photo: P.V. Sivakumar

nomie production. They must unite and move beyond the divisive forces of class, caste and religion to retain and reclaim control of the economy.

The consequences of opening economies to free trade and exploitation of women were recounted by S. Chandrawathie, an activist of the Free Trade Zone Workers' Union of Sri Lanka. "Working in the free trade zones has given us economic independence, but the social stigmatisation that accompanies this makes us wonder whether it is worth it."

In the session on 'Women and violence', the keynote speaker from Palestine, Rana Nishashibi, said the U.N. Security Council had become the 'war council'. She said 55 per cent of the Palestinians lived below the poverty line and 55 per cent were unemployed.

Latifa Giteli from Godhra said she had never worked outside

her house before the Gujarat riots. A trip to a relief camp to see her relatives inspired her to help others whose need was greater.

Thin-Thin Aung of the Women's League, Myanmar, said the women in exile were essential to reconciliation and the peace-building process in her country.

Neelam Hussain, a tenant rights activist from Lahore in Pakistan, said the struggle of women in Pakistan was also the struggle of women in India. Iraqi economist, Amal Shalash, said the sanctions against Iraq were not on account of human rights violations, but because it had resisted imperialism.

Speakers from India, Japan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, who spoke at the conference on dalits, other social groups and globalisation, said that the withdrawal of the State from economic and social governance as part of the structural adjustment pro-

grammes had thrown the marginalised groups to the market where they faced discriminatory access and exclusion.

Nazomi Bando of Buraku Liberation League of Japan spoke of how globalisation had an adverse impact on the 3 million Buraku people of Japan who were confined to certain occupations considered demeaning because of their 'impurity'.

Padmalal Viswakarma of Dalit Preparatory Committee, Nepal, said the dalits in Nepal were extreme 'sudras' who were discriminated against not only by the 'brahmins' but also the 'adivasis' under the influence of Hinduism. Bhalchan Mungekar, Vice-Chancellor, Bombay University, said globalisation was not only an economic policy or technological development, it was an alternative development paradigm which was against the interests of the dalits, poor and marginalised groups.

THE HINDU

6 JAN 2000