

Pak man says he killed daughters for 'family honour'

Multan: Nazir Ahmed appears calm and unrepentant as he recounts how he slit the throats of his three young daughters and their 25-year old stepsister to salvage his family's "honour"—a crime that shocked Pakistan.

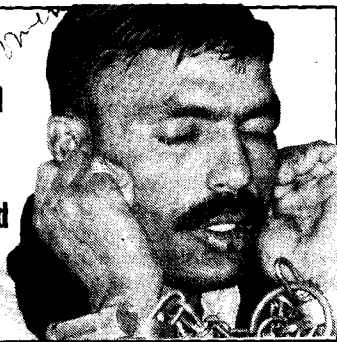
The 40-year old labourer, speaking to AP in police detention as he was being shifted to jail, confessed to just one regret—that he didn't murder the stepsister's alleged lover too.

Hundreds of girls and women are murdered by male relatives each year in this conservative Islamic nation, and rights groups said Wednesday such "honour killings" will only stop when authorities get serious about punishing perpe-

and Humaira, 4—pausing between the slayings to brandish the bloodstained knife at his wife, warning her not to intervene or raise alarm. "I was shivering with fear. I did not know how to save my daughters," Bibi, sobbing, told AP by phone from the village. "I begged my husband to spare my daughters but he said, 'If you make a noise, I will kill you.'" "The whole night the bodies of my daughters lay in front of me. I did not have the sense to know what has happened." The next morning, Ahmed was arrested. He said he killed Muqadas because she had committed adultery, and his daughters because he didn't want them to do the same when they grew up.

'I thought the younger girls would do what their eldest sister had done, so they should be eliminated'

NAZIR AHMED



trators. The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said that in more than half of such cases that make it to court, most are settled with cash settlements paid by relatives to the victims' families, although under a law passed last year, the minimum penalty is 10 years, the maximum is death by hanging.

Ahmed's killing spree—witnessed by his wife Rehmat Bibi as she cradled their 3 month-old baby son—happened on Friday night at their home in the cotton-growing village of Gago Mandi in eastern Punjab province.

It is the latest of more than 260 such honour killings documented by the rights commission, mostly from media reports, during the first 11 months of 2005. Bibi recounted how she was woken by a shriek as Ahmed put his hand to the mouth of his stepdaughter Muqadas and struck her in the throat with a machete. Bibi looked helplessly on from the corner of the room as he then killed the three girls—Bano, 8, Sumaira, 7,

He said he bought a butcher's knife and a machete after midday prayers on Friday and hid them in the house where he carried out the killings.

"I thought the younger girls would do what their eldest sister had done, so they should be eliminated," he said, his hands cuffed, his face unshaven. "We are poor people and we have nothing else to protect but our honour." Despite Ahmed's contention that Muqadas had committed adultery, the rights commission reported that according to local people, Muqadas had fled her husband because he had abused her and forced her to work in a brick-making factory.

Muqadas was Bibi's daughter by her first marriage to Ahmed's brother, who died 14 years ago. Ahmed married his brother's widow, which is customary under Islamic tradition. "Women are treated as property and those committing crimes against them do not get punished," said the rights commission's director, Kamla Hyat. AP

Woman assaulted in train raid

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Lucknow, Dec. 22: A gang of armed youths stormed Pushpak Express last night and allegedly raped a newly married woman before pushing three men out of the train.

The woman said she was "sexually assaulted" but refused to go for a medical test.

Armed with guns and knives, eight to 10 youths — all in their twenties — boarded the Mumbai-bound train around 10 pm in Bhopal and went on a looting spree.

When the train neared Vidisha, about 60 km away, they dragged the woman to the toilet and allegedly raped her.

The gang terrorised the passengers of the unreserved compartment for an hour and a half, snatching valuables and thrashing some of them.

Three passengers, Akhilesh, Ajay and Sanjay, all in their late twenties, tried to put up a resistance and slapped one of the goons. The thug retaliated by firing a shot at Ajay. The gang then took the three to the edge of the door and kicked them out. The goons pulled the chain between Kulhar and Bina and fled.

The three youths have been admitted to a hospital in Jhansi and their condition is

said to be critical.

"They did sexually assault me. I kept begging them to take all my money and ornaments but let me go, but two of them pounced on me," the 22-year-old woman said in her statement to Jhansi police.

But she refused to go for a medical check-up. "What will happen even if she goes for the test? Such criminals are never brought to book," said one of her relatives in Lucknow.

Her mother-in-law, who was accompanying her, said: "They first demanded jewellery and, when I parted with everything I had, they said these were not pure gold. Then they began to abuse me in filthy language and dragged my daughter-in-law from her seat."

Another witness, 32-year-old Kunti Kanaujia, said "no one dared to protest", as the goons were beating up those who did. The passengers later registered a case with the Jhansi Government Railway Police.

Amitabh Lal, the divisional manager of Northern Railway, said police jawans on the train could not reach the coach as "it was not connected with the sleeper coaches".

Railway minister Lalu Prasad described the incident as "unfortunate" and has ordered a probe.

Raj quits Sena, to launch new party

Blasts Uddhav's Leadership, Spurned Bal Thackeray's Proposal

Mumbai: Rebel leader Raj Thackeray on Sunday quit the Shiv Sena and announced the formation of a new political outfit next year. "I have sought respect, but all I got was humiliation," Raj told a press conference at Shivaji Park in central Mumbai. The dissident leader, however, made it clear that he was not joining any other political party.

"After I announced my decision to quit all Sena posts, several party MPs, MLAs and corporators had contacted me saying they are with me. But, I do not want to create my party by breaking the Sena," Raj said.

In a letter to Sena chief Bal Thackeray on November 25, he said he had written that "under the leadership of his cousin and Sena executive president Uddhav Thackeray, the party was stinking and Uddhav should be held accountable for party's debacle in Mahan Assembly poll."

"No such thing happened. The Sena, with Uddhav and his coterie taking all decisions, has been floundering in the past six-seven years," Raj said.

"When I met my uncle Bal Thackeray at his residence on December 15, he proposed that I look after Pune, Nasik and Konkan re-



Raj Thackeray, flanked by his supporters, addresses a press conference at Dadar in Mumbai on Sunday

gions, a proposal which I rejected," Raj said. "That was not the proposal of Sena chief but of someone else," he said in an apparent reference to Uddhav.

Raj said "I want to set up a new party in order to realise the dream of the Sena chief for Maharashtra and also my dream for the state." Explaining the delay of 20 days in announcing his decision, Raj said "You are

aware of the phase that I was passing through. On the one hand was my party and on the other my home."

"The Sena chief was, is and will be my God," he said and equated Bal Thackeray once again with Lord Vitthal. Asked if the "temple" (political party) he would set up in the name of his Lord Vitthal would succeed, Raj said "I will make all efforts. In my letter, I also told him that the Sena should be re-structured in order to regain the lost glory. For this, your time starts now," Raj said.

The rebel leader said he would undertake a tour of Maharashtra and after that would make public policies and ideologies of his new party. "After I announced my decision to quit party posts, I had received 2-3 phone calls from the Sena chief but I refused to answer them," Raj said.

When asked what would happen to his ties with the Thackeray family, Raj said "How do I know what is in store for future?" About Sena chief's reaction when he spurned his proposal, Raj said, "This is a very personal thing... May be he did not like what I had to say." To a query, he said no name had so far been decided for his new political outfit. Agencies

SENA WAR ■ Claims support of MPs and MLAs, says those who celebrated after Raj's announcement not 'true Shivsainiks'

Raj's exit sad but won't affect party: Uddhav

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, DECEMBER 18

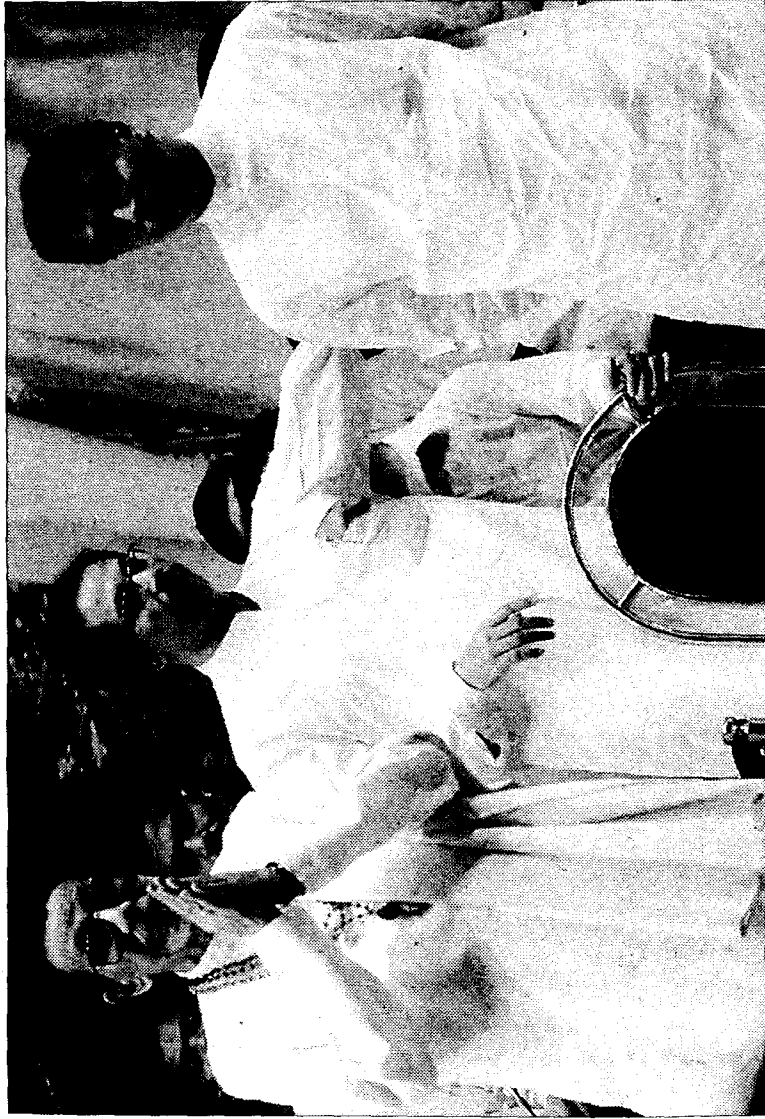
S HIV Sena executive president Uddhav Thackeray, the man behind Raj Thackeray's exit from the party, today said the "real Shivsainiks" were saddened by Raj's move but added that his leaving "won't make any difference to the party."

Talking to mediapersons at Matoshree, Uddhav said though he was the executive president and Raj had accused him of favouritism, no decision relating to the party was taken without Bal Thackeray's consent. He added all his decisions and actions were for the party's benefit. "I haven't done anything which would benefit me personally."

Uddhav said those who celebrated after Raj's announcement today were not "true Shivsainiks."

"I have felt sad, as have lakhs of Shivsainiks across the state, but the Shivsainiks have faith in Balasaheb. Many corporators, MLAs and MPs have called me up to express support for the party," he said, adding that the party's work would go on as usual. "But our doors are still open to Raj," he said.

Meanwhile, Sanjay Nirupam, who quit Sena to join the Congress, described the upheaval in the Sena



as imminent. "It had to happen. If Raj really works hard among the lower levels, tours the state extensively, he will be able to create some base for his party. Now the real challenge to Uddhav will be from Raj and not the Congress or NCP. He will have to become more accessible

and keep the base intact," Nirupam said. Chhagan Bhujbal, one of the first leaders to be expelled from the party, said this was the beginning of Sena's decline.

Vinod Tawde, chief of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Mumbai unit said he was saddened by the turn of

events. "This has come at a time when Opposition parties needed to become strong. It is people's loss."

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) general secretary Gurunath Kulkarni extended his best wishes to Raj "if he shows the guts to form a new party."

The history of Shiv Sena

- Formed in Mumbai on June 19, 1966. Among those present at the first meeting is Congress leader Ramrao Adik. Congress encourages Sena to counter the growing influence of CPI among textile workers.
- First Dassera rally at Shivaji Park on October 30, 1966.
- First major political achievement in 1968 when it wins 42 seats in Bombay Municipal Corporation in alliance with Prajatantra Socialist Party.
- First street-battle over Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute in 1969. Hotels belonging to Kannadigas attacked. Sena picks up momentum as it plays "Mairathi Maroos" card.
- Sena-CPI clashes culminate in the murder of CPI MLA Krishna Desai in 1970, taking Sena to a position of prominence among textile workers and in state politics.
- Captures BMC in 1985. Starts spreading with leaders like Chhagan Bhujbal (the only MLA in 1985), Anand Dighe, Narayan Rane and Chandrakant Khaire. As Mayor of Bombay, Bhujbal renames the city as Mumbai.
- In 1988, Raj (21 then) makes political debut, organises a rally of unemployed youths. Made chief of the Bharatiya Vidyarthi Sena the next year.
- In 1989, Sena, in alliance with BJP since 1984, latches on to the Hindutva plank.
- First major rebellion in 1992 when Bhujbal quits with 18 MLAs.
- In 1995, Sena-BJP wrests power from the Congress. Manohar Joshi made chief minister. Rane succeeds him in 1999.
- In 1999, Sena-BJP loses power to Congress-NCP.
- Uddhav made executive president of Sena in 2002. Raj proposes his name.
- Sena loses Assembly polls in 2004 under Uddhav's leadership.
- In November 27, 2005, Raj resigns as Sena leader and chief of Vidyarthi Sena.
- November 29: Bal Thackeray hits out at Raj in Saarna.
- November 30: Sena MLAs led by leader of Opposition Ramdas Kodam meet Raj, ask him to compromise.
- December 9: Raj's wife Sharmila invites Bal Thackeray for a party to celebrate her father's birthday. Thackeray stays away. Uddhav not invited.
- December 12: Peace formula flops as Uddhav demands an apology from Raj.
- December 15: Raj meets Bal Thackeray, remains defiant.
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19 DEC 2005

Raj Thackeray resigns from Shiv Sena

112-1 19/12

To announce formation of political party next year

Special Correspondent

MUMBAI: Raj Thackeray quit the Shiv Sena on Sunday, saying he had done his best to stay but could not. Making the announcement at a press conference, he said he would form a political party soon.

He would tour Maharashtra next year and then decide on the party's formation, what line it should take, and how it should function.

Mr. Raj resigned as Shiv Sena leader and president of the Bharatiya Vidyarthi Sena, the party's youth wing, on November 27.

He said since his resignation from the party posts, the media had been in a big hurry to know his future plans. Nobody had any idea of what he had undergone after quitting the party posts. "What I suffered should not be inflicted even on my enemies. I was caught between the party on the one side and my family, on the other."

Since morning, his supporters started gathering outside his house in Shivaji Park. The road leading to the press conference venue, Shivaji Park gymkhana, was packed with people carrying banners and posters. Mr. Raj's announcement was greeted with bursts of crackers and slogans.

Met Bal Thackeray

He said he had met Sena chief and uncle, Bal Thackeray, a few days ago. He did not disclose what took place at the meeting but said Mr. Bal Thackeray had offered him charge of three regions — Nasik, Pune and Konkan.

"I told him my thinking was



An emotional Raj Thackeray at the press conference in Mumbai.

different, and it was not possible for me to work like this any longer," Mr. Raj said. "Why should I look after the Konkan region," he asked, indicating that someone else was behind the suggestion.

He read out the letter he sent to Mr. Bal Thackeray on November 25, where he had castigated the functioning of the party and the fact that it lost the Malvan by-election. He asked if working president Uddhav Thackeray was not accountable for the defeat.

As there was no response to the letter, he quit the party posts.

"Still a God"

Reiterating that Mr. Bal Thackeray was still "god" for him, Mr. Raj said his political thinking was similar to that of his uncle; therefore, he could not join another party. He had examined all possibilities, and he

felt that a new party was necessary for Maharashtra's sake. He did not want to split the Sena and take people away from the party. Many elected Sena members had called him to express their support.

"He is my brother"

At Matoshree, Mr. Bal Thackeray's residence, some Sena supporters gathered to express support.

Talking to mediapersons, Mr. Uddhav Thackeray expressed sadness at Mr. Raj's move. "Apart from being in the same party, Raj is also my brother," he said.

"I have been saying that he should come and talk about the issues which he raised, but his stand did not change even after he met my father." It was natural for him, his father and all Shiv Sainiks to feel bad about Mr. Raj's decision, and none wanted this to happen.

"Raj's decision to quit was sudden, and he gave no indication of what was to come. I did not expect this of Raj. While Raj refused to accept the proposal put forward by Mr. Bal Thackeray, he also did not say what he wanted."

"Some misunderstanding"

Mr. Uddhav said his father was aware of what was going on in the party, and he had full control. "He may wear goggles, but he is no Dritharashtra."

"If there was something remiss with the party, Balasaheb would have noticed it," he said. "The issues raised by Mr. Raj are a result of some misunderstanding."

BPO murder rings Calcutta alarm

BISWARUP GOOPTU & ZEESHAN JAWED

Calcutta, Dec. 17: The rape and murder of a BPO employee in Bangalore by the driver of her office pick-up car has jolted Calcutta's IT and ITES industry into taking a fresh look at its own safety practices.

Prathiba Murthy was attacked while being driven home alone late last night in a car hired by her office. For many women call-centre workers in Calcutta, the crime has driven home a chilling truth: that they could be equally at risk.

With most city tech firms situated in Salt Lake's Sector V, with its poorly-lit roads and dodgy reputation for safety, senior BPO executives were today reassessing their companies' security policies and the way these are enforced.

Most IT and ITES firms

have watertight security on their campus with outsiders put through a round of questioning and frisking. But outside the campus, in the dead of the night, it's a different story.

"I leave my office sometime after midnight. The roads are dark and deserted. We do spot police patrols... but the general feeling is they can increase the numbers of patrols," Ratan Jain of BNKE Solutions said.

What's worrying most techies is that Bangalore was considered as safe a city for women as Calcutta.

"We try and make sure that women agents aren't the last to be dropped home," said Atanu Guha Thakurta, head regulatory, Airtel.

"The Bangalore incident has given us a loud wake-up call," admitted Satadru Sinha, senior executive (administra-

SECURITY TIPS

For industry

- Have a supervisor in the car who will be present during pick-ups and drop-offs
- Ensure women aren't first to be picked up or last to be dropped home
- Check backgrounds of travel agencies and drivers, if necessary with help from police
- Tell drivers never to stop car unless there's an emergency
- Give each driver a mobile phone
- Tell women employees to carry mobiles and call home or office from time to time, if possible

For administration

- Increase police patrols
- Maintain roads and streetlights

tion) with Cognizant Technology Solutions.

"At Cognizant, (we have) a supervisor and administrator present during all pick-ups

have helped in Prathiba's case. "We also run a thorough check on the backgrounds of the travel agencies and their drivers," said Guha Thakurta.

Car rental firms said this, too, are particular about this.

"We get a police verification done on the drivers. All details about them are provided to the local police station," said Surajit Mitra of Calcutta Cabs, which provides car pool services to IBM.

"We have a fixed set of drivers and the people they drive know them. Most important, the women never travel alone at night; male colleagues are always with them."

Cognizant, however, has revised its work schedules so that women employees do not work late hours.

The industry feels the administration has an important role.

"There has to be more active patrolling by the police, along with proper and constant maintenance of the roads and streetlights," suggested Suresh Menon, chief operating officer, BNKE Solutions. "The unauthorised shanties in the area (Sector V), too, are a hazard."

"Though the rape and murder happened in Bangalore, she (Prathiba) was one of us, with the same working conditions," said Piyali Jha, a senior executive with a leading IT company in Sector V.

"Even I work night shifts and return home in the small hours. I have decided that if I'm the first one to be picked up or dropped home, I would keep talking to my family over the cellphone.

"At least somebody would know what is happening if a mishap occurs."



and drop-offs. Every driver has a mobile phone to ensure constant contact."

Giving the driver a cellphone, however, would not

বাঙ্গালোরের ঘটনায় উদ্বেগের ছায়া শহরে

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা

বি পি ও থেকে ডিউটি সেরে রাতে বাড়ি ফেরার পথে এক মহিলা কর্মীকে ধর্ষণ করে খুন করেছে গাড়ির চালক। বাঙ্গালোর থেকে এই খবর আসার পরেই উদ্ভিন্ন কলকাতার তথ্যপ্রযুক্তি মহল। কলকাতায় মূলত সল্টলেকের সেক্টর ফাইভকে ঘিরে গড়ে উঠেছে আই টি হাব। নির্জন ওই এলাকায় রাতে মহিলাদের নিরাপত্তা কতটা জোরদার, সে নিয়ে নানা সংশয় দেখা দিয়েছে।

কলকাতার তথ্যপ্রযুক্তি সংস্থাগুলির অধিকাংশের অবশ্য দাবি, মহিলাদের নিরাপত্তার বিষয়টি নিয়ে তাঁরা সচেতন এবং তাঁদের বাড়ি থেকে আনা ও বাড়িতে ফেরার জন্য গাড়িরও ব্যবস্থা থাকে। কলকাতায় উইপ্রো-র সেন্টার হেড ইন্সপেক্টর জানান, তাঁদের সংস্থায় কর্মীদের যাতায়াতের পুল কারে রেডিও থাকে। যখন কোনও মহিলা কর্মী রাতে বাড়ি যান, সঙ্গে অন্তত কজন

পুরুষকর্মী থাকেন। কর্মীদের নামানোর ব্যবস্থা এমন থাকে, যাতে কখনওই কোনও মহিলা একা হয়ে না পড়েন।

রিসার্চ ইঞ্জিনিয়ার্সের তরফে চন্দন দাস বলেন, “আমাদের গাড়ি-চালকেরা সংস্থায় বহুদিন কাজ করছেন। আমরা এ ধরনের ঘটনা কথা ভাবতেই পারি না।” গ্লোবাসিন-এর সি ই ও বিক্রম দাশগুপ্ত অবশ্য স্বীকার করে নিয়েছেন এ শহরে এমন ঘটনা এখনও শুরু না হলেও আশঙ্কা অমূলক বলে উড়িয়ে দেওয়া যায় না। তিনি বলেন, “যখন সেক্টর ফাইভের কথা ভাবা হয়েছিল, তখন বিষয়টি এত ব্যাপকতা পাবে ভাবা যায়নি। সল্টলেকের চেয়ে নিউটাউনের ক্ষেত্রে সমস্যা বেশি হওয়ার ভয় রয়েছে। কারণ নিউটাউন আরও নির্জন।”

বর্তমানে সেক্টর ফাইভ এলাকাটি বিধাননগর পূর্ব থানার আওতায়। নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিত করতে সেখানে একটি ফাঁড়িও আছে। কিন্তু বাড়তি নিরাপত্তার প্রয়োজনীয়তা বুঝেই ডি

আই জি প্রেসিডেন্সি রেঞ্জ হরমনপ্রীত সিংহ আগেই জানিয়েছেন, খুব শীঘ্রই একটি নতুন থানা তৈরি হচ্ছে।

কিন্তু শুধু সল্টলেকেই তো নয়, শহরের অন্যান্য এলাকার অফিসেও মহিলারা বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্রে রাতের ডিউটি করে বাড়ি ফেরেন। সে ক্ষেত্রে তাঁদের নিরাপত্তা সুনিশ্চিত করতে আদৌ কি কিছু ভাবছে কলকাতা পুলিশ? ডিসি (ডিডি) জ্ঞানবন্ত সিংহ মনে করেন, রাতের কলকাতাকে নিরাপদ করার জন্য যথেষ্ট ব্যবস্থা তাঁরা আগেই নিয়ে রেখেছেন। তিনি বলেন, “রাস্তায় ১৫টি রেডিও ফ্লাইং স্কোয়াড রয়েছে, থানার টহলদারি গাড়ি থাকে। গুরুত্বপূর্ণ মোড়গুলিতেও পুলিশের গাড়ি দাঁড়িয়ে থাকে। রাতে পুলিশ যাতে সাহায্য করতে পারে সে জন্য বেশ কিছু ক্যামেরা করা হয়েছে। ক্যামেরা গায়ে থানার নম্বরও লেখা থাকে। সেখানকার দায়িত্বপ্রাপ্ত অফিসারের কর্তব্য কোনও কিছু ঘটলে থানায় জানানো।”

তা হলে কি কলকাতা নিশ্চিত

থাকতে পারে, এখানে বাঙ্গালোরের ঘটনার পুনরাবৃত্তি ঘটবে না?

নারী সংগঠনের কর্মী শাশ্বতী ঘোষ মনে করেন, এ ক্ষেত্রেও চলে আসছে চিরন্তন গ্রহণযোগ্যতার প্রশ্ন। মেয়েরা কাজ করে গভীর রাতে বাড়ি ফিরবে, এটা মানতে এখনও সমাজে অনেক আপত্তি। আবার অনেকের অভিমত, যে মেয়েরা বেশি রাতে একা বাড়ির বাইরে থাকেন, তাঁদের ‘সফট টার্গেট’ বলে ধরে নেওয়ার মানসিকতা থেকে এখনও বেরিয়ে আসা যায়নি। তবে শাশ্বতীর বক্তব্য, “এমন ঘটনার পরে মেয়েরা রাতের ডিউটি করবে না, তা হতে পারে না। সমস্যা সমাধানের পথটা সবাইকে ভাবতে হবে। পুলিশকে আরও সক্রিয় ভূমিকা নিতে হবে। কিন্তু পুলিশ সব নয়। যে ক্ষেত্রে সর্ধের মধ্যেই ভূত, সেখানে চিন্তাটা আরও বেশি। কর্মসংস্থানগুলিকেও আরও বেশি সচেতন হতে হবে। এমন ব্যবস্থা করতে হবে যাতে কখনও গাড়িতে একা কোনও মেয়ে না থাকেন।”

Call centre woman 'raped', murdered

Press Trust of India

BANGALORE, Dec. 16. — A woman employee at a call centre here was murdered after being allegedly raped by the driver of the drop-car vehicle, provoking concerns about the safety of similarly employed women.

The incident, the first to be reported from the booming BPO sector in the country's IT capital, occurred on 13 December, but came to light four days later with the driver's arrest, DCP (South) Mr Alok Kumar said.

The police have found the body of the victim, identified as Prathibha (24). She got married recently and worked with HP in Electronics City on the outskirts of Bangalore, police said.

The accused, Shivkumar, has confessed that he killed Prathibha on the night of 13 December on the way to her home. He brandished a knife demanding that she withdraw cash from her ATM account and hand it over to him. When Prathiba resisted, the accused drove her to a

'Ladies first, please'

BANGALORE, Dec. 16. — Nasscom today asked BPO companies to ensure that a woman employee was not the last to be dropped home, Nasscom president Mr Kiran Karnik said. "We would like to take steps to make sure our people are safe and secure in general," he said. — PTI

deserted place in Anjanapura, slit her throat and dumped the body. Police said they suspected rape too.

Nasscom, the apex body of the software and BPO industries, voiced its concern over the incident, besides promising to continue its dialogue with the police on law and order matters. It spoke also of trying to improve the industry's internal system for the safety and security of employees, especially women.

The BPO industry has attracted young graduates, particularly young women, who work in shifts. Most companies hire vehicles from tourist operators and travel agencies for providing transport facilities to their employees.

17 DEC 2005

THE STATESMAN

15 DEC 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Immoral traffic Act to be amended

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 14

THE GOVERNMENT plans to amend the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act to deal more firmly with the problems of commercial sexual exploitation of women. Minister of state for HRD Kanti Singh informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday that the Cabinet approval to the amendments was awaited.

She was replying to a calling attention motion moved by CPI(M) member Minati Sen who expressed concern over the increasing incidents of trafficking in women in the country.

The minister said the HRD ministry had framed a national plan of action on combating trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation and set up a central advisory committee to monitor implementation of the plan.

IN THE PARLIAMENT

The government on Wednesday deferred introduction of a Constitution Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha which provided for reservation to Scheduled Castes and Tribes in unaided educational institutions. Speaker Somnath Chatterjee made the announcement saying that HRD minister Arjun Singh had requested for postponement and he had agreed to it.

Lok Pal Bill

A group of ministers is examining the Lok Pal Bill and has held two meetings so far. Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

"The government is committed to bring a Bill on Lok Pal. Accordingly,

a GoM has been constituted to examine and make recommendations on the Bill," minister of state for personnel Suresh Pachouri said during Question Hour. He said the legislation was earlier introduced six times in Parliament and had lapsed following dissolution of respective Lok Sabhas. The Bill in 1985 was withdrawn.

Improve PDS, says Brinda

Rajya Sabha members today made impassioned pleas for the government to improve the Public Distribution System (PDS) through various means to ensure that the system benefited the poorest of the poor and those who were starving in various parts of the country.

Initiating a discussion on the PDS—incidentally this was her maiden speech—CPI(M)'s Brinda Karat said it was time the government

made the system universal so as to ensure that not only does no one go hungry in India, but also simultaneously bring down the levels of malnutrition.

She suggested that the FCI should be strengthened and should in addition to supplying grain, begin procuring cereals and coarse grains, providing minimum support prices to these. She pointed out that for large sections in different states, cereals and coarse grain were the only means of income as well as the staple diet.

Karat drew attention to reduced availability of food — substantiated by various reports that point to reduced per capita food grain availability — and said increasing poverty had left women shouldering most of the burden. In such cases, women found themselves faced with a choice of starvation or working for less than minimum wage, she pointed out.

“Atrocities against women increasing”

Iboyaima Laithangbam

IMPHAL: A procession was taken out on Wednesday here to highlight atrocities against women.

The Union of Action for Development (UAD) and 50 other NGOs organised the procession to observe the International Fortnight for Protection of Violence Against Women.

More meetings planned

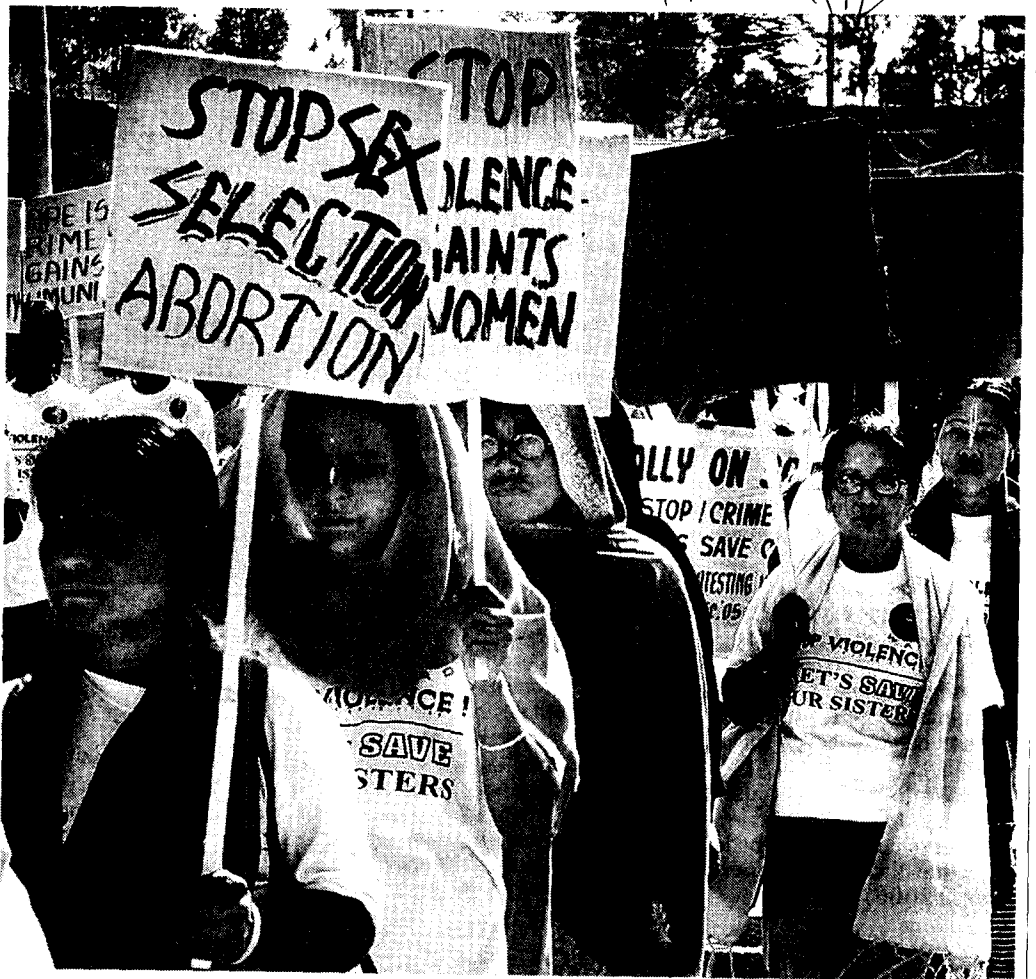
More processions and public meetings are planned during this fortnight. M. Sobita, UAD secretary told *The Hindu* that like other states in Manipur too atrocities were being committed on women. Sixteen complaints of atrocities had been received in 2003 by her organisation. In 2004, there were 17 complaints. Till May this year there were four complaints.

24 women died of torture

Thirty per cent of the complaints had been disposed of and two cases of maintenance were pending in the competent court. At least 24 women had died of torture in the State.

The UAD was started in 2002 and Ms. Sobita claimed that it had been rendering a yeoman service to downtrodden women.

She called for a women's commission to address the grievances of the harassed women.



BANNERS SAY IT ALL: A rally being staged in Imphal on Wednesday protesting violence against women. - PHOTO: PTI

THE HINDU

Somnath hopes women's Bill will be passed

HD-13
28/11 VE

Government committed to empowering women socially, politically

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee is hopeful of the controversial Women's Reservation Bill, which seeks to reserve one-third seats in State legislatures and in Parliament for women, being passed during his tenure.

"This is my expectation," he told reporters on the sidelines of the IV International Congress on Women, Work and Health here on Sunday. He expressed the confidence that pressure from women's groups and other citizens would prove successful in empowering women in the political sphere in the near future.

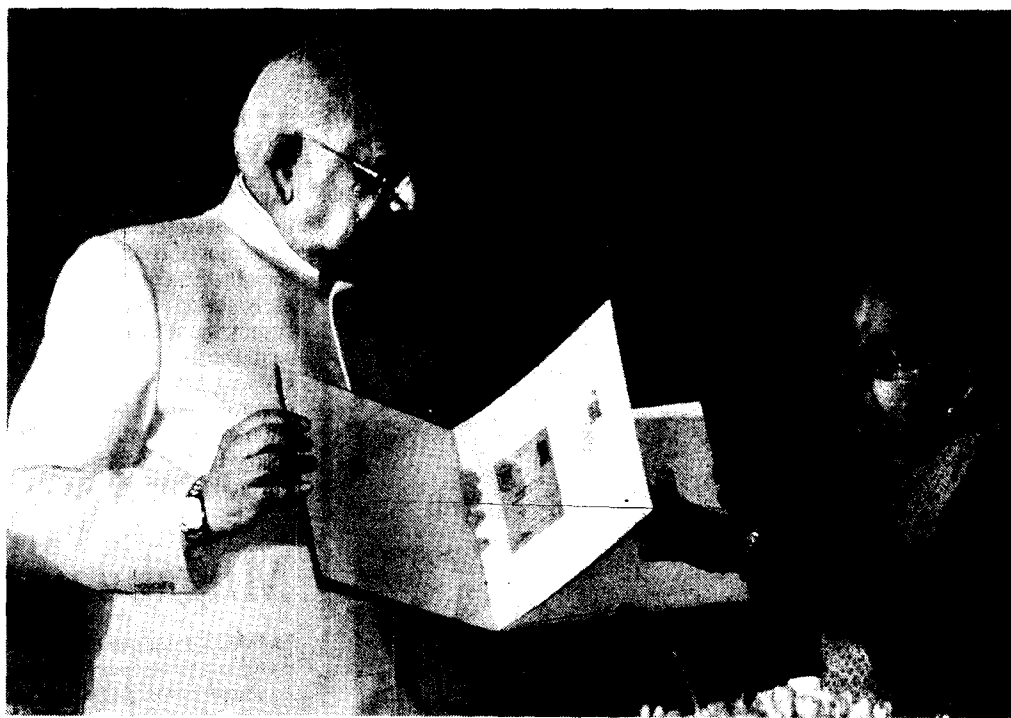
Quota in local bodies

Earlier, inaugurating the four-day congress, Mr. Chatterjee said he was proud of the fact that the Constitution provided reservation for one-third of the seats in local government bodies for women, both in the rural and urban areas. This was a unique achievement, and there was a proposal to extend it to the State legislatures and Parliament.

The Government was committed to empowering women socially, educationally, economically and politically. Specially designed policies and programmes were in place to realise this objective. "In several States, substantial progress has been made, as a result, in reducing female infant mortality, maternal mortality and improving female literacy and retention of girls in schools. The current emphasis is on replicating these successes in States that have been lagging behind for various socio-cultural reasons."

Always at a disadvantage

On the condition of women in



ALL FOR WOMEN: Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee releasing a commemorative stamp and first day cover at the inauguration of an international congress on women in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

- In developed countries the so-called "glass ceiling" was the problem
- Several States have made progress in reducing female infant mortality

other countries, he said they were always disadvantaged, including in the developed countries, one way or the other. In developed countries, the problem was with the so-called "glass ceiling" at workplaces that discriminated against them moving to top decision-making positions. In less-developed countries, the problem was with the

societal preference for male children, which translated into institutionalised inequities faced by women in all fields.

Mr. Chatterjee said much of the research work carried out on occupational health was with regard to the organised, urban workers and therefore, a large number of women did not benefit from it. Among the reasons

for their marginal relevance was the fact that a comprehensive view was not taken of the different roles that they were expected to perform, especially in situations of socio-economic deprivation and underdevelopment.

"In fact, other aspects, such as sexual harassment and gender-related discrimination at the workplace, also need to be taken into account because of their impact on the overall health of women, including their mental health; only then will the complexity of women's work and health evoke a far more empathetic and sensitive resonance."

Women in home hell

Geneva/London, Nov. 24 (Reuters): One in six women worldwide suffers domestic violence — some battered during pregnancy — yet many remain silent about the assaults, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said today.

In its first global study, the WHO also said physically- or sexually-abused women were more likely to suffer longer-term health problems, including distress and suicide attempts.

The UN agency called for changing behaviour through education programmes and training more health workers and police to investigate signs of mistreatment.

"Women are more at risk from violence involving people they know at home than from strangers in the street. There is a feeling that the home is a safe haven and that pregnancy is a very protected period, but that is not the case," WHO's director-general Lee Jong-Wook said. "Domestic violence remains largely hidden."

The Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women study is based on interviews with more than 24,000 women in 10 countries, ranging from Japan and Thailand to Ethiopia and Peru.

It paints a harrowing picture of broken bones, bruises, burns, cracked skulls, dislocated jaws, rape and fear. Husbands or intimate partners are the main perpetrators.

A Peruvian woman lost twins after being hit in the stomach by the father of her unborn babies, while a Brazilian sleeps in a locked bedroom to protect herself from the partner who has threatened to shoot her, according to the report.

"Every 18 seconds, somewhere, a woman suffers violence or maltreatment ... We must put an end to this shameful practice," said Spain's health minister Elena Salgado, current president of WHO's annual health assembly.

Domestic violence can be sparked by dinner being late, not finishing the housework on time, disobeying or refusing to have sex, the report said. In many cases women agree that a man is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances.

In terms of symptoms — pain, dizziness, mental distress, miscarriages — the findings across the 15 urban and rural settings were "remarkably consistent", according to Claudia Garcia-Moreno, the study's coordinator. "Whether you are a cosmopolitan woman in Sao Paulo, Brazil or Japan, or a rural woman in Ethiopia or Peru, the association between violence and poor health remains," she said.

"The striking thing we found is the degree that this violence still remains hidden, she added.

THE TELEGRAPH

25 NOV 2005

CHILD ABUSE

India Needs Law That Defines Rights And Remedies

By TAMALI SEN GUPTA

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which India ratified in 1992 requires member states to take affirmative action in protecting children from all forms of sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture or any form of cruelty. Currently Indian laws are inadequate to identify and punish offences against children. Child abuse, especially sexual abuse, is a serious problem in India. It has devastating effects on the victim.

It is estimated that between 30 and 50 per cent of Indian children are sexually abused. India has approximately 300,000 to 500,000 child prostitutes. There is no separate legislation to deal with child sexual abuse and the existing laws are inadequate. An average of 44,476 children are reported missing every year, out of which 11,008 children remain untraced. Most of these children end up in brothels. These children are taken to Mumbai, Delhi and the tourist beaches of Goa, Puri, Mahabalipuram and Kerala where pedophile tourism is on the rise.

Third largest crime

Trafficking in children, underage girls and young women is the third largest organised crime next only to illegal trade in drugs and arms. Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia, some of the countries closely associated with piracy, drug dealing, and gun running, are also associated with human trafficking. India with a large number of poor is a source of women and children for trafficking.

In spite of this, only 65,602 persons were arrested during the five-year period of 1997-2001, out of which 87 per cent were females. Traffickers, transporters, brothel owners, clients and other such exploiters are largely untouched by the law; as prosecution is rare.

While there are strong laws relating to rape of female children, the rules of evidence and the inordinate delay in prosecution often leads to vital evidence going missing and witnesses turning hostile. There are no effective laws dealing with abuse of male children. This lacuna in the law

has ensured that there is no disincentive to commit abuse of male children in India.

The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 as amended in 1986 widened the scope of the law and enhanced penalties for offences involving children and minors. The act deals primarily

done in the case of a girl.

Section 375 provides inter alia that sexual intercourse with a female child under the age of 16 is rape regardless of whether it was with her consent or not. The only exclusion is in case the minor is the wife of the person accused of rape and is above 12



with trafficking in women and children at brothels. It does not cover the trafficking in children at beaches, hotels and guest houses.

One of the biggest lacunae in the Act is that even if minor children are found in a brothel, they are passed off as the children of prostitutes and mostly have to be released without any proper procedure in place to determine if this is true.

Penal Code

The Indian Penal Code, 1860 has several provisions to deal with the use of criminal force against women and female children: Sections 354, 366, 366 A, 366 B, 372 (selling minors for prostitution), 373 (buying minor for the purpose of prostitution) and 375. Abuse of male children is covered under Sections 372 and 373. In addition Section 377 may be invoked. Punishment may extend to 10 years. There is no minimum punishment for procuring, buying or abusing a minor male child; a male child is not treated as a victim of rape, nor is there any presumption of lack of consent as is statutorily

years of age. Enhanced punishment is provided for rape of a female child below 12 years. The Section does not apply to the rape of a male child by another male as Section 375 clarifies that only a woman can be raped. This has been upheld by the Supreme Court in the case of Sakshi 2004.

Section 377 covers several offences: non-consensual assault of a male child; non-consensual assault of a male adult under threat of death; sodomy of a female child; sodomy of an adult female; unnatural sexual relations with animals; and consensual homosexual relations.

Several gay rights activists have been campaigning for deletion of Section 377 from the IPC. While consensual homosexual relations are covered under Section 377, this is only a small part of the entire gamut of offences covered by the section and any hasty move for deletion of the section will leave many victims of crime without any legal recourse.

As Section 377 has no minimum punishment, the offenders are normally released on bail

and then become absconders. By contrast, Section 375 gives a minimum punishment of 7 years. When a minimum punishment is prescribed, it is assumed that the crime of rape is a heinous one and, therefore, a minimum term of seven years is prescribed. There is no such presumption in Section 377 even if a minor male child is brutally sodomised although the police may at their own discretion add on other sections.

It is also imperative that child sexual abuse and non-consensual sodomy be separated from the wider issue of gay rights based on consensual relations between adults. All these are covered under Section 377 of the IPC. The Law Commission has been studying the matter for the last five years, but no new laws have been passed. Meanwhile, instances of trafficking in children continue.

Juvenile justice

The only existing legislation on children, the Juvenile Justice Act 2000, deals primarily with children in conflict with the law and their rehabilitation. It does not provide adequately for children in need or identify offences against child victims. Enforcement of even the existing laws for protection of children are weak.

While the issues have been deliberated for the last 15 years, no new laws have been passed to protect children and punish those who abuse them. Child abuse is a threat to the social fabric of a nation and will have disastrous consequences for India unless a more humane approach to children is adopted by the state by defining child rights and enacting positive measures to protect child rights.

Almost all countries have legislation to protect children. The United Kingdom (Sexual Offences Act 2003 dealing extensively with the rights of children), the United States, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Malaysia, among other nations, have adopted a child rights approach. Under this approach, any transgression of a child's rights, violence and other forms of physical and mental torture, is a punishable offence. The government should enact a separate child abuse law clearly defining the rights and remedies for children.

ধর্ষণের প্রমাণ

ন্যায় বিচারের জন্যই আইন প্রণয়ন করা হইয়া থাকে, কিন্তু আইনের ফাঁক লইয়া অন্যায় আরও জাঁকিয়া বসে। এই কারণে ভারতে ধর্ষণের মামলার চার শতাংশেরও কম ক্ষেত্রে অভিযুক্তের শাস্তি হয়। সম্প্রতি সুপ্রিম কোর্ট ন্যায় বিচারের উপর জোর দিতে আইনের ফাঁস খানিক আলগা করিয়াছেন। মধ্যপ্রদেশ হাইকোর্টের একটি রায় বিবেচনা করিয়া বিচারপতিরা বলিয়াছেন, ধর্ষণের মামলায় ডাক্তারের রিপোর্ট বা সাক্ষ্য অপরিহার্য নহে। অভিযোগকারিণীর বক্তব্য যদি গ্রহণযোগ্য বলিয়া মনে হয়, তবে ধর্ষণ প্রমাণিত হইতে পারে। এই রায় আমাদের আশ্বস্ত করিয়াছে। কারণ ইহার দ্বারা স্পষ্ট যে, আইনের বইয়ের প্রাচীরে বিচারপতিদের সত্যদৃষ্টি আটকাইয়া নাই। গ্রামাঞ্চলে প্রায়শই ধর্ষণের অভিযোগ থানায় দায়ের হইয়া থাকে অপরাধ ঘটিবার চার-পাঁচ দিন পর। তাহার পর যথাযথ মেডিক্যাল প্রমাণ সংগৃহীত হইবার আশা কম। সরকারি হাসপাতালের ডাক্তাররাও ফরেনসিক সাক্ষ্য গ্রহণের জন্য কী কী প্রয়োজন, সে বিষয়ে যথেষ্ট অবহিত নহেন। অভিযোগকারিণীকে কী কী প্রশ্ন করিতে হইবে, কী কী নমুনা সংগ্রহ করিতে হইবে এবং কীভাবে সংগ্রহ করিতে হইবে, সে বিষয়ে তাঁহাদের কোনও নির্দেশরেখা দেওয়া হয় না। ফলে নমুনা সংগ্রহে খামতি রহিয়া যায়, ফরেনসিক পরীক্ষার কঠোর নিয়মে ধর্ষণের সত্যতা সন্দেহাতীত রূপে প্রমাণিত হয় না। ফলে মামলা করিবার ক্লেশ ভোগ করিয়াও অভিযোগকারিণী ন্যায়বিচার হইতে বাঞ্ছিত হন। বিশেষজ্ঞরা মনে করেন, পাঁচ জন মহিলা ধর্ষিতা হইলে এক জন অভিযোগ দায়ের করেন। যাঁহারা সাহস করিয়া বিচার প্রার্থনা করেন, তাঁহারাও এইরূপ আইনের ফাঁসে শ্বাসরুদ্ধ হইলে মামলা দায়ের করিবার কষ্ট মহিলারা কেন স্বীকার করিবেন? ডাক্তারি সাক্ষ্যের গুরুত্বকে লঘু করিয়া সুপ্রিম কোর্ট তাই সামাজিক ন্যায়ের উপর অধিক জোর দিয়াছেন।

ধর্ষণ-বিষয়ক আইনের সহিত নারী আন্দোলনের একটি দীর্ঘ এবং ঘনিষ্ঠ সম্পর্ক রহিয়াছে। ১৯৭৪ সালের মথুরা ধর্ষণ মামলার রায়ের বিরুদ্ধে তীব্র প্রতিবাদে ফলে ১৯৮৩ সালে আইন পরিবর্তন করা হয়, এবং যৌনমিলনে মহিলার সম্মতি ছিল কি না, সে বিষয়ে মহিলার সাক্ষ্যকেই চরম গুরুত্ব দেওয়ার প্রয়োজনীয়তা স্বীকার করা হয়। ধর্ষিতা মহিলার চরিত্রের বিচার করিয়া ধর্ষণের অভিযোগের সত্যতা নির্ণয় করার রীতিটিও আদালতে শেষ অবধি টেকে নাই। মহারাষ্ট্রের একটি মামলায় সুপ্রিম কোর্ট নির্দেশ দেয় যে, কোনও মহিলার চরিত্র যেমনই হোক, নিজের দেহের সুরক্ষা করিবার অধিকার তাঁহার রহিয়াছে। ধর্ষণ বিষয়টিতে পিতৃতান্ত্রিকতার দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি হইতে এইরূপে ক্রমশ সরিয়া আসিতেছে উচ্চতম আদালত। নিম্নতর আদালতে যদিও সাবেক বিচারধারা প্রায়শই বহমান, তবু সুপ্রিম কোর্টের এই রায়গুলি ঠিক দৃষ্টান্ত স্থাপন করিবে, সন্দেহ নাই।

তবে এই সঙ্গে সতর্কতার বাণীরও প্রয়োজন আছে। মেডিক্যাল রিপোর্ট ধর্ষণের প্রমাণে অতি মূল্যবান সাক্ষ্য। ইহার প্রয়োজনীয়তাকে লঘু করা অভিযোগকারিণীর পক্ষে মঙ্গলজনক নহে। বস্তুত ধর্ষণের অধিকাংশ মামলাই যে খারিজ হইয়া যায়, তাহার কারণ পুলিশের দুর্নীতি, এবং সাক্ষ্য সংগ্রহে পুলিশের এবং ডাক্তারদের অপটুতা ও অবহেলা। এই কারণে মুম্বইয়ের একটি বেসরকারি সংগঠন ডাক্তারদের জন্য একটি নির্দেশরেখা বাহির করিয়াছে, যেখানে কী কী প্রশ্ন করিতে হইবে, এবং কী কী নমুনা সংগ্রহ করিতে হইবে, তাহা বলা হইয়াছে। সম্প্রতি জাতীয় মহিলা কমিশনও একটি 'প্রোটোকল' বা রূপরেখা তৈরি করিবার উদ্যোগ লইয়াছে, যাহাতে পঞ্চায়েত, পুলিশ, ডাক্তার, প্রত্যেকের কর্মপ্রণালী বলা হইয়াছে। এইরূপ নির্দেশরেখা প্রস্তুত করা, এবং পুলিশ, ডাক্তার প্রভৃতি সকলের মধ্যে প্রশিক্ষণের আয়োজন করা একান্ত প্রয়োজন। সেই সঙ্গে, ধর্ষণের বিচার যেন যথাযথ এবং দ্রুত হয়, সে বিষয়ে উদ্যোগ লইতে হইবে। দক্ষিণ আফ্রিকা ভারতের তুলনায় ধনী দেশ নহে। কিন্তু কয়েক বৎসর পূর্বে সে দেশের সরকার ২৯টি বিশেষ আদালত স্থাপন করিয়াছে কেবল যৌন অপরাধের মামলার নিষ্পত্তির জন্য। ইহার ফলে অধিকাংশ ধর্ষণের মামলায় এখন ছয় সপ্তাহ হইতে তিন মাসের মধ্যে রায় পাওয়া যাইতেছে, অপরাধ প্রমাণিত হওয়ার হারও বাড়িয়াছে। এই উদ্যোগ আমাদেরও লইতে হইবে, কারণ শেষ বিচারে যে কোনও দেশের বিচারব্যবস্থা তাহার সমাজব্যবস্থারই পরিচয়।

Even minor girls may marry, says Delhi HC

Agencies
New Delhi, October 6

SAYING "ALL is fair in love and war", Delhi High Court has ruled that a girl or a boy can get married if they attain the age of discretion. Upholding the validity of the marriage of two girls who had not reached the age of 18 — mandatory under the law to get married — judges Manmohan Sarin and Manju Goel said there was nothing illegal about it.

The Bench, quoting a Supreme Court judgment on a similar matter in which a girl was on the verge of attaining the age of 18, held that "both the girls in the present cases have reached the age of discretion". The court said that, once a girl or boy has attained the age of discretion and chosen a life partner of her or his own will, the marriage cannot be nullified on the ground of their being minors.

The judges gave the ruling on a habeas corpus writ petition by the husband of a minor girl, aged 16 years and eight months, and the statement given by another 16-year-old girl.

Both said they had married of their own free will and wanted to live with their husbands, not with their parents. Before holding their marriages as valid, the Bench also quoted from an age-old ruling to say, "You cannot love and be wise", besides the oft-repeated adages, "Love is blind" and "All is fair in love and war". "The cases at hand amply demonstrate the truth of the above adages and the resistance thereto from societal norms". Both the couples are working-class people.

According to the Hindu Marriage Act, the marriageable age for a girl is 18 years and for a boy 21 years. Commenting on this, the Bench said, "The question of a marriage being illegal or void ab initio on account of the minority of a Hindu spouse is decided". Quoting a judgment, the Bench said that, in the matter of Simran Kaur vs the state of Himachal Pradesh, in which the girl was 15 years old and had

“
A girl of 15 is not capable of taking a decision relating to marriage. The judgment will encourage child marriage rather than discourage it

— National Commission for Women

”
married of her own accord, the apex court had held that the marriage was neither void nor voidable. The observation of the lower court in the matter that the marriage was not a legal marriage was held to be unwarranted and unsustainable, the higher court said.

"We, accordingly, in the instant case, hold that the marriage — in which the age of the girl is 16 years — was neither void nor illegal on account of the girl being less than 18 years of age", the Bench held.

Meanwhile, the high court order

drew flak from women's groups as the National Commission for Women (NCW) decided to appeal against the verdict seen as "encouraging" child marriage. "A girl of 15 is not capable of taking a decision relating to marriage. The judgment will encourage child marriage rather than discourage it", the NCW said in a statement.

"The NCW plans to appeal against the judgment and approach the government for the necessary relief", it said. The women's groups, which had gathered at a national consultation meet on the Draft Protection Against Sexual Harassment of Women Bill, 2005, passed a resolution on Thursday criticising the judgment passed by the court on Wednesday "It's a ridiculous, outrageous and retrograde judgment", CPI(M) politburo member and president of the women's group AIDWA, Brinda Karat said.

"The decision is highly objectionable. We condemn it in the severest of terms. The HC has gone against the laws banning child marriage", said Karat and added that it was the Centre's responsibility to appeal against the court order. Tourism minister Renuka Choudhury, chief guest, criticised the court's decision, saying, "I'm baffled, upset and angry. If a girl can marry at 15, you might as well allow 15-year-olds to drink, vote and drive".

The National Federation of Indian Women criticised the order, saying, "This judgment — with one stroke of the pen — renders invalid, or at least ineffective, the existing law on the age of marriage, which, as of today, stands at 18 for girls".

Lower court punishment seen inadequate

SC frowns on rape leniency

R.VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, Oct. 5: The Supreme Court has advised lower courts not to hand down "inadequate punishments" for rape as it is a crime against society and human dignity, not just a violation of an individual.

"Awarding of inadequate punishments by courts is becoming disturbingly frequent," the apex court said in a judgment delivered on Monday and asked Madhya Pradesh High Court to consider afresh a rape case. The Supreme Court felt the punishment awarded to the convict was less.

In rape cases the punishment "shall not be less than 10 years" of imprisonment which "may be" extended for life. But for "adequate and special reasons", lower courts and high courts in the country could award a sentence less than 10 years' imprisonment which could be seven years or even less.

In the instant case, Madhya Pradesh High Court had awarded less than seven years to a rape convict. On the appeal of the state government for enhancing the punishment, the Supreme Court said the high court had disposed of the case "in a most unsatisfactory manner exhibiting complete non-application of mind".

"Since the judgment of the high court is not in accor-

dance with law, we have no option but to set aside the same and to remit the matter back to the high court for a fresh consideration of the appeal," Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti and Justice G.P. Mathur said.

Justice P.K. Balasubramanyan, writing a separate but concurrent judgment, said rape "is a particularly heinous

Child rapes

■ **A one-year-old was raped and murdered by her 27-year-old neighbour on Monday night at Bonjemahari village in Asansol. The mentally unstable youth was arrested the next day and has confessed, police said.**

■ **A seven-year-old was allegedly raped by a Class VI student in Krishnagar. Police learnt of it after the girl complained of abdominal pain at a shalishi meeting.**

■ See Page 13

crime, a crime against society... one that reduces a man to an animal".

The judge noted the "disturbing" trend of lower courts awarding "inadequate punishments" to rape convicts and said that "to view such an offence, once it is proved, lightly, is itself an affront to society".

"Though the award of maximum punishment may depend on the circumstances of the case, the award of the minimum punishment generally is imperative," Justice

Balasubramanyan said.

He observed that the "power" under the Indian Penal Code for a court to award lesser sentence should not be used "indiscriminately or routinely".

The judge said the reasons for awarding lesser punishment should be special and adequate and they should be set out clearly and cogently in the judgment.

"Long pendency of the criminal trial or the offer of the rapist to marry the victim are not relevant reasons" to award less punishment, the judge said.

"Nor is the age of the offender by itself an adequate reason" for a milder sentence.

"The rationale for advocating the award of a punishment commensurate with the gravity of the offence and its impact on society is to ensure that a civilised society does not revert to the days of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

"Not awarding a just punishment might provoke the victim or her relatives to retaliate in kind and that is what is exactly sought to be prevented by the criminal justice system we have adopted," Justice Balasubramanyan, agreeing with the other two judges, said.

Quoting Kautilya, Justice Balasubramanyan said: "Whoever imposes severe punishment becomes repulsive to people, while he who awards mild punishment becomes contemptible."

Sex abuse cell mandatory

MONOBINA GUPTA

New Delhi, Sept. 26: Males who have found it difficult to keep their libido in check in office had better learn to do so — especially if the place where they work has at least 50 employees.

According to the Protection Against Sexual Harassment of Women Bill, 2005, it will be “mandatory for every establishment” which employs or has employed in the preceding 12 months “more than 50 employees to constitute an internal complaints committee”.

In organisations that have less than 50 employees, it is up to the employer to set up such committees.

“If the establishment has more than one branch, it will be mandatory for the employer to constitute a committee in each of them,” the bill says.

“The continuance of the committee will be mandatory even if the mandatory number of employees falls after the committee has been constituted.”

The committee will have a minimum of three members and be headed by a woman. There has to be at least one external expert and not less than half the members on the panel have to be women.

The bill is ready to be introduced in Parliament’s winter session and final touches will be given at a two-day workshop of women’s organisations and the National Commission for Women in Delhi on October 6 and 7.

The Supreme Court had laid down guidelines for a complaints committee in 1997 but allegations of violations have prompted the government to press ahead with

the legislation.

“We are very keen to pass this bill in the winter session,” said a senior official in the department of women and children in the human resource development ministry.

Sexual harassment has been defined as “unwelcome sexually determined behaviour such as physical contact, advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography (and) sexual demands, whether by words or action”.

The bill leaves it to the woman’s “perception”.

“It is clarified that it is the reasonable perception of the woman that would be relevant in determining whether any conduct was sexually coloured and if so whether such conduct was unwelcome or not.”

The bill says a sexually harassed woman must be compensated for “mental trauma, pa-

in, suffering and emotional distress, loss in career opportunities (and) medical expenses”.

The procedure for seeking redress involves the aggrieved person submitting a report of the complaint to the internal committee. The panel will conduct an inquiry but it will be up to the management to decide whether or not to take action against the offender.

“We will try to move an amendment which will make it mandatory for the management to follow the judgment of the inquiry committee,” says the Lawyers’ Collective.

If the management wants to act, it can take up the case in court. “The court can then award compensation without requiring the person aggrieved to establish her claim of sexual harassment,” the bill says.

2005

THE TELEGRAPH

Growing outrage against Musharraf's rape remark

By Chahmoud Rezaqulov/TNN

New York: There is mounting anger and disgust worldwide over Pakistani military dictator Pervez Musharraf's coarse "get raped, become rich" remarks even as the general claimed he was only paraphrasing "what others are saying".

Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin bluntly took up the issue with Musharraf during a meeting at the UN, irked by the Pakistani general's gratuitous reference to Canada in his uncouth utterances. Musharraf, when asked about the Mukhtarai Mai rape incident in Pakistan, told The Washington Post in an interview published

on Tuesday that Pakistan should not be singled out on rape issues as other countries had the same problems. "You must understand the environment in Pakistan... This has become a money-making concern. A lot of people say if you want to go abroad and get a visa for Canada or citizenship and be a millionaire, get yourself raped," he told the paper.

Martin said such comments "are not acceptable" and violence against women is a blight that besmirches all humanity. Musharraf subsequently tried to slime out of the controversy by pointing out that he had referred to what others were saying, although he also tried to make light of the whole

issue asking that the remarks not be taken seriously. But he compounded his coarse one-upmanship on the sensitive matter with another diatribe, this time drawing India and the US into the issue.

Asked about his remarks in a press conference at the UN, the General, obviously prepared for the questions, launched into a lengthy explanation about how rape was a worldwide occurrence and singled out stories in Indian news magazines India Today and Outlook, including the recent case in Jharkhand. He also referred to stories of alleged rape in New Orleans to argue that "it is happening everywhere". While that may be true,

The Mai Incident

Three years ago, a Pakistani village council ordered that Mukhtarai Mai be gang-raped as punishment after her brother, who was just 12 at the time, was judged to have offended tribal honour by befriending a 30-year-old woman from a more powerful clan. Following Musharraf's remarks in New York, Mai was quoted in the Pakistani newspaper Dawn as saying, "I offer all the riches I've made out of the panchayat-enforced gang-rape to the President in return for justice." Agencies

Musharraf's critics are pointing out that nowhere in the world are men, particularly men in uniform, given virtual immunity from rape charges by mediaeval state laws as happens in Pakistan.

"The offensiveness of his remarks defy description. Rape is not sanctioned by city fathers in the countries mentioned, as it was in Mukhtarai Mai's case; two, cases of rape are far more strenuously reported and prosecuted in those countries than in ours," wrote Kamran Shafi, a retired army officer and a trenchant critic of a mediaeval and militarised Pakistan, in an angry column headlined, "Do you want a Canadian visa?"

Musharraf's remarks on women draw flak

Disparaging language, says ex-Premier Benazir

B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) led by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has taken serious exception to the "disparaging language" used by President Pervez Musharraf about women in Pakistan in his interview to an American newspaper during his visit to New York.

Sherry Rehman, Member of National Assembly and president of policy planning for the PPP, in a statement issued here, said it was shocking that Gen. Musharraf had publicly aired his low opinion of women, who he claimed, "are willing to get themselves raped to get visas for Canada or any other foreign country."

"Women ashamed"

"All Pakistanis must have lowered their heads in shame to be represented by such views at the United Nations forum," she said, adding that the PPP and all progressive people across the country want to distance themselves from such a view.

"Instead of enacting laws to protect women, all this Government has done is hold expensive international conferences at which it tries to impress upon donors its commitment to empowering women", Ms. Rehman said.

Even the National Assembly has become a farce in the face of Government attempts to strangle the Opposition's voice.

She complained that women who move adjournment motions to discuss gang-rapes by police officials, or to obtain some justice for the victims, such as the recent case of a woman in Rawalpindi, who still cannot get an FIR registered against her assailants, are



OUTRAGED: Activists from the Joint Action Committee for People's Rights raise slogans during a demonstration in Karachi on Friday. - PHOTO: AFP

not allowed to do so.

The PPP soundly condemns such sentiments that cast women victims as NGO-driven manipulators, and sympathises with all women who raise their voice against such tyranny and injustice, Ms. Rehman said.

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Pervez rape slur sparks protests

Islamabad, Sept. 16 (Reuters): Outrage mounted in Pakistan and abroad today over President Pervez Musharraf's comment that many Pakistanis felt that crying rape was an easy way to make money and move to Canada.

Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin has already condemned the remarks made by Musharraf, who is in the US having addressed the UN General Assembly on Wednesday.

London-based rights group Amnesty International said Musharraf should apologise, and newspapers back home decried their leader's attitude.

Musharraf told the *Washington Post* in an interview published on Tuesday that Pakistan should not be singled out on rape issues as other countries had the same problems. "You must understand the environment in Pakistan ... This has become a money-making concern. A lot of people say if you want to go abroad and get a visa for Canada or citizenship and be a millionaire, get yourself raped," the *Post* quoted Musharraf as saying.

Dawn, Pakistan's leading English-language daily, rounded on Musharraf in an editorial headlined: "Wrong thing to



Protesters at a rally in Karachi. (AFP)

say". "If this attitude, of blaming rape and other crimes against women on women themselves and ridiculing NGOs (non-government organisations) that take up such issues, begins to travel upward from ignorant mullahs and male chauvinists to permeate the higher echelons of the administration, then God help us," it said.

Amnesty International said it was outraged at the remarks by Musharraf, who is due to address an audience of

Pakistani-American women in New York tomorrow.

"This callous and insulting statement requires a public apology from President Musharraf to the women of Pakistan and especially to victims of rape, sexual assault and other forms of violence that are rampant with impunity in Pakistan," the group said in a statement issued yesterday.

Musharraf, according to media reports, told a news conference in New York yesterday that he had been expressing a commonly held opinion rather than his own.

Earlier, Canada's Martin said he had raised the matter with the Pakistani leader during a meeting on the sidelines of the General Assembly.

Afghan violence

Suspected Taliban militants shot dead a candidate in Afghanistan's weekend elections today and the guerrillas warned voters they could be hurt unless they boycotted the polls.

National Assembly candidate Abdul Hadi was killed in the southern province of Helmand, provincial spokesman Mohammad Wali Alizai said. He was the seventh candidate to be killed.

BRAVE HEARTS

Tough path to democracy for women

"Why should I step down? Because I am a woman? No, never"

HERAT (AFGHANISTAN): The number that appeared on Gheida Tavaen Afif's cellphone was unfamiliar, but she answered it anyway. "Step down or you'll be dead," a gruff voice said.

It was the latest in a string of threatening calls made from payphones and cellphones to the 26-year-old, who is standing for Parliament in Herat, but she ignores them.

"Why should I step down? Because I am a woman? No, never," she said at her campaign office, which is situated in her family compound. Ms. Afif says her father is supporting her financially, along with her brother and sister who both live overseas, though the family did not report the calls to the police because they were powerless to stop the harassment.

"Even if I risk getting killed, I will still struggle and push my way ahead because someone needs to stop this stupidity," she adds.

Hundreds of women like her are defying threats, instability and conservative attitudes to stand in the parliamentary polls on September 18, the country's first for 30 years and the next step in its tough

path to democracy. In the south and east, they face a situation that has barely changed since the time of the Taliban, the hardline Islamist regime that banned women from studying, working or leaving the house without being covered by a burqa.

Meanwhile, in much of northern and western Afghanistan, rights groups say, local warlords who helped lay waste to much of the country during a bitter civil war in the 1990s are now intimidating candidates. Nevertheless, 328 women are standing for Parliament's Lower House, where 68 of 249 seats have been set aside for women. Another 237 are running for seats on provincial councils.

Only five seats reserved for women on provincial councils will stay empty because not enough women have stood for election, all of them in the conservative, ethnic Pashtun southern provinces where the Taliban was spawned.

The quotas have given an incentive for otherwise conservative tribal elders and powerful political families to put their normally sidelined sisters and daughters on the campaign trail.



Nima Suratgar, candidate for the September 18 parliamentary election (right), at campaign meeting, recently. — PHOTO: AFP

And independent female candidates have found innovative ways around the intimidation.

Shukria Barikzai (33), who is standing for Parliament in Kabul, has received a stream of death threats over the phone and by E-mail.

Instead of planning rallies or meetings, she drives around the city and stops at crowded locations like bus stations to make speeches and distribute leaflets to passers-by. Money is another problem because few women have independent financial means to pay for leaflets, phone bills and office expenses. — AFP

Ruling puts schools on abuse notice

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 11

IF A child is sexually abused at school, the school authorities will be held responsible. If they are found guilty of failing to protect the child, they could be jailed for up to six months.

The Juvenile Justice Court has ordered the arrest of two school authorities who had failed to protect their respective pupils from sexual abuse. One owns a crèche in east Delhi; the other is a teacher in another Delhi school. At the crèche, an attendant had abused a boy; at the school, three

NO SHIRKING

Whoever having charge over a juvenile or child exposes, or wilfully neglects the juvenile, or causes him to be assaulted in a manner that is likely to cause mental or physical suffering to the child, shall be punished for six months

Section 23 (Juvenile Justice Act)

boys had abused a classmate for over a year.

The Juvenile Justice Board's principal magistrate, Santosh Snehi Mann, said the management and the teachers couldn't



wilful neglect on their part resulting in sexual abuse of the child, causing him mental and physical suffering," the magistrate said.

Reacting to the court's ruling, Lata Vaidyanathan, principal of a Delhi school, agreed that any kind of neglect on part of the schools is unpardonable as children are placed under their trust and care.

But R. C. Shekhar, another principal, said, "It may be the school principal and administration's responsibility to protect a child from harm, but not to the extent of being imprisoned."

escape liability if the wards suffered any form of mental or physical abuse while in their care.

"In the school, a child is in the actual charge of the teacher and school authorities. There appears

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A significant advance

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The passage by Parliament of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Bill – in response to demands from the National Commission for Women and citizens' bodies – to provide for a civil remedy against atrocities has not come a day too soon, considering the inadequacy of existing criminal law. The Bill marks a significant advance over the proposal envisaged by the National Democratic Alliance Government whereby only habitual assaults and physical injury were sought to be taken cognisance of as domestic violence. In seeking to secure women's right to their matrimonial home for the duration of a dispute – as recommended by the Parliamentary Standing Committee headed by Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh – the current Bill addresses a critical factor that constrains women from coming out with complaints on the continuing violence against them. The provision to guarantee relief for women who are victims of actual cruelties or are subject to constant threat of violence, regardless of the nature of their relationship with the accused – matrimonial, consanguinous or otherwise – is significant, in view of the fact that registration of marriages is not compulsory under the Hindu Marriages Act and that lack of proof of a wedding can be used by perpetrators to evade responsibility. Concerns have been raised about making the proposed law applicable to live-in relationships – not recognised by the existing laws. But these objections overlook the pre-eminent purpose of the Bill, namely, to safeguard the basic rights of all women. The Bill also rightly avoids, unlike the 2003 proposal, any reference to the right of self-defence for the accused, which could serve as an alibi for perpetrators of abuse. This should encourage recourse to legal and transparent means of resolving familial and marital discord.

The Bill of course is by no means comprehensive in the sense that there are other facets of violence it does not address. Yet, such omissions do not detract from the fact that it answers by far the most sensitive issue of combating grotesque brutalities committed against women, which go largely unpunished under Indian penal legislation with the victims being denied any other relief as well. The many laudatory provisions in the Bill notwithstanding, women's organisations have cautioned against the potential for abuse of the wide powers vested in the protection officers – intermediaries between the courts and the victims of violence – and have proposed an enhanced role for Non-Governmental Organisations who may be already engaged in the delivery of relief and counselling. The NGOs' opposition to the requirement of registration of the agencies with a designated authority has validity, because the stipulation will, on the one hand, encourage a tendency to kowtow to the bureaucracy and, on the other, deny victims potential valuable help from sources remaining outside the ambit of registration.

The elusive quota for women

The unending saga of the Women's Reservation Bill can be viewed in two ways. If nine years and countless unparliamentary fisticuffs later, the Bill can do no better than wait for the 'next session,' the prognosis cannot be bright. On the other hand, why not see hope in the fact that these nine years have helped cool tempers around the Bill? Nobody will claim that Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh and Railways Minister Lalu Prasad are the picture of cooperation. Indeed, thanks to their seeming intransigence, several oddball ideas have gained currency, including a ludicrous proposal to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha to 900. Yet the debates are no longer rancorous and there is talk of movement towards a negotiated consensus. Progressive legislation is tough to pass for a complexity of reasons. Women round the world have fought protracted battles to win their rights. In the United States, the 19th Amendment granting them voting rights was the result of a 72-year struggle that began in 1848. In Britain, they won the right to vote in 1918, half a century after John Stuart Mill called for women's suffrage. Switzerland caved in as late as 1971.

The republican Constitution, adopted in 1950, enfranchised Indian women at one stroke. Over the years, Parliament has passed a remarkable range of pro-women legislation — most of it unopposed. However, entrenched patriarchy is not easily challenged. It can hardly be to the satisfaction of the Lok Sabha that with respect to women's representation in the lower House, India ranks a miserable 134 out of 186 countries surveyed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (*World Map of Women in Politics*, 2005, published by the IPU and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women). Pakistan, by contrast, ranks 40, its women having 21.3 per cent representation compared with Indian women's 8.3 per cent. The surprise in the pack is Rwanda; it has edged past the Nordic countries to bag the top position with 48.8 per cent representation for its women. Sweden follows with 45.3 per cent. These achievements are, in large part, an outcome of special enabling measures. The Nordic countries mandate affirmative action such as quotas and targets, while Belgium provides for a statutory quota of 33.3 per cent for women. The Indian case is ironic, considering the higher overall winning ratio for women candidates. Forty-five of 355 women contestants (12.6 per cent) won in the 14th General Election compared with 498 of 5,050 men contestants (9.8 per cent). The strike rate in the preceding general election was 17.2 per cent for women and 11.3 per cent for men. Male candidates have an edge in the national parties but barely so. Of the 30 women fielded by the Bharatiya Janata Party in the May 2004 contest, 10 (33.3 per cent) won. The female success ratio was 62.5 per cent for the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and 26.6 per cent for the Congress. Need we say more?

Monsoon Session Draws To A Close

Women's Bill remains a sore point for PM

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 30 AUGUST

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Friday called for utmost care in the proper implementation of the Rural Employment Guarantee Act to ensure that its benefits reached its intended benefactors. He said those who will be in charge of implementing the scheme should ensure that the right kind of projects are selected and that the loopholes for wastage and corruption are plugged.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha before the House was adjourned sine die, Dr Manmohan Singh said he was happy that the session had passed the Bill so that "the poorest of our people have been assured an important fruit of democracy, the assurance of gainful employment. Our government is proud of the Rural Employment Guarantee Bill that this House has approved in this session." The challenge, he said, was now in how well this assurance was implemented and its benefits reached the intended beneficiaries. "Great responsibility rests on the shoulders of those charged with the responsibility of implementing the Employment Guarantee Act, particularly on the Panchayati Raj institutions," Dr Singh said. He said the government was also proud that the session had passed a Bill amending the Hindu Succession Act to fulfil "a long-standing promise we had made to our sisters and daughters. We are equally committed to the empowerment of women," Mr Singh said.

Regretted that the Women's Reservation Bill couldn't be tabled in the session he said: "I regret the inability to move ahead on the reservation of seats for women in the highest decision-making bodies of our country. But I reiterate our commitment to this just demand of half of our population," he said. The PM expressed his appreciation to Speaker for his "fortitude, wisdom, and your inestimable patience and transparent sincerity in trying to conduct the proceedings of this House."



Left brews storm over SME Bill

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 30 AUGUST

THE Left and the government seem to be headed for another round of confrontation over a provision in the draft Bill for development of small and medium scale enterprises. The CPI contends that it will deny social security benefits to 75% of the workforce in the country. Talking to reporters in Parliament on Tuesday, Gurudas Dasgupta, leader of the CPI in the Lok Sabha, warned that passing the Bill could lead to "serious confrontation" between the Left and the government.

"The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Bill, 2005, pending before the Union Cabinet, will deny majority of the workers in the country the benefits of labour laws," Mr Dasgupta said. He made public the draft Bill and a covering note marked "secret" that recorded the "minutes of the Cabinet on the August 11, 2005". He quoted from a passage in the Bill, which, according to him, denied workers in the small and medium enterprises — essentially those in the unorganised sector — the right to a clutch of social security benefits, including the insurance, provident fund, maternity benefits, bonus and gratuity.

Domestic violence Bill passed amid RS din

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 29. — Parliament approved the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Bill today when the Rajya Sabha passed the measure in an inexplicable hurry without any discussion.

The discussion on the Bill apparently fell victim to a prolonged turmoil the House witnessed over the issue of the finance minister, Mr P. Chidambaram's lawyer wife appearing in an Income-Tax Department case in a Chennai court.

In the middle of the turmoil, which saw BJP and AIADMK members storming the Well of the House, the Chairman, Mr Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, firmly ruled that no discussion could take place after Mr Chidambaram made his personal explanation, and asked the minister of state for HRD, Ms Kanti Singh, to move the Bill.

With the protesting Opposition members in no mood to allow any other business, Ms Singh went through the motion of clause by clause consideration of the Bill with the rul-



Mrs Brinda Karat and Mrs Jaya Bachchan: Livid

ing party members approving the measure step-by-step by voice vote. Amidst the din, the CPI-M member, Ms Brinda Karat, was seen loudly protesting at the haste in which the Bill was being passed. It transpired that Ms Karat had certain amendments to move to the Bill.

Also, after failing to register her protest, an angry Ms Jaya Bachchan, along with her Samajwadi Party members walked out, charging the BJP and other Opposition parties with not being serious about women's issues.

Defence of truth Bill

A Parliamentary committee today termed as "right step" a Bill that sought to make "truth" a defence in contempt of court cases — a provision that is unavailable for pleading by any accused, adds PTI. "The defence of truth being introduced by the legislation is a right step, taken in the right direction, considering the interests of the larger section of the society," the standing committee on public grievances, law and justice said in its report tabled in both Houses.

Afghan women face poll hurdles

Cash bigger problem, says Minister

STOCKHOLM: Many Afghan women who would like to contest the September 18 elections cannot do so because they have no money of their own and their husbands control the family purse strings, Afghanistan's Women's Affairs Minister has said.

Massouda Jalal, in Sweden for a meeting on women's rights in societies recovering from conflicts, said hundreds of women were running for seats in Parliament and local councils, but there could have been thousands more.

"The main reason thousands of women did not become candidates is that they cannot afford the financial expenses," Ms. Jalal told reporters, adding that this was because men were often in charge of the household mon-

ey in the strongly Muslim nation.

Those women who are standing for office "are always mentioning the money as a problem. This is a bigger problem than security," she said.

About 30,000 U.S.-led and NATO troops are trying to defeat a Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

"God willing, we hope security will allow women to vote and participate, but security is not completed, it is still a concern even though we have a partial peace," Ms. Jalal said.

"I hear from candidates that some of them get threats, but it doesn't mean they are not going ahead — we have hundreds of candidates," she said. — Reuters



SEEKING SUPPORT: A candidate for the Afghanistan parliamentary elections, Shukria Barakzai (right) hands out posters to school girls as she campaigns in Kabul recently. — PHOTO: REUTERS

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Sonia's charge on women's Bill baseless, says Sushma Swaraj

BJP stand is that it will support any formula except "quota within quota"

110-12
27/8

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday described as "wrong and baseless" Congress president Sonia Gandhi's charge that the BJP had changed its stand on the Women's Reservation Bill.

"Ms. Gandhi has either been misled or she is trying to cover up her failure in convincing the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) allies to arrive at a consensus that made her blame the Opposition for derailing the exercise," BJP spokesperson Sushma Swaraj told reporters here. She challenged the Government to introduce the Bill in Parliament next week.

Placing on record the BJP's stand that it would support any formula that would ensure reservation for women except a "quota within quota," Ms. Swaraj said this had been made clear

• **Government challenged to introduce the Bill in Parliament next week**

• **Election Commission formula is 'non-controversial'**

at meetings called by the Government, including the one convened by the Prime Minister last week. "We will not disturb any consensus arrived at by the Government but the fact is that the Government itself is unable to convince its ally, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and supporter [the] Samajwadi Party," she said. The BJP's experience had shown that the original Bill would not be passed unless the Government accepted the concept of sub-quota. "We are opposing a quota within quota because the Constitution does not permit

reservation on religious or caste lines and it would be struck down by the Supreme Court." Reacting to a similar demand made by the former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Uma Bharti, Ms. Swaraj said these were individual opinions. As a party there was only one opinion, she added.

It was because of all these issues that the BJP suggested the adoption of the Election Commission formula that would make it mandatory for parties to reserve 33 per cent of the tickets for women. "This option is quick to adopt and implement and non-controversial. In fact, I had opposed the Election Commission proposal but changed my mind subsequently," Ms. Swaraj said.

Ms. Swaraj also sought to give credit to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for twice clearing the Bill from the Cabi-

net and tabling it in Parliament for discussion while the present Government had failed to do even that.

"Last time it was the Members of Parliament who had torn the bill but this time round it would be the Ministers themselves," she added.

NFIW expresses shock

The National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) has expressed shock at the now familiar ending of the hopes of seeing the Bill being translated into legislation.

"This has been going on for over a decade. The Governments of all hues have assured the women of their support for the Bill. The reality, however, has been very different. One or the other sections have managed to sabotage the Bill," a statement issued by NFIW general secretary Annie Raja said.

27 AUG 2005

Mother arrested after girl crusade

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Behrampore, Aug. 25: The mother of nine-year-old Bilkis Khatun was arrested this morning for allegedly forcing her into a marriage mid-July after the girl hitch-hiked to a police station and lodged her own complaint.

Police are looking for the groom, Tufan Sheikh, the girl's 25-year-old cousin, and qazi Aish Mohammad, who registered the marriage in Bhagabangola, 235 km from Calcutta.

Bilkis, a Class IV student of Natun Habaspur Primary School, was married off to Tufan in the absence of her father, the police said. Nurul Islam, a mason, works in Lucknow.

After her marriage on July 14, Bilkis was not sent off to her in-laws' because of her tender age, a police officer said. "After about two weeks, Tufan left for Lucknow, where he worked as a mason, while Bilkis stayed with her mother and went to school."

This morning, Bilkis told her mother that she had to leave for school early as she had to meet a teacher. Moyna Bibi agreed. "She walked up to the main road and caught a trekker to Bhagabangola, 5 km away. The little girl simply strode into the police station and narrated her plight to the officer on duty," a policeman said.

The officer heard her out and asked Bilkis to lodge a written complaint, which she did with the help of a local youth present at the police station then. Treating the complaint as an FIR, the force got going. Along with Moyna Bibi, qazi Moazzem Hossain, who conducted the wedding, was held.

The girl had earlier tried to run away from the marriage, but her mother threatened her into submission. Moyna had even said that she would commit suicide if fled.

"Tufan Sheikh's family is better off financially and we think the mother did not want to waste time when the youth readily agreed to the match," a police officer said.

Murshidabad superintendent of police N.K. Singh confirmed that the arrests were made on the basis of Bilkis's complaint. "The marriage of a minor girl is illegal," he said.

415-6
26/8/96

Much reservation

Women

THE BILL to provide reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies, that has been making the rounds of Parliament since 1996, seems destined to stay in a state of limbo even this year. The seemingly endless debate on whether or not to reserve one-third seats in Parliament for women has taken several turns — most intended to keep the matter on the backburner — but in the process, political parties appear to have lost thread of the real issue — why is there gender disparity in political participation in the first place, and will tokenism in the form of a quota mitigate the circumstances resulting in such a difference?

In India, equality for women is a concept that the Constitution avows, with the ground reality presenting a completely different picture. That of continued discrimination against women, both economically and socially, with little apology. Let's not forget that it has taken 58 years since the country's Independence for women to be able to stake a legal claim to ancestral property, with both Houses of Parliament having cleared the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act in its current session. Simi-

larly, a new legislation that has been enacted to protect women from domestic violence is testimony to the fact that the country has a long way to go before it can rid itself of this inhuman taint that is, according to statistics, widespread.

Political parties must recognise that providing reservation for women in Parliament will not automatically lead to their larger presence in polity. Nor will sub-quotas for backward classes and minorities within its ambit allow women from these sections greater freedom to assert their political identity. The experiment that started with providing quotas for women in village *panchayats* showed what a farce such an exercise can become — women elected to the *panchayats*, in many cases, were just figureheads, while the real decision-making took place elsewhere. The key to greater participation by women in politics lies in their social, economic and cultural empowerment. This is not something that is achievable by a quota. Laws are certainly a help in the process, but as the widespread violation of the statutes on dowry and child marriage shows, the need of the hour is a changed mindset of society as a whole.

26 AUG 2006

NDA for EC formula on women's quota

It will make it mandatory for parties to give women 33.3 per cent of the ticket

Neena Vyas

Singh.

NEW DELHI: At a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh here on Wednesday, almost all National Democratic Alliance constituents and other Opposition parties favoured implementation of the Election Commission (EC) formula for increasing women's representation in Parliament and State assemblies.

Although the Bharatiya Janata Party earlier gave the Government a "blank cheque," saying it would support any consensual formula, its leaders Sushma Swaraj and V.K. Malhotra, who attended the meeting, said there was a better chance for consensus on the EC formula, which would make it mandatory for parties to give women 33.3 per cent of all party ticket. The Commission would be empowered to derecognise and de-register parties which failed to meet the requirement.

Those present included Home Minister Shivraj Patil, Law Minister H.R. Bhardwaj, the former Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Leaders of Opposition, K. Advani and Jaswant

was presented as a Bill, the party would demand a quota for backward castes within the overall reservation for women.

No consensus

Later, the BJP leaders said there was no consensus on the 1996 Bill or the government proposal either among the United Progressive Alliance and its allies or the NDA and other Opposition parties.

The view was that if 33.3 per cent reservation was not possible — it would also be time consuming as the Constitution

would have to be amended and delimitation done afresh — "let us take at least one step forward" and accept the EC formula, for which only the Representation of the People Act would have to be amended by a simple majority.

Ms. Swaraj said that in France, where a similar law was enforced, more than 40 per cent women got elected.

Proportional representation

The All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam suggested

introduction of double-member constituencies, while another Opposition leader mentioned proportional representation.

TDP sticks to stand

By and large the NDA parties — BJP, JD (U), Shiv Sena and Akali Dal — supported the EC proposal.

The Telugu Desam Party stuck to its stand that it supported the original Bill and would support the new government proposal or any other formula to enable increased representation for women.

Awestruck at women power

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Women got so much of the say in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday during the discussion on "The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Bill, 2005" that more than one male member pondered aloud what would

Samaj Party to withdraw a comment they found objectionable, Mr. Jha quipped:

"When they constitute only five per cent of the membership of the House, this is the state of affairs. What will happen when they have 33 per cent reservation."

Later, as the Bill was being put to vote, Ramji Lal Suman

(Samajwadi Party) said while it was all well to bring in such laws to protect women and it was a welcome move, there should be some protection for men also. To this, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad quipped: "I will take you to Jammu & Kashmir" where this legislation will not be applicable.

মহিলা বিল নিয়ে নতুন সূত্র বিজেপির

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২৪ অগস্ট: নির্বাচন কমিশনের সুপারিশ অনুযায়ী রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির উপরেই মহিলাদের জন্য আসন সংরক্ষণের দায়িত্ব দেওয়ার প্রস্তাব দিল বিজেপি। কমিশনের প্রস্তাব ছিল, প্রতিটি রাজ্যে একটি দলের মোট প্রার্থীর এক-তৃতীয়াংশ যাতে মহিলা হন, তার জন্য আইন করুক কেন্দ্র। সে ক্ষেত্রে যেমন মুলায়ম সিংহের সমাজবাদী পার্টিকে উত্তরপ্রদেশের এক-তৃতীয়াংশ আসনে মহিলাদের টিকিট দিতে হবে, পশ্চিমবঙ্গে তা করতে হবে সি পি এমকে। বিজেপি-র প্রস্তাব, মহিলা আসন সংরক্ষণ বিল নিয়ে যখন রাজনৈতিক একমত হচ্ছে না, তখন এই সূত্র প্রয়োগ করে যদি এগনো যায়।

মহিলা বিল নিয়ে আজ বিরোধী দলগুলোর নেতাদের বৈঠকে ডাকেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। সরকারের তরফে সেখানে বুঝিয়ে দেওয়া হয়, মহিলা সংরক্ষণ বিল নিয়ে এখনও বিস্তর জটিলতা রয়েছে। সংবিধান সংশোধন করতে হবে। এবং তা করতে অর্ধেক রাজ্যের সম্মতিও দরকার। ফলে সময় লাগবে। ২০০৯ সালের আগে কিছু করা যাবে বলে মনে হয় না।

বিজেপির তরফে অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী প্রস্তাব দেন, মহিলাদের জন্য আসন সংরক্ষণ সরকার দ্রুত করতে চাইলে জনপ্রতিনিধিত্ব আইনে সংশোধন আনুক। তার পরে নির্দেশ জারি করুক যাতে পাটিগুলো রাজ্যওয়াড়ি, মহিলাদের জন্য এক-তৃতীয়াংশ আসনে সংরক্ষণ করে। সংযুক্ত জনতা দলের নেতা নীতিশ কুমার অবশ্য “কোটার ভেতর কোটার” দাবি জানান। বিজেপি সূত্রের খবর, এনডিএ-র আর কেউ আজ নীতিশ কুমারের মতো দাবি জানাননি। তেলুগু দেশম পার্টির নেতা ইয়ারান নাইডু এবং অকালি দলের তরফে বলা হয়, নীতিশের প্রস্তাব মানতে তাঁদের অসুবিধা নেই, আবার তা না হলেও আপত্তি নেই। রাজনৈতিক মহলের বক্তব্য, বিজেপির দেওয়া সূত্রে সিপিএম রাজি হবে কি না তা নিয়ে সংশয় রয়েছে। কারণ, এই ব্যবস্থায় এক-তৃতীয়াংশ আসনে মহিলাদের জয় সুনিশ্চিত হবে না। অথচ তা সুনিশ্চিত করাই সিপিএমের দাবি। সুতরাং শরিক এবং বিরোধীদের সঙ্গে দু’দিন বৈঠকের পরে মহিলা বিল নিয়ে সরকার যে তিমিরে সেই তিমিরেই।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

পারিবারিক নির্যাতন বন্ধে বিল পাশ হল

নয়াদিল্লি, ২৪ অগস্ট: পারিবারিক নির্যাতনের ক্ষেত্রে মেয়েদের নিরাপত্তা সুরক্ষিত করতে আজ লোকসভায় সর্বসম্মতিক্রমে একটি বিল পাশ হয়েছে।

পরিবারের যে কোনও সদস্যের কাছ থেকে যে কোনও রকম নিপীড়ন বা হয়রানির শিকার হওয়া মহিলারা এই বিলের আওতায় আসবেন। বিয়ের পরে পণের টাকা দিতে না পারায় মেয়েরা পরিবারে যে ধরনের হেনস্থার শিকার হন, বিলে তার প্রতিকারের কথাও বলা হয়েছে। যৌথ বা ছোট পরিবার, দুই ক্ষেত্রেই নির্যাতনকারীদের বিরুদ্ধে কড়া ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হবে। বিবাহিতাদের ক্ষেত্রে, বিয়ের পরে প্রয়োজনে বাপের বাড়িতে এসে থাকার অধিকার বিষয়েও সাফ জানানো হয়েছে। যে সব ক্ষেত্রে মেয়েরা নিগ্রহকারীর সঙ্গে একত্রে বাস করতে বাধ্য হচ্ছেন, সে ক্ষেত্রেও আইন তাদের নিরাপত্তার ব্যবস্থা করবে বলে আশ্বাস দেওয়া হয়েছে। বলা হয়েছে, মৌখিক

হোক বা মানসিক, অর্থনৈতিক হোক বা যৌন নিগ্রহ—সব ক্ষেত্রেই মেয়েরা এখন থেকে আইনি সহায়তা পাবেন স্থানীয় ম্যাজিস্ট্রেটের কাছ থেকে। আদালতের নির্দেশ না মানলে নিগ্রহকারীর এক বছর পর্যন্ত জেল বা কুড়ি হাজার টাকা পর্যন্ত জরিমানাও হতে পারে।

এই ধরনের একটি বিল, গোটা পরিবার বা স্বামী-স্ত্রী-র মধ্যে বিভেদ সৃষ্টি করতে পারে, এমন আশঙ্কা অবশ্য উড়িয়ে দিয়েছেন কেন্দ্রীয় মানবসম্পদ উন্নয়ন দফতরের প্রতিমন্ত্রী কান্তি সিংহ। তিনি জানিয়েছেন, এই বিষয়ে ২০০৩ সাল থেকে এ যাবৎ মোট দেড় লাখ অভিযোগ জমা পড়েছে এবং প্রতি বছর এই সংখ্যা সাড়ে নয় শতাংশ হারে বাড়ছে।

কান্তি সিংহ আরও জানিয়েছেন, অল্প কিছু দিনের মধ্যেই কর্মক্ষেত্রে মহিলাদের উপরে যৌন হেনস্থা প্রতিরোধেও একটি বিল আনতে চলেছে কেন্দ্র। — পি টি আই

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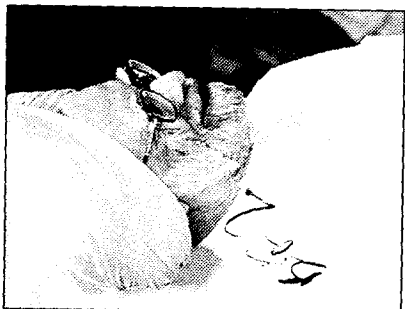
Women's Bill gets shot in arm from EC

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 24 AUGUST

With the UPA government failing to break the deadlock over its formula on the Women's Reservation Bill, fresh hopes were pinned on the Election Commission's (EC) proposal making it binding for the political parties to earmark 33% seats for women while allocating tickets for elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislatures.

A meeting convened this afternoon by PM Manmohan Singh as part of his efforts to hammer out a consensus over the women's reservation issue saw the opposition parties re-opening the chapter on the EC proposal.

Barring the AIADMK, which came out in support of identifying double-member constituencies to accommodate the interests of women, and Mr Sharad Joshi's



Swatantra Bharat Party, which favoured the proportional representation principle, the other opposition parties urged the government to work out a consensus over the EC formula.

"It's the simplest and the easiest proposal," observed BJP leader in the Rajya Sabha, Mr Jaswant Singh — a view which



EC proposes Parties Earmark 33% Seats For Women While Allotting LS Tickets

was endorsed by his deputy, Ms Sushma Swaraj. "It can be implemented in the 2006 assembly polls in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Pondicherry, Assam and Kerala. The quota-within-quota demand will be automatically dissolved as it'll be left to the parties to leave at least 33% seats for women. All that will be required is to move a one-line amendment in the People's Representation Act, which can be passed by a voice-vote."

The meeting saw former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee making a strong plea for ensuring

a forward movement on the long-pending bill. The government's proposal of enlarging the strength of the Lok Sabha by 33% to accommodate the interests of women, he maintained, too had been stuck, with the RJD, a constituent of the UPA, and the Samajwadi party, which is extending outside support to the

government, sticking to their quota-within-quota demand.

The NDA, too, appeared to be divided on the quota-within-quota demand, with the JD(U)'s Nitish Kumar coming out in its favour during Wednesday's meeting. His stand was endorsed by the Akali Dal and the TDP.

That being the case, BJP president LK Advani wondered whether the EC's proposal could be explored. "The UPA government's Bill, in any case, was to come into force only after the 2009 Lok Sabha polls. A lot of spadework will have to be done before implementing it," he said.

The JD(U), SAD and the TDP too said they were not averse to the EC formula. Sensing the mood at the meeting, the PM is learnt to have expressed happiness over the "fruitful discussions." But Union home minister Shriyraj Patil, is learnt to have demurred.

25 AUG 2005

LS passes Bill against domestic violence

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 24. - The Lok Sabha today passed a far-reaching reformist legislation to protect women from all forms of domestic violence ranging from physical violence and sexual abuse to economic and emotional harassment by family members or relatives.

It was passed unanimously by voice vote after a two-day discussion that saw many a moving

speech by women members.

Replying to the discussion on the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Bill 2005, the minister of state for HRD, Ms Kanti Singh, told a cheering House that the government would also bring in a new legislation to check sexual exploitation of women in workplaces. She said that the government would instruct all women-related departments to adhere to 'gender budgeting' to hasten eco-

omic, social and educational empowerment of women. It was decided to bring in the bill as the phenomenon of domestic violence was widely prevalent, but had remained largely invisible in the public domain, she pointed out.

Under the bill, any harassment by way of unlawful dowry demands to the woman or her relatives would be strictly banned. The bill brings under its purview women in marriages and live-in relationships

and those living in a shared household through "consanguinity or adoption." According to the bill, domestic relationship means "a relationship between two persons who live or have, at any point of time, lived together in a shared household, when they are related by consanguinity, marriage, or through a relationship, in the nature of marriage, adoption or are family members living together as a joint family."

While the legislation enables a female to file a complaint against the male partner or his relatives, it does not enable any female relative of the husband or male partner to file a complaint against the female partner. The bill empowers a magistrate to pass protection orders in favour of the victim to prevent the respondent from aiding or committing an act of domestic violence or any other specified act. "Breach of protection order by the respondent

shall be an offence and shall be punishable with imprisonment, which may extend to one year or fine, which may extend to Rs.20,000 or with both," says the statement of objects and reasons for the Bill. It also seeks to ensure for women the right to secure housing. It [provides rights for women to reside in their matrimonial homes or shared households, whether or not they have any title or rights in such homes or households.

THE STATESMAN

Women's reservation debate on

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 24. — As differences between the BJP and its NDA partners surfaced today on the issue of reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures, the much-hyped women's reservation Bill appeared to have hit a dead-end once again.

At a meeting of the non-UPA and non-Left parties here called by the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, no consensus could be evolved once again over the bill. Earlier, a similar meeting of the UPA and its supporting Left allies had met with the same fate. The BJP, however, defended its partners' right to differ on the issue and once again reiterated that it was ready to back the Bill's passage in whatever format it was brought in by the government.

In today's meeting, Mr LK Advani and Mrs Sushma Swaraj from the

Parliament adopts rural job Bill

NEW DELHI, Aug. 24. — The Parliament tonight approved the historic Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, when the Rajya Sabha adopted it by voice vote after the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, spoke about the imperative of maintaining 7 to 8 per cent GDP growth to finance and effectively sustain the awesome scheme. The Bill seeks to ensure job for 100 days a year to one member of each rural household in the country. The Lok Sabha passed the Bill yesterday. Now, it will go to the President for his assent to become an Act of Parliament.

BJP and other NDA leaders, including from the TDP, were present. The Janata Dal (United) leader, Mr Nitish Kumar, insisted on "quota within quota" earmarking a percentage of reservation for the minority communities in the Bill. The Akali Dal and TDP, though not in open support of such a provision, maintained that they had no objection to it. The BJP, however, was opposed to any reservation for Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians.

Home minister Mr Shivraj Patil came forward with two more alternative proposals for the Bill. One

related to "double member constituencies", the brainchild of the AIADMK. Swatantra Bharat's Mr Sharad Joshi suggested "Proportional representation list system" as another alternative. There were in total five proposals for an alternative to the Bill.

Mrs Swaraj, however, said that the government's new delimitation exercise for additional allocation of seats in Parliament and Assemblies would be a time-taking exercise, as it would pose enormous logistical problems and further delay the Bill's passage.

BJP leaders claimed that consensus in today's discus-

sion emerged in favour of the Election Commission's recommendation as it did not involve a ratification by states and could be passed by a voice vote.

"If the EC proposal was accepted, it could be implemented during the next years' Assembly elections in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam. It would also effectively address some of the political parties' insistence on 'quota within quota' as it would be entirely up to the parties to decide as to whom they want to give tickets to," Mrs Swaraj argued. But with the Left adamant on its original 1997 Bill, it seems unlikely that a consensus on the matter could be evolved.

BJP parliamentary party spokesman Mr VK Malhotra warned the government against any attempt to bring in legislation that would guarantee reservation for Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims.

25 AUG 2001

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Yadavs foil govt plan on women's quota bill

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: OBC chieftains from the north—UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and railway minister Lalu Prasad—had to launch a grim last-ditch fight on Monday to beat back a determined push for an early passage of the women's reservation bill after the DMK suddenly switched sides to join the pro-quota forces.

The DMK's changed stance, conveyed to Lalu, at once tipped the balance in favour of the proponents of the women's quota, leading the railway minister and the UP CM to dig their heels in on the matter amid rising fears that government was seeking an extension of the session to get the quota bill, which has been languishing for years, passed.

DMK boss M Karunanidhi told Lalu that no hurdle should be placed in the way of the bill and that the quota for "backwards" could be considered in the second phase. The DMK's desertion blasted a big hole in the fortification that the OBC politicians have built to oppose the passage of the bill unless it was amended to provide for a "quota within quota" for OBC and Muslim women.

The development, which saw the DMK uncoupling itself from its Tamil Nadu partner, the PMK, alarmed not just the "backward" MPs in different parties but the entire male political establishment which sees the OBC resistance as their last line of defence against the women's quota.

Luckily for them, the resistance held

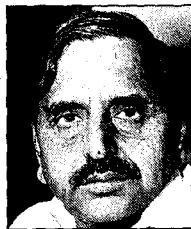
its own against the growing momentum of political correctness in spite of the fact that BSP chief Mayawati did not come out in the open to support a "backward" quota within the larger women's quota.

At the meeting of UPA partners, the Left and others like the SP, the BSP and Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen supporting the government convened here to craft a consensus, the UP CM is reported to have questioned the very rationale of the exercise, saying the parties had more important concerns to care for than women's quota. He got solid support from Lalu, who put his foot down saying that he would not mind getting isolated over the issue.

"You earmark half of the 33% you propose to reserve for women for OBCs and Muslims. Or else, I will not support you," the railway minister reportedly told his UPA colleagues.

Lalu took his opposition to the Central Hall, lobbying MPs of parties which are supporting the bill using different devices, including invoking fears of loss of power, promoting OBC solidarity and the argument that the passage of the bill with no indication of the seats to be exclusively designated for women would make everyone's political fate uncertain. He also herded all his MPs and took them to Pranab Mukherjee to show that he meant business.

The two Yadav leaders also got support from Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen's representative Azeezuddin Owaisi, who made a strong pitch for quota for Muslims.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

The myth of "feminisation"

Even after 50 years of women's lib, some men still find it hard to accept the idea of women in sharp suits setting the agenda and telling them what to do.

Hasan Suroor

FIRST, A well-known fact: a British workplace is no longer a sea of white and brown men in grey suits; and even in smoke-filled boardrooms there is a view beyond the glass ceiling. Now a myth: too many top jobs in key areas are being taken away by women causing a dangerous "shift in the balance of power between the sexes."

And now the ultimate myth: something called the "feminisation" of the workplace is going on — and so rapidly that it threatens the very identity of men. It is said to be already happening. Remember the woman chief executive of a company who referred to a male journalist as "that gentleman in tight trousers," rather than by his name?

In the past week, the British media have been consumed by a new controversy over what has been termed a "battle of sexes." It all started when Michael Buerk, one of Bri-

tain's most respected broadcasters and a former high-profile BBC news presenter and foreign correspondent, complained that the "shift in the balance of power between the sexes" had gone too far and men were being reduced to picking up the crumbs. He used a rather colourful expression to suggest that men were in danger of being marginalised — not only at the workplace but everywhere.

"Life is now being lived according to women's rules," he bemoaned in an interview with *The Radio Times* adding that men were becoming "more like women." "Look at the changes in the workplace. There is no manufacturing industry any more; there are no mines; few vital jobs require physical strength. We have lots of jobs that require people-skills and multi-tasking—which women are a lot better at," he said.

Using the BBC as an example of how women were supposedly squeezing men out of their traditional strongholds, Mr. Buerk

complained: "Almost all the big jobs in broadcasting are held by women — the controllers of BBC1 television and Radio 4, for example ... These are the people who decide what we see and hear."

The BBC is routinely accused of all manner of things — pro-Labour bias, anti-Israeli tilt, too much political correctness — but this is the first time someone has made a fuss over its gender profile which, despite some women in senior positions, remains — like most of Britain — very much a male patch. Its two top positions — chairman and director-general — are, both, held by men. And another coveted position — that of the BBC's Political Editor — has always been, and con-

OUT OF LONDON

tinues to be, a male monopoly. Feminists were rather upset when, recently, the BBC brought in a male journalist from outside the BBC to replace its outgoing political editor Andrew Marr bypassing its own senior female staffer, Martha Kearney, political editor of *Newsnight*. *The Guardian's* columnist, Polly Toynbee, famously accused the BBC of throwing away an opportunity to signal a change in its macho approach to political journalism by ignoring the more mellow Ms. Kearney's claim.

Outside the BBC, things are even worse. In almost all professions — politics, bureaucracy, business, academia, police, army — it is a man's world. And that includes the media where, contrary to Mr. Buerk's lament, top jobs are not occupied by women.

Women's groups have angrily contested the theory of the "feminisation" of the work-

place pointing out that far from dominating the workplace, women do not even get the same wages as men for the same work.

As for claims that the City — London's notoriously male-dominated financial district — is being "taken over" by aggressive women bosses, the fact is that, according to surveys, there is only one female chairperson among Britain's top 100 companies, and one woman chief executive. Boardrooms are said to be overwhelmingly white and male. One analyst said that it was still "unusual" to see women in senior positions. "While there are some exceptional women who have reached exceptional positions, they remain just that: the exception. I am a woman working in the very male-dominated City and I have lost count of the times that I've been the only female in the room," noted Polly Fergusson editor of the financial magazine *Shares*, writing in *The Sunday Telegraph*.

Arguably, the Old Boys network has started to sag a bit, but "feminisation" of the workplace? Come on. For, despite all the hand-wringing over women barn-storming their way through male preserves, British society still remains solidly white, male and middle class.

So, what is the Buerk-ian fuss about? Obviously, even after 50 years of women's lib, some men still find it hard to accept the idea of women in sharp suits setting the agenda and telling them what to do. A more charitable explanation is that Mr. Buerk's outburst was all a PR gimmick to create interest in his new Channel Five programme *Don't Get Me Started!* And, lastly, it is August — the "silly" season when nothing happens and a news-starved media need to manufacture controversies to remain in business. Take your pick.

Walking to school

Walkers have been found to be more active than those who come by car, bus or train.

Nicholas Bakalar

WALKING TO school may be the cure for teenage couch potatoes. A Scottish study demonstrates that the walkers are more active during the rest of the day than their peers who arrive by car, bus or train.

Why walking to school encourages greater

physical activity is not clear, but the authors speculate that a morning walk may stimulate further social interaction and lead to more exercise.

They said that similar results had been found for 10-year-olds, but that walking to school made no difference in the physical activity level of five-year-olds.

The researchers recruited 13- and 14-year-olds from four schools near Edinburgh, giving each an instrument that records the time and distance of vertical movement. They were asked to wear the devices all day except while bathing or swimming.

The results were published online by *British Medical Journal* on August 16.

By every measurement, the teenagers who walked to school exercised more than those who rode.

Those who walked both to and from school got 25 per cent more exercise than riders over the entire weekday, 8.9 per cent more during school hours, 4.2 per cent more while on morning break, 18.4 per cent more during lunch break and 17 per cent more exercise outside school.

The teenagers who walked one way had increases over the riders that were almost as great.

Turning down a lift to school may have other advantages, said Joanna Inchley, a research fellow at the University of Edinburgh and co-author of the study. "Obviously cutting down on car travel has much broader environmental and safety benefits as well as the health benefits for children," she said.

Driving the teenagers to soccer practice may not be enough, Ms. Inchley said. "Parents need the support of schools and community groups to provide a range of age-appropriate opportunities for children and adolescents to be active. It's not just about team-based sports." —*New York Times News Service*

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THE HINDU

রেলের বাড়তি জমিতে হোটেল, শপিং মূল একমত হলে না মহিলা বিলে

আজকালের প্রতিবেদন: দিল্লি, ২২ আগস্ট— দীর্ঘ বৈঠকেও ইউ পি এ-র শরিক ও সমর্থনকারী দলগুলির মধ্যে মহিলা সংরক্ষণ বিল নিয়ে আজও একমত হলে না। শরিক রাষ্ট্রীয় জনতা দল, সরকার সমর্থক সমাজবাদী পার্টি, বহুজন সমাজ পার্টি তফসিলি জাতি, উপজাতি ও অনগ্রসর মহিলাদের কেটার দাবি বার বার জানাতে থাকায় প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংয়ের সভাপতিত্বে আজ আড়াই ঘণ্টার বৈঠকটি থেকে কোনও ফলই উঠে আসেনি। সংসদের চলতি অধিবেশনে বিলটি পেশ হতে পারে— এমন কোনও আশার আলোই দেখা যায়নি। বিরক্ত সি পি এম সরকারকেই খোঁচা দিয়ে বলেছে, বিলটিকে দেরি করানোর জন্যই একমতের চেষ্টা করা হচ্ছে। এটা বিলটিকে বিলম্বিত করারই কৌশল। যখন সংসদের গরিষ্ঠাংশই মহিলা বিল সমর্থন করছে, তখন বিলটি তো পেশ করাই যায়। তবে আজ রাজ্যসভায় রেলের একটি অতি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বিল (আর এল ডি এ) পাস হয়ে যাওয়ার সেটি আইনে পরিণত হতে চলেছে। রেলের খালি জমি ব্যবহারের জন্য একটি রেল-জমি উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ গঠনের জন্য এই আর এল ডি এ বিলটি আনা হয়েছিল। বিলটি আগেই লোকসভায় গৃহীত হয়। এই বিলে রেলের বাড়তি জমি বিক্রি না করে তা থেকে রেলের আয়ের কথা ভাবা হয়েছে। তবে সে জমি বিক্রি করে নয়, বিভিন্ন বাণিজ্যিক উপায়ে। বিলটি আজ রাজ্যসভায় সর্বসম্মতভাবে পাস হয়েছে। রেলমন্ত্রী লালুপ্রসাদ বিলটি নিয়ে আলোচনায় জানিয়েছেন, এই জমি থেকে রেল বছরের শেষে ১০ হাজার কোটি টাকা বাড়তি আয় করতে পারবে। সারা দেশে প্রতিরক্ষা বাহিনীর পরেই জমির পরিমাণে রেল দ্বিতীয় স্থানে। লালু জানিয়েছেন, রেলের ৪৩ হাজার হেক্টর বাণিজ্যিক জমি আছে। তাতে সরকার

তৈরি করবে শপিং কমপ্লেক্স, পার্কিংলট, নার্সিংহোম, হোটেল ইত্যাদি। রেল স্টেশনের কাছাকাছি এসব ক্ষেত্র থেকে রেলের আয় হবে ভালই। এই অতিরিক্ত জমি কোনওভাবেই বিক্রি করা হবে না, তবে নির্দিষ্টকালের জন্য লিজ দেওয়া হবে। কয়েকজন সাংসদ জমি-মাফিয়া ও অসাধু প্রমোটারদের প্রসঙ্গ তোলায় লালু বলেন, শক্ত হাতে এসব রোখার ব্যবস্থা রয়েছে বিলে। বিলটিকে লালু বৈপ্লবিক আখ্যা দেন। মহিলা সংরক্ষণ বিল নিয়ে আজ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সভাপতিত্বে বৈঠকে কংগ্রেস, বামদলগুলি, আর জে ডি, এল জে পি, এস পি, বি এস পি, ডি এম কে, টি আর এস নেতারা যোগ দেন। ছিলেন ইউ পি এ চেয়ারপার্সন সোনিয়া গান্ধী ও সংসদীয় মন্ত্রী গুলাম নবি আজাদ। রাজ্য বিধানসভাগুলি ও লোকসভায় ৩৩ শতাংশ মহিলা সংরক্ষণের যে বিলটি নিয়ে আলোচনা, সেটি তৈরি হয়েছিল কেন্দ্রে যুক্তফ্রন্ট সরকারের আমলে। গীতা মুখার্জির নেতৃত্বে একটি স্থায়ী কমিটি এই বিল তৈরি করেছিল। যুক্তফ্রন্ট আমলেও লালু-মুলায়মরা বাধা দিয়েছিলেন। আজও বিলটি নিয়ে একমত না হওয়ার পর সরকারের উঁচু মহল থেকে জানানো হয়েছে, কোনও দলই মহিলাদের সংরক্ষণ দেওয়ার বিরোধী নয়। কিন্তু কীভাবে দেওয়া হবে তা নিয়েই মতভেদ। ওই সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, প্রধানমন্ত্রী সবার মতামত নিলেন। মূল বিলটিতে প্রয়োজনে কিছু সংশোধন/সংযোজন হবে। এর পর পেশ করা হবে বিল। সি পি এম আজ লোকসভায় দাবি জানিয়েছে, বেসরকারি ক্ষেত্রগুলিতে তফসিলি জাতি-উপজাতির সংরক্ষণের জন্য বিল আনার। আজ প্রশ্নোত্তর পর্বে সরকারের প্রতি এই দাবি জানিয়েছেন সি পি এম সাংসদ বাসুদেব আচারিয়া। রাজ্যসভায় আজ সরকার পেশ করে শ্রমিক আইন বিল।

২৩ আগস্ট ১৯৮৫

Consensus eludes Women's Bill

We favour original version but will not stand in the way of consensus: Left

Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI: A two-hour discussion among the United Progressive Alliance constituents and its supporting parties on the proposed Women's Reservation Bill did not produce consensus but several parties said they agreed "in principle" with the idea of reserving one-third of seats for women in State legislatures and Parliament.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who was in the chair, was reported to have said at the end of the meeting that he appreciated the views expressed and would get back to them. Besides UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, leaders of the UPA constituents, representatives of the Left parties, the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party were present.

There was a shift in the Left parties stand on the issue. They had earlier stated their preference for the "original 1996 Bill" proposing reservation of one-third of the current strength of all seats in legislatures for women without any sub-quotas within this reservation. After the Monday meeting, Gurudas Dasgupta of the CPI said that while they favoured the original Bill "the Left will not stand in the way of consensus."

The new MP of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Brinda Karat, told reporters, "the large majority of parties want 33.3 per cent reservation for women and early legislation on this."

Apparently a different tune was heard from the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal, with the former asserting that it would oppose the Bill in Parliament. SP chief Mulayam Singh Yadav made three points: one, he favoured making it mandatory for parties to give 10 per cent of ticket to women; two, if inadequacy of representation was the issue why not reser-

vation for Muslim women (there are only two in the present Lok Sabha); and three, if 33.3 per cent reservation was given to women and 22.5 per cent already existed for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, more than 55 per cent of seats in Parliament would be reserved which would not be fair or just for other sections of the population.

RJD president Lalu Prasad said his party would not oppose "10 to 15 per cent reservation for women" under the old proposed Bill or the new proposal to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 900 and state Assemblies by 3000. "We are committed to social justice" and "it must be seen which sections of the population do not have adequate representation."

His view was that while the RJD was "not opposed" to women's reservation, the case of dalits, backward classes, Muslims and other religious minorities should not be overlooked.

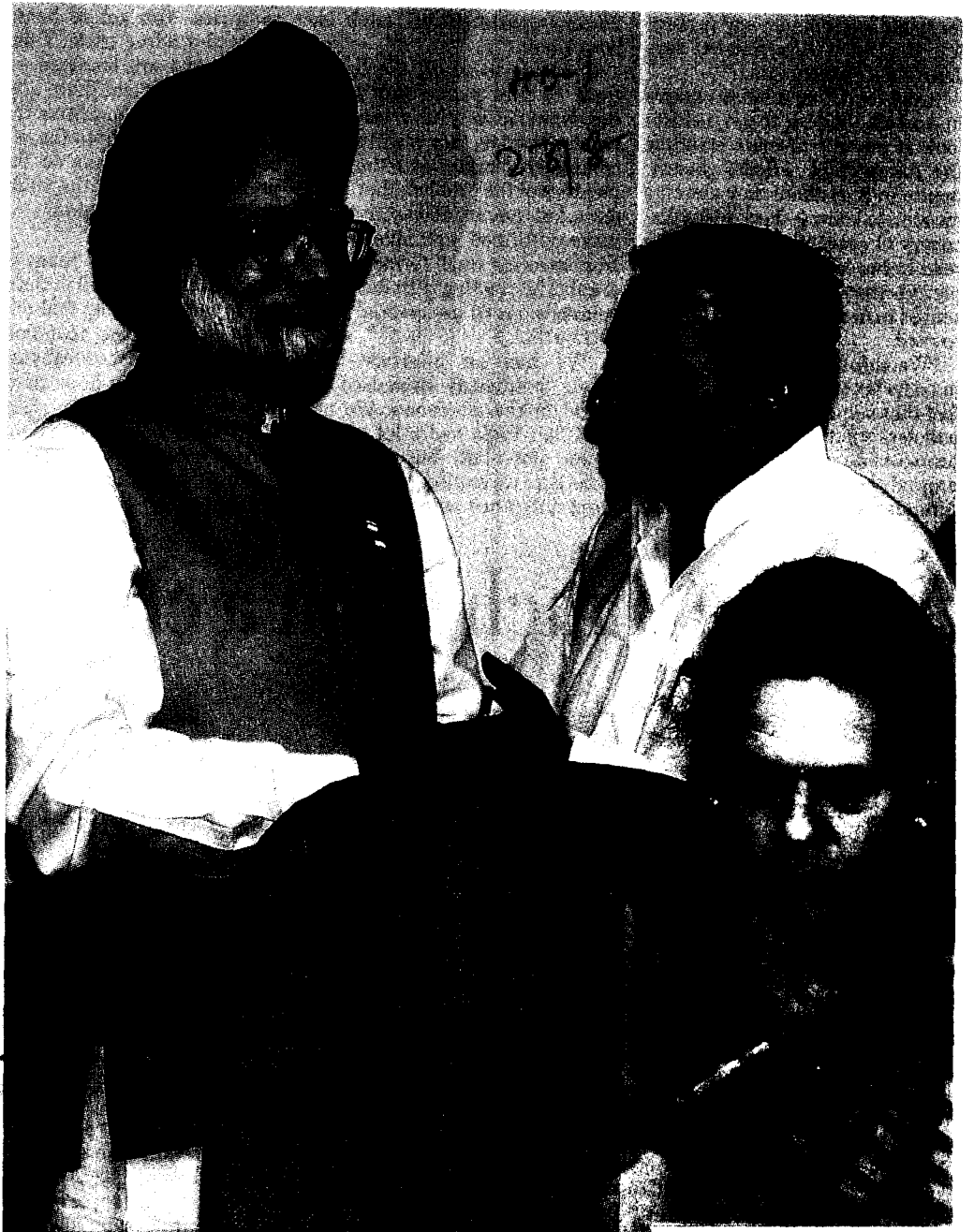
The RJD, he said, supported either "10 to 15 per cent women's reservation" or quotas within the women's quota if it is to be a 33.3 per cent reservation. "The rest will depend on the common view that emerges (*Baaki pan-chon ki rai*)."

Early legislation sought

Bahujan Samaj Party leader Mayawati and Lok Jan Shakti Party president Ram Vilas Paswan supported the Bill. Both wanted early legislation.

Congress leader Ambika Soni said: "The meeting was part of the ongoing exercise to evolve consensus on the Bill and this exercise will continue. There was a free and frank discussion and the feeling was that almost all present were committed to some form or another of reservation for women."

Party spokesperson Anand Sharma said later: "All leaders at the meeting favoured women's reservation in principle."



Prime Minister

Chairperso

PERSISTING DIFFERENCES: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav at the all-party meeting on the Women's Bill in New Delhi on Monday. — PHOTO: V. SUDERSHAN

THE HINDU

Now, Bill to deter domestic violence

PRESS Trust of India
New Delhi, August 22

A LANDMARK Bill that seeks to deter domestic violence in all forms against women by providing for punishment upto one year in jail for culprits was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Bill, 2005, introduced by minister of state for HRD Kanti Singh, defines the expression "domestic violence" to include actual abuse or threat of abuse — physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic violence.

Harassment by way of unlawful dowry demands to the woman or her relatives would also be covered under this definition, according to the statement of objects and reasons of the Bill.

The measure empowers a magistrate to pass protection orders in favour of the aggrieved person to prevent the respondent from aiding or committing an act of domestic violence or any other specified act.

Breach of protection order by the respondent shall be an offence and shall be punishable with imprisonment, which may extend to one year or fine which may extend to Rs 20,000 or with both.

The magistrate can prevent the respondent from entering a workplace or any other place frequented by the aggrieved person, attempting to communicate with her, isolating any assets used by both the parties and causing violence to the aggrieved person, her relatives or others who provide her assistance from domestic violence.

Observing that domestic violence was a human rights issue, the statement said that the phenomenon was widely prevalent but had remained largely invisible in public domain.

It said that need for the legislation arose as the civil law does not address this phenomenon in its entirety.

At present, where a woman is subjected to cruelty by her husband or his relatives, it is an offence under section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (cruelty by

Tricolour issue

A BILL to allow people to wear the National Flag on items of clothing, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday. Manikrao Gavit, minister of state for home, introduced the Prevention of Offences to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2005, to enable people to use the National Flag as their costumes, uniforms or as accessories, in a respectable manner. The statement on objects and reasons for the measure states that the Bill was formulated to meet demands from people, particularly sportspersons, to declare their affection for the National Flag by wearing it on their clothes.

HTC, New Delhi

husband or relative).

The Bill covers women who are or have been in a relationship with the abuser where both parties have lived together in a household and are related by consanguinity, marriage or through a relationship in the nature of marriage or adoption. In addition, relationships with family members living together as a joint family are also included. Even those women who are sisters, widows, mothers, single women or living with the abuser are entitled to legal protection under the proposed legislation.

It provides for the rights of women to secure housing. It also provides for the right of a woman to reside in her matrimonial home or shared household, whether or not she has any title or rights in such home or household.

This right is secured by a residence order, which is passed by the Magistrate.

The Bill also provides for appointment of Protection Officers and registration of non-governmental organisations as service providers for giving assistance to the aggrieved person with respect to her medical examination and obtaining of legal aid and safe shelter.

27 AUG 2005

House ditches women, again

MPs fail to reach consensus on reservation Bill in LS

PRESS Trust of India
New Delhi, August 22

WITH THE RJD and SP and BSP pitching for quota for SC, ST and OBC women, consensus continued to elude the Women's Reservation Bill which is unlikely to see the light of the day during the current session of Parliament.

A two-and-a-half hour meeting of UPA constituents and supporting parties, chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, failed to reach a consensus on the Bill, which seeks to earmark 33 per cent seats in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies for women.

The meeting was attended by leaders of Left parties, RJD, LJP, SP, BSP, DMK and TRS. Sonia Gandhi and parliamentary affairs minister Ghulam Nabi Azad were also present.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, railway minister Lalu Prasad said if the Bill in its original form was introduced, then a separate quota should be earmarked for Muslims, SC, ST and OBC women. Otherwise, he favoured only ten per cent, or maximum 15 per cent, quota for women irrespective of the category to which they belonged.

Observing that RJD was committed to social justice, Lalu said whether it was old or new Bill, his party was not against the women's reservation legislation.

SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav opposed rotation of seats saying it would "hamper" development work as members may not take interest in their constituencies.

On the provision for 33 per cent reservation, he said it was against democratic norms and cited instances of countries like the US and the UK where there was no reservation. He said since seats are already reserved for SC and ST, earmarking additional 33 per cent for women would affect the other sections of the society. To a question, he said SP would oppose the Bill if the government went ahead with the measure.

Echoing similar views, BSP chief Mayawati said her party was not against reservation for women but demanded quota for SC, ST and OBC women.

LJP leader Ram Vilas Paswan said he was in favour of women's reservation and felt that if a sub-quota could be introduced for OBC, ST and SC women it would be welcome. "But, the Bill should not be stopped."

CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat said except RJD and SP all other parties supported the original legislation.

"We have left it to the government as to which form it wants to bring in the Bill," she said adding that her party wanted the Bill to be passed without any further delay.

CPI leader Gurudas Dasgupta said his party supported the first Bill and at the same time made it clear that it would

not stand in the way of passing the second Bill, which seeks to raise the number of seats to accommodate women, if there was consensus on it.

Congress leader Ambika Soni said today's meeting was part of the ongoing exercise to evolve a consensus. Asked whether the Bill would be introduced in the current session, she said there was no decision on it.

9 RS MPs take oath

NINE NEW members of the Rajya Sabha, including Sitaram Yechury and Brinda Karat of CPI(M), took oath on Monday amidst warm welcome in the House. Other members were Suryakant Krupashanker Acharya and Surendra Motilala Patel of BJP, Ahmed Patel of Congress, Chittabrata Majumdar of CPI(M), Abani Roy of RSP, Arjun Kumar Sengupta (Independent) and Swapan Sadhan Bose of Trinamool Congress.

They were administered the oath in the presence of Rajya Sabha chairman Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. Yechury, Karat, Ahmed Patel and Sengupta took the oath in English, Majumdar and Roy in Bengali while Acharya and Surendra Patel took the oath in Gujarati.

HTC, New Delhi



Sitaram Yechuri



Brinda Karat

23 AUG 2005

THE HINDU
LAKSHMI

একমত্য নয়, তবু মহিলা বিল নিয়ে এগোবে কেন্দ্র

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২২ অগস্ট: মহিলা সংরক্ষণ বিল নিয়ে অখণ্ড একমত্যের আশা কার্যত ছেড়ে দিয়েছে সরকার। বিলটি পাশ করাতে গেলে দুই তৃতীয়াংশ সাংসদের সমর্থন দরকার ও সমাজবাদী পার্টির মতো সরকারের সমর্থক কয়েকটি দল বিলটির প্রস্তাবিত খসড়ার বিরোধী। তবে এই পরিস্থিতিতে প্রধান বিরোধী দল বি জে পি-র সমর্থন সরকারের দিকেই আছে। ফলে সমাজবাদী পার্টির মতো দু' একটি দল পাশে না থাকলেও সরকার বিলটি নিয়ে এগোবে বলে ইঙ্গিত।

দীর্ঘ টালবাহানা, অসংখ্য বৈঠকের পর কিছুটা হলেও আশার আলো দেখছে মহিলা বিল। সর্বদলীয় একমত্য তৈরি করে এই অধিবেশনেই বিতর্কিত বিলটি পাশ করিয়ে নেওয়া যাবে, পরিস্থিতি ঠিক এখনই এমন নয়। কিন্তু প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের উপস্থিতিতে এই বিল নিয়ে যে বৈঠক হয়েছে, সেখানে অনেকটাই নমনীয়তা দেখিয়েছেন সরকারের শরিক ও সমর্থক দলের নেতারা। শুধু সমাজবাদী পার্টিই বিলটির বিরোধিতা করেছে।

বরঞ্চ কিছুটা নরম লালু। বামেরাও তাদের গৌড়া অবস্থান থেকে সরে এসে জানিয়েছে, নতুন বা পুরনো যে কোনও বিলেই তাঁদের সমর্থন রয়েছে। অবশ্যই যদি তাতে সর্বসম্মতি হয়। বৈঠকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলেছেন, সবার বক্তব্যই শোনা হয়েছে। এর ভিত্তিতে মতৈক্যে পৌঁছানোর চেষ্টা করা হবে।

সেই সর্বসম্মতি কবে এবং কী ভাবে আসবে, বিলের রূপরেখা কেমন হবে তা অবশ্য স্পষ্ট হয়নি। নিজে সাংসদ নন বলে এই ধরনের বৈঠকে থাকেন না সি পি এমের সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রকাশ কারাট। কিন্তু, গুরুত্বপূর্ণ এই বিলটি নিয়ে আলোচনার জন্য তাঁকে আমন্ত্রণ জানান প্রধানমন্ত্রী স্বয়ং। প্রকাশ কারাট ও সি পি আইয়ের ডি রাজা দু'জনেই এক সুরে প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে জানিয়েছেন যে, তাঁরা নীতিগত ভাবে মূল বিলটিরই পক্ষে। অর্থাৎ, বাম বিরোধিতায় মহিলা বিল পাশ না হওয়ার দায় নিতে চাইছেন না কমিউনিস্টরা। নতুন বিল অনুযায়ী, লোকসভার আসন সংখ্যা এক তৃতীয়াংশ বাড়িয়ে ওই সংখ্যক আসনের জন্য দ্বৈত সদস্যপদের ব্যবস্থা করা হবে। এর অর্থ, লোকসভার আসন সংখ্যা ৫৪৩ থেকে বাড়িয়ে ৮২৩ করে তার এক তৃতীয়াংশ মহিলাদের জন্য সংরক্ষিত করা হবে। এর ফলে লোকসভার আয়তন অনেকটাই বাড়বে। অবশ্য এই সমস্যা কী ভাবে সামলানো যাবে, প্রশ্ন রয়ে গিয়েছে।

আজকের বৈঠকে লালু নতুন বিল নিয়ে বিরোধিতার কোনও শব্দ উচ্চারণ করেননি। শুধু বলেছেন, দেশের সামনে এখন অন্য অনেক বড় কাজ রয়েছে। এই বিলটি নিয়ে অযথা তাড়াহড়োর প্রয়োজন নেই। রাজনৈতিক সূত্রের খবর, সরকারে থাকার বাধ্যবাধতাই লালুকে মহিলা বিলের বিষয়ে কিছুটা নরম করে তুলেছে।

বোরখায় মুখ ঢেকে ভোটে দাঁড়ানোর ফতোয়া

মুজফ্ফরনগর, ১৭ অগস্ট: ফের বিতর্কিত ফতোয়া। ফের শিরোনামে দেওবন্দের দারুল উলুম। উত্তরপ্রদেশে এই ইসলামি আদালত এ বার ফতোয়া জারি করেছে, মুসলিম মহিলারা নির্বাচনে দাঁড়াতে পারবেন না। দাঁড়ালেও, বোরখায় মুখ ঢেকে।

দারুল উলুমের এই ফতোয়ায় কাল বলা হয়েছে, “বোরখা না-পরে পুরুষের সামনে বেরনোর অনুমতি নেই মুসলিম মহিলাদের। ইসলামি আইনে শুধু পর্দানসীন মহিলারাই নির্বাচনে দাঁড়াতে পারেন।” পঞ্চায়েত নির্বাচনে যে মুসলিম মহিলারা প্রার্থী হয়েছেন, তাঁদের অবিলম্বে বোরখায় মুখ ঢাকার নির্দেশ দিয়েছে দারুল উলুম। উত্তরপ্রদেশের চলতি পঞ্চায়েত নির্বাচনে ৩৩ শতাংশ আসন মহিলাদের জন্য সংরক্ষিত রয়েছে। ভোটের প্রার্থী কয়েকশো মুসলিম মহিলা।

উত্তরপ্রদেশের দেওবন্দ শহরে প্রায় ১৪০ বছরের পুরনো এই ইসলামি

শিক্ষা ও আইন প্রতিষ্ঠান থেকে প্রতি দিন কয়েকশো ফতোয়া জারি করা হয়। মুসলিম মহিলাদের নিয়ে দারুল উলুমের বিতর্কিত ফতোয়া জারি করার ঘটনা নতুন নয়। মাস দু'য়েক আগেই পশ্চিম উত্তরপ্রদেশের এক প্রত্যন্ত গ্রামের ইমরানাকে তাঁর স্বশুর ধর্ষণ

করার পরে দারুল উলুম ফতোয়া দিয়েছিল, স্বামীকে ছেড়ে স্বশুরের সঙ্গে ঘর করতে হবে ইমরানাকে। সেই বিতর্কিত ফতোয়া নিয়ে রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির মধ্যে বিস্তর জলধোলা হয়। প্রশ্ন উঠেছিল, এই ধরনের ফতোয়া জারি করা বন্ধ করতে মুসলিম ব্যক্তিগত আইন সংশোধন করা উচিত কি না। বিতর্ক ঘিরে সমাজবাদী পার্টি-কংগ্রেস এবং বিজেপি-সিপিএমের এক অভাবনীয় মেরুকরণও হয়েছিল।

তবে কালকের ফতোয়ার এক

বাক্যে কড়া সমালোচনা করেছে বিভিন্ন রাজনৈতিক দল। কংগ্রেস নেতা ও আইনমন্ত্রী হংসরাজ ভরদ্বাজ বলেছেন, এই ধরনের ধর্মীয় ফতোয়ার সংবিধানে কোনও গুরুত্বই নেই। ফতোয়া মানা হবে কি না, সে সিদ্ধান্ত নেবেন সাধারণ মানুষ। কংগ্রেস সাংসদ রশিদ আলভির

মন্তব্য, কোনও সম্প্রদায়ের মহিলাদের যদি ভোটে দাঁড়াতে না-দেওয়া হয়, তা হলে সেই সম্প্রদায় আরও পিছিয়ে পড়বে। মহিলাদের অবস্থানের উন্নতি না-হলে সম্প্রদায়ের উন্নয়ন সম্ভব নয়। সিপিএম নেতা সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি বলেছেন, ভারতীয় সংবিধানে নারী-পুরুষের সমান অধিকার। কোনও ফতোয়া জারি করে সেই অধিকার কেড়ে নেওয়ার চেষ্টা হলে, আমরা বাধা দেব। বিজেপি'র সহ-সভাপতি বেকাইয়া নায়ডুও বলেছেন, সব

ক্ষেত্রেই মেয়েদের সমান সুযোগ-সুবিধে পাওয়া উচিত।

শুধু উলুমের এই ফতোয়াই নয়, ‘ইসলামি আদালত’ই যে অবৈধ, আজ তা সাফ বলে দেন আইনমন্ত্রী ভরদ্বাজ। তাঁর কথায়, “কোনও ইসলামি আদালত সংবিধানস্বীকৃত নয়।... সংবিধান অনুযায়ী দেশে একটিই বিচারব্যবস্থা রয়েছে— নিম্ন আদালত, উচ্চ আদালত এবং শীর্ষ আদালত।” মুসলিম পার্সোনাল ল’ বোর্ড ও দারুল উলুমের তত্ত্বাবধানে দেশে দ্বিতীয় বিচারব্যবস্থা চলছে বলে অনুযোগ করেছিলেন আইনজীবী বিশ্বলোচন মদন। তার পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে কাল ইসলামি আদালতকে নোটিসও জারি করেছিল সুপ্রিম কোর্ট। তার পরেও মহিলাদের ভোটে দাঁড়ানো নিয়ে দারুল উলুমের এই ফতোয়া ফের স্পষ্ট করে দিল, নিজেদের এক সমান্তরাল বিচারব্যবস্থা বলেই মনে করছে ইসলামি আদালত।

● ইসলামি কোর্টে বিবাহবিচ্ছেদ...পৃঃ ৭



A giant leap in propaganda

A Small Step For Gender Justice

Women
A MOUNTAIN of gender justice is being mined out of a molehill of a Bill that the Rajya Sabha passed this Tuesday, supposedly to give women rights of inheritance equal to those of men. All advocates of gender justice will do well to realise that what the present amendment to the Hindu Succession Act 1956 will achieve is only a marginal improvement on the existing state of affairs. Even after the new piece of legislation comes into effect, the law will remain helpless if women are, as they traditionally have been, discriminated against when it comes to inheriting property. This is because of the limited ambit of the Amendment Bill. It replaces Section 6 of the 1956 Act, deletes Section 23 and inserts a 'her' in a phrase in Section 30. The entire law relates to coparcenary property alone. The replacement effected for Section 6 does give women equal rights in inheriting coparcenary property. However, the bulk of property and wealth at least in urban areas, where the bulk of income generated in a modern economy accumulates, falls outside joint family property addressed by the law. The amendment does well to also delete Section 23, under which a female heir could not demand partition of a common dwelling but had to wait for a male heir to ask for partition. The semantic amendment of Section 30 too is in order but offers no radical succour.

The government, social scientists and gender justice groups should consider alternative remedies to customary prejudice against women in our society. This newspaper has championed lower rates of income-tax for women as a means of encouraging more equitable property ownership between men and women. We hope that others would come up with alternative solutions that can induce property owners to overcome traditional male bias in distribution of property. The government has done well to follow through on a recommendation of the Law Commission to amend the Hindu Succession Act. But to flaunt this as a major move for gender equity would be inappropriate.

The Economic Times

OUT OF COURT

It may be somewhat reassuring when the stone dropped into a pond has ripples spreading wider than before. At most, that is what can be said of the public interest litigation filed in the Supreme Court against the presence, in a democratic country, of a parallel judiciary based on faith. The PIL appears to have originated in the debate over the fate of Ms Imrana Bibi, who was allegedly raped by her father-in-law. The local *panchayat* ruled that she should then treat her husband as "her son" and not live with him, a sentence that was upheld by the powerful Darul Uloom Deoband. Incidents of this kind are not new; what is heartening is that the young woman came forward to complain. But her distress remained stuck in the groove of religious law and debate, and she ended up pleading to be left alone. Two similar incidents were reported immediately afterwards, suggesting that the number and frequency of this particular kind of domestic humiliation are actually completely unknown. The PIL represents a glimmer of hope. Perhaps the time is coming when the issue can be debated sanely, without frothing in the mouth over whose religion is best.

All religions put women at a disadvantage, silence their voices and appropriate their rights. Society's urge to keep women powerless is merely given a respectable veneer by hostile interpretations of religious texts when they exist, and of sacrosanct traditional practices and superstitions when they do not. It might be worth counting the number of times the Supreme Court and other courts have pointed out in the last few years what women can inherit, and how, and also that women can dispose of property as they wish. How much difference has that made? The question the PIL has raised is about the legitimacy of a parallel judicial system based on faith. The greatest damage is done when a criminal act is made to look like a "family matter". While the question demands immediate attention — the court has issued notices to the Centre, states and Muslim bodies — it is also necessary to think beyond the religious aspect. In a "secular" set-up, for example, in the villages of West Bengal, panchayats and headmen almost invariably punish the women who have been molested or raped. The men might get away by marrying them, or apologizing, or paying a fine. Ultimately, it is this barefaced cruelty that has to be tackled, in whatever guise it is presented.

Equal rights for women in parental property

Rajya Sabha passes Hindu Succession (Amendment) Bill 2004

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Rajya Sabha on Tuesday unanimously passed the landmark Hindu Succession (Amendment) Bill 2004, which proposes to remove discrimination against women in the Hindu Succession Act by giving equal rights to Hindu, Buddhist, Jain or Sikh women, including married daughters, in the parental property as the sons have. The Bill, introduced in the upper House on December 20, 2004, was passed by voice vote. It will now be sent to the Lok Sabha for consideration and adoption.

Only one male member (the rest were women) participated in the discussion that came at the fag end of the day. Some of the members pointed to the low attendance in the House during the debate. Some women members, however, lauded it as a gift after Independence Day, while others said it was well-timed

with the "rakhi" festival towards the weekend.

Replying to the discussion, the Minister for Law, H.R. Bhardwaj, expressed happiness at the unequivocal support given to the Bill by the BJP-led opposition National Democratic Alliance.

The Bill is based on the recommendations of the Law Commission in its 174th report on "Property Rights of Women: Proposed Reform under the Hindu Law" and coopts the major suggestions of the Parliamentary Standing Committee that went into it.

"This Bill is a limited measure to remove gender bias. Its pas-

sage will strengthen my hands for working out the Women's Reservation Bill," Mr. Bhardwaj told the House. He said the government was examining all such provisions in law that promoted gender discrimination and were violative of Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution.

Explaining the need for amendment to the Bill, the Minister said the Hindu Succession Act lays down a uniform and comprehensive system of inheritance and applies to persons governed by 'Mitakshara' and 'Dayabhaga' schools. It applies to every person who is a Hindu by religion in any of its forms or

• Only one male member participates in the discussion

• Bill is based on the recommendations of the Law Commission

• It is a precursor to the Women's Reservation Bill

developments or to any other person who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion.

Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act deals with devolution of interest of a male Hindu in coparcenary property and recognises the rule of devolution by survivorship among the members of the coparcenary. The retention of the Mitakshara coparcenary property without including the females in it means that the females could not inherit in ancestral property as their male counterparts do.

The law by excluding the daughter in the coparcenary ownership not only contributes to her discrimination on the ground of gender but also has led to oppression and negation of her fundamental right of equality guaranteed by the Constitution. Several States such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Maha-

rashtira have already made necessary changes in the law by giving equal rights to daughters in Hindu Mitakshara coparcenary property. Discriminatory sections such as 23 and 24 have been omitted in the Bill.

Initiating the discussion, BJP member Maya Singh said the Bill would help gain economic empowerment and equal rights for women. Prabha Thakur (Congress) said unless a law was implemented it had no meaning.

Chandrakala Pandey (CPI-M) wanted agriculture land to be included in Mitakshara property and the wife to have joint ownership of a husband's bank account. Kum Kum Rai (BJD) said the Bill was a "bold decision" and would help reduce domestic violence. The lone male member who spoke on the Bill - R. Shunmugasundaram (DMK) - said had it been brought earlier, the evil of dowry could have been checked.

women

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THE STATESMAN

RS passes Hindu succession Bill

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 16. - A legislation aimed at giving Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh women equal rights in inheritance of ancestral property was passed by the Rajya Sabha today.

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Bill, 2004, moved by the Union law minister, Mr HR Bhardwaj, proposes to remove the discrimination contained in Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act 1956 by giving equal rights to daughters in ancestral property

and agricultural land as being enjoyed by the sons.

The Bill received overwhelming support from the members, who admitted that women have been discriminated against over the years. It was passed by voice vote. It seeks to ensure gender equality in the share of inheritance in the joint family.

According to the statement of objects and reasons attached to the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Bill 2004, Section 23 of the 1956 Act had disentitled a female heir to ask for partition in respect of a dwelling house wholly occu-

pied by a joint family until the male heirs chose to divide their respective shares therein.

"The Bill also proposes to omit the said Section so as to remove the disability on female heirs contained there," Mr Bhardwaj said. The recommendation for amending it was given by the Law Commission in its 174th report.

The law minister observed the Bill was aimed at removing the gender bias. The Bill lays down a uniform and comprehensive system of inheritance and applies, inter alia, to persons governed by the Mitakshara and Dayabhaga

schools and also to those governed previously by the Murumakkattayam, Aliyasantana and Nambudiri laws.

It applies to every person who is a Hindu by religion in any of its forms or developments, including a Virashaiva, a Lingayat or a follower of the Brahmo, Parthana or Arya Samaj; or to any person who is a Buddhist, Jain or Sikh by religion; or to any other person who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or a Jew by religion.

The Bill will now be introduced in the Lok Sabha for discussion and passage.

Inheritance bill row brews

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 14: Thanks to the National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi, Hindu women, especially in rural areas, could be entitled to their rightful share of ancestral property.

That is, if the amended Hindu Succession Act, 2004, is ratified by Parliament. The amended legislation, cleared by the Union cabinet two weeks ago, will be introduced this week.

But if the mood in the political establishment is an indicator, the amended bill could meet the same fate

as the women's reservation bill.

Among the far-reaching changes mooted by the cabinet are removing discriminations against women in the inheritance of arable land. In its communication to the government last month, the NAC noted: "Since land ownership is a basic pre-requisite for dignity and economic development, we trust that the government would accord this matter the priority it deserves."

Government sources said the amendment seeks to do away with anomalies in state laws on the access women have to arable land and related issues — "frag-

mentation of agricultural holdings", "fixation of ceiling" and "devolution of tenancy rights" — and make it incumbent on governments to implement the new law.

For instance, in tenurial laws operating in Haryana, Himachal, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, the specified rules of devolution show a strong preference for agnatic (an agnate is one who is descended by male line from the same male ancestor) succession, with preference for agnatic males.

In all these states, land (ownership and inheritance) devolves in the first instance

on male lineal descendants in the male line of descent. Except in Uttar Pradesh, a widow inherits only in the absence of male heirs. Daughters and sisters are excluded as heirs.

BJP sources said party members from western Uttar Pradesh and Punjab and the Shiromani Akali Dal have already opposed it. The issue will be discussed in an NDA meeting on Tuesday.

The Akalis reportedly made it clear the changes had to be viewed in concert with the skewed male-female ratio in Punjab and Haryana — because of rampant female foeticide — and if the land had to be shared by women, it

may encourage the practice further.

The Samajwadi Party and its ally, Rashtriya Lok Dal, are not in favour of it.

"Publicly we cannot oppose the bill," said BJP MP VK. Malhotra, "and if we support it together with the Congress and Left, there will be no problem."

A woman (married, unmarried or in any other capacity) can hold only a limited interest in the land in that after her death, the holding goes not to her heirs but to the heir of the last male landowner.

She also forfeits the land if she remarries or does not cultivate the land for a year.

New dark age for Iraqi women ✓

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In a country where the most basic human rights are routinely abused, the issue of women's rights is low on the agenda, except for those who would proscribe them.

Peter Beaumont

EARLIER THIS year I was in Iraq's second city, Basra, lunching with a group of Iraqi women professionals. It was the time of the elections, and the conversation turned to women's rights. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the women complained, their freedoms had gradually been eroded, not by official diktat but by groups of Shia radicals who had invaded hospitals, universities and schools, insisting that women wore headscarves and behaved as men saw fit.

It was a story I heard again and again across the once cosmopolitan city from middle-class professional women who told me they intended to vote for the secular list headed by interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi for fear of what would happen if the "religious" Shia list swept to a majority.

It was not to be. Mr. Allawi and the largely secular views he represented have lost out to a new sense of religiosity and resurgence of tribal authority that is on the march across Iraq south of Kurdistan.

Now women from Basra to Kirkuk are facing a renewed assault on their freedoms as Iraq's politicians squabble over a new Constitution that will at best fudge women's rights, and at worst hugely undermine them, despite the guarantee of a quota for representation by women in Iraq's new Parliament.

The principal of equality that existed in what was once one of the Middle East's most secular countries, and guar-

anteed women's rights even in the midst of Saddam Hussein's atrocities, is now under threat in the negotiation of the very Constitution that many hoped would guarantee equality. Ironically, it is with the tacit agreement of millions of largely poorly educated Iraqi women.

The major Shia religious parties want to replace the secular civil law that now governs marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance with *Sharia* law. A draft of the constitution published earlier this month in the newspaper run by the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq frames sexual equality specifically in terms of "the provisions of Islamic *Sharia*" rather than Iraq's civil legal code. Even if, as has been suggested, the new constitution results in a parallel system where women can choose *Sharia* or the civil code, women's rights activists fear they may be forced by male relatives to choose a system that is not in their interests.

In a country where the most basic human rights — to life, freedom from intimidation, freedom from torture, a fair judicial process, and freedom of confession — are routinely abused, the issue of women's rights is low on the agenda, except for those who would proscribe them.

Whatever happens over the next few days with the finalisation of a draft Constitution, any nods it makes towards equality are likely to be vague, and are unlikely to improve the lot of most Iraqi women. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

15 AUG 2005

THE HINDU

CAPITAL CRIME

Another night, another nightmare of a gang-rape

16-year-old girl assaulted aboard bus by drivers and conductors

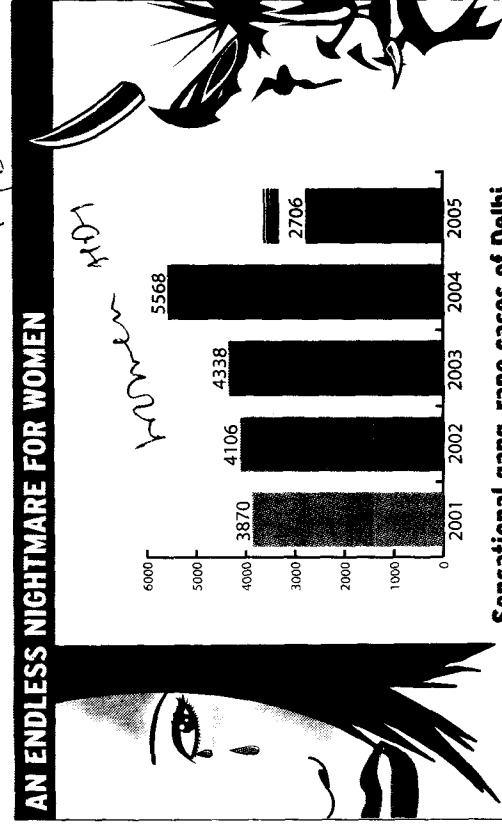
Devesh K. Pandey

NEW DELHI: The Capital was shaken by yet another case of gang-rape in the wee hours of Thursday. The victim was a 16-year-old girl who was criminally assaulted by six men in a stationary bus parked at a depot near Najafgarh in South-West Delhi. The accused have been remanded by a court to two-day police custody for further interrogation as the police suspect involvement of some more people in the ghastly crime.

It was around 1-30 a.m. that the Police Control Room received a phone call informing that some people were assaulting a minor girl in a stationary bus of route 578 at the Dichaon Kalan village bus depot in Najafgarh. Two PCR vans on night patrol rushed to the spot and the local police were alerted. As the police reached the spot, they saw the bus stationed there and heard a girl crying out for help.

Assistant Sub-Inspector Jagbir Singh entered the bus and saw the accused assaulting the victim. According to the police, one of the accused tried to flee but was overpowered. The other accused were rounded up with the help of the local police and the girl was taken to hospital for medical examination.

During interrogation by the police,



Sensational gang-rape cases of Delhi

Date	Victim	Place	Status
October 14, 2003	Swiss diplomat	Siri Fort Auditorium parking	Unsolved
May 8, 2005	Delhi University student	Dhaura Kuan	Identity of real culprits unknown
July 20, 2005	Slum dweller	Mayapuri	Unsolved

Graphic: Surajit Patro

Narender, with whom she was acquainted. According to her, they chatted for a while, after which Narender took her to the bus parked nearby. In the bus, she saw some men on board.

According to the girl, the occupants of the bus overpowered her and assaulted her by turns.

After the medical examination of the girl in hospital later in the morning, the accused were produced by the police in court, where the Judge remanded them to two days in police custody.

"The victim is still in a state of shock and unable to recall the incident properly. For now, we are providing her psychological counselling, after which she would be in a position to give her statement," said a senior police officer on Thursday evening, adding that an identification parade would soon be held for identification of the accused by the victim.

The All India Progressive Women's Association has condemned the crime and demanded resignation of Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit and Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil, holding them responsible for the increasing incidence of crimes against women in the Capital. The Association alleged that criminals were being appointed as drivers and conductors in Blue Line buses. It demanded arrangement of special DTC buses for women.

To register its protest, the Association will hold a dharna at Delhi Police Headquarters on Friday.

the accused identified themselves as bus drivers Narender and Rajbir, conductors Vikas and Shekhar, and helper Narender. The sixth accused was identified as Sandeep, a trader described as a friend of the bus employees.

Still to recover from the trauma, the girl purportedly told the police that she had run away from her Mahipalpur home in the Capital a few days ago. Around 10 p.m. on Wednesday, she boarded a bus from Shiv Murti and got down at the Dichaon Kalan bus depot where she met the bus helper,

12 AUG 2005 THE HINDU

পুলিশের আশ্বাসই সার, দিল্লিতে ফের ধর্ষণ

নয়াদিল্লি, ১১ অগস্ট: দিল্লি কি মেয়েদের জন্য আদৌ নিরাপদ-সেই পুরনো প্রশ্নটাই আবার ফিরে এল। গত রাতে। ফের গণধর্ষণের একটি ঘটনা, এ বার তার শিকার এক কিশোরী। ফের প্রমাণ হল, ধর্ষণ প্রতিরোধে হেল্প লাইন, রাতে টহলদারি, রাজধানীর পুলিশের এ সব প্রতিশ্রুতি কত অসার।

গত রাতে নজফগড় এলাকায় ১৬ বছরের এক কিশোরীকে একটি বাসের ভিতর ধর্ষণ করে ছয় জন দুষ্কর্তী। প্রত্যেককেই গ্রেফতার করেছে পুলিশ। এদের এক জন, নরেন্দ্র, কিশোরীটির পরিচিত। গত কয়েক দিন ধরে ওই কিশোরী নিখোঁজ ছিল। গত সন্ধ্যেই বাড়িতে ফোন করে সে জানায়, “আজ বাড়ি ফিরছি।” সম্ভবত বাড়ি ফেরার সময়ই ধর্ষণের ঘটনাটি ঘটে।

পুলিশ জানিয়েছে, কিশোরীটি স্থানীয় একটি বস্তির বাসিন্দা। নরেন্দ্রই ভুলিয়ে ভালিয়ে তাঁকে একটি বেসরকারি বাসে তোলে। সেখানেই নরেন্দ্র ও তাঁর পাঁচ বন্ধু মেয়েটির উপর অত্যাচার করে। এক অজ্ঞাতপরিচয় ব্যক্তি ফোন করে ধর্ষণের ঘটনাটি পুলিশকে জানালে তারা ঘটনাস্থলে পৌঁছে অভিযুক্তদের গ্রেফতার করে।

মেট্রোপলিটন ম্যাজিস্ট্রেট ১৩ অগস্ট পর্যন্ত অভিযুক্তদের পুলিশি হেফাজতে জেরা করার নির্দেশ দিয়েছে।

ঘটনা ঘটে। গৃহবধু ধর্ষণের ঘটনার পরে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী দিল্লি পুলিশ কমিশনারকে তলব করে তদন্তের

১১ অগস্ট, ২০০৫ নজফগড়ে বাসের মধ্যে কিশোরীকে গণধর্ষণ

২০ জুলাই, ২০০৫ বৃদ্ধার উপরে পাশবিক অত্যাচার

২০ জুলাই, ২০০৫ মায়াপুরীতে গৃহবধুকে গাড়িতে তুলে ধর্ষণ

৯ মে, ২০০৫ ধলা কুঁয়ায় ছাত্রীকে চলন্ত গাড়িতে গণধর্ষণ



দিল্লির হাল

খাস রাজধানীতে মেয়েদের নিরাপত্তা কতটা, তা নিয়ে জোর বিতর্ক নতুন করে শুরু হয় ৮ মে। ধলা কুঁয়ায় ধর্ষিতা হন দিল্লি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের এক ছাত্রী। রাস্তা থেকে তাঁকে গাড়িতে তুলে গণধর্ষণ করে দুষ্কর্তীরা। প্রতিবাদে আন্দোলনে নামেন ছাত্রছাত্রীরা। ২০ জুলাই অসুস্থ এক গৃহবধুকে একই ভাবে রাস্তা থেকে তুলে ধর্ষণ করা হয়, গাড়িতেই। ওই একই দিনে সত্তর বছরের এক বৃদ্ধার উপরেও নির্যাতনের

অগ্রগতি সম্পর্কে জানতে চান। খানিকটা নড়ে চড়ে বসে দিল্লি পুলিশও। তবে পুলিশের ‘ব্যবস্থা’ নিয়ে তৈরি হয় নতুন বিতর্ক।

মেয়েদের নিরাপত্তার ভার যেন মেয়েদেরই, এমন ভঙ্গিতে পুলিশ মেয়েদের চলা ফেরার ব্যাপারে কতগুলি নির্দেশিকা তৈরি করে বিজ্ঞাপন দিতে শুরু করে। “অন্ধকার রাস্তায় হটবেন না, অন্ধকার বাসস্টপে দাঁড়াবেন না, ফাঁকা বাসে উঠবেন না,”

জাতীয় অভিভাবক সুলভ নির্দেশও থাকে সেই নির্দেশিকায়। পুলিশি নিষ্ক্রিয়তা নিয়ে কড়া বিবৃতি দেন জাতীয় মহিলা কমিশনের চেয়ারপার্সন গিরিজা ব্যাস। ধর্ষিতা মহিলাদের জন্য একটি আইনি সেল খোলার কথাও বলেন তিনি। দিন কয়েক আগে ঠিক হয় ধর্ষণ, রাস্তায় মেয়েদের উপর হামলা, নিগ্রহ ঘটলে মেয়েরা যাতে তৎক্ষণাৎ পুলিশকে খবর দিতে পারেন সেই জন্য একটি হেল্প লাইন চালু করা হবে। কিন্তু কবে? আরও কতগুলো ঘটনা ঘটলে এই হেল্প লাইনের পরিকল্পনা বাস্তবায়িত হবে এ বিষয়ে নিশ্চিত বলতে পারছেন না কেউই।

গিরিজা ব্যাস বলেন, কালকের অভিযুক্তদের কয়েক ঘণ্টার মধ্যে ধরা হয়েছে এটা ভাল কথা। কিন্তু বিচারের প্রক্রিয়াটাও যাতে তাড়াতাড়ি হয় সেটা দেখাও জরুরি। আমরা পুলিশকে বহু বার হেল্প লাইন চালু করার কথা বলেছি। কিন্তু কেন তা হচ্ছে না বুঝছি না।” খোদ পুলিশ কর্তার কাছেও তার স্পষ্ট জবাব এ দিনও মেলেনি। দিল্লির পুলিশ কমিশনার কৃষ্ণকান্ত পলের কথায়, “আমরা খুবই উদ্বিগ্ন। স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রকের সঙ্গে কথা বলছি।”

Efforts on for consensus on Women's Bill

Centre moots more seats

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: As part of the ongoing consensus building exercise on political reservation for women, the Government has proposed a substantial increase in the number of Lok Sabha seats and a "consequent increase" in the strength of state Assembly seats while simultaneously reserving one-third of the total legislature seats for women.

Three Ministers — Home Minister Shivraj Patil, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad — held separate meetings with leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Telugu Desam and some others here on Friday morning to elicit their views on the proposal.

Mr. Azad himself was tight-lipped saying that the meetings were "inconclusive" and this was an exercise that would cover all political parties. He was unwilling to give details of the Government proposal. However, the BJP deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha, Sushma Swaraj, said the Government had proposed increasing the Lok Sabha strength to 900 and the total seats in state Assemblies from around 6,000 at present to 9,000.

While the BJP was willing to give its support to "any proposal" on which political consensus could be built to take forward the goal of increased representa-

tion for women, Ms. Swaraj said both the CPI (M) and the CPI favoured the Government bringing to the House without delay the 1996 women's reservation Bill drafted during the United Front regime.

"Bring the Bill in its original form... let members give their suggestions on the floor of the House," CPI (M) parliamentary party leader Basudev Acharia told reporters later. On the Government's proposal to increase Lok Sabha seats, he said it would complicate and delay the entire process since a fresh delimitation exercise would be needed.

Members of the CPI — Gurdas Dasgupta, D. Raja and Sudhakar Reddy — who met the three Ministers held a similar view. "We support the 1996 Bill," Mr. Dasgupta and Mr. Raja said after the meeting. However, they added "our eyes are not closed" and "we would be willing to look at the Government proposal with an open mind" with the goal of a "guaranteed" one-third reservation of all seats for women.

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- Proposal to increase seats in Lok Sabha to 900 and those of the Assemblies to 9,000

- Left parties for bringing back original Bill

- BJP ready to support any consensus proposal

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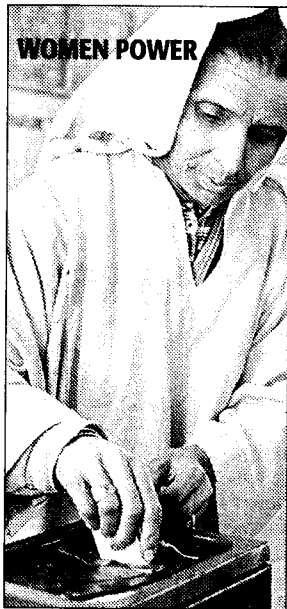
Govt move on women's Bill suffers setback

BJP, CPM Demand Initial Legislation

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 5 AUGUST

THE BJP on Friday put the ball on the long-pending Women's Reservation Bill in the government's court, asserting that it was amenable to any formula, barring the "quota-within-quota" proposal favoured by the two Yadav chieftains, Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prasad, to break the deadlock.

The UPA government's attempt to forge a consensus around its proposal to enhance the strength of the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies by 33%



of their existing seats to accommodate the political aspirations of women received a setback, with the CPM making it clear that it wanted the Centre to push the bill in its original form.

With the RJD, a crucial component of the UPA, and the Samajwadi Party, which lends outside support to the government, remaining firm on their "quota-within-quota" formulation, it is more or less certain the women-empowerment bill will remain on the back-burner.

The original piece of legislation, which incorporates the recommendations of the standing committee chaired by late Geeta Mukherjee, makes out a case for reserving 33% of the existing seats in the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies for women.

For the RJD and the Samajwadi Party, such a proposal is an absolute no-no. While the BJP and the CPM would prefer the provisions of the original bill, but have made it clear that they would not like to come in the way of the Centre if it manages to evolve a consensus on any other formula.

Caught between the rigid pos-

ture adopted by the two Yadav satraps on one hand and the CPM on the other, the Manmohan Singh government would find it extremely difficult to make a forward movement on the bill. As part of its efforts to locate a meeting-ground among the various political parties, the Centre on Friday kicked-off its plans by holding confabulations with the leaders of the principal opposition party, the BJP and the Left separately.

Accompanied by his cabinet colleagues Pranab Mukherjee and Ghulam Nabi Azad, home minister Shivraj Patil first met a high-level BJP team led by LK Advani. They later held separate meetings with the leaders of the CPM and the CPI.

The BJP delegation, which also comprised of Vijay Kumar Malhotra, Sushma Swaraj and Pramod Mahajan, told the government managers that they were all for the bill, regardless of its final shape.

"Barring the quota-within-quota proposal, which, in any case, is unconstitutional, we're ready to support any government-sponsored effort to break the deadlock," BJP spokesperson Sushma Swaraj told newsmen. "The matter has been pending for the last nine years, with formula after being bandied about to break the impasse. This has made the situation complicated," she added.

The BJP spokesperson claimed her party's view on the quota-within-quota formulation was endorsed by Union home minister. "Given the government's stance on the formulation, we literally presented Mr Patil with a blank-cheque," Ms Swaraj said.

For a change, both the BJP and the CPM felt the government proposal of increasing the strengths of the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies to provide 33% reservation for women would only end up delaying the implementation of the bill.

"We are not against the government proposal. Our only fear is that it'll prolong the matter. We told the government managers that it may not be implemented during our lifetime," Ms Swaraj said.

To begin with, the delimitation commission will have to be asked to stop its work and, instead, get cracking in the task of carving out 300 new Lok Sabha seats and 3,000 new assembly seats. Then it will have to serve seats for SC/STs. The existing assembly spaces will have to be enhanced to accommodate the new members. "All this will require a lot of time," Ms Swaraj added.

এক-তৃতীয়াংশ আসন বাড়াতে প্রস্তাব মহিলা বিলে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৫
অগস্ট: লোকসভা ও বিধানসভাস্থলির আসন সরাসরি এক-তৃতীয়াংশ বাড়িয়ে তা মহিলাদের জন্য সংরক্ষিত করার নতুন প্রস্তাব নিয়ে এল সরকার। প্রস্তাবে এক-তৃতীয়াংশ আসনে আর দ্বৈত সদস্যপদের কথা বলা হয়নি, সরাসরি নতুন আসনের কথা বলা হয়েছে। আজ এই নিয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল, লোকসভার নেতা প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় ও সংসদীয় মন্ত্রী গুলাম নবী আজাদ বিজেপি ও দুই কমিউনিস্ট দলের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করেন।

প্রস্তাবিত নতুন মহিলা বিল নিয়ে আলোচনার শুরুতেই অবশ্য বিজেপি পুরো দায়িত্বটা সরকারের উপরে চাপিয়ে দিয়েছে। এই বিলের ভবিষ্যত নিয়ে সংশয়ে থাকা বিজেপি নেতারা

সরকারকে জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, এক-তৃতীয়াংশ আসন বাড়ানোই হোক, পুরনো মহিলা বিলাই আসুক, অথবা দলগুলিকে এক-তৃতীয়াংশ মহিলা প্রার্থী দিতে বলা হোক, যে কোনও কিছুতেই তাঁরা রাজি। অন্যদিকে দুই কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি বলেছে, এত ঝঞ্জাটের মধ্যে না গিয়ে সরকার পুরনো বিলটিকেই নিয়ে আসুক।

সরকারের নতুন প্রস্তাবের মধ্যে যুক্তিও যেমন আছে, তেমন সমস্যাও আছে। যুক্তি হল, বহু সংসদীয় আসন অতিরিক্ত বড় হয়ে যাওয়ায় এমনিতেই সেগুলিকে ভাঙা দরকার। তা হলে সেগুলি দিয়েই নতুন এক-তৃতীয়াংশ আসন তৈরি করা হোক। এর আগে সরকার এক-তৃতীয়াংশ আসনে দ্বৈত সদস্যপদের কথা ভেবেছিল। কিন্তু যত

মহিলা সংগঠনের সঙ্গে সরকার কথা বলেছে, তাদের কেউ ওই ধরনের ঝণ্ডা অংশিদারিত্বে রাজি হয়নি। ফলে সরকার এখন সরাসরি এক-তৃতীয়াংশ আসন বাড়ানোর প্রস্তাব এনেছে।

এর মধ্যে লক্ষ্যীয় সমস্যাগুলি হল:
 • ৫৪২-এর সঙ্গে ১৮১ আসন যোগ হলে সদস্যদের বসার জায়গা থাকবে না (যেমন ব্রিটিশ পার্লামেন্টে সব সদস্য এলে বসতে পান না)। সে ক্ষেত্রে সেগুলি হালকা লোকসভায় পরিণত করতে হবে এবং এতদিনের রীতি বদলে যাবে।

• এর জন্য নতুন করে লোকসভা কেন্দ্র পুনর্বিদ্যায় করতে হবে। আগের সিদ্ধান্ত ছিল, ২০২০-র পরে তা করা হবে। এখনই কেন্দ্র পুনর্বিদ্যায়ের এক দফা কাজ (সংখ্যা অপরিবর্তিত রেখে)

সবে শেষ হচ্ছে। এর পর বড় আকারের পুনর্বিদ্যায় করতে হলে বেশ কয়েক বছর সময় লেগে যাবে। ততদিন বিষয়টি ঝুলেই থাকবে।

• আসনসংখ্যা এক-তৃতীয়াংশ বাড়িয়ে তা মহিলাদের জন্য সংরক্ষণ করলে তা সময়ের এক-চতুর্থাংশ হয়ে যাবে (৭২৩ এর মধ্যে ১৮১)। সময়ের এক-তৃতীয়াংশ করতে হলে মোট আসনসংখ্যা ৮০০-র উপর নিয়ে যেতে হবে; অথবা নতুন আসনগুলি ছাড়াও এখনকার যাটটি আসন মহিলা সংরক্ষণের আওতায় আনতে হবে।

আজকের বৈঠকের পর বিজেপির তরফে বিজয়কুমার মলহোত্র জানিয়েছেন, তাঁরা যে কোনও প্রস্তাবে রাজি আছেন। সরকার দেখুক, কোন প্রস্তাবে একমত হয়। বৈঠকে বিরোধী বিলটি আনার দাবি জানান।

নেতা লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণী, সুব্রমা স্বরাজ ও প্রমোদ মহাজনও উপস্থিত ছিলেন। সিপিএমের তরফে বাসুদেব আচার্য ও নীলোৎপল বসু এবং সিপিআইএমের তরফে গুরুদাস দাশগুপ্ত ও ডি রাজা জানিয়েছেন, তাঁরা চান সরকার ৯৬ সালের পুরনো বিলটিই আনুক। কারণ, নতুন প্রস্তাবে অনেক ঝঞ্জাট আছে এবং তা রূপায়িত করতে অনেক সময় লেগে যাবে। রাজার বক্তব্য, সরকার নতুন করে কেন্দ্র পুনর্বিদ্যায় করতে চাইলে করুক, তবে তার সঙ্গে মহিলা বিলাকে জোড়া চলবে না। পরে বাম সাংসদদের একটি প্রতিনিধিদল প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাছে গিয়ে একই কথা জানিয়েছেন। তাঁরা এই অধিকেশনই মহিলা বিল আনার এবং এই বছরেই অরণ্যের অধিকার সংক্রান্ত বিলটি আনার দাবি জানান।

নাবালিকার বিয়ে ঠেকাতে উদ্যোগ বর্ধমানে

রানা সেনগুপ্ত ● বর্ধমান

নাবালিকার বিয়ে দিলে পাত্র ও পাত্রী দু'পক্ষকেই সামাজিক বয়কটের মুখে পড়তে হবে। তাদের রেশন কার্ড, বিপিএল তালিকায় নাম তোলা, ব্যাঙ্ক ঋণ পাওয়া থেকে বঞ্চিত করা হবে। রাজ্যের প্রথম পূর্ণসাক্ষর জেলা বর্ধমানে নাবালিকার বিয়ে ঠেকাতে এই ব্যবস্থাই নিচ্ছে জেলা পরিষদ। বিয়েতে যাঁরা নিমন্ত্রণে যাবেন, তাঁদের উপরেও পঞ্চায়েতের মাধ্যমে নিষেধাজ্ঞা জারি হবে। সভাপতি উদয় সরকার বলেন, “এ ব্যবস্থা কিছু জায়গায় চালু হয়েছে। এ বার চালু হবে গোটা জেলায়।”

নাবালিকার বিয়ে আইনত নিষিদ্ধ। তবু জেলায় প্রতি বছর ৫৪% মেয়ের বিয়ে হয় ১৮ বছরের নীচে। তথ্যটি জানান সভাপতি। তাঁর কথায়, “এটা দারুণ লজ্জার।” এর ফলে ২০০৪-০৫ সালে প্রতি হাজারে শিশুমৃত্যুর হার ছিল ৩১.৩ জন। প্রসবকালীন মায়ের মৃত্যুর হার প্রতি লক্ষে ১৪৮.৭। মস্তেধর, কাটোয়া-১, জামালপুর ও আউসগ্রামে মৃত্যু হয়েছে ২১৩, ২০২, ১৬৯ ও ১৬৮ জন মায়ের। এই মৃত্যু ঠেকাতেই নাবালিকাদের বিয়ে সংক্রান্ত ফতোয়া দিচ্ছে জেলা পরিষদ।

জেলা পরিষদের শিশু ও নারী কল্যাণ স্থায়ী সমিতির কর্মাধ্যক্ষ স্বপন বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় বলেন, “সমীক্ষায় দেখা গিয়েছে, শিক্ষা ও সচেতনতার অভাবে নাবালিকার বিয়ে দিচ্ছেন অনেকে। তফসিলি জাতি ও উপজাতি ছাড়াও সাধারণ মধ্যবিত্ত মানুষ আছেন ওই দলে। বিয়ের এক বছরের মধ্যে ওই কিশোরী মা হচ্ছে। অপুষ্টিতে ভুগছে মা ও শিশু। মৃত্যু হচ্ছে কখনও এক জনের, কখনও বা দু'জনেরই। দেশ বা রাজ্যের নিরিখে মৃত্যুর হার কম হলেও প্রথম পূর্ণসাক্ষর জেলায় এটা লজ্জার।”

সভাপতি বলেন, “জেলায় সচেতনতা শিবির চলছে। এতে পঞ্চায়েত সমিতি ও পঞ্চায়েতের সদস্য, স্বাস্থ্য ও শিশু-নারী কল্যাণ সমিতির কর্মাধ্যক্ষ, বিডিও ও শিশুস্বাস্থ্য আধিকারিকেরা যোগ দিচ্ছেন। শিবিরে বোঝানো হচ্ছে, ১৮ বছরের আগে বিয়ে দিলে কী কী ক্ষতি হতে পারে।”

বাড়ছে নারী-নিগ্রহ, মানলেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রীও

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার: রাজ্যে নারী-নিগ্রহের ঘটনা বাড়ছে। স্বীকার করলেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্য স্বয়ং। বৃহস্পতিবার বিধানসভায় তিনি জানান, কী করে নারী-নিগ্রহ কমানো যায়, তা নিয়ে আলোচনার জন্য ৩১ অগস্ট সরকার একটি কর্মশালার আয়োজন করছে। গ্রামাঞ্চলের স্বনির্ভর গোষ্ঠীর মহিলাদের ওই কর্মশালায় আনা হবে।

রাষ্ট্রের জাতিসংঘের পরিষিতি নিয়ে এ দিন মূলতুবি প্রস্তাব আনে তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস। ডাকাতি, অপহরণ, মাওবাদী হামলা-সহ বিভিন্ন প্রসঙ্গে বিরোধীদের অভিযোগ উড়িয়ে দিলেও নারী-নিগ্রহ বাড়ার বিষয়টি মেনে নেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বলেন, “আমি এই অভিযোগ মেনে নিতে বাধ্য। কারণ, রাজ্যে নারী-নিগ্রহ বাড়ছে। আমাদের এই সমস্যার গভীরে যাওয়ার দরকার। আমি ইতিমধ্যেই সমাজকল্যাণ দফতর ও মহিলা কমিশনের সঙ্গে কথা বলেছি।”

মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর মতে, নারী-নিগ্রহের নানা কারণের মধ্যে আছে মেয়েদের কম বয়সে বিয়ে, পণ প্রথা, দারিদ্র। রাজ্যের তিনটি বিশ্ব বিদ্যালয়কে নারী-নির্যাতনের ব্যাপারে সন্ধানিত করা হয়েছে। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বলেন, “কর্মশালার আগে সেই সন্ধানিত রিপোর্ট পেয়ে যাব। সমস্যা ঠিক কোথায়, কেন নারী-নিগ্রহ বাড়ছে, তার একটা চিত্র আমরা পেয়ে যাব।”

বিরোধী দলনেতা পঙ্কজ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়ের অভিযোগ, “রাজ্যে নারী-নির্যাতনের ঘটনা ২০০ গুণ বেড়ে গিয়েছে।” সাবিন্দ্রী মিত্রের পরামর্শ, নিজের হাত না রেখে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী স্বরাষ্ট্র

দফতরের দায়িত্ব অন্য এক জনের হাতে তুলে দিন। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বলেন, “এ রাজ্যে এখন নারীদের চেতনার বিকাশ হচ্ছে। মহিলাদের তৈরি দু'লক্ষ স্বনির্ভর দল কাজ করছে। মালদহ, শিলিগুড়িতে কয়েকটি দলের সঙ্গে দেখা হয়েছে আমার। তাঁদের মুখের ভাষাই পাল্টে গিয়েছে। কর্মশালায় আমরা সেই মহিলাদের সামনে নিয়ে আসব।”

তৃণমূলের সৌগত রায়ের মতে, বিহারের মতো এ রাজ্যেও প্রতিনিয়ত অপহরণের ঘটনা ঘটছে। বেশির ভাগ ক্ষেত্রেই অপহৃতেরা মুক্তিপণ দিয়ে ছাড়া পাচ্ছেন। পুলিশ অপহরণকারীদের ধরতে পারছে না। বুদ্ধবাবু বলেন, “২০০৩ সাল থেকে কলকাতায় অপহরণের ঘটনা ঘটেনি। ২০০২ সালে দু'টি এবং ২০০১ সালে ১৪টি অপহরণের ঘটনা ঘটেছিল। তার মধ্যে ১০টি মামলার মীমাংসা করেছে পুলিশ। ছ'টি ক্ষেত্রে অপহৃতেরা নিজেরাই ফিরে এসেছেন।” মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জানান, ২০০১ সাল থেকে এ-পর্যন্ত রাজ্য পুলিশের এলাকায় ৬০টি অপহরণের ঘটনা ঘটেছে। তার মধ্যে ৫৯টির মীমাংসা করেছে পুলিশ। ২০০৪ সালে একটি বাচ্চা ছেলেকে খুন করে ফেলে রেখে গিয়েছিল অপহরণকারীরা।

বিরোধীরা বলেন, খাদিম-কর্তা অপহরণের ক্ষেত্রেও তো মুক্তিপণ দিতে হয়েছিল! মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বলেন, “খাদিম-কর্তার প্রাণসংশয়ের প্রশ্ন ছিল। মুক্তিপণ দেওয়ার সময় পুলিশ যে উপস্থিত ছিল, তার প্রমাণ হিসাবে সেই সময়কার ছবি আদালতে পেশ করা হয়েছে।”

Atrocities on women rising, admits Buddha

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Aug. 4. — Painting a not-so-worrying law and order picture chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, however, admitted in the West Bengal Assembly today that atrocities on women are on the rise.

Replying to a Trinamul Congress-sponsored adjournment motion on what the party described as “worsening law and order, election victories through rigging, perpetration of violence against women and rapid spread of terrorist activities”, the chief minister said he agreed to the fact that atrocities on women are increasing and have now become a matter of “great concern” for the government. “I have talked to our social welfare minister and women’s commission and I would like to appeal to the Opposition to cooperate with me in arresting this unfortunate menace. I have asked three universities to conduct a detailed study of the causes that are leading to atrocities on women and they are going to submit to me a report soon. A convention on the issue is going to be organised on 31 August and I will be able to gauge the reasons for such violence”, Mr Bhattacharjee remarked.

Moving the adjournment motion Mr Pankaj Banerjee, leader of the Opposition, said that even female students of Presidency College and

Ashutosh College are being molested which speaks a lot about the city police’s incompetence to combat the menace. The chief minister, however, said that poverty, forced dowry, child marriages and lack of education are the prime reasons for such atrocities.

With regard to other aspects like rigging, Mr Saugata Roy, senior Trinamul MLA, said that Mr Afzal Amanullah’s “explosive report” is telltale evidence of how the CPI-M is bent on eliminating the Opposition through covert and overt forms of violence during elections. “We apprehend the same in the 2006 Assembly polls”, Mr Roy remarked. Mr Dipak Ghosh, Trinamul MLA, went hammer and tongs at the ruling party, saying that 28 years of Left rule have led to starvation deaths in Amlasole and Jalangi.

Denying these allegations, the chief minister said that law and order would never break down in Bengal and that cases of abduction were not increasing, either in the city or other areas of the state.

With regard to the recent Maoist menace, Mr Bhattacharjee said he did not believe that Maoist attacks in Bandowan, Barikul and Midnapore were related to development of the respective regions. “There isn’t a single village in Bengal which doesn’t have drinking water”, the chief minister claimed. The adjournment motion was put to vote and it got defeated by 86 votes.

05 AUG 2005

THE STATESMAN

Delhi's tony colonies have worst sex ratio

By Abantika Ghosh/TNN

New Delhi: "Pay Rs 500 and save Rs 5,00,000 later" is how mushrooming undercover sex-detection clinics in the city advertise themselves. And it seems many are falling for the criminal lure.

If Census 2001 figures are anything to go by, this kind of misplaced "economy" attracts Delhi's glitterati more than dwellers of its teeming slums. A comparative analysis of the sex ratio among 0-6-year-olds in "upmarket" areas of the city reveal that most urban localities in these areas have far less tolerance for the girl child than their rural counterparts.

Defence Colony, for instance, is a good example. Rural Defence Colony notches a fairly impressive sex ratio of 987 females per 1,000 males, while the urban area has a dismal 883 females per 1,000 males.

West Delhi's affluent enclave, Patel Nagar, is similar — its urban areas have a sex ratio of 866 girls to 1,000 boys as against the rural figure of 937. South Delhi's hot address, Vasant Vihar, is no better: its urban areas have a 856:1,000 ratio while its rural areas are better at 887:1,000.

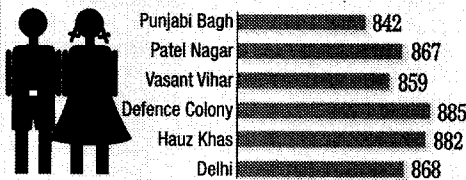
In absolute terms, urban East Delhi's Preet Vihar has the worst sex ratio — it is 780 girls to 1,000 boys. Next is urban Punjabi Bagh that has a ratio of 840 girls to 1,000 boys.

As a matter of fact, none of the city's administrative districts come close to the WHO prescribed minimum acceptable sex ratio of 950 girls per 1,000 boys. This, despite the fact that all nine districts of Delhi have a literacy rate of 82% — way above the national average of 65.38%. Overall, at 868 females per 1,000 males, the Capital, in fact, has the dubious distinction of ranking third among the states with low sex ratio. Punjab tops this dubious list, followed by Haryana.

The urban-rural gap probably owes itself to sheer costs. An ultrasound (earlier methods of foetal sex

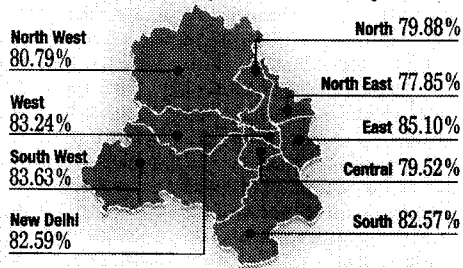
CAPITAL DISCRIMINATION

Minimum accepted WHO figure is 950 girls per 1000 boys.
No Delhi district meets this



What's Education Got To Do With It

Delhi dists have 82% literacy — above national avg of 65.38%



selection like amniocentesis and chorionic villi biopsy have made way for this more accurate technology) can cost anywhere between Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,500. If it is followed up by actual foeticide, the cost goes up to Rs 5,000.

Says A R Nanda, executive director of Population Foundation of India, "With some 116 blacklisted clinics in Delhi, it is the upper middle class that can indulge in this new form of consumerism."

Nanda, who during his tenure as the Union health secretary was instrumental for the formulation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994, adds that the phenomenon has, somewhat ironically, also been a side-effect of the higher success rate of the family planning programme among the middle and upper middle classes.

"The constituents of the 'lower' rungs of society can afford to have five-six kids. But that's just not fashionable among the upper strata. Yet, they are desperate for a male heir, hence female foeticide," Nanda explains. Agrees Poornima Advani, former chairperson of the National Commission for Women, "Use of modern technology by the moneyed is endemic not just in Delhi, but throughout the country."

23 AUG 1977 THE HINDU

NCW condemns sexual 'exploitation' of tribal woman

Police official must be arrested and tried in a fast-track court

Women 12
K10 -

Ms. Vyas said she had spoken to the Jharkhand Chief Secretary, the Director-General of Police and the Superintendent of Police looking into the case to get a first hand account. The victim was in the Capital and would meet the NCW members to give her version.

Ms. Vyas said the victim became "mentally unsound" after her former husband took away

her young son, and her health had deteriorated after the sexual exploitation. "The victim feels mentally and physically insecure, and it is the duty of the Government to ensure her safety," she said and demanded compensation for the tribal woman.

The incident highlighted the need to amend the Indian Penal Code and include sections to protect women from such ex-

ploitation. "I fall short of words to condemn the incident where a woman is victimised by the very people she approaches for justice. Words like law, justice and security are meaningless in the present context," Ms. Vyas said.

Ranjana Kumari of the Centre for Social Research has also condemned the incident and sought the arrest of the official.

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Condemning the alleged sexual exploitation of a tribal woman by a top police official in Ranchi, Jharkhand, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has sought his arrest. "Merely placing him under suspension is not punishment enough for a senior police officer to whom people go to seek justice and protection," NCW chairperson Girija Vyas told reporters here on Tuesday. She sought his arrest and wanted the case to be tried in a fast-track court.

Will more seats in Parliament help Women's Bill?

Yes. And male politicians will stop worrying about losing their seats



Rajani Patil
Chairperson, Central
Social Welfare Board

The Bill was first tabled in 1996 but could not be passed in Parliament because of the double standards of male politicians who feared they may lose their seats if women's reservation actually went through.

In fact, most male politicians feel women don't make good parliamentarians. That's because for a long time, women have played second-fiddle in matters of governance. This in spite of the fact that women comprise almost 50% of India's population.

Parliament is the highest decision-making body in the country and an adequate representation of women would ensure they have equal say in all matters relating to the State and governance. For long, women have joined politics only because of two reasons. One because it was a part of the family legacy — their fathers or husbands are/were active politicians; two, because they belonged to wealthy families.

Reservation may change all that and common women may then be involved in the

day-to-day governance. There is a proposal to increase the number of seats in Parliament. This could help remove the mental block of male politicians about losing their constituencies to women. The main hitch to the Women's Reservation Bill will then be removed.

The fact is, even after so many years since Independence, the number of seats in Parliament has not really increased much. If seats are increased, women too can be accommodated and their voices will finally be heard.

Let us not forget that women are serious about governance. The success of women panchayati leaders is proof of that. Today, there are nearly 10 lakh women panchayati leaders in the country. This has been possible due to reservation at the grassroots level.

For the first time, they have managed to come out of the four walls of their houses and take active part in matters relating to their villages and taluks.

But the story was not the same when reservation was first introduced in Panchayats more than a decade back. It took them years to come out of the background and make space for themselves.

success at the grassroots level, it should now be replicated at higher levels too.

The UPA in its Common Minimum Programme has made a commitment towards women's reservation. Now, they have completed one year in office, it's time to honour that commitment.

As told to **Aparna Ramalingam**



Subhashini Ali Sangal
President, AIDWA

translation of the demand for women's reservation

We are opposed to the proposal on increasing the number of seats in Parliament and state assemblies because it will again postpone the demand for women's reservation

Into reality. The proposal is extremely unwieldy and will create many new problems, the most intractable being that the delimitation of parliamentary and assembly constituencies will have to be taken up immediately. Since the population profile of the country has undergone several changes since 1952, various social groups, states and regions have been demanding delimitation of constituencies for some time.

But the question of delimitation was frozen by Parliament in 2002. If re-opened again, even if it is specifically to provide reservation for women, it will be impossible not to admit and discuss the demands of other groups. This will once again push the reservation issue to the furthest reaches of the proverbial back-burner.

In any case, there is no evidence that this proposal will receive the support of those who have been opposing the original Bill — both overtly and covertly. Therefore, the entire exercise may come to naught after much time and energy have been wasted. And we, especially, will cut a very sorry figure.

The problems relating to passage of the Bill do not ac-

tually have much to do with the existing number of seats versus an increased number of seats. They are the product of a mindset that wants to deny women the right to become public representatives.

This is not a mindset that contributes to the strengthening and expansion of a democratic polity and should be exposed, challenged and, hopefully, transformed. This can only be done if the Bill, as it stands, is placed before both Houses of Parliament and then debated upon so that its genuine lacunae or shortcomings, if any, can be removed. After that, it must be put to vote.

The argument of "lack of consensus" cannot be used to postpone the Bill indefinitely. Our system of parliamentary democracy is based on the principle of respecting the will of the majority and many legislations are passed on this principle.

The Bill must also be voted upon so that the public commitments of political parties are put to the acid test.

If they remain true to the promises that they have repeatedly made to the electorate, then a very grave injustice that has been done to women will to some extent be undone.

SUNDAY DEBATE



বিজয়িনী ও একটি প্রশ্ন

রূপান দেওল বাজাজ সুখী, হয়তো বা ঈষৎ অসুখীও, কিন্তু নিশ্চিত ভাবেই তিনি জয়ী। অষ্টাদশ বর্ষ পূর্বে এক 'সানডাউনার পার্টি'-তে পঞ্জাব পুলিশের তদানীন্তন প্রধান কে পি এস গিল তাঁহার অসম্মান করিয়াছিলেন। ক্ষুব্ধ ও অপমানিত রূপান—যিনি স্বয়ং আই এ এস অফিসারও বটেন— অতঃপর সন্ত্রমহানির অভিযোগ লইয়া বিভিন্ন আদালতে ঘুরিয়াছেন। অবশেষে দেশের শীর্ষ আদালত জানাইয়া দিল, কে পি এস গিল 'দোষী'। শীর্ষ আদালত যে গিল-কে কারাদণ্ড দেয় নাই, শুধুমাত্র জরিমানার ভিতরেই শাস্তিকে সীমাবদ্ধ রাখিয়াছে (যে জরিমানা ইতিপূর্বে গিল প্রদানও করিয়াছেন) তাহাতে রূপান ঈষৎ ক্ষুব্ধ হইতে পারেন, কিন্তু গিল-কে 'দোষী' সাব্যস্ত করিয়া সুপ্রিম কোর্ট নির্দিষ্ট জানাইয়া দিয়াছে, সুশিচারের লক্ষ্যে এক মহিলার দীর্ঘ ও একক সংগ্রাম ব্যর্থ হয় নাই। রূপান তাই জয়ী। তাঁহার মতে, এই বিজয় আরও তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ এই কারণে যে অস্থিমজ্জায় পুরুষতান্ত্রিক একটি সমাজে কর্মরতা নারীর সন্ত্রমরক্ষার ক্ষেত্রে এই রায় এক উজ্জ্বল মাইলফলকের ন্যায় প্রতিভাত হইতে পারে। প্রায় নিঃসঙ্গ লড়াইয়ের পরে বিজয়িনীর বক্তব্যটি এক্ষণে আশাবাদে প্রদীপ্ত হওয়াই স্বাভাবিক, কিন্তু সমকালীন ভারতে কর্মরতা নারীর তথাকথিত হীনতর অবস্থার উন্নয়নে, বিশেষত যৌন নিগ্রহের প্রতিকারসাধনে এই রায় সত্যই কতটা কার্যকর হইবে, সেই ব্যাপারে সংশয় থাকিয়াই যায়। নিঃসন্দেহে, সুপ্রিম কোর্টের এই রায়ের প্রতীকী মূল্যই সর্বাধিক, কিন্তু সেই প্রতীকী মূল্য বাস্তবে কর্মরতা নারীর ক্ষমতায়নে, বা তাঁহার সন্ত্রমরক্ষার্থে কী ভূমিকা লইবে, তাহা ভবিষ্যতের বিষয় বইকী! অপিচ, সুপ্রিম কোর্টের এই রায়কে মুক্তকণ্ঠেই স্বাগত জানানো কর্তব্য।

দীর্ঘ প্রতীক্ষান্তে কাঙ্ক্ষিত রায় আসিবার পরে শীর্ষ আদালতের পুরানো আখরগুলি ফিরিয়া দেখিলে একটি গভীর খটকা জাগিয়া উঠে। বিচার চলিবে, এই মর্মে প্রদত্ত এক নির্দেশে কে পি এস গিলকে শীর্ষ আদালত জানাইয়াছিল, নারীর মর্যাদা ও সন্ত্রমের সারাৎসার হইল তাঁহার নারীত্ব। খটকাটি ইহার ভিতরেই নিহিত। শীর্ষ আদালতের বিচারকর্ম এবং বিচারপদ্ধতির প্রতি সম্পূর্ণ মর্যাদা রাখিয়াও বলা চলে, এমন পর্যবেক্ষণও কিন্তু পিতৃতন্ত্রেরই নীতি-চালিত। সন্ত্রমকে যদি নারীর নারীত্বের সহিত সমীকৃত করিয়া দেখা হয়, যদি নারীর যৌনতাচিহ্নিত অস্তিত্বেরই দ্যোতক হইয়া উঠে তাঁহার সন্ত্রম, তাহা হইলে গোড়াতেই একটি গলদ থাকিয়া যায়। পুরুষতন্ত্র যে ছাঁচে নারীকে যৌনতার প্রতিমা বানাইয়া তাহাকে ক্ষমতা হইতে দূরে, প্রান্তিক অবস্থানে ঠেলিয়া দিবার প্রয়াস করে, হয়তো বা অনবধানেই সুপ্রিম কোর্টের পর্যবেক্ষণের ভিতরেও সেই একই দৃষ্টিকোণের ছাপ পরিলক্ষিত হয় না কি? 'নারী' যে তাহার লিঙ্গনির্দিষ্ট অবস্থানের গণ্ডি ছাড়াইয়া বৃহত্তর অর্থে 'মানুষ' এবং সেই মনুষ্যোচিত অধিকারের বশেই যে তাহার স্বীয় সন্ত্রম রক্ষার অধিকার পূর্ণমাত্রায় বিদ্যমান, সেই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কথাটি শীর্ষ আদালতের পর্যবেক্ষণে অনুপস্থিত থাকিল না কি? বরং, জন্মলগ্ন হইতে নারীর লিঙ্গচিহ্নিত অবস্থান এবং তাহার যৌনতাকে একাকার করিবার ফলে সেই সঙ্কটই দেখা দিয়াছে, যাহা সনাতন পুরুষতান্ত্রিক কদাচরণে পরিদৃষ্ট হয়। সুপ্রিম কোর্ট, নিশ্চিত ভাবেই সুবিচার করিয়াছে। তাহার জন্য এই প্রতিষ্ঠানের সাধুবাদ প্রাপ্য। এই মুহূর্তে শুধু ইহাই খেয়াল রাখা প্রয়োজন যে লিঙ্গভেদ-জনিত সমস্যার প্রতিকার করিতে গিয়া কোনও ভাবে যেন লিঙ্গ-চিহ্নিত অস্তিত্বের সহিত যৌনতার বিষয়টি গুলাইয়া না যায়। পিতৃতন্ত্র কিন্তু নারীর সমূহ অস্তিত্বকে মসৃণ ভাবে তাহার যৌনতার খোপে চালান করিতেই ব্যগ্র। পিতৃতন্ত্রের অনাচারের প্রতিকারকল্পে উৎসাহীগণও যদি সেই একই ভুল করিয়া বসেন, তাহা হইলে ঘুরপথে পিতৃতন্ত্রের হাতটিই শক্ত হইবে। একদা রূপান দেওল বাজাজের প্রতি ক্ষমতামত্ত কে পি এস গিল যে অন্যায় করিয়াছিলেন, যতই প্রতীকী অর্থে হউক, তাহার প্রতিকার হইল সন্দেহ নাই। শুধু পড়িয়া থাকিল একটি প্রশ্ন। একটি জরুরি প্রশ্ন।

Eroding women's rights

Iraq's draft constitution is about to go before the national assembly for approval. It seems likely to mean a massive erosion of women's rights.

Margaret Owen

IF THE women of Iraq ever needed support from the international community, the United Nations, and, in particular, the British Government, it is now. With only two weeks until the country's draft constitution is due to be ready (the deadline is August 15) who else can help Iraqi women to prevent the total erosion of their human rights — rights they have enjoyed, in a secular state, since 1959?

Tony Blair, who continues to justify the invasion of the country as the only means of toppling a brutal dictatorship and helping establish democracy, now has an obligation to use all his powers to avert a new dictatorship in Iraq — that of the mullahs over women.

Apart from considerations of humanity and human rights, Iraq's future will depend greatly on its women, many of whom, in the hitherto secular state, are well-educated professionals and a key resource in the reconstruction of the economy as well as the social fabric of communities. The Security Council Resolution 1325 requires that women are treated equally and are enabled to participate fully and proportionately in decision-making. Only then can there be hope for the establishment of good governance, democracy and justice.

In March 2004, Iraq adopted an interim constitution called the TAL (transitional administrative law). It was then that Iraqi women won their battle to stop the passing of the proposed rule 137, which, if promulgated, would have destroyed all hopes for women's equality, dignity and justice in the country, in effect allowing the total subordination of women to men within their families, in the community and in political life. This particular interpretation of the *Quran* would legalise polygamy; divorce by *talaq*; honour killings; stoning and public beheadings of women for alleged adultery. But now rule 137's provisions are back in the new draft constitution.

Despite the appalling security situation in Iraq (two Sunni members of the committee who are drafting the constitution were gunned down last week), thousands of brave Iraqi women, from different governorates, risked their lives on July 26 when they congregated in Baghdad's Al-Firdaws Square to protest against their exclusion in the draft constitution.

The drafts released last weekend are a cause for deepest concern. Written by a committee of 46 men and nine women, they expressly state that the main source of legislation in the new Iraqi constitution is to be *Sharia* law, which will take precedence over international law. *Sharia* law decrees that "personal status" (that is, family law relating to marriage, divorce, custody, widowhood and inheritance) is to be determined according to the different religious sects.

These developments have caused deep dismay among women's organisations across Iraq, whether Kurds, Sunnis or Shias. Iraqi women have campaigned and lobbied hard over the past few months, often risking great personal danger — several politically active women have been assassinated, abducted, raped or threatened — for the new constitution to guarantee women's rights and abide by international treaties.

If Iraq is truly to become a democratic state, complying with international human rights treaties and conventions, then its constitution, while upholding the *Sharia* law, must ensure that its interpretation does not breach its international obligations. It is unprecedented to rush the writing of a document as important as a constitution, because once written, it will determine the future of the country and the lives of its people. Civil society, both male and female, must be consulted. But the present state of near-civil war is not the best time to take soundings, or educate and inform the population on the meaning of a constitution, and its importance for their future — another reason surely for a postponement.

Every day in Iraq, women are beaten, raped, abducted and murdered in "honour killings." Millions more live in poverty and fear. The new constitution must uphold their rights, for we know that it is only when women have equality with men that there can be true democracy, justice and peace. Iraqi women are imploring the international community to act to protect the lives of 13 million women. Tony Blair and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw must not remain silent. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

(Margaret Owen is the head of Widows for Peace through Democracy and a member of the U.K. Bar Human Rights Committee.)

29 JUL 2005

THE HINDU

Gill guilty of outraging Rupan's modesty: SC

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, July 27. — In a setback to Mr KPS Gill, the super cop instrumental in wiping out terrorism in Punjab, the Supreme Court today upheld his conviction for outraging the modesty of a woman IAS official, Ms Rupan Deol Bajaj, in 1988 but rejected her plea for imposing a jail term on him.

A Bench of Mr Justice KG Balakrishnan and Mr Justice BN Srikrishna dismissed Mr Gill's appeal challenging a Punjab and Haryana High Court verdict holding him guilty of the charges levelled by Ms Bajaj.

Reacting to the verdict, Ms Bajaj said she was relieved and happy, a report adds from Chandigarh. "The incident was shocking as I felt that this could not have happened to me because of the position I was in," she said, adding that she could not believe that people holding such important positions could behave in such a manner.

The High Court, on 20 August 1998, upheld Mr Gill's conviction under Section 354 (outraging the modesty of a woman) and Section 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult a woman) for pinching her at a party hosted at the then Punjab financial commissioner (home),

Mr SL Kapoor's Chandigarh residence on 18 July 1988.

The High Court, while maintaining the concurrent findings of the lower courts, had asked Mr Gill to execute a bond to maintain peace and good behaviour till 5 January 1999. It had also upheld the sessions court's order directing him to pay a Rs 2 lakh compensation to Ms Bajaj.

Although Mr Gill had deposited the money in the High Court Registry, Ms Bajaj had refused to take it saying it should go to an organisation working for women's uplift.

Noting this, the Court today said the Chief Justice of the High Court would take the

appropriate decision on giving the money to a women's organisation. It, however, rejected Ms Bajaj's plea for restoring the three months' rigorous imprisonment ordered by the chief judicial magistrate, Chandigarh, on 6 August 1996.

The sessions court had on 6 January 1998 upheld the CJM's verdict convicting him under Sections 354 and Section 509. But, instead of imposing a sentence, the court had ordered his release on three years' probation on his entering into a bond of Rs 20,000 with two sureties of a similar amount. Later, the High Court had reduced the period of probation to one year.

AT A PINCH

- Ms Rupan Deol Bajaj was slapped on the posterior by Mr KPS Gill on 18 July 1988
- An FIR was registered on 29 July
- The HC quashed it in 1989. It was, however, restored by the SC in 1995
- The CJM convicted Mr Gill on 6 August 1996 and jailed him for three months
- The Chandigarh district and sessions judge upheld the conviction on 6 January 1998, but commuted the sentence and instead asked Mr Gill to pay Rs 2 lakh in compensation
- He was released on a three-year probation
- The HC on 20 August 1998 upheld Mr Gill's conviction under Section 354 and Section 509.
- The Supreme Court upholds the conviction on 27 July 2005, but denies Ms Bajaj's plea for a jail term — SNS



Mr Gill and Ms Bajaj

28 JUL 2005

777 1311

Women's bill: Left, BJP 'no' to UPA move

To add more seats to meet 33 p.c.
reservation for women

Special Correspondent

10-12/26/7

NEW DELHI: The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) came under criticism here on Monday over the Women's Reservation Bill with the Left parties and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rejecting the new proposal of adding more seats to create 33 per cent seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. The women's groups also joined the chorus against the Centre.

The Left and the BJP were on the same side of the fence at a dialogue of "Women MPs on Women's Reservation Bill and the Domestic Violence Bill" organised by the National Commission for Women (NCW) that sought 33 per cent reservation for women in the current session of Parliament.

However, the dozen-odd Members of Parliament who attended the interaction and the even lesser number who spoke stuck to their respective party's stand on the issue.

Initiating the dialogue Sumitra Mahajan (BJP) referred to the new draft of the bill prepared by the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, that suggests raising the number of seats to 800 plus in Parliament to give reservation to women.

The letters have been sent to the leaders of various political parties and if the Government is to be believed 20 of the 21 political parties have reportedly agreed to the proposal. "The seats will have to be increased through a proper delimitation process which would not be possible by the next general

• Women's groups too join chorus

• BJP for the original bill drafted by the previous Government

• We are not interested in any debate on the issue.
Brinda Karat

elections," she said. Advocating for the original bill drafted by the previous Government, Ms. Mahajan said they could not discuss the draft since the participants of the dialogue had not seen the new bill and the old one was not valid. Unless the present Government accepts the old bill, there is no point in any discussion.

Diversionsary tactic

Backing Ms. Mahajan, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) Polit Bureau member Brinda Karat said the new proposal was a diversionsary tactic on the part of the UPA Government that had not held even one discussion on the issue in the past one year.

"As it is the ongoing delimitation process is dogged by controversies and we cannot afford to shift ground now," she said while asking the UPA alliance partners to support the original bill and ensure its passage in the House.

"We are not interested in any debate on the issue," Ms. Karat said while suggesting that political parties could raise objections in Parliament when the bill came up for discussion.

Driving around Delhi, raping

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 20: The capital of rape has lived up to its ignoble reputation with chilling consistency: another woman was dragged into a car in Delhi today and gangraped while being driven around the city.

The 23-year-old resident of a *Jhuggi* in Mayapuri, in southwest Delhi, had gone to answer nature's call in an open field with two other women at 4.30 am when four men drove up in a white Maruti.

Three of the gang-rappers grabbed the housewife while the fourth stayed at the wheel. The women with the victim tried to pull her free, but were beaten up.

As the car sped away with

the woman, they rushed back to the *Jhuggi* to inform her family, who went to the police.

The men drove around the city raping her. Two hours later, she was dropped off near Saraswati Vihar in northwest Delhi, about 15 km from where she was abducted, police said.

When the police control room van found her, the woman was in such a state of shock that she could not tell the police her name. Finally, she wrote her name and address on a piece of paper.

The victim was taken to a hospital where a medical examination confirmed rape, the police said. She could not

reveal much about the identity of the rapists, they added.

The victim hails from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh and has been living in Delhi for the past three years. Her husband makes a meagre living out of making plastic packaging boxes.

On May 8, a college student had been abducted from Dhaura Kuan in south Delhi and gangraped in a moving Santri. The Delhi University student, who came from Shilong, was on her way to a *paratha* stall near her house with a friend when she was kidnapped.

The men had raped her as

After college student, it's housewife's turn

they drove from south to east Delhi, even changing the car in between.

The police came under severe criticism for failing to catch the culprits immediately although her friend had informed them on a cellphone minutes after the kidnapping. One of the accused, who turned out to be a driver with a Gurgaon BPO, was later caught and identified by the girl but three others are still at large.

"We have registered a case and investigations are on," was all deputy commissioner of police (southwest district) R.S. Yadav said today.

The police have detained

few persons for questioning but there is no concrete evidence linking the two rapes except that the modus operandi was similar.

After today's incident, Delhi Police's claims of improved patrolling since the May 8 rape sound hollow. The crime was committed even as the police safety guide for women issued in the public interest handed out advice like "Keep a mobile handy" or "Do not take deserted short cuts".

Women in the national capital have to live with the fear that a rapist could strike any time — while responding to a medical emergency, buying something to eat, going to see a film or just going to answer nature's call.

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THE TELEGRAPH

Employees can sue boss for sexual favouritism

CATHERINE ELSWORTH

Los Angeles, July 20: A court in California has ruled that bosses create an atmosphere of "sexual favouritism" by sleeping with their employees and can be sued for harassment even by workers with whom they are not involved.

The ruling, which is a significant expansion of the state's sexual harassment law, means that members of staff can claim harassment even if they were never approached or sexual favours nor were the sub-

ject of inappropriate advances.

Merely conveying the message that the way to get ahead at work is to sleep with the boss is enough to constitute harassment. The California supreme court's unanimous decision related to a suit filed by two female prison workers.

They accused a warden of giving preferential treatment to at least three of their colleagues with whom he was having affairs. When they complained about the favouritism he retaliated, they claimed.

Phil Horowitz, of the state's employment lawyers association, which supported the women's lawsuit, said: "It is the first major decision saying women can sue if they are treated worse because they're not the paramour of the supervisor."

Employment law experts said the ruling conflicted with decisions in other states.

Previously, only workers who had an affair or received unwanted sexual attention could sue in California. Lower courts had dismissed the prison employees' suit, saying

that although the warden might have acted unfairly the women were not discriminated against.

But the state's high court overturned the decision and said that widespread "sexual favouritism" in the workplace could be seen as sexual harassment even when the plaintiffs had not been harassed.

Chief justice Ronald George said: "The message is conveyed to female employees that they are viewed by management as sexual playthings or that the way for women to get ahead in the work-

place is by engaging in sexual conduct with their supervisors or the management."

A spokesman for the state's attorney general's office said the decision, which could also lead to suits from male employees who feel they are victims of sexual favouritism, sounded a warning to business owners.

The court ruled that "mere office gossip" was not enough to justify a lawsuit. There must be evidence of widespread sexual favouritism.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Women 9-3 n/a

Delhi woman gangraped in moving car

New Delhi: A 23-year-old housewife was abducted by four men in north-west Delhi on Wednesday and repeatedly gangraped in a moving car, just two months after a similar incident, not far from this spot, shook the nation.

The woman, a resident of Mayapuri slum cluster, had gone to an open field at about 4.30 am this morning to answer nature's call when she was forced into a white Maruti car. Two other women, who were also with her, tried to pull her free from the clutches of the men but were beaten up.

About two hours later, the woman was dumped off near Saraswati Vihar in north-west Delhi, almost 15 kilometres away from the place she was abducted, police sources said.

She had been repeatedly gangraped and was in such a state of shock that she could not even say her name to personnel of a Police Control Room (PCR) van which found her. She finally wrote her name and address on a piece of paper, the sources said. The woman was then taken to a hospital where medical examination confirmed rape.

Delhi Police, facing flak for its tardy investigations into the gangrape of a 22-year-old Delhi University student in May, was tightlipped about the latest incident. "We have registered a case and investigations are on," was all Deputy Commissioner of Police R S Yadav said. PTI

21 JUL 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Mr. Gu. 15 **Toothless Bill** *1977*

Legislation on sexual harassment at work introduced

THE philosophy behind the draft sexual harassment Bill is laudable. Women must have protection from unwelcome attention at the workplace which could undermine their career prospects. Trouble is, this is another of those so-called gender-friendly legislations which is unlikely to work. The Bill, which does not cover women of Jammu and Kashmir, applies to all forms of work, from agricultural labour to the IT sector. The devil is in the detail. Any establishment with 50 or more employees is supposed to set up an internal complaints committee of three members of whom at least two must be women. In addition, there has to be an external experts committee to look into complaints of which half the members have to be women. As we know, in most establishments, women are fairly low in the pecking order. It will be very difficult for such a committee to take on powerful male bosses in the event of a complaint of harassment coming before it.

Then there is the problem of the definition of workplace. For a woman vegetable vendor or a daily wage agricultural worker, the workplace changes all the time. In the case of harassment at educational institutions, what happens if one student harasses another? The Bill says nothing about any of these issues. A glaring anomaly in the Bill is that it overlooks the right of the accused. There are instances where people have brought false or frivolous charges against colleagues or superiors with mala fide intentions. The Bill also says nothing about any preventive steps. Once an employer makes it known that there will be zero-tolerance for any inappropriate conduct in the workplace, there will be a marked change in mindset. A more gender-sensitive legal system will automatically encourage women to come forward with their grievances. The Bill, as it stands, will only generate needless bureaucracy and will do little to improve women's lot. National Commission for Women chairperson Girija Vyas's wry remark sums up just how unworkable the Bill is. She urged women to rely on self-defence and self-protection to ward off unwanted attention.

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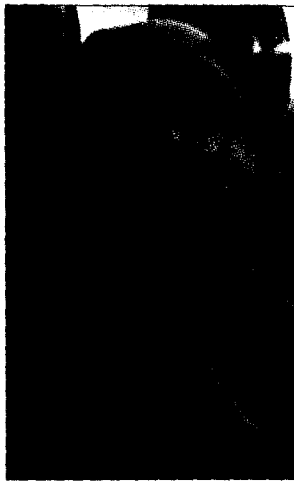
Father-in-law as rapist, again

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, July 8. — If Imrana belonged to Uttar Pradesh, Jyotsnara Begum is Assam's. But the 19-year-old, newly-married girl's story is reminiscent of Imrana's, thematically uniting India in wretched depravity.

Jyotsnara was raped by her 50-plus father-in-law, Mainuddin Bhuyan, last month while her husband and mother-in-law were away from their residence in Kachakati village, Dhing, in Nagaon district of Central Assam.

The incident came to light after a first information report had been lodged with the police by her father, Mujibur Rahman, a few days ago. He was obliged to go to the police after local Muslim clerics, quoting shariat, had annulled Jyotsnara's



marriage, ordering her husband, Imran Hussain Bhuyan, to divorce her with compensation. She was asked to live with her father-in-law, who had victimised his helpless daughter-in-law when his son and wife were away in Dimapur, Nagaland.

Jyotsnara told them everything when they returned home three days

later but her mother-in-law warned her against a public disclosure, threatening her with dire consequences. Jyotsnara escaped to her father's residence in South Zaramari, giving her hawk-eyed mother-in-law the slip. Shocked at what had befallen his daughter, her father initially approached Muslim clerics, seeking justice. After scrutinising the signed statements of some people, including Jyotsnara's husband, acknowledging the allegation to be founded upon facts, the clerics announced their verdict, such as it was.

Nagaon's superintendent of police, Mr KK Sharma, has confirmed that an FIR was subsequently lodged. A medical examination of the rape victim has been carried out. And no queries about Mainuddin, the culprit, please: no one knows where he is.

09 JUL 2005 THE STATESMAN

ইমরানার পরে জ্যোৎস্নারা, বৃত্তান্ত একই

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, গুয়াহাটি, চ
জুলাই: উত্তর প্রদেশের মুজফফর নগরের পরে অসমের নগাঁও জেলা। ইমরানার পরে জ্যোৎস্নারা বেগম। স্বশুরের দ্বারা ধর্ষিতা হওয়ার পরে 'তালাক' পেয়ে এখন বাপের বাড়িতে গৃহবন্দি। জ্যোৎস্নারা-কাণ্ডে ঘটনার প্রায় দেড় মাস পরে মেয়ের বাবা পুলিশের কাছে এফআইআর করায় অভিযুক্ত স্বশুর-শাশুড়ি-স্বামী ঘর ছেড়ে পালিয়ে গিয়েছেন।

নগাঁও জেলার ধিং থানার শোলোবাড়ি-কাছকাটি গ্রামে জ্যোৎস্নারার স্বশুরবাড়ি। দরমা দেওয়া দু'টি কাঁচা ঘর। আছে একটি 'পাক' ঘরও। বাড়িতে আলো নেই। পুলিশের অভিযোগ, জ্যোৎস্নারার ৫৫ বছরের স্বশুর মইনুদ্দিন ভুইঞার নামে বিভিন্ন থানায় বেশ কয়েকটি চুরির অভিযোগ রয়েছে। বাবার চুরির হাত-বশ

থাকলেও তাঁর একমাত্র ছেলে এমরান হোসেন ভুইঞা লোকের বাড়ি কাজ করেন। বাড়িতে তৃতীয় ব্যক্তি বলতে তাঁর মা গৃহবধু হালিমা খাতুন। পাঁচ কিলোমিটার দূরে, একই থানার দক্ষিণ জারামারি গ্রাম থেকে আট মাস আগে পুত্রবধু হয়ে এ বাড়িতে পা রেখেছিলেন সদ্য যুবতী ১৯ বছরের জ্যোৎস্নারা।

তাঁদের সংসারে অভাব থাকলেও তেমন অশান্তি প্রতিবেশীদের চোখে পড়েনি কোনওদিন। ২৫ মে-র সকালটাও এ বাড়ির শুরু হয়েছিল তেমনই শান্তভাবে। শাশুড়ি-মাকে সঙ্গে নিয়ে স্বামী রওনা হয়েছেন ডিমাপুরের উদ্দেশ্যে আত্মীয়ের বাড়িতে।

রাতে স্বশুর পুত্রবধুকে বলেন, 'আজ আমার ঘরে শোও।' তার পরে যুবতী পুত্রবধুর বিশ্বাস ভাঙতে অবশ্য বেশি সময় লাগেনি। ভয়ে কঁটা হয়ে গোটা রাত স্বশুরের পাশবিক

অত্যাচারের শিকার হয়েছেন জ্যোৎস্নারা। একাধিকবার ধর্ষণ করা হয় তাঁকে।

ধর্ষিতা হওয়ার পরে তাঁকে ভয় দেখানো হয়। 'মুখ খুললে প্রাণে মেরে ফেলা'-র ভয়। তারপরে তিন দিন ওই বাড়িতে 'বোবা' হয়ে থেকে ডিমাপুর-ফেরত স্বামীর কাছে সুবিচারের আশায় যখন মুখ খোলেন, সে আশায় জল ঢেলে দেন স্বামী-শাশুড়ি। তাঁরাও 'পাঁচকান' করতে বারণ করে দেন জ্যোৎস্নারাকে। পরের রাতে পালিয়ে বাপের বাড়ি চলে আসেন তিনি।

স্বামী ফেরলেও জ্যোৎস্নারার বাবা মুজিবর রহমান মেয়েকে ফেরাননি। গোঁড়া ধর্মের আচার মেনে শরিয়তের 'সুবিচার' পেতে তিনি যান দারুণ হাদিস পরমাইবেটি ইসলামিয়া মাদ্রাসায়। মাদ্রাসার 'মুফতি' (বিচারক) আব্দুল মান্নান ডেকে পাঠান জ্যোৎস্নারার স্বামী

এমরানকে। সেখানে বাবার 'কুর্মে'র কথা স্বীকার করেন তিনি। ২৭ জুন মান্নান ফতোয়া জারি করে জানান, "জ্যোৎস্নারা 'হারাম' হয়ে গিয়েছে। তাই স্বামী-স্ত্রী আর একসঙ্গে থাকতে পারবে না।" স্ত্রীকে 'তালাক' দেওয়ার বিচার হয় তাঁর।

'তালাক' মেয়ের বিচার পেতে সব ঘটনার কথা জানিয়ে গত ৬ জুলাই জেলার পুলিশ সুপারের কাছে লিখিত ভাবে আর্জি জানান জ্যোৎস্নারার বাবা। তারপরে পুলিশি নিয়ম মেনে জ্যোৎস্নারার মেডিক্যাল টেস্ট হয়েছে, ম্যাজিস্ট্রেটের কাছে গোপন 'জবানবন্দি' নেওয়া হয়েছে।

এসপি-র নির্দেশে গত কাল ধিং থানায় একটি এফআইআর-ও করেন মুজিবর রহমান। পুলিশ আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে তদন্ত শুরু করতেই তিন অভিযুক্ত বেপাতা।

09 JUL 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Another 'honour' rape in Pak

Multan, July 6

A MARRIED woman was allegedly kidnapped and gang-raped in eastern Pakistan in retaliation for her cousin's affair with a daughter of one of the suspects, a police official said on Wednesday. Seven men have been arrested in this connection.

The case is reminiscent of the gang rape of 33-year-old Mukhtar Mai, who last week won a court appeal overturning the acquittals of 13 of her attackers after drawing international attention to her plight by speaking out.

Both cases involve a woman targeted for punishment for the actions of a male relative.

The latest attack occurred last week in the town of Chanriot when one of the suspects was angered over a relationship between his 17-year-old daughter and the victim's 24-year-old cousin.

He and his accomplices kidnapped the 30-year-old victim and gang-raped her with six oth-



Mukhtar Mai: Not the last

er suspects, area police official Mahar Muntaz said. The seven suspects were arrested on Tuesday after police received a complaint from the victim's family, he said.

"The woman has told us that she was kidnapped and raped by seven men last week," he said.

Muntaz said the lead suspect in the gang rape told the police that his daughter was kidnapped and sexually assaulted by the

youth, but that an initial police investigation showed that the young woman willingly went with the young man to a nearby city last month.

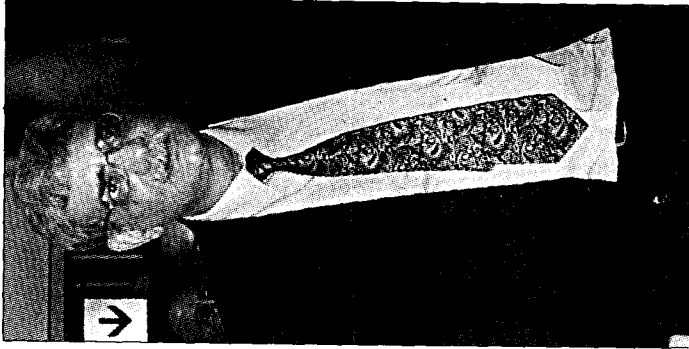
The police plan to question the daughter and the young man to find out "the nature of their relations," he said, adding that officers will "determine who is right and who is wrong" and "send this to a court soon."

Muntaz earlier said the lead suspect was the brother of the 17-year-old woman, but later clarified that he was her father.

Violence against women is common in Pakistan. Hundreds of women are raped or killed every year in so-called "honour" attacks over behavior deemed inappropriate, including extramarital affairs or marriage without a family's consent. The women often have no direct involvement in the so-called crime but are punished for being related to the man involved.

Chanriot is about 250 kilometers northwest of Multan.

AP



REUTERS

Pakistani ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Younis Khan arrives at Amman airport. Pakistan has decided to relocate Khan from Baghdad to Amman, Jordan, after the attack on him on Tuesday.

07 Jul 200

Mai case rerun in Pak

Associated Press

24 ultras arrested

MULTAN, July 6. — Seven men have been arrested in eastern Pakistan for the kidnap and gang-rape of a married woman in retaliation for her cousin's affair with a daughter of one of the suspects, police said today.

The case is reminiscent of the gang rape of 33-year-old Mukhtaran Mai, who last week won a court appeal overturning the acquittals of 13 of her rapists after drawing international attention to her plight by speaking out. Both cases involve a woman targeted for punishment for the actions of a male relative.

The latest attack occurred last week in the town of Chanot when one of the suspects was angered over a relationship between his 17-year-old daughter and the victim's 24-year-old cousin. He and his accomplices kidnapped the 30-year-old victim and gang-raped her with six other suspects, an officer, Mr Mahar Mumtaz, said.

The seven suspects were arrested on Tuesday after police received a complaint from her family, he said. "The woman has

PESHAWAR, July 6. — Pakistani security forces today detained 24 suspected militants after a raid on an Afghan refugee camp near the border with Afghanistan, officials said. Two of the detainees were Pakistani tribesmen and the rest were Afghans, Mr Abdul Qayyum, the administration chief of the Bajaur tribal area, said following the raid on the camp, which houses an estimated 6,000 Afghans. "The operation was part of an ongoing counter terrorism campaign," Mr Qayyum said. — AFP

told us that she was kidnapped and raped by seven men last week."

Mumtaz said the lead suspect in the gang rape told police that his daughter was kidnapped and sexually assaulted by the youth, but that an initial police investigation showed that the woman willingly went with the young man to a nearby city last month.

Police plan to question the daughter and the young man to find out "the nature of their relations", he said, adding that officers will "determine who is right and who is wrong" and "send this to a court soon".

Cops refuse to lodge Rani's FIR against father-in-law

VASISTHA Bhardwaj
Muzaffarnagar, July 4

THE MUZAFFARNAGAR police allegedly refused to lodge Rani's FIR against her father-in-law on the grounds that the case falls under the jurisdiction of Bulandshahar police. Rani had reached the police station on Monday with Rehana Adeeb, head of Astitva, a women's organisation. She alleges that her father-in-law had raped her two and a half years ago.

She made the allegations only recently when National Women's Commission president Girija Vyas was in Muzaffarnagar to probe into the Imrana case.

Rani alleged that her father-in-law, Ishtiaque, had raped her in Bulandshahar about two and half years ago when she was alone at home. When Rani told her husband, Istikhar, and another family member she was told to keep the matter a secret.

Later, she was sent to her parents' house at Subhashnagar on

Anti-fatwa protest

FORMER UNION minister Bandaru Dattatreya and 30 BJP women activists courted arrest on Monday while protesting the *fatwa* against Imrana by the Darul-Uloom, Deoband. They also demanded changes in religious personal laws.

PTI, Hyderabad

the understanding that her husband would join her there after getting legally separated from his father. Instead, her husband came back later to take Rani back to the same house.

Rani and her husband also met the Imam of a madrasa at Khalapar where the Imam pronounced a *fatwa* declaring Rani impure for her husband. He asked her not to reside with him.

Following the Imam's directive,

her husband left Rani. Rani is now contesting a maintenance case in the ACJM court. When Rani heard of the Imrana episode, she met Girja Vyas, who directed the police to look into the matter.

Woman beaten up

In another case, four people brutally beat up one Aamna, wife of Israel of Budhana area in Muzaffarnagar. She, reportedly, fractured both legs. According to Rehana Adeeb, head of an NGO, Aamna, too, tried to lodge an FIR against her husband and those who attacked her but the police refused to lodge it. Aamna has a tumour and alleges that her husband was not treating her. When Aamna tried to sell her property to meet her medical expenses, her husband allegedly gave her *talaq*. Aamna, however, refused to accept the divorce. Once the matter was reported, her husband promised her treatment. But on Saturday night, she was brutally attacked.

শ্বশুরের ধর্ষণে বিয়ে খারিজ! শরিয়ত আদালতে এলেন না ইমরানা

মুজফ্ফরনগর (উত্তরপ্রদেশ), ১ জুলাই (পি টি আই)— ধর্মীয় অনুশাসনের বাইরে যেতে রাজি নন লাঞ্ছিতা ইমরানা। জাতীয় মহিলা কমিশনের চেয়ারপার্সন গিরিজা ব্যাসের উপস্থিতিতে গতকালই তিনি জানিয়েছিলেন, শরিয়তের নির্দেশই মাথা পেতে নেবেন। কিন্তু ধর্ষক শ্বশুরের শাস্তি চাই। পরিস্থিতি যা-ই হোক না কেন, শরিয়ত-ই তাঁর কাছে শেষ কথা। কিন্তু আজ শরিয়ত আদালতে এলেন না ইমরানা। শ্বশুরবাড়ির সঙ্গে ইমরানার সম্পর্কের ভবিষ্যৎ কী হবে, তা ঠিক করতে দেওবন্দ দারুল-উলুমের ধর্মীয় আদালতে আজ ইমরানা ও তাঁর পরিবারের লোকদের হাজির হওয়ার কথা ছিল। বেশ কিছু দিন হল খবরের শিরোনামে উঠে এসেছেন উত্তরপ্রদেশের মুজফ্ফরনগরের চারথাওয়াল গ্রামের এই গৃহবধু। গত ৬ জুন রাতে তাঁর স্বামীর অনুপস্থিতিতে তাঁকে ধর্ষণ করে তাঁর শ্বশুর আলি মহম্মদ। ইমরানার ভাইয়েরা আলি মহম্মদের বিরুদ্ধে থানায় এফ আই আর করেন। পুলিশ আলিকে গ্রেপ্তার করে, কিন্তু বিষয়টি মীমাংসার জন্য পঞ্চায়েতে ওঠে। মোড়লেরা রায় দেয়, ইমরানার আর তাঁর স্বামী নূর ইলাহির সঙ্গে থাকা চলবে না। তাঁকে শ্বশুর আলি মহম্মদকে বিয়ে করতে হবে। অর্থাৎ এত

দিনের স্বামী নূর হবে তাঁর সন্তান! নিপীড়কের বদলে লাঞ্ছিতার সাজা। পঞ্চায়েতের সালিশিতে স্তম্ভিত হয় দেশের বিভিন্ন মহল। শুরু হয়ে যায় রাজনীতি। ইমরানা জানিয়ে দেন, পঞ্চায়েতের এই রায় তিনি কোনওমতেই মেনে নেবেন না। ধর্ষক শ্বশুরকে তিনি স্বামী বলে মানতে পারবেন না। স্বামী যদি তাঁকে নাও গ্রহণ করেন, তবে পিত্রালয়ে গিয়ে উঠবেন। সে-ক্ষেত্রে তাঁর পাঁচটি সন্তানকে স্বামীর কাছেই রেখে যেতে হবে। এর পর মুসলিম ধর্মীয় সংগঠন দারুল উলুম দেওবন্দ রায় দেয়, স্বামীর সঙ্গে থাকতে পারবেন না ইমরানা। এই ফতোয়া সমর্থন করে মুসলিম পার্সোনাল ল বোর্ড। কিন্তু বিষয়টি নিয়ে

আবার

গুরগাঁও, ১ জুলাই (পি টি আই)— আরও এক শ্বশুরের কীর্তি! হরিয়ানার মেওয়াত জেলার এক গ্রামে ষটেছে পুত্রবধু ধর্ষণের ঘটনা। ধর্ষিত বধু বাপের বাড়ি চলে গেছেন। বাবা জান মহম্মদকে সব খুলে বলেছেন। শ্বশুর ইসলাম খান পুত্রবধুকে ফিরিয়ে নিতে এসেছিল। জান মহম্মদ জানিয়ে দেন, ওর মুখে সবই শুনেছি। ও আর শ্বশুরবাড়ি ফিরবে না।

মুসলিমদের ভেতরেও নানা মত উঠে আসায় বোর্ডের কর্মসমিতির বৈঠক ডাকার উদ্যোগ নেওয়া হয়েছে। এদিকে, শ্বশুর আলিকে আর ১৪ দিন বিচারবিভাগীয় পুলিশ হেফাজতে রাখার নির্দেশ দিয়েছে আজ আদালত। ভূপালে বি জে পি সভাপতি লালকৃষ্ণ আদবানি বলেন, উলেমারা এ ধরনের ফতোয়া কী করে দেন? ভোটব্যাঙ্কের দিকে তাকিয়ে মুলায়ম বলেছেন, শরিয়ত আদালতের রায়ই গ্রাহ্য। ফতোয়া খারিজের দাবি জানিয়েছে খোদ সারা ভারত মুসলিম মহিলা পার্সোনাল ল বোর্ড।

IMRANA'S OBEDIENCE

To obey, and then to disappear: this is what Imrana Bibi seems to want to do most at the moment. In all the public turmoil over "personal law" that has been set off by her father-in-law allegedly raping her last month, Imrana's personhood is precisely the thing that has been most absent and the least heard. Her latest public statements, though cryptic, have been addressed to the clerics and to the media — she will obey whatever the former deem, and wants to be left alone by the latter. The submission of her will to the interpreted will of the *sharia*, and then a withdrawal from publicity would determine this 28-year-old woman's future with her five children, driven out of her home, with her marriage possibly annulled. What emerges most starkly from the aftermath of her rape in an Uttar Pradesh village is that the woman is the

one to get most brutally punished by her community for what has been done to her. Immediately after being raped, Imrana was given the *talaq* by her husband, and ordered out of the village by the local *qazi*. This was followed by *fatwas* and conflicting pronouncements by the local *panchayat*, different schools of Muslim theologians, and the Muslim personal law board. Each had a different opinion about the nature of her defilement, the status of her marriage, and which of the two men (the husband or the father-in-law) she should be spending the rest of her life with.

The personal, in such matters, is always already political. The Samajwa-

di Party in UP supported the fatwas, the Congressmen distanced themselves (although the women pitched in to "help"), and the Bharatiya Janata Party has started clamouring for the uniform civil code — as if brutal and criminal gender injustice in personal law is purely an Islamic evil. Nothing can be more remote from the core of Imrana's personal suffering than this partisan, opportunistic and communalized political furore. On the one hand, a theological controversy, and on the other, a political agenda — in both, Imrana's effacement is total, to-

gether with that of her basic human rights, as guaranteed by the Constitution and ideally to be protected by the judiciary.

By allowing the whole idea of a uniform civil code to get identified with the lowest kind of communal politics, the affirmation of a distinctly "Muslim"

The elimination of Imrana Bibi's personhood is essential to the theology as well as the politics of personal law in India

identity through a vengefully reactionary interpretation of the *sharia* becomes the way of asserting a difference threatened by majoritarian interests. In countries where this pressure does not exist, people have begun to interpret and live with the same set of laws in a far more liberal and flexible way. The gradual building up of trust that is required for the formulation of a uniform civil code becomes impossible in such a reactive, and reactionary, climate. Also, will this "uniformity" automatically guarantee sexual justice and equality for women? The elimination of Imrana's personhood is essential to the theology as well as the politics of personal law in India.

In the shadow of law and Shariat

VASISTHA Bhardwaj
Muzaffarnagar, June 30

WITH SHAME and a moral sense of duty pulling her in opposite directions, Imrana rested her faith on the principles of her religion to guide her through this harrowing period. On a day when a delegation of the National Commission for Women (NCW) reached here to look into the Imrana episode, the woman — who was allegedly raped by her father-in-law — reiterated

that she would abide by the *fatwa* (religious edict) issued by the Darul-Uloom, Deoband directing her to separate from her husband. However, she said she was confident of getting justice from the court of law.

"I will abide by the Shariat," said the 28-year old mother of five, while talking to reporters in the presence of NCW chairperson Girja Vyas. Imrana, however, said the *fatwa* had not been communicated to her in writing. "If I get the *fatwa*, I will abide by it."

Imrana asserted she had immense faith in the law of the land and demanded the harshest punishment for her father-in-law, now in jail. Refusing to be drawn into any controversy over the edict, Vyas said, "The issue should not be publicised but treated on humanitarian grounds. We are bound by the Constitution." She repeatedly requested that the issue be handled with great sensitivity.

Vyas said that the NCW would ensure that Imrana gets compensation and is rehabilitated, add-

ing that the case tested the credibility of the law of the land. "The Constitution is supreme," the NCW chief said, and demanded a speedy trial.

Imrana's case has not only got human rights groups up in arms in her support, it also has divided the Muslim community.

A panchayat organised by the All India Muslim Women Personal Law Board (AIMWPLB) on Thursday rejected the *fatwa* issued by the Darul-Uloom. The AIMWPLB said it would make ef-

orts to ensure that those who pronounced the "wrong" verdict in the case be tried under the IPC.

In contrast, All-India Muslim Personal Law Board chief Syed Md Rabey Al-Hasani Nadvi had on Wednesday supported the Darul-Uloom ruling even as he called for the severest punishment against the accused. Rejecting the AIMWPLB's view, AIMWPLB president Shaista Amber

said the *fatwa* was based on the "wrong interpretation" of the Koran and was "unacceptable."

She further stated that the AIMWPLB would make efforts to ensure that those who pronounced the verdict in the case were tried under the IPC. "The panchayat rejects the *fatwa* issued by Darul-uloom outright. According to the Koran, she was *halal* for her husband and had the right to live with him and their children," Amber asserted.

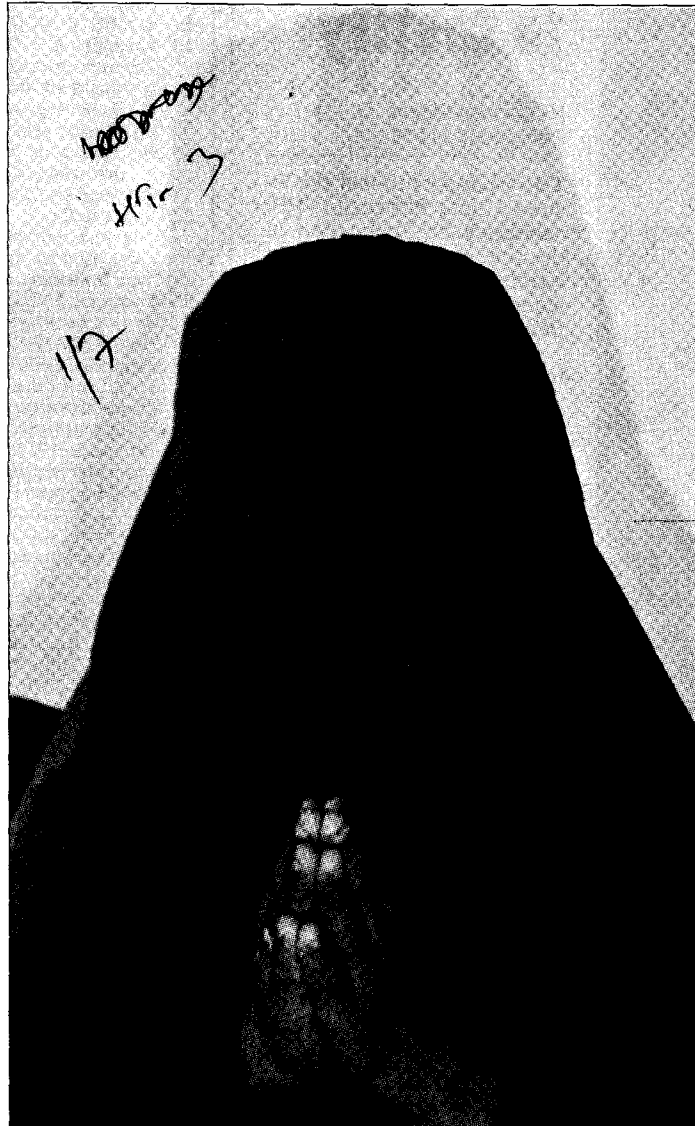
Meanwhile, thousands of women led by CPI(M) leader Subhashni Ali held a demonstration at the collectorate compound in Muzaffarnagar in support of Im-



AIMWPLB chief Shaista Amber at a panchayat in Lucknow on Thursday.

The Constitution is supreme... We'll ensure Imrana is compensated and rehabilitated

— NCW chief Girja Vyas



Imrana addresses the media after meeting members of the National Commission for Women in Muzaffarnagar on Thursday.

rana. Ali said the case should be decided according to law and criticised UP CM Mulayam Singh Yadav for preferring the Shariat.

The protesters demanded stern action against Imrana's father-in-law. "The *fatwa* is irrational and against the principles of natural justice as it punishes the victim and not the culprit,"

Ali said. Claiming that there had been a deviation in the stance of the law board — which distanced itself from the views expressed by two of its members earlier this week terming them personal opinions — Amber said the law board should expel them and take stern action against those maligning Islam.

Votebank politics, fumes BJP

Chandigarh, June 30

THE BJP on Thursday accused Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and the Congress of playing "votebank politics" on the Imrana rape case. The saffron party also demanded reforms in religious personal laws to bring them in conformity with the Constitution.

"The UP chief minister is supporting the retrograde step where an innocent victim is being punished for no fault of hers. The Congress party and some of its allies, on the other hand, are ducking out of the debate on this issue and have not clarified their stand. This is a cruel example of votebank politics," BJP spokesperson Arun Jaitley said.

He added, "There is an urgent need to bring the country's personal laws, whose basis is formed by religion, in conformance with Constitutional requirements and guarantees." Claiming that the BJP had started a national debate on the incident, Jaitley said Imrana's case highlighted how a woman's right to equality and living with dignity had been eroded. "It is time the Constitution prevails when there is a direct conflict with personal laws," he said.

The BJP leader also welcomed the stand taken by the CPM on the issue, with the communists advocating reforms in personal laws. He regretted the Congress was yet to clarify its stand, despite the fact that it is headed by a woman (Sonia Gandhi)! "Sonia Gandhi, the PM, the law minister or even the home minister have not said anything on this sensitive issue. But, the Congress won't be able to circumvent the issue forever," Jaitley said.

Fatwa ok but Imrana wants spotlight off

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUZAFFARNAGAR, JUNE 30

IMRANA today emerged out of hiding to say she would abide by the fatwa issued by the Darul Uloom Deoband which has ruled that she cannot go back to her husband after being raped by her father-in-law.

The 28-year-old mother of five wants justice from the Shariat and law courts and would like her father-in-law to receive the strictest punishment.

"Media ne mujhe do rahe par khadaa kar diya hai," Imrana told National Commission for Women chief Girija Vyas when she arrived with a seven-member team to speak to Imrana.

Virtually banished from her husband's house in Charthawal by a village panchayat and the Darul Uloom's fatwa, Imrana says she is prepared to leave her husband even as she asks to be left in peace.

"Mujhey akela chhod do," she says even as women organisations continue to descend here to persuade her to fight the clergy and their fatwas. Imrana's stand has surprised these organisations, which believe she may have been brainwashed into thinking she must abide by the fatwa. Incidentally, she is yet to receive the fatwa.

Refusing to be drawn into a controversy over the fatwa, NCW chief Vyas said the issue should be treated on humanitarian grounds. "Is par rajniti nahin honi chahiye." The government cannot remain a spectator, she added.

Imrana may want to be left alone, but dozens of women led by former MP and social activist Suhasini Ali turned up here today to march up to the District Magistrate's office chanting: "Hum tumhare saath hain, tum akeli nahin. Dharam ke naam par nari par atyachar bardasht nahin kiya jayega."

Women's board says no

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW, JUNE 30

A PANCHAYAT organised by the All India Muslim Women Personal Law Board today rejected the Darul Uloom Deoband's fatwa saying Imrana cannot go back to her husband after being raped by her father-in-law.

It said it would try to make sure that those who pronounced a "wrong" verdict in the case be tried under the IPC. "The panchayat has outrightly rejected the fatwa issued by Darul Uloom and has stated that as per the Koran she (Imrana) was 'halal' for her husband and had the right to live with her husband and children," board chief Shaista Amber said.

In contrast, All-India Muslim Personal Law Board president Syed Mohammed Rabey al-Hasani Nadvi had yesterday supported the ruling even as it called for punishment against the accused.

The NCW team, which included panel member Niba Kunwar and other women activists, had brought along former Justice A S Qureshi to investigate the matter.

The Imrana episode has given heart to other domestic rape victims who gathered courage to demonstrate publicly. "There is not one Imrana but dozens of them in Charthawal alone," said Azizian, who says she and her daughter have been victims of rape. She adds that many others like her are being raped and molested by fathers-in-law and other male relatives.