

Women vote and participate in Kuwait for the first time

DIANA ELIAS

KUWAIT CITY, JUNE 29

WOMEN went to the polls on Thursday for the first time in Kuwait, voting for parliament members in an election that has shaken up politics-as-usual in the conservative oil-rich emirate.

Women, who won the right to vote and run for office last year, went to separate polling stations from men. There are 28 female candidates among the 252 people running in the election, and women make 57 percent of voters.

"It feels like a wedding day," said Sialwa al-Sanoussi, a 45-year-old housewife, one of the first to arrive at a women's polling station in Dahyia, one of Kuwait's wealthiest areas. She wore black and covered her hair with a matching headcover.

With Thursday's vote, Saudi Arabia is now the only Arab country that holds elections but doesn't allow women to vote.

Even fundamentalist Muslims who opposed giving women the right to vote have campaigned for their support in the weeks heading up to Thursday's election.

But the entry of women is not the only new twist in the election. The vote has sparked a surprisingly vocal campaign for reform in Kuwait, where the ruling Al Sabah family



A woman casts her vote in Saiwa, Kuwait City on Thursday. AP

Democratic turn for Kuwait

- **POPULATION:** About 3 million, including 2 million foreign workers.
- **FORM OF GOVERNMENT:** A 50-seat parliament. The ruler has the right to dissolve the legislature. Key cabinet portfolios like defence and oil are held by the ruling Al-Sabah family.
- **SEATS CONTESTED:** all 50
- **CANDIDATES:** 252, including 28 women. Voters to choose two for each of 25 constituencies.
- **VOTERS:** Over 340,000 voters, 57 percent of them women participating for the first time

heads the government and has a strong influence over politics.

During the campaigning, reformist candidates—who include Islamic fundamentalists and secular activists—spoke out harshly against corruption, accusing ministers and even members of the ruling family of mismanagement and wasting state land.

At one point, the emir, Sheik Sabah Al Ahmed Al Sabah, expressed his "deep hurt and dismay" over what he called the "low level of dialogue," in the campaigns—though the government did not attempt to clamp down on it. —AP

JUN 29 2006

Rape to be redefined, tougher bill on anvil

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Centre is considering a draft bill to change the definition of rape and provide for a harsher sentence, Union home minister Shivraj Patil told reporters on Friday. He made these remarks while speaking about the key features of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2005, which came into force from Friday.

He said experts had toyed with three options as punishment—ten years or life imprisonment or death—but refused to comment further.

Sources said the new definition of rape could usher in a significant change. They said the meaning of 'rape' could be enlarged to include "forced oral and anal sex and insertion of objects into vagina and anus", as suggested by the National Commission for Women and the Law Commission. Marital rape is another point to be considered. Rape could mean sexual

assault and thus bring in its ambit forms of sexual offences involving children.

A provision could be made about the "consent" of a woman. It has been suggested that the absence of resistance cannot be deemed to be consent as women are



to prove their absence of willingness with body injuries. The age of consent of woman could also be changed. Punishment for rape may take away the discretion of courts in awarding less than statutory sentence to an accused. The sentence could also be made harsher than the presently prescribed one.

Patil expressed happiness at the other changes being ushered in by the CrPC amendment. An undertrial prisoner can be released on a personal bond with or without sureties if he has been under detention for a period extending to half the maximum period of punishment for his offence. Also, no undertrial can now be detained beyond the maximum period of imprisonment for his offence.

25 JUN 2005

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Acutely disgraceful

More distressing thoughts on the girl child

The Union Women and Child Development ministry, which often tends to get more upset than embarrassed over Unicef's disconcerting findings, has itself come up with chilling data in the era of globalisation ~ at once a tragedy and a proud boast of contemporary India. Its minister's statement to this newspaper that most girls drop out of schools in the rural areas before they attain the age of puberty is a collective shame. The articulate Renuka Chowdhury's bluntness serves to reinforce her statement on International Women's Day three months ago that the girl child is becoming an "endangered species". That warning may have been issued in the context of female foeticide, but the disgrace is no less acute when the government reflects on the predicament of village girls in search of learning. It is now established by the ministry that an increasing percentage of girls are dropping out because of the lack of sanitary facilities in schools. Much as the ministry claims that its statistics pertain to the rural areas in eight states, conditions are as shocking in certain parts of Metro India. Hence the minister's admission in a moment of candour that the buildings of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, even government and private schools, are so dilapidated that "insufficient sanitary conditions force the girls to stay out of school for their convenience". Her directive that "no school in the Capital should run without toilets" reaffirms the reality that sanitation ranks among the foremost disincentives to learning. It is pretty much obvious that there has been no improvement since 2003 when a survey on elementary education revealed that the percentage of schools without toilets for girls varied from 2.32 in Jharkhand (it was 3.32 in Bihar) to 58.35 in Haryana. Only 7.97 per cent of the schools in West Bengal could boast of such facilities. Small wonder that the latest data shows that the dropout rate in the state's class I to X category is a staggering 84.44 per cent.

If in the Prime Minister's reckoning, the overall dropout rate in "unacceptably high", drastic prescriptions are imperative. It is almost comforting to imagine that universal elementary education will one day be a reality. The reality, as revealed by the government's own statistics, makes a travesty of what must be Dr Manmohan Singh's consummation devoutly to be wished ~ "we need education for all today".

ইন্টারনেটেও শাসন, রেহাই নেই সৌদি মেয়েদের

রিয়াধ, ২৩ জুন: সারা শরীর
বোরখায় না ঢেকে পথে বেরনো
নিষিদ্ধ। গাড়ি চালানো মানা। দেশের
বাইরে যাওয়ার জন্য অনুমতি নেওয়া
বাধ্যতামূলক।

পদে পদে এমনই নিষেধের
বেড়াভালে আবদ্ধ সৌদি আরবের
মেয়েরা। 'বুক ফাটে তবু মুখ ফোটে
না'-র জলজ্যান্ত উদাহরণ হয়েই তাঁরা
বছরের পর বছর কাটিয়েছেন। কিন্তু
বাকি পৃথিবীতে ঘড়ির কাঁটা তো থেমে
থাকেনি! সমাজ সংস্কৃতির সঙ্গে তাল
মিলিয়ে প্রযুক্তির আকাশছোঁয়া
অগ্রগতি আমূল বদলে দিয়েছে চেনা
জগতটাকে। বায়ুমণ্ডলের মতোই গোটা
পৃথিবীটাকে ঘিরে তৈরি হয়েছে আর
এক জাল— ইন্টারনেট। আর এই
ইন্টারনেট-বিশ্ব বা 'সাইবারস্পেস', এক
আশ্চর্য স্বাধীনতা এনে দিয়েছে মানুষের
হাতে। নিজেকে আড়ালে রেখেও
নিজের মত, অভিজ্ঞতা, রুচি, পছন্দ
বিশ্বজুড়ে ছড়িয়ে দেওয়ার স্বাধীনতা।

আর সেই মুক্তির স্বাদ চেখে
দেখতে চেয়েছেন চিরকলে
নিষেধাজ্ঞার শিকলে বাঁধা পড়া সৌদি
মেয়েরাও। সদ্য কুড়ির গণ্ডি পেরনো
ফারা আজিজ কিংবা সৌদি ইভ তারই
প্রমাণ। পরিচয় গোপন রেখে মনের
কথা সাইবার দুনিয়ায় ছড়িয়ে দিতে
বেনামে ব্লগ খুলেছেন এরা সকলেই।

কিন্তু বিধি বাম।

রক্ষণশীলতার ধারক-বাহকদের
কাছে সে খবর পৌঁছতেও দেরি হয়নি।
'অফিসিয়াল কমিউনিটি অফ সৌদি
আরবিয়ান ব্লগারস' (অসকাব) এমনই
এক সংস্থা। সৌদি মেয়েদের এই ব্লগ-
প্রীতিকে মোটেই সুনজরে দেখছে না
তারা। তাদের অভিযোগ, পরিচয়
গোপন থাকায় এ সব ব্লগে ইসলাম-
বিরোধী লেখালিখি করছেন মেয়েরা।
তাই, বাইরে থেকে কলকাঠি নেড়ে
মেয়েদের ব্লগ জোর করে বন্ধ করে
দিচ্ছে অসকাব। যেমন হয়েছে সৌদি
ইভের ক্ষেত্রে। সম্প্রতি তিনি জানতে
পেরেছেন, তাঁর ব্লগ বন্ধ করে দেওয়া
হয়েছে। কারণ, তিনি তাতে প্রেম,
যৌনতা এবং ঈশ্বর বিষয়ে নিজের মত
ব্যক্ত করেছিলেন।

ফলে এক অদৃশ্য সাইবার যুদ্ধে
সামিল হয়েছে সৌদি আরব।

সৌদি আরবে ইন্টারনেটের ব্যবহার
এমনিতেই যথেষ্ট সীমিত। 'কিং
আবদুলাজিজ সিটি ফর সায়েন্স অ্যান্ড
টেকনোলজি' বা কেএসিএসটি নামে
কেন্দ্রীয় প্রহরী সংস্থা এ বিষয়ে নজর
রাখে। তাদের কাছে এই নিষেধাজ্ঞা
অমান্য করার একাধিক অনুরোধ
করেছেন সৌদি মহিলারা। তবে সংস্থার
প্রধান মিশাল-আল-কাধির বক্তব্য,
"সাধারণত মাদক, সম্ভ্রাসবাদ বা
যৌনতা সংক্রান্ত লেখা ও অশ্লীল
ছবিযুক্ত ব্লগ বা সাইটই আমরা বন্ধ
করি। কখনও হয়তো ভুল হয়ে যায়।
সে ক্ষেত্রে ব্লগের মালিক ই-মেল করে
তাঁর দাবি জানাতেই পারেন। আমরা তা
খতিয়ে দেখব।" কিন্তু এ ব্যাখ্যায় সন্তুষ্ট
নন ইভ। তাঁর কথায়, "আমি মেয়ে।
তার উপর আরবি ভাষায় লিখি। তাই
এত সমস্যা। আমি পুরুষ হলে এ সব
কিছু হতই না। ব্যক্তিগত অভিজ্ঞতা
লিখেছি বলেই নাকি আমার ব্লগ বন্ধ।
কিন্তু ব্লগ ব্যক্তিগত অনুভূতি প্রকাশেরই
জায়গা! সেটা কি অসক্যার জানে না?"

তবু, ইভের মতো অসংখ্য মেয়ে
পরিবারকে লুকিয়ে, শত বাধা অগ্রাহ্য
করেও নাম লেখাচ্ছেন সাইবার-
দুনিয়ায়। দেশে না হোক, দেশের
বাইরেও যে বন্ধুরা আছে! প্রতিবাদের
ভাষাটুকু না হয় তারাই পড়ুক!

Gender bias: Pranab shields army vice-chief

Sonali Das | TNN

Hazaribag: A day after vice-chief of army staff Lt-General S Pattabhiraman tendered apology for his remark on women recruits in the armed forces, defence min-

ister Pranab Mukherjee set out to defend him saying that his atonement itself was an indication that the army had no gender bias or reservation against women.

"Pattabhiraman has apologised for his statement and it is evident that he, too, has concerns about women soldiers in the army," Mukherjee said expressing confidence that women will be given their right place in the army. The army vice-chief's remark that women should be kept out of the services had created an uproar in political and social circles of the country forcing him first to deny his statement and later apologise for it.

Mukherjee, however, refused to comment on what steps the army would take to make conditions more conducive for women soldiers. "I have nothing more to say to the press," he said. After being conferred the D Litt degree of the university, Mukherjee in his 30-minute speech stressed the need for a substantive national consciousness among citizens, particularly students, and asserted that education was one of the most powerful tools for democratic empowerment.

WOMEN NO ISSUE



Pattabhiraman has apologised for his statement and it is evident that he, too, has concerns about women soldiers in the army

Pranab Mukherjee
DEFENCE MINISTER

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Army Vice-Chief regrets remarks

"I have no hesitation in tendering apology," says Lt. Gen. Pattabhiraman

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: THE Vice-Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General S. Pattabhiraman, on Tuesday said he regretted that "remarks ascribed to me by a journalist during an interview on June 16 in relation to intake of lady officers in the Army have caused consternation and generated adverse publicity".

"Should my remarks, as reported in the Press, have caused any anguish or doubt on my personal commitment and healthy respect towards the role of lady officers in the Army, I have no hesitation in tendering an apol-

• "I have a healthy respect for lady officers in the Army"

• "The lady officers have contributed a lot"



ogy to such groups or sections of society or individuals," he said in a statement. Gen. Pattabhiraman had been quoted as saying that the Army could do without women.

His purported observation came against the backdrop of a lady officer committing suicide. Despite issuing a clarification

that his comments were "misconstrued and quoted out of context", the said remarks had drawn flak from women activists.

In his statement on Tuesday, Gen. Pattabhiraman said: "I would like to place on record that the lady officers joining the Army as part of the Women's

Special Entry Scheme have contributed in as much measure as their male counterparts have towards upholding the Army's traditional work culture and ethos. They have also excelled in fields such as adventure sports and shooting, apart from providing value addition to the Army's work in fields like education, IT, communication engineering, architecture, inventory management, intelligence and combat logistics. I also recognise that women of our country have played a stellar role not only in nation-building but also in extreme adventure activities like climbing the Everest."

21 JUN 2008

Army treads on gender minefield

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 17: In the aftermath of the suicide of a lady officer, army headquarters today admitted that it was grappling with the management of women in its officer cadre but more of their number will be recruited to its non-combat wings.

Lieutenant Susmita Chakraborty, who shot herself in the army's Northern Command headquarters in Udhampur on Thursday, was

frustrated because she was being assigned duties she did not want to perform. She told her father she was being made to organise late-night parties and gift bouquets to visiting dignitaries — tasks that the MSc in Chemistry hated to perform.

The army has appointed a court of inquiry to investigate the circumstances leading to her death but preliminary reports that include her consultations with a psychiatrist suggest that she suffered from "low self-esteem", said Major-General R.S. Sujana, speak-

ing for army headquarters here today.

"Life can be tough in the army and men or women need to be adequately trained. They should be mentally prepared to find a different type of life. We would very much like lady officers to become an integral part of the army. We hope to learn more from the sad and tragic case of Lieutenant Susmita Chakraborty. In keeping with the changing times, we are looking to induct more women officers," Sujana said.

He added that instructions had been given to the Officers'

Training Academy in Chennai (where women cadets are put through the paces before being commissioned) and to field formations to suggest measures on "how to further refine management of women officers".

Army headquarters said it was keen on recruiting women who (like men) must come "mentally prepared for the rigours of army life".

Recruitment to the army is heavily skewed against women. Women are being recruited under a special entry scheme that began in 1983. There

are only 918 lady officers in the 10.5-lakh-strong force.

The scheme was launched because army headquarters was seeking to meet the shortage in its officer cadre. But it was difficult to find suitable male candidates in adequate number.

The army is not immediately considering the recruitment of women to combat units. The current policy allows for women to be inducted as officers on short service commission only in such wings as the Army Supply Corps (the outfit in which Susmita ser-

ved), the Judge Advocate General Branch and education.

But more women will be recruited to the intelligence corps as area and/or language specialists, analysts and logistics managers.

The induction of women into combat wings is more of a cultural and political issue. The government will have to amend policy to make it possible. But an unstated emotion guiding the policy on women recruits to combat wings is how to deal with a scenario in which she may be taken prisoner of war. (See Page 6)

WANTED BUT...



Pilot Kavita Kumarasen with her sister after the passing-out parade at the Air Force Academy in Hyderabad on Saturday. (PTI)

18/6/83

18 JUN 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

Ensuring children's right to food

Survival is tough for most Indian children. About half of them suffer from chronic malnutrition and persistent hunger. More than 60 of 1000 children born die before their first birthday; and nearly three million children under the age of five die annually from preventable diseases. Despite progress and constitutional guarantees, children frequently suffer deprivation and lack of access to certain basic services. Recently, an all-India convention in Hyderabad on 'Children's Right to Food' drew attention to the role of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) in protecting the rights of children below six – their right to food, nutrition, health, and pre-school education. Although it is the world's largest early child development programme, the ICDS is tragically starved of funds. The convention called for "universalisation with quality" of the ICDS. Currently, many ICDS *anganwadis* are in disrepair; and improvements are needed to their working conditions and physical infrastructure, including utensils and water supply. Improving quality calls for training and increasing the numbers of *anganwadi* workers who presently work under extremely difficult circumstances with low salaries and inadequate community support. Universalisation implies that the benefits of the ICDS should reach every child under six, every adolescent girl, and every pregnant and nursing mother with special emphasis placed on marginalised Dalit and tribal communities. The Supreme Court orders on the ICDS in the 'Right to Food' case in 2001 mandated the universalisation of the Noon Meal Scheme (NMS) and the ICDS. However, these orders have still not been implemented in many States. Of the required 1.7 million *anganwadi* centres, 650,000 have been 'established' and only 600,000 are functional.

This apart, much waits to be done. There is, for example, an imperative need to provide children below three with supplementary nutrition (apart from the noon meal); organise counselling for young mothers about their children's nutritional needs; and give poor communities vital information on health interventions. The key to remedying the nutritional deprivation of India's children is for the various governments to give this issue priority attention. Although it is already one of the core commitments of the Common Minimum Programme, further impetus will come from incorporating the challenge of overcoming nutritional deprivation in the 11th Plan, as was suggested at the Hyderabad convention. Bringing the inter-related issues into the public domain by making ICDS data transparent in accordance with the Right to Information Act, prohibiting ICDS privatisation, and ensuring consensus-building and wide community participation in strengthening the scheme are critical to its success. This will go a long way in ensuring that the basic rights of tens of millions of India's poorest children are enforced.

02 Nov 2006

Little change in life of women & kids

Sanjay Singh

NEW DELHI, April 27: The newly-created women and child development ministry is pulling up its socks in fear that it may lose its share of funds in the forthcoming 11th plan. An indication to this effect has been received from the Planning Commission which has reportedly suggested that the ministry either give up the Integrated Child Development Scheme, Anganwadi and other schemes or divert the funds for a better cause.

Many WCD run-projects have come under scrutiny from various agencies including state audit bureaus. A senior WCD ministry official said that these projects have largely failed as the infant mortality and maternal mortality rates in India remain one of the highest in the world. The government is also con-

cerned about the level of malnutrition in children and mothers which has shown little signs of improvement. The question before the WCD ministry is where these funds are going. No one knows for sure how the funds are being allocated by states and how it is being utilised. The WCD secretary, Mrs Reva Nayyar, has asked state officials to ensure that all department related projects are run efficiently.

Mrs Nayyar told the Statesman that she would urge MPs to contribute from their MPLADS funds in a way that anganwadis and other centres through which "our schemes are run get proper infrastructure". She admitted that despite huge funds being sanctioned under different schemes by the WCD, state governments hardly utilise them. The ministry has been forced to take the help of NGOs to mon-

itor the use of funds across the country. But these NGOs are also under the scanner for reported cases of financial frauds and irregularities.

State governments too have been accused of diverting WCD funds. Recently, the Delhi government was dragged to the High Court for not holding an inquiry into the alleged large-scale misappropriation of ICDS funds by some of its officials. Some irregularities found in states include fake purchases worth Rs 1.3 crore, excess expenditure over and above allotted funds, non-maintenance of stock registers, variations between challans and stock registers and payment by cash instead of cheque, which is in violation of rules. There have also been purchases of articles not mentioned in the ICDS manuals.

The Planning Commission has indicated that the newly-created women and child development ministry may lose its share of funds in the forthcoming 11th Plan owing to the little achieved by it

- The Commission has reportedly suggested that the ministry either wind up its Integrated Child Development Scheme, Anganwadi and other projects or divert the funds to a better cause
- Many WCD run-projects have come under scrutiny by various agencies including state audit bureaus
- A senior WCD ministry official said that these projects had largely failed as the infant and maternal mortality rates in India remained among the

- highest in the world. The level of malnutrition shows little signs of coming down
- The WCD secretary, Mrs Reva Nayyar, has asked state officials to ensure that all department-related projects are run efficiently. She said that despite huge funds being sanctioned under different schemes by the WCD, state governments hardly utilised them
- MPs have been urged to contribute from their MPLADS funds so

- anganwadis and other centres come by the right sort of infrastructure
- State governments too have been accused of diverting WCD funds



COURT OF INQUIRY SET UP

Woman Army officer commits suicide

Statesman News Service

NAGORTA, June 16: The Army today dismissed allegations that the young woman Army officer, who shot herself to death at the Northern Command headquarters in Udhampur last night, as she was unhappy with the job "but had no money to repay the amount of money which the Army had spent on her training."

This is the first ever incident of a lady officer committing suicide in the Armed Forces. Allegations are that Lt. Sushmita Chakraborty was depressed and unsatisfied with her job and wanted to quit but her mother did not allow her to do so.

A Bengali, her family is settled in Bhopal. Chakraborty, a post graduate in Chemistry was commissioned into India Army's Army Service Corps on 17 September 2005.

informed.

She had requested for one month's leave in March this year to visit her home town in Bhopal. She later extended the leave by a month and returned after two months to the Udhampur based Northern Command along with her mother.

"Sushmita was to undergo Young Officers' Course in Bangalore from 10 July and she was very enthusiastically preparing for it. In fact, in her interaction with me, she had said that she would try to excel at the course," informed Brig Chhokra.

He said that yesterday around 2.15 p.m., she had come to the Officers' Mess where she was residing with her mother. At the Mess gate, she requested the guard commander to provide her with a weapon to enable her to carry out her training for the Young Officers' Course.

"She then entered a

guest room of the mess with the weapon. The guard commander who had returned to his post, heard the sound of a gun shot and rushed back. Upon entering the guest room, he found Lt. Sushmita Chakraborty lying in a pool of blood. The Army doctor who rushed to the guest room declared her dead," said Brig Chhokra adding that she was mildly anxious and depressed.

She had denied suicidal ideas but had feelings of worthlessness and low self esteem.

The Army officers informed that her mother told them yesterday that she had tried to commit suicide during her recent two months' leave also.

At the Command Hospital, Sushmita Chakraborty was treated as a case of Adjustment Disorder with four sessions of individual psychotherapy. The Army has instituted a court of inquiry into the incident, sources said.

had been assigned. She also told us that she would often be asked to arrange parties for other Army officers," Mr Chakraborty said. Sushmita had talked to her seniors and told them that she was not satisfied with the work she had been given and had been assured of work of some other nature, Mr Chakraborty added. "But I do not what exactly happened later," he said.

"She won a gold medal in her post graduate exams. She felt that despite being educated she had to do menial work and this was the reason for her depression," he said. After spending around two months in Bhopal, Chakraborty had returned to Udhampur on 3 June along with her mother. She had completed her post graduation in chemistry a couple of years back from Nutan College, Bhopal and was commissioned into the Army in October last year.

Chakraborty, 25, was in the Army Supply Corps and was posted in Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir. She committed suicide by shooting herself with a sentry's rifle yesterday. Her body will be flown here tonight and cremated tomorrow.

"She was in the transport department of the Army. I am not very sure about the exact nature of her job but she was not satisfied," said Mr Chakraborty, an employee of Bharat Heavy Electrical Limited (BHEL). "She would often complain to us that she did not know anything about the job she

'My daughter was under depression'

Statesman News Service

BHOPAL, June 16: Mr PB Chakraborty, father of Sushmita Chakraborty said here today that her daughter was not satisfied with the nature of her job and had been under depression for the past few months.

Chakraborty, 25, was in the Army Supply Corps and was posted in Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir. She committed suicide by shooting herself with a sentry's rifle yesterday. Her body will be flown here tonight and cremated tomorrow.

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had been assigned. She also told us that she would often be asked to arrange parties for other Army officers," Mr Chakraborty said. Sushmita had talked to her seniors and told them that she was not satisfied with the work she had been given and had been assured of work of some other nature, Mr Chakraborty added. "But I do not what exactly happened later," he said.

"She won a gold medal in her post graduate exams. She felt that despite being educated she had to do menial work and this was the reason for her depression," he said. After spending around two months in Bhopal, Chakraborty had returned to Udhampur on 3 June along with her mother. She had completed her post graduation in chemistry a couple of years back from Nutan College, Bhopal and was commissioned into the Army in October last year.

"I feel that the Army should clearly tell young recruits what type of job they are being given," Mr Chakraborty said. Relatives and friends of Mr Chakraborty started gathering in his house at Saket Nagar locality here as soon as they came to know about his daughter's death. Sushmita's friends also said that she had been depressed for the past few months. "Sushmita's aim was to become a doctor but she was not able to qualify the exams. Still, she was initially happy with her job in the Army. But then she suddenly went into depression," said Sushmita's friend Ms Sangeeta, who also lives in Saket Nagar.

Another friend added: "She had a jovial nature and was an extrovert. But when she came to Bhopal some time back I noticed that her behaviour had changed. She had become dull."

Quick justice only for raped foreigners?

Indian victims are ignored by the very system that dispenses 22-day convictions, says 26-yr-old German student who was raped in Alwar

JS

A rape conviction in 22 days is not the norm in India but a rare exception. Until now, this exception has only been made in Rajasthan for foreigners who come from countries that are important for the Indian tourism sector. These convictions show the potential capacity of the police and judiciary for dispensation of quick justice but they also point to the fact that many Indian rape victims are discriminated against and ignored by the

lution against women who already have become victims of sexual violence, it concerns all women in India. The prevalent impunity in rape cases creates an atmosphere within society which encourages men to use violence against women.

The danger comes not only and not mainly from perpetrators who are unknown to the victims but often from colleagues, friends, husbands and other relatives. It makes things even worse that crimes committed by persons who are well-known to the victim are mostly not taken seriously.

The danger comes not only and not mainly from perpetrators who are unknown to the victims but often from colleagues, friends, husbands and other relatives

same system. A victim has only a small chance of getting (quick) justice if there are no financial interests at stake, if she is not in an influential position and if there is not much media attention.

The fact that in many cases victims have to wait for a trial for several years and that the majority of rape accused are acquitted demonstrates that state governments and judiciaries fail to handle cases of violence against women with due diligence.

Amnesty International has elaborated in several reports that governments, under these conditions, are responsible for human rights violations against women even if the acts are committed by private individuals.

If a state fails to ensure law enforcement, if the behaviour of police and judiciary officials leads to a widespread impunity in cases of sexual violence, this has to be judged as the tolerance and acceptance of violence against women by the state. This state failure is not only a human rights vio-

A widespread prejudice about so-called date rapes is that it was a consensual act. But can anyone really imagine that a woman would choose to go through many humiliating judicial procedures, especially in a society where rape victims are strongly stigmatised and where it is highly probable that the offender will be acquitted, if her claims were not true? In fact, most women who experience sexual violence don't report it because they are afraid of the police, afraid of the stigma and afraid of the offender and his family.

It is a shame if people allege in so-called date rape cases that the victim agreed or that she is somehow responsible or guilty for what has happened. Is a victim guilty only for trusting a friend or colleague and being friendly to him or, in other words, for having a drink and dinner with him? Is it asking too much if a woman expects respectful behaviour from a friend?

► Fair, fast trial a must, P 8

বুধিয়ার দৌড় বন্ধ করতে চলেছে ওড়িশা সরকার

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, ভুবনেশ্বর ও কলকাতা, ৮ মে: শিশু দৌড়বিদ বুধিয়া সিংহকে লম্বা দৌড়ে নামানোর ব্যাপারে নিষেধাজ্ঞা জারি করতে চলেছে ওড়িশা সরকার। স্বাস্থ্য পরীক্ষার প্রাথমিক রিপোর্ট পাওয়ার পরে মহিলা ও শিশুকল্যাণ দফতরের মন্ত্রী প্রমীলা মল্লিক আজ বলেন, বুধিয়ার দৌড় বন্ধ করা হবে। কারণ, ডাক্তারি পরীক্ষার রিপোর্টে বলা হয়েছে, এত ছোট বয়সে বুধিয়াকে লম্বা দৌড়ে নামানো উচিত নয়। এতে তার কিডনিও বিকল হতে পারে।

চার বছরের বুধিয়ার কোচ বিরীঞ্চ দাস অবশ্য অবশ্য সরকারি নিষেধাজ্ঞা জারি হলে, তা মানতে নারাজ। তিনি ওই নিষেধাজ্ঞাকে চালেঞ্জ জানাতে

আদালতে যাবেন বলে হুমকি দিয়েছেন। তিনি বলেন, সরকারি কর্মিটি ওড়িশা হাইকোর্টের নির্দেশ অমান্য করে তাঁর ও বুধিয়ার উপরে জোর করে বিভিন্ন ব্যবস্থা নিচ্ছে। এই সব ব্যবস্থার বিরুদ্ধেই হাইকোর্ট অর্ন্তবর্তী স্থগিতাশেষ দেয়। কিন্তু তা মানেনি ওই কর্মিটি। বুধিয়া নিজেও বলছে, সে দৌড়তে চায়। এ ব্যাপারে তার উপর কোনও চাপ নেই বলেও জানিয়েছে চার বছরের ছেলটি।

অর্থাৎ বুধিয়াকে নিয়ে বিতর্কের অবসান হচ্ছে না। পুরী থেকে ভুবনেশ্বরের পথে ৬৫ কিলোমিটার দৌড়নোর জন্য বুধিয়ার নাম 'লিমকা বুক অফ রেকর্ডস'-এ উঠেছে। সেইসঙ্গে শুরু হয়ে যায় বিতর্ক। বহু সংগঠন ও মানুষের মতে, একটি

শিশুকে এত লম্বা দৌড়ে নামানোটা অমানবিক। এতে বুধিয়ার ক্ষতি হবেই। আবার অন্য মতের বক্তব্য, বুধিয়া এক নজিরবিহীন প্রতিভা। তা ছাড়া, খেলাধুলায় শিশুকাল থেকেই কড়া প্রশিক্ষণের মধ্য দিয়ে যেতে হয়। আপাতদৃষ্টিতে যা অমানবিক বলে মনে হলেও ভবিষ্যতের জন্য তা জরুরি। এই মতের পক্ষে জোরালো সওয়াল করছেন বুধিয়ার কোচ বিরীঞ্চ দাস।

কিন্তু ডাক্তারেরা এই মত মানতে নারাজ। বুধিয়ার ডাক্তারি পরীক্ষার একটি প্রাথমিক রিপোর্ট মহিলা ও শিশুকল্যাণ দফতরে এবং খোদা শিশু কল্যাণ কর্মিটির কাছে পেশ করা হয়েছে। তাতে শিশুটিকে লম্বা দৌড়ে নামানোর ব্যাপারে আপত্তিই জানানো

হয়েছে। প্রাথমিক রিপোর্টে বলা হয়েছে, লম্বা দৌড় বন্ধ করা না হলে বুধিয়ার স্বাস্থ্যের অবনতি হতে থাকবে। এমনকী কিডনিও বিকল হতে পারে। তবে বুধিয়ার আরও কয়েকটি পরীক্ষা বাকি আছে। কলকাতার 'সাই'-এ বুধিয়ার 'ফিজিওলাজিক্যাল' পরীক্ষা হবে।

কলকাতায় সোম্য বিশ্বাসের কোচ কুন্তল রায়ও বুধিয়াকে দৌড় করানোর বিরুদ্ধে। তিনি বলেন, এত ছোট বয়সে ম্যারাথন দৌড় করানোর কোনও মানেই হয় না। সবচেয়ে ছোট বয়সে শুরু করা যায় সাঁতার। তারপরে জিমন্যাস্টিক্স। তারপরে অ্যাথলেটিক্সের হাউলস। কিন্তু বাধ্যতামূলক ভাবে ছোট বয়সে দৌড়

করালে শিশুদের বৃদ্ধি নষ্ট হয়ে যাবে। ইথিওপিয়া, কেনিয়া— লম্বা দৌড়ে যে দু'টি দেশ দৌড়ে সফল, সেখানে শিশুরা কি অল্প বয়সে প্রশিক্ষণ নেয় না? জবাবে কুন্তলবাবু বলেন, ওই দুই দেশে শিশুরা পাহাড়, নদী পেরিয়ে ঝুলে যায়। তা-ও দশ বছর বয়সের পরে। আগে নয়। আইএফএ ও সিএবি-র স্পোর্টস মেডিসিন বিশেষজ্ঞ শান্তিরঞ্জন দাশগুপ্ত বলেন, শরীরে দু'ধরনের মাসল রয়েছে—স্লো টুইচ মাসল ও ফাস্ট টুইচ মাসল। যারা ফাস্ট টুইচ মাসল, তাদের ফাস্ট টুইচ বোশি থাকে। ম্যারাথনরদের স্লো টুইচ বোশি। অল্প বয়সে বোশি দৌড় করলে বৃদ্ধি আটকে যেতে পারে। এমনকী

বামন হওয়ার আশঙ্কাও থাকে।

Rape victim's word enough: SC

Dhananjay Mahapatra | TNN

New Delhi: Providing a new input to deal with sexual offenders in a male-dominated society, the supreme court has advised all trial courts to treat a victim's testimony as gospel truth unless it is tinged with a false motive to implicate the accused.

Just her word against that of the alleged rapist is enough, said a bench comprising Justices Arijit Pasayat and S H Kapadia. "In a given case, even if a doctor who examined the victim does not find a sign of rape, it is no ground to disbelieve the sole testimony of the prosecutrix," it said.

Explaining the enormous amount of reliance put on the victim's statement, Justice Pasayat, writing the judgment for the bench, said that in the normal course, a victim of sexual assault would not like to disclose such an offence even to her family members much less before the police.

"The Indian woman has a tendency to conceal such offence because it

Even if there is no sign of rape, it is no ground to disbelieve the complainant's testimony

The Indian woman tends to conceal rape since it involves both her and her family's prestige

involves her prestige as well as that of her family. Only in a few cases do the victims or family members have the courage to go to a police station and lodge a case," he said.

The apex court's observations came while deciding a case where a person had raped a six-month pregnant woman in broad daylight inside the court premises at Hardoi in Uttar Pradesh. Interestingly, the accused Om Prakash had accompanied the woman to the court to help her in ar-

ranging bail for her husband. The trial court convicted him and sentenced him to ten years' imprisonment. The Allahabad HC upheld the conviction and the sentence.

Dealing with his appeal, the SC found that the rape charges were proved against the accused but he could not have been convicted for raping a pregnant woman as no evidence to that effect was given in the trial court by the prosecution.

"Mere possibility of knowledge is not enough. It required the prosecution to establish that the accused knew her to be pregnant," the court said and reduced the sentence from ten years to seven years. Expressing outrage at the rising graph of crimes against women—rapes in particular—Justice Pasayat said, "It is an irony that while we are celebrating women's rights in all spheres, we show little or no concern for her honour. It's a sad reflection on the attitude of indifference by society towards the violation of human dignity of the victims of sex crimes."

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

গৃহবধু অন্তরা চার বারের চেষ্টায় আইএএস

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা: স্বপ্ন ছুঁতে পারার তৃপ্তি তাঁর চোখেমুখে।

জেদটা পুষে রেখেছিলেন তিনি। তিন বার ব্যর্থ হয়েও আশা ছাড়েননি। আরও ভাল ভাবে প্রস্তুতি চালিয়ে পরীক্ষায় বসলেন চতুর্থ বার। এবং সল্টলেকের গৃহবধু অন্তরা দস্ত শেষ পর্যন্ত আই এ এস হচ্ছেনই। মেধা-তালিকায় তাঁর স্থান ৪১।

সল্টলেকের সি-এ ব্লকে স্বশুরবাড়িতে বসে অন্তরা বললেন, “আই এ এস হওয়ার জন্য আমার কাছে এটাই ছিল শেষ সুযোগ। পরপর তিন বার পরীক্ষা দিয়েও উত্তরোত্তে পারিনি। ফলে জেদ বেড়ে গিয়েছিল। অবশেষে এ বছর পারলাম।” ত্রিশ ছুইছুই অন্তরার পছন্দের বিষয় আন্তর্জাতিক সম্পর্ক। দেশ-বিদেশের খবরেই ডুবে থাকেন। তাই যাদবপুর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় থেকে আন্তর্জাতিক সম্পর্ক নিয়ে এম এ পাশ করার পরে ওই বিভাগেই গবেষণা করছিলেন। গবেষণার বিষয় ‘বিশ্ব বাণিজ্য সংস্থা ও ভারতীয় কৃষি’। গবেষণার ফাঁকেই চলছিল আই এ এসের জন্য শেষ বারের প্রস্তুতি।

উত্তরপ্রদেশের মথুরাপুরের মেয়ে অন্তরার বড় হয়ে ওঠা কলকাতার ভবানীপুরে। শ্রী শিক্ষায়তন থেকে মাধ্যমিক। বিজ্ঞান শাখায় ভাল নম্বর পেয়ে উচ্চ



সফল্যের হাসিমুখ। — নিজস্ব চিত্র

মাধ্যমিক। সিভিল সার্ভিস পরীক্ষার প্রস্তুতির জন্যই কলা বিভাগে ভর্তি হন। যাদবপুর থেকে রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞানে প্রথম।

অন্তরা বলেন, “স্নাতক স্তরে থাকাকালীনই প্রথম বার সিভিল সার্ভিস পরীক্ষায় বসি। পারিনি। কিন্তু জানতাম, নিষ্ঠা থাকলে পারবই।” সফল্যের পরে আত্মবিশ্বাসী অন্তরা জানান, সরকারি উচ্চপদস্থ কর্মী হিসেবে যে-ক্ষমতা থাকবে, তার সাহায্যে গরিব মানুষের জন্য কিছু করতে চান তিনি।

অন্তরার পছন্দের তালিকায় রয়েছে আন্তর্জাতিক সম্পর্কের বইপত্র। সঙ্গে অবশ্যই হিন্দি, ইংরেজি সাহিত্য। স্বশুরবাড়ির প্রত্যেকেই উচ্চশিক্ষিত ও প্রতিষ্ঠিত। স্বামী তন্ময় দস্ত আই আই টি (খড়াপুর)-র স্নাতক। এখন ইন্ডিয়ান অয়েলের ইঞ্জিনিয়ার। চ্যালেঞ্জটা তাই ছিল ওঁদের সঙ্গেও।

এত প্রস্তুতি সত্ত্বেও তিন বার সিভিল সার্ভিস পরীক্ষায় সফল না-হওয়ার পরে হতাশ লাগেনি? হাসিতে উজ্জ্বল অন্তরা বলেন, “নিজের কাছে এটাই ছিল আমার চ্যালেঞ্জ। বাবা-মা

আর আমার স্বশুরবাড়ির সবাই উৎসাহ দিতেন। তবে আই এ এস হতেই হবে, এমন জোর কেউ দিতেন না। এ বারেও না-হলে অধ্যাপনায় যেতাম।” এই দৃঢ় মনোবল থেকেই আই এ এস হতে ইচ্ছুকদের জন্য অন্তরার পরামর্শ, “হাল ছেড়ো না।”

27 MAY 2009

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Scarred for life

'YOU are not welcome here. Go away. We don't want to talk to you. People of your kind have been coming here all through these years, selling the plight of our daughters and making money... Please go away, we will not talk to you..." These were the words that welcomed this correspondent in Kunan Poshpora, in Trehgam block of Kupwara district on the Line of Control in North Kashmir.

Accompanied by Md Abdul Khaliq Mir who lived in the same village and two volunteers - Md Bashir Ahmed Shiekh and Md Manzoor Ahmed Masoodi - from Maqbool National Welfare Association, an NGO that works for destitute women and orphans in Kashmir, the visit to Kunan Poshpora, one of the most infamous villages in the Valley, was meant to study the impact on the lives of the people of that fateful day in 1991 when the entire village figured in the international headlines.

The sleepy hamlets of Kunan Poshpora allegedly witnessed the mass rape of women during a cordon-and-search operation by the 4th Rajputana Rifles of the 68 Mountain Brigade on the night of 23 and 24 February 1991. The incident generated much controversy and enormous publicity, given the human rights violations and alleged excesses of the security forces. The charge was that not less than 23 - possibly up to 100 women of all ages - were raped by the troops. The matter is shrouded in mystery as the officials claim that no such incident had occurred. Yet, the fact remains that the entire village has been stigmatised for the past 15 years.

Even after all these years, the mere mention of the word "*akhbar wali*" (journalist) caused the entire village to rise up in arms against this correspondent. The village women did not want to talk. They said: "You make money and go away, and do nothing for us or our girls." However, with constant persuasion by Md Khaliq, the people started opening up slowly.

Md Sadiq Dar, 50, recalls that fateful day. There was a crackdown in the entire village by the troops of Rajputana Rifles. There had been heavy snowfall the earlier night, and the troops asked all the men of the village to come out of their homes. They gathered at Kunan Chowk for interrogation. It

Fifteen years after the Kunan Poshpora mass rape, women of the two villages are ostracised and humiliated, writes KAVITA SURI



is alleged that the troops raped the village women all through the night.

Even after 15 years, it has not been possible to erase the stigma attached with Kunan Poshpora. Nobody is willing to marry girls from here.

Kunan village consists of about 150 families. The population is over 3,000. Most of the girls are still unmarried.

Initially, it seemed that people would forget after a few years and everything would fall in place. However, that was not to happen.

Fifteen years ago, the girls of the village were young. Today, their lives still remain scarred. Most of them are unmarried, while the few that did get married returned to their maternal homes after brief stays at their in-laws'. Moreover, almost all the school and college-going girls discontinued their studies after the incident.

As a result of the incident, people of the surrounding areas and other villages began to tease the girls of Kunan. Those who ventured out to collect firewood from the nearby forests would have to face taunting remarks. People said: "You are the ones who were raped by the troops."

Gradually, the girls stopped

going out to collect firewood. In fact, for the past 14 years, most of them have not left their houses.

Dar, who has two daughters, married off the elder one, Shakeela, in Poshpora in 1997 with great difficulty; few were willing to consider marrying their son to his "stigmatised" daughter. Her in-laws called her names, torturing her and often telling her that "they married their son to her, knowing she was a rape victim." After a few months when she could bear it no longer, Shakeela returned home to her father. She now has two sons and finds it very difficult to sustain the family.

Dar's younger daughter, Zarina, was married later but she, too, returned home after a year.

Dar said: "She too faced the same situation. Still, I sent her back to her in-laws, but they beat her up. They would tell her that she was a rape victim and that they took pity on her, thinking she would bring a good dowry - which she did not." He added that after the incident, he forced his daughters to quit studies. However, he now laments having done so.

He said: "Had they continued with their education, they would have been self-sufficient and independent today. I wonder what

will happen to them after I am gone."

After the infamous incident, over 100 girls of the two villages quit their studies, Dar informed. This is because their classmates taunted them endlessly. At Kunan's Government Middle School (the only such school in the entire hamlet), the girls from the village discontinued for they could not take it any longer. And for the ones who travelled all the way to high schools in Heeri and Trehgam, covering 10-15 km, it was the same story.

Said Abdul Khaliq: "In the bus, people would raise fingers at them, calling them rape victims, even if they were not among the ones to have been raped... If only these girls were educated, they would have a better chance in the marriage market. Worst of all, the stigma of hailing from Kunan persisted. The result is that most of the girls are unmarried and uneducated."

Abdul Khaliq lamented the lot of the Kunan Poshpora women. He said: "It was such a heinous incident... Naturally, the girls are stigmatised. Things worsened as they were not educated and had no jobs."

The villagers are fed up with the NGOs, media persons, human rights activists and others who visited them and made promises that were never to be fulfilled. Khaira Begum said: "We were told that we would be helped, that our girls would be rehabilitated. So many promises were made to our daughters and us, but none were fulfilled..."

Nobody, not even the elected representatives, has done anything for the girls of Kunan Poshpora. Of course, with the exception of Dilafroze Qazi, a woman from Srinagar who runs the SSM College of Engineering in Parihaspora, Pattan. Qazi opened a public school for the girls of the area. Started two years ago, the school - where education is free for Kunan's residents - has 43 students on its rolls. Qazi has also opened a self-help group for young women where lessons in embroidery are given.

Perhaps Kunan Poshpora does not exist for the rest of the people.

[The author, the Jammu-based Special Representative of The Statesman, is also a peace scholar with WISCOMP (Women In Security, Conflict Management and Peace)]

MORAL POLICING

No more dressing up for Iran women

Tehran, April 20

IRAN'S ISLAMIC authorities are preparing a crackdown on women flouting the stringent dress code in the clearest sign yet of social and political repression under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

From Thursday, police in Tehran are under orders to arrest women failing to conform to the regime's definition of Islamic morals by wearing loose-fitting hijab, or headscarves, tight jackets and shortened trousers exposing skin. Offenders could be punished with £30 fines or two months in jail. Officers will also be authorised to confront men with outlandish hairstyles and people walking pet dogs, an activity long denounced as un-Islamic by the religious rulers.

The clampdown coincides with a bill before Iran's conservative-dominated parliament pro-



posing that fines for people with TV satellite dishes rise from £60 to more than £3,000. Millions of Iranians have illegal dishes, enabling them to watch western films and news channels.

The dress purge is led by a Tehran city councillor, Nader Shariatmaderi, a close ally of Ahmadinejad who helped to plot last year's election victory.

Loosely arranged headscarves — exposing glamorous hairstyles — and shorter, tight-fitting overcoats (manteaus) became a symbol of the social freedoms that flourished under the reformist presidency of Mohammed Khatami.

During his election campaign, Ahmadinejad dismissed fears that his presidency might herald a forced reversal, saying Iran had more urgent problems.

However, Shariatmaderi denounced the trends as "damaging to revolutionary and Islamic principles". "We are looking for a social utopia to live in but in the last couple of months, our attention has wavered," he told the councillors.

Guardian News Service

Kuwait women vote for first time

Kuwait, April 4 (Reuters): Women made history in Kuwait today by voting and running for office for the first time in a local by-election after the conservative, US-allied Gulf state granted them suffrage last year.

Polls opened at 0500 GMT for the vote to fill a single seat in the 16-member Municipal Council. The rest of the members were elected or appointed last year.

"Today is the biggest feast we have been waiting for for more than 40 years," Khaledah al-Khadher, one of the two female candidates, said at a polling station in Salwa suburb. "This is the first time Kuwaiti women can show the men that we are capable, it is important that we do our best and leave the outcome of the polls to God," added Khadher, wearing a conservative black Islamic-style dress.

Some 28,000 voters, including 16,000 women, are eligible to cast ballots for the six men and two women standing. Last May, parliament passed a government-sponsored bill granting suffrage to women who had fought for their political rights for more than four decades.

Today's election paves the way for women to take part in 2007 parliamentary polls, the first since Kuwait's new ruler, Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, took office this year after the death of his half-brother.

"Contesting this election and other elections is a must for Kuwaiti women, it is a



Candidate Khaledah al-Khadher (left) jokes with supporters at a polling station in Kuwait. (Reuters)

right women have been denied and they have now got it back," said candidate Khadher, 48.

"This is a historic day," said an announcer on state-run Kuwait Television, which carried live footage of male voters in traditional white robes and women, many in black gowns covering them from head to toe, voting in separate rooms.

Islamist MPs, who were opposed to granting women political rights, had pushed through a clause requiring separate polling stations for men and women.

Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah said today that the political participation of women would boost Kuwait's interna-

tional standing.

Visiting a polling station with some cabinet members, he said today: "We say to Kuwaiti women: 'God bless you'. You are welcome to participate in all spheres of life." Kuwaitis voted in wider municipal polls last June but women could not take part because the suffrage bill was delayed by conservative Islamist and tribal MPs.

Shortly after women won the vote, the reformist government appointed its first female cabinet minister, planning minister Massouma al-Mubarak, a rights activist.

Centre studying fallout of 'fatwa' against girl

Legal Correspondent

Women
NEW DELHI: The Centre on Monday informed the Supreme Court that it was looking into the controversy over the establishment of a parallel Muslim judicial system in the wake of a 'fatwa' issued by Islamic seminary Darul-Uloom against a Muslim girl, allegedly raped by her father-in-law.

Additional Solicitor-General Gopal Subramaniam told a Bench of Justices Ruma Pal and Dalveer Bhandari that "we are looking into the matter. We have to collect information from all over the country." Hence, he sought time from the court. The Bench accepted the request and asked the petitioner, advocate Vishwa Lochan Madan, to serve a copy of the petition to the parties if he had not already given.

In August last, the apex court had issued notice to the Centre, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) and others on a writ petition to restrain the Board from establishing a parallel Muslim judicial system (Nizam-e-Qaza). Mr. Madan

submitted that Imrana was allegedly raped by her father-in-law and the village panchayat passed a fatwa asking her to treat her father-in-law as her husband. The Darul-Uloom also declared that Imrana was ineligible to live with her husband. This was endorsed by the AIMPLB.

He contended that matters relating to Imrana's status of marriage and dissolution of marriage were squarely covered under Section 2 of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937. He said a parallel Muslim judicial system was sought to be introduced by the setting up of Dar-ul-Qaza (courts) at various places which had started functioning as courts of justice.

He demanded that activities of the AIMPLB and other similar organisations for establishment of a Muslim judicial system and the setting up of Dar-ul-Qazas and Shariat Court be made absolutely illegal and unconstitutional, and fatwas pronounced by various authorities were made unenforceable.

29 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

Whip cracked on child abuse and marriage

Don't thrash him: A new law is coming up

CHE TAN Chauhan
New Delhi, March 27

THINK TWICE before yelling at your kid the next time. You can be prosecuted for mistreating the child if the government's proposed new law — the draft Offences Against Children Act, 2006 — comes into force.

The ministry of women and child development is set on defending children against any form of abuse — a slap at home, a serious thrashing by a teacher, or sexual abuse.

Sample the draft bill's definition of sexual assault: "Any type of penetration (including sodomy) or manipulation of child's body for penetration".

Even oral sex — whether the child is forced to perform it or made the recipient — has been defined and made punishable.

Abuse includes flashing of nudity in front of a child or asking the child to do so, causing a child to be exposed to pornography in any manner, fondling a child and molestation.

Punishment is stringent: For sexual assault, a maximum of life imprisonment and a minimum of 12 years rigorous imprisonment with a fine; for sexual abuse, a maximum of 10 years simple imprisonment with a fine. For abuse, the minimum jail term is five years for a child under 12, two years if the child is aged between 12 and 16, and six

months if over 16. If the victim is over 16, consent will be used as evidence to book the accused.

The proposed law is more stringent than the IPC, under which minimum punishment for raping a child is 10 years.

The bill does not spare abusive parents and teachers either. They can be jailed for five years and fined for child abuse. But it does provide teachers a safeguard. "Scolding or minor beating" will not amount to corporal punishment as long as it is not persistent.

Other aspects covered include commercial sexual exploitation, child pornography, sale of children and economic exploitation, including forced begging.

LEGAL POSITION

NO FOOLING AROUND

New law will tread uncharted ground

■ **Assault:** All forms of sex including oral, beating by parents/teacher

■ **Abuse:** Flashing of private parts in front of child/by child, forced begging/prostitution, pornography

■ **Punishment:** Between 12 years and life imprisonment for assault, between 5 and 10 years for abuse

ARE YOU IDIOT?

Existing laws differ on who's a child

■ **Sex with or without consent is rape if girl is under 16**

■ **Sex with or without consent is rape if juvenile if under 18 years**

■ **Child Marriage Restraint Act: A boy under 21, a girl under 18 is under-age.**

Don't wed her off: Supreme Court is watching

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 27

SO FAR, child marriages have survived because they can't be voided once they have been performed, even though they are illegal. Now, the Supreme Court wants a fresh look at the trend.

The court on Monday stayed two High Courts' judgments that had given their stamp of approval to runaway marriages by minor girls. Both marriages remain valid, the Supreme Court pointed out. What was unacceptable was the Andhra and Delhi High Courts' observation that they could not prevent runaway marriages by teenagers.

The National Commission of

Women had expressed fears that the High Court judgments could unintentionally encourage child marriages. It had also pointed out several anomalies in the present law. While the rape of a minor girl is punishable, no one can stop a husband from having sex with his minor wife. And while those indulging in the practice of child marriages can be punished, the marriage is valid once performed. It can be voided at the instance of the girl after she turns a major.

All these contradictions made the law regarding prevention of such marriages difficult to implement, the NCW said. The NCW said this adversely affected the health of women and children in the country.

A Supreme Court bench, headed by the Chief Justice, said the two marriages concerned were still valid in the eyes of the law, but it stayed the two judgments. It said it would look into the existing confusion over the issue of who was a minor, the legal status of a child marriage and the minimum marriageable age.

The court also sought the assistance of the Law Commission. Part of the confusion pertains to age. Though 18 is the minimum for marriage, the Delhi High Court had recognised 15 as the age when a girl is old enough to make up her mind. It had ruled that the marriage of a minor girl above 15 years of age is not illegal if it is of her free will.

28 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

Court notice to Centre on marriageable age for girls

High Court orders upholding marriage of girls who had not reached 18 years stayed by Supreme Court

Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Monday issued notice to the Union Government on petitions filed by the National Commission for Women and the Delhi Commission for Women highlighting disparities in the legal system on girls' marriageable

age. A Bench of the Court comprising Chief Justice Y. K. Sabharwal, Justice C. K. Thakker and Justice R. V. Raveendran stayed a Delhi High Court order that upheld the marriage of a girl who had not reached the age of 18.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court too had held that the mar-

riage of a 13-year-old girl was valid.

The Bench also issued notice to the Delhi and Andhra Pradesh Governments.

The petitioners pointed out that there were disparities between the Child Marriage (Restrained) Act, the Hindu Marriage Act, explanation to Section 375

of the Indian Penal Code, the Shariat, the Indian Divorce Act, the Child Labour (Regulation) Act and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, on the minimum age for a girl's marriage.

They said the Delhi High Court had upheld the validity of the marriage of two girls who

were less than 18 years, stating that a girl and a boy could get married if they attained the age of discretion. The Andhra Pradesh High Court had said that the law did not leave any scope for the court to take a different opinion, and that it was upholding the marriage with a heavy

heart.

100-1
women

MPs demand panel on girl children

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Members in the Lok Sabha on Monday recommended the setting up of an MPs' committee to look into the issues relating to the girl child.

The suggestion was made during the zero hour after Tejaswini Sriramesh (Congress) drew the members' attention to alleged sexual abuse of a school girl in Chincholi (Karnataka) by some advocates when she approached one of

them for help to get a bus pass. The victim — a minor — who had lost her bus pass sought help from an advocate who demanded Rs. 300 for the job. Ms. Sriramesh alleged that the advocate assaulted the girl since she was carrying only Rs. 100. He also allowed three of his colleagues to exploit her. The victim is now pregnant, she claimed.

According to Ms. Sriramesh, the victim approached the court directly and the judge asked her to file a complaint

with the police. The police registered a case only after court's intervention.

Ms. Sriramesh said that while the Government was announcing schemes and laws for the girl child, there should be a proper mechanism to monitor such laws and schemes and also the cases of abuse of girls.

The House agreed and suggested the setting up of a committee. It also recommended that the Bar Council of India be apprised of the matter.

Grant, Waters get 6-yr RI for paedophilia

Mumbai: A sessions court on Saturday sentenced British nationals Duncan Grant and Alan Waters to six years' rigorous imprisonment for sexually abusing children of the shelter homes run by the duo here and in Raigad.

The court also sentenced another accused William D'Souza, a local resident, to three years' rigorous imprisonment for abetting the others in sexually abusing children

Waters and Grant were convicted under section 377 (having unnatural sex) along with other sections of the IPC. They were accused of sexual exploitation and assault by five minor boys who were previously living at three shelter homes set up by Grant in 2001. D'Souza, superintendent of the Colaba shelter home, was tried for aiding the Britons. Both Grant and Waters fled the country when the case

came to light. However, Waters was deported from the US in 2004 after Interpol issued a red-corner notice against the duo.

Grant had shifted base to Tanzania and faced child-abuse allegations even



Grant and Waters are taken to the sessions court on Saturday

at shelter homes in Colaba, Cuffe Parade and Murud Janjira in Raigad. Besides, it imposed a fine of 20,000 sterling pounds each on Grant and Waters. The fine will have to be paid in Indian rupees at Saturday's exchange rate of Rs 79 for one pound. The fine amount will be used for the rehabilitation of the boys who were sexually abused by the duo.

there after he set up similar shelter houses and was deported to Britain. He returned to India in June 2005 and surrendered before the police. D'Souza was arrested in 2001 and granted bail.

In November, D'souza told the court he wanted to turn an approver. However, the very next day, he alleged that the prosecution had "armtwisted" him into turning an approver. Agencies

Campaign launched to protect girl child

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Union Minister for Women and Child Development Renuka Chowdhury on Wednesday launched a nation-wide campaign to reverse the "alarming" decline in the ratio of women in the population in many parts of the country.

Addressing a press conference on the occasion of the International Women's Day, she said: "It is a tragedy that every year half million girl children are being killed and prevented from being born, ironically with the help of modern tools of science and technology leading to the

of the Survival of the Girl Child." **"Most delinquent"**

Noting that the Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and eastern Uttar Pradesh were the "most delinquent," she said the phenomenon was more prevalent among the educated and the rich than the illiterate and the poor.

"It is shocking that the declining sex ratio has already led to a situation where brothers shared a wife and in some cases even fathers and sons shared a wife in several parts of the country. This could have serious consequences as the genes would all get

mixed up resulting in ill-health and other complications."

Further empowerment

The campaign would focus on further empowerment and creation of greater employment opportunities for women, besides raising awareness on the importance of having women for the welfare of the society. It will be implemented in collaboration with the Ministries of the Human Resource Development and Health and Family Welfare and State Governments.

"We have to remove the mindset that women had a negative economic value for the family.

We are at present in the last year of the 10th Plan. The approach to the 11th Plan would focus on the survival of the girl child as the central theme."

She said that while her Ministry would work on all aspects of women and child development, it would focus on the issue of survival of the girl child. "The declining sex ratio is the most shocking because the geographical spread of the problem coincides with areas of growth, economic prosperity, agricultural surplus and high per capita incomes. This being the most shocking development, my Ministry needs to address this first."

• Female foeticide more prevalent among rich and educated

• Has already led to a situation where brothers share a wife

• Need seen to remove negative mindset on women

decline in the ratio of women in the population. We have got to put a stop to this. Beginning today, my Ministry would observe the next 10 years as the Decade

Haryana declares 2006 as Girl Child Year

State Chief Minister Hooda announces a host of schemes on the eve of International Women's Day

Special Correspondent

CHANDIGARH: The Haryana Government has decided to provide loans to 10,000 women every year through the State Women Development Corporation to enable them take up self-employment opportunities, the Haryana Chief Minister, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, said on Tuesday in his message on the eve of International Women's Day.

He said that as women constituted half of society, their integral development was of utmost importance. Therefore, apart from declaring the year 2006 as the Girl Child Year, the State Government had also taken initiatives to enhance the so-

cio-economic status of women. Complimenting the fairer sex on the occasion of International Women's Day, he reiterated the commitment of the Government to empower them to ensure their equal participation in the development of the State.

He said that it had also been decided to confer best mother award upon 2,367 women every year.

Expressing concern over the declining sex ratio of women, he said that his Government had launched an innovative scheme 'Ladli' under which an incentive of Rs. 5,000 per year would be given for five years on the birth of a second daughter in a family.

In case of a family having a daughter or only daughters, the parents would be entitled to get old age allowance of Rs. 300 per month after 55 years of age under the 'Ladli Samajik Suraksha Pension Yojna'.

Also, a financial assistance of Rs. 15,000 is given under 'Indira Gandhi Priyadarshni Vivah Sha-

gun Yojana' on the wedding of girls living below the poverty line and belonging to Scheduled Castes.

Mr. Hooda further said that special attention was being paid towards the health of girls. It had been decided to conduct health check-up of all girls up to the age

• Steps taken to enhance the socio-economic status of women

• An incentive of Rs. 5,000 per year would be given for five years on the birth of a second daughter in a family under the scheme 'Ladli'



of 18 years and each of them would be given a health card to maintain record of their health. Also, the network of Kishori Shakti Yojana was being expanded from 85 Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) projects to all ICDS projects in the State.

A separate university would be set up for women and 25 per cent seats in Industrial Training Institutes and technical institutes would be reserved for women.

All the 222 Government Girls Senior Secondary Schools would be connected with the EDUSAT (education through satellite) programme. Separate toilets for girls would also be provided at

all government schools. The government had reserved 33 per cent seats for women in the recruitment of teachers. A special scheme had been introduced to give prizes to girls hailing from rural areas to encourage them to study.

A Janani Suvidha Yojana had been introduced and a network of well-equipped delivery huts was being created to provide hygienic conditions to conduct deliveries.

About 1,605 self help groups had been formed for empowerment of women and sports competitions had also been introduced at block level to encourage women in taking keen interest in games, he added.

haryana 14/3 813

মহিলা কর্মীদের হেনস্থা ঠেকাতে কমিটি গড়া শুরু সরকারি অফিসে

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা: অবশেষে রাজ্য সরকারের বিভিন্ন দফতরে মহিলা কর্মীদের সম্মান রক্ষায় কমিটি গঠনের কাজ শুরু হল।

কাজের জায়গায় মহিলা কর্মীদের নিরাপত্তার স্বার্থে প্রায় দশ বছর আগে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের দেওয়া নির্দেশ রাজ্য সরকার বহু ক্ষেত্রেই এখনও কার্যকর করেনি। প্রতিটি দফতরে, বিভাগে কর্মরত মহিলাদের সম্মান রক্ষার জন্য একটি নজরদারি কমিটি গঠনের নির্দেশ দেয় সুপ্রিম কোর্ট। সম্প্রতি রাজ্যের নারী ও সমাজকল্যাণ দফতর একটি চিঠিতে বিভিন্ন দফতরকে তাদের কড়া মনোভাব জানিয়েছে। এর পর নড়েচড়ে বসতে বাধ্য হচ্ছে রাজ্য সরকারের বিভিন্ন দফতর।

কর্মরত মহিলারা কাজের জায়গায় পুরুষ সহকর্মী, উর্ধ্বতন কর্তৃপক্ষ অনেকের কাছেই নানা ভাবে অপমানিত, অসম্মানিত হন। এই রাজ্য প্রশাসনও ব্যতিক্রম নয়। কোনও কোনও ক্ষেত্রে তাঁদের যৌন হেনস্থা করার চেষ্টাও যে হচ্ছে, তাও স্বীকার করে নিয়েছেন নারী ও সমাজ কল্যাণ দফতরের এক সূত্র। বহু ক্ষেত্রে

প্রতিবাদ করতে গিয়ে সিংহভাগ পুরুষ সহকর্মীর মিলিত বিরোধিতার মুখোমুখি হতে হচ্ছে মহিলাদের। সামাজিক সম্মান কিংবা 'এঁদের সঙ্গে সারা জীবন চাকরি তো করতে হবে'— এই মনোভাবে বেশির ভাগ মহিলাই নীরব থাকেন বা প্রতিকূল পরিস্থিতি মেনে নিতে বাধ্য হন। এর ফলে এঁদের অনেকেই বিষাদের শিকার হন।

সূত্রটির বক্তব্য, সম্প্রতি বেশ কয়েকটি স্বেচ্ছাসেবী সংস্থা, কাউন্সেলিং সংস্থা সরকারের বিভিন্ন মহলে এই সরকারি মহিলা কর্মীদের সুরক্ষার বিষয়ে চাপ তৈরি করছিলেন। বেশ কিছু ক্ষেত্রে পরিবারের লোকেরা সংশ্লিষ্ট মহিলার মানসিক বিষাদের চিকিৎসা করানোর জন্য কাউন্সেলরদের শরণাপন্ন হয়েছিলেন। প্রায় প্রতিটি ক্ষেত্রেই দেখা গিয়েছে এঁদের মানসিক বিষাদের মূলে রয়েছে অফিসের পুরুষ সহকর্মীদের অন্যায, অশালীন ব্যবহার।

মহিলাদের নাম গোপন রেখে ওই সব সংস্থা সরকারি কর্তাদের বিভিন্ন মহলকে সতর্ক করে। এর পরেই সরকারের শীর্ষস্তর থেকে এই সংক্রান্ত

বিষয়টি দেখভাল, তদারকির দায়িত্ব যাদের হাতে আছে সেই 'নোডাল' দফতরকে অবিলম্বে সক্রিয় হওয়ার জন্য বলা হয়। 'নোডাল' দফতর হিসাবে এর পরেই নারী ও সমাজকল্যাণ দফতর সমস্ত সরকারি দফতরকে কড়া চিঠি পাঠিয়েছে।

সমাজকল্যাণ দফতরের নির্দেশ: সাত সদস্যের কমিটি অবিলম্বে গঠন করতে হবে প্রতিটি দফতরে। দফতরেরই কোনও প্রবীণ মহিলা কর্মীকে কমিটির প্রধান হিসাবে বসাতে হবে। কমিটির সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ সদস্যকে অবশ্যই মহিলা হতে হবে এবং দেখতে হবে যেন তাঁরা ওই দফতরেরই কর্মী হন। কমিটিতে দফতরেরই কোনও সিনিয়র অফিসারকে রাখা হবে। কোনও রকম অভিযোগ পেলেই কমিটি সব পক্ষের সঙ্গে কথা বলে, তা বিচার-বিবেচনা করে বিভাগীয় প্রধানকে রিপোর্ট দেবে। তবে কমিটি করলেই যে সমস্যার শেষ, তা নয়। সরকারি এক কর্তার মতে, অন্তত এই কমিটির উপস্থিতি দফতরের পুরুষ কর্মীদের উপর চাপ তৈরি হবে। তাঁরা কথাবার্তায় সতর্ক হতে বাধ্য হবেন।

05 MAR 1996

ANA-INDIAN PAPER

Women
40-10
16/2

A progressive direction

The Supreme Court's direction on Tuesday to the Centre and the States to enact legislation to make the registration of marriages compulsory irrespective of religion is a breakthrough. It will aid the dismantling of the unhealthy social edifices of child marriage and the exploitation of married women. The Court has ordered the governments to amend the relevant rules and procedures within three months to effect this. Compulsory registration will have far-reaching benefits. Child marriage, which continues to be practised in many communities (although prohibited by a 1929 Act), will be drastically curtailed, ensuring the girl child the right to a free and wholesome childhood. Parents will no longer be able to sell their girl children into marriage for economic reasons or because of social compulsions. This is evidenced by the fact that in Sri Lanka, after registration was made compulsory, there was a dramatic decrease in child marriages. Cases of desertion and polygamy are likely to be fewer as there will be documentary proof of marriage. A marriage certificate can be used in court by women in vulnerable situations to assert their rights as spouses.

Since the Special Marriage Act came into force in 1954 for civil marriages, there have been moves to push for legislation to document all marriages. But these have fallen by the wayside as the majority of marriages are solemnised by religious rites and fall within the domain of different personal laws. Meanwhile, the absence of such a law has caused tremendous hardship to women of all communities as the core principles of gender equality and non-discrimination are often nullified by retrograde social practices. Only a few States have taken the initiative to make registration compulsory. The reform, which has been spearheaded by the National Commission for Women, will have a nationwide impact as proof of marriage will now be available. If the purposes of the proposed law are to be served fully, it must have the following attributes. The process of registration must be made simple. Cost, access, and effective communication will be the keys to success in urban as well as rural India. The costs of registration should be nominal. Easy, hassle-free access will be facilitated if, in towns and clusters of villages, post offices in addition to sub-registrar's offices and, in villages, village administrative officers or gram pramukhs are entrusted with the job of registration. As in the case of compulsory registration of births and deaths, there must be a vigorous campaign to communicate the new rules of the game to all households, above all to women. It needs to be emphasised that, under extenuating circumstances, unregistered marriages should not stand invalidated. The government has to be responsive to the difficulties of women that may arise from non-registration. Although many specifics are yet to be settled, it is clear the Supreme Court has struck a progressive blow for gender equality in India.

15 SEP 2006

THE HINDU

Farah wages lonely battle

HT Correspondents
Aligarh/Delhi/Lucknow, February 10

LIKE MOST girls her age, Farah Aziz — a post-graduate student of journalism and mass communication in Aligarh Muslim University — likes to wear jeans and t-shirts. But her choice of clothes has left her harassed, threatened and created turmoil in the university.

On February 2, Farah was assaulted by two students on a bike near the vice-chancellor's office. They snatched her shawl and fled. Farah promptly reported the matter to V-C Naseem Ahmad and the proctor. Along with her, several other girl students complained of being eve-teased. The following day, Farah lodged an FIR with the police.

Surprisingly, neither the AMU administration nor the police took any action. On the contrary, Farah got another dose of harassment from the moral police, who warned her

AMU debate

- AMU administration has called Farah's allegations attempt to malign univ's good name
- Students' union has refuted charges, saying it never threatened her
- Some have called it attempt to divert attention from stir for minority status

to stick to the AMU 'dress code' of kurta and dupatta or face the consequences. The thing is, AMU doesn't have any such dress code.

Not one to be cowed down, Farah has taken her fight to Delhi and approached the NHRC for protection and a directive to AMU to take measures to prevent such incidents in the future. On Thursday, at a press conference in JNU, she said: "The women's cell at AMU is virtually non-functional. This, despite SC guidelines that a women's cell be established in every university to address issues of sexual harassment." She also said she was warned by students' union office-bearers to keep quiet.

The administration has called Farah's allegations an attempt to malign the university's name. AMU spokesperson Prof Asmar Mirza Beg said that when the matter was brought to the notice of the V-C, he immediately directed the proctor to enquire into it and report it to the police. An FIR was lodged but since Farah couldn't identify her assailants, immediate disciplinary action couldn't be taken.

AMUSU president Abdul Hafeez Gandhi said: "I refute all allegations. We are willing to take up Farah's complaint. She should've gone through proper channels instead of going to the media." Some student leaders have accused Farah of working at the behest of some political party to divert attention from the movement for restoration of minority status to AMU.

11 FEB 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

মোটরবাইক না পেয়ে আসুর থেকে উধাও বর

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা: নগদ ৬৫ হাজার টাকা হাতে না-পোলে ছেলেকে বিয়ে করতে পাঠানো হবে না বলে হুঁশিয়ারি দিয়ে রেখেছিল পাত্রপক্ষ। সেই মতো দিন দশেক আগে পাত্রের 'তিলক' (আশীর্বাদ)-এর দিনেই পুরো টাকাটা কনের ভাই তাঁদের হাতে তুলে দেন। বিয়ের যৌতুক, ঝাট-বিছানা-ড্রেসিং ট্রোবিল-আলমারিও গুছিয়ে রাখা ছিল। কিন্তু তাতেও বিয়ে ভেঙে গেল।

বিয়ের পিড়িতে বসার আগেই অটোচালক বর মোটর সাইকেলের জন্য আন্দার করে বসায় কী বলবে ভেবেই পাচ্ছিল না পাত্রীপক্ষ। কালীপুর রোডের জমজমাট বিয়েবাড়িতে হই হই করে মালাবদল হয়ে গিয়েছে, কেবল শিঁদুর পরানো বাকি। বরের কানে কানে এক বন্ধু কী বললেন, সঙ্গে সঙ্গে পাগাড়ি খুলে বোরিয়ে গেলেন ওই 'গুণধর' যুবক। পাত্র রাজীব সাইকেলে মোটর

সাইকেলে বসিয়ে উধাও হয়ে যায় তার ভাই সঞ্জীব।

সিনেমায় 'লগনহস্তা' নায়িকার যা হয়, ঋতার ক্ষেত্রে তা হয়নি। 'মহানুভব' বিকল্প পাত্র জোটেনি। শুক্রবার রাত থেকে উধাও পাত্রকে এখনও খুঁজে আনতে পারেনি পুলিশ। তবে অনেক টালবাহানার পরে শনিবার সকালে ছেলের বাবা শিবপ্রসাদ সাইট, তার ভগ্নিপতি সুরেন্দ্র সাইট এবং এই বিয়ের ঘটক কাতিক সাইটকে চিংপুর থানার পুলিশ ফ্রেফতার করেছে। ধৃত তিন জন এবং এবং পাত্রের বিরুদ্ধে বিয়ের প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়ে টাকা নিয়েও বিয়ে না-করায় প্রতারণার অভিযোগ দায়ের করা হয়েছে।

এ দিন সকালেও 'মঙ্গল-



জপমানিত ঋতা। ইনসেটে রাজীব। —নিজস্ব চিত্র

ভবন' নামে ওই বিয়েবাড়ির গায়ে উর্ধ্ববের সাজ বেন কনের ভেঙে-পড়া পরিবারটির সঙ্গে ঠাট্টা করছিল। শূন্য মণ্ডপে ছড়িয়ে-ছিটিয়ে ঘট-কলাগাছ-মাসলিক চিহ্ন। লজ্জায়-অপমানো জড়োসজো হয়ে মাথা নিচু করে গায় বসে ২৪ বছরের ওই তরুণী। কেন এমন হল? বিয়ে করতে এসে হুবু বর তাঁকে কি কিছু বলেছিলেন? বহু প্রশ্নেও তাঁর মুখে কথা সরল না।

মা উম্মিলাদেবী বলেন, "কেন এমন ঘটল, মাথায় ঢুকছে না। বিয়ের আগের দিন থেকে পূজো-আচ্চা চলায় দুর্দিন মেয়ে উপোস করে আছে। ওই ঘটনার পরে একটা দানাও দাঁতে কাটছে না।" মেয়ের বাবা রামরাজবাবু ইলেকট্রনিক সামগ্রী মেরামতির

কাজ করতেন। দুর্ঘটনায় একটা চোখ নষ্ট হয়ে বসে গিয়েছেন। কনের ভাই সন্তোষ সাইট অসুস্থ হয়ে পড়েছেন। মোবাইলের দোকানের কর্মী ভাই-ই দিদির বিয়ের খরচ জোগাড় করেন।

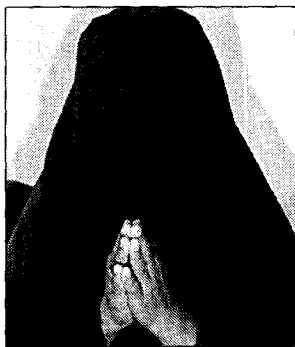
পাত্রীপক্ষের তরফে জানানো হয়, গত অগস্ট থেকে মেয়ের বিয়ের সম্বন্ধ নিয়ে দুই পরিবারে কথা চলছে। তবে মা-বাবার মতই তার মত জানিয়ে 'সুপাত্র' পাত্র একবারও মেয়েকে দেখতে চাননি। বরপক্ষের তরফে পাত্রের আকস্মিক অন্তর্ধানের ব্যাখ্যা মেলেনি। বরাহনগরের কাশীনাথ দত্ত রোডে ছেলের বাড়িতে কথা বলার জন্য ছিলেন, পাত্রের মা ও মাসি। ছেলের মা বলেন, "ওই মেয়েকে পছন্দ করেই ঘরে আনতে চেয়েছিলাম। আমার দুই ছেলে, কেন, কোথায় চলে গেল, কিছু জানি না।" পাত্রের মাসি বলেন, "মেয়ে কালো বলে ছেলের পছন্দ হয়নি।"

Imrana sees threat to life

Imrana 97 22
TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Lucknow, Feb. 1: Imrana Bibi, the 28-year-old mother of five whose accusation of rape against her father-in-law last year had split the Muslim clergy and caught the nation's attention, today said she fears a threat to her life.

Imrana moved an application in the district and sessions court in Muzaffarnagar saying she was being subject



Imrana: Seeking justice

to pressure by her in-laws to withdraw the rape case and reach a compromise, and feared for her life.

"I am being victimised again. I had reiterated my charge that I was raped by my father-in-law. I want justice. But some vested interests have colluded with the defence and adopted tactics of delaying the trial," she said in court this morning.

The defence is trying to prove that there was no rape and had sought permission to submit in court a video-

recording of an alleged statement by Imrana that her father-in-law Ali Mohammad had not succeeded in his rape attempt. The statement was recorded by the Muslim organisation, Milli Council, on June 24 last year, the defence lawyer said.

However, the prosecution objected to the move, saying a statement recorded by a private organisation with vested interest should not be accepted as evidence.

The next hearing is on February 6.

The Imrana case made headlines in June last year when a community panchayat passed the edict that Imrana would have to separate from her husband because the rape had altered her relationship with him, making him like a son to her. The Deoband seminary, Dar-ul Uloom, endorsed this verdict in a fatwa, sparking an outcry across the country.

Imrana's application comes a day after the All India Muslim Personal Law Board demanded that the uniform civil code be scrapped. As long as the provision existed in the Constitution, Muslims would fear interference in their personal law, it said.

Deoband exit

Dar-ul Uloom's media adviser Mufti Azahar Arshad quit the seminary yesterday in protest against the handling of the Imrana case. He accused the Deoband brass of changing their stand several times.

আইন এবং মানবিকতা

সমাজের হাজার সমস্যা সমাধানের জন্মই আইন। কিন্তু তাহা সত্ত্বেও আইনের স্থান সামাজিক বাস্তবতা হইতে অনেক যোজন দূরে, অনেকখানি উর্ধ্বে। অন্য ভাবে বলিলে, সমাজের প্রচলিত আচরণবিধি বা ধ্যানধারণার দ্বারা নিয়ন্ত্রিত হইবার কোনও দায় আইনের নাই। তাই একটি বিশেষ সমাজের বিশেষ বাস্তব পরিস্থিতির প্রতি লক্ষ্য রাখিয়া কোনও বিচারবিভাগীয় নির্দেশ আসলে আইনের সুব্যবহার নয়: এই যুক্তি সঙ্গত। সম্প্রতি ভারতের সর্বোচ্চ আদালত যে ভাবে কলকাতা হাইকোর্টের একটি বিতর্কিত নির্দেশের সমালোচনা করিয়া বিপক্ষে মত প্রকাশ করিল, তাহাতে এই যুক্তিই আবার আলোর সামনে আসিয়া পড়িল। প্রায় তিন বছর আগে সহবাস মামলা লইয়া যখন গোটা দেশ তোলপাড়, কলিকাতা হাইকোর্ট একটি বিশেষ মামলার পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে সিদ্ধান্ত করে যে, বাস্তব পরিস্থিতির নিরিখে, সামাজিক ন্যায়বিচারের দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি হইতে, বিয়ের প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়া সহবাস করিলে এবং তাহার পর বিবাহ না করিলে সেই সহবাস 'ধর্ষণ'-এর পর্যায়ে পড়ে। এই নির্দেশের ভিত্তিতে কলিকাতা হাইকোর্ট বেশ কয়েকটি মামলায় অভিযুক্তদের জামিনের আবেদন খারিজ করিয়াও দেয়। হাইকোর্ট সে সময় স্পষ্ট ভাষায় জানাইয়াছিল যে কেবল আইনের ধারা-উপধারার উপর নির্ভর না করিয়া বাস্তব পরিস্থিতির ভিত্তিতেই সমস্যা সমাধানের চেষ্টা করা উচিত। বেশ কয়েক বছর পর সমস্যাটি আবার জনসমক্ষে আসিল সুপ্রিম কোর্টের রায়কে কেন্দ্র করিয়া। সুপ্রিম কোর্টের সাম্প্রতিক রায়টি গুরুত্ববহ। এই রায়ে বলা হইতেছে যে, বাস্তব পরিস্থিতি যাহাই হউক না কেন, ধর্ষণ কি ধর্ষণ নয়, তাহা নির্ভর করিবে একটি বিশেষ ধারার উপরেই: যে ধারা (৩৭৬) অনুযায়ী সংশ্লিষ্ট মহিলা প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক কি না এবং তাহার সহবাসের বিষয়ে সম্মতি ছিল কি না, তাহাই বিবেচ্য। প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক মহিলার সম্মতি থাকিলে কোনও সামাজিক প্রেক্ষিতেই ধর্ষণের অভিযোগ টেকে না।

সুপ্রিম কোর্টের এই রায় প্রকৃতপক্ষে আইন বিষয়ে একটি অতি-প্রচলিত ভুল ধারণাকে সংশোধন করে। এই সংশোধন খুব জরুরি। আইন আইনই, তাহাকে নির্দিষ্ট ঘটনার প্রয়োজন অনুযায়ী বাঁকাইয়া চুরাইয়া লওয়া যায় না। সামাজিক ন্যায়ের দিক হইতে যাহারা তর্ক করিবেন, তাহারা নিশ্চয়ই বলিবেন, এ ক্ষেত্রে সহবাসে সম্মতি তো আসিয়াছিল বিবাহের প্রতিশ্রুতির পরই। অর্থাৎ এই সম্মতি শর্তসাপেক্ষ সম্মতি। ইহার পর বিবাহের প্রতিশ্রুতি যদি রক্ষিত না হয়, তবে কি আর সেই সম্মতিকে সত্যকারের সম্মতি বলিয়া গণ্য করা যায়? আইনের পরিভাষা কিন্তু সামাজিক ন্যায়ের পরিভাষা হইতে ভিন্ন। আইন এ ক্ষেত্রে বলিবে, সম্মতি সম্মতি-ই, তাহার মধ্যে সত্য মিথ্যা শর্তসাপেক্ষতা ইত্যাদি বিভেদ করা অসম্ভব। এবং সম্মতি ছিল বলিয়াই এ সকল ক্ষেত্রে সহবাস সহবাস-ই, ধর্ষণ নয়। বিবাহের প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়া যদি পরে তাহা ভঙ্গ করা হয়, সে ক্ষেত্রে ধর্ষণ নয়, সংশ্লিষ্ট ব্যক্তির বিরুদ্ধে প্রতারণা বা জালিয়াতির অভিযোগ আনা সম্ভব। এবং তাহা সর্বতোভাবে ন্যায্য ও বিচার্য অভিযোগ। মানবিকতা ও আইনগত যুক্তিতর্কের ধারা দুইটি পৃথক করা সর্বাগ্রে প্রয়োজন, কাঙ্ক্ষিতও বটে। স্মরণ রাখিতে হইবে, প্রকৃত আইনের যুক্তিতেই অপরাধীর বিরুদ্ধে অভিযোগ প্রতিষ্ঠা বাঞ্ছনীয়, তাহার জন্য আইনের ধারার কষ্টকল্পিত বা 'বাস্তবানুগ' ভাবানুবাদ বাঞ্ছিত নয়।

Rising from conflict, women in charge

Liberia: A new start

Monrovia, Jan. 16 (Reuters): Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took office as Africa's first elected woman President today, backed by a strong show of US support and vowing to fight graft and rebuild her country after years of war.

As well as several fellow African leaders, US First Lady Laura Bush and secretary of state Condoleezza Rice attended the inauguration in a sign of Washington's backing for Africa's oldest republic, founded in 1847 by freed slaves from America.

Johnson-Sirleaf, wearing a cream and gold dress, was sworn in at a colourful open-air ceremony to loud cheers from hundreds of foreign dignitaries and Liberians, including women wearing dresses emblazoned with their new President's portrait.

"Let us begin anew, moving forward into a future that is filled with hope and promise," Johnson-Sirleaf said in her first address as leader of a nation that lacks basic services like water and electricity after a devastating 14-year civil war.

"Oh yes, God has answered our prayer," said Teresa Smith, a businesswoman attending the ceremony with her six children.

Johnson-Sirleaf vowed to fight rampant corruption, which experts say has fuelled decades of instability, and to uphold a foreign donor-backed Governance and Economic Management Programme (GEMAP) that will oversee state spending.

"We will accept and enforce the terms of GEMAP. We will ensure competence and integrity in the management of our resources," said the Harvard-trained economist

Laura remarks please Rice

Monrovia, Jan. 16 (AFP): US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice said today she was flattered that First Lady Laura Bush thought she would make a good President, but her response is still "thanks but no thanks".

Laura Bush told CNN on Friday that Rice would make a great leader. But the chief US diplomat, "Obviously it's flattering that people say things like that," Rice said en route to Monrovia. "I know what I'm good at. I know what I want to do and that's not it."

who is 67. She pledged to "wage war against corruption regardless of where it exists or by whom it is practiced".

A US official travelling with Bush said Johnson-Sirleaf's inauguration was "a clear example of women's empowerment across Africa".

But the official acknowledged "the President-elect will have to show results rather quickly".

Wearied of their country's recent history of conflict, chaos and destruction, Liberians have high expectations both for the new President they call "Mama Ellen" and for the superpower across the Atlantic they look upon as a kind of Godfather.

"The US has a long and special relationship with Liberia which we will continue," the US official accompanying Bush said.

Washington spent more than \$840 million last year on Liberia as it emerged from a brutal civil war that ended in 2003 after killing 250,000 people and leaving the country's infrastructure in ruins. US officials say helping the country is a priority of President Bush's administration. US secret service agents mingled with UN peacekeepers in the ramshackle capital.



Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Monrovia after she was sworn in President of Liberia. (AFP)

Chile: End of violent era

Santiago, Jan. 16 (Reuters): Chile elected socialist Michelle Bachelet to be its first woman President yesterday, making her only the second woman elected to head a South American state as Latin America cements a shift to the Left.

With almost all votes counted, Bachelet, from Chile's ruling Centre-Left coalition, won 53 per cent of ballots cast while Opposition candidate Sebastian Pinera took 47 per cent, the government Electoral Service said.

Bachelet, 54, a medical doctor imprisoned and tortured during the 1973-1990 Augusto Pinochet dictatorship before living in exile abroad, will be the fourth consecutive President from the Centre-Left alliance that has run Chile since 1990.

"Violence came into my life, destroying what I loved, because I was a victim of hate," Bachelet told tens of thousands of confetti-tossing supporters along the main boulevard in downtown Santiago.

"I have dedicated my life to reversing that hate and con-



Michelle Bachelet in Santiago. (Reuters)

verting it into understanding, tolerance and, why not say it, love."

A former defence minister, Bachelet is only the second woman elected to head a South American nation after Janet Jagan of Guyana was chosen to succeed her husband as President in 1997 after he died.

"I feel emotional, happy. We are breathing the air of liberty and unity," said Ana Paredes, 37, a hotel employee who said she spontaneously decided to join Bachelet revellers.

NEW DELHI, Jan. 1. — The demon of crime against women reared its head once again in the Capital on the very first day of the New Year. In what could have reminded Delhiites of the Dhaura Kuan incident of a Delhi University student from the North-East India being gangraped in a moving car, a housewife was raped inside a cruising car by her neighbour and his friends in Narela area of north-west Delhi on Saturday morning.

The victim resides in a DDA flat in Narela.

The 23-year-old victim was going to a nearby market yesterday morning to buy vegetables when one of her neighbours, Vikram, who was in the car with two of his friends offered her a lift, a police officer said.

Instead of taking the victim to the market, the accused persons kept the car running and allegedly raped the woman, the police officer added. After committing the crime, they dropped her near the market and asked her not to tell anybody about

the incident, the police officer said. The woman filed a complaint with the police after which a medical test confirmed a sexual assault.

While two of the accused persons, Susheel (20) and Naresh (22), have been arrested, Vikram, who had lured her into the car, was absconding, the police officer said. The police said later, though, Vikram had been traced and would soon be arrested.

In another part of the city, a minor girl was allegedly abducted and raped by her neighbour. The victim was trapped in the

Sultanpuri area of north-west Delhi by the accused person, Subhash, who took her to Ghaziabad, a police officer said.

Police received information about where the accused was hiding and raided the house. While Subhash managed to escape, the girl was rescued, the police officer added. A case has been registered at Sultanpuri police station and attempts to catch him are on, police said.

In the Dilshad Garden area of north-east Delhi, a 28-year-old woman was allegedly raped by an

assailant named Ved Prakash, police said. Arti (55) and Saroj (30), —names changed — were found in an unconscious state on a pavement near the Punjabi Bagh flyover with marks of injury on their bodies this morning.

With more than 600 rapes in 2005, the Capital's record in crime against women is ahead of that of the other metropolitan cities like Chennai, Mumbai and Kolkata.

In 2004, 551 rapes were reported in Delhi, the maximum in a year in any metropolitan city.

In 35 of these incidents, the vic-

tims were gangraped. In 2004, 21 cases of gangrapes were reported.

In over 25 per cent of the rapes reported this year, the victim was neither known to the accused nor was a relative.

This points to a serious law and order problem in the Capital, conceded a senior police officer. Last year, only four per cent of the victims were raped by unknown persons. Delhi police officers, however, feel that the Capital is as safe as any other city.

Another report on Page 4

Capital reels under rash of rapes