



Rashtra Mahila

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Editor's Column

The decision of the Ministry of Indian Overseas Affairs (MOIA) to launch an extensive sensitization and awareness campaign to ensure that Indian women married to overseas Indians are not cheated, harassed or deserted is to be heartily welcomed in view of a large number of women getting trapped into fraudulent marriages.

In Punjab alone, there are over 15,000 victims known as "holiday wives", of fraudulent NRI marriages. 80% of the marriages in the state to NRI men are doomed, with husbands never returning to take their brides with them.

With this concern, the Ministry is taking steps through a National Consultation on Marriages to educating prospective brides and

their families about the safeguards to be followed before entering into marriage with overseas Indians. A booklet is also being prepared in English and five to six vernacular languages by MOIA for educating people in Delhi as well as in other important states.

FOCUS
OVERSEAS MARRIAGES

In addition, the MOIA will set up a "Gender Cell" to advise women. Moreover, those women, who feel that injustice has been meted out to them by the runaway NRI grooms, can approach the nearest passport office with all the details and their complaints will be forwarded to the department concerned abroad.

The Ministry has also proposed to set up a Gender Advisory group comprising eminent people in the MOIA and representatives of all stakeholders to advise the ministry from time to time on gender issues of the Diaspora.

The Ministry is also seeking active support from the states and NGOs, in partnership with foreign embassies and the law makers, to establish safety nets and catalyze social support system to address this social problem.

However, in the final analysis, young women and their parents must not be lured by the affluent NRI grooms. They themselves should make searching enquiries before going for such marriages.

Well Done NCW

Acting on a tip, Mrs. Nirmala Venkatesh, Member. NCW, arrived in village Gowribidanur in Kolar district with the police and freed a woman, who had been locked up for the last 16 years by her husband, suspecting her of infidelity. A pack of ferocious dogs kept vigil outside, ensuring no stranger could come in.



Member Nirmala Venkatesh (right) with the rescued woman.

Relief Plan for Victims of Rape

The NCW has submitted a draft proposing that rape victims be provided maintenance for at least three months besides financial assistance to pursue the case against the accused. The Central government is likely to announce the scheme shortly.

According to the proposals, the victim will not have to wait till conviction of the accused; she will be eligible for relief once assault on her is confirmed.

The proposal follows a direction from the Supreme Court and the Central government to formulate a compensatory scheme for rape victims. The Commission formulated the proposals after consulting legal experts, women's rights activists, social workers and human rights activists.

The Central government had promised Rs. 320 crores initially for the scheme. The money in the Rape Victims Relief and Rehabilitation Fund would be kept with and disbursed by district collectors.

If the rape victim dies, then the relief amount would be given to her family members. The amount could range from Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 5 lakhs depending upon the severity of the case and the role of the victim in the family's economy.

Bhagya Lakshmi Scheme

The Karnataka Government has announced a Rs. 234-crore 'Bhagya Lakshmi' welfare scheme under which a girl child born after March 31, 2006, would be eligible to get Rs. 10,000 to be redeemed after 18 years. In a State, where the male-female sex ratio is 1,000:966, this scheme aims to give "moral courage" to poor families where a girl child is born and to secure her future.

NCW on Harassment Panels

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has sought reports from all universities whether they have set up committees to deal with complaints of sexual harassment as per the Supreme Court guidelines, in the wake of the recent alleged molestation of a girl student in Aligarh Muslim University.

Women's Commission Bill Passed in Manipur

The Manipur Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the Manipur State Commission for Women Bill, 2006.

The Bill seeks to provide a law for the creation of a Commission which would have a Chairperson, three members and a member secretary along with supporting officers and staff.

NCW Acts on Anjali's Complaint

Taking cognisance of the complaint filed by the dismissed Air Force Officer, Anjali Gupta, alleging that no action was taken on her complaint of sexual harassment by her seniors, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has sought an action-taken report in the matter from the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Headquarters Training Command, Bangalore. The Air Force authorities have also been asked to submit a report regarding compliance with Supreme Court guidelines about the setting up of a complaints committee to deal with sexual harassment at workplace.

NCW Slams MPLB

The National Commission for Women has criticised the Muslim Personal Law Board (MPLB) for opposing compulsory marriage registration. The Commission said such registration would only provide a woman with legal evidence to prove

her marriage and it did not infringe upon any personal law.

Number of Working Women Rising

The work participation rate of women has shown a continuous rise since 1981. However, women's participation in the workforce is still "substantially" low because of lack of education and skills.

According to the Registrar General of India, the work participation rate of women increased from 19.67% in 1981 to 25.68% in 2001, with a higher rate in rural areas at 30.98%, compared with only 11.55% in urban areas.

In rural areas, women mainly worked as cultivators and agricultural labourers, while in urban areas, almost 80% of them were engaged in the unorganised sector like household industries, petty trade and services and construction activity.

In the organised sector, women workers constituted 18.4% as on March, 2003 of which about 49.68 lakh women were employed in the public and private sectors. Of these, nearly 28.12 lakh worked in the community, social and personnel services sector.

Girls Set to Break 2000 Year Old Tradition in Kerala Churches

Breaking a 2000-year-old tradition, the Catholic church in Kerala will permit girls to perform certain altar duties, which have normally been done by boys till now.

Girls upto the age of 14 will be allowed to "serve the altar" and assist the priest in ceremonies like mass functions, which were normally being done by boys.

The altar girls will have specific roles to play like lighting the incense, helping with the prayers and the priest to perform certain functions.

From the Complaint Cell

The Commission received a complaint from a widow with two minor daughters, working as an Assistant Teacher in a Girls' School of being tortured by the School Management on the pretext of a fabricated complaint. Thereafter, her services were discontinued by the School Management.

She filed an application before the Education Officer (Basic), District Mathura, who directed the school management to re-instate the complainant and also cancel the order wherein her services were discontinued. However, the school refused to comply with the direction of the education officer. Thereafter, the matter was taken up by the Commission and notice was issued to the Education Officer seeking an Action Taken Report on the matter at the earliest. Thereafter, the Commission was informed by the said authority that the order wherein the complainant's resignation was accepted and her services discontinued was cancelled and that the school management had been directed to re-instate the complainant alongwith the payment of back wages. Presently, the complainant is working in the said school.

3 Clinics Sealed for PNDT Act Violation

For the first time, in a shocking expose of violation of laws against sex determination of the foetus, three clinics in the Capital have been sealed and their registration cancelled after raids conducted by the National Inspection and Monitoring Committee headed by NCW Member Malini Bhattacharya, brought to light grave violations of the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act.

Kaviyatri Sammelan

NCW Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas was the chief guest at the Kaviyatri Sammelan organised by the Delhi Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and Chitrakala Sangam to commemorate 8th March, the International Women's Day.



Dr. Girija Vyas addressing the Sammelan

Workshop on Women Police

Deputy Secretary, Ms. Gurpreet Deo attended a workshop on the 'Role of Women Police in Contemporary Society and their Problems', at the Punjab Police Academy, Phillaur. She made a presentation on the topic 'Problems, Challenges and Welfare of Women in Police'. The audience comprised women police officers of all ranks.



Ms. Gurpreet Deo addressing the workshop

Members' Visits

- Member Malini Bhattacharya visited Ambasa in Tripura to enquire into the alleged rape of three tribal women by Assam Rifles personnel. She recommended apprehension of the culprits without delay.

Ms. Bhattacharya met the Chairperson and the members of the West Bengal Women Commission to discuss implementation of the NCW programme 'Chalo Gaon Ke Ore'. Later, she attended a public hearing on disabled women at the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University. She also attended a workshop on Prevention of Domestic Violence Act organised by the West Bengal Women's Commission.

Thereafter, she left for Tripura to discuss the Chalo Gaon Ke Ore programme with the representatives of the State Govt. and Tripura Commission for Women. Ms. Bhattacharya attended a public hearing organised by Tripura Women's Commission at Belonia in South Tripura on trafficking of girls from Tripura to states like Haryana, Uttaranchal, etc. under the pretext of marriage.

Ms. Bhattacharya enquired into the exploitation of female domestic workers by placement agencies and gave various recommendation for implementation.



Ms. Malini Bhattacharya speaking at the public hearing

- Member Nirmala Venkatesh investigated into the dowry harassment case of Madhulika Rastogi married to a Bangalore based Air Deccan pilot, who had deserted her. She had asked the concerned authorities to take appropriate action. She also investigated into the alleged rape of G. Sarada by a boy much younger to her and after counselling both of them resolved the issue.

Mrs. Nirmala Venkatesh celebrated the Women's Day Celebration at Raipur, Mahasumund and Pithora respectively. The member attended a National Conference on 'Range and Scope of Skill Development for Empowerment of Rural/Deprived Women' organised by Vigyan Samiti at Udaipur.

Important Decisions

Educating the Girl Child

A total of 1,000 new residential schools for girls from SC, ST, OBC and minority communities are to be opened in 2006-07 under the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme. Rs. 128 crore is to be provided for this project, and an additional sum of Rs. 172 crore will be available during the year. To further incentivise the girl child who passes the VIII Standard examination and enrolls in a secondary school, a sum of Rs. 3,000 will be deposited in her name, and she would be entitled to withdraw it on turning 18.

Bihar Passes Bill on Quota for Women

The Bihar assembly has passed by voice vote a bill providing reservation for women and backward classes in Panchayati Raj institutions.

NCW Asks for More Women in Police

In its efforts to provide greater safety to women, particularly in the metros, the National Commission for Women Chairperson, Dr. Girija Vyas submitted a set of proposals, including setting up of *Mahila* desk at every police station and conducting sensitisation programmes for police personnel.

Dr. Vyas has also written to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister on the issue.

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