



Editor's Column

A fast-track court in Jodhpur has created legal history by delivering judgement within 15 days of the commencement of the trial in a rape case, wherein a German tourist was raped by an auto rickshaw driver and his accomplice. It handed out life imprisonment to the two persons found guilty. This is indeed a commendable achievement in view of the inordinate delay in the conclusion of court cases in India.

Admittedly, rape is one of the most cold-blooded and heinous crimes which violates the body and soul of a woman bringing in its wake social stigma to the victim. What is worst is the extremely painful long wait for justice for those who are bold enough to report the crime. Each time, the victim appears in the court, she has to relive the horror

FOCUS

FAST-TRACK
COURTS

of the crime all over again. In such a situation, all the agencies concerned in expediting the judgement in record time need to be complimented — the Jodhpur Bench of the High Court for taking suo moto cognizance of the case and issuing instruction for speedy trial, the police for filing the chargesheet within two days of the incident, the DNA lab for submitting its report with remarkable speed, the trial court for hearing the case and passing judgement a day after the last witness deposed before it.

The Rajasthan High Court has also issued guidelines for formation of a special cell for speedy and scientific investigation into all sexual crimes and ensuring that the investigation is completed within a week of the offence.

Under the ruling, all SPs would compile a report in all such cases and submit their reports to the cell every quarterly. The designated officer of the special cell would send the report to the registrar of the High Court and the High Court, in turn, would then send the reports to the fast track courts.

Now that the Jodhpur fast-track court has set an example, other states must emulate it. As the judge has pointed out that the nature of the punishment in such offences should put the fear of law in the minds of people with criminal mentality. Not just the quantum of punishment but also quick dispensation of justice would be a great deterrence.

Making a Difference

Women members of a self-help group of the remote Dharmaram village in Andhra Pradesh have taken up cudgels against the widely prevalent menace of arrack in their village, which is responsible for destroying many families.

The women recently destroyed a large quantity of arrack packets and alert members of the group foiled an attempt by a villager to smuggle arrack packets on his bicycle at midnight and set ablaze the illegal consignment in front of the gram panchayat office.

Inspired by the spirited fight launched by the women members of the local self-help groups, the village youth have also joined the campaign against arrack.

The gram panchayat also adopted a unanimous resolution to impose a fine of Rs. 5,000 on anyone who sell arrack or maintain an arrack shop in defiance of the self imposed ban. The women have also obtained written assurances from the arrack traders against selling arrack in the village.

Helpline for Women

Concerned over the possibility of harassment of women students at Delhi University, Delhi University's Students Union held a meeting with DCP North. The police have issued helpline numbers for complaints. These numbers are 9899090920, 9212005012, 9811746913, 9810030663

4 NEW MEMBERS JOIN NCW



Ms. Yasmeen Abrar, is the daughter of a well-known freedom fighter of Rajasthan. A brilliant student, she grew up in a political family. A former Member of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly from 1998-2003, she was also a consultant at Rashtriya Mahila Kosh and has been a PCC member of Rajasthan for the past 15 years. Widely travelled in India and abroad, Ms. Abrar has been working for the upliftment of women and children for the last two decades.

Ms. Abrar's invaluable experience as a Member of the Mahila Bal Vikas Samiti, Rajasthan, will help her to effectively work as a member of the NCW. We welcome Ms. Abrar to the Commission.



Ms. Sushila Tiriya, a former M.P. of Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, has dedicated her life to the service of the needy and disadvantaged people. Currently, Vice-President of the Adivasi Vikas Parishad, Orissa, Ms. Tiriya has been working for spreading education and improving the health of women. Extremely active in the political arena, she held a number of important posts and had been a member of various parliamentary committees. Widely travelled in India and

abroad, her experiences in working with the tribal and marginalised sections of the society will stand her in good stead while working in the NCW. We welcome Ms. Tiriya to the Commission.



Ms. Malini Bhattacharya, retired professor of English, Jadavpur University and retired Director, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, was a member of the Lok Sabha from 1989 to 1996 and a member of the Panel of Chairpersons for Lok Sabha. She was also a member of the Select Committee on the Pre-natal Diagnostics Test Bill as well as a member of the Select Committee of the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution Bill. A former member of the West Bengal

Commission for Women, currently Ms. Bhattacharya is a member of the West Bengal State Planning Board and of the State Advisory Committee on PNDT Act and the Vice-Chairperson of the West Bengal Folk and Tribal Culture Centre. We welcome Ms. Bhattacharya to the Commission.



Ms. Neeva Konwar, a former lecturer, worked as a Executive member in Assam Seva Samiti for destitute children and leprosy patients and in Mahila Imdad Committee in Assam. A former Vice-President of the Indian Council of Social Welfare, she was also director of the Allahabad Bank as well as the General Secretary, AIMC. She has attended International Conferences in USSR, Singapore, Beijing etc. Ms. Konwar undertook a study tour in New Zealand and Australia. As she

has held a number of important political posts, her experience as an administrator and a social activist will be an asset to the NCW. We welcome Ms. Konwar to the Commission.

Police Self-Defence Training Sessions

A 10-day training programme in self-defence techniques, organised by Delhi Police's Crime Against Women Cell for college students to career women was a big hit.

During these sessions, held at training centres across the city, women were taught how to use items like pen, pencil, diary, handbag and *dupatta* as weapons of self-defence. The trainees also interacted with legal experts, psychologists and NGOs.

The training was aimed at making the participants physically fit, mentally alert and more self confident.

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90% of Women and Children in Delhi are Anaemic

The Indian Medical Association says nine out of 10 adolescent girls, children and pregnant women in east Delhi are anaemic and the number is rising.

The figures are based on an ongoing survey in east Delhi, with as many as 25,000 respondents, including MCD students and residents of about 35 slums. The study has found that India leads in iron deficiency anaemia in the world and 90 per cent adolescent girls and about 85 per cent adult women are anaemic. Figures also show that 24 per cent of adolescent girls between 10 and 19 years suffer from severe anaemia.

Anaemia is a silent energy-drainer and one of the major causes of decreased productivity and decreased scholastic achievement leading to school dropouts. Nearly 20 per cent of maternal deaths in the country is due to anaemia.

Figures show most rapists are under 25

Figures collected by the Delhi Police show on the basis of profiles of rapists arrested till April, 2005 that 80 per cent of the total rapists were below 25 years of age. Of them, 62 per cent were in the age group of 18-25.

In 21 per cent of the cases, the age of rapist was between 25 and 35. Till April end, 174 cases of rape were reported in Delhi.

According to police figures, in over 95 per cent cases the accused is known to the rapist, which is why rapes may be difficult to prevent.

Haryana Incentives for Women

The Haryana govt. has announced several incentives for the empowerment of women. The govt. announced two percent rebate in registration fees for transfer of property in the name of women. and a further rebate of 10 paise per unit would be given in electricity bills in case the domestic connection was in the name of a woman. A women cooperative bank would be set up and its unique feature would be that it would be run by women themselves.

Moreover, children would be provided health cards and their health check-up would be conducted at regular intervals.

Members' Visits

- Member Yasmeeen Abrar visited Sawai Madhopur and discussed women related issues with the district collector. Later, she met women sarpanches and held a meeting with the officers of Women and Child Development. Ms. Abrar also visited the National Park and heard the problems of women workers. The Member visited the district sub-jail which she found dark and unclean and expressed dissatisfaction with the treatment meted out to the inmates. Later, she visited the Nari-Niketan. She also visited the Neem Chowki Mahalla, where the women said that they were being exploited by their Beedi employers. She also meet the NGOs of Sawai Madhopur, who complained about the non-cooperation of the local administration.
- Member Neeva Konwar visited Assam and held discussions with the Chairperson and members of the State Commission for Women. Later, she interacted with the NGOs and attended a public hearing on the problems of women weavers. Next, she visited Shillong and called on the Chief Minister and discussed problems of women in Meghalaya. Ms. Konwar also attended a seminar on the 'Problems of family ties/



Member Neeva Konwar at the Public Hearing on women weavers at Sualkuchi Village in Kamrup Distt., Assam



A view of the audience

Registration of Marriage', which discussed the problems faced by Khasi women. On her way back, she visited the women shelter home at Jalukbari. She found the home in a dilapidated condition; there was no provision of counselling of the inmates. She recommended that the mentally retarded child of an inmate be sent to the Tezpur Mental hospital for treatment.

- Taking suo motu cognizance of an incident of brutality on women, Member Malini Bhattacharya visited Howrah to enquire into the case, wherein four women from the nearby village of Kundalia were apprehended by a group of villagers on the charge of stealing groundnuts. They were so brutally beaten up that two of them died and the other two were severely injured. Later, she visited the Block Panchayat office and talked to the Chairman local administration and OC. Jaipur Thana. Thereafter, she visited the incident spot. After getting conflicting reports of the incident, Ms Bhattacharya asked the authorities to make a proper investigation and arrest all those mentioned in the FIR. Ms Bhattacharya also directed the local authorities to defuse tension in the area and provide relief to the victims.

In addition, thirty three per cent of the posts of teachers has been reserved for women. The uniform allowance for girls has been doubled from Rs. 100 to Rs. 200 per month. Bicycles are to be given free of cost to girl students of Class VI, VII and VIII, belonging to the weaker sections of the society, who do not have a middle school in their villages.

Banda Incident

The National Commission for Women had sent a two-member team comprising Member Yasmeen Abrar and Deputy Secretary Gurpreet Deo to enquire into the alleged incident of "Sati" at Bahundari village in the Banda district of U.P.

According to reports, the half-burnt body of 75-year old Ram Kumari was found on her husband's pyre on 7th May. However, the police took no action till the villagers started flocking to the place to offer prayers.

The team found glaring discrepancies between police investigation and the statements made by the villagers. The team also pointed out that the incident could not be labelled as 'Sati' as evidences did not lead to the same. The team has, thus, recommended that the case be handed over to the State Crime Branch and has given two months time to the state government to carry out the investigation.

Survival Tips for Women

- Carry a weapon for self-defence - could be a compass, knife or pepper spray.
- Even things that women normally use, like a hairpin or a dupatta, can come in handy to ward off assailants.
- Move out in groups at night, lonely girls make for easy targets.
- Enrol for kick-boxing or any martial arts classes. In addition to helping one fight back, they add to one's confidence.
- Eat well and stay healthy.
- Be alert at all times.
- Avoid secluded and dark spaces after dusk.
- If driving back alone at night - roll up the windows, do not offer lifts or stop on the way, change the route you take, tell someone when you start so they can time your journey and raise an alarm if required.

Courtesy : 'Times of India'

Important Decisions

New law to make DNA test must in rape cases

- The amended CrPC Bill passed in Rajya Sabha makes DNA test in rape cases mandatory. Further, there will be a mandatory judicial inquiry in case of a rape in police custody.

In a move aimed at avoiding harassment of women by police, the Bill also prohibits arrest of women after sunset and before sunrise barring "exceptional circumstances".

HC for pay equity

- In a ruling, which is expected to bring women employees on par with their male counterparts vis a vis pay structure, the Delhi High Court has held if the nature of work of both sexes is the same, there should not be any discrimination with regard to their pay scales. Designation cannot be held to be the determining factor in such cases.

Women's Quota Act

- The Assam Government took a major step towards economically empowering women by passing the Women's Reservation Act during the current Assembly Session. The Act will provide 30 per cent reservation in vacancies, barring in Central and judicial services (Grade A), to economically backward women.

State decides to hike scholarships for girls

- Taking serious note of the findings on school dropout rates among SC/ST girl students, the Maharashtra government has decided to hike the scholarships for the girl students from Rs. 300 to Rs. 600.

Gangrape accused can't get bail on default

- The Delhi High Court held that pending investigation relating to an offence punishable with death or life imprisonment or imprisonment for a term not less than ten years, the accused could not get "bail on default" till 90 days of judicial custody.

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