



Rashtra Mahila

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Editor's Column

In a far-reaching decision, the Delhi Cabinet has made it mandatory to include mother's name in all certificates, application forms and documents issued by the state government. Henceforth, voter's identity cards, driving licences, ration cards, school, birth and death certificates, cutting across all sectors and departments would also include the mother's name.

This, indeed, is a big step towards women's empowerment. Moreover, the particulars of both mother and father in the documents would help in establishing the identity of the person concerned in a more specific manner.

The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development, in turn, has also asked the state governments to include

the names of both parents on all official documents, thereby acknowledging that both parents are equally important in officially defining an individual's identity.

FOCUS

MOTHER'S NAME

The resonance of this change would reach far and deep. Till now, the insistence only on the father's identity underscored the role of the mother and her presence in an individual's life.

However, in recent changes, the mother's name as a guardian is sufficient to open a bank account or gain admission in a school. Along with laws reiterating the woman's right to property and to the disposal of her inheritance, the stature

of women has enhanced considerably in the present social structure.

Thus, though law alone cannot change the status of women in the Indian society, unless accompanied by political will and simultaneous change in the patriarchal mind-set, yet it can provide the tools which will encourage and help hasten change.

The Constitution provides for equal right and equal protection for women, prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of sex and empowers the state to take affirmative discrimination in favour of women.

The Delhi Government has taken an affirmative action in the right direction and we hope others states will follow suit.

Chairperson Visits Bangkok

NCW Chairperson, Dr. Girija Vyas attended the Regional Policy Dialogue - follow up on Women's Health and Right Advocacy at Bangkok organised by the Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women. She spoke on sexual reproduction and health rights of women highlighting issues of maternal mortality, infanticide and violence against women.

Senior Government officials, parliamentarians, representatives of NGOs, United Nation agencies, the media and academia came together to discuss issues of concern for sexual reproductive and health rights in South Asia. The meeting clarified and formulated strategies for the work of the Regional Task Force.



Dr. Girija Vyas (centre) at the seminar.

NCW Panel on Alleged Mass Rape in Manipur

The National Commission for Women (NCW), which recently visited Lungthulien and Parbung in Tipaimukh subdivision of Manipur to conduct an independent inquiry into the alleged mass rape of Hmar women by militants, observed that the “atrocities” committed against women were a “shocking incident”.

The NCW Member Malini Bhattacharya, who headed the panel, said that a few rape victims were minor girls adding that in case of minor girls, their mere statements that they had been raped could be accepted as true by the court according to a recent Supreme Court order.

Ms. Bhattacharya further informed that she had interviewed 21 of the 25 alleged rape victims, 13 in Lungthulien and 8 in Parbung, during her visit to the area.

The NCW is to shortly submit its reports to the Centre and the Manipur Govt wherein it made several proposals to uplift the living conditions in this area.

The NCW member, accompanied by officials of both Mizoram and

Manipur, also visited Hmar refugees at Sakawrdai refugee camp.

In the wake of such atrocities, the NCW has also demanded that armed forces be stationed in two villages in Manipur’s Churachandpur district.



Ms. Malini Bhattacharya addressing the refugees at Sakawrdai in Mizoram

Compensation for Victims of Rape

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has envisaged a scheme for paying upto Rs. 5 lakh in compensation to rape victims.

If cleared the state will soon be paying compensation for a crime, which according to the National Crime Records Bureau is registered once every half hour.

Depending on each case, the amount of compensation can go upto Rs. 5 lakh. If the victim is an earning member of a family, the family will get compensation of Rs. 2 lakh. If she isn’t an earning member, family members will be paid Rs. 1 lakh.

Compensation for minor victims will be given to their guardians. If the victim is killed, the compensation

could go up to Rs. 5 lakh depending on her employment history and number of dependents.

The first instalment of Rs. 20,000 will be paid within three weeks of application, which must include a copy of the FIR and a medical report confirming rape. The balance of the compensation amount will be handed over the course of the year, subject to the victim’s cooperation with the police in the trial of the rape accused.

This decision will be taken by district level relief & rehabilitation boards, set up by the state governments, and headed by collectors. The boards will also have monitoring committees to provide to the victim’s legal, medical and psychological aid.

This is India

A woman from Hirankhedi village of Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh accused of having illicit relations with a fellow villager, was summoned before the village council that decided to find out the truth by calling snake charmers for a traditional ‘test’.

After hearing her case, the snake charmers directed the woman to walk a distance of 100 yards while keeping a piece of red hot iron on her palm to prove her fidelity even as Pappu Nath, accused of having an illicit relationship with her, pleaded that he treated her as his sister.

The woman, however, was saved from the ordeal at the last minute, as police intervened acting on prior information. Seven people have been arrested in this connection.

WHO : *Chulhas* bane of Rural Women, Children

According to a new study conducted by WHO soot bellowing out of *chulhas* in rural homes could be claiming lives of several lakh women and children. More than one-third of children dying every year and falling victims to acute respiratory infection is caused by breathing noxious air inside their homes.

The study showed that women contact acute infection of lower respiratory tract, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, cataract, tuberculosis and lung cancer from cooking in open gas stoves.

Haryana to Keep Track of Pregnant Women

Grappling with a low sex ratio and increasing incidents of female foeticide, the Haryana administration has set up a district level authority to keep track of all pregnant women from the third month of pregnancy till delivery and ultrasound centres in the state.

After the delivery, the field staff of the appropriate authority would visit the family concerned to find out the fate of the new-born child. In case, the baby is found missing or reported to have died an unnatural death and a case of female foeticide detected, the authority would take action against the ultrasound centre concerned and the parents of the child.

Self-Defence Tool for Women

Clearock Enterprises in Bangalore launched Oleo Zapp, a self-defence tool that can be used against potential attackers to disable them temporarily.

Oleo Zapp is an aerosol spray comprising Oleoresin Capsaicin, a powerful extract from red chilli. When

Important Decisions

Take Victim's Word to Convict Rapists : SC

The Supreme Court has held that the courts can convict a rape accused on the sole basis of the evidence given by a victim, unless her testimony is proved to be infirm and not trustworthy.

“If the totality of circumstances appearing on the record of the case discloses that the prosecutrix doesn't have a strong motive to falsely involve the person charged, the court should ordinarily have no hesitation in accepting her evidence.”

Interim Maintenance Default to Cost Husband Dear : HC

The Delhi High Court has ruled that if a husband commits default in payment of interim maintenance to his wife and children, he is not entitled to any matrimonial relief in divorce proceedings by him or against him. This ruling will benefit women who, in several cases, are left to fend for themselves as husbands get divorce without paying maintenance.

A division bench refused to grant divorce to a man who had failed to pay interim maintenance and litigation expenses to his wife.

Adopt a Baby, Earn Leave

The Union government has decided to give maternity leave, earlier enjoyed by only natural

mothers to a female government servant, with less than two children, on valid adoption of a child below the age of one year by an authority competent to grant leave, for a period of 135 days immediately after the date of valid adoption.

During the period of the adoption leave, the employee will be paid leave salary equal to the pay drawn immediately before going on leave.

Set Up Sexual Harassment Panel

The National Commission for Women has sent a reminder to the army top brass about the Supreme Court order that enjoins upon all government and non-government work places to have committees to deal with cases of sexual harassment.

The reminder was sent when the wife of an army officer approached the Commission with allegations of harassment against her husband.

The NCW letter says “had the committee been set up, the complainant could have easily approached it before coming to the NCW”.

As another junior woman officer has come forward to level charges of sexual harassment by two of her male superiors, the Commission says it is high time the armed forces followed the guidelines given by the Supreme Court in the Vishakha judgement to resolve such cases.

sprayed, the extract acts as a severe eye, nose and throat irritant, which immediately destabilises the attacker for 30-45 minutes with no permanent side effects. Through a special aerosol spray processing, the entire 55 ml content can be released in six seconds

from a safe distance of six to eight feet.

A half-a-second spray is required to disable an attacker and immediately seek help or escape to a safe distance. It will help young women and old people to defend themselves against miscreants.

Members' Visits

- Member Nirmala Venkatesh enquired into the acid attack on a 27-year old girl named Hemavathi in Bangalore. After visiting her at the hospital, Mrs. Venkatesh wrote to the Chief Minister, Karnataka for financial assistance for the treatment of the victim. The CM promised to give 4-5 lakhs from the CM's fund. An interim relief of Rs. 50,000 has already been released.

Later, she visited Mysore and attended a meeting of Bhavi women construction workers to discuss their problems and also attended a Dalit women rally on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti celebration. She also enquired into the bigamy and divorce case of Pusalata and Vijaylaxmi respectively.



Mrs. Venkatesh with the acid attack victim

- Member Neeva Konwar attended a two-day NCW sponsored workshop on 'Child Marriage and its ill effects' organised by the Indian Rural Technology Development Institute, Manikpur, Pratapgarh in U.P.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Konwar emphasised the need for curbing child marriages which caused early motherhood leading to maternal mortality. She said in UP about 60% girls get married when they are below 18 and emphasised the need for sensitisation and awareness creation to curb this social evil.



Ms. Neeva Konwar addressing the workshop

From the Complaint Cell

The National Commission for Women received a complaint from a resident of New Delhi in which the complainant said she was married to a resident of Bhopal, M.P. in May, 1999. She alleged that she had been harassed/threatened by her husband and brother-in-laws, who were demanding dowry from her.

This is the second marriage of the husband and there is an age difference of 22 years between the two. The husband has a son and a daughter aged 19 years and 16 years respectively from his first wife and a daughter aged 5 years from his second wife. The wife is from a very poor family and her father died before her marriage. The husband, after the death of his first wife, wanted to remarry for the sake of his children and to take care of his household. Therefore, this marriage was a sort of compromise under the circumstances.

The matter was taken up by the Commission and notice was sent to the Police for taking suitable action against her husband. The Superintendent of Police, Bhopal conducted an inquiry and sent the report to the Commission wherein it was indicated that the complainant did not go to Bhopal for evidence before the police. On receipt of the action taken report, the complainant informed the Commission that she was ready to live with her husband if he gave assurance of good behaviour and security. On the basis of her request, the Commission issued summons to both the parties to appear before the Commission. An amicable settlement was reached between the parties. The husband agreed to take responsibility of his wife and daughter and promised that there would be no occasion for any further complaint.

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