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## Editor's Column

Delhi is witnessing one nightmare after another. In a span of two months, yet another abduction and rape of a young girl has taken place, close on the heels of the abduction and gangrape of a call centre employee in a moving vehicle. The victim, a resident of Sultanpuri, was allegedly raped because she protested against the lewd comments made by the criminals.

If figures are anything to go by, despite tall claims by the Delhi Police, women continue to be unsafe in the city. The city witnesses at least one rape each day - 433 cases have occurred so far this year.

However, to make matters worse, the latest crime in Sultanpuri has also raised questions about the efficiency of the police force. Six hundred cops took two hours to find the woman even after the police received a call regarding the incident from the boy, who was accompanying the victim. If the call had been traced in time,

**FOCUS**
**Rape**

perhaps the crime could have been prevented. The truth remains that the accused managed to roam free on the streets of outer Delhi even after a PCR call was made about the girl's abduction. The rape took place an hour later.

In the wake of such recurring heinous incidents, the obvious demand is more stringent punishment for the rapists. But the real deterrent against such crimes is certainty and not severity of punishment.

The most important imperatives would be better investigation, competent prosecutors, unbiased lawyers and a sympathetic judiciary as well as having victim protection programmes so that the victims are not threatened or bought over by the perpetrators. The last and not the least is to ensure quick trial of rape cases through fast-track courts. If the rapist is convicted and sentenced within 3 months of the crime, only then people will believe that the law of the land does protect women.

## Aarushi Murder Case

The Chairperson NCW held a press conference in the Commission to express her 'sadness' at the closure report of the case. She said it would be unfortunate if the premier investigating agency like the CBI expressed its helplessness to nail down the culprits, but added that she had full faith in the judiciary and was sure that the culprits would be punished. Dr. Vyas said that the Commission had written letters to the Home Minister and the Law Minister to ensure that justice was done in the case.

She also said that the Commission had taken suo moto cognizance of the alleged rape of a minor dalit girl in Banda district by a ruling party MLA from Naraini. Meanwhile, the Commission has asked for a report from S.P. Banda and have decided to set up a committee to make an independent enquiry, she added.



*Dr. Girija Vyas addressing the press meet.*

The National Conference was organised by the Lawyers' Collective, Women's Rights Initiatives, the National Commission for Women and was supported by the United Nations Trust Fund to evaluate the implementation of the Act during the last four years.

Welcoming the participants, Ms. Indira Jaisingh said that the Lawyers' Collective had realized the need to acknowledge the existence of domestic violence and a corresponding need to formulate laws to combat it. But, she added that laws were as good as they were implemented. She said, in our country, marriages are considered as insurance against violence yet the single largest user of this law were married women, who have no right to matrimonial homes and could be thrown out at any moment. She said that it was time for women to demand a right to their matrimonial homes.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Annie F. Stenhammer, Regional Director of UNIFEM said that her organisation was committed to work for excluded women and fight for women against domestic violence.

In her keynote address, NCW Member-Secretary Ms. Zohra Chatterji said that the Domestic Violence Act provided women a civil recourse to initiate legal action against the perpetrators. Married women, divorcees, widows or women in live-in-relationship were using the Act to seek relief. However, she regretted that there was lack of uniformity of practice in the states as many states have not provided proper protection officers or service providers nor a separate



*Member Secretary Ms. Zohra Chatterji lighting the lamp. Ms. Indira Jaisingh, Ms. Yasmeen Abrar, Ms. Anne Stenhammer and Smt. Meira Kumar look on*

budgetary allocation for this scheme.

In her inaugural address, Lok Sabha Speaker, Ms. Meira Kumar said that it was ironical that in India, on one hand, women were worshipped as Ma Durga, yet they were subjected to domestic violence, honour killings and female foeticide. She said that 30% of women in India have experienced domestic violence; the reason being the perception of women as a weaker sex. She urged the Govt. agencies, the media, the civil society and the NGOs to work in tandem to eliminate gender violence.

While giving a vote of thanks, Member Yasmeen Abrar said that the Domestic Violence Act should be translated in Hindi to reach women at the grassroot level. Earlier, she released the report on the Implementation of the Domestic Violence Act.

The working sessions mainly focused on presentation of comments on the findings of the fourth monitoring report. It was observed that there was

an urgent need to sensitize and train the judiciary and police and also make an assessment of the beneficiaries under the Act.

### Profile in courage

A 15-year-old tribal girl, who was forced to parade naked through four villages in Birbhum district for daring to fall in love with a boy from another community, has been nominated for the National Bravery Award. She showed exemplary courage by filing a police complaint against her tormentors, who had also threatened her if she went to the police.

Though her parents did not want to lodge a complaint as they feared a social boycott and knew what lay in store for her yet the girl mustered courage to identify the culprits at a police identification parade.

The NCW salutes the brave girl and hopes that she would be a role model for girls in similar situations.

## Mothers' Day Celebration at Kottayam

Dr. Girija Vyas, Chairperson, National Commission for Women attended the valedictory function of the Mothers' Day Celebration of the Knanaya Arch Diocese at Kottayam.



*Dr. Girija Vyas addressing the large gathering at the Mothers' Day Celebration*

The colourful rally comprised thousands of Knanaya women, who had gathered at the large play ground of O.L.L. Higher Secondary School. The valedictory meeting commenced with Mar. Mathew Moolakatt, the Arch Bishop of the Diocese in the chair. While inaugurating the meeting, Dr. Vyas expressed her pleasure in being with such a large crowd of mothers and talked at length on the present pitiable status, problems and



*A view of the audience*

exploitation of women in India. Sharing her experiences as Chairperson of the Women's Commission, she dwelt on the role of women in various fields of life and said that the condition of women in the literate state of Kerala was much better. She said that women, in general, should uphold motherhood - and fight for their rights. Mar Joseph Pandarasseril, the auxiliary bishop of the Diocese honoured eight Knanaya women for their remarkable achievements in the fields of Education, Politics, Sports and Health.

Later on, she met the NGOs to discuss various initiatives that can be taken by them to enhance the cause of women's empowerment.

### NCW takes cognizance of attack on presiding officer

National Commission for Women Chairperson Dr. Girija Vyas while addressing a press conference at Alappuzha said she was "anguished over the government doing nothing" after a woman presiding officer was attacked during the local body polls allegedly by Communist Party of India (Marxist) activists during the elections at Mararikulam.

She said the charges framed by the police on the accused were very weak and they were out on bail already. The incident was a shame on the democratic setup and appalling considering such an incident had occurred in a highly literate State like Kerala, she added.

Stating that the NCW would demand a report from the State government and the State Women's Commission as well on what it had done regarding the incident, Dr. Vyas said the SWC should have acted independently without bothering what the State government did or which party was in power.

The government, too, should have taken up the issue as a special case so as to prevent such incidents in future.

The Chairperson said that NCW would also set up an independent committee to conduct further probe into the episode. Earlier, she had conducted a hearing with T. Usha, the presiding officer, who was attacked in the polls.

● Member Secretary Ms. Zohra Chatterji visited the Central Prison in Bangalore. She found the prison well-managed having medical and counselling facilities. The convicts and the undertrials were satisfied with arrangements for their children residing with them. However, economic activities were confined only to agarbatti making, bakery and tailoring.

She also met the Member-Secretary of the State Commission for Women. She was told about the Commission's Suraksha scheme, which provided financial assistance of Rs. 20,000 to 2 lacs to victims of acid attack and poor women, who had succumbed to burns.

Ms. Chatterji also visited the Family Counselling Centre run by NGO Vanitha Sahyavani in association with Bangalore police. A helpline funded by the police is operated for Bangalore City by the NGO for 12 hours. Ms Chatterji's idea of setting up a national helpline supported by NCW was greatly welcomed.

Later in her meeting with the Principal Secretary, Home, the Member-Secretary requested recruitment of more women constables and officers.

● Ms. Chatterji also visited the Nari Bandi Niketan in Lucknow. She found the prison neat, clean and well-managed having a 26-bedded hospital. There were 252 convicts and 75 undertrial prisoners. Out of 252 inmates, 113 were in the age group of 40-60 years and a large number were undertrials held U/S 498-A. There is a creche and a nursery school and economic activities like tailoring, embroidery, cleaning and packing of foodgrains are available for the inmates.

Later, she met Shri Karamvir Singh, DGP, U.P. to discuss status of crime against women in U.P. The DGP pointed out that 50% of the crimes pertain to cases of so called abduction under Section 363/366 of IPC, which were mostly consensual in nature and, therefore, posed a problem to the police as the couple tended to leave the State and thus recovery of major girls was not possible. As a result, the cases remain pending. He urged that NCW may study the issue and suggest appropriate amendments to the laws in keeping with the changing social values.

Ms. Chatterji was informed that U.P. has Mahila Thanas in every district and in the latest recruitment of 35,000

personnel, 20% would be women. It was suggested that the State Government might consider designating women police officers as protection officers for better implementation of the Domestic Violence Act.

The Member Secretary also met Secretary WCD, who specially highlighted that there was need for central assistance for proper implementation of the Domestic Violence Act since it was an Act of the Central Government.

### NGO Column

Shri Amitra Sudan Chakravorty from Tripura writes "our organisation MANAB has undertaken a study on the 'Status of Marriage Recording in Tripura', where registration of marriage is compulsory with effect from 2004. Our organisation believes that registration alone can go a long way to empower women to exercise their rights and prevent trafficking of women in the guise of marriage. To begin our research, we have filed an application under Right to Information Act 2005, the reply of which is incomplete and shows the failure of the state to ensure 100% marriage registration in Tripura. The second appeal in this regard before the Tripura Information Commission has been fixed for hearing on 2.1.2011. This is our small initiative to protect the basic human rights of women in Tripura".

**NB :** In order to recognise the valuable contribution of NGOs to women's empowerment, from this issue, we are introducing an 'NGO column' in which inspiring initiatives undertaken by NGOs to advance the cause of women's empowerment and prevent violation of their rights will be projected. You are invited to share your experiences.

- Editor

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[www.ncw.nic.in](http://www.ncw.nic.in)