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In a welcome move, the Supreme Court has taken up cudgels on behalf of the sex workers, stating that they have been forced into the flesh trade for sheer survival. It has asked the centre and the states to frame schemes for their vocational training to make them economically self-reliant so that they can lead their lives with dignity.

However, the court was aware of the enormity of the task. "We are fully conscious of the fact that simply by our orders, the sex workers will not be rehabilitated immediately. The states should not only come out with schemes indicating therein rehabilitation of the sex workers but they should also demonstrate their commitment to the cause by coming out with some concrete results, at least, "in phases", it said.

The court asked the panel set up by it to provide a list of sex-workers, who were living under dire

circumstances and were willing for rehabilitation, initially focusing on the four metros. Holding that the right to live with dignity is a constitutional right, the court sought suggestions for formulating conditions which would enable those, who wished to continue working as sex workers, to do so 'with dignity.'

Comparing the plight of the sex workers with women characters in literature, who sacrificed their lives to feed a starving family, the court urged the society to sympathise rather than look down upon them.

FOCUS

REHABILITATION OF SEX-WORKERS

Observing that the Government has so far shown a lack of commitment, the court termed the contents of the affidavits filed by the centre and the various state

governments on court's earlier orders, on schemes to rehabilitate the sex workers, at "best vague and too general" and hence ordered the secretaries of social welfare departments of all states to meet the panel chairman to discuss "proper" schemes.

The court admitted that "It will take long time, but we have to work patiently. What we have done in this case is to present the situation of sex workers in the country in correct light. It is ultimately the people of the country, particularly, the young people, who by their idealism and patriotism can solve the massive problems of the sex workers."

The Supreme Court has made a beginning and we hope that the centre and the states will work out practical, implementable schemes at the earliest to rehabilitate the sex workers so that they can get their rightful place in the society and lead their lives with dignity.

COPS TO BE SUSPENDED FOR NOT REGISTERING FIRs

Reacting strongly to a newspaper report "Capital's Shame: 5 rapes in the 48 hours,' the Ministry of Women and Child Development has suggested tough measures to tackle rising cases of rape and atrocities against women. It said that all cases of rape must be tried through fast track courts; the hearing must be on a day-to-day basis, More over, FIRs in all such cases should be immediately lodged and any delay, dilatory tactics, soft pedalling or procrastination must invite exemplary penal action. For instance, "any police officer not lodging an FIR must be suspended forthwith".

The measures would have a telling effect and would provide women with security and status. The ministry is also in the process of amending the laws related to rape. The laws would be made more stringent and a change in the definition of rape is also being contemplated. A committee is already working on the matter.

A scheme to compensate rape victims was launched on August 1. Under the scheme, ₹ 2 lakh will be provided to a rape victim. In case, the victim is a minor or is mentally or physically challenged, the amount may be increased to ₹ 3 lakh.

Ms. Mamta Sharma, NCW's New Chairperson



Till recently, President of the Rajasthan Mahila Congress, Ms. Mamta Sharma took over as the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women with effect from 2nd August, 2011.

Belonging to an illustrious political family, Ms. Sharma joined active politics in 1985 and in 1986 was nominated as the Executive Member of the Rajasthan Red Cross Society and later became the General Secretary of the Rajasthan Pradesh Congress. In 1998, she won the Assembly election from Bundi and in 2002 was appointed Parliamentary Secretary during Cabinet expansion.

She was re-elected to the State Assembly from the Bundi constituency in 2003 and was the only woman candidate out of 18 candidates to have won.

Extensively travelled in India and abroad, Ms. Sharma, with her varied experience as a political and social activist will be able to provide a pro-active and dynamic leadership, devoted to the cause of women.

We welcome Ms. Mamta Sharma to the Commission and wish her a very successful tenure.

States to set up anti-human trafficking units at district level

With increasing number of cases of human trafficking-selling of girls and children from backward districts, the Centre has asked the States to set up anti-human trafficking units at district level expeditiously and appoint nodal officers to monitor the situation. The centre also emphasized that capacity building of the law enforcement agencies and first responders should be prioritized in view of the increasing trafficking-related crimes. The States have also been advised to set up helplines and special desks at police stations and control rooms to address the situation on a priority basis. The Government is also proposing to strengthen laws related to checking such crimes.

Thailand Delegation Visits NCW

A delegation comprising three researchers from Thailand visited NCW to understand the status of Indian women in politics as well as women empowerment and development. Member Wansuk Syiem welcomed the delegation and explained the mandate of the Commission and Mr. Raj Singh, Deputy Secretary, spoke about the constitution and functioning of the Commission. The researchers said that there was no statutory body like the NCW in Thailand and their main problem was related to the migrants. In reply to their questions about the legal and research cell of the Commission, coordinators Lilabati and Smita explained the functioning of the legal cell and Shri Jawahari Singh, SRO, briefed them about the Research Cell.



Ms. Wansuk Syiem (Right) with the delegation from Thailand

Rohtak announces Rs. 1 Lakh award for sex test tip-offs

In order to stop sex-selective abortion in Haryana, which has a skewed sex-ratio, the district administration in Rohtak has announced a ₹ 1 lakh award in cash to informers, who would inform the Haryana government about errant ultrasound clinics, engaged in determining sex of foetuses. The name of the informer will not be disclosed as the objective is to stop such practices.

Dr. Charu WaliKhanna joins as NCW Member



A leading women's rights lawyer and a former Executive Member of the Bar Association of India. Dr. Charu WaliKhanna joined the National Commission for Women as a Member with effect from 2nd August, 2011.

An M.A. in Sociology with Post Graduate diplomas in Intellectual Property Rights Law and Human Rights and International Humanitarian and Refugee Laws, Dr. WaliKhanna has been working in the field of women's rights, advancing the cause of vulnerable and marginalized sections of the society, especially, women.

An author of several books, including "Laws on Violence against Women", Supreme Court & High Court Judgement relating to Women and Children" "Women - Silent Victims In Armed Conflict: An Area Study of Jammu & Kashmir", she has also prepared simple self-help manuals for women in regional languages on special Constitutional Provisions for Women, Right to Life; Violence against Women, including, Domestic Violence, Dowry, Female Foeticide, Sexual Harassment, How to file an FIR, Legal Aid; Panchayati Raj & Governance, among others.

With her extensive knowledge on law and dedicated work related to downtrodden women, she will be an asset to the Commission. We welcome Dr. WaliKhanna to NCW.

Action against errant NRI husbands

In the wake of alarming rise in fraudulent marriages by NRI grooms, particularly in the Punjab, the passport office in Jalandhar has started impounding passports of NRI grooms, who desert their brides.

The provision that exists in the Passport Act and is being put to use, perhaps for the first time in the country is helping deserted brides.

So far, about two dozen passports of NRIs have been impounded. The office has also started a women grievance section and a helpline where deserted brides can complain. Over 50 NRIs have been issued show cause notices, before the passport office finally impounded their passports. Section 10(3) of the Passport Act states that the regional passport officer or the issuing authority can suspend or impound the passports of such offenders in public interest after issuing a show cause notice.

In this way, the menace can be effectively addressed as it works both inside and outside the country. Once the passport is impounded, the errant husband's travel ends. In case he is in India, it would not be possible for him to go back unless he settles his marital discord legally or mutually.

According to National Commission for Women and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, of the 30,000 women deserted by NRI husbands 15,000 are from Punjab's Doaba region alone.

Do you Know?

- One out of every **140 women** in India runs the risk of dying during childbirth.
- Only **49%** of Indian women use some form of modern contraceptives
- **53%** are assisted by trained health workers while giving birth
- An average Indian woman is expected to **live for 66 yrs** - among the lowest in the world
- Only **11%** of the seats in govt. are occupied by women

These are the findings of Save the Children's "State of the World's mothers 2011" report. It looks at how good the life of a woman or a mother is around the globe. The report ranks India right on top among the 12 countries that account for two-thirds of both under-five mortality and maternal deaths in the world. Overall, India's position has fallen further as compared to last year's index, slipping from 73 to 75.

IMPORTANT DECISIONS

- **Divorce pending, man can't drive wife out of home: Bombay HC**

The Bombay high court has ruled that a pending divorce case would not absolve a man of his duty to provide a residence to his wife, who had complained of domestic violence. The court pointed out that the objective of the Domestic Violence Act, 2005 was “to provide more effective protection to helpless and shelterless victims and to ensure the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution. Merely because the divorce proceedings are pending, the wife, who was allegedly subjected to domestic violence, cannot be deprived of claiming residence in the shared household.

- **Second wife can also sue husband for bigamy, says SC**

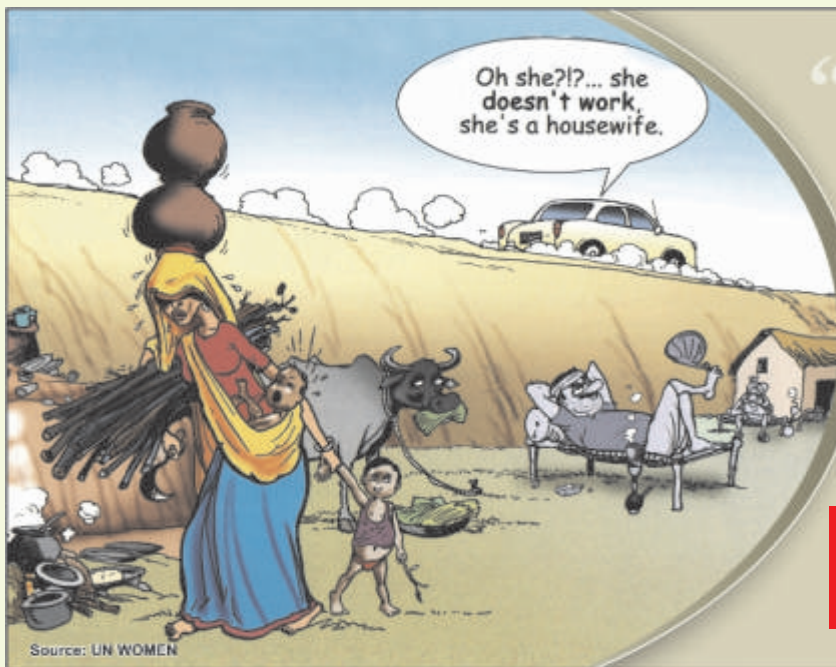
The Supreme Court has ruled that a woman with whom a second marriage is performed is also entitled to drag the man to court under section 494 of the Indian Penal Code which makes bigamy a criminal offence, punishable with a jail term of maximum seven years.

- **Wife-bashing has no place in civilised society; Court**

A Delhi city court has sentenced a man to three years in jail for piercing his wife with a trident after a quarrel with her over a petty issue. The Additional Sessions Judge while sentencing also imposed a fine of Rs. 50,000 on the man to be given to his wife and said, “A message is required to be sent, loud and clear that wife-bashing has no place in a civilised society and violent husbands deserve no mercy.’

- **HC Upholds cousins' marriage after conversion**

The Delhi High Court has said that cousins born in the Hindu community can marry, each other after converting to Christianity as it dismissed a plea of a retired judge against his magistrate son, who married the maternal uncle's daughter after conversion. "Respondents (couple) have rightly converted as per Section 3 of the Indian Christian Marriage Act. Therefore, after conversion into Christianity, the marriage does not fall under the “sapinda” relationship (which is prohibited under the Hindu Marriage Act),” said Mr. Justice Suresh Kait while upholding the marriage.



Source: UN WOMEN

“It's time to change your attitude towards women”

The share of unpaid activities for females was 51% as compared to only 33% for males in all the states of India.

Let's make women's work count in the economy.

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