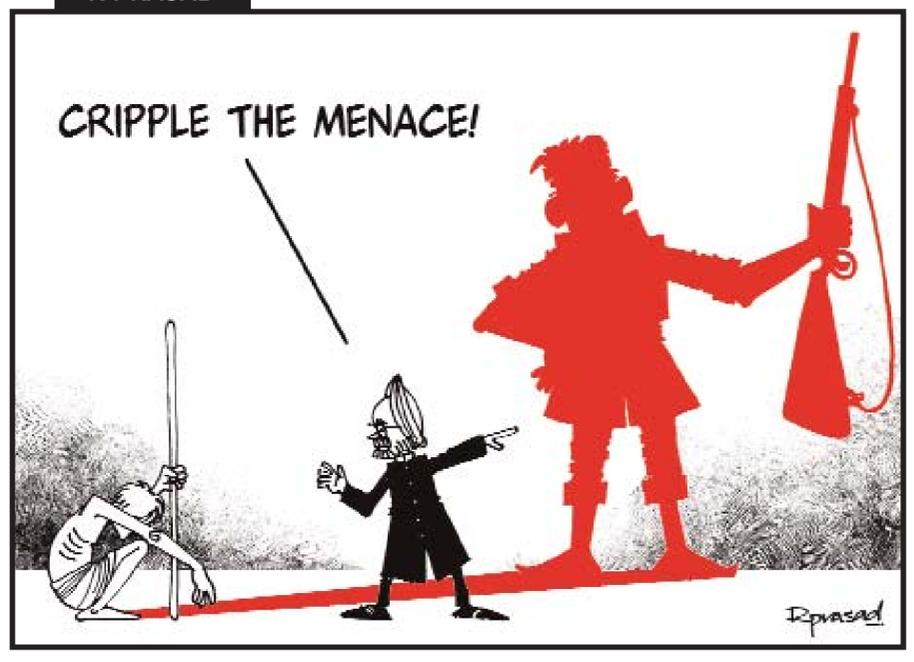


R PRASAD



Architects of Act on domestic violence caught in a catfight

By Vrinda Gopinath
in New Delhi

IT HAS barely been a year since the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, was implemented. But the law has already turned into a bone of contention between Union minister of women and child development Renuka Chowdhury and the Act's chief initiator, Indira Jaising.

The last few days have seen accusations flying thick and fast, e-petitions and activism, as both sides view each other with suspicion and fear over the attempt to review the Act on domestic violence.

Jaising, a senior Supreme Court advocate and director of the Lawyers' Collective Women's Rights Initiative, has accused Chowdhury of succumbing to male propaganda that the law was misused by women to victimise "innocent husbands and in-laws". The minister vehemently denied the charges.

It all began when Chowdhury invited Jaising to join a women lawyer's panel the ministry has set up.

The panel will advise and guide the ministry in drafting various women-centric bills. The ministry has a role in formulation of criminal, civil and labour welfare laws concerning women and frequently deals with proposals for amendment or enactment of new legislations.

To start with, the ministry listed six laws — including the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1986, and the Domestic Violence Act, 2005, — for the panel to study.

But the list of laws aroused Jaising's suspicions as to the real motive. "All five laws, except domestic violence Act, have been reviewed by various ministries and amended over time. Who is the ministry fooling?" the lawyer said.

Jaising turned down the invitation to join the panel — whose other members are Manali Singhal, Priya Hingorani and Priyaveer Kapur — and unleashed an e-campaign among women's organisations, networks and partners, to defeat any move to review the year-old law on domestic violence.



Renuka Chowdhury and Indira Jaising are at loggerheads over the Act.

But Chowdhury dismissed the charges with contempt. "It is an absurd accusation," she said.

"I do not know on what basis Indira Jaising has accused us of wanting to review the domestic violence law. I recommended the setting up of the panel as an advisory panel as we deal with so much legal work. Take for instance, the prevention of immoral trafficking of women. We have walked into a legal minefield by recommending that the

Jaising feels that the law is victimising innocents

client be punished. The panel of eminent women lawyers is meant to be an honorary one that will brief us when we approach the law ministry."

But Jaising was unconvinced by such protests. "The ministry has been hatching plans to review the domestic law for several months, because I had heard I was going to be on this panel several months ago, but the ministry denied it vehemently. Obviously they did not have the guts to go public then. What really stuns me is that no demands have come



from the women's movement (for any amendment). In that context we apprehend the ministry is succumbing to pressure from vocal groups of men, who believe in lawlessness and denial of rights to women."

As if to confirm Jaising's fears, a member of the panel concedes there are several wide interpretations of the domestic violence Act. "There has been some criticism of the law that the definition itself is too wide," she said, refusing to be named. "Even the clause of 'shared household' is open for interpretations. Can a wife claim the in-laws' house when she hasn't lived there?"

The Supreme Court has already struck down the statutory right to reside in the shared household in the Batra versus Batra case. According to Jaising, in a country where the joint family pattern of residence is the norm, the judgment virtually gives licence to men to throw out women from the shared household without fear of legal action.

Jaising's e-petition has already received a hundred signature in one week, with women's groups, individuals and activists on board.

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Raisina Tattle

Cauvery master

AMREESH is not aged, but in his mid-fifties. And he was not ailing to stop attending office, or signing official files. The Union minister of state for information and broadcasting, who was a Kannada film star before he jumped onto the political bangwagon, has sent a protest resignation on the Cauvery water dispute, and since has abstained from all official work. The MP for Manda, the birthplace of Cauvery, said the UPA administration would give all it has to the protracted Indo-US nuclear deal and not to the *aam aadmi*. That got his goat. But what has the I&B ministry got to do with a water dispute? Perhaps, he was "airing" his views.

Active Arjun

UNION minister of mines Sisram Oia has been under the weather for the past several months. Born in 1927, the freedom fighter from Rajasthan is one of the four oldest Union ministers in Manmohan Singh's Cabinet. His ill health has forced him to operate from home, rather than Sastri Bhavan where his office is located. The indisposed minister seldom attends Cabinet meetings, though he has nothing much to lecture about even if he does. The country's mines are all there in the wilderness, bare and dry!

Another veteran in the thick of things, human recourse development minister Arjun Singh, has not been keeping well too. Despite heavy and prolonged medication, the 1930-born leader has been regularly attending office and Cabinet meetings...more often seen with his walking stick. He hobbles into Sastri Bhavan at 11 am sharp and leaves at 1 pm. He meets the "aam-aadmi" at his home between 5 pm and 7 pm. Singh leads by example on human resource.



Conspicuous absence

SIBLING rivalry has put the brakes on Tamil Nadu chief minister Karunanidhi's proposal to anoint/appoint son M.K. Stalin as deputy chief minister. Pressure from his other son, M.K. Azhagiri, forced the DMK supremo to stall his plans for Stalin. The rift in the family was evident when Karunanidhi and his entire clan — close to 42 near and dear ones — recently attended a DMK youth wing conclave. Even Adhitya, the three-year-old son of Rajya Sabha MP Kanimozhi, was present.

But Azhagiri was conspicuously absent, and has vowed to spoil Stalin's party and stall sister Kanimozhi's entry into Manmohan Singh's council of ministers at the Centre. It's rumoured that the rebellious son has been grooming his daughter, Kayal Vizhi, for a stint at the Upper House from April next.

BJP's clarion call

THE BJP is contemplating a comeback call to all its dissidents, especially the special ones like Uma Bharti, just before its national executive on January 21 in New Delhi. It's like gathering forces to vault up its wary. "Let us remove the evil UPA". Even those wishing to keep Bharti, who has since launched her own party, out of the loop — Rajnath Singh and Kalyan Singh — have agreed to have the *sanyasin* back in the party fold. Her task has also been charted out: the responsibility of revitalising the party's Madhya Pradesh unit. Of course, the chief minister's post would be there for the taking.



Jaguars on the prowl

Each owner swears by the car, whether he chooses to flaunt it or not

By Kunal Doley
in New Delhi

THE THRILLS of driving an iconic marque can be experienced only by, yes, driving it. And nobody knows this better than the select group of connoisseurs who possess these cars. As news of Indian auto giant Tata Motors buying Ford's iconic British brands Jaguar and Land Rover spread, die-hard 'Jag' aficionados recalled their pride and moments of ecstasy with one of the most loved cars of all times.

"It's like a relationship that never ends," said Navinder Singh, an avid car collector and enthusiast. "It's as if the car has a life running inside it. You can fall in love with the car and

'It's as if my Jaguar has a life running inside it'

once you do, you can never switch to any other make," he said.

Singh, however, is very possessive when it comes to sharing his Jags. "I make it a point to drive the cars myself. I cannot imagine parting with them even for a moment," he added. His impressive line-up includes three classic Jags — the six-cylinder Daimler Sovereign (Jaguar sold this model under the Daimler Sovereign brand), the 12-cylinder luxury grand tourer, Jaguar XK5, and the all-time favourite, Jaguar XK 120. Interestingly, all of them are in his favourite colour — "British racing green".

The love for brand Jaguar apparently runs in Singh's family. His cousin brother, Fateh Singh Akoi, who belongs to the Imperial Hotel family, also owns a metallic blue 1948 XK 120. The duo has driven their cars extensively across India taking part in various vintage car rallies. For instance, on Sunday, they went on a drive to Pataudi Palace in Haryana, courtesy of the Heritage Motoring Club of India (HMCI).

But there are some people who don't believe in making their passion public. Industrialist Somnath Roy Choudhury, who shuttles between Delhi and Kolkata looking after his two primary



MONEYBAG AND HIS JAG: Fateh Singh Akoi, whose family runs the Imperial Hotel, with his Jaguar XK 120.



WHEELS OF FORTUNE: The Jaguar XK 150. The Pataudi family used to own one of these models.



MARK OF SUCCESS: R.N. Sethi, a senior member of the Heritage Motoring Club of India, owns a Jaguar Mark II.

business concerns — telecom and pharmaceuticals — said he has neither taken part in any car rally nor does he want to put his collections on display in any expo or meet.

"It's a very private affair for me. The car is an icon in itself and it feels great to simply be associated with it," he explained.

Talking about his prized possession, Rajeev Kher, a Delhi-based exporter of surgical instruments, too said it's the sheer high of owning a classic Jaguar car that makes long-lasting relationships. In his case, the classic XK 120 in old English white that he's driven on some of his most memorable journeys has not parted with him for the past 40 years. Although none of the people MAIL TODAY spoke to wanted to quote the

exact value of a vintage Jaguar, auto experts said prices usually hover around Rs 10-15 lakh but at times can even go up to Rs 1 crore depending upon the make and condition of the car.

'I own a car that was once the fastest in the world'

"The car has given me fantastic performance so far and the driving thrills that I have acquired from it are also immense. It feels good to know that I'm driving a car which was considered to be one of the fastest cars in the world when I bought it," Kher said, adding: "The surprising part is, barring a few restora-

tion touch-ups here and there, the car has not had a major breakdown yet."

And apart from him, another proud owner of the XK 120 model is American fashion designer Ralph Lauren, Kher said.

However, with the good comes the bad — maintenance is an expensive and tricky affair for Jaguar owners. "It's very difficult to maintain a classic car like the Jaguar. Every spare part has to be imported and utmost care has to be taken that it's from a genuine Jaguar spare parts dealer," said R.N. Sethi, senior member of the HMCI. And though Sethi himself has sold his 1962 Mark II classic, he said he'll still swear by the high that he gets when he comes across the famous Jaguar mascot on the car's bonnet.

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Transvestite protester locked up in men's jail



WOE-MAN: Shanti Kinnar (50).

FIFTY-YEAR-OLD SHANTI Kinnar is a transvestite and a prisoner. But Shanti, who dresses as a woman, has been forced to live in the men's barracks in the Mirzapur Jail.

Shanti is a Gondwana Gantratra Party member and belongs to the feminine transgender community of Sonebhadra. The police arrested her on October 15 when she was leading a tribals' protest march in Narayandih village. She was booked under the Gangster Act.

Shanti has sought the help of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). She claims the police didn't determine her gender before putting her in with the men.

The Human Rights Law Centre (NRLC), an NGO, has complained about Shanti's situation to the NHRC. The com-

plaint, submitted on Wednesday, said Shanti had been beaten up by male police.

But Shanti, who supports the demand of the tribals to give them forest land, is yet to grab national attention. A respected face among over 500 tribal families Sonebhadra, she has been more active after the coming of The Recognition of Rights Act, 2006.

"Shanti has no criminal history yet she was booked under the Gangster Act. The police have not been able to prove which gang she was in. She was brought to court along with male prisoners and produced before the court handcuffed," said Roma

from Sonebhadra. She claimed the policemen were angry with Shanti because last year she had launched a movement against some policemen who were allegedly trying to sexually harass two tribal girls.

"We came to know about Shanti's arrest when some tribals, who are fond of her, came to us and requested to save her from the police's

'The police didn't test my gender'

clutches," said Shanta Bhattacharya, an activist.

When contacted, Sonebhadra SSP, Ramkumar said, "She was trying to grab some forest land with the tribals' help. We also had information that she

collected money from the villagers in the name of raising a movement for them. But I really have no idea about her gender."

But Bhattacharya didn't agree with the SSP. "Why was her gender not determined before sending her to jail? And what prompted the police to book her under the Gangster Act? What will the police do if they fail to prove the charges in court?" she asked.

The incident coincides with another petition filed before the NHRC by one Sita Kinnar of Delhi, who has demanded a separate cell for eunuchs in every jail and the appointment of at least one eunuch in each police station to stop human rights violations against them.

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