

Acid attacks on women: India to learn from Bangladesh

The Supreme Court Monday asked the Indian government to examine the feasibility of having a stringent penal law akin to the one in Bangladesh to deal with cases of women and young girls being attacked with acid.

A bench of Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan also asked the government to examine the feasibility of regulating the sale of acid on the lines of provisions in Bangladesh.

It asked the government to examine the feasibility of having a stringent provision in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) against acid attacks on women while hearing a public interest lawsuit by Delhi-based girl Laxmi seeking harsher punishment for assailants .

Nineteen-year-old Laxmi had been attacked by a man who had thrown acid on her for refusing to marry him. She received severe burn injuries on her face, arms and other body parts.

As the court took up the hearing of her petition, her counsel Aparna Bhatt apprised the court that Bangladesh had a separate law to deal with such cases.

Bhatt pointed out to the court that the cases of acid attacks generally invoke penal provision for merely inflicting grievous physical injuries, entailing a maximum seven-year jail term on conviction.

She said that the offence is even bailable and thus the accused is able to win his freedom on bail soon, while the victim of an acid attack, like a rape victim, stands doomed for life.

But unlike India, Bangladesh has a much harsher penal provision, entailing longer jail term on conviction on charges of throwing acid.

She told the court that the neighbouring country has an Acid Control Order, which regulates the sale of the material. But in India it is available for sale across the counter and proves to be a lethal weapon in the hands of people with a criminal bent of mind, said Bhatt.

Intervening, Additional Solicitor General Mohan Parashran said the Law Commission of India and the National Women's Commission (NCW) were looking into the matter and examining the feasibility of amending the law to make it more stringent.

The bench then asked the law officer why the government was not simply taking into account the Bangladesh law and amending the Indian penal law appropriately, instead of waiting for the reports of the Law Commission and NCW.

The bench, which also included Justice R.V. Raveendran and Justice M.K. Sharma, said the government was taking unduly long time in amending the law appropriately.

While hearing the matter last July, the apex court had termed the incidents of throwing acid on young girls and women by spurned lovers as a crime 'worse than murder'.

The apex court had then asked the central government to apprise it of its stand on having harsher laws to deal with the crime.

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