

Life term for six teachers in Patan gang rape case



JUSTICE AT LAST
Babu Parmar, the girl's father, hailed the judgement.

The guilty raped a girl at least 14 times over the course of a month

By **D.P. Bhattacharya** in Ahmedabad

A COURT on Friday handed life terms to six teachers after finding them guilty of raping a student in Patan in 2007.

The order was passed by the Patan district and sessions court. Magistrate S.C. Srivastava also asked the guilty to pay Rs 10,000 each as compensation to the victim.

The six teachers of the Patan Primary Teacher's College were found guilty of gangrape of a Dalit girl, Manisha (name changed), who had taken admission in the college on July 24, 2007.

The teachers are: Manish Parmar, Ashwin Parmar, Mahendra Prajapati, Atul Patel, Suresh Patel and Kiran Patel.

"The defence argued the accused were breadwinners of their family and, therefore, their sentences should be shortened," special public prosecutor Naina Bhatt said. "After hearing both sides, the court decided on life-terms for all the accused," she added.

"I am very happy with the judgement," Manisha said from her home at Jetalvasna village. "My struggle for justice has finally paid off."

Her father, Babu Parmar, termed the judgment a victory for all those girls who have "suffered silently at the hands of these monsters". He is a daily-wager.

Manisha made headlines in February 2008 when she accused the six teachers of

her college of repeatedly raping her over the course of a month. Manisha was raped 14 times between November 2007 and January 2008 by the accused.

The accused raped the girl both inside and outside the college, threatening to kill her if she spoke about it to anybody.

The guilty have excellent academic records

The matter came to light when the girl fainted one day at the institute. When she was rushed to a hospital, doctors confirmed she had been raped.

After a public outcry, Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi ordered a magisterial inquiry and announced a cash reward of Rs 1 lakh for the victim for "showing courage to expose the criminals".

The matter was handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department after the intervention of the Gujarat governor and a chargesheet was filed on April 11, 2008 against five teachers. Only teacher, Kiran Patel, was only charged with sexually abusing the girl.

Meanwhile, Manisha sat for her examinations and scored 84.84 per cent in her first year at the college. Notably, one day after the results were out, a teacher found a suicide note written by her. Her father was informed. He came and took her away.

Manjula Pradeep of Navsarjan, a pan-Gujarat Dalit organisation that offered legal assistance to Manisha in her battle for justice, hailed the verdict. "The judgement has restored our faith in the judiciary," she said. "If they go unpunished, it will only make them bolder," she added.



A file photo of one of the accused teachers being taken to court.

THE ACCUSED

■ **Mahendra Prajapati**, M.Sc., B.Ed.

■ **Atul Patel**, M.Sc., B.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D. He has received the Ramanujan Award in Maths

■ **Suresh Patel**, M.A., B.Ed. (Social Science)

■ **Kiran Patel**, M.Sc., M.Ed., Ph.D. (Maths)

■ **Ashwin Parmar**, M.A., B.Ed., LLB (Psychology)

■ **Manish Parmar**, degree in arts

Unsafe inside campus

JULY 24, 2007

Manisha takes admission at Primary Teachers' College, Patan

NOVEMBER 9

Ashwin Kumar Parmar, Manish Parmar and Mahendra Prajapati, all teachers at the college, rape her inside the institute

NOVEMBER 23

Manish and one more teacher, Suresh Patel, rape her again. Another teacher, Kiran Patel, sexually abuses her

DECEMBER 31

Manish, Kiran and Suresh rape her again at a village

JANUARY 25, 2008

Another teacher, Atul Patel, rapes her at the institute

JANUARY 31

Manisha faints in the prayer hall of the institute. Doctor confirms she had been raped

FEBRUARY 6

The Gujarat government orders inquiry

APRIL 11

Criminal Investigation Department files chargesheet

MAY 6

Trial starts at Patan fast track court

MARCH 6, 2009

All six accused awarded life-sentence

Saras prototype plane crashes and kills three IAF test pilots

By **Sowmya Aji** in Bangalore

A PROTOTYPE of the indigenously developed passenger aircraft, Saras, crashed on Friday afternoon near Bangalore, killing all three IAF test pilots on board.

Ramanagaram district SP Bishnahalli said the plane crashed in an uninhabited area at She-shagirihalli near Bidadi, about 30 km from the Karnataka capital. "Villagers informed the police after noticing a burning plane crash down. We rushed fire-tenders to the spot and put out the fire. But three pilots inside the plane were burnt to death," he added.

The pilots are identified as Wing Commanders Praveen and Shah and Squadron Leader Ilayaraja. The plane took off from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)'s airport in Bangalore around 3.30 pm and crashed a few minutes later.



IAF personnel near the wreckage in Bidadi near Bangalore.

Sources said the aircraft lost contact with the air traffic control in HAL minutes after it took off.

It was the first accident of a Saras plane. "It's not immediately known what caused the accident but the usual suspects are engine failure, mechanical failure, bird hit and oil leakage. It will take time to figure out what went wrong. The black box has to be recovered and examined," a rescue official said.

The pilots were from the Aircraft Systems Testing Establishment, responsible for test flights conducted by the National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) that has developed the 14-seater Saras aircraft. The Saras did its first test flight in May 2004.

Retired Air Marshal B.K. Pandey said the Saras programme should not be written off because of the mishap.

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Tunnel yes but it will not be bomb-proof

By **Mail Today Bureau** in Mumbai

THE MUMBAI police on Friday denied reports a bomb-proof tunnel was being built within the Arthur Road Jail to transport 26/11 accused Mohammad Ajmal Qasab to a court that will try him. Qasab is currently lodged in the Arthur Road Jail.

Maharashtra home minister Jayant Patil also denied reports of a bomb-proof tunnel.

The police, however, said a 20-foot tunnel was being built to escort Qasab from his cell to the court. The decision to build the tunnel was taken to shield Qasab from not just potential attacks but also the media.

"Reports that Rs 2 crore was being spent on the tunnel are not true. We are not going to spend that much (money) on the tunnel. We just want to escort him safely to the court and back," a police officer said.

The trial in the Mumbai attack will start only the tunnel is ready. The police, however, said special



Mohammad Ajmal Qasab

measures had been taken to ensure Qasab's safety. They gave no details, but said Qasab was lodged in a cell reinforced by steel plates strong enough to withstand rifle fire or bomb blasts. The terrorist did not share the cell with other prisoners.

The cell where Qasab is lodged is also under camera surveillance so his every move is watched. The cell also has no ceiling fan as the police fear Qasab might try to end his life.

The police believe the underworld might try to kill Qasab to weaken India's case in the Mumbai attack.