

NIAS compiles database on gender violence

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, FEB. 23. If the "Vanita Sahayavani," the helpline for women in distress, offered by the Bangalore City Police in association with the Social Welfare Department, is out of reach for any reason, one need not despair.

Help may be at hand from other sources listed in a directory brought out by the Bangalore-based National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) in association with the United Nations Development Forum for Women (UNIFEM). NIAS, a premier multi-disciplinary research institution located on the IISc campus, is known for its work on socio-economic issues.

The directory, in Kannada and English, is a comprehensive compendium of various support services available to counter violence against women.

Besides the names and contact numbers/addresses of support groups for women in Bangalore City and district, the directory also covers Mysore and several other districts.

Compiled with the main objective of providing ready answers to questions such as "where to go" and "what to do" when a

woman is subject to violence, the directory contains addresses and telephone numbers of police stations, and names and contact numbers of senior police officials.

It also has information on the existing laws on gender discrimination and violence against women; the constitutional and legal rights of women; non-governmental agencies working for the welfare of women; family counselling centres; short-stay homes for women, and skill-training centres for them.

According to statistics tabulated by the police, in Bangalore City itself violence of different forms against women is increasing.

These range from the more prominently reported "dowry harassment" cases (several of them ending with bride-burning or abetted suicides) to domestic violence at the hands of husbands or in-laws, sexual abuse, including rape and harassment of women at workplaces, and in some cases in educational institutions.

The directory, considered the first-of-its kind in Karnataka, is the result of a project undertaken by NIAS along with UNIFEM, which is facilitating a world-wide campaign against violence on women.

The project covered Bangalore Urban and Rural districts and the City, and the districts of Bidar, Belgaum, Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Dharwad, Kodagu, Kolar, Koppal, Mandya, Mysore, and Shimoga.

The Chief Secretary, Teresa Bhattacharya, who released the NIAS- UNIFEM directory, said a massive reorientation programme was necessary to sensitise men to adopt a better perception about women. This was needed in the context of a society which was still male dominated and where women subjected to violence were afraid to speak out.

"We have come to a situation where violence against women is considered inevitable and where one out of every four women is subjected to some form or other of violence at some point in her life.

Reorientation programmes are also badly needed for persons in administration and the judiciary to change their perceptions about women," Ms. Bhattacharya remarked.

The directory could well be a beginning in the process of helping women coping with gender discrimination and related violence, till the male mindset itself undergoes a transformation for the better.