

# Godman Asaram Bapu Jailed For Life In Rape Case

JODHPUR: A Special Court in Jodhpur on Wednesday convicted self-styled godman Asaram for raping a minor girl at his ashram in Rajasthan in 2013 and sentenced him to a prison term for life till his natural death.

The judgment was pronounced by Special Judge for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe cases, Madhu Sudan Sharma, inside the Jodhpur Central Jail, where Asaram is lodged.

The court also awarded 20 years in jail each to Shilpi, the warden of Asaram's ashram, and associate Sharad.

The court, however, acquitted Asaram's 'sevadars' Shiva and cook Prakash.

Asaram was arrested in 2013 after the then 16-year-old girl from Uttar Pradesh's Shahjahanpur, a Class 12 student at his Chhindwara Ashram in Madhya Pradesh, filed a complaint and accused him of rape at his ashram in Manai village on the Jodhpur outskirts on August 15, 2013.

"Asaram has been sentenced to life imprisonment till natural death... Shilpi and Sharad have also been directed to pay Rs one



lakh fine each," said defence lawyer Sushma Dhara, adding an appeal would be filed in the Rajasthan High Court against the judgment and for Asaram's bail.

The 77-year-old godman and two others were convicted under Section 376D of the Indian Penal Code, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act and the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, the 474-page judgment said.

The defence lawyer said that Asaram appeared normal in the court but became sad and worried when the court convicted him.

Talking to reporters outside his house in Shahjahanpur in Uttar Pradesh, the victim's father welcomed the court verdict and said "their struggles and ordeal during the period they were seeking justice tested their grit but they had full faith in the judicial system".

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) said: "Nine witnesses were attacked in this case, of which three died... the courts should ensure that the other related cases, including those of killing of witnesses, should also be completed without delay."

Former Deputy Inspector General of Gujarat Police D.G. Vanzara, who was accused of fake shootouts in the past, stepped

into controversy by saying that it is "improper to dub Asaram as a rapist".

The police charge-sheet against Asaram and four co-accused was filed on November 6, 2013, under the Pocso Act, the Juvenile Justice Act and the IPC.

Asaram is facing trial in another sexual assault case in Gujarat. The final arguments in the case were completed in the Jodhpur court on April 7 and the order was reserved for Wednesday.

After the registration of a rape case, Asaram was arrested from Indore in Madhya Pradesh and brought to Jodhpur on September 1, 2013. He is under judicial custody since September 2, 2013. He was earlier denied bail by the Supreme Court.

Apprehending threat to law and order from the followers of Asaram, high security was in place in Jodhpur, with prohibitory orders enforced in the city.

The Union Home Ministry on Tuesday also issued an advisory to Rajasthan, Gujarat and Haryana to step up security/vigilance to prevent any untoward incident in the wake of court verdict.

BEIJING: China's defence minister said Tuesday that fighting the threat of terrorism is a top concern to be discussed by a Beijing-led group of Central Asian states at a meeting this week that highlights Chinese ambitions to dominate the Asian security agenda.

Wei Fenghe told fellow defence officials from the eight-member Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Beijing that the group stood as a force for peace.

Foreign ministers from the group were also meeting in Beijing on Tuesday and a heads of state summit is planned for June in the Chinese port of Qingdao.

Chinese President Xi Jinping also plans to meet with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for an informal summit Friday and Saturday in the central city of Wuhan. Their two nations are rivals for Asian lead-

ership and share a disputed and often tense Himalayan border. The focus on terrorism reflects China's hopes to use the grouping to stamp out threats of cross-border support for low-level separatist insurgencies particularly in the predominantly Turkic-speaking region of Xinjiang.

Along with China and Russia, the SCO includes the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan as well as close Chinese ally Pakistan and its arch-rival India. Co-operation among member nation defence ministries "has made important contributions to maintain peace in the region and the world," Wei said.

The meeting would also discuss the South China Sea, where China has rapidly been consolidating its claim to virtually the entire strategic waterway.



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