

Mother of married woman denied pension: Chhattisgarh HC asks govt to decide in 6 weeks

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RAIPUR, FEB 15: The Chhattisgarh High Court has termed as "highly unjust" the denial of family pension to the 68-year-old mother of a police constable killed in a Naxal attack and directed the state government to decide her case within six weeks. A division bench of Chief Justice Ramesh Sinha and Justice Ravindra Kumar Agrawal passed the order on February 11 on a petition filed by Filistila Lakra (68). Her son, Ignatius Lakra, a 21-year-old constable with the 10th Battalion of the Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) in Surajpur district, was killed in an encounter with Maoists in 2002. Following Ignatius' death, his father and Filistila's husband Robin had been receiving family pension. However, after Robin's demise in August 2020, the pension was discontinued by the treasury office in

Jashpur district. Despite approaching the Commandant of the 10th Battalion of the CAF and the Treasury Officer in Jashpur and Ambikapur (Surguja), the woman failed to get relief, after which she moved the High Court in 2021. In October 2021, the High Court had directed the authorities to scrutinize and decide the issue at the earliest, preferably within a period of 60 days. The Commandant of the 10th Battalion had responded that under the Chhattisgarh Police Karmchari Varg Asadharan Parivar Nirvrtti Vetan Niyam (Rules) 1965, there was no provision to grant family pension to the successor after the death of the original pensioner. The Directorate of Treasury, Accounts and Pension, under the Finance Department, subsequently declared Filistila Lakra ineligible for family pension. The woman's

cousel, Ashish Beck, argued that the 1965 Rules were discriminatory as the Chhattisgarh Civil Services (Extraordinary Pension) Rules, 1963 provides that pension sanctioned to the father of a deceased employee would, after his death, be payable to the mother. The Rules of 1965 are supposed to follow the earlier Rules of 1963, but with respect to the family pension to be received by the mother of the deceased employee (after the death of father) the Rules of 1965 are arbitrary, unreasonable and discriminatory, he submitted. Opposing the plea, Deputy Advocate General Prasun Kumar Bhaduri contended that the 1963 Rules were general in nature, whereas the 1965 Rules were special provisions applicable to a specific category of police personnel, and that special rules prevail over general rules. "The Pension Rules 1965 is a special rule

framed for special category of class. Rule 55(iv) of Pension Rules 1965 provides that if the deceased employee is not survived with widow then the pension will be distributed amongst the family member as provided therein. There is no provision to extend the benefit of family pension to another member of the family if the first receiver of family pension expired," Bhaduri submitted. After hearing both sides, the bench ruled in favour of the petitioner. "We have no hesitation in holding that the Act of 1965 should also contain similar provision as provided in the Rules of 1963 which was brought into by amendment in 1970 so as to provide the benefit of pension to the mother of

the deceased employee after the death of father who had been sanctioned pension," the HC said. Denial of pension to the mother of the deceased employee is highly unjust, especially when in the present case, the son of the petitioner laid down his life in a Naxal attack, the court said. "We dispose of this petition with an observation that the 'Note 6' inserted by way of amendment dated 30.11.1970 in the Rules of 1963 be read as a part of the Rules of 1965 and also the 15 pension sanctioned to father under the Rules of 1965 will, after his death, be payable to the mother," the HC said. As such, the petitioner would be entitled to grant of pension.

added. "Respondent authorities are directed to consider and decide the case of the petitioner in light of the observations made in this petition within a period of six weeks," the High Court ordered.

VACB records of sponsors, celebrities in Sabarimala flag mast gold misappropriation probe

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB 15: The Vigilance Department, probing the alleged misappropriation of gold and money in connection with the installation of a new temple flag mast at the Sabarimala shrine in 2017, has begun recording statements of sponsors, including film personalities, officials said on Sunday. The Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) launched a preliminary inquiry last week following a direction from the Kerala High Court based on a report by the Devaswom Vigilance regarding suspected misappropriation linked to the temple flag mast project. VACB sources said 27 people who had sponsored gold for the flag mast in 2017 have been identified. Statements of around 10 people, including filmmaker Shaji Kailas, actor-turned-Ranjipannicker and producer Suresh Kumar, have already been recorded, an official said. The remaining sponsors, including MP Suresh Gopi and actor Mohanlal, will be questioned after the project.

they agree on a convenient time, they added. The VACB team is collecting details regarding the quantity of gold donated by each sponsor for the flag mast project in 2017, officials said. VACB is also looking into whether more sponsors donated gold or money from the flag mast in Sabarimala. On February 9, the Kerala High Court granted the VACB 30 days to complete the inquiry and submit a report. A report filed before the High Court by the Chief Vigilance Officer of the Travancore Devaswom Board stated that in August 2016, it was decided that the installation of the new flag mast would be undertaken entirely at the expense of Phoenix Infrastructure Pvt Ltd, Hyderabad. An estimate of Rs 3.20 crore submitted by the Devaswom Chief Engineer was approved by the Board on September 23, 2016, the report said. The report further revealed that 9.161 kilograms of gold were purchased from the Customs Department on March 22, 2017, and 412 grams of gold were contributed by devotees for the project.

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