

## SC for panels to examine dowry cases

Committees of social workers, homemakers, retired persons and other upstanding citizens will form the vanguard against frivolous complaints of dowry harassment in their localities.

They will sift the genuine cases from the trivial ones. No suspect shall be arrested in a dowry case immediately after a complaint is registered.

Police and the courts will have to wait for the committee's inquiry report. The Supreme Court on Thursday ordered the setting up of 'family welfare committees' in all districts under the aegis of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).

### Much abuse

A Bench of Justices A.K. Goel and U.U. Lalit said Section 498A (dowry harassment) of the IPC had come under much abuse. Dowry complaints were being filed in the heat of the moment over trivial issues.

The three-member family welfare committees will be set up by the district legal services authorities. Members can be appointed from para legal volunteers, social workers, retired persons, "wives of working officers" and other citizens.

Every complaint received by the police and the Magistrate will be passed on to the local committee, which will enquire into the genuineness of the complaint and file a report with the police official or Magistrate concerned within a month. The committee can directly get in touch with the parties involved, but the members will not be called as witnesses in case there is a trial.

Till the report of the committee is received, no arrest should normally be effected, the court said.

Trial judges should close Section 498A cases based on matrimonial disputes once parties reached a settlement. In fact, bail should be given the same day, the court directed.

END

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