

Rahul Gandhi's politicking about tragic death of Asifa should trigger a real debate about Siddaramaiah govt's record to #ProtectOurChildren.

- **Statement by BJP MP Rajeev Chandrasekhar**

Congress President Mr. Rahul Gandhi has belatedly woken up to issue of crimes against children and is trying to score political points from horror and cruelty inflicted on an innocent child - 8-year Asifa.

Justice for Asifa is a must and is non-negotiable. No punishment would be too severe for the preparators of such cruelty on any child. Crimes against children are the most horrific and these crimes are not political point scoring opportunities.

And justice is pending also for Child victims of crimes in Karnataka. And since the focus is now squarely on the issue of Protecting Our Children- which I have been trying for last 4 years in Bengaluru, there's a compelling need now to talk about Congress Government and CM Siddaramaiah's record in Karnataka and Bengaluru.

Ever since February 2014, I have been urging CM Siddaramaiah to act on Child Safety issues – to put in place safety guidelines, regulations for schools and have more Child Courts. I even wrote to Rahul Gandhi and Siddaramaiah in August 2015, but neither he nor his Congress Government did anything about safety of Children and so tragically more children became victims. Direct consequence of this Govt apathy and negligence.

The number of cases of sexual abuse has been going upward over the past five years in the State. While the number of cases registered in 2012-13 was 138, this year the number is over 10 times that. Statistics from the Karnataka State Integrated Child Protection Society (KSICPS) show that 1,420 cases were registered under the Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Amongst the cases filed, more than 93% of the cases are still pending trial -a result of lack of adequate Child courts. While the rise in registered cases is a sign of ending silence on the topic, but there's been lack of safety guidelines and accountability of schools, long delays in trials and low conviction rates. Low conviction rates are particularly dangerous because offenders are free to offend again. The Child sexual offender's registry was one of my suggestions that State govt introduced but till date not operationalized because of lack of convictions.

In a recent state level consultation on Child trafficking with experts from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, evidence was presented about the sorry state of affairs in Karnataka on Child trafficking and Child Prostitution.

All this show that the Siddaramaiah govt despite overwhelming evidence of rise in crimes against and Trafficking of children has done very little. Totally unforgivable and Unpardonable.

Congress does not have a clear position on anything. Their strategy seems to be lurch from one political opportunity to another. They jump from one bandwagon to another whether they believe in it or not. This is a brazen political opportunism and hypocrisy where the main issue of justice for victim is sacrificed at the altar of political point scoring.

The Congress leader must look at the fact that POCSO trials in Karnataka under CM Siddaramaiah are taking over three years for trial with accused out on bail. I believe if one is serious about protecting the children, the discussion should be around swift arrests, prosecution, fair investigation as well as putting safeguards to #ProtectOurChildren instead of fighting over a religious or political angle in any rape case.

Next time Rahul Gandhi takes time off from his pre-election temple run in Karnataka, I invite him to a proper civilized debate on child safety in Karnataka and discuss what Siddaramaiah has really done to #ProtectOurChildren.

Let's make this tragedy create a permanent focus on thousands of innocent victims in Karnataka and elsewhere and the cruel crimes and criminals and not have that lost with some cheap politics.