



Editor's Column

For women of Bengaluru, the New Year's Eve celebration turned into a nightmare as they were groped, pushed and molested in the heart of the city, on the busy MG Road and the Brigade Road, by an unruly mob, despite deployment of nearly 15,000 policemen for crowd control. The initial response of the police was that they were yet to receive any complaints from the victims.

However, some of the women, who were subjected to the ordeal, as well as eye witnesses have now come forward to reiterate that mass molestation did take place, particularly, by drunken men. What further outraged the nation was the response of some politicians and particularly, the State Home Minister, who

shrugging off the barbarity of the pervers said, "these things do happen in crowded places," while giving sermons against western culture and dress. A senior Samajwadi politician commenting on the incident said mass molestations "do happen when half-clothed women are out on the

FOCUS BENGALURU'S SHAME

streets late at night." Indeed! Who are they to decide the dress codes for women? On the contrary, women have every right to wear whatever they want to.

However, what was worse, was the indifferent attitude of the city police. Instead of taking swift action, the police are seeking formal complaints before taking criminal action. The National

Commission for women, on its part, has taken immediate action by summoning Karnataka's Home Minister and the Samajwadi leader for their "disgusting comments". The NCW has also written to the Karnataka police chief, city police commissioner and the Home Minister seeking replies on what action has been taken.

Admittedly, it is high time, the state government learnt the right lessons from Bengaluru's night of horror. Improved policing is essential but accessibility and pro active approach of the police force with sufficient number of women police, especially in big gatherings, where a large number of women would be present is of equal importance. For, in this country, if we wait for mindsets to change, we might have to wait forever.

Important Decisions

- The Supreme Court has allowed a 22-year-woman from Mumbai to abort her 24-week-pregnancy, despite it being past the legal limit of 20 weeks after the doctors said that the foetus was abnormal and allowing the pregnancy to complete its full course could endanger the mother's life.
- An expert panel headed by a former finance secretary has recommended that widows should receive pension from the age of 18 instead of 40 as is currently the case. It also recommended that widows would be eligible for a one time grant for remarriage and waivers for educational fees and skill development. The panel has also recommended that the pension schemes under the national social assistance programme should cover all target households, except those which meet the "automatic exclusion criteria" under the socio-economic caste census. Presently, only BPL households are eligible for these schemes.
- The Delhi police will soon establish a separate control room for handling calls on national emergency response system phone number 112. The emergency helpline will be the go-to solution for availing of emergency services like fire control and ambulances.

Interactive session with NCW Chairperson

An interactive session with NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam was organized by the CII Southern Regional Headquarters, Chennai.

At the outset, Ms. Suchitra Ella, Chairwoman of IWN National and Ms. Anu Sriram, Chairwoman of IWN Southern

Region spoke about the key initiatives taken by IWN, followed by discussions on CII-Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill and recommendations on Crèche Policy submitted to NCW by CII.

During the interactive session, the Chairperson said that there was a proposal to upgrade 14,000 Anganwadis and the Crèche Bill has been sent to the Prime Minister's Office, which will also cover the agricultural sector, as women wanted schools near agriculture-centred areas.

While replying to a question whether there can be any skill development programme for girls, who are secondary school drop-outs, Ms. Kumaramangalam said that standard procedures will be set in place for the same and tight monitoring will be undertaken. The Chairperson also highlighted the importance of creating awareness related to laws for the welfare of women such as property law, zero F.I.R, free legal services, etc. She asked IWN/CII to consider giving allowance to women, who opt to work in the male-dominated engineering sector, like the mechanical field.

She also suggested that companies can give loans to women for building houses. With regard to developing a strategy paper on toilets by IWN and CII in consultation with National Highways and NCW at strategic locations, Ms. Kumaramangalam agreed to facilitate a meeting with the Minister for Road, Transport & Highways & Shipping, to take the discussion forward.



NCW Chairperson (4th from left) with other participants.

We UniTE

The Indian Merchants' Chamber and UN women organized a programme titled, 'We Unite Investing in Planet 50:50' on 6th December, 2016 in Mumbai. The programme focused on gender equality and a future free from violence against women and girls.

Speaking on the occasion, NCW Chairperson Lalitha Kumaramangalam said, "All governments understand that women's empowerment makes economic sense and Governments must realize that cost of violence against women impedes economic growth. Women across India have varying childcare needs and there are no one-size-fits-all solutions, but a variety of solutions exist. We also need reliable gender-disaggregated data on crime, land records, etc., to address gaps in women's safety and empowerment."



(From left) Ms. Lalitha Kumaramangalam, Mr. Paul Divaka, Mr. Yuri Afanasiev, UN Resident Coordinator, India, Ms. Pavithra Y, Ms. Yamini Mishra, Gender Budgeting Specialist, UN Women.

Ads on sex determination to be deleted

The Supreme Court has directed the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare to set up a nodal agency to ensure that search agencies like Google, Yahoo and Microsoft do not flash commercial advertisements as well as research material on internet pertaining to pre-natal sex determination in India. The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act 1994 says that nobody shall propagate pre-natal sex determination.

A two-judge bench observed, "Whatever is prohibited under the Act cannot go through the websites. If anyone comes across anything which offends or has an impact on the sex-ratio in India, it shall be removed by the search engines within 36 hours and the nodal agency should be informed." However, the court said the "interim arrangement" would continue till the issue pertaining to advertisements relating to pre-natal sex determination was "debated" before it. The next hearing would be on 17th February, 2017.

Making a Difference

A cashless marriage, may be the first of its kind, was held at a temple at Badia in East Singhbhum district within hours of a toilet being built at the groom's house. What was most inspiring was that prior to the wedding, the family members of the bride Sunita, a resident of Itihasa village in Chakradharpur of West Singhbhum district and the bridegroom Subhash Naik of Badia village, joined hands and provided voluntary services in the construction of a toilet in Subhash Naik's house.

According to the Deputy Collector Sanjay Kumar, the construction work was completed before the marriage was solemnised and it was Kumar, who was instrumental in convincing both the families to opt for a cashless marriage. From tent house rent to purchase of vegetables, grocery and jewellery were made without paying cash. Even payment to the priest and gifts that were presented to the couple were online or through cheques. Kumar said a joint account of the couple was also opened instantly and an ATM card was handed over to them after the wedding. Almost the entire village turned up to witness this unique cashless marriage ceremony and were happy to be part of the cashless movement launched across the country.

Profile in Courage

The Delhi police recently felicitated a 21 -year -college student for showing exemplary courage in fighting two men on a bike trying to snatch her mobile phone in Mayur Vihar. She held on to her phone tightly till the two men fell off the bike. She held on to one of them and screamed for help till people rushed to her help. The Delhi police awarded the college student a cash reward of 5000 rupees.

Suo motu cognizance

- Taking suo motu cognizance, the Commission had constituted an enquiry committee to enquire into two media reports titled (a) "New Year's Eve in Bengaluru witnesses mass molestation of women in police presence" and (b) "CCTV grabs show beasts that roamed Bengaluru roads". Member Sushma Sahu alongwith advocate Anita enquired into the matter and also sent a letter to the Commissioner of Police, Bengaluru, in this regard. The police ensured speedy and fair investigation into the cases.
- An Enquiry Committee was constituted to enquire into the media report titled "Laash dekh akroshit huye log - tod phod", wherein it has been reported that a dead body of a woman has been found floating in a pond near her house at Darbhanga in Bihar. Member Sushma Sahu and a local advocate visited Darbhanga to enquire into the matter. The Committee met the complainants and asked the police to take speedy action into the matter.

Complaints received by NCW in December, 2016

Month	Complaints Received	Action Taken Reports received	Complaints Closed
December 2016	1776	294	327

The Commission took suo motu cognizance in 16 cases in the Month of January, 2017.

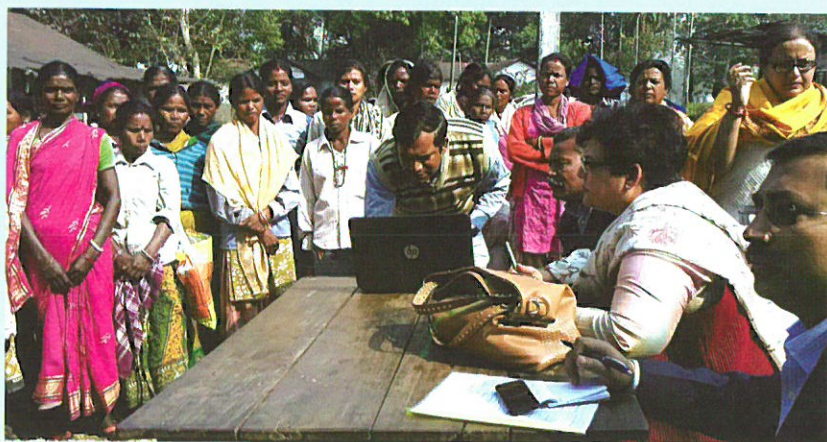
Members' Visits

❖ Member Sushma Sahu along with NCW counsellors Praveen and Neha Mahajan Gupta attended a Jan Sunwai at Patna on 20th and 21st December, 2016. At the Jan Sunwai, 43 cases were taken up; out of which 39 cases were closed and in 4 cases, directions were given to the police authorities for speedy action. 5 cases were taken up on the spot and forwarded to the police for further action. ● A team headed by Member Sushma Sahu conducted a surprise visit of a Rain Basera (shelter home) in the North District of Delhi. The team observed that the quality of food was unhealthy and living conditions of the inmates were not up to the mark. ● The Member inaugurated the National Seminar on 'Empowerment of Women through Skill Development & Training' at Bidar in Karnataka organized by the Animal Welfare Board of India. ● Ms. Sahu enquired into a complaint forwarded by the Ministry of WCD which alleged that the complainant based in Bengaluru was made to suffer mentally, emotionally and financially. The Member met the complainant and directed the concerned authorities to take speedy action into this matter. ● The Member also visited Hajipur to enquire into a case in which a woman, resident of Gram Fatehpur, Dist. Muzaffarpur, was murdered. As the police was not taking proper action into the matter, and threatening the family members to close the case, the Member directed the concerned authorities to look into the matter and also wrote a letter to NCPDR and NHRC to take further appropriate action.



Member Sushma Sahu inaugurating the National Seminar at Bidar and later addressing the gathering

❖ Member Rekha Sharma along with Counsellor Varun Chhabra went to Meerut to inquire into the complaint of a father, whose daughter is not traceable since 2012. The Member met IG, Meerut Range, in this context and asked him to take effective steps to trace out the girl. After intervention of the Commission, the police filed charge sheet in the court. As the matter is now subjudice, the complainant has to approach the court for any further action. ● The Member visited Darjeeling & Jalpaiguri in North Bengal to oversee the condition of women workers of the closed tea estates. She visited many closed tea estates, namely, Panighata and Trihance tea estates in Darjeeling district as well as Surendra Nagar, Dharnipur and Red Bank estates which are in dire conditions, with no electricity and inadequate water along with lack of proper transport, medical and educational facilities except the well-run Makaibari tea estate. She also visited Bundapari, Dheklapara and Jay Birpara tea gardens, where the conditions are equally deplorable. All tea workers, mainly comprising women, are surviving on free ration provided by the Central government. ● During December, the Member conducted 20 hearings in the presence of concerned parties and police authorities in NCW office to resolve contentious issues and the success rate was 95 percent.



Member Rekha Sharma interacting with women workers of a closed tea garden

● The National Commission for Women organized a "Mahila Jan Sunwai" in collaboration with the District Police and the District Legal Services Authority on 17-18th January, 2017 in West District, Delhi. Member Alok Rawat along with Sr. Coordinator Kanchan Khattar and Counsellor Varun Chhabra conducted the Sunwai. Around 120 cases were taken up during the Sunwai.

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