

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1904
TO BE ANSWERED ON 11.12.2024

WOMEN SAFETY AT WORKPLACE

1904. MS. DOLA SEN:

Will the Minister of Women and Child Development be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is cognizant of the fact that no new laws or policies have been passed since 2019 to enhance the safety of women at their workplace;
- (b) the steps taken to address this gap between Financial Year 2019-2024, the details thereof;
- (c) whether Government plan to launch programs aimed at training and raising awareness about the safety of women employees in the informal sector and rural areas; and
- (d) if so, the details of the programs along with a timeline, if so, the reasons therefor?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
(SHRIMATI SAVITRI THAKUR)

(a) to (d): To promote women's empowerment and their safety, and to increase their participation in the workforce, government has taken several steps. Some recent laws and policies that directly and indirectly cater to the safety of women in the workplace are listed below:

- i.□ The Government of India with an aim to modernize and improve the criminal justice system has enacted Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) which came into effect from 1st July, 2024. In BNS 2023, the offences against women and children earlier scattered in Indian Penal Code, 1860 have been brought together and consolidated under Chapter-V of BNS. It has introduced new provisions to strengthen laws related to women and children, specifically, Section 69 of BNS which makes sexual intercourse on false promise of marriage, employment, promotion or by suppressing the identity etc. now a punishable offence. This provision shares a close affinity with 'the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013' (SH Act), which seeks to safeguard women against workplace sexual harassment. Also, Sections 75 and 79 of BNS 2023 provide additional legal protections against harassment,

covering actions like unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks and also word, gesture or act intended to insult modesty of a woman. A woman facing sexual harassment at workplace has an option to file a complaint under these provisions. Additionally, provisions under section 398 BNSS which introduces Witness Protection Schemes, acknowledging the critical need to shield witnesses from threats and intimidation and Section 2(1)(d) of BSA which now enables electronic or digital record on emails, documents on computers, laptop or smartphone, messages and voice mail messages stored on digital devices under definition of documents can also be referred for protection of women from harassment at workplace.

(ii) Further, the Labour Codes, collectively include provisions to promote participation of women in workforce in a dignified manner and with adequate safety measures adopted by the employers. Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020, consolidates and amends laws regulating the safety, health, and working conditions of workers, with specific provisions to ensure the safety of women at the workplace. Code on Wages, 2019 aims to ensure a minimum wage for all workers, including women, and includes provisions to promote gender-neutral job advertisements and eliminate gender bias in recruitment and promotion. Code on Social Security, 2020 provides social security to workers, including women, and includes provisions for maternity benefits and creche facilities.

(iii) The Ministry of Women and Child Development recently launched the SHe-Box portal duly encompassing various provisions of The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (SH Act). This portal is an initiative of the Ministry to provide a publicly available centralised repository of information related to Internal Committees (ICs) and Local Committees (LCs) formed across the country, whether in government or private sector. It also provides a common platform to file complaints and track the status of such complaints. The portal includes a feature where complaints registered on it will be automatically forwarded to the IC/ LC of the workplaces concerned within the Central Ministries/ Departments, States/ UTs and in Private sector. The portal provides for designating a nodal officer for every workplace who is required to ensure updation of data/ information on a regular basis for real time monitoring of complaints.

(iv) Additionally, following are the other measures taken by the Government to improve safety at the Workplace-

- a.□ Ministry of Women and Child Development being the Nodal Ministry for SH Act observes the Enactment day i.e. 9th December of the SH Act every year and issues letters/ advisories to all sectors (including Central Government/ State Government/ Private Bodies/ Trade organization/ Educational Institutions/ and other organizations) for effective implementation of the Act and also to constitute IC/ LC immediately.
- b.□ The Ministry has also issued a Handbook on SH Act, 2013. The Handbook provides information about the Act in an easy-to-use practical manner. The soft copy of the Handbook has been uploaded on the Ministry's website for the purposes of mass

dissemination and it has also been sent to Ministers and officials concerned of various Ministries/ Departments, State Governments and Union Territory Administrations.

c.□ The Ministry has prepared a training module in collaboration with Institute of Secretariat Training and Management (ISTM) for training and Gender Sensitization programmes of personnel. Ministry also launched a 'Guide on Gender-Inclusive Communication' on 28th November 2023 to help removing gender stereotypes.

d.□ The Department of Personnel and Training, Government of India has also issued advisories time to time to all the Central Ministries/ Departments to complete the inquiry in a time bound manner and to include the information related to number of cases filed/ disposed under the SH Act in their annual report.

(v) Under Nirbhaya Fund, Government has taken several measures to improve safety of women at workplace:

a.□ The component of One Stop Centres (OSCs) under 'Sambal' sub-scheme of 'Mission Shakti', a comprehensive Umbrella Scheme for safety, security and empowerment of women is implemented under the Nirbhaya Fund. The OSCs provide women affected by violence and who are in distress with a range of integrated services under one roof such as Police facilitation, medical aid, providing legal aid and legal counselling, psycho-social counselling, temporary shelter etc.; A fully functional dedicated Women Helpline-181 (WHL) under Nirbhaya Fund is also functional to provide emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence and in distress across the country. This helpline is fully integrated with 112. Another component Sakhi Niwas (Working Women's Hostels) provides safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, with day care facility for their children, wherever possible, in urban, semi urban, or even rural areas where employment opportunity for women exist.

b.□ To ensure safety of public places where women work and live, various components of the Safe City Projects have been implemented in 8 Cities (namely Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai). To ensure safe transportation for women, rail and road transport projects like Integrated Emergency Response Management System (IERMS), Video Surveillance System at Konkan Railway, Artificial Intelligence (AI) based Facial Recognition System (FRS) integrated with Video surveillance Systems, including Command-and-Control Centre at 7 major railway stations and tabs for safety of women passengers on board the train by Ministry of Railways, and projects like Vehicle Tracking Platform with command and control centre across States/ UTs, and some State specific projects like Uttar Pradesh Road transport Corporation (UPSRTC), Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC), etc. by Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, have been implemented.

c.□ To provide help and support to needy women and women in distress, Emergency Response Support System (ERSS-112) has been established in all 36 States and UTs for various emergencies, with computer aided dispatch of field resources.
