

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 4324
TO BE ANSWERED ON 20.12.2024

PREVENTION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

4324. SHRI SUKANTA KUMAR PANIGRAHI:

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

- (a) the details of the steps taken by the Ministry to prevent sexual violence against women and children in the country particularly in the State of Odisha during the last three years;
- (b) whether the Ministry has implemented or proposed any new policies, programmes or awareness campaigns to address the rising cases of sexual violence, if so, the details thereof;
- (c) the details of the measures proposed to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of these initiatives at the grassroots level including conducting workshops at each Block level of every district and monitoring the same periodically;
- (d) whether the Ministry has collaborated with other Government bodies or Non-Governmental Organizations to strengthen the prevention of sexual violence, if so, the details thereof; and
- (e) the details of the specific provisions or changes made to enhance the legal and institutional support for survivors of sexual violence with periodically counselling by legal experts?

ANSWER

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

(a) to (e): 'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India and the responsibility to maintain law and order, protection of life and property of the citizens including investigation and prosecution of crime against women rests with the respective State Governments and they are competent to deal with such crimes. However, the Central Government gives highest priority to safety and security of women and children and has taken several initiatives in this regard.

To promote women's empowerment and their safety, in domestic and public spaces including workplaces, the government has taken several steps. Some of the initiatives 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 Adhinyam (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. The Act has introduced new provisions specifically, Section 111 related to “organized crime”, Section 69 related to sexual intercourse on false promise of marriage, employment, promotion or by suppressing the identity, Section 95 related to hiring, employing or engaging a child to commit an offence etc. In respect of the crimes related to buying a child for the purposes of prostitution (Section 99), gang rape (Section 70) and exploitation of a trafficked person (Section 144) the punishment has been increased. Further, in respect of certain severe crimes against women like buying child for the purposes of prostitution (section 99 of BNS), organised crime (Section 111), kidnapping or maiming a child for purpose of begging (Section 139) mandatory minimum punishment have been prescribed. 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.
- ii. The introduction of Zero FIR and electronic First Information Reports (e-FIR) is a noteworthy advancement in modernizing the legal system and improving the effectiveness of law enforcement. These measures have removed Geographical restrictions and administrative bottlenecks in the system.
- iii. Section 193(3)(ii) of BNSS mandates that the police officer shall, within a period of ninety days, inform the progress of the investigation to the informant or the victim. Provisions under section 398 of BNSS introduces Witness Protection Schemes, acknowledging the critical need to shield witnesses from threats and intimidation. Further, Section 2(1)(d) of BSA 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.
- iv. 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, 2013’ (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.

- v. Under Nirbhaya Fund, Government has taken several measures to improve safety and security of women:
 - a. The component of One Stop Centre (OSCs) under 'Sambal' sub-scheme of 'Mission Shakti', 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. upto 5 days are provided under one roof to any women under assault or distress. Till date, 802 OSCs have been made functional in 36 States/UTs wherein over 10.12 lakh women have been assisted so far.
 - b. A fully functional dedicated 24x7x365 toll-free Women Helpline-181 (WHL) under Nirbhaya Fund provides emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence and in distress across the country. This helpline is fully integrated with 112. 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. As of October 31, 2024, a total of 81,64,796 women have been assisted across the country.
 - c. In addition, under Nirbhaya Fund, the Central Government has provided assistance to States/ UTs for setting up/ strengthening Women Help Desks (WHDs) in all police stations. So far, 14658 Women Help Desks have been established in police stations out of which 13,743 are headed by women. Further, 827 Anti-Human Trafficking Units have been set up for prevention of human trafficking and support to the victims. Cyber Forensic cum Training Labs have also been established in 33 States/UTs with 24,264 person trained in handling cyber related cases.
 - d. To ensure safety of public places where women work and live, 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.
 - e. To ensure that justice is delivered to unfortunate women and young girls who are victims of heinous sexual offences, the Government provides financial assistance to States/ UTs for setting up Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) since 2019. So far, 790 Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) have been approved, out of which 750 including 408 exclusive POCSO (e-POCSO) courts are operational in 30 States/UTs, having disposed of more than 2,87,000 cases of rape, and offences under POCSO Act across the country.

- vi. Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) has also undertaken several initiatives, which, inter-alia includes training and skill development programs for Investigation Officers, Prosecution Officers and Medical Officers. BPR&D has also prepared Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) for 'Women Help Desk at Police Stations' to ensure their smooth functioning. Emphasis has been laid upon appropriate behavioural and attitudinal skills of the police in course of prevention and detection of crime against women and children and interaction with victims of crime. Webinars on women safety with sensitivity, gender sensitization of police personnel etc. have also been organized by BPR&D.
- vii. Ministry of Home Affairs has also put in place Crime Multi Agency Centre (Cri-MAC), a national-level communication platform for online sharing of information on crime & criminals, including human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. This platform operates on a 24x7 basis and facilitates a seamless flow of information between various law enforcement agencies. Cri-MAC is instrumental in addressing the growing concern of cyber-enabled sex trafficking.
- viii. The government actively promotes legal literacy under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, which mandates the dissemination of legal knowledge to marginalized and vulnerable sections of society. Through this Act, Legal Services Authorities organize legal literacy camps, workshops, media campaigns, and distribution of educational materials in regional languages. The initiative emphasizes empowering citizens with knowledge of their rights and remedies, fostering equitable access to justice, and reducing exploitation. Additionally, Lok Adalats, established under this Act, not only resolve disputes amicably but also serve as a platform for spreading legal awareness.
- ix. Recognizing the need for psycho-social counselling to women affected by violence and in distress, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has engaged the services of National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) for providing basic and advanced training under the project named 'Stree Manoraksha' to the staff of One Stop Centres (OSCs) across the country on handling psycho-social and mental health care needs of women facing violence and distress.
- x. Further, the Ministry of Women and Child Development also administers sub-scheme "Samarthya" under Mission Shakti in which the component of Shakti Sadan is for relief and rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances and the victims of trafficking.
- xi. Another component Sakhi Niwas (Working Women's Hostels) of Mission Shakti 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. The government has also earmarked Rs. 5000 Crore during the current financial year for providing financial assistance to States for establishing working women hostel under the Scheme of Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI).
- xii. The Government, through institutions like the National Commission for Women (NCW) and its counterparts in States have been spreading awareness through seminars, workshops, audio- visual, print and electronic media etc. to sensitize the people about the safety and security of women and also about various provisions of the legislation and policies etc. In addition, Ministry of Women and

Child Development and Ministry of Home Affairs have issued advisories to States/ UTs from time to time on various issues pertaining to safety and security of women. In respect of the registered complaints, NCW takes up the matter with stakeholders especially the Police Authorities to ensure that the complaints are redressed and brought to logical conclusion.

The Projects/ Schemes under Nirbhaya Fund that have been implemented/ being implemented in the State of Odisha include, Emergency Response Support System (ERSS)-112, Setting-up/ Strengthening Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTU), Setting-up/ Strengthening Women Help Desk (WHDs), Cyber Crime Prevention against Women & Children (CCPWC), Cyber forensic and related facilities in State Forensic Science Laboratories (SFSLs), Universalisation of Women Helpline (WHL)-181, State-wise Vehicle Tracking Platform (VTP), Training of Investigating Officers (IOs)/ Prosecution Officers (POs)/ Medical Officers (MOs) in Forensic Evidence collection, Setting up Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) to dispose of cases pending trial under rape and POCSO Act. There are 30 operational One Stop Centers (OSCs) in the State of Odisha with an OSC in each of the 30 districts.

Governments' comprehensive initiatives reflect a strong commitment to ensuring the safety and empowerment of women. By integrating legislative reforms, technological advancements, victim-centric approaches, and awareness programs, the government has laid a robust foundation for addressing crimes against women, ensuring justice, and promoting gender equality. These efforts signify a progressive step towards fostering a secure and inclusive society where women can thrive without fear or discrimination.
