

Nearly 110 children suffering from cancer were taken for a visit to the historic Sion Fort here, in a bid to boost their morale to fight the disease. "We aim to felicitate children suffering from cancer. The kids are warriors as they fight cancer while their parents, doctors and nurses are angels who help them fight the disease," the NGO engaged in the welfare of kids suffering from cancer said in a statement. -PTI



(L to R) Care India's Neera Saggi, Bayer Group's UVL Ananda, Educationist Rupa Shah, Nirmala Niketan's Geeta Ibrahim and United Way's Jayanti Shukla, formed the panel moderated by R N Bhaskar.

Country cannot develop without empowering women: Athawale

STAFF REPORTER
Mumbai

The country cannot develop without empowering women, said the Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment, Ramdas Athawale, during his opening remarks at the session 'Women Empowerment' organised by The Free Press Journal (FPJ) and Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC). This session took place in Mumbai on International Women's Day.

Athawale set the tone of the discussion by talking about the Indian system which leads to discrimination against women and went on to talk about the much-awaited Women's Reservation Bill which is still pending.

Following his keynote address, the panel discussion commenced which was moderated by Free Press Journal, consulting editor, R N Bhaskar.

The experts at the panel were UVL Ananda, head stakeholder affairs and head CSR, South Asia, Bayer Group; Geeta Ibrahim, principal, College of Home Science, Nirmala Niketan; Neera Saggi, chairperson, Care India; Rupa Shah, educationist and former vice-chancellor, SNDT University and Jayanti Shukla, chief executive director, United Way.

At the panel 'Women empowerment and social transformation- Justice for Weaker sections', Ananda said, "Discrimination starts the way we are brought up." There is discrimination at all levels, she stressed, but she felt that sexual abuse against



Union Minister for Social Justice & Empowerment Ramdas Athawale delivering the keynote address.

the girl child can have a huge impact in her life. She maintained that children have a voice and personality and parents have a responsibility to detect early signs of abuse. Ananda reiterated the need to let go of taboos and talk about things that can have a far reaching effect in the life of the child. This approach will help her to grow stronger and communicate openly.

Adding to Ananda, Shah stated that although rules and regulations favouring women empowerment exist they are seldom implemented. "The government is doing plenty but there is much more that needs to be done," said Shah. She

said that there is a need for society to teach men to empower women. Coming from an academic background, she is of the strong opinion that the teaching curriculum should have a gender course. "Education should be rewritten for both genders."

Saggi believes that empowerment can be political, social and economic. "Women need freedom to move around." Commenting on political freedom, she said that 67 per cent of active Indian voters are women. She further added that in terms of economic freedom for women, India ranks along with some Saudi Arabian countries,

which is very low. "India needs to do a lot here," Saggi said. She did admit, however, that India has moved up substantially in rankings relating to women empowerment but there is a lot more that needs to be done.

Shukla sharing her learning said that at different age levels, women have different sets of problems. "Every woman should be categorised differently to empower women (at different levels)," said Shukla whose NGO works with various communities. Meanwhile, Ibrahim said that at Nirmala Niketan, they are trying to create women entrepreneurs. Her college has tried to help drop outs get jobs with various short courses that would skill them and thus empower them. Ibrahim added that her institution now wants to go beyond women in order to focus on gender equality. This has led it to open its doors to boys for post graduate courses in Nirmala Niketan.

This panel discussion was followed by case studies presented by Mumbai city, deputy collector, Vandana Georaikar and Hotel Transit, director, Bharat Malkani. While Georaikar spoke about the work she did with women in rural Maharashtra, Malkani promised the Women's Federation chairperson that their handmade pickle project which was launched by Athawale at the event, will be promoted by Indian hotels along with other international brands. Malkani who believes in women equality said that equality comes with economic equality.

Sex assault compensation scheme is 'insulting', take a relook: HC to Maha govt

AGENCIES
Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday asked the Maharashtra government to take fresh look at a scheme for giving compensation to sexual assault and acid attack victims, saying it lack empathy and is "insulting and shameful".

"We are not happy with this Manodhairya scheme. It is insulting, inhuman and shameful. There has been no application of mind while formulating this scheme."

"It is just an empty formality. This is a very sorry state of affairs," a division bench of Chief Justice Manjula Chellur and Justice G S Kulkarni said.

The court was hearing a petition filed by a 14-year-old girl, who claims to be a victim of rape, seeking compensation of Rs three lakh under the scheme.

The girl was given Rs two lakh by the government after the petition was filed in October last year.

"Look at the state of Goa. It gives Rs 10 lakh compensation. We expect Maharashtra to also be progressive and positive."

"We direct our order and all other relevant judgments passed by the Supreme Court in the past on this issue to be placed before the state chief secretary so that he can make some progress and take some laudable decision in the matter within four weeks," the court noted. Under the scheme launched in October 2013,



The court said the clauses have been framed with no application of mind and these lack empathy towards the victims.

the state government gives a compensation of up to Rs three lakh to victims of rape and other crimes against women.

Apart from the monetary compensation, the government also provides counselling to the victim and vocational or educational training if required.

During the hearing, the bench was informed by the state government that the scheme has two categories - the first for rape and sexual assault victims and the second for acid attack victims. Rs two lakh is given to victims of the first category and Rs three lakh for the second category.

The court said the clauses have been framed with no application of mind and these lack empathy towards the victims.

"What about child victims? Is Rs two lakh enough for them? In a place like Bombay what will a child do with Rs two lakh. They will not even get proper education," it said. -PTI

Govt committed to gender equality: CM

AGENCIES
Mumbai

The Maharashtra government is committed to ensure equal opportunities for women in all the spheres, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said here on Wednesday.

"Caring sister, daughter, loving wife and the pillar of

strength in everyone's life 'Mother', such are the diverse roles a woman has," Fadnavis tweeted on the occasion of International Women's Day on Wednesday. "But what is common is her motherly nature. We are progressing & seeing her lead instead of plead. I salute this nature's gift to mankind!" he wrote. -PTI

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Ladies special train with all-women crew

STAFF REPORTER
Mumbai

It was indeed a special day for women commuters and women railway staffers who boarded the ladies' special train which left from Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) at 6pm on Wednesday.

On account of International Women's Day, the central railways ran a ladies' special local train from CST to Panvel. A first of ride it was on this track. The train was boarded by all women-crew consisting of motor woman, guard, Ticket Checker and Railway Protection Force (RPF).

The train was also decorated with roses and all the women commuters who boarded the train were gifted a rose each by the central railway officials who were present on the platform. The train was driven by a motor woman Surekha Yadav, who is Asia's first woman train driver to drive the Deccan Queen from Pune to CST.

"I feel proud to have been asked to pilot the train on the eve of women's day. I have been appreciated by all my senior officials for my work and I hope to con-



The train was driven by a motor woman Surekha Yadav, who is Asia's first woman train driver to drive the Deccan Queen from Pune to CST. All the women commuters who boarded the train were gifted a rose.

tinue my work with full dedication in future too," said Yadav.

All women commuters rushed towards the platform when they heard the announcement informing them of the ladies special train. "It feels special that a local train service has been planned by the railways only for us women commuters," said Snehal Chorge, a daily commuter at CST station.

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