

Indian Express 08.06.2010

Municipal platform to protect women at workplace

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Mumbai: From Tuesday, Mumbai's working women will have a support platform that will strive towards eliminating sexual harassment at the workplace.

Aimed at making Mumbai a "gender friendly city", the BMC's Savitribai Phule Gender Resource Centre will be inaugurated by municipal commissioner Swadheen Kshatriya. Such centres have been set up by NGOs but this is the first by a civic body.

Built on a municipal reserved plot at Balaseth Murudkar Marg in Lower Parel, the centre is the result of the efforts of the civic body's committee on prevention of sexual harassment, formed in 2003 for women in municipal offices. Dr Kamakshi Bhate of KEM Hospital said it will also serve as a platform for various agencies and NGOs working towards empowerment of urban working women, especially those from BPL families.

"NGOs such as Akshara, Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Sneha and Lawyers Collective have already come forward and agreed to share their resources for complaints redressal, counselling and training. We will also involve corporate firms and various UN programmes. We will also have community psychiatric units in slum areas to help women who undergo various forms of embarrassment, at home and at their workplaces," said Bhate.

One of the main areas of focus will be a violence resource centre, a platform for redressal of complaints. Any woman harassed can complain and will be counselled by trained persons. A community video unit will involve youths in highlighting and documenting women's issues and violence against women.

The centre will include self-defence training, and a library and a reading room. It will be open to

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Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 08 June 2010 10:26 - Last Updated Tuesday, 08 June 2010 10:29

school and college girls from BPL families who mostly live in one-room houses without a place to study. "A preventive health clinic open to all girls and women will be on the premises," said Dr Bhate.