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Corporation's 'jagratha samithis' to help women in distress

KOCHI: There has been no respite in crimes against women in the city with even men in khaki among culprits, and vandals targeting a traffic warden in broad daylight on Saturday. Sensing the public outrage, the Kochi corporation has decided to move quickly and fast track its decision to set up 'jagratha samithis' to help women in distress.

The 'jagratha samithis' will be organized at the corporation as well as the division level and are expected to become functional by the month-end. These 'samithis' will provide all support to victims of abuse, including counseling and legal help. The decision follows the recent direction of the Kerala State Women's Commission to set up such groups

This year till September, the city police have registered 663 cases of crime against women, including 304 molestation cases, 18 kidnapping cases, 220 cases of cruelty by husbands and relatives.

"The 'samithi' will address issues faced by women. It is not really possible for women to approach the police with complaints due to several reasons. The 'samithis' will be able to bridge that gap and help women," said mayor Tony Chammany.

The 11-member 'jagratha samithi' at the corporation level will have mayor as the chairman, deputy mayor as deputy chairperson and members will include welfare standing committee chairperson, a doctor, city police commissioner or a person nominated by him, legal expert, counsellor, a district-level official of the social welfare department and social workers. The division-level 'samithis' will have councillor of the respective area, sub-inspectors of the area and anganawadi supervisors as its members.

Councillor Minimol V K, who has been supervising the setting up of 'samithis', said that women can lodge their complaints either with the councillor of the area or inform them over the telephone.

"A helpline number will be provided for women in distress to directly contact the corporation," she said.

Minimol added that if the 'jagratha samithis' fail to handle an issue, it would be reported to the police. In such cases, the corporation will extend all support to the complainant.

The civic body will also organise awareness programmes at the division level prior to the launch of 'samithis'.

In the last week, four women were molested or assaulted in public places in the city. In the first instance, a woman passenger was molested in a moving bus by the bus owner's son and conductor. In the second such incident, a migrant worker molested a woman at Vyttila Mobility Hub. This was

followed by an assault by a drunken civil police officer on a woman who was trying to board a bus at mobility hub. In the latest incident, a traffic warden was assaulted at Kathrikkadavu on Saturday.

While the corporation is busy setting up jagratha samithis, a similar initiative, launched by the previous council, had failed to hold a single meeting to address women's woes.

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