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EDITORIAL 01

Regressive move: On minimising night duty for women

Reducing work hours of women is not the way to ensure their safety

The last thing that a rape and murder need are **platitudes**, and a predictably **tiresome** one is being **peddled** after the **brutal** killing of a woman doctor on duty at Kolkata's R.G. Kar Hospital on August 9. One of the guidelines issued by the West Bengal government calls for minimising night duty for women. How will this **dictum** — “wherever possible, night duty may be avoided for women to the extent possible” — secure safety at the workplace? This **regressive** move will only end up removing women from the workforce, instead of ensuring a stop to violence. With the labour force participation rate for urban women in India, ages 15 and above, pegged at an **abysmal** 25.2% in April-June 2024, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey's quarterly bulletin, the governments at the Centre and States must ensure that women, employed as health-care professionals, gig and factory workers, call centre staff, auto drivers,



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hotel duties and journalists, are able to work safely, anywhere, and at anytime. Reducing their time at work will only lead to women losing jobs and their financial independence. The other guidelines, as part of the programme called 'Rattirer Shaathi (helpers of the night)', include the call for separate rest rooms and toilets for women, creating safe zones with CCTVs, and a special mobile phone app — measures which should have been already in place.

The Supreme Court, taking suo motu **cognisance** of the Kolkata case, in its hearing on Tuesday announced a national task force to look into the safety of doctors and medical professionals. Gender violence should be a matter of serious concern in every sphere, not least the informal sector, where women are employed in large numbers. The sweeping changes brought into the system after the 2012 Delhi rape, such as harsher laws and **stringent** punishment, have not been enough. The National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) annual report of 2022, the latest one available, shows that 4.45 lakh cases of crimes against women were registered, which is equivalent to nearly 51 FIRs every hour. Protocols cannot be just on paper, the Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said. In 2017, when the Court was confirming the death penalty of four men, who were accused in the 2012 Delhi rape, Justice R. Banumathi had said that apart from effective

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implementation of laws, a change in the mindset of the society at large and creating awareness in the public on gender justice would go a long way to combat violence against women. Campaigns led by women after the R.G. Kar rape, to “reclaim the night” in Kolkata and other parts of the country, should serve as wake-up calls to governments, and society, to do it right by women.

SUMMARY

The West Bengal government has issued guidelines recommending reducing night duty for women, but this regressive move may not ensure workplace safety. With an abysmal 25.2% participation rate for urban women in India, governments must ensure women can work safely, anywhere, and at anytime. Reducing their time at work will lead to women losing jobs and financial independence. The guidelines, part of the 'Rattirer Shaathi' program, call for separate rest rooms and toilets for women, creating safe zones with CCTVs, and a special mobile phone app. The Supreme Court has announced a national task force to investigate the safety of doctors and medical professionals. Gender violence should be a serious concern in every sphere, including the informal sector. Campaigns led by women after the R.G. Kar rape should serve as wake-up calls to governments and society to do it right by women.

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Vocabulary

1. Regressive

Synonyms: Backward, conservative, retrogressive

Antonyms: Progressive, innovative, advanced

2. Platitude

Meaning: A remark or expression that has been repeated so often it has become dull, lacking originality, or depth.

3. Tiresome

Synonyms: Tedious, boring, dull

Antonyms: Engaging, interesting, exciting

4. Peddled

Synonyms: Promoted, marketed, hawked

Antonyms: Concealed, suppressed, rejected

5. Brutal

Synonyms: Violent, cruel, harsh

Antonyms: Gentle, mild, compassionate

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6. Dictum

Synonyms: Statement, declaration, maxim

Antonyms: Suggestion, opinion, hypothesis

7. Abysmal

Synonyms: Appalling, atrocious, dreadful

Antonyms: Excellent, outstanding, good

8. Cognizant

Synonyms: Aware, conscious, informed

Antonyms: Ignorant, oblivious, neglectful

9. Stringent

Synonyms: Strict, severe, rigorous

Antonyms: lenient, flexible, relaxed



EDITORIAL 02

Back from the brink: On the Sri Lankan elections and the road ahead

Sri Lanka has an opportunity to elect a truly representative government

Sri Lanka's ninth presidential election, scheduled for September 21, has attracted a record 39 candidates, signalling a return to "business as usual" despite the severe economic crisis of 2022. The number of contenders, four more than in 2019, suggests a **robust** democratic process. There are familiar faces and some surprises. **Incumbent** President Ranil Wickremesinghe, traditionally with the United National Party, is running as an independent. At 75, he aims to **garner** broad support by highlighting the political and economic stability achieved during his two-year tenure, made possible by backing from the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), led by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa. In early 2022, Sri Lanka faced the full effect of an economic meltdown, brought on by, among other things, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. The central bank announced a debt repayment **moratorium** amid unsustainable debt and critically low reserves.



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The Russia-Ukraine conflict further worsened the situation. The Aragalaya movement resulted in the **ousting** of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022. Since then, Sri Lanka has secured an extended fund facility with the IMF, supported initially by India and now with an “agreement in principle” with India and the Paris Club creditors on a debt treatment plan. During the early recovery phase, people faced price hikes. Recently, prices of electricity, fuel, and cooking gas have decreased, but people are still struggling. Earnings from tourism, a major contributor, amounted to around \$328 million in July against \$219 million a year ago. However, in a move seen as part of electioneering, the government announced a monthly cost of living allowance of LKR 25,000 for public service employees, effective January 2025.

Mr. Wickremesinghe faces Sajith Premadasa of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (United People’s Front), Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, and Mahinda Rajapaksa’s son, Namal of the SLPP. Mr. Dissanayake, who visited India in February, hopes to **capitalise** on public frustration with traditional political parties, a sentiment that **fuelled** the Aragalaya movement. Other candidates include P. Ariyanethran, a “common Tamil candidate”, Sarath Fonseka, former Army Commander, and Nuwan Bopage, a

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nominee of the Aragalaya activists. The leading candidates should push for the **restoration** of provincial councils, which represent a measure of **autonomy** as **envisaged** in the 13th Amendment. It is a sad commentary on the Sri Lankan political leadership that the councils have been **rendered** non-functional for years. Whoever is elected by about 17 million voters as President should revive the provincial councils, which are not Tamil-centric but are intended to infuse an element of agency for the people in the running of their affairs. A functional democracy is the first step to fixing the economy.

SUMMARY

Sri Lanka's ninth presidential election, scheduled for September 21, has attracted a record 39 candidates, signaling a return to "business as usual" despite the severe economic crisis of 2022. Incumbent President Ranil Wickremesinghe, traditionally with the United National Party, is running as an independent, aiming to garner broad support by highlighting the political and economic stability achieved during his two-year tenure. The country has secured an extended fund facility with the IMF, supported initially by India and now with an "agreement in principle" with India and the Paris Club creditors on a debt treatment plan. Other candidates include Sajith Premadasa of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, Anura Kumara

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Dissanayake of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, and Mahinda Rajapaksa's son, Namal of the SLPP. The leading candidates should push for the restoration of provincial councils, which represent a measure of autonomy as envisaged in the 13th Amendment.

Vocabulary

1. Robust

Synonyms: Strong, sturdy, vigorous

Antonyms: Frail, delicate, timid

2. Incumbent

Meaning: Holding an office or position

3. Garner

Synonyms: Collect, gather, assemble

Antonyms: Disperse, scatter, forfeit

4. Moratorium

Meaning: A temporary suspension or halt

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5. Ousting

Synonyms: Evicting, supplanting, sacking

Antonyms: Retaining, supporting, sustaining

6. Capitalise

Synonyms: Utilize, exploit, leverage

Antonyms: Miss, waste, neglect

7. Fuelled

Synonyms: Powered, stimulated, energized

Antonyms: Deplete, drained, exhausted

8. Restoration

Synonyms: Renovation, repair, reconstruction

Antonyms: Destruction, demolition, decay

9. Autonomy

Synonyms: Independence, freedom, liberty

Antonyms: Control, coercion, oppression



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10. Envisage

Synonyms: Visualize, foresee, predict

Antonyms: Ignore, overlook, disregard

11. Render

Synonyms: Offer, supply, furnish

Antonyms: Refuse, deny, conceal

