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Pink Sarathis to the aid of lone women at bus stops

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BENGALURU, DHNS



BMTC's Pink Sarathi jeeps.
DH FILE PHOTO/SK DINESH

Even as the safety of women commuters has come under focus after the Hyderabad horror, BMTC has been running a pilot project for the security of women passengers, with its 'Pink Sarathi' jeeps helping women stranded at bus stops at night.

Senior Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) officials said that since November, 25 Pink Sarathi jeeps inducted through the Nirbhaya scheme have come to the aid of 35 women stranded at bus stops where the frequency of buses after 10 pm was low.

BMTC managing director C Shikha said the initiative is just a small step in major reforms she has planned to ensure the safety of women passengers. "These women

were not in any direct danger but our initiative was aimed at averting unsavoury situations. In the next three months, several measures will be implemented to make women in BMTC buses feel safe and secure," she added.

An official heading the Pink Sarathi team said most of the 35 women they dropped home were waiting for buses alone. Bustling areas during the day suddenly become deserted after 10.30 pm, he said.

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Pink Sarathis to the aid of lone women at bus stops

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"Many times, we parked the vehicle near them as reassurance and left the spot after they got on to the bus. Last month, following directions from the top, we started identifying women who may become vulnerable and dropped them home," he said.

The Pink Sarathis operate in three shifts: 6 am-2 pm; 2 pm-10 pm and 10 pm-6 am. "We are aware of our limits. We can't be police and cover the entire city with 25 jeeps. Most of the city goes to sleep by 10. But there are some pockets which we watch and take action. We once saw a woman waiting for a bus at KHB Colony at 10.45 pm and dropped her home at Sirsi Circle. We decided not to take chances even at places like Kemppegowda Bus Station after 11 pm," the official explained.

Shaheen Shasa, a member of Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike, said public transport was safer than other modes for women travelling at night.

- "Increasing the frequency of buses is important to address women's safety. The government should fund BMTC to induct more bus-

es. Investment here will reduce the necessity of bringing additional infrastructure for women's safety," she said, adding that fixing the basics like adequate lighting at bus stops and real-time information on bus schedules were also needed.

Panic buttons

BMTC managing director C Shikha said the corporation was also focusing on the safety of women inside buses. "As many 357 buses will be retrofitted with panic buttons within the next three months. By that time, we will come out with a new app for reliable information on bus schedules," Shikha said.