

## President asks women to learn judo, karate

President Pratibha Patil Thursday urged women to learn martial arts like judo and karate for self-defence and self-confidence to face the challenges of discrimination.

'Self-defence is the best defence,' Patil said addressing the inaugural of the Sixth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference here.

Patil, the first woman president of the country, asked the government to ensure women's security at work places and insisted that strict action should be taken against those who indulge in 'reprehensible acts like eve-teasing and molesting'.

Urging the women to fight discrimination, Patil said: 'They should work determinedly for their own empowerment. One important step in this direction is imparting physical education - like judo and karate - for self-defence to girl students from a very early age so as to make them physically strong and to build-up self-confidence to face the challenges of life.'

The president's advice came in the wake of increased cases of molestation and rapes reported from different parts of the country. Women and Child Development Minister Renuka Chowdhury held a meeting of legal experts earlier this week to examine the possibility of initiating more stringent laws to deal with such cases.

Emphasising on women's empowerment, Patil said the agenda for it should cover the gender needs and concerns at every stage and sphere of life of a girl - protecting them in the womb by prohibiting female foeticide, addressing the gender preferences in the families and sensitising the society to look at girl child as a boon.

The president stressed the need to make workplace safer for women, enact stringent laws against sexual harassment and address issues like dowry and domestic violence.

The president pointed out that large number of Indian women was joining the police forces. 'Those who needed protection earlier are now giving protection to others. This is a big change.'

Patil said Indian women undertake 60 percent of the farm work and the country has over 2.2 million Self Help Groups at the grass roots level, which translates into more than 33 million households.

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