

# Women of steel are rebuilding the city

**WOMEN'S DAY TODAY** Building Metros and airports to clearing hawkers, there is nothing they can't do. Talk about gender issues? No, they only want their work to do the talking. Don't treat us like we are above or under you, they say. HT profiles women officials who are making their mark in 'male-dominated arenas'

**Tanushree Venkatraman and Sanjana Bhalerao**

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**MUMBAI:** They are building metros, they are building airports, they are making the city walkable, they have not only

stepped into what was considered to be a man's world, but have gone way ahead.

On International Women's Day (March 8), HT speaks to women officials of the Maharashtra government who are breaking every barrier to change

the city's landscape, improve the quality of life and make it better for its citizens. The challenges they face in the bargain are innumerable - long hours at work, visits to dusty construction sites even at odd hours, staying away from children and juggling between family

and work.

What keeps them going, however, is their immense passion and dedication to provide infrastructure that the megapolis deserves. And yes, they are not expecting any special treatment for being women.

**ASHWINIBHIDE, MD, MMRC**

## 'Being a woman can never be an excuse'

**Tanushree Venkatraman**

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She is heading a project which India's Metro man E Sreedharan has termed the "most difficult, most challenging and the most complex Metro project the country has ever undertaken".

Dealing with the project, being in a field considered to be male-dominated and not having a background in engineering - nothing has dithered Ashwini Bhide's passion for her work. The one principle that the managing director of the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation (MMRC) has followed in her career spanning more than two decades is "being a woman can never be an excuse". "My first encounter with urban infrastructure was when I was appointed at the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA). I was an arts graduate, I had no engineering background and here I was heading several major infrastructure projects in a completely male-dominated arena," says Bhide. "But I didn't hesitate to learn on-field. Through the years, I also learnt that projects are not always about engineering, there are a lot of social aspects involved. It needs managerial skills and good co-ordination to complete an infrastructure project."

An IAS officer from the 1995 batch, Bhide is credited for the execution of several infrastructure projects in the city, including the 16.8-km Eastern Freeway, the Mumbai monorail and the city's first Metro from Versova to Ghatkopar. Her contribution towards



**Ashwini Bhide**, a 1995 batch IAS officer is the managing director, Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation (MMRC). She heads the organisation which is executing the fully underground Metro-3 corridor (Colaba-Bandra-Seepz). She has also worked as the additional metropolitan commissioner in the MMRDA

rehabilitating 5,000 families, affected by many infrastructure projects, is also considered to be a case study.

Today, Bhide heads a company that is executing a 33.5-km underground Metro corridor from Colaba in South Mumbai to Seepz in the western suburbs. Once commissioned in 2021, it is expected to change the way the city travels.

Since its inception, however, the project has also been mired in controversy, including resistance to a car-de-

pot in Aarey, tree-cutting across the city and complaints of damage caused to old buildings owing to the works. Family support has given the strength to carry on in her long journey, she says. "My family always understood that the job as an IAS officer in this mega city can be demanding."

Bhide recalls an incident when she had to take her two young children to Mussoorie, where she had to attend a month-long training programme. "I took special permission to bring my

children, my mother-in-law and a house help because my children were very young," she says. However, Mussoorie was followed by a three-week programme in South Korea, for which Bhide had to seek help from her extended family to look after her children in Mumbai. "I remember when the Milan and Dahisar rail-over-bridges were being executed, a major part of the work was to be done at night. I used to be at the site from 11pm to 3am for days," she says.