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To ₹ or Not to ₹

In the age of Trump, crypto is gaining currency, with even Pakistan embracing it for strategic reasons. How long must India wait? **DEEP DIVE >> 5**

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Skill Gap

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One of them is the skill gap, said Rajesh.

Women are often concentrated in functions like marketing, HR or branding, which are not always direct paths to the CEO role, especially in legacy firms where operations or finance backgrounds are preferred. This creates a structural barrier to their ascent to top leadership.

Then there is the issue of the work-life balance due to cultural norms—women are often expected to prioritise domestic responsibilities, which clashes with workplace practices like long hours and remote postings, common in legacy businesses.

Rajesh said, "This prevents leaders from building work-life influence—credibility at the home, which urges family members to support her career, and at the workplace, where sponsors and mentors root for her."

Biocon founder Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw emphasised the role of corpo-

rates to realise and recognise the contribution of women, though enablers such as environmental, social, governance (ESG) and diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) provisions are in place.

"The corporate sector isn't seriously facilitating women to climb the ladder," she said. "Culturally we don't empower women; and there are several deterrents for women to break in. Many give up when there's a hostile environment."

Mazumdar-Shaw, however, noted that things are changing, and more

women leaders are now holding key leadership roles across sectors, especially at global organisations. "Women make strong and successful leaders," she said. "They are far more empathetic, strategic, and risk-taking."

An earlier Prime Database report with data up to March 6 also highlighted the leaky bucket phenomenon in India Inc. It revealed how from 23% of employees being women across all NSE-listed companies, the share dwindled while going up the hierarchy to 13% of key ma-

agement personnel (KMPs) and 10% of executive directors.

"The pool itself is limited because of the leaky bucket," said Pranav Haldea, MD, Prime Database Group. "The low number of women CEOs and MDs can't be looked at in isolation. It has to be looked at in the social context of the society we live in." He stressed the need for policies and supportive practices to ensure women don't drop out in the middle of their careers, in addition to more equality in childcare support, caring of elders and household chores.

HUL'S NAIR THE EXCEPTION, NOT THE RULE

It's Lonely at the Top—At Least if You're a Woman



Lost Decade

NSE-listed cos with women MD/CEOs on their boards

As on Mar 31	Nifty 50	Nifty 100	Nifty 200	Nifty 500
2016	4	8	12	22
2017	3	6	11	20
2018	3	4	7	23
2019	1	5	9	24
2020	1	4	7	22
2021	2	6	7	27
2022	4	7	10	23
2023	3	8	11	24
2024	2	6	10	25
2025	2	4	9	23

Source: primeinfobase.com

Only 9 cos in Nifty 200 have women chiefs; a leaky pipeline, gender bias among reasons

Sreeradha Basu

Bengaluru: Hindustan Unilever's move to appoint Priya Nair as the first female chief executive and managing director in its 92-year history marks a milestone for India's largest fast-moving consumer goods company. Data, however, shows a glaring absence of women at the top of corporate leadership in India.

Overall representation of women in the top job at NSE-listed companies remains low, with only nine out of the Nifty 200 companies having women MDs and CEOs on their boards as of July 10. There are only two women MDs and CEOs in the Nifty 50 companies, three in the Nifty

100, and 24 in the top 500 listed companies on the NSE as of July 10, according to an analysis for ET by primeinfobase.com.

Despite the compelling business case for gender diversity and many companies ostensibly pushing the agenda, the needle has barely moved in the last decade.

The analysis reveals the share of Nifty 200 firms with women CEOs and MDs has fluctuated between 3.5% and 6% in the past decade, with the highest point in FY16, when a dozen companies had female top bosses.

Experts attribute this to multiple factors—a leaky pipeline, lack of policies to retain and support high-potential women, persisting workplace biases, and a gap between talk and action.

"In India, several factors stand out as key impediments to the speedy rise of women to the C-Suite," said Saundarya Rajesh, founder president at Avtar Group, a workplace culture consulting firm.

Skill Gap