Bridging gender gap in India

What is the issue?

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India’s gender gap is best bridged by improving ease of doing business for women and increasing their political empowerment.

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What does the report say?

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- According to the McKinsey Global Institute, India’s economy could earn an additional $700 billion to $2.9 trillion by 2025 by enabling its women to participate in the economy on par with men.
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- But India’s ranking in the recently released World Economic Forum’s 2018 Gender Gap Index remained stuck on 108th position for the second year in a row.
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- Also, we ranked lower than last year on the ‘Economic Participation of women in the economy’ and ‘Political Empowerment’ parameters within the index.
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- However, there are a bunch of opportunities that the government can leverage to improve India’s rankings and bridge some part of the 33% gender gap.
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- This will require raising the political commitment on the issue significantly, building a strong public-private partnership and initiating government actions on a war-footing.
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What should be done?

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- **Increase women's representation in Parliament** – At present in India, the proportion of women in Parliament is 12% and women in ministerial positions is 19%.
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- Women legislators are needed because they are likely to advocate changes that promote women.
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- Also, according to UN University, they have also proven to improve the economic performance of their constituencies 1.8% more than male legislatures.
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- Hence, the Women's Reservation Bill should be immediately passed by the Lok Sabha.
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- Also, the parties can voluntarily reserve quotas for women when drawing up their list of candidates.
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- According to the World Atlas of Gender Quotas, such voluntary quotas have proved to be the single most effective tool for 'fast-tracking' women's representation in elected bodies of government.
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- **Implement pending policy actions** - Implementing the proposed national programme for crèche and day-care facilities will make subsidised day-care options available to working mothers.
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- Evidence shows that a 50% reduction in the cost of childcare increases the labour supply of young mothers by 6.5-10% (IMF).
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- Also, paid paternity leave can be mandated by either passing the proposed Paternity Bill or amending the Maternity Act to split the existing 26-week paid maternity leave into maternity and paternity or family leave.
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- This will ensure that women are not the sole "cost-burden" on employers.
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- The government could also bring in further policy reforms by taking inspiration from recent policy initiatives by other countries.
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- For example, Malaysia's tax-incentive given for women re-joining the workforce after a break, France's fine on companies that underpay women, or Tunisia's domestic violence law that protects women from abuse and bans harassment in public could be emulated.
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- **Improvements in Ease of Doing Business** - An engendered approach to

improve the ease of doing business should be made by addressing specific problems of women entrepreneurs.
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- For instance, since several female-run businesses are in the informal sector and lack access to information.
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- Hence, the government will need to run strategic media campaigns to educate business women about information sources and answer frequently-asked questions.
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- Also, dedicated women's help desks at the relevant government departments can help in addressing complaints.
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- Additionally, the mindset barriers that women face should be addressed by conducting gender sensitivity training programmes for government and banking officials.
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Source: Business Line

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