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Agent of change

In conjunction with International Women's Day today, *StarTwo* speaks to two women who have succeeded in a male-dominated world, Indian icon Dr Kiran Bedi, and professional race driver Milka Duno from Venezuela.

WONG LI ZA

SHE gained much attention for towing away the then Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi's car for a parking violation in the early 80s and was nicknamed "Crane Bedi". An Indian icon, Dr Kiran Bedi is her country's first and highest-ranking woman police officer.

While in the force, Kiran served fearlessly, believing that no one was above the law, which explained the towing of the prime minister's car.

"That incident was totally in tandem with my beliefs. It revealed consistency of conviction and showed a commitment to duty and justice. It was an exposure to who I really was by nature and nurture," she explained via e-mail.

In 1990, she won national acclaim by single-handedly standing down a violent riot in New Delhi, facing hundreds of sword-wielding protestors armed only with her police baton. All her other colleagues fled.

"All the cops ran away and was left by myself to take them all on. While I was awarded for gallantry, many others were accused of cowardice."

Was she afraid for her life at any point?

"No, I was not afraid. I was a leader and a provider," she said matter-of-factly.

Outspoken and fearless

Being a woman in a male-dominated world of the police force, her challenge was to

continually succeed despite all odds.

"The obstruction came from my peers and seniors at times, and also a lack of resources. My challenge was how to continue meeting the expectations of my responsibilities," said Kiran, who now lives in Delhi.

"My principle in life was gratitude with continuity of right action and right effort."

Known for her no-nonsense, outspoken and fearless attributes, Kiran, 60, is highly regarded as a modern time agent of change.

She joined the Indian Police Service in 1972, quickly rising up the ranks in the male-dominated field. Throughout her career, Kiran has held various positions including Special Commissioner of Intelligence with the Delhi Police, Director General of Narcotics Control Bureau, Deputy Inspector General of Police and Inspector General of Prisons.

The former tennis ace, who has won national and Asian titles, also served as Police Adviser to the Secretary General in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with the United Nations.

One of her most challenging postings was when she was Inspector General of Prisons in 1993 in charge of Tihar, India's largest prison complex. She introduced several reforms in prison management such as cracking down on corruption and drug abuse, and introduced a system of redress on complaints made by prisoners.

The mother of one was also concerned about the welfare of prisoners and introduced meditation courses, carpentry, yoga

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and literacy campaigns at the prison.

For these reform work, Kiran was awarded the Philippines Ramon Magsaysay Award (also known as the Asian Nobel Prize) in 1994. She was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her revolutionary reforms.

Born on June 9, 1949 in Punjab, Kiran has always had a strong desire to be in the government. "For me, that was the route to serve. I chose policing for the power of service potential it had to do good," said Kiran.

Her father was a landlord who emphasised on good education for all his four daughters. Kiran has a Diploma in English Language from the Government

College for Women in Amritsar, a Masters in Political Science from Punjab University, Chandigarh, and a Law degree from Delhi University.

Numerous accolades

In 1993, the Department of Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi awarded her a PhD for her research entitled *Drug Abuse And Domestic Violence*.

Besides the Ramon Magsaysay award, Kiran is also the recipient of several decorations – the President's Gallantry Award (1979), Asia Region Award for Drug Prevention and Control by the International Organisation of Good Templars (1991), Mahila Shiromani Award (1995), Father Machismo Humanitarian Award (1995), Pride of India (1999) and Mother Teresa Memorial National Award for Social Justice (2005).

She was also the first woman to receive the Joseph Beuys Award in 1997, given for outstanding social work.

Among her accolades, the Ramon Magsaysay Award meant the most to her as she said: "It was an award which empowered me, and brought international endorsement which strengthened my causes."

Kiran was appointed Director General of India's Bureau of Police Research and

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heads two NGOs, which she also founded – the Navjyoti India Foundation (NIF) and the India Vision Foundation (IVF).

The NIF was set up in 1988 with the idea of promoting welfare policing, the outcome of which was the correction, de-addiction and rehabilitation of drug addicts programme to curb crime rate. Since its inception, the foundation has made significant contributions to other areas such as education, women empowerment, family counselling, rural and urban development, HIV/AIDS and environment.

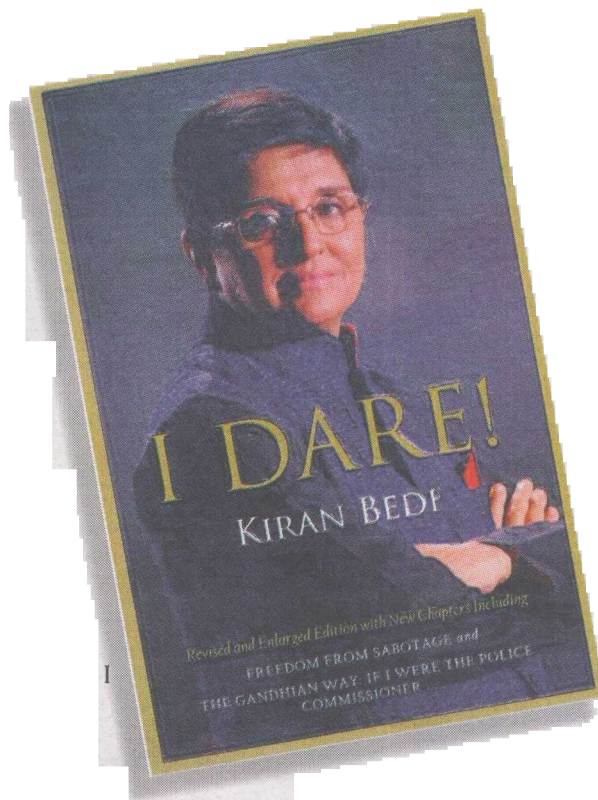
The IVF reaches out to thousands of underprivileged people daily, from the poor, drug addicts to prisoners, and gives aid in areas of education, vocational training, counselling, health care and treatment for drug addiction. The organisation has won the United Nation's Serge Sotiroff Memorial Award for drug abuse prevention.

Kiran's daughter supports her in voluntary work while her husband is also into

voluntary activities, and has his own trust for children's education.

Kiran also authored a few books, including *It's Always Possible*, which talks about her transformation work with the Tihar Prison. Two biographies have been written about her, entitled *I Dare!* and *Kiran Bedi – The Kindly Baton*.

A multiple award-winning documentary on her life entitled *Yes Madam, Sir* was also made and screened at film festivals around the world a few years ago.



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Development in 2006 but she opted for early retirement in 2008. Currently, she