

Spare a thought for disabled, pass the bill

TNN | Dec 7, 2016, 06.31 AM IST



For millions of Indians with disabilities and their families and friends, it was a momentous occasion when in April 2010, the then Government constituted a committee to draft a new disability rights legislation, keeping in mind India's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

It has been more than six years since then.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Bill 2014 was tabled in Rajya Sabha in February 2014. It has been more than two years since then. On December 2, last Friday, the eve of International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the entire country was looking at Rajya Sabha in hopeful

anticipation. It would have been an unprecedented gift for our brothers and sisters with disabilities had the RPWD bill been passed.

That did not happen.

Our honourable parliamentarians let politics triumph over the lives of millions of persons with disabilities—one of the most marginalised populations—an integral part of the "people of this country" that they claim to represent.

On December 5, the minister of social justice and empowerment tried to speak over the noise and move the bill for consideration and passage. Even the deputy chairman of Rajya Sabha urged all MPs to at least allow this bill to pass, reminding them that it was a "non-controversial" matter. The Opposition, however, did not relent.

While we respect the onerous responsibility that our parliamentarians have, we urge them to please spare a thought for that disabled person in the remotest village, struggling to live a life of basic dignity, to please spare a thought for that mother with a child with disability, running from pillar to post. And above all, to please realise that this bill is a completely non-political matter.

The new disability law is not just another law. It will be a game changer.

Amongst disabled people, there are the haves and have-nots. So far, only the three big disability groups-orthopaedically disabled, blind and deaf-have benefited from various entitlements. Others like people with intellectual disabilities, people with psychosocial disabilities, people affected by leprosy and people with cerebral palsy or autism, by and large, got nothing. This new disability law will change that. There is a lot in it for the have-nots.

Other than the neglected disabilities, there are as many as 14 more brand new disabilities being added. People with thalassemia, haemophilia, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, learning disabilities, etc. would finally be able to get their rights, most important being protection against blatant discrimination.

We call upon all Members of Parliament to please allow the House to function, so this Bill can be passed. This will send a strong message across the country and the world that when it comes to the rights of the most vulnerable, our parliamentarians stand together to protect them.

(Javed Abidi is convener of Disabled Rights Group)