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After wasting 18 days, RS gets into Act, clears Disabilities Bill

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New Delhi: After wasting 18 days in pandemonium on demonetization, the Rajya Sabha finally conducted its first legislative business of the Winter Session on Wednesday, unanimously passing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2016. The exhaustive Bill, containing 119 amendments, had 59 suggestions from the Standing Committee that were accepted by the government.

Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Thawar Chand Gehlot, said: "All the standing committee recommendations have been accepted. The number of categories of disabled are to be in-

creased for physical as well as mental disabilities."

CPM leader Sitaram Yechury asked the government to remove the clause "this does not apply to posts that require people who are not disabled" and sought that the "reservation should be based on cadre strength, not on number of vacancies meant to be filled" to which Gehlot said he would ensure this is incorporated in the Rules later.

To another issue raised by Yechury on the competent authority who will define certain disabilities, Gehlot said the medical board will decide on the definition as well as what disabilities are.

The Bill was introduced by the UPA government in 2014, and an

independent body of experts, The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), was set up in 2010 under activist Sudha Kaul to draw up the Bill and also to monitor policies regarding disability.

The 2016 Bill is also compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by India in 2007, adding for the first time, punitive action against those who discriminate against the disabled. While first-time offenders are now punishable for a 6-month jail time, and a fine of Rs 10,000, repeat offenders will be punishable of a jail term of up to 2 years with a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh.

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