Disabilities Bill clears Rajya Sabha hurdle

NEW DELHI: The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed a bill that stipulates stringent punishment for discriminating against differently-abled persons, the first in the winter session of Parliament that didn’t transact any legislative business, after an incomplete debate on demonetisation on November 15.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014, proposes to increase the types of disabilities from 7 to 21 and added new categories such as acid attack victims, intellectual disability, autism, thalassemia, Parkinson’s disease, hemophilia, speech and language disability and specific learning disability. It also proposes to increase reservation in educational institutions and government jobs from 3% to 4% for those with benchmark disabilities.

The bill will now be sent to the Lok Sabha. Once passed by the lower house, it will replace the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. The new bill provides for jail term up to 2 years and fine up to Rs 10 lakh for discrimination against differently-abled persons.

Participating in the debate, CPIM leader Siritaram Yechury said, "There are disabilities such as speech and language and intellectual capability as mentioned in the bill. Who is the authority to define it?" Social justice and empowerment minister Thawar Chand Gehlot explained that a Medical Board would define disability.

Welcoming the decision, Javed Abidi, convenor of the Disability Rights Group (DRG), said in a press statement that the new law would be a "game-changer and positively impact" the lives of crores of disabled people in India.