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Parliament passes Bill to prevent sexual harassment at workplace

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Expressing concern at the increase in sexual offences against women, the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday approved the amended Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, that seeks to provide protection to women in unorganised and organised sectors including the private sector. The Bill covers sexual harassment of domestic help and agriculture workers.

The Bill, which has already been passed by the Lok Sabha, was approved unanimously after Minister of State for Women and Child Development Krishna Tirath gave an assurance to the House that stringent rules would be framed to ensure that the Bill was not just “another piece of legislation” without an implementation mechanism and effective monitoring.

Cases of sexual harassment of women at workplace will have

to be disposed of by in-house committees (that must be set up) within a period of 90 days failing which a penalty of Rs. 50,000 would be imposed.

Repeated non-compliance with the provisions of the Bill can attract higher penalties and may lead to cancellation of licence or registration to conduct business.

Sexual harassment, says the Bill, includes any one or more of unwelcome acts or behaviour like physical contact and advances, a demand or request for sexual favours or making sexually coloured remarks or showing pornography.

The acts or behaviour whether directly, or by implication, include any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

The Bill makes it mandatory that all offices, hospitals, institutions and other workplaces should have an internal redress mechanism for complaints related to sexual harassment.

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