

## **Acid attack survivors to come under disability law**

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NEW DELHI: Persons afflicted with [Parkinson's](#) disease and [acid attack](#) survivors will soon be considered disabled under law. [The Persons with Disabilities Bill](#) (PWD), which is set to be tabled in Parliament, lists 21 infirmities. People falling under these 21 categories will be recognised as disabled and be eligible for affirmative action and benefits under the law.

A proposed [amendment](#) to the 1995 Act had increased number of disabilities from seven to 19. However, the bill was referred to a group of ministers for discussion and two more categories were added. The Supreme Court had asked the government to consider the disabled tag for acid attack victims, and the home ministry too had made a similar recommendation.

The GoM also pushed for inclusion of Parkinson's disease in the PWD Act. They argued that the disorder was a debilitating stigma in rural areas and recognising it would help sensitise the general population. The other key additions to the 1995 Act are autism, thalassemia, haemophilia, multiple sclerosis, sickle cell disease and dwarfism.

Sources said that social justice minister Thawar Chand Gehlot was likely to move the bill for passage in Rajya Sabha on Friday, with the government keen to announce the updated law on Saturday to coincide with World Disability Day. Apparently, the idea of branding the legislative achievement by coupling it with the disability day kept the Centre from announcing the Cabinet nod to the bill on Wednesday.

If the bill secures Parliament's nod, it would be a major upgrade of the disabilities' statute, given that the number of handicaps have remained frozen at seven for two decades. The amended bill entitles every child between 6 and 18 years with "benchmark disability" the "right to free education". It also increases reservation in higher educational institutions from 3% to 4% for students with benchmark disabilities.

The bill hikes reservation in government jobs from 3% to 4% and stresses on easy accessibility in public transport. According to the provisions, the offices of the chief commissioner of persons with disabilities and the state commissioners of disabilities will be strengthened. They will act as regulatory bodies and grievance redressal agencies and will monitor implementation of the Act — with the bill providing for penalties for offences against people with disabilities. The bill has proposed a fund to provide financial support to the disabled.

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