

## Rajya Sabha nod for child marriage prevention bill

The upper house of parliament Thursday approved a bill to ban child marriages - and void those that have taken place - with the government describing the measure as being essential to remove the 'biggest obscenity'.

'Sixty-five percent of the girls married in India are below the age of 18. We need to remove this biggest obscenity of child-child and child-adult marriages,' Minister of State for Women and Child Development declared while moving the Prevention of Child Marriage Bill, 2004 that the Rajya Sabha later adopted.

It will now be sent to the Lok Sabha for adoption before being sent to President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam for his assent, after which it comes into law.

The bill provides for the appointment by state governments of child marriage prevention officers, who will also rule on such marriages that have already taken place.

In the case of marriages being declared void, the bill states that the husband, or if he is a minor at the time of the marriage his guardian would pay maintenance to the minor girl till she remarried.

Replying to the debate on the bill, Chaudhary said every child marriage, whether conducted before or after the commencement of the act, could be voided at the option of the contracting party.

She lamented that in spite of a law against child marriages being on the statute since 1927, the pernicious practice had not stopped due to social and economic factors.

'An act was passed 77 years ago but there was no legal way to make child marriage a crime. We need to move ahead to prevent the practice rather than cure the evil as envisaged in the previous law,' Chowdhury added.

The bill had been tabled in parliament in 2004. It was then considered by a parliamentary standing committee and a group of ministers before cabinet approval was obtained earlier this year.

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