

Activists against child labour law amendments

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NEW DELHI: Days after the Rajya Sabha passed the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) bill 2012, Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi put the Centre on the mat saying the proposed legislation was driven by arguments that reflected an age-old mindset, complacency and apathy towards children. Satyarthi met handful of parliamentarians on Wednesday hoping to convince them to bring about changes in the bill. The bill is expected to get smooth passage in the Lok Sabha.

In India 33 million children between the age of 0-18 years are child labourers according to the 2011 Census.

This bill only ensures further "victimisation of children" in their poverty since it allows for children to help their parents in their traditional profession, Satyarthi said appealing to PM Modi for removing this lacuna. "We have miserably failed in ensuring that our children go to school. This provision will allow children to be used in domestic work, zari factories, etc," he said.

The founder of NGO Bachpan Bachao Andolan added, "Poverty is the most misused argument used to perpetuate this injustice in children and we are using the same arguments that we did 30 years back. The argument is driven by age-old mindset, complacency for status quo and apathy towards children. We have already lost three generations of children to labour, we cannot afford to lose more." He also pointed out that the reduction in the number of hazardous occupations and processes from the existing list of 83 to 3 in the prohibited list was harmful.

Child rights activists have also warned against the contradiction in the government's policies for economic growth like Digital India and Make in India. "Make in India can only happen if you have an educated population that big investors who want labour force can invest in. If they find that children are being used in the supply chain they will pull out much like countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia and Brazil have found much to their embarrassment," Satyarthi said.

NGO Child Rights and You (CRY) has also expressed its disappointment with the proposed law saying it is based on the premise that work and education go hand in hand. "While the government has increased the punishment and penalty for violators, recent data shows that the rates of prosecution and conviction are shockingly poor," a statement said.