

# Bill Summary

## The Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Bill, 2020

- The Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on September 14, 2020. It amends the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897. The Act provides for the prevention of the spread of dangerous epidemic diseases. The Bill amends the Act to include protections for healthcare personnel combatting epidemic diseases and expands the powers of the central government to prevent the spread of such diseases. The Bill repeals the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance that was promulgated on April 22, 2020.
- **Definitions:** The Bill defines healthcare service personnel as persons who are at risk of contracting the epidemic disease while carrying out duties related to the epidemic. They include: (i) public and clinical healthcare providers such as doctors and nurses, (ii) any person empowered under the Act to take measures to prevent the outbreak of the disease, and (iii) other persons designated as such by the state government.
- Under the Bill, an ‘act of violence’ includes any of the following acts committed against a healthcare service personnel: (i) harassment impacting living or working conditions, (ii) harm, injury, hurt, or danger to life, (iii) obstruction in discharge of duties, and (iv) loss or damage to the property or documents of the healthcare service personnel. Property includes: (i) clinical establishment, (ii) quarantine facility, (iii) mobile medical unit, and (iv) any other property in which a healthcare service personnel has direct interest, in relation to the epidemic.
- **Protection for healthcare personnel and damage to property:** The Bill specifies that no person can: (i) commit or abet the commission of an act of violence against a healthcare service personnel, or (ii) abet or cause damage or loss to any property during an epidemic. Contravention of this provision is punishable with imprisonment between three months and five years, and a fine between Rs 50,000 and two lakh rupees. This offence may be compounded by the victim with the permission of the Court. Further, if an act of violence against a healthcare service personnel causes grievous harm, the person committing the offence will be punishable with imprisonment between six months and seven years, and a fine between one lakh rupees and five lakh rupees. These offences will be cognizable and non-bailable.
- **Compensation:** Persons convicted of offences under the Bill will also be liable to pay compensation to the healthcare service personnel whom they have hurt. In the case of damage or loss of property, the compensation payable to the victim will be twice the amount of the fair market value of the damaged or lost property, as determined by the Court. If the convicted person fails to pay the compensation, the amount will be recovered as an arrear of land revenue under the Revenue Recovery Act, 1890.
- **Investigation:** Cases registered under the Bill will be investigated by a police officer, not below the rank of Inspector. The investigation must be completed within 30 days from the date of registration of the First Information Report.
- **Trial:** The inquiry or trial should be concluded within one year. If it is not concluded within this time period, the Judge must record the reasons for the delay and extend the time period. However, the time period may not be extended for more than six months at a time. When prosecuting a person for causing grievous harm to a healthcare service personnel, the Court will presume that person is guilty of the offence, unless the contrary is proved.
- **Powers of the central government:** The Act specifies that the central government may regulate: (i) the inspection of any ship or vessel leaving or arriving at any port, and (ii) the detention of any person intending to travel from the port, during an outbreak. The Bill expands the powers of the central government to regulate the inspection of any bus, train, goods vehicle, ship, vessel, or aircraft leaving or arriving at any land port, port, or aerodrome. Further, the government may regulate the detention of any person intending to travel by these means.

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