

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

LOK SABHA
UN-STARRED QUESTION NO. 2766
TO BE ANSWERED ON 17.03.2023

POLICY INITIATIVE TO CHECK CHILD MARRIAGES

2766. SHRI KUNWAR PUSHPENDRA SINGH CHANDEL:

Will the Minister of Women and Child Development be pleased to state:

- a. whether the Government has taken any policy initiative to check child marriages;
- b. if so, the details of the efforts made by the Government in this regard during the last five years; and
- c. the number of cases registered for conducting marriages in violation of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in the country particularly in Bundelkhand?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
(SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI)

(a) to (b): In order to curb child marriages and to take punitive actions against those associated with child marriages, the Government has enacted the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA). Section 16 of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) authorises the State Government to appoint for the whole State, or such part there of as may be specified, an officer or officers to be known as the 'Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPO)' having jurisdiction over the area or areas specified in the notification. This section also specifies the functions to be discharged by CMPOs, which also include preventing solemnisation of child marriages by taking such action as they may deem fit; to collect evidence for the effective prosecution of persons contravening the provisions of the Act; to advise the individuals or counsel the residents of the locality not to indulge in promoting, helping, aiding or allowing the solemnisation of child marriages; to create awareness about the ill effects of child marriages; and to sensitize the community on the issue of child marriages. These authorities function under the respective State Governments/ UT Administrations. As such, implementation of the provisions of the Act lies with them.

Further, the Government has introduced a Bill namely 'the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in the Parliament on 21.12.2021 for raising the age of marriage of women to 21 years to make it at par with the men. The proposed Bill also has provisions to make consequential amendments in the enactments, inter alia, relating to age of marriage of parties, such as 'The Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872', 'The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936', 'The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act,

1937', 'The Special Marriage Act, 1954', 'The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955', and 'The Foreign Marriage Act, 1969'. The Bill has since been referred to Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports for examination.

Further, 'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India. The responsibilities to maintain law and order, protection of life and property of the citizens, investigation and prosecution of crime against women and children including prohibition of child marriages, rest with the respective State Governments. The State Governments are competent to deal with such offenses under the extant provisions of laws.

Nevertheless, the Central Government also undertakes awareness drives, media campaigns and outreach programs and issues advisories to the States/ UTs from time to time to highlight evil effects of this practice. Further, the Ministry of Women and Child Development implements the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme, wherein creation of awareness on matters pertaining to gender equality and discouraging child marriage is an important focus area. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) also undertakes awareness programs and consultations with stakeholders from time to time in this regard. In addition, Government of India has introduced CHILDLINE with short code 1098, a 24X7 telephone emergency outreach service for children in crisis which responds with suitable interventions to call for any form of assistance which a child requires, including for prevention of child marriages in coordination with police, CMPOs, District Child Protection Units etc.

(c): The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) compiles and publishes the data on the number of cases of child marriage registered under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 in its publication 'Crime in India'. The said report is available upto the year 2021. As per information available with NCRB, the number of cases registered under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 during 2019, 2020 and 2021 are 523, 785 and 1050 respectively including Uttar Pradesh. The region-wise data is not maintained by NCRB. Higher reporting of cases does not necessarily reflect increase in the number of cases of child marriages, but it may be because of increased awareness among citizens to report such incidents due to initiatives by the Government and better enforcement of law by States/ UTs.
