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## Lok Sabha passes Maternity Benefit Bill

**NEW DELHI** The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed a Bill providing for enhancement of maternity bonus from Rs. 250 to Rs. 1,000 for working women. The Rajya Sabha has already passed the Bill.

The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2007 gives powers to the Union government to enhance this benefit further subject to a maximum of Rs. 20,000. Women working in factories, shops, plantations and other establishments will benefit.

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 regulates the employment of women in factories, circus industry, plantation and shops or establishments employing 10 or more persons except those covered under the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) Corporation.

While the amendment revises the bonus amount, the compensation equivalent to average daily wage for 12 weeks remains unchanged.

Replying to the debate during which the members made

a demand for increasing the benefit to at least Rs. 5,000, Minister of State for Labour and Employment Oscar Fernandes said the government would take necessary action.

Noting that the new legislation was brought to implement the recommendations of the Labour Commission, he said the government would later bring in a more comprehensive Bill after holding meetings with MPs and social organisations.

Earlier, participating in the debate, Pratibha Singh (Congress) said a benefit of Rs. 1,000 was not enough, given the price rise. Kiran Maheshwari (BJP) said the pre-condition that the benefit would be given to the women only if no pre-natal confinement or post-natal care was provided by the employer should be done away with. She called for setting up monitoring committees at the State level to ensure that working women got the benefit.