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# Men force review of 'biased' dowry law

**CHARU SUDAN KASTURI**

**New Delhi, July 6:** The Centre has decided to review India's laws against dowry and domestic violence that male complainants allege are biased against them, accepting for the first time that the legislation in their current form may be open to abuse.

The women and child development ministry has decided to invite male complainants and groups representing them individually for discussions on possible changes to these laws, top government officials have told **The Telegraph**.

The ministry has also called a meeting with the National Commission for Women (NCW) on July 8 to discuss any loopholes in the dowry law that allegedly allow harassment of innocent relatives of the husband.

The decision to scrutinise these laws for alleged loopholes comes days after women and child development minister Renuka Chowdhury met male activists alleging misuse of marital laws at a public conference.

Ministry officials said they had "received a huge pile of complaints — many of which appear legitimate" — in the week after the June 25 meeting. "We have been opposed to



**Renuka**

changing our marital laws in a manner that may weaken their implementation for women, but the complaints have forced us to reconsider," a senior official said.

The agenda of the June 25 meeting — initially called to discuss the grievances of the male activists — was changed a day before to exhort men to stand up against exploitation of women.

Officials had then explained the change in the agenda, saying they were unwilling to accept any flaws in current laws. Male activists had opposed the agenda change on the ground that it had turned the meeting into a "sham".

A source said the complaints included a case where a woman alleged that her in-laws, who were not even in the same city as the complainant,

had tried to kill her.

The male activists have suggested the government change its dowry legislation to punish women found to have misused the law.

They have also asked for a clause in the same law that, they say, would check "unnecessary" harassment of the husband's parents and family.

The current dowry law requires police to arrest all those named in a woman's complaint before starting an investigation.

"We want this to be changed. If the woman has serious injury, or if the wife is dead, police should certainly arrest all those capable of destroying evidence. But if there are no injury marks, the police should only arrest family members of the husband once there is some prima facie evidence against them," said Swapan Sarkar of the Save Family Foundation, a group of NGOs seeking amendments to the laws against dowry and domestic violence.

The Dowry Prevention Act of 1961 punishes those who have paid dowry in addition to the recipient, but ministry officials said the former were rarely punished.

"The NCW has been asked to study the law and suggest changes to ensure those who

give dowry are also punished. That, we believe, will automatically deter many who want to misuse the law," a source said.

Male activists have demanded that the domestic violence law be made gender neutral — in other words, a male victim should also have recourse to justice under this law.