Karnataka Rohith Vemula (Prevention of Discrimination, Exclusion or Injustice) (Right to Education and Dignity) Bill, 2026

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Why in News?

Recently, the Karnataka State Cabinet cleared the Rohith Vemula Bill, 2026, aimed at eliminating caste-based discrimination in higher education institutions.

- **Aim –** To safeguard the *right to education and dignity of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students, teaching faculty, and non-teaching staff* by institutionalising grievance redressal and penalising discriminatory practices.
- **Nodal Ministry –** Law and Parliamentary Affairs Department, Government of Karnataka.
- **Objectives - Prevent Identity-Based Discrimination -** Establish a legal framework to stop exclusion, harassment, or bias against students from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and other disadvantaged groups in higher education.
- **Safeguard Right to Education and Dignity -** Ensure that all students, faculty, and staff enjoy equal treatment and protection from discrimination, reinforcing education as a constitutional right.
- **Mandatory Disclosures & Accountability -** Require institutions to provide **granular reporting** on discrimination cases, climate risks, and mitigation measures, with third-party verification and public access to data.
- **Penalties for Non-Compliance -** Impose **strict fines** (up to Rs.10 lakh in Karnataka's version) and cut government grants for institutions found guilty of discrimination or failing to comply with reporting norms.
- **Institutional Mechanisms -** Establish **equity panels** or grievance redressal committees within universities to investigate complaints and enforce accountability.

- **Polluter-Pays Principle in Education -** Similar to environmental law, institutions responsible for discrimination may face compensation liabilities, ensuring justice for affected students.
- **Legal Status**
  - **Karnataka** – Cleared by Cabinet; to be tabled in Monsoon Session 2026.
  - **Telangana** – Cabinet sub-committee constituted (April 2026) to draft a similar bill.
  - **Legal Standing** – Complements but does not replace the SC/ST Atrocities Act; focuses on higher education institutional accountability.

State Legislatures leverage the Concurrent List and Article 15(4) to create local social justice laws, and the Supreme Court now allows them to sub-classify Scheduled Castes to ensure reservation benefits.

References

1. The Hindu | Rohit Vemula Bill
2. Indian Express | Rohit Vemula Bill

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