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Don't repeal Section 377: Homosexuals

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MUMBAI: While the homosexuals in India have welcomed Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss' statement seeking the removal of provisions in Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that classifies sex between two men as a criminal offence, they do not want the repeal of the section to protect the boy child from abuse.

Delhi based NGO Naz Foundation challenged arrests made under Section 377 and the Delhi High Court is hearing a petition by the Foundation.

Says, Nitin Karani, Board of Trustee of Mumbai based Humsafar Trust "Section 377 is applicable even to the heterosexuals, as it prohibits anal sex (even) between husband and wife. We are demanding that consensual sex in private between individuals not be considered illegal. But Section 377 is needed so that children are not abused. Hence, it should be read down but not abolished."

The health ministry had supported the gay community's call to remove the law but the home ministry was not in favour of it. "It's nice to know people at the top level are speaking for us," said Geeta Kumana of Mumbai based lesbian group Aanchal Trust. She was reacting to Ramadoss' statement made on Friday at the 17th International Conference on Aids in Mexico City.

The gay and lesbian community is relieved that with immense pressure built over a period of time the government was waking up to the rights of the homosexuals in the country. However, they say the society as a whole is still to accept gays and lesbians in their fold. "When one speaks individually to parents and friends there is a conditional change and acceptance. But, when one starts agitating for rights in front of police, politician etc I find there is a huge homophobia; there is no acceptance," rues Geeta.

A day after India's 61st Independence Day on 16 August this year, a Queer Azaadi (Independence) March will be organised by the queer community (homosexuals, lesbians, transgender, bisexual and all those marginalised by society that labels them as 'strange') in Mumbai to state that while the rest of India had achieved independence from the British on 15 August 1947, queer Indians were still bound by a British Raj law (Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, introduced in 1860) and Victorian puritanism.

The March aims to highlight issues that affect queer communities in India - Like Act that outlaws same-sex intercourse, forced marriage of homosexuals, harassment of queer community by using sec 377 against them etc. The closeted queer community, especially in small towns, hopes to gain visibility for their cause through this rally. Leading gays and lesbian rights group Humsafar Trust and Aanchal Trust are in the forefront of the three hours March that will start from August Kranti Maidan and end at Girgaum Chowpatty in south Mumbai.

In June this year, gays in Delhi, for the first time, marched through the heart of the city proclaiming their sexuality. The homosexual community gradually seems to be coming out in the open in India

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