

Copyright Bill cleared; artistes entitled to lifelong royalty

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Song writers, artistes and performers can now claim royalty for their works, as Parliament on Tuesday approved amendments to the Copyright Act that entitles artistes to lifelong royalty.

The Copyright Act (Amendment) Bill, 2012 was passed by the Lok Sabha unanimously, with members from all parties supporting the measure for creative artistes, whose benefits are cornered by producers under the existing law.

The Bill, passed by the Rajya Sabha last week, declares authors owners of the copyright, which cannot be as-

signed to producers, as was the practice till now.

Introducing the Bill, Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal said poor artistes had been left in the lurch, as producers cornered all royalties, but the new law would help them live a good life even in old age, as they would continue to get their dues for their work.

Citing the examples of *shehnai* exponent Bismillah Khan and music composer Ravi, to press home the point that the condition of such excellent artistes was pitiable, as they weren't able to pay even house rent and hospital charges, Mr. Sibal said the Bill made it mandatory for broadcasters — both radio

and television — to pay royalty to the owners of the copyright each time a work of art was broadcast.

It bans persons from bringing out cover versions of any literary, dramatic or musical work for five years from the first recording of the original creation.

The Bill received overwhelming support, including from the Opposition, which appreciated the government for such a step, though there was still resistance when the Bill was introduced in the winter session, and the Minister had to withdraw it in the Rajya Sabha.

Leader of the Opposition Sushma Swaraj pointed out that eminent artistes, ranging from Pandit Ravishankar

to A.R. Rahman, had pleaded for the changes in the Copyright Act.

The Bill provides for exemption from copyright for any work prepared for the physically challenged in special formats such as Braille. It also permits compulsory licence to be granted for a certain number of copies in non-special formats to non-profit organisations working to help disabled persons.

The Minister said the amendment would allow authors to negotiate with music companies for royalty to be paid to them for their creations. The Bill also exempted students from the copyright laws for using such material for research purposes. It sought to impose a

fine and two years' imprisonment for persons indulging in piracy.

Noted lyricist and Rajya Sabha member Javed Akhtar, who has been spearheading the campaign for such a measure, was in the Lok Sabha gallery, as was Ms Swaraj, who said she was supporting the Bill despite her being told that film producers would be unhappy with her if she did so.

Seeking to do a balancing act, she said she had done for film producers what nobody else did. She said she was the one who declared film-making an industry within three months of her becoming Information and Broadcasting Minister during the NDA rule.