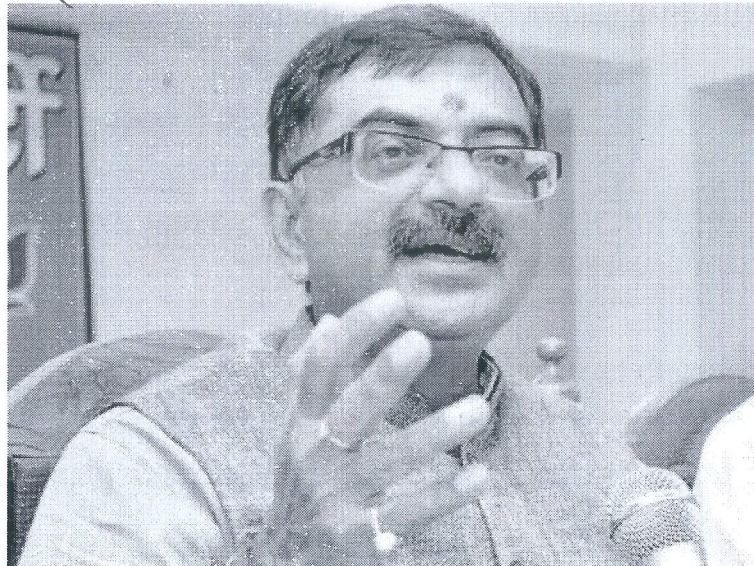


'Change laws to end discrimination against leprosy patients'

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CHENNAI: Leprosy is neither highly contagious nor fatal, but the law in India has stigmatised victims of the disease. Now, as the number of annual cases is increasing after several years of decline, doctors, legal experts and parliamentarians say that besides social stigma, draconian laws are hindering efforts to finally eliminate it.

At a national awareness convention on leprosy on Saturday, former Rajya Sabha MP Tarun Vijay noted that the law commission headed by Justice AP Shah also had prepared a draft legislation, Eliminating Discrimination against Persons Affected by Leprosy (EDPAL) Bill, 2015, which was submitted in April 2015. The Bill is under the examination of the

government. "I urge the government to table this for the upcoming winter session. It is the duty of the government to help the poor, marginalised and under-privileged sections of society," he said.

Earlier, justice K Chandru, a retired judge of the Madras high court said the comprehensive report by the law commission recommended changes in the marriage law which allows leprosy as a ground for divorce, annulment of marriage, and separation with forfeiture of maintenance. "Leprosy is no longer incurable. It is not contagious and so it should not be a ground for separation," he said. The legislation also permits termination of a person from jobs, and prevents him/her from owning land and travelling in public transport with the same freedom as others. "The inequality in law is so huge that a person with leprosy

