

RAJYA SABHA GIVES NOD FOR NCBC BILL

Relevant for: Indian Polity & Constitution | Topic: Statutory bodies incl. NHRC

Landmark Bill: Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Thawar Chand Gehlot speaking in the Lok Sabha. PTI

The Bill extending constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) was cleared unanimously by the Rajya Sabha on Monday. The Lok Sabha had passed the proposed law on August 2 with more than a two-thirds majority.

In the Upper House, the Constitution (123rd Amendment) Bill, 2017, was adopted by all the present 156 members, incorporating certain amendments made by the Lok Sabha. Several Opposition members, however, recommended that the government should make public the caste census findings, based on which the reservation policy should be formulated.

Replying to the debate on the Bill, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Thawar Chand Gehlot said the law would help the Other Backward Classes (OBC) get justice. Acceding to the recommendation of Opposition members, he said the Commission would have female representation.

The Minister also assured the House that the NCBC would not encroach upon the rights of State governments as they would have their own backward classes commissions. He said States had their own lists of OBC castes, while the Centre had a separate one and that the NCBC would make recommendations only to the Centre. Mr. Gehlot said the government would immediately constitute the Commission.

Minority representation

During the debate, referring to the demands of some Opposition leaders to ensure representation of minority communities in the Commission, BJP's Bhupender Yadav said political parties should rise above vote bank politics and focus on social justice. "OBC is a religion-neutral term...there is a separate Commission for the minorities," he said.

Stating that the Bill was long overdue, Mr. Yadav said in several States, even 27% reservation for OBCs had not been implemented. He also accused the Congress of scuttling the attempts to strengthen the backward communities in the past, urging the party to support the proposed law.

Congress leader B.K. Hariprasad raised the issue of caste census and minority representation and also wanted the "creamy layer" system to be dispensed with.

Ram Gopal Yadav of the Samajwadi Party demanded reservation for OBCs in the Judiciary. D. Raja of the CPI said there was no point in having commissions if their recommendations were not binding upon the government. A. Navaneethakrishnan of the AIADMK supported the Bill.

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