

## Lok Sabha passes anti-graft amendment Bill

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill, 2018 that seeks to punish bribe-givers and bribe-takers.

The Bill provides for jail terms of three to seven years, besides fine, to those convicted of taking bribes and those offering illegal gratification.

The Bill also extends the ambit of public servants who will be protected by the provision of a prior government sanction for prosecution. There is also a provision now to get prior permission for starting an investigation and that has prompted many to say that the law has been “diluted” from its original draft.

### Safeguards incorporated

The Bill, cleared by the Rajya Sabha last week, was passed unanimously by the Lower House after debating for nearly four hours.

Minister of State for Personnel and Public Grievances Jitendra Singh replied to the debate.

He said safeguards had been provided to ensure that honest officers were not intimidated by false complaints. “For any corruption case, we will bring guidelines for decision to be ordinarily given in two years.” He described the Bill as “historic.”

In a departure from the earlier anti-corruption law, the current law makes a distinction between “collusive bribe givers” and those who are “coerced.” In such cases, the Bill seeks to protect those who report the matter within seven days.

However, taking note of the concerns raised by many members that the seven-day window was too short, Dr. Singh said the government would look at ways to “extend this period while framing the rules.”

Many members who took part in the debate stressed on the need to curb election expenditure and bring about electoral reforms to stop corruption in politics.

Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, while supporting the Bill, said despite the government’s claim of corruption-free governance, there had been many such allegations, including the multi-core Rafale deal, bank frauds by Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and Vijay Mallya. “They talk about zero tolerance against corruption... but the reality is diametrically opposite. There is maximum corruption, minimum prevention,” said Mr. Chowdhury. He questioned the delay in appointing a Lokpal.

### Sena’s charge

But the sharpest attack came from Shiv Sena member Arvind Sawant who tore into the Modi government over demonetisation and grand election rallies.

He alleged that the “BJP used investigating agencies like Enforcement Directorate (ED) to pressure political rivals and make them join their party.” He also asked whether the elections rallies of the Prime Minister or a Chief Minister were borne by the exchequer or the political party. “Let the people find out,” said Mr. Sawant.

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