

SC-ST panel now statutory body

NEW DELHI, May 31.

The proposal to set up a statutory commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes secured parliamentary approval today when the Rajya Sabha unanimously adopted the relevant Constitution Amendment Bill.

The Constitution (68th Amendment) Bill, 1990, as passed by the Lok Sabha yesterday, received 188 votes in favour with none opposing when the measure was put to vote.

A total of nine amendments were moved by members before the final voting. Of these, two were withdrawn by the proposers and seven negated by a voice vote.

Mr. Ram Awadhesh Singh (Lok Dal) protested that other backward classes had not been brought under the purview of the proposed commission. He also wanted to know what the Government proposed to do about the implementation of the Mandal Commission report on backward classes. Mr. Madhav Singh Solanki and Mr. R. N. Yadav (both Cong-I) also wanted to know about the future of the Mandal Commission report.

Moving the bill for consideration, the Labour and Welfare Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, said the decision to give statutory status to the Commission would go a long way in protecting the interests of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha yesterday.

Mr. Paswan assured the members that the Government was open to suggestions on the final shape of the proposed commission. "What is more important is that we must ensure that the commission is effective in carrying out its assigned task," he said.

The chairman and the vice-chairman of the commission would have rank of Cabinet Minister and Minister of State respectively, he said.

Though Mr. Paswan assured the members that the National Front Government was soon going to implement the report, Mr. Ram Awadhesh Singh seemed dissatisfied and walked out of the House. Later, however, before the voting on the Bill commenced, the Lok Dal member returned.

An amendment by Mr. S. S. Ahluwalia (Cong-I) seeking reference of the Bill to a select committee of the House was negated by voice vote. Another amendment by Mr. V. Narayanaswamy (Cong-I) to the same effect was withdrawn by him.

Initiating the discussion, Mr. B.N. Pande (Cong-I) said Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had a role to play in the development of the country.

Mr. H. Hanumanthappa, (Cong-I) said Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continued to be neglected even after 43 years of independence.

Mr. Hanumanthappa moved two amendments, one to incorporate a provision for taking disciplinary action against officers who wilfully disobeyed the directives for ending atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The other amendment pertained to making public sector undertakings and other Government institutions respond to the Commission's directives on cases against atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Mr. P. K. Kunjachen, (CPI-M) wanted ample powers for the commission as otherwise it could not be effective. He wanted Mr. Paswan give specific powers to the Commission.

Mr. Jogi, (Cong-I) wanted another commission to be set up for backward classes.

Mr. S. P. Gautam (BJP), welcoming the Bill said that though reservation of seats been made for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, very few Cabinet Ministers belonged to these communities.

Ms. Sushila Tiria, Cong-I) said it was regrettable that 50 per cent of the posts reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had not been filled. She alleged that many of them had been dereserved since independence.

Mr. Satya Prakash Malaviya, (Janata Dal), urged the Government to make clear in the Bill itself its intention to grant the chairman and deputy chairman of the commission the rank of Cabinet Minister and Minister of State respectively.

He wanted it to take revolutionary steps to prevent the carrying of refuse by Harijans on their heads. The law in this regard had remained unimplemented, he added. — PTI, UNI