

Both Houses clear **NCBC** bill

CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS The bill would help the people from the backward classes to fight atrocities and ensure quick justice

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NEW DELHI: The Rajya Sabha on Monday passed a bill to provide constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes, with many MPs urging the Union government to make public the findings of the caste census and implement the reservation policy accordingly.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed as "historic" the passage of the bill. "A historic moment for our country! I am glad that Parliament has passed the Constitution (123rd Amendment) Bill, which grants Constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes. This will contribute to the empowerment of the OBC communities across India," the PM tweeted.

The Upper House adopted the legislation, along with the amendments made by the Lok Sabha, by 156 votes to none. Over two-third majority of those present voted in favour of the bill, which is required for amending the Constitution.

The Constitution (123rd Amendment) Bill 2017 was passed after a spirited debate in the Rajya Sabha and it was passed by the Lok Sabha on August 2, superseding the amendments earlier carried out by the Upper House.

The bill was passed after the House repealed the National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993. The NCBC, a statutory body created in 1993, was given limited powers - only to recommend to the government inclusion or exclusion of a community in the central list of OBCs. Also, the power to hear complaints of the OBCs and protect

their interests remained with the National Commission for Scheduled Castes.

The Rajya Sabha had earlier passed the measure on July 31 last year, along with an amendment and sent it to the Lower House. The Lok Sabha had passed the bill last week with alternate amendments as well as some more changes unanimously with over two-third majority.

Social justice and empowerment minister Thaawarchand Gehlot, replying to the debate, said the bill would help the backward classes people fight atrocities against them and ensure quick justice to them. "This bill would provide justice to the OBC people. It is the need of the hour," he said.

The bill seeks to bring the NCBC on par with the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

BJP President Amit Shah hailed the passage of the bill in Parliament as historic and said it fulfilled a long pending demand of the OBCs.

The BJP's performance in 2019, party leaders say, will much depend on whether it is able to retain hold over OBC communities.

Chhaya Verma (Congress) sought reservation in Parliament and Assemblies for the OBCs.

Earlier, initiating the discussion, BK Hariprasad of the Congress, said the government has included a woman member from the backward classes in the proposed Commission and that was a welcome move. He demanded that similarly, a member from religious minority community be made a member of the Commission.



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