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## Amendments to RTI law get stamp of Parliament

RICHA SHARMA @New Delhi

THE contentious Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was passed by voice vote in the Rajya Sabha after an Opposition motion to send it to a select committee for vetting was defeated with 117 ayes and 75 nays after uproar.

Though the ruling NDA was short on numbers, it managed to draw support from the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, the Biju Janata Dal and the YSR Congress. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly called up BJD chief and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and his Telangana counterpart K Chandrashekar Rao seeking support for the bill. There was ample drama before the motion on sending the bill to a panel was put to vote, as recent defector C M Ramesh was seen telling his former TDP colleagues to tick 'Noes' and getting the voting slips signed. Angry Opposition members confronted him and tried to snatch voting slips from his hands.

After the voting, the Opposition charged the government with horse-trading and staged a walkout. Leader of Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad quipped "this is how the BJP won 303 seats" (in Lok Sabha) before he led the walkout.

The amendments pertain to tenure, salary and allowances of the central information commissioners and state commissioners, which will now be regulated by the Centre.

The Opposition had moved five motions for sending the bill to the panel. While deputy chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh wanted to take up the motions and the bill together, the Opposition disagreed. Demanding that the motions be taken up first, they entered the Well of the House and shouted slogans. And Congress' Ripun Bora tore up a copy of the bill.

Later, when the Congress realised that the NDA had the numbers, it agreed to discuss the bill. Jairam Ramesh said: "You may muster the numbers as some phone calls have been made to state capitals."