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House passes human rights bill amid opposition concern

Shah Allays Fears Of Govt Role In Picking Panel Members

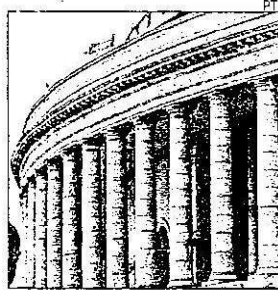
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2019, passed last week by Lok Sabha, was approved by Rajya Sabha on Monday with home minister Amit Shah seeking to allay fears that the government could influence appointments to human rights panels. Shah also said the opposition should not look at every government decision with suspicion.

While the opposition expressed concern that the bill sought to amend the term of office of the chairperson and members of National Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Commissions from five years to three years, Shah said this was done only to fill up vacancies.

Replying to the debate earlier, Shah's deputy Nityanand Rai called for the opposition to show the same trust in PM Narendra Modi which the world was showing in him. "Modi hai to mumkin hai, Shah hai to sidhhi hai," Rai said.

The bill, passed by Lok Sabha on Friday, stipulates that besides a former Chief Justice of India, as is the cur-



SLUGFEST CONTINUES

rent requirement, a former Supreme Court judge can also become NHRC chairperson.

"There have been apprehensions that it will be government's committee... or members could be re-appointed after three years," Shah said and pointed out that there was a panel for appointment. "If appointments are viewed with suspicion, then any democratic body cannot function," he added.

TMC leader Derek O'Brien said it was unfair to expect members to proceed with consideration of amendments at such short notice.

Raising a point of order, Congress leader Anand Sharma said members should get at least two days notice to file their amendments to the bill. He said when bills were not being referred to standing committees for scrutiny, members should be given time to submit their amendments to the bill. He said the government was in a hurry to pass the bill and members' right to move amendments was being violated.

LS clears RTI bill as oppn walks out

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fore various standing committees are formed.

New Delhi: Lok Sabha passed the RTI (Amendment) Bill on Monday in the midst of opposition protests that it would dilute the transparency law and the government rejecting the arguments, saying that the bill did not impact the autonomy of the Central Information Commission.

The bill may become a test case in Rajya Sabha where so far — unlike prior to the Lok Sabha elections — government bills have passed without much resistance. The RTI amendment may test the calm with BJD having opposed the bill along with other opposition parties in Lok Sabha.

The opposition protested the provisions that seek to "downgrade" the CIC with its members losing their equivalence to election commissioners and Supreme Court judges. The government has argued that a statutory body cannot be at par with constitutional positions like ECs and SC judges.

Opposition MPs have also protested that the current session of Parliament was being extended to ensure legislation went through be-

Responding to the criticism, minister of state in PMO Jitendra Singh said there were anomalies in the Act which needed to be corrected and the amendment was an enabling legislation.

"There was no provision to frame rules and this bill will address that. Without amending Section 27, you cannot frame rules," he said.

Singh said Section 12(e), which deals with autonomy, has been left untouched. There are sections that deal with salaries, allowances and other terms of service but the government is yet to deliberate on salaries.

Several MPs from BSP and TMC called for a division, which was defeated 218 to 79 votes. After this, Congress leader in the House Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury sought a clarification which was disallowed by the Speaker. Unhappy with this, members of the opposition parties staged a walkout.

Later, the opposition parties registered their protest at the Rajya Sabha business advisory committee meeting, where 19 bills listed by the government were brought up.