# Parliament passes Bill on OBC lists

## In a break from its protests in RS, Opposition joins discussion and supports Bill

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Parliament on Wednesday passed a constitutional amendment aimed at restoring the rights of the States and the Union Territories to maintain their own list of Socially and Economically Backward Classes (SEBCs), commonly known as Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Seventh Amendment) Bill, 2021 was passed unanimously by the Rajya Sabha, a day after the Lok Sabha passed it. In a break from its protests on the Pegasus issue and farm laws, the Opposition joined the discussion and supported the Bill. While the Bill received support from across party lines, at least 10 parties, including the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) Janata Dal (United), called for a caste-based census and 12 parties demanded the removal of the 50% cap on reservation.

MPs standing for the National Anthem after the adjournment of the Rajya Sabha in New Delhi on Wednesday. ▪PTI

On May 5, the Supreme Court held that the Maratha reservation granted by the Maharashtra government was unconstitutional and that the President alone was empowered to identify SEBCs. In his response to the discussion on the Bill, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar said the government understood the concerns over the 50% cap and that it should be revisited as it was decided 30 years ago.

Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi said the government was congratulating itself for correcting a mistake it made in 2018, referring to the 102 Constitutional Amendment that said the President, in consultation with the Governor, would notify SEBCs. This Bill was an empty promise since there was a cap of 50% on reservation and this cap couldn't be changed till the caste census was done to reveal the actual numbers, he stated.

The Samajwadi Party's (SP) Ramgopal Yadav argued for a caste census. He said there was speculation that the Uttar Pradesh government would delist Yadav, Gujarat and Kurmi from the backward list. The BJP government, he said, was not bringing in the caste census only so that it could amend the backward list as per its wishes. There was need to raise the 50% cap on reservation, he observed.