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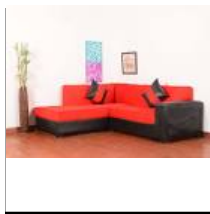
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Government, opposition come together briefly to pass disabilities bill

TNN | Dec 17, 2016, 01:29AM IST

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NEW DELHI: The treasury and opposition benches came together briefly in the Lok Sabha on the last day of the winter session of Parliament on Friday to clear the disabilities bill that increases the number of officially recognised categories to 21, from seven, besides hiking reservation for the disabled from 3% to 4%.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2016, for the first time, also includes acid attack and Parkinson's disease in the list of recognised disabilities.

Though the entire opposition supported the bill, Congress and Telangana Rashtra Samithi members pressed for division on an amendment on the issue of reservation. They wanted an amendment to increase the reservation to 5%, arguing that the original bill, introduced by the UPA-II government in 2014, had provided for it.

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The amendment was, however, defeated by 121 to 43 votes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was present in the House during the discussion and division which saw the House run smoothly for over two hours, leading to passage of the bill. The bonhomie over the politically sensitive issue was similar to the one witnessed in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday when the upper House passed the bill.

Replying to the debate, minister of social justice and empowerment Thaawar Chand Gehlot announced that a scheme of "universal identity card for the disabled" was on the anvil and an agency had already been finalised for it. The proposed card would also be linked to Aadhaar to help the disabled all over the country in a seamless fashion, he said.

Gehlot said the universal identity card would overcome the problem of getting disability certificate.

He said the government had joined hands with German and British firms for making available state-of-the-art limbs to the disabled, wherever possible.

Two bills were also introduced in the Lok Sabha on Friday. It includes Major Port Authorities Bill, 2016, which seeks to provide greater autonomy in decision-making to 12 major ports in the country and professionalise their governance by setting up a board for each.

The other bill, Merchant Shipping Bill, 2016, seeks to ensure efficient maintenance of Indian mercantile marine and that laws relating to merchant shipping comply with the country's obligations under international conventions and maritime treaties to which India is party.

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