

Dalit activists upset over SC/ST Bill

Special Correspondent

The Bill exempts institutions of national importance from purview of reservation Activists term it as legislative piece of “academic untouchability”

JAIPUR: Dalit activists here on Wednesday took strong exception to several provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation in Posts and Services) Bill, 2008, which they said had withdrawn the quota facility from critical spheres of knowledge and development and would prevent Dalits from occupying the positions of authority and influence.

The Bill, passed by the Rajya Sabha on December 23, is scheduled to be introduced in the current session of Lok Sabha on Thursday.

Addressing a protest meeting organised by the Centre for Dalits Rights along with the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) and other Dalit groups here, activists charged that some sections of the Bill were antithetical to the protective provisions for SC/ST communities and even the reservation norms.

The Bill exempts the institutions of national importance and Indian Institutes of Management from the purview of reservation by prohibiting the quota in recruitment to posts above the lowest grade of Group ‘A’ posts. It makes no mention of reservation proportionate to the population of Dalits and tribals.

CDR Chairperson and former Member of the Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission R.K. Ankodia said the Bill was a reflection of the discriminatory ethos that SC/ST were fit only to occupy the lowest positions in society and it doubted the ability and skills of these communities. “This Bill is undoubtedly a mechanism to ensure that SC/ST continue to remain at the lower echelons of society,” he added.

The participants in the meeting regretted that the United Progressive Alliance government in the Centre, by tabling the contentious Bill, had defied its own Common Minimum Programme which pledged to “provide for full equality of opportunity in education and employment to SC/ST, OBCs and religious minorities.”

Dalits have been demanding since long the enactment of a law to ensure guarantee to the quota provisions.

Far from promoting reservation in the private sector, the Bill in its present form had emerged as a legislative piece of “academic untouchability” and a means to “de-reserve” the society and would serve the interests of the sections opposed to the reservation policy, pointed out CDR Chief Patron P.L. Mimroth.

Dalit activists demanded that reservations in posts and services should cut across all recruitments, promotions and deputations and should be done proportionate to population. The Dalit groups, which have sought the support of legal experts for drafting amendments to the Bill, will shortly submit a revised version of the proposed legislation to the Centre