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Government moves to hike 'creamy layer' income limit for OBC quota

NEW DELHI: The central government has inched a step closer to increasing the "creamy layer" income limit to Rs 8 lakh per annum from the existing limit of Rs 6 lakh for availing quota reserved for Other Backward Class (OBC).

At present, 27 per cent quota in government jobs and seats in educational institutes is given to the OBCs provided the family income is only up to Rs 6 lakh.

"After deliberating over the issue for the last few weeks, the ministry has now moved the relevant file with the proposal to raise the limit to Rs 8 lakh to the Prime Minister Office (PMO) for the nod. It will soon be put up before the cabinet," an official source said here.

The government will have to bring a bill for the changes once the matter is cleared by the union cabinet before the winter session of parliament in November-December.

The BJP-led NDA dispensation initiated in July the process of reviewing the definition of "creamy layer" as applicable to Other Backward Classes (OBCs), which have a sizable presence in poll-bound Uttar Pradesh.

The move was initiated even as the central government came under attack for sporadic incidents of violence against Dalits in various parts of the country and the ruling party tried to build up the right caste matrix by trying to woo the influential OBC voters in Uttar Pradesh.

The issue of creamy layer was initially flagged off in August by Republican Party of India leader and Union Minister of State for Social Justice Ramdas Athawale.

He is understood to have also raised it with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and was keen to raise the bar of annual income to Rs 10 lakh for the purpose of defining the "creamy layer".

However, Union Minister for Social Justice Thahwar Chand Gehlot pitched for it to be raised up to Rs 8 lakh only.

Officials say that raising the ceiling of annual income of OBC families to get benefits of quota would result in a larger pool of candidates being eligible for government jobs and seats in educational institutions.

They also said that a large number of vacancies in government jobs meant for OBCs were vacant for want of candidates from among the communities.

Leaders of the Samajwadi Party, which is seen to have influence over a large section of OBC voters in Uttar Pradesh, have termed the move of the central government as "political".

"The move to raise the creamy layer limit for OBCs at this juncture on the eve of UP elections is politically motivated. The BJP wants to garner political benefits in Uttar Pradesh by such tokenism and lip service. But they will not gain anything," Samajwadi Party leader Dharmendra Yadav had told IANS earlier this month.

"Creamy layer" refers to relatively wealthier members of the OBCs who are not eligible for government-sponsored educational programmes and jobs reserved for the community.

The income criterion was kept at Rs 1 lakh per annum in 1993, and revised to Rs 2.5 lakh in 2004. It was subsequently raised to Rs 4.5 lakh in 2008 and Rs 6 lakh in 2013.