

Assam becomes first state to pass GST Bill

Assam assembly unanimously passed the Constitution Amendment Bill on GST on Friday. The BJP ruled state has become the first state to do so.

“Assam will be remembered as the first state in the country to ratify the GST constitutional amendment bill,” Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal told news agency ANI.

“I declare the Bill, which was passed by both Houses of Parliament, to be ratified unanimously by Assam Assembly,” Speaker Ranjeet Kumar Dass announced in the House.

Though opposition Congress and AIUDF MLAs supported the Bill, they had earlier sought a discussion in the Assembly to evaluate GST’s impact on Assam and people. But they were turned down by the Speaker.

Following passage of the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Second Amendment) Bill, 2014, Dass and Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who introduced it in the House, exchanged sweets.

Sarma said Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal wanted that Assam becomes the first state to pass the amendment as this would send a positive signal to the industry. “We have always lagged behind, but want to be the first in passing this Bill. This is a historic proposal. I thank the Speaker for allowing us to introduce it today after we informed him just last night,” said Sarma, who introduced the bill on behalf of the chief minister.

Sarma said in the House that “of the central GST portion, 42 per cent tax will be given back to the state again.” The GST will also have a special concession option for NE and Himalayan states if they request reduction of taxes for any reason, he claimed.

“Besides, we can also collect special tax during natural calamities like flood if we feel the need to generate more revenue. But everything will have to be approved by the GSTC,” he added.

The Constitution (122nd Amendment) Bill for the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was passed by the Lok Sabha on Monday, with 443 members present in the House voting in favour of the legislation. Arun Jaitley had on Tuesday announced that the deadline for the rollout of the bill was April 1, 2017.

The government has been working overtime to get states on board over the GST following the passage of the bill in Parliament. It is keen to bring two bills aimed at implementing the new tax regime in the winter session to meet the April 2017 deadline for its rollout.

“We are hopeful that both bills (Central GST and Inter-state GST) will be tabled in the winter session. I have already spoken to 15 chief ministers,” Information and Broadcasting Minister M Venkaiah Naidu had said on Wednesday.

The Delhi assembly will table the bill in its monsoon session.

At least 16 states are required to ratify the Constitution amendment bill on GST. It will be then sent to the GST Council which will decide on the new tax rate as well as centre and state taxes that will be subsumed in the new tax regime.

The Council will be constituted after the Constitution amendment bill is notified.

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