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MPs unite to protest atrocities against dalits

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NEW DELHI: In a debate that saw MPs from almost all parties registering their strong protests over rising incidents of atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Tribes, home minister P [Chidambaram](#) said district judges needed to ensure proper and speedy disposal of such cases in their jurisdiction.

Chidambaram pointed to a high pendency of more than 70% for cases relating to [dalits](#) and tribals and said these were adversely affected by delays, witnesses vanishing or turning hostile or indifference of police investigators. The role of the district judge in holding monthly meetings to assess progress of cases and pushing DMs and SPs to ensure quick disposal was necessary, the minister said.

Replying to a debate in Lok Sabha on Monday, Chidambaram pointed out that cases of atrocities against SCs/STs had risen over 2006-08 and while this could be because of higher registration as these sections assert themselves, 33,000 cases in 2008 was a matter of deep shame. "Some of this crime is aimed at crippling SCs economically," the minister said.

Though he refrained from naming states, he alluded to a recent incident in a neighbouring state, clearly Haryana, where dalits had to flee from the village they inhabited. He pointed to a circular issued by the home ministry on April 1, 2010 outlining guidelines on how such cases were to be dealt with, pointing out that the "will and intent" of state governments was crucial.

Congress president [Sonia Gandhi](#) was present through the discussions on Monday as the home minister responded to MPs who said district administrations often lacked the will to pursue accused, often powerful local upper castes. "It is not a matter of pride that so many cases are registered, it is deeply disturbing," Chidambaram said.

The minister also said there were some lacunae in the public order act as courts did not take cognizance of a case until a magistrate committed it to trial. He said some states had set up special courts but these also looked at several other cases apart from those relating to dalits and STs. "Often there is nothing special about these cases." Some states had been better than others, like Andhra Pradesh has set up 22 mobile courts, Tamil Nadu has focused on districts where caste violence is severe while West Bengal has asked district judges to double up as special judges.

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