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Debate over sedition in LS, Congress says law is being misused

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New Delhi: Congress and the government clashed in Lok Sabha on Tuesday over sedition cases with the opposition party alleging that the stringent law was being misused, with a reference to the Disha Ravi case. This drew a sharp retort from junior home minister G Kishan Reddy who said Congress's use of laws like TA-DA showed it should not lecture on democracy.

During question hour, Congress member from Telangana Anumula Revanth Reddy sought the number of cases registered under the offence of sedition in the country during the last 10 years, the conviction rate and the steps taken for their speedy trial. The focus of his question was on climate activist Disha Ravi, who was arrested in the farmers' protest toolkit case and was later granted bail, and cases registered against farm union leaders after the January 26 violence in the national capital.

Reddy tabled a written response in the House. The minister said 47 cases of sedition were registered in 2014, 30 in 2015, 35 in 2016, 51 in 2017, 70 in 2018 and 93 in 2019. "There is no direct involvement of the Centre in sedition cases," he added. However, Anumula Reddy was not satisfied with the response. He said he had sought details for 10 years, but the information was provided only from 2014-2019. "Giving half information is taking the House in

Congress MP Anumula Reddy sought to know the number of cases registered under the offence of sedition in the country during the last 10 years, the conviction rate and the steps taken for their speedy trial

the wrong direction," he said.

Attacking Congress, the minister said, "The member asked as to why the information was not provided before 2014. In case of sedition cases, when Congress was in power, it did not maintain any separate data on this. They clubbed it with the IPC crimes." He added that after the Modi government took charge, it started presenting separate data on sedition charges. "After the rise of social media, after media awareness... they also give big speeches on democracy. But even after that, the cases of sedition are very less," he said.

"In 2019, the conviction rate (for sedition) was 3.3%. This means these are politically motivated cases. If a youth leader is booked for sedition and the cases drags for 4-5 years, he/she is not in a position, they won't get a job, passport, visa. Activists like Disha Ravi are charged, but they are not able to prove anything in court," Reddy said. He asked whether there was a proposal to drop the "false charges" against farm union leaders protesting against the three farm laws.