

Assam Assembly passes Bill to make Muslim marriage registration a must

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Assam Assembly passed the Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Bill, 2024, making it mandatory to register Muslim marriages and divorces with the government. This new legislation replaces the outdated Assam Moslem Marriages and Divorces Registration Act of 1935, which made the registration of Muslim marriages and divorces informal, not mandatory. There remains a scope of registering marriages of an intended person below 21 years (in case of male) and 18 years (in case of female) and hardly any monitoring [is] made for [the] implementation of this Act throughout the State, which attracts and invites huge amount of litigation in the criminal/civil court. There is a scope of misuse by an authorised licensee (Muslim marriage registrars) and citizens for underage/minor marriages and forcefully arranged marriages without the consent of parties. The updated law ensures that marriages adhere to the legal age requirements (18 for girls and 21 for boys) and aims to prevent teenage pregnancies and improve the overall welfare of girls. The law addresses the misuse of the old system, which allowed underage and forced marriages with little oversight.

Pakistan invites PM Modi to SCO meet in Islamabad

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Pakistan has invited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's (SCO) Council of Heads of Government meeting, which it will host in Islamabad on October 15-16. Pakistan, currently holding the rotating chairmanship of the SCO Council, will lead the two-day in-person summit, with several countries, including India, invited to participate. Pakistan's Foreign Office confirmed the invitation to Modi and mentioned that some countries have already confirmed their participation. The SCO, comprising India, China, Russia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, is an influential economic and security bloc that has emerged as one of the largest trans-regional international organisations. As part of this key regional group, both Pakistan and India can hold summit meetings. The Islamabad summit meeting will be preceded by a Ministerial meeting and several rounds of senior officials' meetings focused on financial, economic, socio-cultural, and humanitarian cooperation among the SCO member states.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

Aviation regulator places SpiceJet under strict watch

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE



India's aviation safety regulator, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), has placed SpiceJet under enhanced surveillance due to concerns over the airline's financial health and its impact on flight safety. The DGCA's action includes increased spot checks and night surveillance, following a special audit that found deficiencies in the airline's engineering facilities. On the same day, SpiceJet passengers at Dubai airport faced disruptions as the airline was unable to check them in due to delayed payments to the

ground-handling service provider Dnata, leading to flight cancellations and empty aircraft being flown back to India. The airline has been experiencing financial difficulties, which have led to repeated disruptions at Dubai airport and delayed salary payments to employees for two months. Despite these challenges, SpiceJet claims its Dubai flights are now operating as planned.

Biotech enigma

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Earlier this week the Cabinet cleared a proposal, though without specifying a budget, called BioE3 or Biotechnology for Economy, Environment and Employment. The BioE3 policy, approved by the Cabinet, which aims to boost biotechnology manufacturing in the country without specifying a budget. Despite India's progress in biotechnology, particularly in vaccine development, the sector hasn't achieved the same industrial success as IT. The BioE3 policy seeks to address this by focusing on six key areas: bio-based chemicals, functional foods, precision biotherapeutics, climate-resilient agriculture, carbon capture, and futuristic marine and space research. The policy emphasizes the need for environmentally sustainable industries and suggests setting up bio-foundries and bio-AI hubs. However, the passage notes that India's manufacturing challenges require long-term capital investment and collaboration between the Centre and States for the policy to succeed.



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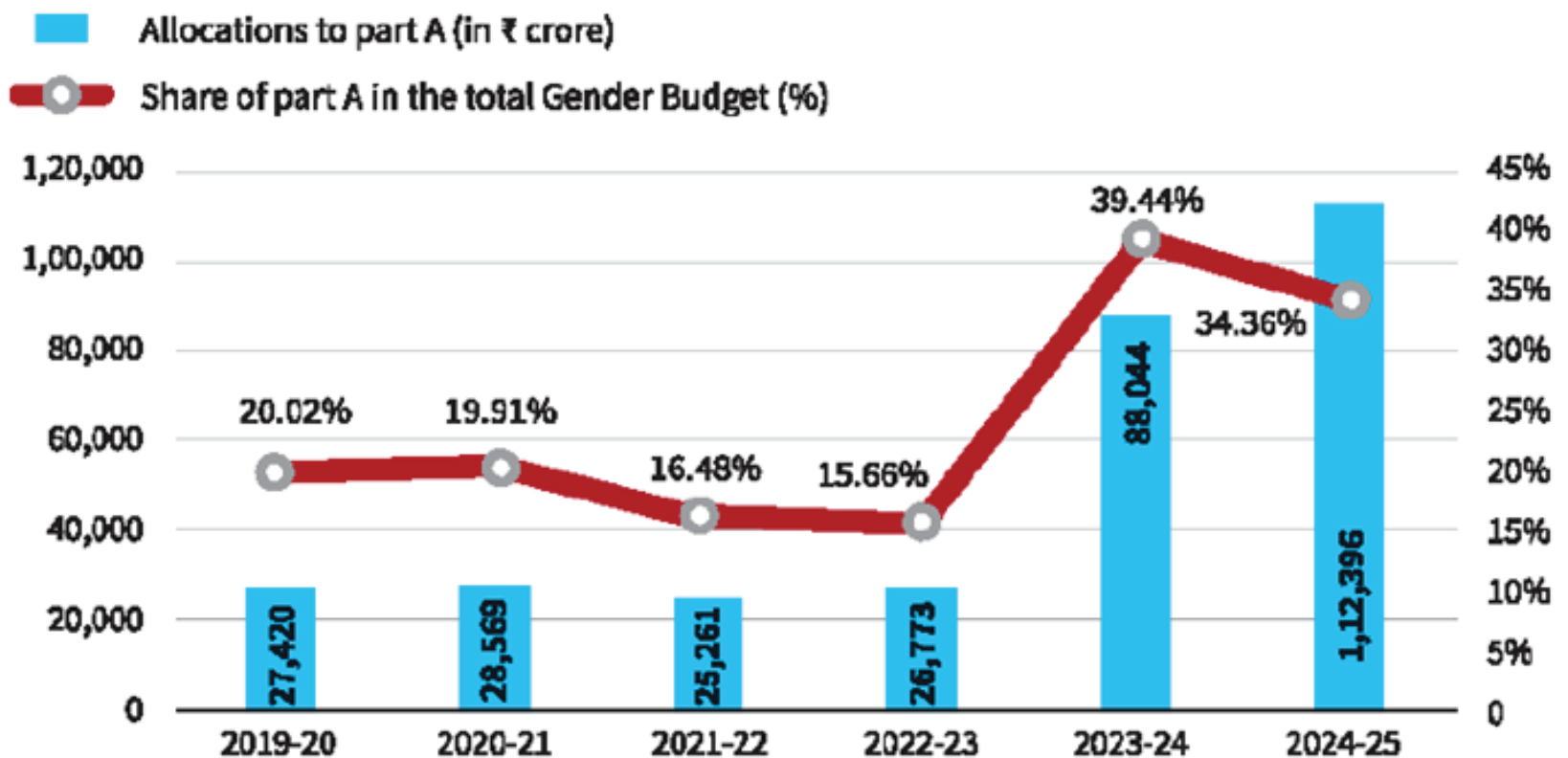
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Analysing the Gender Budget of 2024-25

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1: The allocations under part A and the share in the total Budget

Part A reports expenditures in schemes with 100% allocation for women. Since BE 2023-24, there has been a sudden increase in the allocations in part A.



Women-led development remains at the core of announcements made by the Finance Minister (FM) in this year's Budget. This commitment to women empowerment was reflected in Budget allocations to pro-women programmes, as reported by the Gender Budget Statement (GBS). The GB reached 1 % of GDP estimates in 2024-25 for the first time, and overall allocations currently stand at more than ₹ 3 lakh crore for pro-women programmes.

What is the reason for the increase?

The Gender Budget Statement (GBS), since it was first introduced in 2005-06, consistently reported an average share of 5% of the total budgetary allocations, with marginal ups and downs. This year is special as the share of allocations to pro-women schemes stands at approximately 6.8% of the total budget expenditure for 2024-25, which is way above the usual trends and marks a positive departure from status quo.

The increase in GB allocations are driven by two factors. A part of this increase has been on account of the newly included Part 'C,' a third part in the Gender Budget Statement (GBS) that reports pro-women schemes with less than 30% provisioning for women. The PM Kisan scheme in the agriculture sector has been reported in part C with an outlay of ₹15,000 crore. This is 25% of the total outlay of the programme.

The second factor driving the overall increase is the increment in part A of the GBS. Part A reports expenditures in schemes with 100% allocation for women.

Part A had previously constituted 15-17% of overall allocations reported in the Gender Budget Statement (GBS) till BE 2022-23. Since BE 2023-24, there was a sudden increase in the allocations in part A that raised the share of pro-women schemes with 100% allocations for women to almost 40% (figure 1). This was mainly due to a change in the reporting where the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) — rural and urban — started getting reflected in part A instead of part B. Part B of the GBS reports programmes with allocations of 30-99% for women. Hence, only a part of PMAY was reported earlier. Beginning last year, the entire allocation of ₹80,670 crore in PMAY for 2024-25BE has been reported under part A thus driving the up allocations. Such reporting of PMAY may not be entirely accurate as not all beneficiaries are women.

Have there been other instances of over-reporting/under-reporting?

Over-reporting may also be found in other instances such as the PM Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), which aims to assist entrepreneurs in setting up micro businesses in the non-farm sector. The GBS reported an allocation of ₹920 crore or 40% of the total allocation to PMEGP, without providing any explanation for such reporting.

On the other hand, missing allocations often deflate the amount spent by programmes on women's needs. For example, this year for the first time the entire allocation to the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) is reflected in part A of the GBS, indicating that 100% of its outlay is dedicated to women and girls, which is technically correct and should have been done earlier. In 2023-24BE, only 50% of the scheme's total outlay used to be reflected in part B of the GBS. The GBS this year has also correctly reported increased allocations for the Ministry of Electronics & IT. But it missed out reporting pro-women allocations in the schemes for women entrepreneurs such as PM Vishwakarma, SVANidhi, and Stand-Up India.

In another instance, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), which has the third highest allocation among schemes for women in the GBS, is currently reported under part B with ₹28,888.67 crore which is 33.6% of its total outlay. It is important to note that women constituted 59.3% of all person days under MGNREGA as of December 2023, and should have received commensurate wages from the total MGNREGA budget, yet only 33.6% gets reflected in the GBS.

What next?

These anomalies can be minimised by incorporating explanations for the entries made in the GBS. Incorporating explanations for allocations in GBS would not only ensure accounting accuracy but will help in gender audits and provide pathways for improved gender outcomes in government programmes. Several years of advocating for improved reporting in the GBS by experts is reflected in the inclusion of a third part. The above anomalies in reporting are reflections of the GBS still not having a scientific and systematic approach.

Efforts to reduce misreporting and improve the quality of the GBS is evident, but there is still a long way to go. The need for including rationale is also to maintain that detailed reporting is not a mere exercise in increasing the quantum of allocations reported for women's development — it is to ensure actual spending for women in all government programmes, that are well planned and designed to include women's needs from its inception. Gender responsive budgeting is a powerful tool to close the gender gaps in an economy.

India, China hold 31st WMCC meeting to iron out issues

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



India and China held the 31st meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) in Beijing, where they engaged in a "frank, constructive, and forward-looking" discussion about the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The goal was to narrow differences and seek an early resolution of outstanding issues. Both sides agreed to intensify contact through diplomatic and military channels and

committed to maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border areas, in line with bilateral agreements and protocols. The Indian delegation was led by Gourangalal Das, Joint Secretary (East Asia) in the MEA, while the Chinese delegation was led by Hong Liang, Director General of the Boundary & Ocean Affairs Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both sides decided to "jointly uphold" peace and tranquillity on the ground in border areas in accordance with relevant bilateral agreements, protocols, and understandings reached between the two governments.

SC protects jobs of govt. employees whose castes, tribes were de-scheduled

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court on Thursday protected the jobs of government and bank staffers who got employment on Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe certificates, but whose castes and tribes were later de-scheduled.

The judgment by a Bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Sandeep Mehta concerned employees of Canara Bank, Oriental Insurance Co. Ltd., and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. who had secured jobs between 1978 and 1987 based on caste certificates issued by Karnataka.

These certificates were invalidated after the Supreme Court's 2001 ruling in State of Maharashtra v Milind that only Parliament can modify Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe lists under Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution.

The key issue raised by the petitioners, represented by advocates K.V. Dhananjay and A. Velan, was whether employees who joined services based on SC/ST certificates issued by the Karnataka government could retain their positions after the caste/tribe was de-scheduled.

The petitioners asked the court to examine the validity and applicability of Karnataka government circulars of March 11, 2002 and March 29, 2003 protecting these employees. The effect of the Ministry of Finance's communication of August 17, 2005 endorsing the Karnataka government's approach also came under judicial scrutiny in the case. Justice Mehta, who authored the verdict, held that the jobs of the employees must be protected as they had obtained the certificates without misrepresentation and following

due process under then-prevailing State circulars.

It upheld Karnataka government circulars that aimed to protect such employees. The court, however, clarified that the employees would not be entitled to any future SC/ST category benefits.

Submarine Arighaat set to add ballast to nuclear triad

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



India's second nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, INS Arighaat, was commissioned into service at Visakhapatnam in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday. It joins the first such submarine, INS Arihant, which was commissioned in 2016. The Arighaat will further strengthen India's nuclear triad, enhance nuclear deterrence, establish strategic balance and peace and play a decisive role in the country's

security.

The technological advancements undertaken indigenously on this submarine make it significantly more advanced than its predecessor, Arihant. The presence of both INS Arihant and INS Arighaat will enhance India's capability to deter potential adversaries and safeguard its national interests.

INS Arihant was quietly commissioned into service in August 2016. It has a displacement of 6,000 tonnes and is powered by an 83-MW pressurised light-water reactor with enriched uranium. INS Arighaat retains the same reactor and dimensions, but has several technological upgrades. It has the distinction of having the indigenous systems and equipment which were conceptualised, designed, manufactured and integrated by Indian scientists, industry and Naval personnel.

The completion of the nuclear triad was announced in November 2018, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on social media that INS Arihant had returned from its first deterrence patrol. The advanced technology project began in the 1980s and its first product, Arihant, was launched in 2009 by the then Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and eventually commissioned in 2016. The third of these submarines, which is at an advanced stage of construction, is set to be larger and more capable than the current two.

Nuclear deterrence

INS Arihant is armed with a 750-km-range K-15 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM), while a 3,500-km-range SLBM K-4 is under development, having been tested for the first time in 2020. The K4 will become the mainstay of India's undersea nuclear deterrence, as it gives the stand-off capability to launch nuclear weapons while submerged in Indian waters.



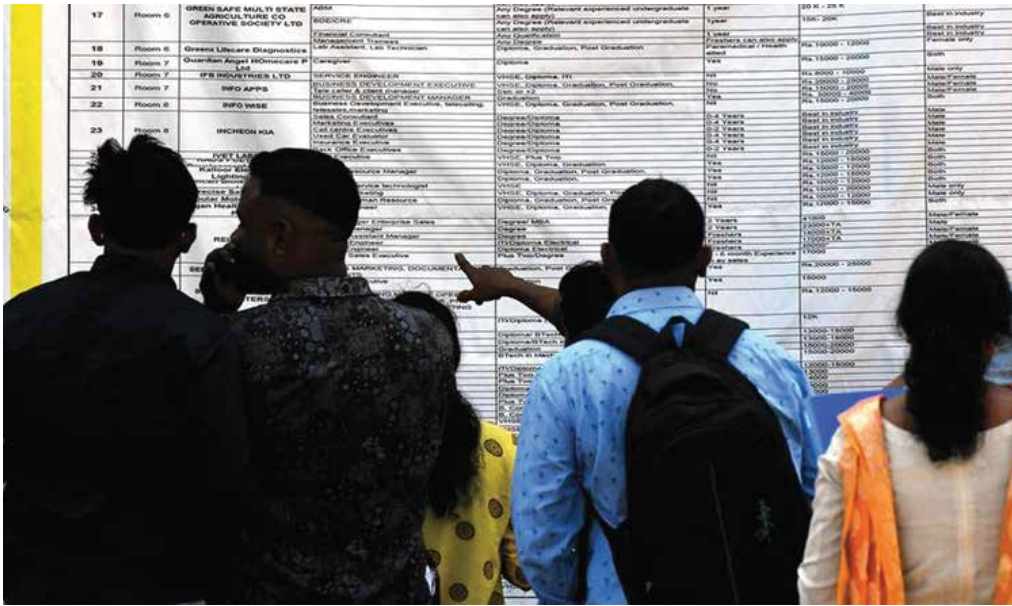
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Moody's, Fitch flag concerns about jobs, private investments

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT



Moody's Ratings on Thursday raised its India GDP growth forecast for 2024 by 0.4 percentage point to 7.2 % citing signs of a revival in rural demand, while Fitch Ratings retained the country's long-term foreign-currency issuer rating at 'BBB-' with a stable outlook, even as it noted that fiscal metrics remained a credit weakness along with governance and GDP per capita trends.

We have raised our real GDP growth projections for the Indian economy [and] now expect 7.2% real GDP growth in

2024, and 6.6% growth in 2025 versus our earlier estimate of 6.4%. These forecast changes assume strong broad-based growth and we recognize potentially higher forecasts if the cyclical momentum, especially for private consumption, gains more traction.

Pointing to signs of a revival in rural demand, Moody's said it expects household consumption to grow as headline inflation eases toward the central bank's 4% target even though it noted that retail inflation's easing to 3.5% in July, was driven by "favourable base effects."

Asserting that the Indian economy was "in a sweet spot, with the mix of solid growth and moderating inflation," Moody's flagged that growth prospects over the medium- and longer-term would, however, "depend on how well the country can productively tap its substantial pool of labour." The extent to which the country ultimately reaped its demographic dividend would depend on the success of government policies for employment generation and skilling, it underlined.

'Credit weakness'

Separately, Fitch Ratings noted that although India's strong medium-term growth outlook and achievement of deficit targets had improved prospects of a modest downtrend in government debt, fiscal metrics still remained a credit weakness as "deficits, debt, and debt service burden" were all high compared to its peers.

"Lagging structural metrics, including governance indicators and GDP per capita, also weigh on the rating," Fitch said.

Retaining its GDP growth estimate for 2024-25 at 7.2%, followed by 6.5% next year, Fitch pegged India's medium-term potential GDP growth at 6.2%, "underpinned by the infrastructure push, strong services sector, and solid private investment outlook".

While healthier bank and corporate balance sheets should pave the way for a positive investment cycle, Fitch said that a key risk was that the 'private investment cycle may not materialise due to subdued consumption, which would weigh on job creation and dampen potential benefits from India's demographic dividend'.

"Doing nothing is very hard to do. You never know when you're finished."—Leslie Nielsen

RIL mulls 1:1 bonus issue; eyes ₹75,000 cr. in 'New Energy' spend

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) said its board would meet on September 5 to consider 1:1 bonus issue. Mukesh D. Ambani, CMD expressed hopes of RIL be placed in the top-30 league of most valuable companies globally in the near future with strategic adoption of Deep-Tech and Advance Manufacturing.

New Energy unit

RIL was on track to fully commit and invest up to ₹75,000 crore in 'New Energy' business to establish a manufacturing ecosystem, extensively enabled by emerging technologies, including AI, IoT, Machine Learning, and Robotics, allowing RIL to maximise margins that would be higher than those of stand-alone, non-integrated players with the firm's complete ownership and automation of the integrated value chains.

Mukesh D Ambani expressed confidence that Green fuels and AI-based solutions will become long-term growth engines for Reliance. Overall, the Reliance Group is well on track to more than double in size before the end of this decade and grow faster in the decades ahead.

AI tools

Jio is developing a comprehensive suite of tools and platforms that span the entire AI lifecycle called JIO Brain to create a powerful AI service platform we can offer to other enterprises as well. With Jio's AI Everywhere for Everyone vision, we are committed to democratising AI, offering powerful AI models and services to everyone in India at the most affordable prices.

SEBI moots UPI-like block mechanism for securities market

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed mandating Qualified Stock Brokers (QSBs) to offer the facility of trading in the secondary market using the UPI-based block mechanism to their clients, similar to the ASBA facility.

Per UPI block facility, clients can trade in the secondary market based on blocked funds in their bank accounts, instead of transferring it upfront to the trading member. The facility is optional for investors, and not mandatory for Trading Members to offer as a service.

Application Supported by Blocked Amount (ASBA)-like facility is already available for the primary market, which ensures that money from an investor gets moved only when an allotment happens. Also, it was suggested that QSBs offer a '3-in-1 trading account facility' as an alternative to making the ASBA-like facility mandatory.



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