

Lok Sabha passes historic women's reservation Bill

Opposition wants Bill to be delinked from delimitation and a quota within quota for OBCs; Home Minister promises to rectify shortcomings

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Twenty-seven years after a Women's Reservation Bill was first introduced in Parliament, the Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed such a Bill with near unanimity, to amend the Constitution and provide one-third reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies.

The Bill will now be taken up by the Rajya Sabha for passage in the remaining two days of the Special Session of Parliament and might require approval from half of the States.

Calling it "historic legislation", Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked the members. "I thank MPs across party lines who voted in support of this Bill," he said in a post on X.

Only two nays

With 454 members of the Lok Sabha supporting the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Eighth) Bill 2023, the constitutional requirement of a "two-thirds majority of the members present and



Wait is over: MPs are jubilant after the passage of the women's reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. PTI

voting" was easily met. Only two members, the All India Majlis-E-Itehadul Muslimeen's Asaduddin Owaisi and Syed Imtiyaz Jaleel, opposed the Bill.

The eight-hour debate saw MPs from the Treasury and Opposition benches, led by the Congress, engage in a battle over who should get credit for the landmark Bill, as well as over the contentious issue of a separate quota for women from Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

Home Minister Amit Shah assured the House that the government would rectify any shortcomings in the future. "You support

the Bill and reservation will be guaranteed," Mr. Shah told Opposition members.

The Congress made a U-turn from its own 2010 position, with its leader Sonia Gandhi, who was the first speaker in the debate, leading the demand for a separate quota within quota for OBCs after a conducting a caste census.

She said there was no need to delay implementation of the Bill by linking it to a delimitation exercise that is frozen till 2026.

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"It is the demand of the Congress to implement the Bill immediately... But along with that, provision should be made for reservation for SC, ST and OBC women," Ms. Gandhi said.

Strongly countering the demand for a separate quota for OBCs, the Home Minister said the BJP not only had the highest number of OBC lawmakers across the political spectrum, but also a Prime Minister from the same community, referring to Mr. Modi. Giving a detailed break-up, Mr. Shah said that 85 BJP MPs, 29% of its total, were OBCs, adding that as many as 29 Ministers were also from backward communities.

The Home Minister also explained that the decision to implement reservation after delimitation is to ensure that a quasi-judicial body like the Delimitation Commission can decide, after public consultation, which seats to reserve. "Should we do it?" Mr. Shah asked, pointing out that if Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Wayanad seat or AIMIM leader Mr. Owaisi's Hyderabad seat got reserved, then the government would be charged with making a "political reservation".

Long voting process

Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal claimed that it was against the provisions of the Constitution to provide reservation immediately, noting that someone may challenge it in a court of law. "We will not allow the Bill to get stuck in some technicality," he said.

As many as 60 members took part in the Lok Sabha debate that went on for nearly eight hours; 27 of them were women MPs. The voting process took nearly two hours as members voted manually, using paper slips. Electronic voting was not possible as some political parties have not yet informed the Lok Sabha secretariat about the division number or the specific seats that they will be allotting to individual members.

Innovative industries to get a leg-up with the State's ₹100-crore 'Co-creation Fund'

The fund was one of several initiatives under the Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Policy 2023, unveiled by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin. Eight Tamil Nadu-based startups run by entrepreneurs belonging to SC/ST communities receive investments to the tune of ₹10.85 crore

Sangeetha Kandavel
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu government will set up a ₹100-crore 'Co-creation Fund', a unique model for investing in private sector venture capital (VC) funds.

According to the Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Policy 2023, which was released by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Wednesday, the fund, to be managed by investors and coordinated by The Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Mission (StartupTN), is inspired by the 'Yozma' (meaning 'initiative') model, established by the Israeli government in the 1990s to kickstart innovative industries by investing in new venture capital funds.

The State government will contribute 40% (with a ceiling of ₹10 crore) in regional, rural impact, women and climate action-focused funds, and 20% (with a ceiling of ₹5 crore) in other thematic funds promoted by the private sector. As per the regulations, the fund size should be ₹20 crore and above, in case of a new fund. The government will bear 75% and 50% of the fund set-up costs, respectively, for the



Innovation mission: Chief Minister M.K. Stalin releasing the Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Policy 2023 on Wednesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

above-mentioned categories. The operations will be managed by the promoters of the fund.

This policy is valid for a period of five years from the date of its notification, or till a new policy is formulated. The government also said that startups promoted by transpersons and persons with disabilities, that have failed to raise funds from mainstream sources, will be identified, and 10 such firms will be given a grant-in-aid of ₹5 lakh, besides special attention in the Tamil Nadu Startup Seed Grant Fund (TANSEED)

programme.

The policy also said StartupTN (the nodal agency of Tamil Nadu responsible for promoting startup and innovation activities) will establish a Social Justice Venture Lab, a hybrid platform that assists SC/ST founders in validating their solutions from an early stage, identifying and utilising technology, building a team for scaling, receiving mentorship, and obtaining regulatory support. The lab will also offer intensive post-investment support services to companies that have received funding through the Tamil

Nadu SC/ST (Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe) Startup Fund.

Another key aspect of the policy, which has over 50 'action points', is the Smart Cards for Start-UPs (budding entrepreneurs) and startups. This will be issued with support features to register companies, obtain recognition from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Industrial Trade (DPIIT), apply for patents and trademarks, and for statutory compliances, web presence, vital coaching services, technology upgradation, marketing, financial

services and other support services required for an early-stage company to take its first few steps.

The beneficiaries of this initiative may also access facilities developed by State/select Government of India-supported labs and institutions. The Smart Card will be loaded with these benefits and services at a subsidised cost, the policy said.

Sanction orders given

The Chief Minister handed over sanction orders for investments to the tune of ₹10.85 crore in eight State-based startups run by entrepreneurs from SC/ST communities.

The startups are based out of Chennai, Coimbatore, Tiruppur and Ramanathapuram districts. Two of them have women co-founders. StartupTN will provide mentorship and post-investment support to these firms.

Icam Technosys, which is creating a Business-to-Business (B2B) e-commerce platform (Tribal Mart) for tribal-made products, was given a funding of ₹50 lakh.

Vervai Food Products received ₹25 lakh. The firm promotes up-cycling of second-grade and cosmetically-damaged vegetables

into edible value-added products with the aim of improving farmers' income, while retaining the nutritive value of the products.

Chennai-based 70 MM Digiverse, a media and entertainment firm, received ₹1 crore in funding.

Lemurian Ventures, which got ₹80 lakh, specialises in packaging and selling dry fish sourced from Ramanathapuram.

Enthu Technologies, a startup primarily into R&D and the manufacture of IoT devices using the LO-RWAN protocol, received ₹3.5 crore.

Auckam Technologies, which designs and manufactures electronic products like water flow meters, home automation devices, IoT-based devices and industrial automation solutions, received ₹2 crore.

KSU Harnexon, an industrial wire harnessing company, primarily catering to the manufacturing and textile industries, received ₹1.2 crore.

Vayuratha, a 3D-printed and assembled drone manufacturer with a focus on the agricultural sector, specifically manufacturing drones for small-scale farmers, received ₹1.6 crore.

Women's share in Assemblies less than 10% in 20 States

Share of women parliamentarians has never exceeded 15% in the past general elections

DATA POINT

Jasmin Nihalani

The BJP government tabled the Women's Reservation Bill as the first order of business in the new Parliament House on Tuesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the Bill a historic decision and said that he had been chosen by god for the noble task of giving rights to women. On Wednesday, the Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha after a day of deliberations.

First introduced in 1996 in the Lok Sabha by the H.D. Deve Gowda-led United Front government, the Bill did not get the approval of the House. It was reintroduced many times subsequently but failed to pass muster and lapsed with the dissolution of Houses.

As per the 128th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2023, or the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, a third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies is proposed to be reserved for women. However, the amendment to the Constitution comes with a caveat that it can be implemented only after a delimitation exercise – scheduled to be held in 2026 – has been completed, using data from the latest Census conducted after the passage of the Bill. This effectively pushes the earliest year of implementation to the 2029 general election.

After implementation, there should be at least 181 (approximately 33.3% of seats) women members in the Lower House. At present there are 82 women in the Lok Sabha which amounts to 15% of its members (Chart 1). The share of women parliamentarians has never exceeded the 15% mark in over 70 years of India's electoral history. When considered as a share of total candidates who participated in the 2019 general election, their share is even lower at 9%. The share of women candidates has never exceeded the 9%

mark ever. Chart 1 shows the share of women members in the Lok Sabha over time.

In the case of the sitting State Legislative Assemblies, the share of women MLAs is far lower with just one State – Tripura – touching the 15% mark (Chart 2). Women members formed less than 10% of Legislative Assemblies in 20 States and Union Territories. This includes States such as Gujarat (8.2%), Maharashtra (8.3%), Andhra Pradesh (8%), Kerala (7.9%), Tamil Nadu (5.1%), Telangana (5%) and Karnataka (4.5%).

In the 2023 election, Nagaland got its first two women MLAs. Mizoram too has not had a women MLA in the past seven Assemblies.

Chart 2 shows the share of women in State Legislative Assemblies over a period of time.

When seen across party lines, women form just 13.5% of sitting members of the largest party in the Lower House, the Bharatiya Janata Party. The highest share of women MPs in the Lok Sabha are from the Biju Janata Dal (41.7%) followed by the Trinamool Congress (40.9%). Similarly, a party-wise analysis of the State Legislative Assemblies shows that the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal had the highest share of women MLAs (15.3%) followed by the Congress in Chhattisgarh (14.7%). The Congress in Karnataka (3%), the Bharat Rashtra Samithi in Telangana (3.4%), and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu (4.5%) had among the lowest shares.

Chart 3 shows the party-wise share of women legislators.

The share of women in India's Parliament is also among the lowest in the world. When compared with BRICS nations, including the new members, India has the second-lowest share (15%), just above Iran (6%). Over time, South Africa and Ethiopia have made giant strides in women representation in their national legislatures. Chart 4 shows the share of women in Parliaments of BRICS and other countries.

Miles to go

The data for the charts were sourced from Trivedi Centre for Political Data's Indian elections dataset, the Election Commission of India and the Inter-Parliamentary Union



First steps: Women visitors arrive at the Parliament House on the day of debate on Women's Reservation Bill | PTI

Chart 1 | The share of women members in the Lok Sabha (%)

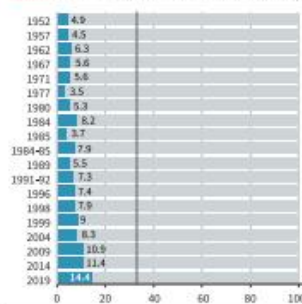


Chart 4 | Women in Parliaments of select countries (%)

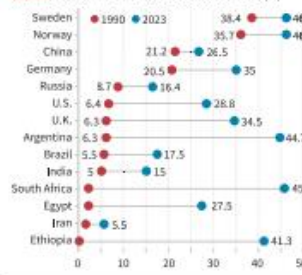


Chart 2 | The share of women in State Legislative Assemblies (%)

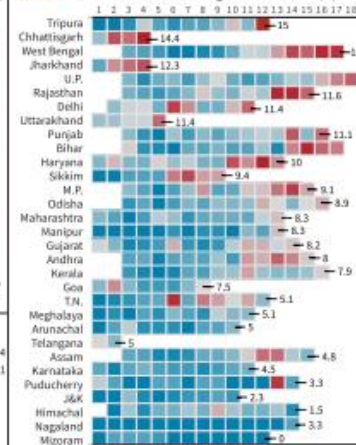


Chart 3 | The share of women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies (%)

