RS clears women's Bill unanimously

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha passed the women's reservation Bill unanimously on Thursday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying that the unanimity will instil confidence among the public.

The Constitution (128th Amendment) Bill, or the *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam*, and its six clauses were passed with all 214 members present in the Upper House voting in favour of them.

"A historic achievement," said Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar after passage of the Bill. The members welcomed the announcement of the passage of the Bill by thumping on the desks.

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Celebration time: BJP MP Krishan Pal Gurjar celebrating with visitors at the Parliament House, in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

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Amendments moved by some Opposition members against the provision that the law will come into force only after a census and delimitation exercise were defeated in a voice vote as none of the members demanded a 'division' on the amendments. The Lok Sabha had passed the Bill a day earlier, on Wednesday.

A total of 72 speakers participated in the debate that was marked with poetry and couplets. The debate was moderated by a series of women who took turns to be in the Chair. The key issues raised by the Opposition included the delay in bringing the Bill and the lack of separate reservation for Other Backward Class (OBC) women within the 33% reservation. The Treasury benches countered these arguments with measures taken by the Modi regime to support women. After passing the Bill, the House adjourned sine die.

Countering the ruling party speakers who heaped credit solely on PM Modi for bringing the legislation, the Opposition members slammed the BJP for showcasing the Bill as an act of the Prime Minister's benevolence towards women. They also criticised the title of the Bill - *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam*.

"Why did it take the government nine and a half years to bring this legislation and why is the government pushing its implementation to 2029," asked Opposition speakers.

App for memory studies launched at IIT-Madras

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

An augmented reality/virtual reality (ARVR) app called MovingMemory was launched at the second annual international conference of the Indian Network for Memory Studies and the Centre for Memory Studies, which was inaugurated at Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M) on Wednesday.

The application was developed by faculty coordinators Avishek Parui and Merin Simi Raj of the Centre for Memory Studies at the institute. It captures moving models of memory through digital reconstruction and enables the user to select any desired avatar and navigate through these three-dimensional spaces.

The 'Memory, Ecology, and Sustainability' conference, inaugurated on Wednesday, is being attended by over 500 participants from across India, the United Kingdom, Germany, New Zealand, Morocco, Canada, Sweden, the United States of America and Bangladesh. The meeting will examine human-centric technologies, policies of cultural memory, and sustainable development goals across the world. Mr. Parui said the conference sought to bridge technology studies and humanities to offer a more complex model of engaging with memory, ecology, and sustainability.

Ms. Raj said the app had the potential to be developed into a model that could integrate the challenges of digital security.

V. Kamakoti, IIT-M Director; Seema Massot, Director, American Centre, U.S. Consulate General, Chennai; and Jyotirmaya Tripathy, head, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences were present.

Silent killer

India must get more people to keep blood pressure under control

Globally, hypertension affects one in three individuals and four out of five do not have it adequately controlled, according to the first World Health Organization (WHO) report on hypertension released on September 19. It is a grim reminder that countries have done little to keep the biggest risk factor for death and disability under check despite the easy availability of inexpensive medicines. Uncontrolled blood pressure (over 140/90) is a main risk factor for cardiovascular diseases such as heart attacks and stroke, and the most common cause of disease and death. It is important to note that health risks associated with hypertension do not begin at over 140/90. Instead, they operate in a continuum even below what is classified as clinical hypertension, especially in people who are diabetic, are obese, and those who consume tobacco and alcohol. Hence, reports on hypertension levels in the population underestimate the cumulative risk of high blood pressure. In the WHO report that relies on 2019 data, 188 million Indians adults aged 30-79 years have hypertension. Of them, the condition has been diagnosed only in 37%, 30% are treated and a meagre 15% of people have hypertension under control. Women appear to be marginally better than men in having the condition diagnosed, treated and controlled. Based on sketchy data from parts of India, stroke incidence was found to be 108-172 per 1,00,000 people per year and the one-month case fatality rate was 18%-42%, as per a February 2022 study. In the Global Burden of Disease report, in 2019, heart attack was the leading cause of death and disability in India.

Studies have shown that excess salt consumption (over five grams a day) is responsible for 17%-30% of hypertension. While member States are required to achieve a 30% relative reduction in mean population intake of salt by 2025, India is yet to implement many components of WHO's prescription to cut down salt intake. A study in four Indian States published in 2021 found high salt and sugar content in packaged food items. Making front-of-pack nutrition labelling mandatory, encouraging reformulation of foods to cut down salt, and raising awareness in people to reduce salt intake should be urgently undertaken. India has, however, done well in improving blood pressure control in people with hypertension through the novel India Hypertension Control Initiative (IHCI). Launched in 2018, the IHCI has successfully enrolled 5.8 million hypertensive patients for treatment in 27 States, as of June 2023. Importantly, 48% of patients enrolled at primary health centres and 55% at health wellness centres achieved blood pressure control as of March 2021. It is now important to greatly increase the number of hypertensive people on treatment and keep blood pressure under control.

China, U.S. and India absent at U.N.'s Climate Ambition Summit

Representatives from 34 states and 7 institutions were given the floor on the day of the summit; all the G-20 governments will be asked to commit to presenting, by 2025, more ambitious economy-wide Nationally Determined Contributions

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The Climate Ambition Summit (CAS) in New York, as part of the United Nations General Assembly, that concluded on Thursday, was marked by the absence of major economies whose actions significantly influence the future of global emissions.

China, the U.S. and India – which collectively account for about 42% of global greenhouse gas emissions and are the top three emitters in that order – were all absent from the summit that was designed, according to the U.N., to "showcase leaders who are movers and doers ... and have credible actions, policies and plans to keep the 1.5 degrees Celsius goal of the Paris Agreement alive and deliver climate justice to those on the front lines of the climate crisis".

In the run-up to the summit, nearly 100 heads of state had written in response to a call from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to ramp up action to address the climate crisis. However, Only representatives from 34 states and seven institutions were given the floor on the day of the summit.

Delegates attend the Climate Ambition Summit at the UN headquarters in New York City on Wednesday. AFP

India's neighbours Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan were among the listed speakers and emerging economies such as South Africa and Brazil were also on the list. The European Union, Germany, France and Canada were also on the podium.

The criteria for countries to be considered for a speaking slot at the summit were that they would be expected to present updated pre-2030 Nationally Determined Contributions (as agreed in Glasgow); updated net-zero targets; energy transition plans with commitments to no new coal, oil and gas; fossil fuel phase-out plans; more ambitious renewable energy targets; Green Climate Fund pledges; and economy-wide plans on adaptation and resilience.

All the "main emitters" and notably all G-20 governments would be asked to commit to presenting, by 2025, more ambitious economy-wide Nationally Determined Contributions featuring absolute emissions cuts and covering all gases.

"The Climate Ambition Summit this year set a high bar for participation... The Secretary-General's Climate Action Team engaged governments, as well as businesses and local authorities with transition plans to reach net zero in line with the UN-backed credibility standard and accountability of net zero pledges," Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for the UN Secretary General, told *The Hindu* in an email. He did not clarify if India had put in a request, or even participated, in the summit. An official in the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change also declined *The Hindu's* request for information.

India last updated its climate pledges in 2022 of reducing emissions intensity – or the volume of emissions per unit of gross domestic product (GDP) – by 45% from 2005 levels by 2030, a 10% increase from what it agreed to in 2015.

Climate solutions

The government committed to meet 50% of its electric power needs from renewable, non-fossil fuel energy sources – up from 40% committed at the Paris agreement. It promised to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of Co2-equivalent [GtCO2e] through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

"Our focus here is on climate solutions – and our task is urgent. Humanity has opened the gates to hell," Mr. Guterres said in his address. "Climate action is dwarfed by the scale of the challenge. If nothing changes, we are heading towards a 2.8-degree temperature rise – towards a dangerous and unstable world."

Tracking India's growth trajectory

With inflationary pressures, a falling rupee, fluctuations in tax revenue streams and an apprehensive outlook on the agriculture sector in Q1 FY24, India's reported growth narrative may be overembellished

ECONOMIC NOTES

Anand Srinivasan
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GETTY IMAGES

The conventional way to assess a country's economic situation is to look at the quarterly (three-month) and annual (12-month) GDP (gross-domestic-product) growth rate and compare it to previous quarters as well as years. In the quarterly release of GDP figures by the NSO (National Statistical Office), the country's performance is likened to reviewing a report card of its economic performance. However, a critical difference between reviewing a report card and India's economic figures is that the latter tells a far more nuanced story.

The Q1 data covering the GDP growth rate from April to June of FY24 boasts a nominal growth rate of 8% and a real growth rate of 7.8%. The growth story currently posits that the numbers reflect an uptick in the agriculture sector growing at 3.5%, unlikely to be sustained due to pressure from the El Niño phenomenon, and the services industry, with financial, real estate and professional services growing at 12.2%. Moreover, there is also talk of sustaining a close to 6.5% growth rate for the current financial year. However, a closer look at the numbers provides a far more interesting interpretation of the growth.

Calculating GDP

The first factor to consider is that calculating the GDP growth rate involves many complex statistical choices and sophisticated statistical operations. One such decision the NSO made while conducting their research was to use the income approach of calculating GDP rather than the expenditure approach. The income approach involves summing up all national incomes from the factors of production and accounting for other elements such as taxes, depreciation, and net foreign factor income. The assumption generally is that both methods lead to similar results.

However, the expenditure approach dictates headline growth to be 4.5% rather than 7.8% which is a large discrepancy. Moreover, another essential statistical operation is the adjusting for inflation using the price deflator. Typically, the deflator is meant to adjust growth figures when they are overstated by inflation. In this case, deflation due to falling commodity prices, reflected in the wholesale price index, has worked to overstate the real growth. Furthermore, there is a base effect from the COVID-19 degrowth period, which continues to plague India's growth figures. Although less pronounced in FY24, the base effect has a role in comparative statistics due to sporadic growth in the years following FY20-21.

Additionally, one must consider whether the proposed, supposedly cooled, inflation rate calculated through the consumer price index can be sustained at current levels with the impending depreciation of the Indian rupee against the dollar due to capital outflow pressures resulting from the RBI's reluctance to raise interest rates. India is a net importer, and its most significant import consists of crude petroleum, whose price seems to be rising due to Saudi's $100 per barrel push and rupee depreciation. The domestic consumption of diesel, a proxy for economic activity in India, fell by 3% in August, which, if sustained, does not paint a rosy growth picture for the coming quarters.

Revenue from taxes

Moreover, the government's tax revenue from direct taxes has weakened over the previous quarter while the indirect tax revenue remained strong, indicating a K-shaped pattern. The income streams from progressive taxation (more significant tax burden on those higher on the income ladder) seem to be a laggard compared to its regressive counterpart. A muted growth of direct tax collected in an economy boosted by the services industry is a statistical discrepancy which remains unexplained in the proposed GDP growth story. Direct and personal taxes should (in the absence of any significant policy changes) have grown closer to the nominal growth rate than it has currently. Narrowing revenue streams indicate forced austerity measures, as the government intends to control the budget deficit, and hence the interest rate. Therefore, growth in FY24 stemming from government expenditure seems to be a pipe dream.

A nuanced approach

In conclusion, after a meticulous analysis of India's Q1 FY24 economic transcript, it becomes palpable that the reported growth narrative might be somewhat overembellished. The divergence in growth figures brought forth by the income and expenditure approaches manifest a significant disparity, raising fundamental questions about the veracity of the promulgated optimistic narrative. Moreover, the underpinnings of this growth story, nuanced by inflationary adjustments and conspicuous fluctuations in tax revenue streams, signal a cautious trajectory. Additionally, the apprehensive outlook on the agriculture sector and potential fiscal constraints paint an arguably more restrained picture than initially portrayed. Therefore, it seems prudent to assert that India's economic performance, although showing signs of resilience, does not quite emerge as the unequivocal success story depicted in initial observations, urging a more nuanced and critical approach in assessing the trajectory ahead.

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THE GIST

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