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Past govts' efforts to get the Women's Reservation Bill passed in the Parliament



Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Why in news?

- The chequered legislative history of the Women's Reservation Bill began when the H D Deve Gowda-led govt introduced it in Parliament in 1996.
- Almost every govt has since tried to push it through — the UPA govt even managed to get it passed in Rajya Sabha in 2010 — but the move could not come to fruition for lack of political will and consensus.



- The Constitution (Eighty-first Amendment) Bill, 1996 was first introduced in the Lok Sabha in Sept. 1996 during the reigns of United Front government, a coalition of 13 parties. It was a surprise move, with several leaders of the Janata Dal and other constituents of the ruling coalition not being in its favour. The Bill was referred to a Joint Committee the following day.
- Among the 31 members of the parliamentary panel were (then MPs) Mamata Banerjee, Nitish Kumar, Sharad Pawar, and Sushma Swaraj etc. The panel proposed seven major suggestions and felt that the Bill's wording of "not less than one third" with regard to reservation for women was vague and liable to be interpreted differently.
- It also suggested that there should be reservation of seats for women in the Rajya Sabha and the Legislative Councils and even stated that the benefit of reservation to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) should be considered "at the appropriate time".
- The committee recommended that the provisions governing the reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state Assemblies should be for a period of 15 years from the date of commencement of the Act, with them being reviewed after that period to decide whether the reservations should continue.
- The committee adopted its report in Dec. 1996. But there were strong dissenting voices. Among them was Nitish Kumar, the current Bihar Chief Minister, who spoke of reservation for OBC women.
- The Bill was taken up for discussion in the Lok Sabha in May 1997 but there was stiff opposition from within the ruling coalition. Leaders from the Hindi heartland opposed the Bill owing to the OBC sub-quota demand. The UF govt could not pass the Bill and it lapsed after the dissolution of this Lok Sabha.

Second attempt: NDA Govt

- Between 1998 and 2004, the BJP-led NDA govt headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee tried to get the Bill passed multiple times.
- The first time, on July 13, 1998, the Lok Sabha saw chaotic scenes. As the Bill was introduced, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Samajwadi Party (SP) MPs registered their protests. One RJD MP even went on to snatch the copies of the Bill from the Speaker and tore them up.
- The Bill was again introduced in Dec. 1998 despite protests from SP, and the BSP. There were differences among the NDA allies over it as well. Nitish, who was opposed to the Bill, was then the Railway Minister. The Bill, however, lapsed as the House was dissolved after the fall of the Vajpayee govt in April 1999.

Vajpayee Govt's another attempt



- After Vajpayee formed the NDA govt again, the Bill was introduced on December 23, 1999. This was again greeted by protests from the members of the SP, BSP, and RJD.
- The Vajpayee govt tried to push the Bill three times afterwards — in 2000, 2002 and 2003, but could not succeed despite support from the Congress and the Left, the main Opposition parties at the time.
- In July 2003, efforts to build a consensus were unsuccessful. The Bill subsequently lapsed.

UPA push for the Bill

- In 2004, the Congress-led govt headed by PM Manmohan Singh, declared that the UPA will “take the lead to introduce legislation for one-third reservation for women in Vidhan Sabhas and in the Lok Sabha”. But it was not easy, since a few of the UPA’s key constituents such as the RJD —were not in its favour.
- The UPA govt finally introduced the Bill on May 6, 2008 — and as was the case up to this point — dramatic scenes followed.
- The Bill sought to reserve, as nearly as may be, one third seats of the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly for women and provide one-third the number of seats reserved for the SCs and STs in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies for women of those categories.
- The committee, which submitted its report to Parliament in Dec. 2009, recommended that the Bill be passed in its present form without any delay.

March 9, 2010: Red-letter day



- A breakthrough came in 2010. The RJD was no longer a part of the UPA government, and along with the SP, extended outside support. In a surprise move, Nitish Kumar made a U-turn and extended support to the Bill.
- After two days of discussion, the Rajya Sabha, on March 9, 2010, passed the Bill by over a two-third majority — the BJP and the Left, who were in the Opposition, supported it.
- On the day the Bill was passed, seven MPs, primarily from the SP and the RJD were suspended for “unruly” conduct.
- The UPA govt, however, did not show the political will to get the Bill passed in the Lok Sabha despite the BJP and the Left supporting it.

IRDAI envisions Bima Sugam as the 'UPI moment' for the insurance sector



Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Why in news?

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) claims that the proposed Bima Sugam is a “game changer” and a “UPI moment” for the insurance segment, with ambitions of becoming the largest online market for insurance products and services which has not been practiced anywhere in the world.

Details

- Bima Sugam is an online platform where customers can choose a suitable scheme from multiple options given by various companies.
- All insurance requirements, including those for life, health, and general insurance (including motor and travel) will be met by Bima Sugam.
- This platform will help in the settlement of claims, whether it's health coverage or death claims, in a paperless manner on the basis of policy numbers.
- Details about insurance schemes are expected to be stored in the platform through the insurance repository initially. This will be followed by a listing of policies. The overall budget for Bima Sugam is Rs 200 crore.
- IRDAI has appointed a committee for the creation of the platform and now plans to invite proposals to appoint a service provider. The latter will be the technological partners for creating and running a platform to provide all the services in one place.

Role and utility for customers

- The proposed platform would act as a single window for the policyholder to manage his/her insurance coverage. It will provide end-to-end solutions for customers' insurance needs i.e., purchase, service, and settlement in a seamless manner.
- It will facilitate insurance companies to access the validated and authentic data from various touch points on a real-time basis. The platform will interface for the intermediaries and agents to sell policies and provide services to policyholders, among others, and reduce paperwork.
- Commissions on policies are expected to come down, benefiting the customers. As per insurers, the cost of buying policies will come down.
- Bima Sugam will enable customers to identify a suitable scheme for themselves from the hundreds of insurance schemes in the life and non-life sectors.

Less paperwork

- Customers will open an insurance account and the policies will be stored in this account, thus removing the need for physical documents.
- Further, the paperwork involved in buying a policy will also come down. Settlement of claims and renewal of policies will also become faster.
- In short, identifying the right policy, buying it, settling the claims and renewals will be streamlined in online process. The process will be mostly on the lines of demat accounts and online trading in the case of stock markets.

Implementation and potential impact

- IRDAI plans to implement Bima Sugam from June 2024. Life insurance and general insurance companies will own a 47.5% stake each, while brokers and agent bodies will own 2.5% each.
- While industry observers say it's going to be a challenging job to implement the Bima Sugam as it has to be backed by technology and innovation, they say it will increase insurance penetration in the country.
- Notably, though 80% of the consumers acknowledge insurance's pivotal role in financial security, yet a staggering 94% remain inadequately covered.

Centre takes over control of more than 100 properties of the Delhi Waqf Board



Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Why in news?

- The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry has taken over 123 properties belonging to the Delhi Waqf Board. It includes many historic mosques, medieval dargahs and cemeteries.
- Following a Delhi High Court order, a committee was formed by the govt to study the status of these monuments. The two-member committee submitted in its report that no representation or objection was received by it from the Delhi Waqf Board.
- Accordingly, these properties lapsed into the hands of the Central govt.

Details

- The Delhi Waqf Board disputed the committee's contention, arguing that it had resulted in "widespread panic, fear and resentment" among the Muslim community.
- As per the Waqf Board Chairman, the report had not been shared with the Waqf Board, and that there was no direction by the High Court to constitute a two-member committee in its order back in 2014. The Waqf Board has approached the Delhi High Court for redressal.
- Almost two weeks after the properties 'allegedly' lapsed into the hands of the Centre, the Waqf Board challenged the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' letter which "absolves" the Board from matters pertaining to the said properties in the High Court.
- The Waqf Board's Chairman also claimed that the Board had gone to the High Court in January this year challenging the formation of a two-member committee for these properties. Even as the petition was pending before the court, the two-member committee's report came out.

Developments so far in 2023

- Most worshippers at the mosques and dargahs were not aware of the change of ownership of the properties until the Land and Development Office under the Housing Ministry started pasting notices to the effect outside these properties on February 17 this year.
- The notices, addressed to 'occupants' of the said properties, were for a survey of the place. Significantly, they did not mention the properties as mosques or dargahs, etc, nor did the notices call the addressee as the owner or possessor of the property.
- Things came out into the public domain when the boundary wall of the Babur Road Masjid-Madrassa compound was demolished in April this year.
- It was followed by a notice to the Masjid Takia Shah in the vicinity. The compound with a centuries-old a mosque and dargah was claimed to be a railway property.



The demolished boundary wall of the Babur Road Masjid-Madrassa compound

The Waqf Board's stand

- The Waqf Board which had gone to court in February following the de-listing of 123 properties, and asked for a halt to the surveys being conducted, filed a fresh application after the demolition of the aforesaid boundary wall.
- The Delhi High Court, however, allowed the survey to continue.

More notices and surveys!

- Last month, a notice for a survey was pasted outside New Delhi's Jama Masjid opposite Parliament House. Against the Waqf Board's wishes, the survey was carried out at the mosque on August 21.
- A day earlier, a portion of the Mamu-Bhanje dargah was demolished as it allegedly infringed on a public road. After that two other mosques - the Pandara Road mosque and the Sunehri Bagh Masjid were also surveyed.

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Author
Civil Services Coach
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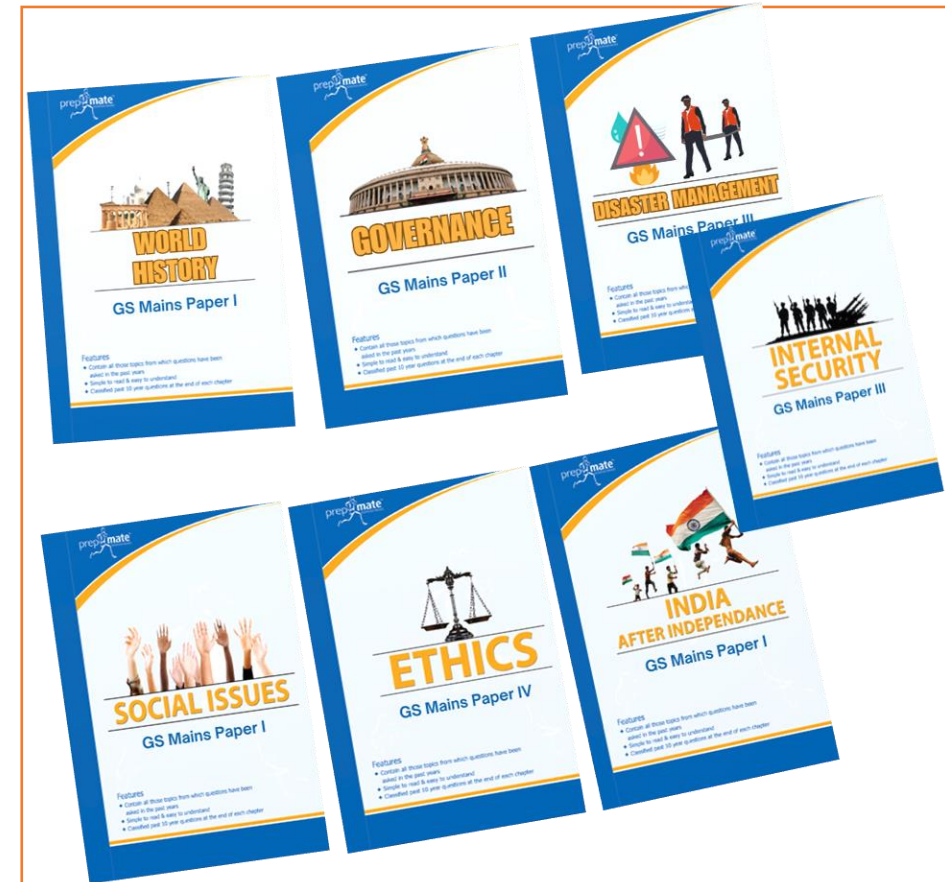
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