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### **1. Why has the Assam government decided to repeal the state's Muslim Marriage Act?**

#### **Why in news?**

The Assam state Cabinet has decided to repeal the Assam Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act of 1935. In the meeting, the Cabinet approved the 'Assam Repealing Ordinance 2024' which will repeal the 89-year-old Act.

#### **But first, what is the Act meant for?**

Enacted in 1935, the Act lays down the process for registration of Muslim marriages and divorces. A 2010 amendment replaced the word 'voluntary' in the original Act with 'compulsory', making registration of Muslim marriages and divorces compulsory in the state of Assam.

The Act authorises the state to grant licences to "any person, being a Muslim" to register marriages and divorces, with Muslim registrars deemed to be public servants. It lays down the process through which marriage and divorce applications can be made to the registrar, and the process for their registration. Crucially, the Act is in line with Muslim personal law.

#### **What is the Assam government's rationale behind repealing the Act?**

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma called this decision "another significant step towards prohibiting child marriages in Assam," stating that the Act contains provisions allowing marriage registration even if the bride and groom have not reached the legal marriageable age of 18 and 21, respectively.

A note on the Cabinet meeting referred to it as "obsolete pre-Independence Act of the British for the then Province." It also stated that the registration machinery in the Act is "informal" therefore "leaving a lot of scope for non-compliance of extant norms".

#### **Why did the state government link this decision to its crackdown on child marriages?**

Last year, the Assam government had launched an unprecedented punitive crackdown against child marriages, arresting more than 4,000 and prosecuting most of them under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The government has resolved to "eradicate" child marriage by 2026.

#### **What is the political background for the Assam Cabinet's decision?**

In Uttarakhand, which has already introduced a UCC, Muslims make up 13.95 per cent of the population. In Assam, they make a much higher proportion of the population — some 34 per cent as per the 2011 Census.

A majority of this population are Muslims of Bengali-origin, and Assamese nationalist politics has been largely in opposition to them, often tagged as "illegal immigrants" from Bangladesh,

with one of the central anxieties in the state being the impact of this migration on its demography.

Over the last year, the State government has made a number of interventions in the realm of the family, marriages, and reproduction, which are perceived to be acting on these anxieties. Along with its crackdown on child marriage — 62 per cent of more than 3,000 people put behind bars in the first round of arrests were Muslim — it has also capped the number of children one can have to be eligible for a new financial support scheme for rural women.

The government is also working on a bill to ban polygamy, and make it a criminal offence. The Chief Minister has, on multiple occasions, stated that the Assam government is working towards introducing a UCC, although that the state's tribal communities will be exempt from it.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## 2. BharatGPT group unveils 'Hanooman'

### Why in news?

The BharatGPT group — led by IIT Bombay along with seven other elite Indian engineering institutes — announced that it would launch its first ChatGPT-like service next month. Backed by Reliance Industries Ltd and the Department of Science and Technology, the group built the 'Hanooman' series of Indic language models in collaboration with Seetha Mahalaxmi Healthcare (SML).

### What is Hanooman?

Essentially, Hanooman is a series of large language models (LLMs) that can respond in 11 Indian languages like Hindi, Tamil, and Marathi, with plans to expand to more than 20 languages.

Hanooman has been designed to work in four fields, including health care, governance, financial services, and education.

Notably, the series isn't just a chatbot. It is a multimodal AI tool, which can generate text, speech, videos and more in multiple Indian languages, according to BharatGPT. One of the first customised versions is VizzhyGPT, an AI model fine-tuned for healthcare using reams of medical data.

### What are LLMs?

Large language models use deep learning techniques to process large amounts of text. They work by processing vast amounts of text, understanding the structure and meaning, and learning from it. LLMs are 'trained' to identify meanings and relationships between words. The greater the amount of training data a model is fed, the smarter it gets at understanding and producing text.

The training data is usually large datasets, such as Wikipedia, OpenWebText, and the Common Crawl Corpus. These contain large amounts of text data, which the models use to understand and generate natural language.

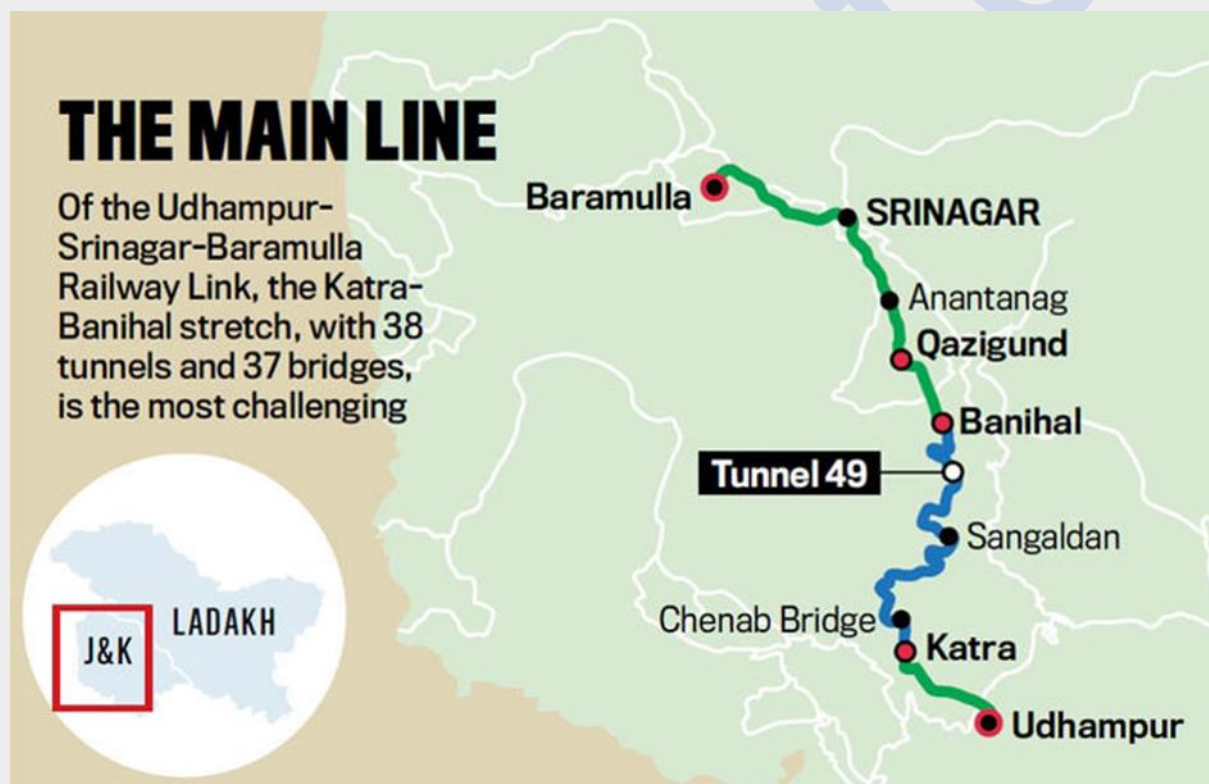
Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: The Indian Express

### 3. PM Modi flags off railway project in Jammu and Kashmir: Route, challenges, benefits

#### Why in news?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated the Banihal-Sangaldan section of the railway line which aims to connect Baramulla in North Kashmir to Udhampur in Jammu. He also flagged off Jammu and Kashmir's first electric train from Sangaldan to Srinagar and Baramulla.



#### The Banihal-Sangaldan railway line

More than 90 per cent of the 48-km railway line between Banihal to Sangaldan passes through tunnels in the mountainous Ramban district, including the country's longest 12.77-km tunnel (T-50).

#### Why it is important?

**Travel option to Valley when roads not usable:** With the train reaching Sangaldan, people now have a way to travel between Jammu and Kashmir even when the National Highway-44 is closed for vehicular traffic between Ramban and Banihal due to landslides. One can travel 30-35 km to Sangaldan by road from Ramban town and then board the train to Kashmir.

**Promote tourism and economy:** The train route also opens far-off areas of Jammu division for tourists, and thus for more economic activity. Hot water springs are situated nearly 5 km from Sangaldan and the picturesque Gool Valley is nearby. These areas have largely remained unexplored so far for want of better road connectivity.

#### **Valley still away from Indian railways network**

It will take a few more months for the Valley's truncated rail line to connect with the Indian Railways network across the country. Of the total 272-km-long Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla railway line, nearly 209 km has been commissioned so far. The Valley is likely to be connected with the Indian railways network by May this year.

A stretch of nearly 63 km, on which works are nearing completion, falls in Reasi district. This stretch has the world's highest single arch railway bridge standing at a height of 1178 mts above the Chenab riverbed, surpassing the Eiffel Tower of Paris by 35 meters.

#### **History of railways in Jammu and Kashmir**

The first railway line in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was built by the British in 1897 over a distance of 40-45 km between Jammu and Sialkot in the plains.



The Jammu to Sialkot train, the first railway link in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

#### **Post Independence**

After Partition, Sialkot went to Pakistan, and Jammu was disconnected from the rail network of India. Until the inauguration of the Pathankot-Jammu line in 1975, the railway station nearest to Jammu and Kashmir was Pathankot in Punjab.

In 1983, work began on a railway line between Jammu and Udhampur. The 53-km line, estimated to cost Rs 50 crore, was supposed to be completed in five years, but ultimately took 21 years and Rs 515 crore. The project, which was completed in 2004, has 20 major tunnels, the longest of which is 2.5 km long, and 158 bridges, the highest of which is 77 m high.

With work underway on the Jammu-Udhampur line, the Centre in 1994 announced the extension of the line from Udhampur to Srinagar, and then Baramulla. This was the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railwayline (USBRL) project, which was approved in March 1995 at an estimated cost of Rs 2,500 crore.

The project got momentum after 2002, when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared it a national project on account of its being among the most challenging works undertaken by the Indian Railways after Independence. The project cost has now ballooned to more than Rs 35,000 crore.

The line will connect Srinagar and Baramulla in the Valley with the rest of the country by train, and will provide a reliable and cost-effective all-weather alternative to the Jammu-Srinagar national highway that is frequently shut down due to landslides.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Indian Express