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ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Anjuman Ara Begum^{*}

Introduction

The Arunachal Pradesh legislature has been unicameral since its inception. Initially, the Legislative Assembly consisted of 33 members, 30 of whom were chosen by the people by direct election and three were nominated by the Union Government. On attainment of statehood in 1978, the membership of the Legislative Assembly was increased to 60. The first Legislative Assembly was constituted on 6th March, 1990. Currently the 7th Legislative Assembly of the state is in operation. Elections for the 8th Legislative Assembly are due in April 2024.

Research Methodology

The survey covers the entire legislative output in the year 2023 which includes the government and private member Bills, Ordinances, and Resolutions if any. After a quantitative assessment of the legislative output, a qualitative analysis of significant legislative initiatives has been made. Information was collected through the webpage of the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly.¹ The assembly has other web pages, however these were not used as regular updates were not available.² The Assembly also has social media handles like Facebook and YouTube where sessions are live telecasted for public information. Application under the Right to Information Act was also filed to obtain information with regard to the sessions of the Assembly as there were no updates on the government website after the 5th session. No information on the Committees was available.³

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¹ *Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly*, E-Vidhan, available at <https://evidhanapla.in/>.

² *Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly*, National E-Vidhan Application (NEVA), available at <https://arla.neva.gov.in/>; *Arunachal Assembly*, available at <https://arunachalassembly.gov.in/> (This has migrated to the e-vidhan website).

³ *Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly Committee*, National E-Vidhan Application (NEVA), available at <https://arla.neva.gov.in/Committee> (last accessed on 31 October 2023).

Legislative Activities in 2023

Usually, two sessions of the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly are conducted in a year. In 2023, three sessions were held including two business sessions and one special session. The 11th session of the 7th Legislative Assembly session was held from March 6-14, 2023 with 4 functional days (Budget session) and the 12th Session was held from September 4-7, 2023 with seven functional days. In addition to this, one special session was held on February 21, 2023 with one functional day. The President of India, Droupadi Murmu addressed this special session of the Assembly at Itanagar on February 21, 2023 to celebrate the 37th statehood day.

A number of Bills were introduced and 6 Bills were passed and received assent from the Governor. The Bills that became Acts in 2023 are as follows:

1. The Arunachal Pradesh Goods Tax (Amendment) Act, 2023,
2. The Arunachal Pradesh Protection of Drinking Water Catchment Areas Act, 2023
3. The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation (Amendment) Act 2023.
4. The Arunachal Pradesh Airport Area Planning and Development Authority Act, 2023
5. The Arunachal Pradesh Court Fees Act, 2023
6. The Arunachal Pradesh Goods & Services Tax (Amendment) Act, 2023

No ordinance was promulgated in the year 2023.

Analysis of Legislations Passed in 2023

Health and Sanitation: Protection of traditional water sources for drinking water

The Arunachal Pradesh Protection of Drinking Water Catchment Areas Act, 2023⁴

Arunachal Pradesh, has several rivers flowing through the State. These rivers are important water resources and are harnessed for generating hydropower. However, the majority of people of the state are dependent on traditional sources of drinking water like rivulets and springs and these serve as the lifeline in villages and small townships. Of late there has been growing concern over the drinking water crisis. About 200 rivers and streams have reportedly dried up.⁵ Experts believe that large-scale deforestation, mining and jhum cultivation or crash and burn system of farming in the hilly regions have disrupted the water

⁴ The Arunachal Pradesh Protection of Drinking Water Catchment Areas Act, 2023

⁵ Rahul Karmakar, *Arunachal Pradesh, India's hydroelectric powerhouse, stares at water scarcity*, July 08, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/arunachal-pradesh-indias-hydroelectric-powerhouse-stares-at-water-scarcity/article24366916.ece> (last accessed on 10 January 2024).

sources.⁶ Due to climatic change as also due to the deleterious effect of global warming and recession of glaciers there will be a direct impact on the availability of water in the entire country especially along the Trans Himalayan Region including Arunachal Pradesh.⁷ Apart from the prevailing jhum cultivation system which is reduced over a period of time, the introduction of cash crops like tea, cardamom, arecanut, etc, has also contributed to the depletion of forest coverage as these crops are cultivated in large areas of land.⁸ The government of Arunachal Pradesh is also actively promoting the cultivation of oil palm in the state which will further adversely affect the drinking water crisis. Oil palm, a tropical plant, was introduced in the foothills and valley areas of Arunachal Pradesh in 2012.⁹ The Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) (Amendment) Act, 2018¹⁰ was introduced, which, for the first time, conferred land property rights to individuals in a state where most of the lands are customarily owned by communities.¹¹ The passing of this Act eased the process of land acquisition for investors in the state, including oil palm companies, as the legislation permitted native individuals to lease out lands to non-native businesses. This has generated apprehensions about dispossession of the hill tribes.¹² Various development projects as well as the process of urbanisation in the region are contributing to this process of change, leading to an increasing privatisation and commercialisation of tribal community land.¹³

Incessant logging and mining of coal and boulders have further drained the land of water and destroyed the rich flora and fauna.¹⁴ Unregulated logging carried out every year has led to gradual drying up of most of the perennial water sources. The unhindered operation of

⁶ Junroi Mamang, *Water Crisis is Real*, available at <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/11/22/water-crisis-is-real/> (last accessed on 4 December 2023).

⁷ Ground Water Information Booklet Upper Subansiri District, Arunachal Pradesh, Central Ground Water Board - North Eastern Region Ministry of Water Resources, Guwahati, September 2013, https://www.cgwb.gov.in/old_website/District_Profile/Arunachal/UPPER%20SUBANSIRI.pdf (last accessed on 4 December 2023).

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Bikash Kumar Bhattacharya, *Oil palm farmers in Arunachal Pradesh lose hope in absence of processing mills, market, road linkage*, 6 June 2022, available at <https://india.mongabay.com/2022/06/in-arunachal-pradesh-oil-palm-farmers-lose-confidence-in-absence-of-processing-mills-market-road-linkage/> (last accessed on 4 December 2023).

¹⁰ The Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) (Amendment) Act, 2018.

¹¹ Chandan Kumar Sharma and Bhaswati Borgohain, *The New Land Settlement Act in Arunachal Pradesh*, Vol 54(23) EPW, available at <https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/23/commentary/new-land-settlement-act-arunachal-pradesh.html> (last accessed on 24 January 2023).

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Junroi Mamang, *Water Crisis is real*, 22 November 2021, available at <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/11/22/water-crisis-is-real/> (last accessed on 4 December 2023).

many saw mills, veneer and plywood mills around the year is not only depleting the forest resources but is also polluting the environment.¹⁵ Drinking water catchments have been rendered vulnerable due to the contamination caused by human activities such as unscientific agricultural practices, deforestation or mining. Catchments are important in preserving the quantity and quality of drinking water sources. Hence it is important to keep these areas clean and safe for human consumption.

The government has planned construction of large dams for years now and India's largest dam in the Dibang valley has already received necessary clearance. However, the issue of drinking water has been ignored for a long time. Absence of government policy on drinking water has further intensified the water crisis. To create public pressure, Mr. Sol Dadum, a social activist undertook a 225-km walk from Seppa in East Kameng district to the state capital Itanagar on April 15, 2022 in demand for the protection of drinking water sources.¹⁶ Finally in April 2023, the Arunachal Pradesh Protection of Drinking Water Catchment Areas Act, 2023¹⁷ was passed which received the assent of the Governor on 15 April 2023. The provisions of this Act shall be in addition to and not in derogation of the provisions of any other law for the time being in force.

The Act focuses on preserving drinking water sources by protecting traditional water catchment by classifying the catchment areas and by establishing a four-tier mechanism at the state, district and village levels. The Drinking Water Catchment Areas have been categorised into 'Critical Catchment Area', 'Sub-Critical Catchment Area' and 'Non-Critical Catchment Area' in terms of threat pertaining to the water availability in the source as defined under sections 11 (2) (a), (b) and (c).

The State level social mechanism described as the 'Arunachal Catchment Areas Pradesh Drinking Water Board (APDWCAAB)' will play an advisory and regulatory role. 'District Drinking Water Catchment Area Protection Board (DDWCAPB)' constituted under section 5 of the Act, will execute the provisions of the Act and will aid the Advisory Board. 'District Executive Committee for Drinking Water Catchment Areas Protection (DECDWCAP)' constituted under section 7 of the Act Organising of awareness programme at different levels and will promote voluntary donation of land for protection of catchment areas in the

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Umanand Jaswal, *Arunachal Pradesh: Long march plan for clean drinking water*, 8 May 2022, available at <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/long-protest-march-plan-for-clean-drinking-water-in-arunachal-pradesh/cid/1864028> (last accessed on 10 January 2024).

¹⁷ The Arunachal Pradesh Protection of Drinking Water Catchment Areas Act, 2023.

village. Lastly, the Village Water & Sanitation Committee will work at the village level to implement the Act and will ensure community participation in the whole mechanism.

The most important objective of the Act, is that it aims to activate gender inclusive grassroots community participation¹⁸ in drinking water governance. It endeavours to create a framework where every individual will participate at all levels and take part in decision-making.

The Act has several provisions (sections 5-12) to protect drinking water catchment areas, including regulating land use activities, prohibiting construction activities, and promoting afforestation like (prohibition of) felling of trees, jhumming, use of chemical fertilizers, cultivation, excavation etc; and periodic testing of soil, planting trees, etc.¹⁹ It also requires the development of an action plan for the protection of drinking water sources and the establishment of a monitoring system to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Act. The Act also provides for penalties for occasional and repeated violations.

The Act's emphasis on community participation will ensure that the people living in these areas become active participants in the decision-making process, which is essential for effective implementation. Under section 9 of the Act, the 'Village Water & Sanitation Committee' constituted under Jal Jeevan Mission programme shall continue to function as such. It shall carry out the various functions envisaged under the Act and shall make suggestions. This Committee will consist of 10-15 members, comprising of elected members of Panchayat up to 25% of the composition out of which, 50% shall be women; and remaining 25% shall consist of Gaon Burahs or Senior members or Literate members or Government retirees, to be decided by the Gram Sabha. The Committee shall work at the grassroot level, will identify traditional practices detrimental for water resources for e.g capturing mithuns, preventing jhumming or cultivation or use of any insecticide or pesticide or any harmful chemicals, quarrying of sand or stone, excavation of earth, open defecation along the water bodies, disposal of solid waste; and attempt to bring behavioral changes, by influencing the community practices and promoting sustainable ways of water resource management. The Act under section 6(1)(e) also instituted an annual reward for the best village contributing to the objectives of the Act.

¹⁸ ANI, *Arunachal Assembly passes Law to protect drinking water*, 9 March 2023, available at <https://theprint.in/politics/arunachal-pradesh-assembly-passes-bill-to-protect-drinking-water-sources/1431191/> (last accessed on 30 October 2023); The Arunachal Pradesh Protection of Drinking Water Catchment Areas Act, 2023, §§ 5–10.

¹⁹ The Arunachal Pradesh Protection of Drinking Water Catchment Areas Act, 2023, § 12.

A drawback of the Act is that it has stressed on voluntary donation of land for conservation and there is no provision for compensation except in the extreme circumstance of livelihood being endangered, but compensation has not been provided for as a matter of right. It declares under section 6(1)(d) that the land, other than certain classes of forest land, shall be donated voluntarily for conservation and development of drinking water catchment area protection and the land so donated shall not be used for any other purpose. However, no compensation shall be paid for such donated land. In extreme circumstances, the District Board may determine the compensation to be paid, which however, shall not be claimed as a matter of right. Another problematic provision is that a first-time offence will be punishable with fine to be decided by the village committee (section 17) and this process need not comply with the demands of procedural fairness. Such arbitrary provisions devalue the salutary aims and objectives of the Act which is trying to conserve water with the participation of the people.

Local Governance: Customary System of Administration of Justice

*The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation (Amendment) Act 2023*²⁰

The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2023 was enacted to amend the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945 [Regulation of 1945 hereinafter]²¹. The Regulation of 1945 is one of the pre-constitutional laws which safeguarded the indigenous local customary laws through the institution of “Village Authority”. The amendment Act of 2023 makes provisions for framing guidelines by the Government for election, selection, appointment, powers, functions and meetings of the Head Gaon Bura, Head Gaon Buri, Gaon Bura and Gaon Buri. It also removes imprisonment as a punishment for village council members abusing their power (section 6). The Act also amends the Arunachal Pradesh Civil Courts Act (Act No. 4 of 2021) in order to allow unilateral appeals. The Act has retrospective application and has the force of law from the date of the state’s statehood, 20th February, 1987²².

During the Budget session, Chief Minister Pema Khandu informed the House that the amendment to the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945, is intended to strengthen the state’s traditional customary laws and expedite the justice delivery process.

²⁰ The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation (Amendment) Act 2023.

²¹ The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2023.

²² State of Arunachal Pradesh Act, 1986.

A brief background discussion on the historical context of the amendment to the 1945 regulation is relevant as it continues to be in operation along with the current amendment of 2023. Arunachal Pradesh has 26 major tribes and more than 110 sub-tribes²³. Scholars such as Kago Gambo and Nani Bath have extensively researched the indigenous systems of administering justice in both criminal and civil matters, which were allowed to operate with little or no interference from the State administration.²⁴ The Government of India Act, 1935, (section 91-92)²⁵, incorporated certain recommendations of the Simon Commission and certain territories were regrouped under two categories: 'Excluded Areas' and 'Partially Excluded Areas.'²⁶ It was the responsibility of the village Councils to maintain peace and order in their respective tribal territories. Every tribe has its own type of village council with different nomenclature but with largely similar functions. The Tribal Councils not only maintained peace in the society but also regulated the socio-political and cultural, and even economic activities of the people. Rules and Regulations issued in 1914, 1937, and 1945 by the British became the constitutional basis for administration of justice in the territories. The centuries-old judicial system in the territories was given recognition through the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945.

The traditional self-governing institutions continue in operation under the broad framework of the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945. These regulations were further strengthened over time. Under the 1945 Regulation, executive officials (Deputy Commissioners, Circle Officers) had adjudicative power. The primary aim of the Regulation 1 of 1945 was to bring certain uniformities in tribal councils of various tribes with regards to dispensation of justice. Through this Regulation, the British government indirectly controlled the workings of Village Councils.

The policy of non-interference continued post-independence as well. The Government of India retained this Regulation of 1945. The Regulation provided the Village Authorities with wide power to be exercised in accordance with their customary laws [Regs 19-20] and to act like a bridge between the public and the law enforcing agencies. They are responsible for all the law-and-order related duties in the village and inflict punishment or order compensation as per their customary laws. In spite of the constitutional separation of judicial

²³ Dani Sulu, *How Many tribes are there in Arunachal Pradesh?* 12 August 2021, available at <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/08/12/how-many-tribes-are-there-in-arunachal-pradesh/> (last accessed on 10 November 2023).

²⁴ Kago Gambo, Nani Bath, *The Administration of Justice in 'Tribal Areas': A Case of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram* Vol 7(2), University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, available at <http://mzuhssjournal.in/images/resources/v7n2/gambo.pdf> (last accessed on 10 November 2023).

²⁵ The Government of India Act, 1935, §§ 91-92.

²⁶ The Government of India Act, 1935, §§ 91, 92.

and executive functions, the provisions of the Assam frontier Administration of Justice, 1945 are still in operation.²⁷ Field visits by the author conducted during 2022-23 indicated that the rural people prefer the traditional justice delivery system, which is quick and less expensive, than the modern judicial system because of judicial delay and the cost of litigation. Another drawback observed is that in many cases the power and position of the village councils are weakened by the village authorities (Gaon Burahs) who are appointed by the government. They owe their position and importance to the Government and are bound by the government instructions issued from time to time and this counters the policy of 'non-interference' towards the customary system.

Administration of Justice

*The Arunachal Pradesh Court Fees Act, 2023*²⁸

The Arunachal Pradesh Court Fees Bill, 2023, was introduced in the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly on September 4, 2023. It seeks to regulate the fees payable to the High Court and Subordinate Courts of Arunachal Pradesh. Currently, these fees are regulated under the Court Fees Act, 1870, which is a central act. The central government has proposed to repeal the 1870 Act and has directed the states to frame their own laws on court fees.²⁹ The state of Arunachal Pradesh, since the beginning had been abiding by the Court Fee Act, 1870 for all its fees payable to the High Court and Subordinate Courts of Arunachal Pradesh, as per the Assam Court Fees (Amendment) Act, 1972.³⁰

The Arunachal Pradesh Court Fees Bill, 2023 passed by a voice vote during the state's Legislative Assembly on September 4, 2023, received Governor's assent on 29th September, 2023 and became an Act. With the passing of this Act, the court fees payable under the Assam Court Fee Act of 1972 will be regulated under the state law of Arunachal Pradesh. This implies Arunachal Pradesh will have the authority to streamline the court fee structure in various courts of the State. Arunachal Pradesh doesn't have a High Court of its own and the bench of the Guwahati High Court is operational in the capital Itanagar.

Fees payable on documents filed in Courts (Chapter II and III): The Act specifies fees to be paid upon submission of certain documents to the High Court or Subordinate Courts, or

²⁷ Department of Law and Judicial, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, Appointment of Deputy Commissioners as Chief Judicial Magistrates, JUD/DSC-37/2010 (Notified on June 11, 2010).

²⁸ The Arunachal Pradesh Court Fees Act, 2023

²⁹ *Arunachal Assembly Passes Two Important Government Bills*, Deccan Herald, 5 September 2023, available at <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/arunachal-pradesh/arunachal-assembly-passes-two-important-government-bills-2673516> (last accessed on 4 December 2023).

³⁰ Assam Court Fees (Amendment) Act, 1972

request for certain documents from them. These include: (i) applications or petitions, (ii) appeals, and (iii) requests for copies of court orders and proceedings. The state government may amend the fees specified in the Schedules to the Act through notification.

Certain documents will be exempt from the levy of fees. These include: (i) written statements called for by the Court after the first hearing, (ii) applications or petitions in certain cases such as settlement of land revenue, water supply for irrigation, relinquishing land, enhancing rent, and solemnising or registering the marriage, (iii) bail bonds and petitions by prisoners, (iv) complaints by public servants, (v) appeals against the assessment of municipal tax, and (vi) compensation claims for acquisition of property for public purposes.

Computation of fees payable in certain suits [section 7]: The Act specifies different methods for computation of fees for different categories of suits. For instance, the fee will be based on: (i) the amount claimed in money-related cases such as those for compensation and arrears of maintenance, (ii) market value in cases involving movable property (other than money), (iii) either market value or land revenue payable in cases involving possession of land or house in a notified township, and (iv) terms of contracts for disputes between landlords and tenants.

Valuation of suits [section 8-10]: The Court may determine or revise the valuation, where it is of the opinion that a suit has been wrongly valued. It may appoint a person to conduct an inquiry and ascertain the valuation. It may direct a party involved in the suit to pay for the costs of the inquiry. In the event of non-payment of costs, the Court may dismiss the suit.

Dispute resolution [section 5]: In the High Court, disputes on the amount of fee between court officers and litigators will be first referred to the taxing officer (appointed by the Chief Justice). The decision of the taxing officer will be final. In cases of general importance, the taxing officer will refer the matter to the Chief Justice or any other Justice designated by the Chief Justice for final decision. In a subordinate court, similar disputes will be decided by the Clerk of the Court. Matters of general importance will be referred to the Judge for final decision.

Mode of fee collection [Chapter VI]: All fees will be collected by stamps, electronic payment, or in such manner as may be prescribed. A document will be considered invalid if it is not properly stamped.

Powers to make rules [section 35, 39, 46]: The High Court will prescribe fees for serving and executing processes issued by the: (i) High Court, (ii) civil courts, (iii) revenue courts, and (iv) criminal courts. The state government will prescribe through rules: (i) regulation of the supply of stamps, (ii) manner of electronic payment, (iii) renewal of damaged stamps, and

(iv) maintenance of records of all stamps. For documents requiring payment of fees in the High Court, stamp-related rules must be framed, in concurrence with the Chief Justice of the High Court.

With the passing of the state's own Court Fee Act, the state will be able to generate revenue from the court fees proceedings which was previously governed under the Assam Court Fee Act 1972. The Act will facilitate the availability of clear and accurate information about the expenses of different legal activities. By including electronic payment methods, the Act will make it convenient for the people to make payments, avoid clerical hurdles and streamline the fee collection process for the government. It will also ensure accurate stamping and thereby safeguard the interests of citizens.

Planning and Infrastructure Development

*The Arunachal Pradesh Airport Area, Planning and Development Authority Act, 2023*³¹

The Arunachal Pradesh Airport Area, Planning and Development Authority Bill, 2023 envisages constituting a statutory authority to oversee the development works to be carried out in the Airport Areas in the state including the Hollongi Donyi Polo airport area. The state doesn't have rail connectivity and hence air connectivity is of special significance.

The proposed Airport Planning and Development Authority under section 6 of the Act will be composed of 11 members and would be the key authority to provide clearances (eg. no objection certificates, consent etc) for the development of the airport planning areas. These include permissions, registrations, licenses, and approvals for setting up or upgrading infrastructural facilities, or carrying out developmental work and excludes clearances under Central enactments.

The airport planning area refers to a defined local planning zone, which includes one or multiple districts, to cater to land use and activities related to the airport. For airport planning areas, the Authority will be deemed to be the: (i) Village Panchayat, (ii) Municipality, (iii) Municipal Corporation, and (iv) Planning and Development Authority, under various laws [section 6 (iv) and section 7]. It will exercise all powers vested with such entities. These include: (i) formulating development plans, (ii) prescribing bye-laws, and (iii) regulating land use [section 6 (v)].

Appeals against the decisions of the Authority may be filed before the civil court [section 10]. An appeal must be filed within 30 days from the date of the decision. In matters arising out of the order or decree of the civil court, the appeal will lie before the High Court.

³¹ The Arunachal Pradesh Airport Area, Planning and Development Authority Act, 2023.

Taxation

The Arunachal Pradesh Goods Tax (Amendment) Act, 2023 [received governors assent in March, 2023] and the Arunachal Pradesh Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Act, 2023 (received governor's assent in September 2023) passed during 2023. Since both the central and state governments administer the GST, any modification or revision required under the Act must be approved by both the central and state governments. Hence the legal modifications approved by the Union Government have also to be passed by the state government.

The Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein moved Arunachal Pradesh Goods and Services Tax Bill 2023 in its amended form, which when passed, assented and notified will enable administration of taxation under GST in a more efficient manner.

Social Reforms and Gender Justice: Private Member's Bill

A private member's intention to introduce a Bill created quite a public stir in 2023. Sri Ninong Ering, MLA, 27th Pasighat Assembly constituency expressed his intention to table a private bill titled 'The Arunachal Pradesh Monogamy Election Eligibility Bill 2023'.³² The intended bill proposed that only individuals with one spouse should be eligible to run for elections. The proposed Bill aimed to bring an amendment to the Representation of People's Act, 1951, by inserting a new subsection, 4 A, in Section 4, which will allow only candidates with one spouse to be eligible to contest elections for the state legislative assembly of Arunachal Pradesh. The bill also aimed to extend the disqualification to the elections of local bodies by amending the Panchayat Act, 1997, and the Municipal Act, 2007. Since elections to the Union and the State legislature is a matter covered by the union list, the amendment could not move forward. Even so the chief minister gave an assurance that the matter would be discussed in the Assembly. Due to the absence of jurisdiction the Bill was not introduced and the MLA proposing it was absent in the session on the scheduled day of discussion (possibly due to social pressure). Hence the promised discussion did not take place.

It is important to note that polygamy is widely practiced in Arunachal Pradesh and has been marked as a social issue with the women's groups describing it as discriminating against women. Such practices are protected under the guise of customary laws. Hence, a private member's intention to bring a law against polygamy during the September session gained a lot of media attention and large-scale appreciation from women's groups who have been

³² Rokibuz Zaman, *Why a 'monogamy bill' is gathering support from Arunachal Pradesh women activists*, 6 October 2023, available at <https://scroll.in/article/1056622/why-a-monogamy-bill-is-gathering-support-from-arunachal-pradesh-women-activists> (last accessed 2 November 2023).

campaigning for years to criminalise this widespread practice. It is said that almost every community practises polygamy and men with financial, social and political influence are able to obtain social acceptance for the practice. The social acceptance for the practice can be judged from the fact that six out of nine chief ministers in Arunachal Pradesh have had multiple wives and currently seven MLAs have more than one wife, with one female MLA being a third wife.

Conclusion

The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) had recommended that states set a minimum number of sitting days for state legislatures, based on the number of members in the Assembly. Arunachal Pradesh is far below the expected number of working days. The Bills introduced and passed are mostly to deal with the community life of the people of the state like preservation of water sources , community participation by strengthening customary institutions and infrastructure development like air connectivity. Several critical issues such as corruption charges against Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC), border issues with China, Hajong Chakma Refugee issues, growing violence against women, deforestation, mega dams, freedom of speech and expression and drug abuse remain unaddressed. The political participation of women is low, hence great importance is being attached to the creation of a panel of women chairpersons.