

Centre mulls delimitation based on 2011 Census to fast-track Women's Reservation Act

“Under the amendments that the government wants to bring in, the basis for the selection of seats will be the Census data of 2011. The number of seats in Parliament will increase to 816, out of which 273 will be reserved for women,” a source said

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The amendment Bill, to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women, will seek to provide the reservation on the basis of the 2011 Census. | Photo Credit: PTI

The government on Monday indicated that it would be bring an amendment Bill proposing a delimitation exercise based on the 2011 Census, to ensure the implementation of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023 ahead of the 2029 Lok Sabha election. Under the proposed amendments, the number of Lok Sabha seats will increase from 543 to 816, with 273 seats reserved for women. The amendments could be brought in the ongoing Budget Session or in a Special Session called for the purpose.

Though the draft of the amendments are yet to be circulated, it is understood by sources that care would be taken so that the existing proportion of seats will be maintained for all States, amid concerns that States that had showed success in population programmes would lose out on representation vis a vis more populous States. Southern States had in particular expressed this concern. Overall, each State is likely to see a 50% rise in seats, but the pro rata basis would be maintained.

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As per Article 82 of the Constitution, the next delimitation exercise was to be done based on the first Census after 2026, but these amendments could mean that the 2011 Census data will be applied and the remaking of constituencies can proceed without the current Census being concluded. The proposals may include the expansion of State Assemblies as well.

The Act originally passed in September 2023 envisaged the conduct of the Decadal Census, followed by delimitation of seats. The 2021 Decadal Census, which got delayed because of COVID, is beginning next month. As per the current timelines, implementation of the Act could be pushed beyond 2030. However, by bringing in fresh amendments, the government is now seeking to bring forward the implementation of the Act.

Government managers, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah, met with leaders of several Opposition parties on Monday, including the Nationalist Congress Party (SP)'s Supriya Sule, YSR Congress Party's P.V. Midhun Reddy, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen's Asaduddin Owaisi and the Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Arvind Sawant, among others. Trinamool Congress and the Left skipped the meeting. A separate meeting of NDA partners was held later on Monday evening. The government managers had consulted the Congress and Samajwadi Party earlier. The Congress will be holding a meeting of Opposition floor leaders on Tuesday morning to go through the proposals put forward by the government.

"The amendments will require a two-thirds majority of both Houses, which is why extensive consultations are being held with the Opposition. Under the amendments that the government wants to bring in, the basis for the selection of seats will be the Census data of 2011. The number of seats in Parliament will increase to 816, out of which 273 will be reserved for women," said a government source.

These sources said efforts will be made either to pass the Bill in the current session of Parliament or convene a Special Session as several leaders are travelling because of the upcoming Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala, West Bengal and Puducherry.

The Women's Reservation Act, 2023, known as the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, mandates a 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

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