

PSIR & GS-2 Daily Brief

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Optional by
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Article - 1 : In Delhi's support for Arab gulf

In Delhi's support for Arab Gulf, a return of the Bombay school of thought



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WHETHER THE Iran war escalates into a more devastating confrontation or cools into a diplomatic mode this week, one fact is now beyond dispute: The Gulf has moved decisively to the very top of India's strategic priorities. Geography alone should have made this happen long ago. The Gulf is not a distant theatre; it is India's immediate neighbourhood, separated only by a narrow stretch of water and tied to the Subcontinent through deep economic, social, and security ties. India's approach to the current war suggests that Delhi will no longer treat the Gulf as a peripheral region.

The Gulf's new centrality also revives an older debate in modern India's strategic imagination — the contest between the so-called "Bombay School" and "Ludhiana School". The terms may sound strange to contemporary ears, but they capture two enduring ways of thinking about India's geopolitics.

The story begins in the late 18th century, when the British Raj, newly ascendant in the Subcontinent, confronted a dramatic external shock: Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798. His ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East exposed the vulnerability of the Indian empire's western approaches. The result was

the birth of the "Great Game", the prolonged contest between Britain and its European rivals for influence across the territorial arc from the Levant to the Hindu Kush. Out of this crucible emerged two distinct strategic visions. Both saw the need for defending India well beyond its territorial borders. They diverged on questions of geographic focus and policy instruments.

The Bombay School, shaped by the commercial dynamism of the emerging Parsi and Gujarati capitalists operating in the space created by the empire in western India and the Arabian Sea, saw India's security beginning at sea. Its leading figures — John Malcolm and Mountstuart Elphinstone — viewed Persia and Arabia as the natural outer ring of India's defence.

Their instincts were outward-looking and maritime. Malcolm's early 19th-century missions to Tehran sought to anchor Persia in a British-Indian orbit through diplomacy and trade. Elphinstone, as governor of Bombay, expanded the East India Company's naval presence in the Persian Gulf and concluded security arrangements with the Arab coastal principalities — the entities that would later become the Trucial States. For the Bombay School, the key to India's security lay in controlling sea lanes, shaping littoral politics, and projecting influence across the Gulf. Ports, commerce, and naval power were its natural instruments.

The Ludhiana School — where the East India Company agents were located before gaining full control of the Punjab — was continental in orientation. Figures such as Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence, and Claude Wade operated in a world shaped by tribal politics, feudal forces, and shifting alliances in the effort to prevent

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European penetration through Central Asia and Afghanistan. For them, Afghanistan was the lynchpin. The defence of India required forward fortifications, tribal militias, and political manipulation in the highlands beyond the Indus.

The First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42) was the decisive collision between these two schools. The Ludhiana School prevailed in policy, pushing the Raj into Kabul to install a friendly ruler. The catastrophic retreat from Afghanistan vindicated the Bombay School's scepticism about continental adventures. Yet the Ludhiana logic proved resilient. As the Raj consolidated the Punjab and fretted about Russian expansion, the Ludhiana School entrenched itself.

After 1947, Pakistan inherited this tradition. Its quest for "strategic depth", the search for a protectorate in Afghanistan, its reliance on tribal proxies, and its entanglement with extremist forces all flowed from the Ludhiana worldview. Rawalpindi's neglect of Karachi — once a vital node of the Bombay Presidency's maritime universe — reflected the same landlocked worldview. It was only China's rise and its maritime ambitions that put Pakistan's coastline back on the strategic map.

Independent India, too, drifted toward the Ludhiana mindset. Partition created new land borders with Pakistan that had to be defended. Delhi's socialist turn diminished the role of trade, ports, and maritime strategy. The three great port cities — Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras — ceded primacy to a land-centric capital.

Economic reforms in the 1990s and the new focus on trade put the maritime world back in the reckoning. But the persistent demands of contested land borders kept Delhi's

strategic gaze fixed on the continent. It was the rapid rise of the oil-rich Gulf — and the massive flows of labour, remittances, energy, and capital — that gave unacknowledged heft to the Bombay School.

Today, nearly 9 million Indian workers, nearly \$50 billion in annual remittances, and critical energy and logistics dependencies tie India inextricably to the Gulf. The region has become a vital extension of India's economic and social space. Revolutionary Iran's confrontational politics after 1979 limited Delhi's engagement with Tehran, but the Arab Gulf steadily assumed the centrality that Persia once held for Malcolm and Elphinstone.

The revival of the Bombay School does not mean India can ignore the challenges on its northwestern marches. The enduring hostility with Pakistan remains real. The task for Delhi is not to choose between maritime and continental imperatives but to integrate them — to anchor maritime India firmly in the Gulf while maintaining credible military deterrence on the land frontier.

Meanwhile, the rise of political moderation and economic openness in Arabia stands in sharp contrast to Iran's oppressive theocracy and Pakistan's persistent use of religious extremism and violent proxies to destabilise India. In subtle but significant ways, the Arab Gulf's positive political evolution offers India a counterweight to the destabilising impulses emanating from Pakistan and Iran. Delhi's strong support for the Arab Gulf in the current war, in essence, about the return of the Bombay School.

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Context There is a significant shift in India's foreign policy & strategic thinking, particularly regarding the Arab Gulf region. It argues that the Gulf has now become India's top strategic priority from a land-focused worldview (the Ludhiana School) back to maritime oriented one (the Bombay School).

Facts

1798 - Napoleon's conquest of Egypt exposed the vulnerability of British India's western approaches.

The Great Game prolonged 19th-Century rivalry between Britain and European powers (especially Russia) for influence from the Levant to the Hindu Kush.

Analytical Crux

India's strategic shift from a continentalist to a maritime is driven by economic interdependence (9 million workers, \$50 billion remittances, energy security) and the Arab Gulf's political moderation, contrasting with Iran's theocracy and Pakistan's extremism. It reflects the nexus between geopolitics and geo-economics, the revival of maritime consciousness in India's foreign policy and a pragmatic balancing of continental and maritime imperatives.

Verbatim Quotes

Maritime vs. Continental Strategic orientation: "The Bombay School, shaped by commercial dynamism of emerging Paris & Gujarat capitalists saw India's security beginning at sea."

"Its leading figures - John Malcolm and Mountstuart Elphinstone viewed Persia and Arabia as the natural outer ring of India's defence."

"The task for Delhi is not to choose between maritime & continental imperatives but to integrate them; to anchor maritime India firmly in the Gulf while maintaining credible military deterrence on the land frontier."

Article - 2 : Iran challenges American airpower dominance

The screenshot shows the top of a web page for the Observer Research Foundation. The header includes the ORF logo and navigation links like 'RESEARCH', 'CENTRES', 'FORUMS', 'EVENTS', and 'ABOUT US'. The article title is 'Iran Challenges American Airpower Dominance' by Harsh V. Pant, published on April 06, 2026. A sub-headline reads: 'In the past, US campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya were conducted against relatively weak air defences. That has not turned out to be the case with Iran, puncturing the long-held myth of America's 'indomitable' air power.' Below the text is a photograph of a destroyed aircraft on a desert ground. To the right of the photo is a profile of the author, Harsh V. Pant, with a 'Read More +' link.

Context The article examines the 2026 Iran conflict, where Iran shot down a U.S. F-15E and an A-10, challenging the narrative of invulnerable US air superiority. It argues that even degraded air defenses can impose attrition, complicate operational planning and generate political costs.

Facts

■ An American F-15E Strike Eagle was shot down over western Iran by enemy fire.

■ Iran's air defence is degraded, but still capable of imposing costs.

■ It marked the first time in the 2026 Iran conflict that a manned American combat aircraft was brought down in hostile airspace.

Analytical Crux

The downing of US aircraft over Iran punctures the myth of invulnerable American airpower. Even a degraded Iranian air defence can impose costs, proving that air superiority no longer guarantees safety in state-on-state conflicts. Attrition of both manned and unmanned systems forces strategic introspection - dominance must now coexist with risk and adaptability.

Verbatim Quotes

"The vulnerability of non-stealth low-altitude platforms operating in contested environments is once again laid bare."

"Air superiority, long viewed as the cornerstone of US military doctrine, no longer guarantees invulnerability."

"The battlefield is no longer permissive; it is dynamic, adaptive and unforgiving."

Article - 3 : Delimitation, women's reservation, political dynamics

Delimitation, women's reservation, political dynamics

In September 2023, Parliament passed the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, or the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which commits to reserving one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas for women, including in constituencies already earmarked for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. However, this potentially transformative measure falls short of immediacy: its implementation is deferred until after the next Census and the subsequent delimitation exercise.

During parliamentary debates, the Congress party, along with several other Opposition parties, demanded its immediate operationalisation, ideally for the 2024 general election. Women's rights groups criticised the government for tying the quota to delimitation after the new Census, arguing that it creates unnecessary delays. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government rejected this, maintaining that such a major change, without updated Census data and delimitation, would undermine both fairness and feasibility.

The shift now seems more deliberate
Less than three years later, that position appears to have shifted. Recent reports suggest that the government now plans to amend the Women's Reservation Act, 2023 by initiating a delimitation exercise based on the 2011 Census, rather than waiting for a fresh Census and a subsequent delimitation process tied to it. At the same time, the size of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies may be expanded by nearly 50%, increasing the Lok Sabha's strength from 543 to 816 seats. In the absence of any formal articulation of the basis for such an expansion, questions arise about its implications for representational balance and political fairness.

Taken together, these developments – particularly the proposed increase in seats – point to a decoupling of women's reservation from the next Census, expected to include caste enumeration beyond the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the delimitation exercise that would follow. While this shift is framed as a means of expediting implementation, it also suggests a more deliberate political reconfiguration underlying these far-reaching structural changes.

The timing is telling. Acting at this juncture allows the government to claim credit for a long-pending reform that previous administrations failed to implement, even if it entails departing from the sequencing that it had earlier defended. It has clear electoral implications, likely to mobilise women voters in upcoming Assembly elections across key States/Union Territory, consolidate support ahead of the 2027 contests, and position the Bharatiya Janata Party as the party that delivered on women's reservations and gender justice. This claim could, in turn, become a chief plank of its campaign for the 2029 general election.



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Delimitation, however, remains contentious, questioning whether representation should be based solely on population or also consider economic, social, and demographic factors. A strictly population-based approach would strengthen the parliamentary power of northern States where fertility rates remain relatively high, while reducing the relative influence of southern and peninsular states that have stabilised population growth and significantly drive India's economy and employment. This dynamic is likely to deepen the existing north-south divide, driven by demographic asymmetries and uneven development outcomes, placing additional strain on the federal compact and the balance of inter-State representation.

These conflicting concerns stem from the constitutional freeze on delimitation, leaving constituency boundaries and seat allocations unchanged since the early 1970s. After nearly five decades, the government now appears set to lift this freeze, proposing a roughly 50% expansion of the Lok Sabha alongside proportional increases in State Assemblies. This approach is intended to reassure southern States by preserving their relative share of seats and thus reducing resistance to delimitation. Yet, even with a uniform expansion, the absolute seat counts of northern States would rise significantly, further tilting the existing balance of power in their favour. For instance, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar together could approach 180 seats, while the five southern States (Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana) combined may reach around 195, raising the possibility that the northern bloc could still wield disproportionate political weight. In a first-past-the-post system, where numerical strength ultimately determines both electoral victory and seats gained, such an increase risks entrenching structural disadvantages for less populous regions, even if formal proportionality is preserved.

The issue of data
These distributional concerns are compounded by the question of data. Basing women's reservation on the 2011 Census is problematic, particularly when a new Census is already underway. India in 2026 bears little resemblance to its 2011 demographic profile: migration, rapid urbanisation, and the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly reshaped population patterns over the past decade and a half, altering both urban and rural constituencies. Proceeding with outdated data risks misrepresenting current realities at the very moment when foundational decisions on delimitation, seat expansion, and the operationalisation of women's reservation are being made. Yet, the urgency to move ahead suggests a calculated political judgement: that the imperative of delivering women's reservation will outweigh resistance, as few can afford to oppose its expeditious implementation, leaving little

room to contest either the process or its sequencing. The issue is further complicated by what the next Census itself may reveal. Widely expected to be a landmark exercise, the availability of caste data could sharpen demands for greater representation of disadvantaged caste groups, particularly given their demographic strength. It may also amplify calls for sub-quotas within women's reservation, especially from Other Backward Classes (OBCs), including Muslim OBC communities that remain underrepresented. Several political parties and women's organisations have already voiced such demands. By moving ahead without waiting for the 2026-27 Census, the government appears to be postponing these pressures, but only temporarily.

A further concern is the lack of clarity on how women's reservation will operate in practice. While the amendment mandates a one-third quota, it defers critical details, especially the rotation of reserved constituencies. This is not a minor issue: rotation determines who can contest, from where, and with what continuity, shaping both accountability and constituency development. Earlier proposals cautioned that frequent rotation could disrupt these goals, yet the current framework leaves the design unresolved. Reports suggest that in smaller States and Union Territories with one or two Lok Sabha seats, the rotation of reserved constituencies may operate differently, resulting in less frequent turnover, while in larger States, some seats could remain reserved across successive terms. However, the law itself provides only for rotation after delimitation, leaving the precise mechanism to be defined.

The need for deliberation
None of this diminishes the core premise: women's reservation is long overdue and politically imperative. Evidence from other countries suggests that quotas can be effective, and there is little reason to believe that India would be an exception. Taken together, women's reservation, seat expansion and delimitation are not isolated changes; they will jointly reshape who is represented, from where, and in what proportions. Seen in this context, they mark a foundational reordering of the electoral map – one that will redraw constituencies, recalibrate the weight of States, and reconfigure the social composition of legislative bodies. Far from a marginal or technical adjustment, this is a structural shift that could rebalance political power across regions, social groups, and genders. Precisely because of the scale of this shift, implementation must be preceded by thorough deliberation grounded in the latest data. Departing from the logical and constitutionally settled sequence risks distorting representation and seat distribution, thereby weakening the very reform it seeks to advance. India stands on the cusp of one of the most significant transformations of its representative system since the early decades of the Republic.

Context There is a proposed simultaneous overhaul of 3 interconnected structural reforms in India's electoral system: women's reservation (33% seats in Parliament & Assemblies), delimitation (redrawing constituency boundaries), and expansion of Lok Sabha seats (from 543 to ~816).

Facts

Women's Reservation Act (2023) → Officially called the Constitution (one hundred and sixth amendment) act, 2023 or Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam. Reserves one-third (33%) of seats in Lok Sabha & Vidhan Sabha for women.

Government plans to use 2011 Census data instead of 2026-27 Census for expansion of seats.

Analytical Crux

Government plans to use 2011 Census data for women's reservation and expand Lok Sabha seats by 50%, bypassing the 2026 census. This avoids OBC sub-quota demands & positions the ruling party for electoral gains in 2027-29. However, population-based delimitation will favour northern states over southern ones, deepening the north-south divide, all based on outdated demographic data misrepresenting current realities shaped by migration and urbanisation.

Verbatim Quotes

"Taken together, women's reservation, seat expansion and delimitation are not isolated changes; they will jointly reshape who is represented, from where and in what proportions." – Zoya Hassan

"India stands on the cusp of one of the most significant transformations of its representative system since the early decades of the Republic." – Zoya Hassan.

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Upcoming Batch: 22 June, 2026

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