Census 2021

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs has said in the Lok Sabha that owing to the outbreak of **Covid-19** pandemic, **Census 2021** and other Census-related field activities have been postponed until further orders.

In India, a census is conducted every decade and **Census 2021** will be **the 16th national census of the country.**

Key Points

- **Background:**
  - The earliest literature 'Rig Veda' reveals that some kind of **population count was maintained during 800-600 BC.**
  - During the regime of Mughal king Akbar, the administrative report **'Ain-e-Akbari' included comprehensive data pertaining to population,** industry, wealth and many other characteristics.
  - The first Census was conducted in India in **1872 (although non-synchronously in different parts) during the reign of Governor-General Lord Mayo.**
  - The newly established office of the registrar general and census commissioner launched and completed the first **Census of India in 1881.**
    - With a history of more than 130 years, it has proved to be a reliable exercise that is **conducted every 10 years.**
  - The **Census Act, enacted in 1948**, then provided for the **permanent scheme of conducting population Census** with duties and responsibilities of Census Officers.
    - The individual data collected in Census under the Census Act, 1948, are not made public as per the provisions contained in the Act.
    - The individual data are not used for the preparation of any other database, including the **National Register of Citizens (NRC).** Only the aggregated Census data at various administrative levels are released.

- **About:**
  - **Census of India** is one of the Many legacies of the colonial raj continued after 1947. The term census is derived from the latin term **from censere, which means to assess.**
  - In the Census, data is collected on demographic and various socio-economic parameters like **education, SC/ST (Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe), religion, language, marriage, fertility, Disability, occupation and Migration of the individuals.**
  - The forthcoming Census is to be **the first digital Census and there is a provision for self-enumeration.** Census will be **conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs.**
    A mobile application for data collection and a Census portal for managing and monitoring various Census related activities have been developed.
- **Census 2021 vs Previous Editions:**
  - **Digital Data:**
    - It is for the first time the data is collected digitally via mobile applications (installed on enumerator's phone) **with a provision of working in offline mode.**
    - This would **help in reducing the delay and having the results almost immediately,** unlike earlier cases where it used to take multiple years for the data to be analyzed and the reports published.
  - **Census Monitoring & Management Portal:**
    It will act as a **single source** for all officers/officials involved in Census activities to provide **multi-language support.**
  - **No Caste Data:**
    The latest Census (as per the existing plan) will not collect caste data. While the **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC)** was conducted alongside Census 2011, the outcome of the caste Census is yet to be made public.
  - **Transgender Head:**
    It is for the first time that information of households headed by a person from the **Transgender Community** and members living in the family will be collected. Earlier there was a column for male and female only.

- **Importance of Census:**
  - **Comprehensive Source of Data:**
    It gathers knowledge about the **<u>Demographic Dividend</u> of the nation which is vital for many purposes** such as health survey, education survey, agriculture survey, etc.
  - **Decision-making:**
    Census is significant for any country for evidence-based decision making.
  - **Policy-making:**
    Census is responsible for taking the collected information **from a dwelling unit to the delivery unit.** It will boost coherence policy-making and scientific planning, resulting in optimisation of resources.
  - **Demarcation:**
    Census data is also used **for the demarcation of constituencies and allocation of representation** to the Parliament, State Legislative Assemblies and local bodies.
  - **Grants:**
    The **<u>Finance Commission</u>** gives grants to the states on the basis of population figures available from the Census data.

- **Challenges:**
  - **Errors:**
    There are two types of error during statistical exercise: **Content error, and Coverage error** which needs to be minimised.
  - **Furnishing of false information:**
    Due to fear of losing intended benefits of **various schemes (or fear of losing citizenship this time) and lack of education, people fabricate and tend to provide false information.**
  - **Associated Costs:**
    Huge expenditure (thousands of crores) is incurred by the government in conducting this exercise.
  - **Security:**
    - The move towards digital mode of collecting the data is a **step forward to speed up the process of analysis.**
    - However, **the security of the data being collected** (especially on the application) and adequate backup mechanism for such data **has to be looked into.**
  - **Abuse of Data:**
    The availability of data with regional authorities **has the potential for abuse of such data, as the concerned authority has access to everything about a particular family** (ownership, caste, financial aspects, occupation, lifestyle, etc.).
  - **Lack of community participation:**
    Lack of community participation and inadequate training of enumerators to collect the precise **and accurate data acts as a big challenge** in conducting the Census exercise.

Way Forward

- There is a **need to Strengthen the Data Quality which** can be done by **minimising the coverage error and content error.**
- Proper training of enumerators (data collectors) and organizers should be organised. Also, enumerators should be well paid to keep them motivated, as they are the focal point of data collection and ensuring data accuracy.
- Public campaigns should be launched **in order to make people aware about the importance of Census** in their life.

Sources: TH