Census-NPR Postponement

Why in News?

The Centre has decided to postpone the first phase of the 2021 Census, earlier planned to start on 1st April 2020, due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

What is the current situation?

- The 21-day national lockdown called by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is until April 15.
- But the return of any semblance of normalcy in daily life will take many more weeks, if not months.
- India is still struggling to make sense of the extent and intensity of the pandemic and the accompanying and inevitable economic calamity.
- It is certain that all resources will need to be mobilised, first for combating the malady and then for tending society and the economy back to its health and dynamism.

What was the original schedule?

- According to the original schedule, there were two phases,
    a. 1st phase (April to September 2020) - House listing and updating of the National Population Register, and
    b. 2nd phase (February 2021) - Population enumeration.
- As the Census is a massive exercise, which involves mass contact and diversion of resources, the Centre has postponed it.

What does this suspension mean?

- As the Centre has put off the first phase until further orders, the State governments can now focus on the pressing task of combating the coronavirus.
- This suspension opens a fresh window, and an entirely new context, for reconciliation between the Centre and States on the exercise itself.
- The NPR exercise and the allied questions regarding citizenship rights had turned India into a cauldron of discord.
- But, the pandemic has forced the collective attention of the country on the interconnectedness of modern life.

Why did the State governments oppose?

- Several State governments had made their opposition clear to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.
- They also made their opposition to the additional questions in the NPR pro forma that many fear is a prelude to something more cynical and divisive that is based on some quaint ideas of nationhood.
- The Centre clarified that people could choose not to respond to these questions, but never bothered to address the underlying concerns.

What could the Centre do?

- The Centre can turn this crisis into an opportunity to restore mutually respectful terms for relations with States and harmony among communities — both currently frayed.
- Unshakeable national unity is essential for the country to tide over the pandemic crisis.
- The Centre must use this sobering backdrop to analyse India’s priorities as a country and revisit its idea of citizenship and plans for the NPR.

Source: The Hindu

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