Conducting the Census

What is the issue?

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the census process was postponed.
- But the repeated postponement and the undue delay in the Census's commencement will severely affect the availability of vital information on population numbers at district and other lower levels.

What is Census?

- The Census is the process of collecting, compiling, analyzing and disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, at a specific time, of all persons in a country.
- It is the basis for reviewing the country's progress in the past decade, monitoring the ongoing government schemes and plan for the future.

The census is a Union subject under Article 246 of India Constitution. As per the provisions of the Census Act 1948, the Census of India is conducted.

- In India, the Census is conducted 10 years once.
- Census 2011 was the 15th National Census of the country since 1881 (first Census) and the 7th after Independence.

What is the significance of census?

- Census provides detailed information on demography, economic activity, literacy and education, housing and household amenities, urbanisation, fertility and mortality, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, etc.
- Since the Census tallies data on several features of the Indian population, the Census is vital to administrative functions and planning of welfare schemes.
- Census data are also critical as they are used as a frame to underpin other sample surveys that are representative of the whole population.
- The national Census is utilised by international agencies to project the world's population as well.

Is it conducted regularly?

- Since 1881, only 2021, a pandemic-affected year, was an exception as the exercise was postponed.
- With the deadline for freezing of boundaries further extended to June 30, 2023, the Census can effectively be conducted only some months after this event.

Freezing of boundaries is necessary as State governments are in the habit of creating new districts and tehsils or reorganising existing ones.

- Census enumeration is preceded by activities such as house-listing.
- Most States were in line to begin this in early 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.
- But the repeated postponement and, consequently, the undue delay in the Census's commencement will severely affect the availability of vital information on population numbers at district and other lower levels.

Why is there a delay?

- The COVID-19 pandemic has been cited as a reason for the delay. But, this is no longer a valid excuse, since
  - Lockdowns and physical distancing norms are now a thing of the past,
  - Infection levels in the country have remained relatively low ever since the last COVID wave happened in early 2022.
- In fact, Census data should validate the various estimates on mortality based on **'excess deaths' analyses** during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It is imperative that decadal changes in India's demography related to **urbanisation and migration** of people across States are captured adequately.
- Welfare schemes such as the targeted Public Distribution System under the National Food Security Act depend on population estimates.
- But, the government continues to rely on Census 2011, which is now clearly outdated.
- Inter-State disparities in population growth rates could also impinge upon debates on the prospective delimitation of electoral boundaries and apportioning of seats across States.
- Considering these and other imperatives for the smooth planning and implementation of administrative, welfare and statistical management for governance, the Union government must commencing the Census.

Click here to read 'Census as a Mirror of Past and Present.

Reference

1. The Hindu | Time to count: On government's delay in conducting census
2. The Hindu | Avoid further delay in conducting the Census

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