UN Population Report on India

Why in news?

The recently released UNDP report on world population trends says that India will overtake China to become the world's most populous country in a year's time.

To know more about the UN Population Report, click here.

What does the report say about India?

- With a population of 1.4 billion, India accounts for about 17.5% of the world's population.
- Two-thirds of the projected increase in global population through 2050 will be driven by the momentum of past growth that is embedded in the youthful age structure of the current population.
- Such growth would occur even if childbearing in today's high-fertility countries were to fall immediately to around two births per woman.

What is the status of fertility rate of India?

- India's young population (15-64 years) accounts for 67% of the whole.
- This means that even at a declining total fertility rate, India's population is expected to increase, though at slower rates.
- In fact, the findings of the 5th round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 5) tell us that India's total fertility rate has fallen to 2, from the NFHS 4 level of 2.2 about six years back.
- Only five States - Bihar, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Manipur - have a fertility rate of above 2.1.

  The fertility rate of 2.1 is considered to be the replacement rate, or the rate at which a generation exactly replaces another over time.

- For the other States, a low TFR will have its effect only after a generation.
- For now, India's 'population problem' is a largely regional one; two major States, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which account for a quarter of India's population (over 36 crore), are skewing the picture.

What burdens does high population impose?

- More mouths to feed.
- More infrastructure to be created.
- More demands on energy resources.
- More jobs to be provided at higher productivity levels to ensure that per capita incomes do not fall.

- For the last burden to be overcome, an investment in education and health becomes paramount.

What is needed?

- India's 'demographic dividend' will materialise only if its workforce is productive.
- The capacity of the Indian state to equip ever large numbers with reasonable skills is already stretched.
- Since this increase in numbers is concentrated in the northern States, it imposes a burden on the better-off western and southern States to create jobs and infrastructure.
- To contain socio-economic imbalances, it is important that the outlier States are brought in line and their labour productivity improved.

What is the key factor behind high population growth?

- A key factor behind high population growth rates is the lack of women's agency.
- All-India female literacy rate stands at 70.3%, against 84.7% in the case of males, but Bihar and Uttar Pradesh feature lower female literacy rates of 60.5% and 63.4%, respectively.
- Labour productivity is shackled by the low labour force participation rate of women (LFPR), at 25%, while the overall LFPR is 43%.
- Levels of infant and maternal mortality are higher than the national average in many northern States.
- **Solution** - An investment in women's health and education will lift LFPR and reduce TFR, as has been empirically established.

What is next?

- To arrest policy drift here, States must be given an additional incentive by the Finance Commission, while deciding on the devolution of taxes, to invest in human capital.
- At present, per capita income criteria dominates parameters for horizontal transfers.
- In sum, India's 'demographic dividend' can yet be salvaged.

Reference

https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/editorial/the-population-question/article65644550.ece

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