NEXT IAS

DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE NEXT CENSUS FOR INDIA'S ECONOMY

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Context

- **India's upcoming Census 2027** is a cornerstone for **economic planning and governance** that aims **to provide crucial data** that influences everything from inflation tracking to urban development.

Census in India

- It is a survey of the **population of an area** that includes collecting details of a **country's demographics** including **age, sex and occupation**.

- It serves as the **statistical foundation** for all surveys and policymaking in India.

- It is **typically conducted every ten years** (decennial) to update the **National Population Register (NPR).**

- **History:** 1st Decennial Census: 1881, under WC Plowden (Census Commissioner of India).
  - Independent India's 1st Census: 1951

- **Constitutional & Legal Mandates:** Article 246 (7th Schedule Union List i.e, Census is Union subject).
  - **The Census of India Act of 1948** does not specify its timing or periodicity.

- The population census is conducted by the **Office of the Registrar General** and **Census Commissioner of India** under the **Ministry of Home Affairs.**

Census 2027

- Earlier Census was **scheduled for 2021** but had to be **postponed due to the Covid pandemic**.

- Now, Census 2027 will be **India's first digital Census** and will be the **first Census since 1931** to **capture granular caste data**, beyond the broader classifications of SCs and STs.

- The **Delimitation of Constituencies** for the **Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies** is to be carried out on the basis of the next Census.
  - There is a need to pass a **Delimitation Act by Parliament** to constitute a **Delimitation Commission** for the delimitation exercise.
  - **Article 82 of the Constitution** mandates readjustment of seats after every Census.

Importance of Census

- **Statistical Foundation:** Census collects data on age, gender, employment, education, migration, and economic status, offering a comprehensive snapshot of the nation.
  - It helps policymakers understand how India has changed over the past 16 years and predict future trends.

- **Inflation Control & Monetary Policy:** The **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**, which tracks inflation, relies on Census-based consumption patterns.
  - Outdated Census data can lead to miscalculations in inflation, affecting interest rates and economic growth.

- **Urban Planning, Migration & Infrastructure Development:** The Census provides insights into migration trends, and helps governments plan housing, transportation, and employment policies by analyzing migration trends and population density.
  - It ensures cities can accommodate growing populations efficiently.
  - **For example,** if a village lacks piped water or has poor electrification, the data flags it for priority under schemes like **Jal Jeevan Mission or Saubhagya Yojana.**

- **Welfare & Social Programs:** Government schemes like food security, healthcare, and education subsidies **depend on Census data** to identify eligible beneficiaries.
  - Delays in Census updates can result in inefficient resource allocation and exclusion of deserving individuals.

- ◆ Accurate population data ensures that programs like **PM-KISAN, MGNREGS, and rural housing schemes** reach the right beneficiaries.
- **Employment & Labor Market Trends:** Census data provides insights into workforce distribution, unemployment rates, and skill gaps, helping policymakers design job creation strategies and vocational training programs.
- **Political & Economic Representation:** The Census influences delimitation, which determines seat distribution in Parliament based on population shifts.
  - ◆ It affects regional representation and economic resource allocation.
- **Private Sector & Investment Decisions:** Businesses rely on Census data to assess market demand, consumer behavior, and workforce availability, guiding investment strategies and expansion plans.

Challenges & Hurdles

- **Delayed or Outdated Data:** The delay in conducting the next one has created a data vacuum, making it difficult to design policies that reflect current realities like urban migration, changing family structures, or economic shifts.
- **Political Influence and Data Integrity:** Census data can be politicized, especially when it involves sensitive topics like caste or religion.
  - ◆ The framing of questions or selective data release can skew public perception and policy priorities.
- **Undercounting and Non-Response:** Certain populations—like migrant workers, the homeless, or marginalized communities—are often undercounted due to mobility, lack of documentation, or mistrust in government processes.
  - ◆ It leads to inequitable resource allocation.
- **Data Quality and Accuracy:** Errors in data collection, processing, or self-reporting can compromise the accuracy of Census results.
  - ◆ For example, **self-declared data in schemes like eShram** may not reflect actual conditions.
- **Privacy Concerns:** People may hesitate to share personal information due to privacy fears, especially in the digital age.
  - ◆ It can result in incomplete or inaccurate responses, affecting the reliability of the data.
- **Information Overload:** Ironically, having too much data can be a problem. Policymakers **may struggle to extract actionable insights** from massive datasets, especially if the data isn't well-organized or lacks interoperability across departments.

Looking Ahead

- With digital data collection and advanced technology, the Census aims to be more efficient and accurate than previous editions.
- If conducted effectively, it will provide critical insights that shape India's economic policies, inflation control, and urban development for the next decade.
- Success of Census 2027 will determine how well India adapts to changing demographics and economic challenges in the years ahead.

Source: IE

Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss how the upcoming Census can influence India's economic planning and development, particularly in the context of changing demographic trends and technological advancements.

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