

## **Census-NPR Postponement**

### **Why in News?**

The Centre has decided to postpone the first phase of the 2021 Census, earlier planned to start on 1<sup>st</sup> 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. 1<sup>st</sup> phase (April to September 2020) - House listing and updating of the National Population Register, and
  - b. 2<sup>nd</sup> 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**

