

EVERYONE COUNTS: ON CENSUS-NPR POSTPONEMENT**The Centre must use the opportunity of the pause in NPR to redraft questions**

The Centre's decision to postpone the first phase of the 2021 Census, earlier planned to start on April 1, was expected in view of the COVID-19 outbreak that has brought life to a standstill in India and across the world. 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. What is for certain is that all resources, public and private, will need to be mobilised, first for combating the malady and then for tending society and the economy back to its health and dynamism. The Census is a massive exercise, which involves mass contact and diversion of resources. According to the original schedule, the first phase, from April to September, would have included house listing and updating of the National Population Register, and the second phase, in February 2021, would have been population enumeration. The Centre has done well by putting off the first phase until further orders. State governments can now focus on the pressing task of combating the coronavirus.

The unexpected suspension of the Census operation also opens a fresh window, and an entirely new context, for reconciliation between the Centre and States on the exercise itself. If the NPR exercise, and the allied questions regarding citizenship rights had turned India into a cauldron of discord, the pandemic forced the collective attention of the country, nay the world, on the interconnectedness of modern life. Several State governments had made their opposition clear to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and 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 to not respond to these questions, but never bothered to address the underlying concerns. The pandemic is a reminder that the future of humanity is collective and cannot be fragmented. 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. If India can come out of this more united and more resolute, the pains of the pandemic will fade sooner. The coronavirus is forcing the re-examination in many nations about national power. 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.

Meanings of Difficult words:

- ❖ **count** (verb) – matter, be significant, be important; include, take into account.
- ❖ **pause** (noun) – break/interval, temporary stoppage, suspension.
- ❖ **redraft** (verb) - change, modify, adjust, alter.
- ❖ **postpone** (verb) – delay, defer, reschedule, hold off.
- ❖ **in view of** (phrase) – in the light of, owing to, considering.
- ❖ **COVID-19** (noun) – coronavirus disease 2019.
- ❖ **outbreak** (noun) – sudden appearance/occurrence (of a disease); outburst, epidemic.
- ❖ **bring something to a standstill** (phrase) – bring to an end, finish, conclude.
- ❖ **lock down** (noun) – a state of isolation; confinement, restraint, encirclement.
- ❖ **semblance** (noun) – appearance, approximation; likeness, similarity.
- ❖ **normalcy** (noun) – a normal condition; normality, regularity.
- ❖ **make sense of** (phrase) – understand, comprehend, fathom out.
- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) - the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **accompanying** (adjective) - occurring, happening, taking place (at the same time).
- ❖ **inevitable** (adjective) – unavoidable, sure to happen, unpreventable.
- ❖ **calamity** (noun) – disaster, catastrophe, tragedy.

- ❖ **for certain** (phrase) - definitely, undoubtedly, for sure.
- ❖ **mobilise** (verb) – organize, deploy, galvanize/encourage, call up, bring into play.
- ❖ **combat** (verb) – fight, tackle, confront/resist.
- ❖ **malady** (noun) – serious problem.
- ❖ **tend** (verb) - move/proceed in a particular direction (by looking after or taking care of something).
- ❖ **dynamism** (noun) – strength, powerfulness, potency/efficacy.
- ❖ **diversion** (noun) – rerouting, redirection, deflection, digression.
- ❖ **enumeration** (noun) – the action of establishing the number of something; counting, numbering, tally.
- ❖ **put off** (phrasal verb) – postpone, defer, delay.
- ❖ **pressing** (adjective) - critical, desperate, serious.
- ❖ **coronavirus** (CoV)(noun) – a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.
- ❖ **suspension** (noun) - postponement, delay, adjournment.
- ❖ **window** (noun) – opportunity, chance, opening.
- ❖ **context** (noun) – circumstances, conditions, situation.
- ❖ **reconciliation** (noun) – restoration of harmony, resolution, compromise.
- ❖ **allied** (adjective) - associated, related, connected.
- ❖ **cauldron** (noun) – unstable situation, uncertainty (with emotions).
- ❖ **discord** (noun) - disagreement, lack of agreement, lack of harmony; hostility.
- ❖ **collective** (adjective) – combined, united, cooperative (by all the members of a group).
- ❖ **nay** (adverb) – in truth, in fact, actually.
- ❖ **interconnectedness** (noun) - the state of being connected or related to each other.
- ❖ **make something clear to** (phrase) - to help one understand something.
- ❖ **pro forma** (noun) - a Latin term that means “for the sake of form” or “as a matter of form.” It is most often used to describe a practice or document that is provided as a courtesy or satisfies minimum requirements, conforms to a norm or doctrine, tends to be performed perfunctorily (done quickly) or is considered a formality.
- ❖ **prelude** (noun) – introduction, start, beginning.
- ❖ **cynical** (adjective) – sceptical, doubtful, distrustful.
- ❖ **divisive** (adjective) – alienating/isolating, disharmonious, discordant.
- ❖ **quaint** (adjective) - unusual, different, out of the ordinary.
- ❖ **nationhood** (noun) - the fact of being a nation.
- ❖ **address** (verb) – tackle, deal with, attend to, try to sort out.
- ❖ **underlying** (adjective) – fundamental, basic, primary.
- ❖ **humanity** (noun) – humankind, the human race, people.
- ❖ **fragmented** (adjective) – separated, isolated, disintegrated/collapsed/divided.
- ❖ **mutually** (adverb) - together, cooperatively, in concert.
- ❖ **harmony** (noun) – unity, solidarity, peace/goodwill.
- ❖ **frayed** (adjective) – strained, stressed, fraught, overtaxed.
- ❖ **unshakeable** (adjective) - steadfast, resolute/firm, determined.
- ❖ **tide over** (phrasal verb) – sustain, keep someone going, help/assist (someone in difficulty).
- ❖ **come out of** (phrasal verb) – to no longer be in a bad situation (crisis).
- ❖ **fade** (verb) - disappear, vanish, diminish/decrease.
- ❖ **sobering** (adjective) – serious/sensible, thoughtful; logical/realistic, pragmatic.
- ❖ **backdrop** (noun) – situation, scenario, context.

POLITICAL PARDON: ON SRI LANKAN SOLDIER'S RELEASE

Freeing a soldier convicted for massacre dashes hopes for accountability in Sri Lanka

The grant of presidential pardon, on Thursday, to a Sri Lankan soldier on death row for murdering eight Tamil villagers has sparked justified outrage among those who have been demanding justice from the state for past crimes. Far from helping the cause of accountability for war-time atrocities, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has gone the other way to nullify a rare instance of justice being ensured by Sri Lanka's judicial system. Not many army men have been brought to book for attacks on civilians; but, in what came to be known as the 'Mirusuvil massacre', military police had immediately detained the soldiers involved, thus denying them impunity. The victims included three boys aged five, 13 and 15. In December 2000, a group of internally displaced villagers had come to have a look at their war-ravaged homes at Mirusuvil in the Jaffna peninsula. They ran into some army men, who led them away blindfolded. Their bodies were later found in a sewer, with their throats slit. The only one who escaped later led the military police to the spot and turned a crucial witness. Five soldiers were indicted, and a special provision for having a trial before a bench of three high court judges was invoked. The plodding trial ended in 2015 with only one of them, Sunil Ratnayake, being found guilty. He was sentenced to death, but there is a moratorium on executions since 1976.

It hardly needs emphasis that the exercise of the power of pardon is an act of compassion, and not a tool for political or electoral messaging. However, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has sent out a message to his vast body of supporters among the Sinhalese that he would not let 'war heroes' languish in prison, even if it means that the minority Tamils get a chilling message that substantive justice for war crimes will always elude them; and even when rendered, it could be undone with a stroke of the pen. There is also an electoral angle to the decision, as parliamentary polls were set for April 25, but have now been postponed in view of the global pandemic. The process of granting pardon may have been going on in the run-up to the polls. Sri Lanka's Constitution lays down a procedure that says the President must get a report from the trial judge, the Attorney General's advice on that, and a recommendation from the Minister for Justice before he can pardon a convict. However, there appears to be no rule that such advice or recommendation is binding. Apart from some domestic voices from the Tamil leadership and individual politicians, the UN Human Rights High Commissioner and rights watchdog bodies have questioned the release of the soldier, rightly calling it an affront to the victims. The pardon, granted at a time when the country's focus is on fighting COVID-19, is a serious setback to hopes that accountability could be brought about in Sri Lanka through domestic mechanisms.

Meanings of Difficult words:

- ❖ **pardon** (noun) - it means completely absolving the person of the crime and letting him go free; relieve, acquittal/discharge, exoneration, general pardon.
- ❖ **convict** (verb) – declare guilty, give a sentence.
- ❖ **massacre** (noun) – carnage, mass murder, mass killing.
- ❖ **dash** (verb) - destroy, spoil, wreck, ruin (hopes/expectations).
- ❖ **accountability** (noun) – responsibility, liability, answerability.
- ❖ **grant** (noun) – issuance, awarding, granting/allocation.
- ❖ **spark** (verb) - give rise to, trigger, prompt/stir up.
- ❖ **outrage** (noun) – indignation, fury, anger.
- ❖ **far from** (phrase) – not, not at all, nowhere near.
- ❖ **atrocious** (noun) – act of barbarity/brutality, cruelty, inhumanity.
- ❖ **nullify** (verb) - cancel, invalidate, annul, repeal/revoke.
- ❖ **bring to book** (phrase) – punish officially.
- ❖ **impunity** (noun) – immunity, exemption/freedom from punishment, special treatment.
- ❖ **look at** (phrasal verb) – view, see; check out, analyse.

- ❖ **war-ravaged** (adjective) - severely damaged/devastated by a war.
- ❖ **peninsula** (noun) – an area of land almost surrounded by water (on three sides) and one side attached to the mainland.
- ❖ **run into** (phrasal verb) – experience, encounter, meet with.
- ❖ **lead away** (phrasal verb) - mislead, divert, side-track (someone in a direction away from his/her direction).
- ❖ **blindfolded** (adjective) – covering the eyes of someone (by a strip of cloth), so that he/she can't see anything.
- ❖ **sewer** (noun) – drain.
- ❖ **slit** (verb) – cut, split open, slice open.
- ❖ **indict** (verb) – charge with, accuse of, prosecute for.
- ❖ **provision** (noun) – term, clause, requirement.
- ❖ **invoke** (verb) – cite, refer to, adduce.
- ❖ **plodding** (adjective) - boring, slow-moving, unexciting, uneventful, monotonous.
- ❖ **sentence** (verb) - punish, convict.
- ❖ **moratorium** (noun) – a temporary suspension of an activity; embargo, ban, prohibition.
- ❖ **execution** (noun) – the death penalty, being put to death, capital punishment.
- ❖ **hardly** (adjective) - barely, only just, almost not.
- ❖ **emphasis** (noun) - prominence, importance/significance.
- ❖ **President's power of pardon** (noun) - it forgives the defendant for a crime. However, it does not erase or shield the record of the offense. Rather, a presidential pardon excuses the defendant from serving out the rest of his sentence. The president excuses him from all punishment and consequences of the conviction.
- ❖ **compassion** (noun) – concern, consideration, humanity.
- ❖ **send out** (phrasal verb) – produce, create, give out.
- ❖ **vast** (adjective) - huge, extensive, massive.
- ❖ **languish** (verb) – suffer, be abandoned, be neglected, be forgotten.
- ❖ **chilling** (adjective) – frightening, terrifying, disturbing/horrifying.
- ❖ **substantive** (adjective) – important & meaningful.
- ❖ **elude** (verb) – evade, avoid, get away from, dodge, slip away from.
- ❖ **render** (verb) – deliver, hand down, give, announce (a verdict/judgement).
- ❖ **undone** (adjective) – defeated, beaten, foiled, ruined (by reversing something).
- ❖ **stroke** (noun) - a mark/sign of the pen (by a single action with sudden effect).
- ❖ **postpone** (verb) – delay, defer, reschedule, hold off.
- ❖ **in view of** (phrase) – in the light of, owing to, considering.
- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) - the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **go on** (phrasal verb) – talk at length, continue, proceed.
- ❖ **run-up to** (noun) – a period of time just before an important event.
- ❖ **lay down** (phrasal verb) – formulate, stipulate, set down.
- ❖ **convict** (noun) – prisoner, inmate, lawbreaker.
- ❖ **binding** (adjective) – compulsory, imperative, mandatory, necessary.
- ❖ **domestic** (adjective) - local, internal, national, not international.
- ❖ **watchdog** (noun) – inspector/supervisor, observer, ombudsman.
- ❖ **affront** (noun) – insult, offence, indignity/humiliation.
- ❖ **COVID-19** (noun) – coronavirus disease 2019.
- ❖ **setback** (noun) – problem, difficulty, issue.
- ❖ **bring in** (phrasal verb) – introduce, initiate, put in place, usher in.
- ❖ **mechanism** (noun) – procedure, system, method, apparatus.