



Cabinet decides to include caste count in next census

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Context

- The Union Cabinet has decided to include caste enumeration as part of the next Census exercise, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced on Wednesday.
- Though the decision comes months ahead of the Bihar Assembly election, the dates for the next **decennial Census exercise, last held in 2011**, are yet to be notified by the government. The **2021 Census has been postponed indefinitely, initially due to the COVID-19 pandemic**.
- The **last time that India's entire population was counted by caste was in pre-Independent India, in 1931**. Since then, only Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been counted in the Census exercises.

Census

- The **origin of the Census** in India dates back to the colonial exercise of **1872**.
- The **first synchronous census was taken in 1881, by W.C. Plowden**, Census Commissioner of India. **Since then**, censuses have been undertaken **uninterruptedly once every ten years**.
- The **Census of India Act of 1948** provides the legal framework for carrying out the Census however, it **does not mention its timing or periodicity**.
- Hence, a **Census is Constitutionally mandated in India but there is no Constitutional or legal requirement that it needs to be conducted decennially**.
- The **10-year frequency** is followed in many countries (Ex. the US and the UK) but some countries like Australia, Canada, Japan conduct it every five years.
- The **decennial Census** is conducted by the **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- • Census is used by the government, policymakers, academics, and others to capture the Indian population, access resources, map social change, and conduct delimitation exercises.

Need for a Caste Census:

- **Addressing Inequities:** Helps identify intra-caste disparities and ensures equitable allocation of resources.
- **Empirical Evidence for Policies:** Provides a data-driven basis for affirmative action.
- **Monitoring Effectiveness:** Enables assessment of existing reservation policies.

- Governance: Guides resource allocation and better implementation of welfare schemes.

Challenges to Caste census:

- Complexity in Classification: Similar-sounding castes or regional variations lead to misclassification.
- Upward/Downward Mobility Claims: Self-reporting influenced by perceived benefits.
- Administrative Feasibility: Inadequate training of enumerators and lack of infrastructure.
- Data Integrity: Risks of data manipulation due to political and social pressures.
- Societal Divisions: Potential hardening of caste identities