

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Edition: International Table of Contents

Page 01 Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity and Constitution	Delimitation will address concerns of southern States: Centre
Page 02 Syllabus : Prelims Fact	Tamil Nadu government notifies greater flamingo sanctuary at Dhanushkodi
Page 06 Syllabus : GS 2 : International Relations	Jaishankar stresses need to boost India-Central Asia links
Page 07 Syllabus : GS 2 and 3 : Social Justice : Issues relating to health and Science and Technology	Taking stock of COVID-19 vaccines
Page 08 Syllabus : GS 1: Indian Society	Injustice in the delay: The announcement of the Census is welcome, but the delay is unjust
Page 08 : Editorial Analysis: Syllabus :GS 2 : International Relations	A Eurocentric reset, a gateway for India

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has clarified that the delimitation exercise—likely to begin after the 2027 Census—will address the concerns of the southern States. This comes amid criticisms from leaders like Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin, who allege that the delayed Census is politically motivated to reduce the representation of States with better population control.

Delimitation will address concerns of southern States: Centre

Vijaita Singh
 NEW DELHI

The delimitation exercise will take care of the concerns expressed by southern States, and discussions will be held with all stakeholders at the appropriate time, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said on Thursday.

In a post on X, a day after it announced that the Census exercise will be concluded by March 1, 2027, the Ministry said that Home Minister Amit Shah has “clarified on many occasions that in delimitation exercise, concerns of southern states will be taken care of and discussed with all concerned at an appropriate time”.

‘Questionable timing’

On Wednesday, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin had questioned the timing of the Census, saying that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had deliberately delayed the exercise to 2027, “making their plan clear to reduce Tamil Nadu’s Parliamentary representation”.

The southern States have been opposing the population-based criteria for the redrawing of constituencies, which was last done on the basis of 1971 Census data.

As per constitutional norms, the first Census held after 2026 can be used as the basis to redraw Lok Sabha constituencies.

In a series of posts on X, the MHA added that the Census was originally planned to be conducted in 2021. “However, due to outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic across the country, the Census work was postponed,” it said.

‘QUICKER DATA’
 » PAGE 6

Key Constitutional and Governance Issues

• Delimitation and Its Basis:

- Delimitation refers to redrawing the boundaries of electoral constituencies based on population data. As per Article 82 and 170 of the Constitution, delimitation for Lok Sabha and State Assemblies is based on the latest Census. However, the 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976) froze delimitation till after the 2001 Census, and this freeze was later extended by the 84th Amendment Act (2001) till the first Census after 2026.

• Concerns of Southern States:

- Southern States like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh have achieved significant demographic success in controlling population growth. If future delimitation is based purely on population, these States risk losing Parliamentary seats, while States with higher fertility rates (mainly in the North) may gain more seats. This is viewed as penalising good performance in family planning and governance.

• Centre’s Response:

- The MHA has attempted to allay fears, stating that the concerns of the southern States will be considered and a consultative process will be followed. However, no clarity has been given yet on whether a formula balancing both equity (based on population) and efficiency (based on governance performance) will be adopted.

• Timing of Census & Political Reactions:

- The Census, originally planned for 2021, has been delayed to 2027 citing COVID-19. Critics argue that the delay serves political motives, aligning the Census just before delimitation, potentially reshaping electoral dynamics before the 2029 General Elections.

Ethical and Federalism Dimensions

- **Equity vs Justice:** Should States that succeeded in population control be

Daily News Analysis

punished with reduced representation?

- **Federal Concerns:** A purely demographic delimitation may deepen regional imbalances and weaken the spirit of cooperative federalism.
- **Transparency & Trust:** The delay in Census without a clear roadmap may erode institutional credibility and trigger political distrust.

Way Forward

- **Multi-dimensional Criteria:** Instead of population alone, other indicators like HDI, infrastructure, and fiscal discipline could be considered in representation allocation.
- **Consensus-Building:** Centre should ensure extensive consultation with all States, especially those expressing strong apprehensions.
- **Parliamentary Debate:** An open discussion in Parliament on the objectives and methodology of delimitation can improve legitimacy.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : The upcoming delimitation exercise has triggered concerns about regional imbalances and federal equity. Critically examine the constitutional, political, and ethical dimensions of using population-based delimitation post-2026. **(250 words)**

On the occasion of World Environment Day 2025, the Tamil Nadu government declared a Greater Flamingo Sanctuary at Dhanushkodi in Ramanathapuram district. Spanning over 524.7 hectares, the sanctuary falls within the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, a crucial ecological zone and migratory bird hotspot.

Tamil Nadu government notifies greater flamingo sanctuary at Dhanushkodi

It spans over 500 hectares and is part of the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve; the move aims at preserving a critical stopover point along the Central Asian Flyway for migratory wetland birds

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu government has officially declared a greater flamingo sanctuary at Dhanushkodi in Ramanathapuram district.

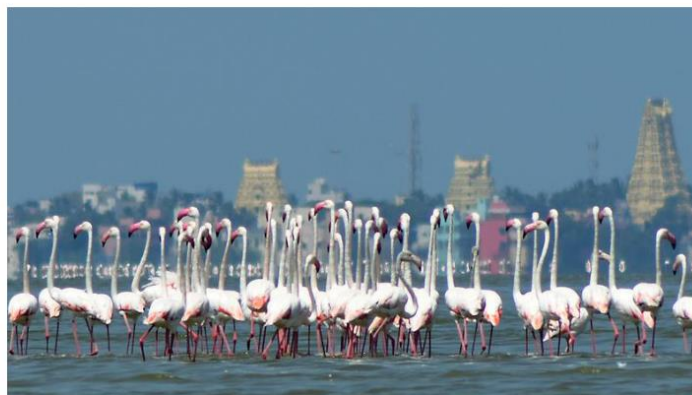
Chief Minister M.K. Stalin inaugurated the sanctuary via video conferencing at an event organised by the Departments of Environment, Climate Change and Forests in Chennai on Thursday to celebrate World Environment Day.

Thangam Thennarasu, holding additional charge as Minister for Environment; R.S. Rajakannapan, Minister for Forests; and Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary to Departments of Environment, Climate Change, and Forests, participated in the event.

Rich biodiversity

The move aims to preserve a critical stopover point along the Central Asian Flyway for thousands of migratory wetland birds.

The sanctuary spans 524.7 hectares and encompasses both revenue and forest lands within Ra-



Safe zone: Flamingos in Dhanuskodi, Ramanathapuram district. As per the latest bird survey, Dhanushkodi region has over 10,700 wetland birds, representing 128 species. L. BALACHANDAR

meshwaram taluk.

The designated area, part of the ecologically sensitive Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, is home to a variety of ecosystems, including mangroves, sand dunes, mudflats, and marshes.

These unique features support a rich biodiversity, from migratory birds and marine life to nesting sea turtles.

A Government Order (G.O.) issued on June 4, by Ms. Sahu, noted that ac-

cording to the recent 2023-2024 Wetland Bird Survey, the Dhanushkodi region recorded over 10,700 wetland birds, representing 128 species, including herons, egrets, sandpipers, and both greater and lesser flamingos.

Ecologically crucial

Mangrove species such as *Avicennia* and *Rhizophora* dominate the Dhanushkodi lagoon, providing essential breeding grounds and natural defenses against

coastal erosion. The sanctuary status is expected to encourage responsible ecotourism, generate local employment, and raise public awareness about wetland conservation, the G.O. said.

T.M. Anbarasan, Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Srinivas Reddy, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force), Rakesh Kumar Dogra, Chief Wildlife Warden, also participated.

Significance of the Move

- **Biodiversity Conservation:**

Daily News Analysis

- The sanctuary protects a rich assemblage of ecosystems—mangroves, sand dunes, mudflats, marshes—that support 128 species of wetland birds, including greater and lesser flamingos. It also hosts marine life and nesting sea turtles, making it an ecologically vibrant habitat.
- **Central Asian Flyway (CAF):**
 - Dhanushkodi is a vital stopover site for migratory birds travelling along the CAF. Conservation of such stopovers ensures the survival of several endangered and vulnerable avian species that depend on seasonal wetland habitats.
- **Part of Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve:**
 - This region is a UNESCO-recognized biosphere reserve, highlighting its global ecological importance. Adding more protected zones strengthens India's compliance with global biodiversity and Ramsar Convention commitments.
- **Eco-Tourism and Livelihoods:**
 - The government aims to promote sustainable eco-tourism, which can generate employment opportunities for local communities while sensitizing the public about conservation.
- **Climate Resilience:**
 - The sanctuary's mangroves—especially species like *Avicennia* and *Rhizophora*—serve as natural buffers against coastal erosion and storm surges, contributing to climate adaptation strategies.

Challenges and Considerations

- **Balancing tourism and ecology:** Ensuring that eco-tourism does not disturb the fragile habitats will require strict regulation.
- **Local participation:** Success depends on effective community involvement and benefit-sharing models.
- **Monitoring and enforcement:** The sanctuary's large area across multiple land jurisdictions may pose administrative and enforcement challenges.

Way Forward

- Strengthen inter-departmental coordination (Environment, Forests, Tourism, Revenue)
- Develop eco-sensitive tourism plans with carrying capacity assessments
- Enhance bird monitoring through citizen science and technology (e.g., eBird, drones)
- Educate locals and tourists through awareness drives, signages, and nature guides.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Which of the following statements about the Dhanushkodi Greater Flamingo Sanctuary is/are correct?

1. It spans over 500 hectares.
2. It includes both revenue and forest land areas.
3. It is located in the Nilgiri Hills region.

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: a)



External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar emphasized the need to deepen India-Central Asia relations, focusing on trade, connectivity, and regional cooperation during the India-Central Asia Business Council meet and ahead of the 4th India-Central Asia Dialogue. He particularly stressed the strategic relevance of the Chabahar Port, INSTC, and trade settlement in national currencies.

Jaishankar stresses need to boost India-Central Asia links

More resources are required for that, the External Affairs Minister says, presses for intensifying trade through Chabahar port; he also calls for 'mutual settlement of trade' in national currencies

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

More efforts and resources need to be invested in improving India's connectivity with Central Asia, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Thursday highlighting the need to intensify trade through the Chabahar port in Iran.

At the India-Central Asia Business Council meeting ahead of the fourth India-Central Asia Dialogue scheduled for Friday, Mr. Jaishankar expressed support for "mutual settlement of trade" in national currencies.

"We are discussing this under the Joint Working Group on Chabahar Port under the India-Central Asia platform," said Mr. Jaishankar at the event organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), referring to the requirements to energise the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), and greater use of Chabahar port to reduce travel distance and costs between India and Central Asia. Mr. Jaishankar spoke at the event which was also addressed by Murat Nur-



S. Jaishankar and Kazakhstan Deputy Prime Minister Murat Nurtleu signed an MoU to strengthen bilateral ties. @DRSJAISHANKAR/X

tleu, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan; Sirojiddin Muhriddin, Foreign Minister of Tajikistan; Rashid Meredov, Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan; and Saidov Bakhtiyor Odilovich, Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan.

At Friday's dialogue, the Ministers are expected to discuss trade, connectivity, technology, and development cooperation. "They will also share perspectives on challenges to regional security and other regional and global issues of mutual interest," said the Ministry of External Affairs in an announcement regarding the Minister-level meeting. The Foreign Minister-

level dialogue is being seen as significant as it comes a month after India conducted Operation Sindoor against terror targets in Pakistan and reached out to the Taliban administration in Afghanistan.

'Come up with ideas'

Mr. Jaishankar further urged the business chambers to come up with ideas for enhancing bilateral ties between India and Central Asia ahead of a possible India-Central Asia leadership summit that he said could be held "sometime in the not so distant future". In the near future, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to travel for the Shanghai Cooperation Or-

ganization (SCO) meet in Tianjin, China. The first India-Central Asia summit was held in virtual mode on January 27, 2022 when Mr. Modi had hosted the heads of governments of the Central Asian countries. The third meeting of the Foreign Ministers was held during December 18-20, 2021 in New Delhi.

"I would say closer engagements between our banks and financial sector will definitely strengthen our economic interaction. Some beginnings have been made in terms of opening of Special Rupee Vostro Accounts in Indian banks by Central Asian banks and there has also been some discussions about use of UPI [Unified Payment Interface]. I would certainly support that very strongly as also the steps we could take to facilitate mutual settlement of trade in our national currencies," he said.

Mr. Jaishankar said India-Central Asia bilateral trade had touched \$2 billion and added the figure did "not reflect full potential". "The need to address this is today more urgent because of the uncertainties of the international economy," he said.

Strategic Importance of Central Asia for India

Daily News Analysis

- **Geopolitical Relevance:**

- Central Asia is a resource-rich region at the heart of Eurasia. It serves as a strategic buffer between major powers—Russia, China, Iran, and Afghanistan—and plays a vital role in regional stability and connectivity.

- **Energy and Resources:**

- The region is endowed with vast hydrocarbon reserves (especially Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan), which can be vital for India's energy security diversification.

- **Connectivity Challenges:**

- India lacks direct land access to Central Asia due to Pakistan's denial of transit. Hence, routes like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and Chabahar Port in Iran are critical for reaching Central Asia via multimodal transport.

- **Chabahar Port as a Strategic Gateway:**

- Chabahar offers India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. Strengthening its infrastructure and operations under the India-Central Asia Joint Working Group is crucial for boosting trade and regional integration.

- **Use of National Currencies and UPI:**

- Jaishankar's support for mutual trade settlement in national currencies and the use of UPI-like systems reflects India's push for de-dollarization, enhancing economic resilience and reducing forex dependency amid global uncertainties.

- **Security and Regional Stability:**

- The dialogue gains added significance post Operation Sindoor and India's outreach to the Taliban, indicating India's active engagement in regional security dynamics and counter-terror strategies.

Way Forward for India-Central Asia Ties

- Operationalize INSTC and Chabahar Port effectively with Central Asian cooperation.
- Expand financial linkages: Promote banking partnerships, Rupee Vostro accounts, and digital payment systems.
- Organize regular leadership summits to sustain political momentum.
- Promote energy partnerships and joint ventures in renewables and hydrocarbons.
- Leverage multilateral platforms like SCO and the India-Central Asia Dialogue for coordinated action on terrorism, climate change, and development.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: India's growing engagement with Central Asia is driven by a convergence of strategic, economic, and geopolitical interests. Discuss the role of connectivity initiatives like the Chabahar Port and INSTC in strengthening India-Central Asia ties, and the challenges involved. (250 Words)

Page 07: GS 2 and 3 : Social Justice : Issues relating to health and Science and Technology

India is witnessing a mild uptick in COVID-19 cases, driven by Omicron sub-variants like NB.1.8.1 and LF.7. While most cases remain mild with flu-like symptoms, the debate around vaccine readiness, booster dose necessity, and preparedness of the public health system has resurfaced. Experts and institutions like ICMR have emphasized no need for mass vaccination but recommend caution, especially for the vulnerable population.



Taking care: People wearing masks near a hospital in Visakhapatnam on May 30, 2022. Doctors said that at present, everyone should focus on personal protection, such as wearing masks.

Taking stock of COVID-19 vaccines

As cases rise in India, doctors across the board say that, at present, they see no need for a mass-vaccination drive; the ICMR has maintained that the new cases have mostly been mild with reported symptoms akin to those of the common cold or seasonal flu, experts stress on the need to practice personal hygiene

The Hindu Bureau

In the past few weeks, headlines around India and Southeast Asia have centred around a virus that the world has wanted to forget: COVID-19. At first, an uptick in cases in Hong Kong, Singapore and other parts of the region caused concern. Gradually though, India too, witnessed a surge in cases, with numbers as of Thursday standing at 4,666, and fatalities at 51.

Doctors and experts have said time and again that there is no reason to panic; spikes and dips in COVID-19 cases are expected; the virus they say, is co-circulating with other seasonal infections and no major waves are expected. Misinformation, in fact, is harder to battle, they point out.

Residents however, are raising questions about the COVID-19 vaccine: it may be recalled that India launched the world's largest COVID-19 immunisation drive in January 2021. To date, over 220 crore doses of vaccines have been administered in the country as per the CoWIN dashboard. These were primarily of the two vaccines available then, AstraZeneca's Covishield and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin.

What is the vaccine situation now? Rajiv Iyali, Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the country's nodal scientific body, has said there is absolutely no need to initiate mass booster doses for COVID-19 vaccination at present, and neither is there a direction from the Central government for this.

Speaking about the rising number of cases in India, Dr. Iyali, however, noted that individual doctors could recommend booster doses to patients on a case-to-case basis, depending on the needs of individuals. He further explained that the need for mass vaccination, while not felt at present, could arise, with perhaps a mutation in the virus or its spread. "For that, India already has the capacity to scale up production and provide for the general public. We have done this before and there is no need to panic," he said, reiterating that as of now there is no need for individuals to rush in to get a booster dose.

Since vaccines used in 2021 and 2022 have now fallen into disuse and expired,

there are no stocks at present, a government official said, adding that the government could direct manufacturers to produce more stocks when necessary. Most States, including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and West Bengal, have no stocks of the vaccine at present.

Varianants driving the spike As of now, the variants of COVID-19 doing the rounds in India are descendants of the Omicron variant, first reported in November 2021. The emerging sub-variants - NB.1.8.1 and LF.7 - that are driving the current COVID surge are descendants of JN.1, a sub-lineage of the Omicron BA.2.86 variant.

In Kerala, for instance, a senior health department official said: "Almost all of the samples sent for whole genome sequencing from the State have shown that the circulating virus variant is JN.1, one of the descendants of Omicron, the immune evasiveness of which is quite well known." These sub-variants, doctors say, are, so far, causing mild illnesses.

P. Senthil Nambir, senior consultant, Infectious Diseases, Apollo Hospitals, Chennai, said that most of the COVID-19 patients he had seen so far have done well. "Most of them had only an upper respiratory infection. Some are the days when COVID-19 affected the lungs causing pneumonia and breathing difficulties. These patients were managed based on their symptoms and most of them did not require any COVID-specific antiviral medications. Prior exposure to the infection, the effects of the vaccine taken or a combination of both factors with vaccine-induced antibodies could be playing a protective role," he explained.

Cases this time around have mostly been mild, the ICMR has maintained, with reported symptoms akin to those of the common cold or seasonal flu. "The key difference with these new strains," said Sujan Bardhan, consultant (TB & chest diseases), Narayana Hospital, RV Nagar Hospital, Kolkata, "is their speed, not their severity. Hospitals are well-prepared and the healthcare system remains under no immediate strain. Nonetheless, the importance of basic preventive measures cannot be overestimated."

Are vaccines needed at present? Doctors across the board say that at present, they see no need for a mass-vaccination drive.

"By the time Omicron ran its course, almost all of our population had been exposed to the virus. Even when this antibody protection wanes, the long-term

immune memory remains. This innate immunity plus the vaccine-derived immunity through good coverage of the initial two doses means that most people have strong hybrid immunity against COVID-19," a Kerala Health Department official said, adding that the previous vaccines may not even be very effective against the Omicron variants - they would, however, offer protection against serious forms of the disease.

Though two indigenous developed nasal vaccines specifically targeting Omicron variant from Bharat Biotech and Indian Immunologicals as well as another indigenous mRNA vaccine for the same variant were made available in the Indian market, the uptake was low, doctors said. Kiran Madala, a Hyderabad-based doctor, part of an international group of genetic epidemiologists under the COVID Treatment Exchange Organization, said the current World Health Organization guidelines recommend vaccines primarily for individuals above the age of 70 to 80, those who are immunocompromised, and patients with multiple comorbidities.

Children, especially those aged two to six, do not need vaccination unless they have underlying health issues or are immunocompromised.

Dr. Nambir in Chennai said some patients, those who have travel obligations, have requested the vaccine, but none are available at present. "But I wish that there was an option of vaccination, not for the general population in large but for two subsets of patient groups in whom the infection could cause problems," he said. The first group of patients are those who have not received any COVID-19 vaccine due to various factors and had no COVID-19 infection in the past. So, they still neither have natural immunity or vaccine-induced immunity. Though a weakened virus, it could cause complications such as pneumonia leading to hospitalization, especially if they are over 65 years of age, he said. The second subset of patients are those with underlying comorbidities such as heart ailments, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease with poor lung function and immune compromised persons, including those who have undergone organ transplants. "Other comorbidities such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome did not last long, but we are still talking about COVID since the end of 2019. So, a vaccine will be beneficial for these two groups of persons

in the long run from the public health perspective. But this being a mutating virus, we will need to modify the vaccines on a regular basis," Dr. Nambir observed.

T. Jacob John, retired professor of clinical virology at Christian Medical College, Vellore, also said that the elderly and immunocompromised people needed to be vaccinated again, irrespective of whether they were fully vaccinated (two doses and a booster) or had been exposed to the virus earlier. "These people are vulnerable even with mild variants as their immune systems are weak, and they are at greater risk of complications."

State governments, however, have taken a more cautious stance. "Whether vaccination is required or not depends on many factors," said T. S. Sathyanarayana, T.N. Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine. "We need to study the epidemiology of the current cases before commenting on the requirement for vaccination now." Kerala has said it was "not advocating for or against COVID booster shots" because of the lack of epidemiological data that booster doses offered enhanced protection against emerging immune-evasive variants.

What next? The Delhi High Court, earlier, directed the Centre to submit a thorough status report detailing its actions regarding the policy for sample collection, collection centres, and transportation of samples. It also stressed urgency to finalise Standard Operating Procedures.

While preparedness of health systems remains crucial, doctors said that at present everyone should focus on personal protection, with special care being given to vulnerable sections of the population. As the virus continues to adapt, so must we, Dr. Haridhan said. Staying informed and following trained health sources, personal protection and hygiene measures, avoiding crowded places when possible or masking up, refraining from going outdoors when ill and maintaining a healthy, well-balanced lifestyle could help navigate this phase and any more to come.

Compiled by Zubeida Hamid with inputs from C. Maya in Kerala, Sreenu Josephine M. in Chennai, Rishi Chaitan Prasad in Delhi, Akhshay Yashwanth in Bengaluru, Shashank Chatterjee in Kolkata and Siddharth Kumar Singh in Hyderabad. (health@thehindu.co.in)

THE GIST

Doctors say spikes and dips in COVID-19 cases are expected; the virus they say, is co-circulating with other seasonal infections and no major waves are expected. Misinformation, in fact, is harder to battle, they point out

As of now, the variants of COVID-19 doing the rounds in India are descendants of the Omicron variant, first reported in November 2021. The emerging sub-variants - NB.1.8.1 and LF.7 - that are driving the current COVID surge are descendants of JN.1, a sub-lineage of the Omicron BA.2.86 variant

While preparedness of health systems remains crucial, doctors said that at present everyone should focus on personal protection, with special care being given to vulnerable sections of the population, including elderly persons, pregnant women and those with immune-compromised systems or chronic diseases

For feedback and suggestions for "Science" please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject "Daily page"

Key Issues and Analysis

• No Immediate Need for Mass Vaccination

Daily News Analysis

- The ICMR and leading experts have ruled out a need for nationwide booster doses, citing mild symptoms and high natural immunity levels due to past exposure and primary vaccination coverage.
- India administered over 220 crore doses during the pandemic's peak, creating hybrid immunity (natural + vaccine-induced) in most of the population.
- **Limited Vaccine Availability**
 - Most vaccines from earlier drives (Covishield, Covaxin) have expired.
 - New vaccines tailored to Omicron variants (nasal, mRNA) are available but underutilized, and government stock is currently non-existent.
- **New COVID Variants – Less Severe but Fast-Spreading**
 - Current surge attributed to Omicron sub-lineages, particularly LF.7 and NB.1.8.1.
 - Experts note that these variants show high transmissibility but low virulence, mostly causing upper respiratory symptoms.
- **Focus on High-Risk Groups**
 - The WHO and Indian experts recommend selective vaccination for:
 - Elderly (70–80+ years)
 - Immunocompromised individuals
 - People with comorbidities (heart, lung, transplant cases)
- **Misinformation and Public Awareness**
 - While the virus continues to mutate, misinformation and panic pose more serious public health challenges.
 - Experts urge the government to maintain transparent communication, publish updated guidelines, and combat vaccine-related myths.
- **Preparedness and Future Planning**
 - State governments are cautious, awaiting epidemiological studies before deciding on vaccine policy.
 - Delhi HC has asked the Centre to submit SOPs and status reports on surveillance, sample collection, and containment strategies.
 - Doctors recommend that the focus now should be on personal protection, not panic — including masking in crowded spaces, hygiene, and early symptom management.

Way Forward

- Strengthen sentinel surveillance and genomic sequencing to track emerging variants.
- Maintain public communication strategies to counter misinformation.
- Prepare a vaccine stockpile for emergency use, especially for vulnerable populations.
- Enhance digital tools like Co-WIN for flexible rollout if needed.
- Integrate COVID response into broader public health systems to address future respiratory disease outbreaks.

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques:With COVID-19 resurging in mild forms, India faces a renewed test of its public health readiness. Critically examine the current strategy of targeted vaccination and preparedness in light of new variants. What steps can be taken to balance caution and normalcy?(250 words)



The Government of India has announced that the next decadal Census will conclude by March 1, 2027, six years after its scheduled time (2021). The delay, initially due to COVID-19, is now being seen as politically sensitive, especially because of its link to delimitation of constituencies and the proposed caste enumeration. While the adoption of digital tools for data collection is being welcomed, the timing and intent behind the delay have raised concerns among scholars, civil society, and some regional governments.

Key Issues and Analysis

• Delay and its Consequences

- The Census, scheduled for 2021, is now postponed to 2027 — the longest gap in India's history.
- **The absence of updated population data affects:**
 - Targeting of welfare schemes
 - Resource allocation to States
 - Urban planning, health, and education infrastructure
- The delay undermines evidence-based policymaking and affects vulnerable populations most severely.

• Digital Census: A Double-Edged Sword

- **For the first time, the Census will be digitally administered, promising:**
 - Faster data processing
 - Greater accessibility and analytical value
- **However, it also raises critical concerns around:**
 - Data privacy and cyber security
 - Digital exclusion in rural/remote areas with limited access

• Caste Enumeration – Boon or Risk?

- For the first time since 1931, caste-based data may be collected.
- **Positives:**
 - Better understanding of socio-economic disparities
 - Improved targeting of affirmative action
- **Risks:**
 - May entrench caste identities

Injustice in the delay

The announcement of the Census is welcome, but the delay is unjust

India's next decadal population census, initially delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, is now scheduled to conclude by March 2027, after a further delay apparently fuelled by political motivations. The Census in 2021 did not take place as planned, thus impacting different aspects of governance, especially social security schemes for vulnerable populations that rely heavily on updated demographic data for effective and efficient delivery. For the first time, the Census will be digitally administered, enabling faster data gathering and easier accessibility for analysis, thereby allowing population-level data to be more dynamic. However, this technological adoption also heightens concerns regarding data theft and privacy. While the nature of the Census will evolve, transparency at all levels will be crucial to building public trust in the exercise. Preparations for this massive operation, which will reach every household, are underway, with more logistical details anticipated in the weeks ahead.

India stands at a demographic crossroads, facing the challenges of growing populations of the young and the old alongside significant regional variations in key indicators. Fresh data from the Census can help address many issues. For the first time since 1931, caste categories will be enumerated. While more reliable data on the socio-economic standing of caste groups can inform development planning, the potential for further social segmentation makes caste enumeration a double-edged sword. A critical aspect of the upcoming Census is its link to the next delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies, which will redraw India's electoral map. The Constitution mandates that the next inter-State delimitation be based on population figures from the first Census after 2026. The current distribution of Lok Sabha seats is based on the 1971 population spread. With the reference date for the Census set as March 1, 2027, for most of the country, this can pave the way for the next delimitation exercise. States that have experienced lower population growth in recent decades, particularly in the peninsular region, have expressed concern that their parliamentary representation will diminish if population becomes the sole criterion for redistribution. The Centre has yet to clarify its stance on this matter. With the Census now in motion, it is imperative for the Centre to engage with all stakeholders and build consensus on the sensitive issue of delimitation. Otherwise, the delay in the announcement of the Census will be taken to mean as an attempt to ensure that the ruling BJP benefits from the increased representation for the Hindi-speaking States.

Daily News Analysis

- Could polarize political narratives and deepen social divisions
- **Census–Delimitation Link and Federal Tensions**
 - As per Article 82 of the Constitution, delimitation will be based on the first Census after 2026.
 - Current seat distribution is based on 1971 data, freezing representation despite demographic changes.
 - Southern States, which have controlled population growth, fear loss of representation in Parliament if the number of seats is strictly tied to population.
- **Trust Deficit and Political Perception**
 - The Centre's silence on how it will balance population-based criteria with equity concerns adds to speculation.
 - Critics argue that the delay may benefit the ruling party, especially in Hindi-speaking States which may gain seats in a future delimitation.

Way Forward

- Ensure transparency and accountability in the planning and execution of the Census.
- Clarify the Centre's stand on delimitation criteria through broad-based consultations.
- Introduce data privacy laws and technological safeguards for the digital Census.
- Frame policies that reflect a balance between population equity and governance efficiency.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The repeated delay in conducting India's decadal Census has implications beyond data collection — from social welfare to electoral representation. Critically examine the governance and federal concerns arising from the postponement and the proposed digital nature of the 2027 Census. **(250 words)**

A Eurocentric reset, a gateway for India

In a diplomatic move, with far-reaching consequences, United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer's new agreement with the European Union (EU) signals a powerful "reset" of their relations, resuming cooperation on food standards, fishing rights, defence and border checks. While this development may appear Eurocentric, it opens a gateway to possibilities and challenges for India that demand urgent attention.

The U.K. and the EU are among India's most important trade and diplomatic partners, and their renewed alignment could redraw India's global strategy map. For Indian exporters, this could simplify compliance and revive supply chain fluidity. For policymakers, this presents an opportunity to strengthen strategic alliances. For the diaspora, this could reshape education and migration prospects. In short, the U.K.-EU reset is not just a regional recalibration. It is a moment that could redefine India's trade corridors, diplomatic engagements, and soft power leverage in the West.

A reshaping of India's export dynamics

The renewed collaboration in areas such as food safety, customs coordination and fisheries is poised to significantly influence Indian exports to both regions. In FY2024, India's exports to the EU stood at \$86 billion, while exports to the U.K. totalled \$12 billion, highlighting their strategic role in India's external trade.

Post-Brexit, Indian exporters have grappled with navigating two separate regulatory regimes, especially in key sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, seafood, and agro-based products. A harmonised U.K.-EU regulatory framework could simplify compliance, reduce redundancy and lower operational costs. India, a significant



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The U.K.-EU reset has the potential to redefine India's trade, diplomatic engagements and soft power leverage in the West

supplier of generic medicines to the U.K., fulfilling over 25% of its pharmaceutical needs, would benefit from a unified approval mechanism that accelerates clearances and enhances cost efficiency.

Similarly, Indian seafood exports, valued at ₹60,523.89 crore (approximately \$7.38 billion) in FY2024, could face fewer trade barriers if the food standards and fishing policies are aligned. However, tighter common standards might challenge Indian Small and Medium Enterprises, which often lack the capital and technical know-how. To remain competitive, India must strengthen its export ecosystem through initiatives such as the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) and the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme.

A stronger voice in global diplomacy

Beyond trade, the geopolitical dimensions are significant for India. A more synchronised U.K.-EU foreign policy, particularly in defence and the Indo-Pacific, offers India an avenue to enhance its multilateral coordination with the EU. India already operates under the EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025, and in 2022, it renewed its Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the U.K., covering cyber security, climate action, and maritime security.

As the U.K. realigns its policies with the EU, India could benefit from cohesive western support on global platforms, such as the United Nations, the G-20, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Strategic ties with France, Germany and the U.K. are vital to India's defence modernisation and technological ambitions, especially regarding naval power.

Notably, India-France bilateral trade reached \$15.1 billion in 2024-25; landmark defence

agreements with Germany and the U.K. have focused on technology transfer and joint development. A coordinated U.K.-EU defence policy could open doors for deeper trilateral or multilateral engagements in the Indo-Pacific, where shared concerns over China's assertiveness persist.

Additionally, India's leadership in the Global South – spotlighted during its G-20 presidency in 2023 – can be amplified by leveraging the U.K.-EU thaw to drive collective action on climate finance, digital infrastructure and global governance reforms. A unified West could become a more dependable ally for India if it engages with India, strategically and assertively, in the future

Enhancing trade and talent power

On the mobility front, India has the world's largest diaspora, which includes large communities in the U.K. and across the EU. In 2024, the U.K. issued more than 1,10,000 student visas to Indian nationals, placing India among the top sources of international students.

While post-Brexit restrictions limited access for Indian professionals to EU markets, renewed U.K.-EU border coordination could enable partial mobility, creating a semi-integrated talent corridor. This could also bolster India's migration pacts with Germany, France and Portugal by embedding them within a broader U.K.-EU framework.

These converging shifts – trade liberalisation, mobility reintegration, and foreign policy alignment – present rare diplomatic and economic opportunities. To seize these opportunities, India must accelerate reforms, modernise its export infrastructure, and assert its role in global governance.

Paper 02: International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question: The U.K.-EU diplomatic reset presents a rare opportunity for India to recalibrate its strategic, economic, and migration policies. Examine the potential benefits and challenges for India in light of this development. (250 words)

Context :

The recent U.K.-EU reset under British PM Keir Starmer marks a significant diplomatic turn in post-Brexit geopolitics. While the move appears Eurocentric, it holds broad implications for India's foreign policy,

trade, diaspora mobility, and strategic alliances. With both the U.K. and EU being among India's major trade and diplomatic partners, their renewed alignment could reshape India's external engagement strategy.

Key Dimensions and Analysis

Trade and Export Dynamics

- U.K.-EU harmonization on food safety, fisheries, customs, etc., can streamline Indian exports.
- Indian exporters currently navigate two regulatory frameworks; a unified regime can:
 - Lower compliance costs
 - Accelerate product approvals (especially pharmaceuticals, seafood)
- **Challenge:** Stricter common standards may hurt SMEs lacking resources and technology.
- **Opportunity:** India can leverage schemes like RoDTEP, PLI, and export infrastructure upgrades to remain competitive.

Strategic and Diplomatic Prospects

- U.K. and EU alignment could lead to:
 - Better coordination with India on climate change, cybersecurity, maritime security
 - Enhanced presence in Indo-Pacific cooperation, especially with France and Germany
- Potential for multilateral coordination in forums like:
 - G20, UN, WTO, Quad-Plus, and regional security alliances
 - U.K.-EU thaw provides India with greater diplomatic weight to push for Global South reforms in climate finance, global governance, and digital equity.

Diaspora and Mobility Integration

- India is a top source of students and skilled migrants to both regions.
- Post-Brexit, mobility into EU from U.K. was restricted; re-integration offers:
 - Talent corridor between India, U.K., and EU
 - Enhanced potential for migration partnerships (Germany, Portugal, France)
- Student visa issuance, bilateral education pacts, and cultural ties could gain further momentum.

Way Forward for India

- Upgrade export ecosystem for compliance with future U.K.-EU norms
- Leverage strategic partnerships to ensure tech transfers and joint defence development
- Build on diaspora diplomacy to integrate migration policies within bilateral frameworks
- Assert leadership in forums like G20 using this opportunity to drive reforms in global governance
- Ensure India's interests are proactively represented in future U.K.-EU economic and strategic dialogues.