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Daily News Analysis

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General studies-2

National Population Register (NPR)

Why in news?

- Union cabinet's approval for the National Population Register (NPR).

Key points:

- The Citizenship Rules, 2003, state that the Centre, by issuing an order, can decide a date to prepare the NPR.
- The NPR was first started in 2010, along with the house-listing phase of the Census of India, 2011
- The data was updated in 2015 through a door to door survey, and its digitization has also been carried out.
- It had been decided to update the NPR, along with the house-listing phase of Census 2021, from April to September 2020 in all states and UTs, except Assam.

Details:

- A meeting of the Union Cabinet has approved over ₹3,941.35 crores for updating the National Population Register (NPR) across the country, barring Assam, and ₹8,754.23 crores for conducting the Census of India, 2021.
- The decennial census will be conducted in two phases — house listing and housing census from April to September 2020, and population enumeration from February 9 to 28, 2021.
- The NPR will be updated along with House Listing and Housing Census except in Assam.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) report on India.

Why in News?

- In its report, the IMF Directors noted that India's rapid economic expansion in recent years has lifted millions of people out of poverty. However, in the first half of 2019, a combination of factors led to subdued economic growth in India.

Key points:

- India is now in the midst of a significant economic slowdown, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said, urging the government to take urgent policy actions to address the current prolonged downturn.
- The issue in India is the growth slowdown. Though there are indications that it is mostly cyclical, not structural, still concerns remain as because of the financial sector issues, the

recovery will be not as quick as it is in case of cyclical slowdowns.

- The staff report was done in August 2019 when the IMF was not fully aware of India's current economic slowdown. Growth in the second quarter of FY 2019-20 came in at a six-year low of 4.5% (year-on-year), and the composition of growth indicates that private domestic demand expanded by only 1% in the quarter. Most high-frequency indicators suggest that weak economic activity has continued into December.
- The new growth projections for India, which will come out in January 2020, would be significantly lower than the previous ones.
- The current economic slowdown is attributed to the abrupt reduction in non-banking financial companies' credit expansion and the associated broad-based tightening of credit conditions appears to be an important factor and weak income growth, especially rural, has been affecting private consumption.
- Private investment has been hindered by financial sector difficulties (including in public sector banks) and insufficient business confidence. Some implementation issues with important and appropriate structural reforms, such as the nation-wide Goods and Services Tax, may also have played a role.

Positives:

- India is still doing well in terms of other economic parameters.
- Foreign Reserves have risen to a record level.
- The current account deficit has narrowed.
- Inflation, although witnessing a temporary hike because of vegetable prices, has been under control for the last few years.
- The issue is primarily how to address the growth slowdown.

Strict governance norms for banks soon, says RBI

Why in news?

- The Reserve Bank of India's report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2018-19.
- The recent governance failures in some financial entities have brought to the fore the impact of the quality of corporate governance on efficiency in the allocation of resources as well as on financial stability.

Key points:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is planning to issue fresh corporate governance norms which will be in line with global best practices.
- The RBI in its Trend and Progress Report of Banking in India 2018-19, notes that the growing size and complexity of the Indian financial system underscores the significance of strengthening corporate governance standards in regulated entities.
- The RBI in the process of issuing draft guidelines on corporate governance for regulated

entities, the objective of which is to align the current regulatory framework with global best practices, must be mindful of the context of the domestic financial system.

- In the case of cooperative banks, there is a pressing need for an umbrella organisation for the sector, which can provide liquidity and capital support to member-banks. The RBI has given approval for its formation. There is a need to ensure that its formation serves the intended purpose.

Chief of Defence Staff gets govt. nod

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).

Key points:

- The creation of the post of CDS has been a long pending demand and forms part of higher-level military reforms.
- The Prime Minister in his Independence Day address of 2019 had announced the appointment of a CDS. Thereafter, an implementation committee was constituted to finalize the exact responsibilities and an enabling framework for the post of CDS.
- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) had approved the recommendations of the committee, headed by the National Security Adviser, on the role and charter of the CDS.
- The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, has approved the creation of the post of CDS in the rank of a four-star General, with salary and perquisites equivalent to a service chief.
- The government has previously informed the Parliament that the CDS would come in the ambit of 'Right to Information Act', in accordance with the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005.

Responsibilities of CDS:

- The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), will function as the Principal Military Adviser to the Defence Minister and also as the Permanent Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC).
- In his capacity as the Permanent Chairman, COSC, the CDS would administer tri-Services organisations, agencies and commands related to Cyber and Space.
- In the strategic domain, the CDS would function as the "Military Adviser to the Nuclear Command Authority" chaired by the Prime Minister.

Railway Board revamp will see cut in strength

Why in News?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the restructuring of the Railway Board.

Key points:

- The Union Cabinet approved the restructuring of the Railway Board, including a reduction in



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its strength as well as the merger of the different cadres into a central service called the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).

- The Board which as of now consists of eight members, including the Chairman, from different service departments such as traffic, civil, mechanical, electrical and signal & telecom will see its strength cut to five members including the Chairman, who will act as a CEO, along with four members responsible for infrastructure, operations and business development, rolling stock and finance.
- The ministry is also considering upgrading the 27 General Managers working at zonal levels and various production and specialized units to the secretary-level grade.
- The modalities and unification of the services will be worked out by the Ministry of Railways in consultation with the DoPT to ensure fairness and transparency.

Significance:

- The Railway Board started in 1905, and over a period of time, has divided the management into several silos. Now, all the 8,400 employees at the management level will come into the Railways through one service — the IRMS.
- The four services of infrastructure, operations and business development, rolling stock and finance will now be unified under IRMS.
- This move will break departmentalism and silos and will set the path of Indian Railways to a high growth trajectory. It will create an organisation that will deliver results speedily. It will be a unified and agile organisation that will take quick decisions.
- It will work single-mindedly as one, not divided into departments. This would help ensure the smooth functioning of the Railways and expediting the decision-making process.
- The Board will also have some independent members, who will be highly distinguished professionals. This would bring in the required knowledge and expertise into the decision-making process.

Double trouble

Why in news?

- The problem of decreasing economic growth rate and increasing inflation in the Indian economy.

Key points:

- India's GDP growth rate has been decreasing. From the level of 8.1% in the fourth quarter of 2017-18, its quarterly GDP growth has fallen to 5% in the second quarter of 2019-20 (six-year low).
- The International Monetary Fund has called for “urgent” policy measures to reverse the current slowdown that has weighed down global economic growth.
- The prices in the economy continue to rise. Food inflation, now in double-digits, has caused



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significant pain.

- Uneven inflation and sluggish growth present serious dilemmas for policymakers.

Concerns:

- In an economy like India's that has just witnessed a debt-fuelled boom followed by a sharp bust in growth rates, it is natural to expect the prices of various goods to adjust in accordance with underlying consumer desires to varying degrees.
- Even as food prices have risen rapidly — food inflation has crossed the 10% mark for the first time in many years — sectors such as manufacturing have witnessed mild deflation as demand for products drops.
- It should be noted that various prices in the economy generally do not rise or fall in tandem. Policymakers, however, tend to view the economy as an entity with a general price level that responds in predictable ways to their policy actions. Such an assumption is likely to cause practical difficulties in implementing monetary policy.

Food inflation:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor, while terming the recent spike in inflation as a transient phenomenon, has called for countercyclical measures and structural reforms to help the economy.
- The central bank's hands have been tied down by the recent spike in inflation, and it has halted its rate cut spree that began in February 2019.
- However, voices continue to grow demanding that the RBI and the government ignore the rise in food inflation and try to infuse more liquidity to boost demand. After all, the rise in food prices may just be an anomaly amid widespread low inflation in the rest of the economy.
- The current food price inflation may be the result of seasonal factors that have affected crop production. If so, it should certainly be a transient phenomenon that will not trouble policymakers for anything beyond a few quarters.

Strengthening grassroots democracy

Why in news?

- Tamil Nadu Government's decision to delay the holding of rural local body elections, due in 2016, by three years.

Key points:

- The unconstitutional delay in holding local body elections started when the Madras High Court cancelled the notification put forward by the State government citing irregularities in it. The reasons cited for subsequent postponements revolved around delimitation and carving out new districts.



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- After resorting to the infamous ordinance route to extend the tenure of the Special Officers of local bodies and some back and forth on the means of electing mayors and municipal chairmen, the State will now see elections being held for rural local bodies alone in two phases on December 27 and 30.
- The elections to urban local bodies are expected to be notified soon, which in itself raises questions on the constitutional and moral validity of the time gap between rural and urban local body elections.
- Unconstitutional and immoral methods are being employed to delay the local body elections.
- There are serious implications of the delay in the conduct of elections given the significance of local bodies in the domains of efficacy, inclusiveness, participation and strengthening of political party structures.
- Scholars argue that decentralisation and people's participation increased in the State of Tamil Nadu since the 1970s, thanks to the socio-political movements in the State.
- The presence of robust machinery at the local level is a measure of the health of democracy and people's participation. Its absence is bound to have an immense effect.
- Criticisms of bureaucratic hassles and delays apart, the importance of local bodies cannot be discounted, especially in the context of their role in the public delivery of services such as the Public Distribution System, pension schemes, and mitigation of disease outbreaks and disasters.
- In February 2016, a few months before the notification for local body elections was put forward, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the much-needed bill that accorded 50% reservation to women in the local bodies, raising the quota from 33%. This has increased the scope for higher inclusiveness for women.
- Reservations are in place for the depressed castes. A delay, therefore, has social justice ramifications too, a principle central to the socio-political history of Tamil Nadu.
- Local body elections serve as a means to both strengthening the political parties' organisational structures and in enabling them to stay closely connected with the voters.
- Local bodies provide opportunities for the emergence of leaders at the local level outside of political parties as well.
- The numerous opportunities in terms of official posts that open up through local body elections serve as an opportunity for political parties to give a chance to party workers from multiple backgrounds to partake in government functioning.
- Eminent scholars of political science argue that such broad-based accommodation results in 'organisational pluralism', wherein, with intra-party pluralism, a given party's engagement with society changes its orientation towards an atmosphere of tolerance.
- In a diverse society like Tamil Nadu, one can argue that the presence of local bodies serves as a means to usher in societal syncretism through broad-based representation.



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Return to the homeland

Why in News?

- Criticism of the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 for its failure to consider the Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka in its provisions.

Key points:

- The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 rules out the possibility of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka being granted citizenship under the new law.
- India has been following the principle of voluntary repatriation in the case of Sri Lankan refugees.

The influx of refugees:

- Tamil Nadu began witnessing an influx of refugees from August 1983 following Black July in Sri Lanka. The Indian government has maintained that these refugees should go back on their own. In other words, India has been following the principle of non-refoulement and favouring voluntary repatriation.
- In October 1983, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi publicly asserted that the country “cannot and will not take millions of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka”. This was in the backdrop of India witnessing the problems posed by the migration of refugees from Bangladesh (East Pakistan) to India in the early 1970s.
- Despite India's concerns, India received thousands of refugees from Sri Lanka over the years. At one point, Tamil Nadu had 2 lakh refugees. Between 1983 and 2013, around 3.04 lakh persons came to the State. At the moment, there are 59,714 refugees living in 107 camps and 34,355 persons outside the camps. Since the end of the civil war in May 2009, nearly 14,000 refugees have returned home.
- The UNHCR is also involved in counselling the refugees, helping them obtain necessary documents, paying for their international travel and providing reintegration grants and post-return support.
- On its part, the Indian government has been taking steps in its own way to facilitate voluntary repatriation. While visa fee is waived and overstay penalty is granted to non-camp refugees on a case-to-case basis, camp refugees are given this benefit as a matter of routine.

The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord:

- There is one more reason why the refugees could not have been included in the scope of the Act. The 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord talks of repatriation.
- New Delhi is conscious of the adverse demographic impact that the civil war has had on the Tamils of Sri Lanka. The numerical strength of MPs from Tamil-speaking areas has gone down over the years as Sri Lanka follows proportional representation. If the refugees go back, this



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will help Tamils get more representatives in the Sri Lankan Parliament.

- The refugees belong to Sri Lanka and they have to go back to Sri Lanka. This would ensure that their right to return back to their homes is upheld and would also relieve some burden on India.

New rules, old problems

Why in News?

Karnataka government's issuance of the notification allowing women to work night shifts in all factories registered under the Factories Act, 1948

Key points:

- In November 2019, the Karnataka government issued a notification allowing women to work night shifts (7 p.m. to 6 a.m.) in all factories registered under the Factories Act, 1948.
- States that already allow this are Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra.
- The amendment suggests that night shifts for women will only be allowed if the employer ensures adequate safeguards concerning occupational safety and health, protection of dignity and honour, and transportation from the factory premises to points nearest to the worker's residence.
- In line with the Night Work Convention, 1990 of the International Labour Organization, these States amended the Factories Act to remove both sex-based discrimination in night work and restrictions on the fundamental right to practise any profession, occupation, trade, or business of one's choice.
- This move has to be read alongside the State's attempt to improve ease of doing business, investor friendliness, and flexibility in a macroeconomic climate vis-a-vis increasing female work participation rate, which is only 25% in India.
- Welcoming the decision, industrial bodies and chambers of commerce have said it will benefit the trade and manufacturing sectors, especially the garment industry.
- Several concerns have been voiced by women garment workers who are estimated to constitute over 90% of the five lakh garment workers in Karnataka.
- Women garment workers are concerned that while the amendment has stipulated many 'new' guidelines amidst the plethora of unaddressed concerns, allowing night shifts would only extend daytime exploitation.
- The Garment Labour Union, a women-led trade union argues that if gender equality is a concern, the state ought to first ensure better working conditions and higher wages in garment factories.
- Women are being allowed to work night shifts in factories in Karnataka even as their concerns about daytime work persist.



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- The 24 points related to occupational rules and regulations stipulated by the amendment have been in existence for years. Yet, women workers fear that when there is no safety or dignity in the workplace even during the daytime, there is very less chance that the employers will be able to ensure all this during night shifts.
- The workers were neither consulted on this matter nor given a circular for their perusal. Omitting workers and trade unions from discussions about the amendment is also seen by the workers as a short-sighted measure.
- The new rules recommending monthly meetings with the representatives of the employer seem farcical.
- Workers remain pessimistic as they are still not given the promised minimum wage. They are puzzled that the night shift amendment does not address the issue of pay structure for night work. Given the very low bargaining power of the employees, this can lead to the exploitation of workers.
- Though the amendment places the onus on employers to prevent sexual harassment, workers say existing mechanisms aimed at addressing workplace violence, including abuse of workers' rights and verbal abuse, which are primarily driven by unrealistic production targets, are simply absent or dysfunctional.
- Workers also express scepticism about strengthening the role of inspectors in factories, as past experience shows improperly conducted inspections or negligence towards grave violations. The reality is that workers face the threat of losing their jobs if they report such violations.
- While the amendment has prioritised installation of CCTV cameras, workers point out that there is no guarantee of their operational status or clarity on who handles the footage.
- The amendment has also failed to address child care, an important concern in a women-dominated sector, especially when paid care is beyond their means.
- Other promises such as 12 consecutive hours of rest between the last shift and the night shift, separate canteens, and more restrooms also appear unconvincing in a context where even restroom breaks are infrequent due to high production targets.
- In a sector where there is systemic failure and worker-management relations are turbulent, putting the onus of worker safety and security in the hands of the management alone can be risky.
- It is well-known that in supply chains, the brands call the shots. Involving them in discussions on worker dignity and equality is important, which has been neglected in the framing of the current framework.

Prelims Facts:

Run Through Files

Why in news?

- To ensure that important government matters don't get delayed owing to conflicting hierarchical and departmental priorities, the Haryana government has introduced a "Run Through Files" mechanism in the Centralised File Movement and Tracking Information



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System (CFMS).

- It would be personally monitored by Chief Minister of Haryana.

Key points:

- A file shall be marked as Run Through Files only by the CM in the CFMS.
- Every file marked as RTF has to be cleared on priority greater than that is currently being accorded to the files marked top priority.
- At whichever level any contribution other than mere signing on the file is made, the same will also be uploaded on CFMS portal.
- A system generated SMS and email will automatically be sent on each downward or upward movement of the file.

Strategic tunnel under Rohtang Pass

- The government will name the strategic tunnel under Rohtang Pass after former prime minister AtalBihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary on December 25th.
- The 8.8-km-long tunnel is the world's longest above an altitude of 3,000 metres.
- The tunnel will cut through PirPanjal range.
- The tunnel provides a temporary winter link to the outside world not only to residents of Lahaul and Spiti but also to those living in Zaskar Valley of Ladakh.
- The Seri nullah default zone lies inside the tunnel.

Bar-headed goose:

- Also known as Anserindicus, it is known to be one of the highest flying birds in the world. It can fly at altitudes of 25,000 feet, while migrating over the Himalayas, where oxygen and temperature levels are extremely low.
- The species has been reported as migrating south from Tibet, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Russia before crossing the Himalaya.
- It is classified as "Least Concerned" as per the IUCN Red List.