

4. India's population to edge ahead of China's by mid-2023, says UN

Prelims Syllabus: Indian Society

Mains Syllabus: GS-I Indian Society - Population and associated issues



Why in News?

- The State of World Population Report 2023 has confirmed that India is expected to edge past China to become the world's most populous country by mid-2023.

State of World Population Report:

- The State of World Population Report is published by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).
- Since 1978, the State of World Population Report has been published every year.
- The State of World Population Report is produced by a group of external advisers, researchers and writers, working alongside UNFPA technical staff.
- The report analyses the trends in world population and demographics. It also throws light on specific regions, countries and population groups and the unique challenges they face.
- The report aims to broaden the understanding of the population and how it can lead to new solutions that build demographic resilience.

India is set to become the most populous country:

- According to the latest report, India's population is estimated to be 1,428 million by mid-2023 which is marginally ahead of China's 1,425 million.
- The U.S. is placed third on the list of most populous countries with an estimated population of 34 crores.
- The 2022 edition of the State of World Population Report had estimated China's population to be 1,448 million by mid-2022 which was more than that of India's 1,406 million population.
- Experts believe that the emergence of India as the world's most populous country in 2023 is mainly attributed to a sharp decline in China's population.
- China witnessed a reduction of 23 million (i.e. 2.3 crores) in just one year.
- Although the numbers released by the reports are only estimates, the UNFPA reports are considered reliable indicators of global population trends.
- The Decennial Census numbers are considered to be the most reliable in India and the 2021 Census exercise was postponed due to the COVID pandemic.
- However, the Census office released population projections for the years 2012 to 2036, according to which, India's population in 2023 was estimated to be only 1,388 million which is significantly less than the numbers projected by the State of World Population report.
- According to the latest State of World Population report, if India's population continues to increase at the current pace which is close to 1% every year, then the population would double from the present value in the next 75 years.

Other key findings of the report:

- The report notes that the global population has reached the 800-crore mark by November 2022.
- The report also highlights the fact that population trends across the world indicate slower growth and ageing societies contrary to the concerns about exploding numbers.
- Further, it reveals that only eight countries namely the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania would account for half the projected growth in global population by 2050.

- **As per the report, the countries with the highest fertility rates were:** Niger (6.7), Chad (6.1), the Democratic Republic of Congo (6.1), Somalia (6.1), Mali (5.8) and the Central African Republic (5.8).
- And, the territories with the lowest birth rates were Hong Kong (0.8), South Korea (0.9), Singapore (1.0), Macau and San Marino (1.1) and China (1.2).
- The report also suggests that two-thirds of the population live in a country where lifetime fertility corresponds with zero growth and this is considered a milestone and indicates advances in medicine, science, health, agriculture and education.

Way forward for India:

- The report has called for a radical rethink of the policies adopted by the countries to address changing demographics and cautioned against the use of family planning as a tool for achieving fertility targets.
- At a time when various states such as Assam are looking at imposing two-child norms, the report says that such type of family planning targets could result in gender-based discrimination and increased instances of prenatal sex determination leading to sex-selective abortion.
- Furthermore, the imposition of such targets could cause an imbalance in sex ratios, denial of the paternity of girl children, violence against women for giving birth to girl children, etc.
- India has a time-bound opportunity to reap benefits from its demographic dividend as about 50% of its population is below the age of 25.
- India must look to maximise the opportunities and convert them into economic benefits by investing in improving the healthcare and education facilities along with creating employment opportunities for young people and also undertaking targeted investments for women and girls.
- Additionally, efforts must be underway to initiate the Census 2021 exercise which has been postponed multiple times in the last two years.
- The delay in completing the 2021 Census could have adverse impacts on various sectors and also the overall growth prospects.