



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper II

- As births decline, China allow couples to have a third child
- Thousands of Rohingya protest at Bhashan Char
- 'It's time to define limits of sedition'

GS Paper III

- GDP shrinks by 7.3%; Q4 uptick moderates 2020-21 carnage
- SC bats for 'one price for vaccines across the nation'
- Twitter has to comply with IT Rules: HC
- 'India can look at the plan for vaccine interchangeability'
- SC flags digital divide in vaccine access
- Fiscal deficit narrower than forecast at 9.2%
- April core sector output jumps 56.1%, base buoys



As births decline, China allow couples to have a third child

China will for the first time allow couples to have a third child, the country's government said on Monday, in a further relaxation of family planning rules five years after a "two-child policy" largely failed to boost birth rates.

Highlights:

1. The change comes less than three weeks after the release of China's once-in-a-decade population census that painted an alarming picture of declining births.
2. The National Bureau of Statistics said that 12 million babies were born last year, the lowest number since 1961.
3. The census said China's population was 1.41 billion in 2020, an increase of 72 million since the last census in 2010, reflecting a 5.38% growth in this period and a 0.53% annual growth.
4. Forecasts say the population could peak in the next couple of years and most likely by 2025 when India will become the world's most populous country.

Dire situation

1. Some Chinese demographers said the announcement, coming so soon after the census, suggested the situation could be direr than the official numbers indicated.
2. The census recorded 264 million in the age group of 60 and over, up 5.44% since 2010 and accounting for 18.70% of the population. Those in the 15-59 age group were 894 million persons, down by 6.79% since 2010 and accounting for 63.35% of the population.
3. China's workforce in the 15-59 age bracket peaked at 925 million in 2011, according to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security said previously. That number was down to 894 million in this census and would drop to 700 million by 2050.
4. The ageing crisis "might be the biggest challenge the Chinese nation faces in the next century.
5. It is, however, unclear if the new announcement may address the problem, at least if the past five years are any indication. China introduced a "two-child



policy” in 2016, but the wide consensus is that it failed to have the desired impact.

6. Surveys carried out by Chinese media attributed financial pressures as one main reason. A 2015 survey by the government said 70% of respondents attributed financial reasons for choosing to not have many children.

Thousands of Rohingya protest at Bhashan Char

Several thousand Rohingya staged “unruly” protests against living conditions on a cyclone-prone island off Bangladesh where they were moved from vast camps on the mainland.

Highlights:

1. Since December, Bangladesh has shifted 18,000 out of a planned 1,00,000 refugees to the low-lying silt island of Bhashan Char from the Cox’s Bazar region, where around 8,50,000 people live in squalid and cramped conditions.
2. The protest involved up to 4,000 people and coincided with an inspection visit by officials from the United Nations refugee agency. An international rights activist said several protesters were injured in police action.
3. A UNHCR spokesperson said the delegation was able to meet with a large group of refugees and to listen to the various issues that they raised, which the delegation will further discuss with the Bangladesh authorities.

‘It’s time to define limits of sedition’

The Supreme Court said “it is time to define the limits of sedition” even as it protected two Telugu channels from any coercive action by the Andhra Pradesh government for their reportage of the COVID-19 pandemic in the State.

Highlights:

1. A three-judge Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud flagged indiscriminate use of the sedition law against critics, journalists, social media users, activists and citizens for airing grievances about the governments’ COVID-19 management, or even for seeking help to gain medical access, equipment, drugs and oxygen cylinders.



2. The court is of the view that the ambit and parameters of the provisions of Sections 124A (sedition), 153A and 505 of the Indian Penal Code 1860 would require interpretation, particularly in the context of the right of the electronic and print media to communicate news, information and the rights, even those that may be critical of the prevailing regime in any part of the nation.

‘Muzzling the media’

1. “This is muzzling the media,” Justice L. Nageswara Rao said.
2. “It is time to define the limits of sedition,” Justice Chandrachud said.
3. The court acknowledged the argument that the media was well within its rights to air critical programmes about a prevailing regime without attracting sedition.
4. Both channels urged the Supreme Court to initiate contempt proceedings against the senior officials of the State government for violating the April 30 order of the Supreme Court to “immediately cease any direct and indirect threats of prosecution and arrest to citizens, who air their grievances”.

GDP shrinks by 7.3%; Q4 uptick moderates 2020-21 carnage

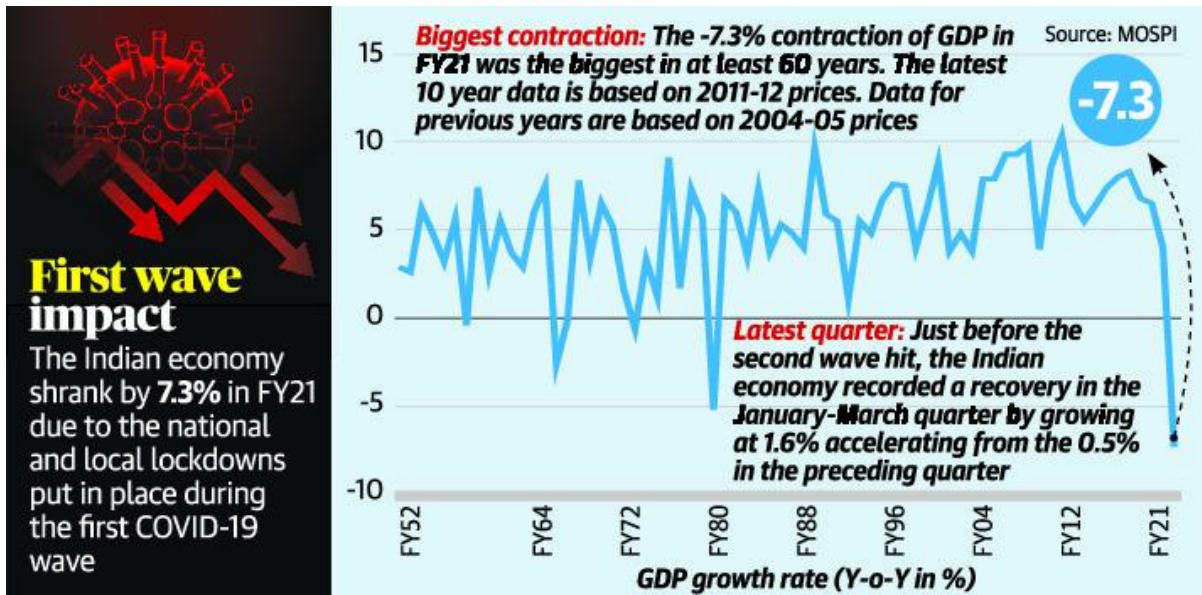
India’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracted by 7.3% in 2020-21, as per provisional National Income estimates released by the National Statistical Office, marginally better than the 8% contraction in the economy projected earlier. GDP growth in 2019-20, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, was 4%.

Highlights:

1. The Gross Value Added (GVA) in the economy shrank 6.2% in 2020-21, compared to a 4.1% rise in the previous year. Only two sectors bucked the trend of negative GVA growth — agriculture, forestry and fishing, which rose 3.6%, and electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services (up 1.9%).
2. Though this is the bleakest performance on record for the economy, the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2020-21 helped moderate the damage, with a higher-than-expected growth of 1.6% in GDP. This marked the second quarter of positive growth after the country entered a technical recession in the first half of the year.



- GDP had contracted 24.4% in April-June 2020, followed by a 7.4% shrinkage in the second quarter. It had returned to positive territory in the September to December quarter with a marginal 0.5% growth.
- GVA for trade, hotels, transport, communication and broadcasting-related services saw the sharpest decline of 18.2%, followed by construction (-8.6%), mining and quarrying (-8.5%) and manufacturing (-7.2%).
- The extent of recovery in the performance of the informal sectors in Q4 FY2021 remains uncertain.



SC bats for 'one price for vaccines across the nation'

The government claimed it will inoculate the “entire eligible population” by 2021-end, only to be barraged with questions from the Supreme Court about the efficacy of its policy, which allows the Centre to procure just 50% of the vaccines while leaving the States to buy their own.

Highlights:

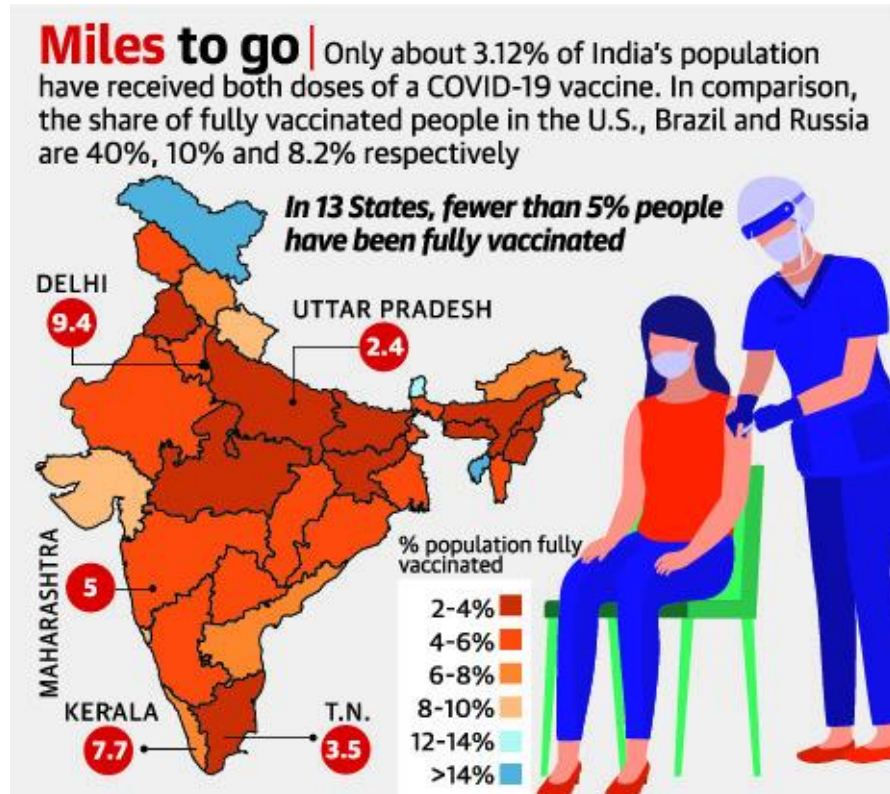
- The court also challenged the differential vaccine pricing policy, saying “there needs to be one price for vaccines across the nation”.



2. The government was in talks with other manufacturers like Pfizer. If the discussions succeed, the government would be able to advance its deadline for completing the immunisation.

3. But the court highlighted the difference in

vaccine prices between the Centre and the States. When the Centre can purchase vaccine in bulk for ₹150 per dose, the States have to pay ₹300 to ₹600.



Twitter has to comply with IT Rules: HC

The Delhi High Court said Twitter has to comply with the new Information Technology Rules for digital media if they have not been stayed by the court.

Highlights:

The petition said the Information Technology Rules 2021 have come into effect from February 25, 2021, and the Centre had given three months' time to every significant social media intermediary to comply with them.



'India can look at the plan for vaccine interchangeability'

India can be looking at initiating trials for interchangeability of different COVID-19 vaccines for use to enhance the efficiency of vaccines and offer longer protection, said a senior health official.

Highlights:

1. Speaking about the possibility of a mixed dose regime trial, NITI Aayog member (Health) V.K. Paul said: There is growing scientific interest in the matter worldwide and India too should look into it.
2. This is biological plausibility and if proven effective it could go a long way in enhancing faster coverage and acting as a better booster dose that can be offered for use.

SC flags digital divide in vaccine access

The Supreme Court asked the government to "please wake up and smell the coffee" about the digital divide hampering vaccine access in the country.

Highlights:

1. A three-judge Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud highlighted the farfetchedness of an illiterate villager from rural India crossing the "digital divide" to register for COVID-19 vaccination on the CoWin portal where slots disappear in the blink of an eye.
2. Justice Chandrachud said the government should be aware of the ground realities in 'Digital India'. Vaccination policy today is entirely exclusionary of the rural areas, the court said.
3. On the difference in prices for procurement between the Centre and States, Justice Chandrachud said, Article 1 of the Constitution says Bharat is a Union of States. When the Constitution says that, we will follow the federal rule. Then the Government of India has to wholly procure the vaccines and distribute them. Here, individual States are left in a lurch.



Fiscal deficit narrower than forecast at 9.2%

India recorded a fiscal deficit of 9.2% of GDP in 2020-21, narrower than the revised estimate of 9.5%, as per data from the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) and official GDP figures released on Monday.

Highlights:

1. Total revenue receipts were about ₹88,000 crores higher than estimated, driven largely by higher excise and customs collections, while total expenditure was ₹61,000 crores more than the revised estimate.
2. Budget 2020-21, presented before the COVID-19 lockdowns, had set a fiscal deficit target of 3.5% of GDP.
3. The slightly better-than-expected fiscal performance doesn't necessarily bode well for this year's fiscal pressures, the Reserve Bank of India's significantly higher-than-anticipated dividend of ₹99,000-odd crore notwithstanding, opine economists. The government has set a target to reduce the fiscal deficit this year to 6.8%.
4. The higher-than-estimated expenditure in 2020-21 was actually driven by a higher revenue expenditure of ₹75,000 crores.
5. Interestingly, CAPEX was cut by ₹14,000 crores. Expenditure control will be important for FY22, as pressures will be there on tax revenue due to lockdowns, while non-tax receipts will be higher due to the RBI transfer of ₹99,000 crore this year.
6. The spurt in revenue spending is due to the release of food subsidies, but higher-than-anticipated tax revenues helped curtail the deficit to ₹18.2 lakh crore from the estimated ₹18.5 lakh crore.

Way Ahead:

1. While tax receipts would be affected due to the anticipation of a prolonged second wave impact on sentiment, the Centre may have to keep spending to prop up demand via a combination of free foodgrains, cash transfers and higher MGNREGA outlays.



April core sector output jumps 56.1%, base buoys

News: The output of eight core sectors jumped by 56.1% in April mainly due to a low base effect and uptick in production of natural gas, refinery products, steel, cement and electricity, official data showed on Monday.

Highlights:

1. The eight infrastructure sectors of coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity had contracted by 37.9% in April 2020 due to the national COVID-19 lockdown.
2. Production of natural gas, refinery products, steel, cement and electricity jumped by 25%, 30.9%, 400%, 548.8% and 38.7% in April, as against (-) 19.9%, (-) 24.2%, (-) 82.8%, (-) 85.2% and (-) 22.9% in April 2020.
3. The improvement was fairly broad-based, with an expected spike in the growth of cement and steel production.