The significance of the 'there is no data' answer

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(Mains GS 2 : Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.)

Context:

Government shows restraints in giving data about migrants, frontline health workers who lost their lives during the pandemic, number of job losses, actual number of manual scavengers as well as people died due to lack of oxygen.

Withholding data:

- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation withhold data of all-India Household Consumer Expenditure Survey conducted by the National Statistical Office during 2017-2018 stating "data quality issues".
- However, leaks from the data had suggested a noteworthy slump in consumption expenditure.
- The Government also did not provide data of the number of deaths caused by manual scavengers, deaths due to lack of oxygen, number of farmers died during the farmers' agitation and economic loss caused due to Internet shutdowns.

Reasons:

- **Hands off responsibility:** Restraining data leads to breach of public confidence and accountability.

- Denial of data on important markers of governance, delivery and issues that matter to people keeps responsibility at bay.
- **Bounced to States:** Not acknowledging facts or numbers leads to deflect accountability to the other unit of power i.e. States and avoidance of responsibility from vital issues.
- **Post truth:** By denying data, the government might want to build a political narrative in its favour.

Widening information gap:

- Information is power and a lack of information is the absence of power.
- Huge data collection from citizens regarding Aadhar, ration cards etc leads to asymmetry of power where information about citizens are with the state but the state did not provide even basic data.
- Denying citizens the data helps the state to restate the emergent power equation between the Government and citizens. However it breaches the 'Right to Information' of citizens.

Challenge before citizens:

- Citizens need to be vocal on problems they face during pandemic and after words to hold stakeholders accountable.
- Media needs to fulfill its part of 'Fourth Pillar of Democracy'.

Conclusion:

Citizens need to recognise the truth and unhesitatingly push for it because good and truthful information is the very basis of the quality of democracy.