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1. Is use of facial recognition by law enforcement agencies a good idea?

❑ **What is Facial recognition technology?**

❑ **What is the significance of the facial recognition technology for law enforcement agencies?**

❑ **What are the concerns about deployment of this technology for law enforcement purposes ?**

❑ **What is the way forward?**

GS paper 2 (Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability)

In this video, you can find detailed answers for all the above questions.

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What is the context about?

❑ In the last few years, considerable interest has been shown by law enforcement agencies in India to employ tools that make use of big data and artificial intelligence technologies.

❑ A recent investigative report identified the use of image and facial recognition technologies by different state police departments for a variety of purposes such as prevention of trafficking of missing children, detection of crime in crowded areas, tracking of persons of interest and live streaming and detection against a database.

What is Facial recognition technology?

❑ Facial recognition technology is essentially a kind of biometric identification technology, much like fingerprints and iris scans.

❑ Using local feature analysis algorithms, the technology analyses photographs and video to measure metrics such as the shape of chin, the distance between the eyes, and other distinctive facial characteristics to create a mathematical sequence, called a face template.

❑ This face template, much like the fingerprint biometric sequence, is the unique identifier of a person.

What is the significance of the facial recognition technology for law enforcement agencies?

Broadly speaking, we can do two things using facial recognition technology.

❑ The first is to identify an unknown person. This involves recording images of a person's face, converting it to a face template, and running it against a database to see if one gets a hit. This is typically what law enforcement agencies use facial recognition technology for.

❑ The second use is to verify the identity of a known person, where the image needs to be authenticated against one known template, for instance, the facial recognition feature to unlock phones.

What are the concerns about deployment of this technology for law enforcement purposes ?

❑ The biggest issue with a facial recognition system is that it is a covert, remote and mass authentication technology. This means that it works without providing notice of its existence and use, requires no direct interaction with the subject.

❑ If facial recognition is used to capture images of persons attending a protest or at places deemed suspicious, authenticate them against a centralised databases such as Aadhaar, (this is currently not permitted under the

Aadhaar Act unless authorised in the interest of national security) and if this information is used to populate suspects' databases, it could have chilling effects on free speech and expression.

What is the way forward?

❑ Given the limited state capacity in India, use of technologies to aid law enforcement must be encouraged. However, it needs to be carefully considered what adverse impacts technologies could have on civil liberties and economic rights.

❑ For high risk technologies such as facial recognition, which have untested accuracy in geographies like India, and pose newer threats, the State would be well advised to exercise restraint.