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Democracy's paradox, the chosen people of the state

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2
Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

1. Context

- The **Indian passport** and **electoral rolls** are meant only for **citizens**, but these documents are **not conclusive proof** of citizenship because they can be **forged**.
- This creates a conflict between **"evidence of status"** and **"status of evidence."**
- The issue resurfaced due to the **Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls.
- The central philosophical issue: Should the state presume **all residents are citizens unless proven otherwise**, or should the burden lie on the individual?

2. Legal & Institutional Debate

- Legal challenge argues:
  - **ECI** has **no authority** to determine citizenship; only the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** does.
  - No legal provision exists for **en masse SIR**; only selective revision is allowed.
  - Determination of a **foreigner** lies with the **MHA** and **Foreigners Tribunals** (under the Foreigners Act, 1946).
- ECI's stance: Determining **eligibility for electoral rolls** implies checking **citizenship**, but this is **not equal** to formal citizenship adjudication.
- A nationwide mechanism for citizenship verification exists in law: the **National Population Register → National Register of Citizens → National Identity Card** chain under the **Citizenship Act** and **2003 Rules**.
- The **onus of proof** in citizenship disputes lies **on the individual**, not the state.
- The **NPR** was updated in 2010 & 2015 (119 crore residents). Its update alongside **Census 2027** remains unclear.

3. Citizenship Law Evolution & Structural Paradox

- India's founders leaned towards **Jus Soli (birth-based)** citizenship, but over time, **Jus Sanguinis (blood/ lineage)** became prominent.
- Current law on **citizenship by birth**:
  - Born **before 1 July 1987** → citizen by default.
  - Born **1987–2004** → one parent must be a citizen.
  - Born **on/after 3 Dec 2004** → one parent must be a citizen **and the other not an "illegal migrant."**
- The **2003 amendment** introduced the category of **illegal immigrants**, barring them and their descendants from citizenship by birth.
- **CAA 2019** created an exception based on **religion**, making citizenship rules controversial.
- The practical paradox: Citizenship, sedition, treason, and voter eligibility are often determined by **lowest-level state actors**,border agents, clerks, teachers despite sovereignty resting with the **people**.

4. Assam Nrc Experience & The Key Democratic Paradox

- Assam is the **only state with a draft NRC**, based on **Section 6A** (added in 1985 after the Assam Accord), creating a **separate citizenship regime** with multiple **cut-off dates**.

- **2019 draft NRC** declared **19 lakh out of 3.29 crore** residents as **D (Doubtful Citizens)**.
- Reliance on **legacy documents** going back decades made the process exclusionary.
- The **Assam BJP government rejected the NRC** because many excluded persons were **Hindus**.
- Being marked **D** can lead to loss of **voting rights**, trial by **Foreigners Tribunal**, and possible **detention or deportation**.
- Whether done by **ECI (SIR)** or **MHA (NPR/NRC)**, the same local officials make citizenship judgments.
- The **fundamental paradox of democracy**:
  - **People** create the **state** and give it legitimacy.
  - Yet, the **state** ultimately decides **who the people are**.

The real story of the India-Russia summit

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
India and its neighborhood- relations.

1. Background:

- The **23rd India-Russia Summit** in New Delhi highlighted today's difficult geopolitical landscape.
- The Ukraine war has created a situation where **India's key partners are on opposing sides**, making diplomacy challenging.
- India's handling of these tensions has positioned it as a key **global stabiliser.**

2. Optics and Timing of the Summit

- Russian President Vladimir Putin received a **red-carpet welcome** on his first visit to India since the Ukraine war began.
- He arrived with a large, high-powered delegation, including **Kirill Dmitriev**, a key figure in ongoing peace efforts involving U.S. stakeholders such as **Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.**
- The optics aimed to reaffirm **India's confidence in its Russia ties** and show **Russia's prioritisation of India.**
- Timing was crucial:
  - **Russia** currently has a **strong battlefield position**.
  - **Ukraine** faces the prospect of **military defeat**.
  - The **U.S.** has effectively **stepped back from Ukraine**.
- Prime Minister Modi's support for **"peace efforts"** aligns with and strengthens Donald Trump's Ukraine peace initiative.
- India and the U.S. are aligned here; **Europe remains sceptical,** posing a **diplomatic challenge** for India.

3. Strengthening Bilateral Economic and Energy Pillars

- The summit adopted **Programme 2030**, aimed at deepening India–Russia strategic economic cooperation until 2030.
- Key decisions included strengthening mechanisms for bilateral settlements and **trade in national currencies.**
- **Removing non-tariff barriers, diversifying trade baskets**, and boosting investments in **non-energy sectors** can help achieve the **$100 billion trade target by 2030.**
- Priority sectors include **fertilizers, railways, pharmaceuticals, mineral resources,** and **critical raw materials.**
- **Energy cooperation** remains foundational:
  - **India is the world's second-largest fossil fuel importer**, making affordable energy a national security need.
  - **Russia's vast resources** are unmatched; China and U.S. companies are already competing for access.
  - India must secure its share to protect **long-term economic security.**

4. Emerging Areas of Cooperation

- **Maritime Connectivity:** Focus on the **Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor**, Northern Sea Route, and shipbuilding.
- **Arctic Cooperation**: Russia has offered to train Indian seafarers.

- **Skilled Labour Mobility**: Russia will accept Indian skilled workers, a result of years-long negotiations.
  - Driven by **Russia's demographic crisis**, war losses, reduced Central Asian labour, and concerns about **Chinese influence in the Far East**.
- **Tourism:** The two sides agreed to ease tourist visas.
- S&T, Space, Nuclear and Defence Cooperation:
  - Long-standing sectors where Russia has been a generous partner with minimal political conditions.
  - **BrahMos** is a mainstay of India's missile arsenal; **S-400** proved crucial during **Operation Sindoor** (May 2025).
  - India has secured higher **localisation, technology transfer, and joint production** in defence.
  - Continued Russian support is essential for maintaining India's existing **Russian-origin equipment** even as India pushes for **indigenisation.**
  - Future cooperation will likely **focus on niche and advanced defence technologies.**

5. Big Picture: Re-engineering the Relationship

- The summit reflects a deliberate **re-engineering of India–Russia ties** to adapt to **changing global power dynamics.**
- Both sides aim to **advance despite obstacles,** particularly shifts in U.S.–China relations that indirectly bring India and Russia closer.
- Europe's path to peace lies through dialogue with Russia, not through India.
- India sees itself as a **credible and balanced partner** capable of **maintaining strong ties with all sides** while **contributing constructively to global stability.**

How can India benefit from neurotechnology ?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 3
Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

1.Background

- The human brain remains the final frontier of scientific exploration.
- In **the coming decades, neurotechnology is expected to advance at an unprecedented pace.**
- These developments will deepen our ability to understand how the brain functions.
- They **may even allow us to influence or shape neural activity in ways once thought impossible.**

2. What is neurotechnology?

- Neurotechnology **uses mechanical and digital tools to communicate directly with the brain.**
- **It can record, monitor, or influence neural activity,** giving new insights into brain function and repair.
- These **systems draw on neuroscience, AI, engineering, and computing to sense or stimulate brain signals** in real time.
- The **core innovation is the Brain-Computer Interface (BCI), which converts brain signals into digital actions.**
- BCIs **can control devices such as a computer cursor, wheelchair, or robotic arm** using thought alone.
- They operate through non-invasive sensors (e.g., EEG) or implanted electrodes for greater precision.
- Some **BCIs serve diagnostic purposes, while others enable movement in paralysed patients or treat conditions** like depression and Parkinson's disease.
- Experiments have **shown brain-to-brain communication in animals, such as transmitting information between two mice.**
- Human applications today are mainly therapeutic, while enhancement or military uses remain controversial and require strong ethical oversight.

3. Why does India need it?

- **India faces a high neurological disease burden, including strokes, spinal cord injuries, depression,** and Parkinson's disease.
- **From 1990 to 2019, neurological disorders from non-communicable diseases and injuries steadily increased** in India's overall disease load.

- **Stroke has become the largest contributor to neurological disability** in the country.
- **Neuroprosthetics can significantly help paralysed individuals** by restoring mobility and communication.
- Targeted neural stimulation offers mental health patients a way to reduce long-term dependence on medication.
- **Neurotechnology aligns with India's rising strengths in biotechnology, engineering, and AI, offering strategic opportunities** beyond healthcare.

4. Where does India stand today?

- India is **building strong academic and private-sector capabilities in neurotechnology.**
- **IIT Kanpur has developed a BCI-based robotic hand to aid stroke** rehabilitation.
- The **National Brain Research Centre (NBRC), Manesar, is a leading national hub for neuroscience research.**
- The **Brain Research Centre at IISc, Bangalore, is another major centre** advancing brain-science innovation.
- Dognosis, an Indian startup, is using neurotechnology to decode brain signals in dogs.
- This work aims to detect neural patterns linked to dogs sensing cancer in human breath, with the potential to transform early cancer screening.

5. What are other countries doing?

- The **U.S. leads globally in neurotechnology, supported by the NIH's BRAIN Initiative**, which accelerates cutting-edge brain research.
- In May 2024, **Neuralink received FDA approval for human trials and has already shown prosthetic-enabled motor restoration** in paralysed patients.
- **China's Brain Project (2016–2030) focuses on cognition research, brain-inspired AI,** and neurological disorder treatments.
- The **EU and Chile are at the forefront of creating laws on BCIs and neurorights**, setting early global standards.
- Neurotechnologies have wide applications from healthcare to gaming to recreation making them economically significant.
- **India's genomic diversity, scientific expertise, and growing interest in brain research position** it as a future global hub.
- **However, weak or unclear regulatory support could slow India's BCI development** and adoption.
- **India needs tailored regulatory pathways, strong ethical and data-protection norms, and public engagement** to ensure safe and beneficial expansion of BCIs.

What is the India Post's DHRUVA framework?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 3
Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

1.Background

- The **Department of Posts has proposed a digital framework called DHRUVA (Digital Hub for Reference and Unique Virtual Address)** to standardise and share physical addresses.
- Under this framework, **each address would receive a unique digital "label" similar to an email address.**
- The postal department says that **DHRUVA will support effective governance, inclusive service delivery,** and a better user experience.
- To enable this system, **the government has issued a draft amendment to the Post Office Act, 2023.**
- **DHRUVA follows the introduction of DIGIPIN, a 10-digit alphanumeric code** created using precise location coordinates.

2. What is DHRUVA?

- **DHRUVA is proposed as a Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) similar to Aadhaar and UPI,** aimed at standardising and simplifying address management.
- It **allows platforms like India Post, Amazon, and Uber to receive a digital "label" instead of requiring users to repeatedly fill out physical addresses**.
- **Each label is authorized by the end user, enabling platforms to access both the descriptive address** and the geo-coded DIGIPIN.

- **DIGIPIN, developed in-house by India Post, is an open-source location pin** assigned to every 12-square-metre block in India.
- DIGIPIN **helps especially in rural or poorly described address areas, giving delivery personnel a precise fallback location** alongside the traditional PIN code.
- DHRUVA **envisions Address Service Providers (ASPs) who generate proxy labels like amit@dhruva.**
- It also **includes Address Validation Agencies (AVAs) to authenticate addresses, and Address Information Agents (AIAs) who manage user consent for sharing** addresses.
- A dedicated governance entity, similar to NPCI, would oversee and regulate the entire DHRUVA ecosystem.

3. How will DHRUVA be used?

- DHRUVA **will enable consent-based address sharing, similar to how UPI tokenises bank accounts, letting users control when and for how long their address can be accessed.**
- Users **will be able to tokenise their physical address into a digital label, allowing secure and regulated sharing** with platforms.
- **Updating addresses will become easier, allowing people to shift deliveries seamlessly** when they move homes.
- **Digital platforms public and private will be able to access user-approved addresses** through secure, consent-driven mechanisms.
- The system will **support service discovery, with intermediaries showing users what doorstep services** are available at their precise location.
- Because the framework relies on address and location data, a legal framework or draft law will be needed to authorise data collection and ensure safeguards.
- Overall, DHRUVA aims to make address use more secure, portable, and digitally manageable, improving both logistics and user experience.

4. Will it help urban governance?

- **Experts argue that DHRUVA may not significantly aid urban governance because its address system is linked to individuals** rather than independently mapped physical structures.
- Since **the framework requires personal information alongside addresses, it must rely on a consent-based sharing mechanism.**
- If citizens choose not to consent to share or generate address labels, large portions of data about buildings or residents could remain missing.
- **Such incomplete datasets would weaken the system's usefulness for urban planning**, infrastructure mapping, and governance.
- **Globally, most address digitisation systems avoid collecting personal information,** which removes the need for consent and results in more comprehensive, reliable datasets.
- Therefore, DHRUVA's reliance on personal-data-driven consent could limit its effectiveness as a tool for urban governance.

KEYWORDS

Section 123, Representation of the People Act, 1951

- Section 123 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 **defines the various corrupt practices** that can **invalidate an election** and lead to the **disqualification of a candidate**.
- It includes **bribery, w**hich refers to **giving, offering, promising, receiving,** or **agreeing to receive** any form of gratification to influence candidature or voting.
- **"Gratification"** covers entertainment and employment but excludes bona fide election expenses.
- The section also lists **undue influence**, which means any **direct or indirect interference with the free exercise of electoral rights**, including threats, social ostracism, excommunication, or inducing fear of divine displeasure;
- However, lawful acts and declarations of public policy are not considered undue influence.
- It prohibits appeals made to voters on the grounds of r**eligion, race, caste, community, or language,** as well as the use or appeal to religious or national symbols for electoral advantage.

- It treats as corrupt practices the promotion of enmity or hatred between groups on identity-based grounds, and the p**ropagation or glorification of sati for electoral benefit** as defined under the **Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987**.
- **Publishing false statements** about a candidate's personal character, conduct, candidature, or withdrawal, with knowledge of their falsity, is also a corrupt practice.
- **Spending beyond the prescribed expenditure limits** or authorizing expenses in violation of Section 77 constitutes corrupt practice.
- **Seeking assistance from government servants** such as gazetted officers, police, armed forces, judges, revenue officers, or others listed for furthering electoral prospects is also prohibited, except when such officials act in the genuine discharge of official duties.
- **Booth capturing**, (defined separately in Section 135A) also counts as a corrupt practice.

AI Preparedness Index (AIPI)

- The **AI Preparedness Index (AIPI)** measures the extent to which **174 countries** are ready to adopt and benefit from **Artificial Intelligence**.
- It is built using a wide set of **macro-structural indicators** that capture a country's **digital infrastructure**, **human capital and labor market policies**, **technological innovation and economic integration**, and **regulation and ethics**.
- The Index uses source data from **eight institutions**, combining **official statistics**, **hard-data surveys**, and **perception-based surveys**.
- The **AIPI** is derived by summing four major dimensions: **digital infrastructure**, **human capital**, **technological innovation**, and **legal frameworks**.
- These four pillars are essential for enabling **smooth and effective AI adoption**.
- Each dimension is calculated by **normalizing** and **averaging** a wide range of **sub-indicators**.
- These include factors such as the **availability of digital infrastructure**, **investment in human capital**, **inclusive STEM capabilities**, **labor and capital mobility**, a **dynamic R&D ecosystem**, and the **flexibility of legal frameworks** to support **digital business models**.