8. Facial Recognition in Today's world

Prelims Level: Scientific Exploration

Mains Level: GS-III Science & Technology, Developments and their Applications and effects in Everyday Life, Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology Indigenization of Technology and Developing a New Technology

Why in News?

- Last week, European media network EURACTIV and Politico published a story that said the European Commission is considering a temporary ban on the use of facial recognition technologies in public spaces.

Highlights:

- Two big tech companies, Alphabet and Microsoft, have taken completely different positions on the idea.

- This comes even as facial recognition technologies are being increasingly adopted by individuals, organisations, and governments.

- European Commission believes that indiscriminate use of facial recognition technologies is a privacy threat, and some regulations are needed so that this does not easily give way to surveillance.

- During the temporary ban period, a sound methodology for assessing the impacts of this technology and possible risk management measures could be identified and developed.

Significance:

- It is increasingly being used for everything: from unlocking your phone to validating your identity, from auto-tagging digital photos to finding missing persons, and from targeted advertising to law enforcement.

- It is also increasingly used for surveillance and can also become problematic in the absence of privacy and data security laws.

Separating Benefits from Drawbacks:

- Benefits of facial recognition systems can be categorised into three. One, face detection, which could help count the number of people in traffic. Two, facial authentication, which could help you unlock your phone.

- Three, facial matching, which could help investigators quickly zero in on suspects.

- Instead of simply banning an entire category of technologies with so many possible applications, including many that are helpful and benign, policymakers should employ precision regulation that applies restrictions and oversight to particular use-cases and end-users where there is greater risk of societal harm.

Current Application Across the Globe:

- The U.S. has recently released guidelines regarding artificial intelligence, and they reportedly point to a light touch when it comes to regulation.
- London has joined the bandwagon, and will use real time facial recognition systems to police the city.
- Closer home, Telangana has recently tested this technology to verify voters in local elections.