Biometrics in Policing

What is the issue?

- There is global consensus that the police charter need to focus equally on crime prevention and detection.
- The use of facial identification software will help the police on this focus but it is facing many challenges.

What is a dismaying paradox?

- Citizens want newer crime control measures to keep them safe.
- At the same time, they resent smarter police innovations in the field because of perceived danger to individual rights and privacy.
- Surprisingly, the campaign against police experiments has a stand that the end should not justify the means used by state agencies.
- Although only by a few groups, this explains the sharp adverse responses to a counter-crime facial recognition technology.
- This technology seeks to make inroads into the underworld's ability to escape the police detection.

Why the police use this technology?

- Despite robust and aggressive policing, most of the police forces including the Indian police have been guilty of underperformance.
- The criminals merge with the community to escape identification.
- So, the police in many countries have sought the help of expert security agencies to scan faces seen in public spaces.
- This is with a view to run them against available databases of faces used in crime fighting.
- The resistance especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, against facial recognition software, has been baffling.
- Its modest use in India explains the lack of public discourse on the pros and cons of facial identification software.

Why is there opposition to this technology?

- There are people who believe that this facial recognition technology **discriminates against minorities and ethnic groups**.
- This is an incomprehensible charge because the cameras take pictures at

random rather than of specific segments of the population.
- The next opposition was from activists who focus on **privacy violation**.
- Criticism is mainly on the ground that recognition technology has many a time been found guilty of errors.
- These critics should remember is that our faces are already online in a number of places, for example, through increased use of CCTV cameras.
- When this is the reality, objecting to the police scanning people for the objective of solving a case under investigation is unreasonable.

What are the points favouring the use of this technology?

- When there is no match of a face with existing records with the police, these data would be deleted.
- If the matched data is not required for further investigation, they would be deleted within a particular time frame.
- There are many instances in which cases were solved with the help of facial recognition.

What does a 2019 U.S. study reveal?

- Many of the facial recognition algorithms today are likely to misidentify members of some groups more frequently than they do of the others.
- The findings of this study raise doubts about the wisdom of employing facial recognition software indiscriminately.
- The study said that the error rates could perhaps be brought down by using a diverse set of training data.
- It is unclear whether the misidentification is due to bias built into the software. But the danger of misidentification cannot be brushed aside.

What is the conclusion?

- Ultimately, any modern technology is filled with hidden dangers.
- There is no claim of infallibility either by the software maker or by the person selling it or who advocates its deployment.
- Grave errors from its use are however few and far between.
- The facial recognition plays a vital role in criminal justice administration, just as the DNA testing establishes either the guilt or the innocence of a person arraigned for crime.
- Over the years, there is a marked improvement in the way policemen handle digital evidence.
- The similar care and sophistication will soon mark criminal investigation by police forces across the globe.

Source: The Hindu

