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[enquiry@tathastuics.com](mailto:enquiry@tathastuics.com)

Plot No.B 22, Bada Bazar Road, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi-110060

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# Govt., Opposition spar in LS over *Vande Mataram*

PM initiates debate on song, says Cong. 'fragmented' it by giving in to Muslim League's reservations about it; Priyanka Gandhi says song is part of India's soul, govt. debating it with eye on Bengal polls

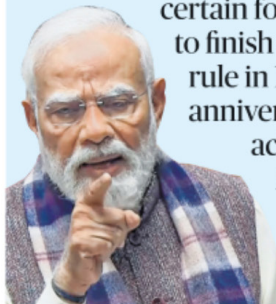
**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Centre and the Opposition on Monday sparred in the Lok Sabha over *Vande Mataram*, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi terming it the voice of the freedom movement that had been "fragmented" by the Congress in its "surrender before the Muslim League".

Initiating the debate to mark 150 years of the National Song, Mr. Modi claimed that India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru "betrayed" the song by echoing Muslim League leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah's communal concerns.

Leading the charge for the Opposition, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra questioned the need to have a debate

When the song turned 50 years, we were still under British rule. At its centenary, we were under Emergency when certain forces were trying to finish Constitutional rule in India. On its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is time to acknowledge *Vande Mataram*'s role in our freedom



**NARENDRA MODI**  
Prime Minister

When we mention *Vande Mataram*, it reminds us of the history of our freedom struggle. This debate is strange; this song has made a place in people's hearts; so what is the need for a debate?



**PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA**  
Congress MP

on the song and accused the government of using it to divert attention from real issues such as unemployment and rising prices.

She said the debate was being held in the view of Assembly elections in West Bengal next year and to le-

vel fresh allegations against those who fought for the country's freedom. She dared the ruling party to have a debate on Nehru and "close the chapter for once and all".

Earlier, Mr. Modi said that every Indian breathing the air of freedom owed a

debt to *Vande Mataram* for fostering the fight against colonial rule, but targeted the Congress for truncating the song.

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## Democracy's paradox, the chosen people of the state

**T**he Indian passport is meant to be issued only to Indian citizens. Only citizens are supposed to be on the electoral rolls of the country. But holding an Indian passport or having one's name on the electoral rolls is no proof of citizenship, because people can, and have, forged their way to these documents. This is a conflict between evidence of status and status of evidence. This vexed question of citizenship governance has resurfaced in the context of Election Commission of India's countrywide Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

The legal challenge against the SIR is based on the following grounds. First, the ECI has no power to determine citizenship, and only the Home Ministry has. Second, there is no provision in the law for an in mass SIR and it can only be done selectively. Third, whether one is a foreigner can be determined only by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) under the Citizenship Act and by quasi-judicial bodies such as Foreigners Tribunals constituted under the Foreigners Act, 1946. The ECI has argued that its constitutional mandate to determine the eligibility of individuals to be included in the electoral rolls necessarily entails verifying their citizenship status. Its central contention is that the process of assessing eligibility for enrolment cannot be equated with a formal determination of citizenship. While these arguments may or may not be accepted by the Supreme Court of India (which is hearing the case), the issues at hand are more fundamental, political and even philosophical in nature. What is being questioned in the SIR is the presumption that all residents are citizens unless proven otherwise.

**For the individual to prove**  
Countrywide, there is no single piece of evidence that proves Indian citizenship – a document that has the status of being evidence of citizenship status. A legal regime for a countrywide adjudication of everyone's citizenship passed by Parliament is awaiting rollout. In Parliament in August, the Centre was asked what proof there is of Indian citizenship. The Centre – the Minister of Home to be precise – said, "The Citizenship Act, 1955, as amended in 2004, provides the Central Government to compulsorily register every citizen of India and issue a National Identity Card to him."

The procedure for the same has been laid down in the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003. The rules state that national identity cards are to be issued to citizens whose particulars are entered in the National Register of Citizens (NRC), a subset of the National Population Register (NPR), which lists all residents. The NRC is mandated in the Act; the NPR is authorised by rules framed under the Act. The NRC is to include only citizens who have proved that they indeed are.



Varghese K. George

The law is clear that when challenged, the onus of proving citizenship lies on the individual, and not the state. Alongside the 2010 Census during the United Progressive Alliance government, data for the NPR was collected, which was updated in 2015, with details of 119 crore residents. Whether the NPR will be updated along with Census 2027 remains unclear. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) dropped its promise of an NRC from the 2024 election manifesto. Any resident can be on the NPR, but to graduate to the NRC, one has to prove that they meet the requirements under the Citizenship Act.

The founders of the Republic favoured a territorial conception of citizenship, *Jus Soli* or 'Right of the Soil', though elements of blood lineage and ethnicity were also included in the original citizenship Act, *Jus Sanguinis* or 'Right of Blood/lineage' gained more prominence over the decades. Consequently, citizenship by birth in India has multiple caveats. As the law stands today, to be eligible for citizenship by birth in India, regardless of who the parents are, one has to be born before July 1, 1987. Persons born in India between July 1, 1987 and December 2, 2004 are citizens of India only if either of the parents is a citizen of the country at the time of his/her birth; and for persons born in India on or after December 3, 2004 to be eligible for citizenship, apart from at least one parent being a citizen, the other parent must not be an 'illegal migrant' at the time of birth. The Citizenship Act of 1955 has been amended multiple times, and it was in 2003 that legislation determined that a section of the residents are 'illegal immigrants' who were to be identified and deported; they and their progeny would not be eligible for Indian citizenship by birth. For a person to be eligible for Indian citizenship by birth now, either both their parents must be determined as citizens, or one of them should be a citizen and the other should not be an illegal immigrant. A section of the identified illegal immigrants qualify for Indian citizenship under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, which turned controversial for the explicit religious test that it mandates.

In 2008, in a pilot project, a few lakh Indians were issued the Multipurpose National Identity Card (MNIC) by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). The card, with an embedded electronic chip with 10 fingerprints, an iris scan, and photograph, along with name, date of birth, parents' names, place of birth, and place of issue had 10-year validity. The NRC for the whole country was a promise made in the BJP's 2019 manifesto. In 2024, the party went silent on it and we do not hear much about it. The SIR by the ECI comes as a proxy of this exercise.

**A persisting conflict**  
Regardless of which Ministry or Department oversees the exercise, questions of citizenship, treason and sedition with regard to an individual are decided at the lowest level of bureaucracy

and the police. The state's authority is created by the will of the people. People are sovereign; the state is their creation and it is not supposed to be the other way around.

Therefore, the modern state apparatus which has been invested with the authority to determine who constitute the people has contradiction built in it. Whether an individual is a citizen, and whether they are not treasonous or seditious are all determined on a daily basis by the border agent, the constable, the village clerk and whoever is enlisting the voter.

This conflict persists whether or not the ECI is stopped from carrying out the SIR. The same primary schoolteacher who works for the SIR under ECI supervision would make the same determination for NPR, and then the NRC under the MHA's oversight, if things come to that. The definition, design and application of citizenship laws are such that the state decides who the people are.

**The Assam exercise**  
The only State that has a draft NRC – Assam – is proof of this concept. To implement the Assam Accord, Parliament passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 1985, which inserted Section 6A into the Citizenship Act, 1955, effectively creating a separate citizenship regime for Assam that was different from the rest of India, and creating three different cut-offs for residents, and placing them under various citizenship status. A draft NRC was published in 2019, and it marked 19 lakh residents out of 3.29 crore as D, for 'Doubtful citizenship'. A person whose status as a citizen could not be "ascertained beyond reasonable doubt ... to the satisfaction of the registering authority", as per the rules as applied in Assam, ends up as a doubtful citizen.

The BJP government in Assam rejected the draft because a large number of people marked D were Hindus. Once a person is marked D in the NRC and/or the electoral rolls, their voting rights can be suspended, their citizenship can be determined by a foreigner's tribunal, and they could be deported. The process relied heavily on legacy records, of possessing documents regarding parentage and residency that go back several decades, to prove the varying cut-off dates of their residency and lineage.

There can be no argument that nobody should determine the citizenship of a resident of India or voting right is delimited from citizenship status. There can be a debate on who should be making the determination, and about the fairness and transparency of the process. Discomforting as it is, the burden is on the individual to establish the eligibility for citizenship. And it is the administrative state that makes the determination of who constitutes people. That is a fundamental paradox of democracy and in the relationship between the people and the state.

varghese.g@thehindu.co.in

### Carceral culture

Prison manuals must mandate disability-related facilities

**T**he Supreme Court of India's directions last week to provide disability-related support in prisons arose from a petition seeking to implement the existing disability law in places of detention, drawing on the experiences of G.N. Saibaba and Stan Swamy. Both men had serious physical conditions and asked for allowances that would have allowed them to cope with prison life: the state delayed or refused them these accommodations, with grave consequences. Deviating to the constitutional guarantees of equality and life with dignity for prisoners, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 obligates governments to ensure support for all services in their control. Many failures in implementing the Act are structural, however: prisons are a State subject whereas the Union government shapes policy through a model prison manual, laws and advisories. Recent national guidelines on prisoners with disabilities acknowledged special needs and called for accessible infrastructure and procedures whereas many State prison manuals still reflect older assumptions about a prisoner who is physically able. In a separate matter, the Court has held that caste-based segregation in jails is unconstitutional and suo moto said that it would monitor discrimination in prisons along caste, gender, and disability lines.

Colonial and postcolonial prison rules encoded social hierarchies, resulting in a routine assignment of sanitation tasks to Dalit and Adivasi prisoners, who are also over-represented among prisoners relative to their population, and the absence of specific obligations on prison authorities to support prisoners who cannot move or use sanitary facilities without assistance. The NCRB also records a nontrivial number of inmates with mental illness. While the Court had already censured it in *Muruganathan* (2025), whose mandates the new order expands nationwide – for not disaggregating data by disability, it is reasonable to assume that many prisoners experience the intersection of caste bias and disability together. Yet, prison rules and oversight mechanisms have repeatedly normalised the idea that the discomfort faced by some bodies is part of the sentence rather than something the state needs to prevent. Following on from the new order, the Centre and States need to amend prison manuals to include clear duties about disability-related accommodation, and screen for disability at admission and support individuals. These measures require more funds, which means the state also needs to confront its carceral austerity, wherein it expands the punitive and security capacity of prisons at the expense of dispensing rights-related functions. Prison budgets have to be redesigned to treat accessibility and non-discrimination as core obligations. Finally, independent inspections and routine publication of disaggregated data on caste and disability inside prisons should support public oversight, or the Court's directions will remain paper tigers.

PRISON → State subject → State prison manuals.  
↳ Union Govt. → Model Prison Manuals



# The real story of the India-Russia summit

**T**he 23rd India-Russia Summit, which was held in New Delhi last week, once again brought to the fore the treacherous geopolitical terrain that defines today's world. The Ukraine war has pitted India's most important partners against each other. Navigating this quagmire is no easy task, but India has led the way for the world.

## The signal sent, the timing

The red carpet treatment given to Russian President Vladimir Putin on his first visit to India since the Ukraine war began, and his decision to bring a large high-powered Russian delegation, were significant. The delegation included Kirill Dmitriev, the face of peace efforts (who has been functioning along with special U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff, and the U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner). In diplomacy, optics matter. For India, it was meant to remove any ambiguity about the Russia relationship, thereby signalling confidence in dealing with the world. For Russia, it signalled the importance of India in its foreign policy priorities.

On matters of war and peace, timing is no less important. The India-Russia summit took place at a time when Russia's stranglehold on the battlefield is very tight, Ukraine is staring at military defeat and the U.S. has, for all practical purposes, turned its back on Ukraine. Since the only peace effort in town is the one being driven by Mr. Trump, Mr. Modi's unambiguous support to the peace efforts on Ukraine in general should rightly be read as being a full and strong endorsement of the Trump initiative, and should be welcomed by the U.S.

India and the U.S. are on the same page here. If there is anyone who has a stake in the success of Mr. Trump's efforts, it is India. The outlier at this point is Europe and India's challenge will be to



**Pankaj Saran**

is Convener, NatStrat, a former Deputy National Security Adviser and a former Ambassador to Russia

There has been a re-engineering of the relationship between Moscow and New Delhi

preserve the major gains with Europe.

## The pillars of ties

On the bilateral front, the Summit's adoption of a Programme for the Development of Strategic Areas of India-Russia Economic Cooperation till 2030 (Programme 2030) and the enabling decisions to strengthen arrangements for bilateral settlements and trade in national currencies are steps in the right direction. This together with removal of non-tariff barriers, diversification of the trade basket and investments in non-energy sectors can enable the achievement of the \$100 billion trade target by 2030. Areas such as fertilizers, railways, pharmaceuticals, mineral resources and critical raw materials are essential for India's growth needs, for which Russia's huge untapped potential is an invaluable fit.

On the energy front, India is the second largest importer of fossil fuel globally. Assured and affordable availability of energy is quite simply a national security imperative. Russia's resources dwarf the rest of the world. China understood this early on, and has worked, with single-minded purpose, to capture a large chunk of them. Today, companies in the United States are waiting in the wings to do so for energy and all critical minerals. If India does not play its cards right, it risks being pushed out from what is its natural preserve, and at great cost to its economic security. Therefore, the focus on energy cooperation is likely to be a foundational pillar of the relationship going forward.

Three new areas that are maturing well are maritime connectivity involving the Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor, the Northern Sea Route and, relatedly, the shipbuilding sector; second, cooperation in the Arctic, especially the Russian offer to train Indian seafarers; and third, and most importantly, the

export of Indian skilled workers to Russia. The last agreement has come about after years of negotiation. The structural demographic crisis in Russia, including in its Far East, hastened by war losses, curtailment of workers from Central Asia and unease over a growing Chinese presence have contributed to making this agreement a reality. The agreement to ease tourist visas is another quick yielding and long overdue initiative.

Science and technology, and space, nuclear and defence cooperation are all areas of long-standing cooperation built over generations. Russia has been a generous partner in all these areas, with much less strings attached than the West. The Indo-Russian BrahMos has emerged as one of the mainstays of India's missile force, while the S400 air defence system proved its indispensability during Operation Sindoor (May 2025). Due to persistent Indian efforts, levels of localisation, technology transfer and joint production have increased significantly. India still needs support to maintain its Russian origin military inventory even as it shifts to indigenisation. Future defence cooperation is likely to be concentrated on niche technologies and systems.

## In perspective

The real story of the summit is the re-engineering of the relationship, the determination to move ahead despite many hurdles, and the eye being kept on the geopolitical shifts underway between the U.S. and China which draw India and Russia closer. As far as Europe is concerned, the road to peace does not lie through New Delhi. It lies in dialogue between Europe and Russia. India's point is that history contains enough examples to emulate and mistakes to avoid. India believes it is, and can be a valuable partner and friend to both.

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# AI could widen the inequalities in Asia Pacific

Technology often fails when those most affected are excluded from its design, a UN report argues

## DATA POINT

### The Hindu Data Team

**O**ver the past decade, newly funded AI companies have quadrupled the world-over, while AI investment has surged 15-fold (Chart 1). Countries in the Asia-Pacific are also racing to harness this technology. However, a UN report argues that the Asia-Pacific region begins this transition from widely unequal starting points. The AI Preparedness Index in the region varies drastically, ranging from over 70% in advanced economies to under 20% in fragile states. The Index by IMF assesses countries' digital infrastructure, human capital and labour market policies, innovation and economic integration, and regulation and ethics.

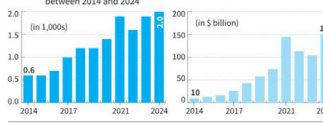
A few economies such as Singapore, South Korea and China have equipped themselves better for AI. Many others, however, lack the access to electricity, data systems, and connectivity needed to participate fully in the transition (Chart 2). These regional divides sit atop deep inequalities within countries themselves. Income and wealth remain heavily concentrated in the top 10% across much of Asia and the Pacific (Chart 3).

The report notes that inclusive adoption will require strengthening both hard and soft foundations. Hard infrastructure includes affordable internet, reliable and clean electricity, cooling resources, and adequate computing capacity. Internet access has expanded rapidly across Asia-Pacific, but inequalities remain (Chart 4). Soft infrastructure includes human capital, strong public institutions, and legal frameworks that ensure secure and fair access. Many nations in the region face skill shortages too (Chart 5).

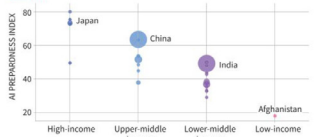
Across Asia-Pacific, women face greater exposure to AI-driven automation than men (Chart 6).



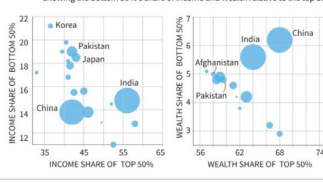
**Chart 1:** The number of newly funded AI companies and the total AI investment between 2014 and 2024



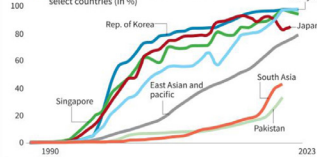
**Chart 2:** IMF's AI Preparedness Index in select Asia-Pacific countries



**Chart 3:** Income and wealth inequality across Asia-Pacific countries in 2023, showing the bottom 50% share of income and wealth relative to the top 10%



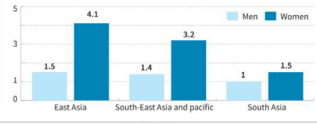
**Chart 4:** Share of population using internet across select countries (in %)



**Chart 5:** Share of population with knowledge of basic arithmetic formula in spreadsheet in 2025 (in %)



**Chart 6:** Jobs exposed to AI-driven automation by sex (in %)



# What is the India Post's DHRUVA framework?

What will be the use cases of the Digital Hub for Reference and Unique Virtual Address (DHRUVA)?

**Aroon Deep**

## The story so far:

**T**he Department of Posts in May proposed a framework called Digital Hub for Reference and Unique Virtual Address, or DHRUVA, which would allow for the standardisation and sharing of physical addresses through "labels" that resemble email addresses. DHRUVA will also help with "effective governance, inclusive service delivery, and enhanced user experience," the postal department said. The government has put out a draft amendment to the Post Office Act, 2023 to enable DHRUVA. This follows the release of DIGIPIN, a 10-digit alphanumeric pin code based on location coordinates.

## What is DHRUVA?

DHRUVA is being proposed as a Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) along the lines of Aadhaar and UPI. The service would

allow a range of players – from logistics players like India Post to e-commerce and gig platforms like Amazon and Uber – to receive a "label" instead of users having to fill out an address. The label would then be authorised by the end user, which would then allow the platform in question to receive both the "descriptive" address, and the "geo-coded" DIGIPIN.

DIGIPIN is an open-sourced location pin system, which India Post developed in-house. Every 12 square metre block in India has its own unique DIGIPIN. India Post hopes that, at least within the postal network, it can be useful in rural areas where precise descriptive addresses may not always be available (or possible), and would help mail delivery personnel with a precise location as a fallback, in addition to the PIN code.

DHRUVA's ecosystem envisions entities like Address Service Providers who would generate a proxy address or label (like amit@dhruva); Address Validation

Agencies who would be able to authenticate addresses; Address Information Agents who would act as intermediaries where users would be able to manage consent for providing their addresses; and a governance entity, along the lines of the National Payments Corporation of India, that would oversee the whole framework.

## How will DHRUVA be used?

India Post said that a key use case would be consent-based data sharing, where people tokenising their addresses (like UPI addresses tokenise bank accounts) can "regulate when their address information can be accessed, and the duration for which it can be accessed through a consent framework." Another useful feature will be updating addresses, allowing users to shift routine deliveries seamlessly when they move houses.

DHRUVA would thus allow users to share their addresses with digital

platforms, public and private. The Department said that this would also help users with "service discovery," by allowing intermediaries to show what doorstep services are available at their location. Since the architecture of such a framework would require data collection, Dvara Research, a non-profit policy research group focusing on issues like financial inclusion, said that a draft law would be needed to authorise it.

## Will it help urban governance?

Beni Chugh, who leads Dvara's Future of Finance Initiative, argued that it was unclear if the system would be helpful in enabling urban governance, as the addresses it envisioned were linked to people, and not independently surveyed structures. "The current design relies on collecting personal information along the addresses, which, makes it necessary to have a consent-based mechanism for address sharing," Ms. Chugh pointed out. "However, if citizens consented not to share addresses or generate address codes, it could result in incomplete datasets of built infrastructure or population. This could reduce the effectiveness of this DPI for urban planning and governance mechanisms. In most parts of the world, digitisation of addresses does not include personal information which preempts the need for users' consent and allows for richer datasets."

## THE GIST

▼  
DHRUVA will help with "effective governance, inclusive service delivery, and enhanced user experience," the postal department said.

▼  
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