What is NAFIS?

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In news—Union Home Minister has recently inaugurated the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) at the two-day National Securities Strategies (NSS) Conference 2022 held in New Delhi.

National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS)-

- The NAFIS project is a **country-wide searchable database of crime- and criminal-related fingerprints.**
- **It was conceptualised and managed by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) at the Central Fingerprint Bureau (CFPB) in New Delhi.**
- The web-based application **functions as a central information repository** by consolidating fingerprint data from all states and Union Territories.
- According to **NCRB,** it enables law enforcement agencies to upload, trace, and retrieve data from the database in real time on a 24×7 basis.
- NAFIS **assigns a unique 10-digit National Fingerprint Number (NFN)** to each person arrested for a crime.
- This unique **ID will be used for the person's lifetime**, and different crimes registered under different FIRs will be linked to the same NFN.
- The **ID's first two digits will be that of the state code** in which the person arrested for a crime is registered, followed by a sequence number.
- By automating the collection, storage, and matching of fingerprints, along with digitizing the records of fingerprint data, **NAFIS will provide the much-needed unique identifier for every arrested person in the CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems) database** as both are connected at the backend.
- It would help in the quick and easy disposal of cases with the help of a centralised fingerprint database.

- In April 2022, **Madhya Pradesh became the first state in the country to identify a deceased person through NAFIS.**
- **Upon the recommendations of the National Police Commission in 1986, the Central Fingerprint Bureau first began to automate the fingerprint database by digitizing the existing manual records** through India's first Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFI) in 1992, called Fingerprint Analysis & Criminal Tracing System (FACTS 1.0)
- **The latest iteration, FACTS 5.0, which was upgraded in 2007,** was considered to have **outlived** its shelf life and thus needed to be replaced by NAFIS.

History of fingerprinting as a crime-fighting tool in India-

- A **system of fingerprinting identification first emerged in colonial India,** where it was tested before it spread to Europe and beyond.
- **At first, it was used by British colonial officials** for administrative rather than criminal purposes.
- **William Herschel, the chief administrator of the Hooghly district of Bengal**, from the late-middle 1800s onwards, **used fingerprinting to reduce fraud and forgeries,** in order to ensure that the correct person was receiving government pensions, signing land transfer deeds, and mortgage bonds.
- The growing use of fingerprinting was deeply tied to how 19th century British officials understood crime in India.
- Entire social groups were categorized as racially distinct **"criminal tribes"** and **were deemed to be "professional" criminals from time immemorial**.
- However, the trouble that they faced was in identifying these groups from the ordinary criminals, something that the British found particularly difficult in such a diverse land.
- **Anthropometry, the measurement of physical features of**

the body, was used by officials in India, but was soon **replaced with a system of fingerprints**, which were seen to be more accurate as it was believed that no two people can have identical sets of patterns, wrote the **historian Simon A Cole in his book 'Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification'.**

- **The uniqueness of every individual's fingerprints was first proposed in Europe by the German anatomist *Johann Mayer* in 1788,** and was confirmed through detailed studies by the Scottish doctor Henry Faulds around the **same time that Herschel had begun to implement fingerprinting as a means of identification in Bengal.**

- While similar attempts were made in England and beyond, the Bengal Police were able to create fingerprint records which replaced the use of anthropometric measurements by 1897, when **the world's first Fingerprint Bureau was established in Calcutta,** four years before a similar decision was taken in England.

- **The Inspector General of the Bengal Police, Edward Henry, recruited two Indian sub-inspectors, Aziz-ul-Haq and H C Bose, for this task.**

- **It was Haq who first devised a system of primary classification** and a system for indexing names in court conviction registers.

- Henry, however, declined to acknowledge the crucial contributions of his Indian subordinates when he presented the so-called "**Henry System of Classification**" in England in 1901, and **established a fingerprint bureau in Scotland Yard**.

- It was only in 1925 that Henry admitted the **invaluable efforts of Haq and Bose to the system of classification,** for which the **colonial state bestowed on them the titles of Khan Bahadur and Rai Bahadur respectively.**