Digital Citizenship Certificates: Hard Copy Only on Request

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Mains: GS-II, citizenship, governance and e-governance



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▼ **In this article**

1. Why in the news
2. What changed: Rule 14 and Rule 15
3. Who is covered: Section 5 and Section 6
4. Background: the five routes to citizenship
5. Significance: the exam view
6. Way forward
7. Prelims practice questions
8. Mains practice questions
9. Frequently asked questions (FAQ)
10. Sources

Why in the news

On 26 November 2026 the Ministry of Home Affairs issued notification **G.S.R. 1007(E)** making the **Citizenship (Fourth Amendment) Rules, 2026**. The rules were published in the Gazette of India (Extraordinary, Part II, Section 3, Sub-section (i)) on 27 November 2026 and came into force the same day. They amend the Citizenship Rules, 2009: every person who acquires Indian citizenship through **registration** or **naturalisation** will now be issued a **digital certificate**, and a **hard copy will be provided only if the applicant requests it**.

One point needs to be clear: the change applies to **people becoming new citizens**. It does not affect the status or documents of existing Indian citizens.

What changed: Rule 14 and Rule 15

The amendments to the Citizenship Rules, 2009 (principal rules G.S.R. 124(E), 25 February 2009):

Certificate of registration (Rule 14):

- Every person registered under **clauses (a), (c), (d), (e) or (f) of Section 5(1)** will be issued a digital certificate of registration in **Form X**.
- Every person registered under **clause (g) of Section 5(1)** (Overseas Citizen of India cardholders) will receive a digital certificate in **Form XI**.

Certificate of naturalisation (Rule 15):

- Every person naturalised under **Section 6(1)** will be issued a digital certificate of naturalisation in **Form XII**.

Signing authority: every digital certificate will be digitally signed, or signed, by an officer **not below the rank of Under Secretary to the Government of India**, or by an officer authorised by the Central Government for this purpose.

Hard copy on request: Rule 14(2B) and Rule 15(1B) have been substituted so that a hard copy of the certificate of registration or naturalisation is issued **on the applicant's request**. The printed copy has not been discontinued; it is simply no longer automatic.

The rules were made in exercise of the powers conferred by **Section 18 of the Citizenship Act, 1955** (57 of 1955). The Citizenship Rules, 2009 were last amended by **G.S.R. 742(E), 19 August 2026**.

Who is covered: Section 5 and Section 6

The clauses of **Section 5(1)** of the Citizenship Act, 1955 to which the new rule applies:

- **Clause (a):** a person of Indian origin ordinarily resident in India for seven years before applying.
- **Clause (c):** a person married to a citizen of India, ordinarily resident in India for seven years before applying.
- **Clause (d):** minor children of persons who are citizens of India.
- **Clause (e):** a person of full age and capacity whose parents are registered as citizens under clause (a) or Section 6(1).
- **Clause (f):** a person of full age who, or either of whose parents, was earlier a citizen of independent India, and who has been ordinarily resident in India for twelve months immediately before applying.
- **Clause (g):** a person of full age registered as an **Overseas Citizen of India cardholder for five years** and ordinarily resident in India for twelve months before applying.

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Naturalisation (Section 6): A person of full age and capacity who is not an illegal migrant may apply through this route on meeting the Third Schedule qualifications. The general residence or service requirement is twelve months immediately before the application and an aggregate of at least eleven years during the preceding fourteen years, in India or in the service of a Government in India. Good character and adequate knowledge of an Eighth Schedule language are also required. The Act provides exceptions and relaxations for specified categories and circumstances, so the eleven-year period is not universal.

Background: the five routes to citizenship

Articles 5 to 11 of the Constitution carry the initial provisions on citizenship, and **Article 11** empowers Parliament to legislate on it. The **Citizenship Act, 1955** enacted under that power lays down five ways of acquiring citizenship:

1. **By birth** (Section 3)
2. **By descent** (Section 4)
3. **By registration** (Section 5)
4. **By naturalisation** (Section 6)
5. **By incorporation of territory** (Section 7)

This amendment changes the digital-certificate provisions for registration and naturalisation under Rules 14 and 15. It does not require all existing Indian citizens to obtain a new document. Digital certificates were already provided for eligible Section 6B applicants; the revised hard-copy provisions also refer to those sub-rules.

Significance: the exam view

- **Digitisation of an administrative process:** a digitally signed certificate can make storage and sharing easier and reduce reliance on a printed copy. It is a step in e-governance and 'Digital India'.
- **A floor on the signing authority:** fixing the minimum rank of the signing officer secures the certificate's authenticity.
- **Exam points:** the name of the rules, the notification number, Section 18, Rules 14/15, Forms X/XI/XII, the clauses of Section 5 and the residence conditions of the Third Schedule are all facts that can be asked directly in Prelims. Mains questions can be framed on citizenship law and e-governance.

Way forward

The success of the digital certificate arrangement will depend on how smooth online verification is and how quickly printed copies reach those who ask for them. It remains to be seen which platforms the online verification of certificates connects to and what practical convenience applicants get.

Prelims practice questions

Question 1. With reference to the Citizenship (Fourth Amendment) Rules, 2026, consider the following statements:

Statement 1: These rules were made in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 18 of the Citizenship Act, 1955

Statement 2: Under these rules, a person acquiring citizenship by registration will be issued a digital certificate in Form X or Form XI

Statement 3: A hard copy of the certificate will no longer be issued under any circumstances

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

▼ **Answer and explanation**

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Statement 1 is correct: the rules were made in exercise of the powers under Section 18 of the Citizenship Act, 1955 (notification G.S.R. 1007(E))

Statement 2 is correct: Form X for clauses (a), (c), (d), (e), (f) of Section 5(1), and Form XI for clause (g)

Statement 3 is incorrect: the hard copy has not been discontinued; it will be issued on the applicant's request

Question 2. With reference to the officer signing digital citizenship certificates under the Citizenship (Fourth Amendment) Rules, 2026, which of the following statements is correct?

(a) The certificate must be signed by the District Collector or an officer above that rank

(b) The certificate will be digitally signed or signed by an officer not below the rank of Under Secretary to the Government of India, or an officer authorised by the Central Government

(c) The certificate bears only the signature of the Home Secretary

(d) The certificate requires no officer's signature

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▼ **Answer and explanation**

Answer: (b)

As per the notification, every digital certificate will be digitally signed or signed by "an officer not below the rank of Under Secretary to the Government of India or an officer as authorised by the Central Government in this behalf". The other options do not match the provision

Question 3. With reference to the general residence requirements for naturalisation under the Citizenship Act, 1955 (excluding statutory exceptions), consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The applicant must have resided in India, or been in the service of a Government in India, throughout the twelve months immediately preceding the date of application

Statement 2: During the fourteen years preceding those twelve months, residence for an aggregate of not less than nine years is required

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 only

(c) Both 1 and 2

(d) Neither 1 nor 2

▼ **Answer and explanation**

Answer: (a) 1 only

Statement 1 is correct: under qualification (c) of the Third Schedule, the twelve months immediately before the application are required

Statement 2 is incorrect: under qualification (d), the aggregate is not less than eleven years, not nine

Mains practice questions

Question 1. Assess the digitisation of citizenship certificates as a step in e-governance. (250 words, 15 marks)

Answer outline

Introduction

- Identify the 2026 amendment and its digital-first certificate arrangement, with printed copies on request.

Main body

- Potential gains: easier storage and sharing, lower dependence on paper and less administrative handling.
- Trust: the prescribed signing authority and secure verification arrangements.
- Inclusion: the continued hard-copy option, digital access and applicant support.
- Limits: cyber security, verification reliability and timely delivery of requested copies.

Conclusion

- Digitisation works when applicants can use and verify their documents easily; a digital format alone does not guarantee good service.

Question 2. Explain the routes to Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Act, 1955. Discuss the main conditions for registration and naturalisation. (250 words, 15 marks)

Answer outline

Introduction

- Connect Article 11 with Parliament's Citizenship Act, 1955.

Main body

- Five routes: birth, descent, registration, naturalisation and incorporation of territory.
- Registration: distinguish the categories under Section 5, including Indian origin, marriage, minors, former citizens and OCI cardholders.
- Naturalisation: explain the general Third Schedule residence or government-service conditions, good character and language knowledge, with statutory exceptions and relaxations.

Conclusion

- Keep substantive eligibility separate from the administrative form of the certificate.

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Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

Q: Will existing Indian citizens need a new digital certificate? A: No. The new rule applies only to people becoming citizens through registration or naturalisation. It has no effect on the status or documents of existing citizens.

Q: Has the hard copy of the citizenship certificate been discontinued? A: No. Under the rule, a hard copy will be issued if the applicant requests one. The digital certificate is now the default.

Q: What changed for OCI cardholders? A: A person registering under Section 5(1)(g) after five years as an OCI cardholder and twelve months of residence will now receive a digital certificate of registration in Form XI.

Sources

- Gazette of India: G.S.R. 1007(E)
- Citizenship Act, 1955: Sections 5, 6, 18 and Third Schedule
- Indian Citizenship Online: Section 6B digital-certificate process

For the distinction between OCI status and citizenship, read: **OCI and the dual-citizenship debate**

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