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1. EU Achieves Milestone: World's First AI Regulation Deal

Introduction

European Commissioner Thierry Breton announced a historic achievement as the European Union (EU) secured a provisional deal on comprehensive laws to regulate the use of artificial intelligence (AI). The deal, reached after a marathon 37-hour negotiation between the European Parliament and member states, positions the EU as the first continent to establish clear rules for AI usage. The proposed AI Act is set for a parliamentary vote in early 2023, with enforcement expected by 2025.

Key Features of the EU Framework

The EU's groundbreaking legislative framework addresses the regulation of AI within its borders. It introduces safeguards, empowers consumers to file complaints against perceived violations, and imposes strict restrictions on facial recognition technology. The legislation also outlines penalties for companies violating the rules, with provisions for government use of real-time biometric surveillance only in specific high-threat scenarios.

EU's Vision for AI Development

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasizes that the AI Act is more than a rulebook; it serves as a launchpad for EU startups and researchers to lead the global AI race. The legislation aims to promote technology development that prioritizes safety and individual rights, providing a unique legal framework for trustworthy AI.

Risk Classification and Regulations

The EU's legal framework categorizes AI applications into four risk classes. While some applications are largely banned, such as mass-scale facial recognition, others, like AI tools for self-driving cars, are permitted but subject to certification and public scrutiny of backend techniques. Medium-risk applications, such as generative AI chatbots, can be deployed with detailed documentation and transparency obligations.

EU vs. Global Approaches to AI Regulation

Europe has taken a leading role in tech regulation over the past decade, with significant laws on online privacy and curbing tech dominance. In contrast, the US and China are also vying for leadership in AI regulation. The US has introduced an executive order

and a proposed AI Bill of Rights, while China has released its own measures. The EU's approach stands out for its detailed and use-case-specific regulations.

India's Unique Approach to AI

India positions itself as a country that effectively uses technology for governance solutions and aims to extend this approach to AI. Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar underscores India's determination to have sovereign AI. The country plans to leverage its Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) model for AI, focusing on real-life applications in healthcare, agriculture, governance, language translation, and more to drive economic development.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; S & T

Source: The Indian Express and The Hindu

2. Recalling the case of Kerala's Hadiya, whose religious conversion led to SC judgement, NIA probe

Why in news?

Hadiya, a woman from Kerala whose religious conversion and marriage to a Muslim man in 2017 led to a high-profile legal case, has divorced her husband and re-married. In a recent video, she said her parents were aware of the decision. The video came two days after her father KM Ashokan moved a habeas corpus petition in the Kerala High Court, alleging that he could not trace his daughter. Ashokan said they used to speak with Hadiya over the phone but did not know where she was. The High Court said it will consider the plea next week.



Back in 2017, Hadiya's father had filed a habeas corpus petition in the HC, sometime after his daughter expressed her wishes to convert to Islam and marry a Muslim man.

Here is what the case was about, why it went to the Supreme Court, and why the central government's counter-terrorism agency National Investigation Agency (NIA) stepped in.

What was the Hadiya case?

Born as KM Akhila in a Hindu family in Kerala's Kottayam, Hadiya enrolled in the Sivaraj Homeopathy Medical College & Research Institute in Salem, Tamil Nadu, in 2010. Here, after becoming friends with some Muslim students, her interest in the religion grew. She began listening to religious sermons on her phone and participated in some rituals, such as fasting during Ramzan.

In 2015, she made her first attempt to convert to Islam by getting an affidavit attested by an advocate in Kochi, saying she was living as a Muslim under no compulsion from anyone. Hadiya attempted to persuade her parents to convert but after their refusal, she left home in 2016 and began living with a friend.

Habeas corpus for Hadiya

On January 12, 2016, Ashokan moved the first habeas corpus petition in the Kerala High Court. A habeas corpus petition is a recourse in law that protects against illegal detention by ordering the person to be produced in court. However, once in court, Hadiya refused to go with her parents.

She went to Sathya Sarani, an organisation for religious learning, and eventually began looking at Muslim matrimonial sites to find a husband.

According to a police officer, this worried Ashokan. Having heard of a few Muslims in Kerala leaving India with their wives to join the terrorist group Islamic State, he moved a fresh writ petition in HC, alleging there was a plan to take his daughter to Syria.

In response to the plea, Hadiya was produced before the court. Following her continued refusal to live with her parents, the court sent her to a hostel in Kochi. Hadiya filed an affidavit in court saying she had embraced Islam of her will, and was later allowed to live with a friend.

In December 2016, she got married to Shefin Jahan. Both were introduced to each other through a matrimonial website. Two days after their wedding, Hadiya returned to court with Jahan. But the court sent Hadiya to the hostel again and ordered Jahan not to have any contact with her.

On May 24, 2017, the Kerala High Court annulled the marriage. Ordering a probe, it said, "A girl aged 24 is weak and vulnerable, capable of being exploited in many ways." It sent Hadiya back to her parents and put her under police surveillance.

When the NIA stepped in

The Supreme Court, acting upon a petition from Jahan, ordered an NIA probe into the case in August 2017. The three-judge bench, headed by then Chief Justice Dipak Misra and comprising Justices AM Khanwilkar and DY Chandrachud, said: "The NIA's involvement is necessary to ascertain if this is really an isolated case or is there something more... something wider..."

The apex court allowed Hadiya to resume her House Surgeoncy at the Homeo Medical College and appointed Dr G Kannan, the college principal, as her guardian. Hadiya was allowed to meet her husband here under CCTV surveillance.

What the Supreme Court ruled

In April 2018, the SC set aside the Kerala HC's annulment of Hadiya and Jahan's marriage. It also ruled that the NIA can continue to probe the issue of a "larger conspiracy" behind the alleged forced religious conversion of Hadiya and others in Kerala.

"We clarify that the investigations by the NIA in respect of any matter of criminality may continue in accordance with law," said the bench.

But Hadiya's choice of a husband cannot be questioned, it added. "She may be brainwashed, but what can we do? Whether the man to whom she is married is good or not is for her to decide. Whether it's an independent choice or not, only she knows. We can't get into it. If she comes to court and says she married by her choice, that's the end of it," the bench said.

"The right to marry a person of one's choice is integral to Article 21 (right to life and liberty) of the Constitution," the court held.

The SC also questioned the HC's decision to annul a marriage of consenting adults. "Can there be a roving inquiry into matrimonial relationship between two consenting adults to find if there was no consent," Chief Justice Dipak Misra had asked.

Ashokan had said he was pained to let his daughter go with a "terrorist", adding he would continue the legal battle. He claimed that the NIA was pursuing a probe because it was convinced that Jahan was a terrorist.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express

3. Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge at COP28

Introduction

On December 2, 118 countries signed a renewable energy pledge at the ongoing COP28 climate summit to triple the world's green energy capacity to 11,000 GW by 2030, thereby, reducing the reliance on fossil fuels in generating energy.

According to the "Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge", countries have to "double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements from around 2% to over 4% every year until 2030".

Coming clean by 2050

Solar, wind, hydropower and biofuels are seen as the fuels of the future, even in developing countries. According to the pledge, the tripling of renewable energy is expected to practically eliminate fossil fuels as energy sources by 2050.

Status of India

Last year, India's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy said that the country was the world's third-largest producer of renewable energy, with 40% of its installed energy capacity coming from non-fossil fuel sources. India has announced its aim to meet 50% of its electricity demands from renewable energy sources by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2070.

India's stand

The pledge was spearheaded by the EU, the US and the UAE and supported by Brazil, Nigeria, Australia, Japan, Canada, Chile and Barbados. India and China have stayed away as the initiative calls for phasing down of coal and "ending the continued investment in unabated new coal-fired power plants". In September 2023, however, India had already supported, as part of the G20, a commitment to work towards tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030. The announcement was one of the strongest declarations to come out of the G20.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express & The Hindu