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1. What is cyber kidnapping, how to protect yourself?



What happened?

A Chinese student who was a victim of 'cyber kidnapping' has been found in rural Utah, unharmed. The 17-year-old, Kai Zhuang, was reported missing on December 28. By the time the police traced him, his parents back in China had paid \$80,000 in ransom.

The boy's parents had informed his host school, in Utah's Riverdale, that he appeared to have been kidnapped. The school then contacted the police. He was found in a tent about 40 km north of Brigham City, where he seems to have self-isolated. What is 'cyber kidnapping', and how does it work?

What is cyber kidnapping?

Cyber kidnapping refers to a crime where the 'kidnappers' convince their victim to hide, and then contact their loved ones for ransom. The victim is also made to send pictures that make it look like they are being held captive — showing them bound or gagged. These are then shared with the family. Both parties believe their loved ones will be harmed if they don't do as the kidnappers ask.

The 'kidnappers', though not physically present, monitor the victim online through video-call platforms. In the Utah boy's case too, his parents were sent a picture indicating he had been kidnapped. The police believe he was being manipulated by

the kidnapers since December 20. He was traced by analysing call data and bank records.

According to the FBI's website, "Although virtual kidnapping takes on many forms, it is always an extortion scheme—one that tricks victims into paying a ransom to free a loved one they believe is being threatened with violence or death. Unlike traditional abductions, virtual kidnapers have not actually kidnapped anyone. Instead, through deceptions and threats, they coerce victims to pay a quick ransom before the scheme falls apart."

How to protect yourself?

Experts recommend being extra careful with calls from unknown numbers, though cyber criminals can also make it appear like they are calling from a loved one's number. Scammers can use data you have shared on social media to make their calls more convincing, so be careful of what you share about yourself and your children online, specially names, specific locations, pictures of your home, neighbourhood, or children's school.

Experts also recommend checking up on your loved ones before making payments, and to approach the police.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: The Indian Express

2. A brothel 'customer' can be charged under ITP Act: What the Kerala HC has said

Introduction

A customer in a brothel can be charged under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, the Kerala High Court ruled on December 21, 2023. In doing so, Justice P G Ajithkumar observed that a "consumer" comes within the purview of Section 5 of the 1956 Act, which punishes those who 'procure', 'induce', or 'take' people for prostitution.

The ITP Act

The ITP Act was passed on December 30, 1956 to prevent 'the commercialisation of vices' and the 'trafficking of females'.

Section 2 defines a "brothel" to include "any house, room, or place, or any portion of any house, room or place, which is used for purposes [of sexual exploitation or abuse] for the gain of another person or for the mutual gain of two or more prostitutes." The term "prostitution" is defined as "the sexual exploitation, or abuse of persons, for commercial purposes."

Section 5 penalises anyone who “procures or attempts to procure a person, with or without their consent, for prostitution purposes.” It also punishes those “inducing persons to go from any place, for prostitution purposes, to become inmates of, or frequent, a brothel.”

Causing or inducing persons to engage in prostitution is punishable with rigorous imprisonment for 3–7 years, along with a Rs 2,000 fine. However, if such an offence is committed against a person’s will or a child, the maximum sentence can be extended to fourteen years or life.

The current case

In the present case, the petitioner was found as a customer in a brothel and arrested. Accused of offences under the ITP Act’s Sections 3 (keeping a brothel or allowing premises to be used as one), 4 (living on prostitution earnings), 5 (procuring, inducing, or taking persons for prostitution), 7 (punishing prostitution in or around public places), the accused filed a plea before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Alappuzha, seeking to be discharged.

The district court rejected the plea and directed that charges be framed against him. The aggrieved petitioner thus moved the Kerala High Court against the lower court’s order.

What the Kerala HC ruled

Noting that the term “procure” isn’t defined in the 1956 Act, the court observed that the word must be understood in the context in which it’s used, bearing in mind the Act’s objective of suppressing immoral trafficking or preventing prostitution.

Although the word ‘procure’ refers to getting possession of or obtaining something, the court construed it to mean those getting or obtaining “domain over a person” for prostitution.

Therefore, the court upheld the lower court order and dismissed the petitioner’s plea, concluding that a consumer also comes within the purview of Section 5.

What the ruling changes

The Kerala High Court ruling has expanded the meaning of the term “procure” in Section 5 of the ITP Act, by adding that a customer will be held liable in addition to pimps/brothel-keepers who “hire” persons for prostitution.

Previously, high courts have expressed differing opinions on whether a brothel customer can be held liable under the ITP Act.

In December 2022, the Kerala HC in *Mathew vs the State of Kerala* ruled that a customer caught in a brothel can be prosecuted under the ITP Act. "Section 7(1) of the Act penalises two types of persons for indulging in prostitution within the areas specified. Those persons are (i) the person who carries on prostitution and (ii) the person with whom such prostitution is carried on," the HC said, adding that the act of immoral traffic cannot be perpetrated or carried on without a 'customer'.

Prior to that ruling, however, the Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka HCs in *Goenka Sajan Kumar vs The State Of AP (2014)* and *Sri Sanauilla vs State Of Karnataka (2017)* ruled against prosecuting brothel customers under sections 3-7 of the ITP Act.

So, what does this mean?

Importantly, the Kerala High Court ruling has not held the petitioner guilty under Section 5 of the ITP Act — it has simply held that he can be charged under it. He will now face trial. Notably, the petitioner was discharged of offences under Sections 3, 4, and 7 by the High Court.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express

3. Nrega, Nyay and PM-Kisan: Why do politicians rush to give direct benefits (cash) to the poor

Why in news?

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge reportedly said that if voted to power, the party would implement the NYAY scheme under which women would be given "at least Rs 60,000-70,000" annually. NYAY is an acronym for Nyuntam Aay Yojana (or Minimum Income Scheme).

Congress's 2019 manifesto had promised that NYAY would be provided to the poorest 20% of Indian families (roughly 5 crore families out of a total of 25 crore; assuming 5 people per household). Nyay was to include a guaranteed payment of Rs 72,000 to each eligible family.

Around the same time, in 2018, the incumbent government, led by Prime Minister Modi, had rolled out a similar scheme called PM-KISAN (Pradhan Mantri – Kisan Samman Nidhi). It was billed as the world's largest direct benefit (read cash) transfer

(or DBT) scheme for farmers and involved “an income support of 6,000/- per year in three equal installments will be provided to all land holding farmer families” in India.

Issues to be discussed

There are several questions here: What is the charm of such schemes? Are they the same as Universal Basic Income? Have they worked elsewhere? Can a country such as India afford them?

Why are Nyay/PM-Kisan not UBI?

While these schemes resemble UBI, the first thing to note is that they are not exactly the roll out of Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Under a UBI, the government gives a “basic” income to every citizen in the country — from the richest person to the poorest one, regardless of whether they work or not. But there is a flip side to UBI: The government also rolls back all types of subsidies — from food to fertiliser to train tickets to medical bills.

The idea is simple: Just give everyone a minimum income amount, cut down the bureaucratic costs involved in running scores of welfare programmes, and simply tax everyone in such a manner as to fund the UBI. The truly needy people will get a minimum help while anyone who doesn't actually need the UBI help will find it taxed away.

As should be evident, such schemes — be it the proposed Nyay or the existing PM-KISAN — are different in all three aspects.

For one, they are not accompanied by removal of all the existing subsidies. It is not as if the poor or the farmers will be deprived of other social welfare schemes if they enjoy the DBT.

Secondly, the amount is much smaller than what anyone can consider to be the minimum or basic income that everyone needs to have to live a decent life. Lastly, the

scope of the schemes is limited to a section of Indians; these are targeted schemes, not universal ones.

Why has UBI not been rolled out?

Even though UBI has captured the imagination of people, the hard fact is that no country can afford it.

In rich countries such as Switzerland (which considered and refused to adopt UBI) the UBI amount is quite a lot even though the population may be small. Sheer affordability itself is a massive stumbling block.

The other problem is the reduction of existing subsidies. Announcing the removal of existing subsidies is almost certain to create a political backlash.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Indian Express