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## 1. How can child safety be ensured online?

### Why in news?

In early February, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg provided a public apology to parents whose children were victims of online predators during a Congressional hearing, that could be described as hostile to not just Meta, but other tech majors including X, TikTok, Snapchat, and Discord. The Big Tech and the Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis hearing was reportedly called "to examine and investigate the plague of online child sexual exploitation" and all their executives were pinned on their abdication of responsibility to protect children on social media platforms.



### What are the issues with children's safety online?

Tech majors are increasingly finding themselves in the midst of a maelstrom of protests across the world, not just over privacy concerns, but also with the security of users online. Across the world, parents and activists are aggressively advancing the agenda of having the tech companies take responsibility, or provide platforms that are 'safe by design' for children and young users.

### Are the risks significant?

The potential risks to children are significant, the report points out. "These include safety concerns such as exposure to graphic sexual content, bullying, sexual harassment and abuse, which in immersive virtual environments can feel more 'real' than on current platforms." Further, vast amounts of data, including about non-verbal behaviour are collected, potentially allowing a handful of large tech companies to facilitate hyper-personalised profiling, advertising and increased surveillance, impacting children's privacy, security, other rights and freedom.

Then there is the mental health aspect, with children facing the prospect of trauma, soliciting and abuse online, which can leave deep psychological scars that impact lives in the real world too. Innocuous and innocent sharing of images online can also be twisted by depraved predators. End-to-end encryption is essential to protect the information that children share online.

### What about the reach of generative AI?

The Davos World Economic Forum in a paper last year explained that generative AI brings potential opportunities, such as homework assistance, easy-to-understand explanations of difficult concepts, and personalised learning experiences that can adapt to a child's learning

style and speed. "Children can use AI to create art, compose music and write stories and software (with no or low coding skills), fostering creativity," it says. For children with disabilities, a world opens up as they can interface and co-create with digital systems in new ways through text, speech or images.

But Generative AI has been shown to instantly create text-based disinformation indistinguishable from, and more persuasive than, human-generated content. AI-generated images are sometimes indistinguishable from reality. Children are vulnerable to the risks of mis/disinformation as their cognitive capacities are still developing. There is also a debate about how interacting with chatbots that have a human-like tone will impact young minds.

### **What can be done to keep children safe online?**

The primary responsibility is that of the tech companies who will have to incorporate 'safety by design'. The proceedings of the Congressional hearings have made it obvious that these companies are fully cognisant of the extent to which their apps and systems impact children negatively.

Drawing on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF offers guidance that lists nine requirements for child-centred AI, including support for children's development and well-being, and protecting children's data and privacy. UNICEF recommends that tech companies apply the highest existing data protection standards to children's data in the metaverse and virtual environments.

In addition, governments have the burden of assessing and adjusting regulatory frameworks periodically to ensure that such technologies do not violate children's rights, and use their might to address harmful content and behaviour inimical to children online.

Ultimately, everyone must start from the assumption that all the rules that exist in the real world to protect children, should also prevail online.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

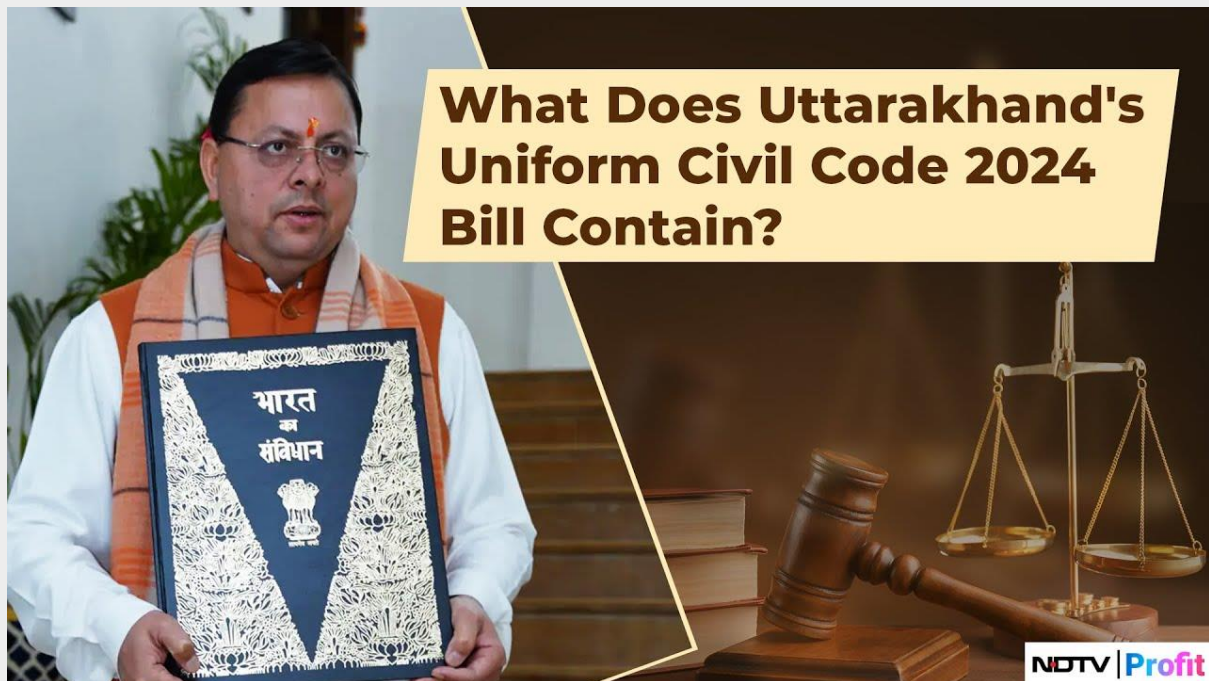
**2. What does Uttarakhand's UCC entail? How will the Uniform Civil Code Bill impact divorce, inheritance of property, and live-in relationships? What are the penalties if the new law is violated? Has any community been left outside its purview? Are other BJP-ruled States also considering formulating a UCC?**

### **Why in News?**

On February 7, the Uttarakhand Assembly passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill, becoming the first legislature in independent India to pass a law that proposes common rules on marriage, divorce, inheritance of property, and live-in relationships for all citizens, irrespective of their religion. This stems from Article 44 of the Constitution (Directive Principles of State Policy) which although not enforceable, obligates the State to strive to implement such a uniform law. The Bill will now be sent to the President for her assent after which it will become a law.

### Who is the Bill applicable to?

It applies to all residents of Uttarakhand except the tribal community which constitutes 2.9% of the State's population. The community has been averse to a UCC from the very beginning. Accordingly, Section 2 stipulates — "Nothing contained in this code shall apply to the members of any Scheduled Tribes."



### How does it regulate live-in relationships?

The Bill imposes an obligation on all heterosexual couples (irrespective of whether they are residents of Uttarakhand or not) to register their live-in relationships by submitting a "statement" to the concerned Registrar. Even if such a relationship is terminated, the Registrar has to be kept informed. In case either of the partners is less than 21 years old, the declaration will also be sent to their parents or guardians.

Subsequently, the Registrar will conduct a "summary inquiry" to ensure that the relationship does not fall under any of the prohibited categories mentioned under Section 380 — if a partner is married or in another relationship, if he or she is a minor, and if his or her consent was obtained by "coercion, fraud or misrepresentation". The Registrar will then have to decide within 30 days. If the registration is refused, reasons have to be conveyed in writing.

Notably, a woman is eligible to claim maintenance in case she is "deserted" by her live-in partner.

In case a couple has spent a month without registering their live-in relationship, they can face a jail term of up to three months or a maximum fine of ₹10,000, or both. Any false statement by them will also attract the same jail term, but a higher fine amount of ₹25,000, or both. Upon being issued a notice, if they still do not register, they may face six months of imprisonment or a fine of ₹25,000 or both.

The Bill abolishes the concept of “illegitimate children” by extending legal recognition to children born in void and voidable marriages, as well as children born in live-in relationships.

### **Is bigamy or polygamy permitted?**

One of the conditions stipulated under Section 4 for a valid marriage is that neither party should have “a spouse living at the time of the marriage” thus prohibiting practices such as bigamy or polygamy. The minimum age of marriage, however, will remain the same.

### **Do marriages have to be registered?**

Marriages that occur after the enactment of the law have to be compulsorily registered within 60 days. This applies to marriages solemnised within the State or outside its territory, provided that at least one party to the marriage is a resident of Uttarakhand. Although non-registration of marriage will not invalidate it, parties can attract a penalty of up to ₹10,000. A three-month jail term and a fine of ₹25,000 will be also awarded in case false information is intentionally rendered during marriage registration.

Marriage ceremonies can be conducted in accordance with any religious and customary rites detailed under legislations such as The Anand Marriage Act, 1909, Arya Marriage Validation Act, 1937, and The Special Marriage Act, 1954, among others.

### **What about divorce proceedings?**

No marriage can be dissolved without a court order or else it can attract imprisonment up to 3 years. Grounds for divorce also include religious conversion but not “irretrievable breakdown of marriage” despite the latter being recognised in several Supreme Court judgments.

Importantly, Section 28 prohibits the initiation of divorce proceedings unless one year has elapsed since the date of marriage. However, an exception can be made if the petitioner has suffered “exceptional hardship” or if the respondent has exhibited “exceptional depravity”. Women can specifically seek a divorce in case the husband has been found guilty of rape or any kind of unnatural sexual offence or if he has more than one wife. Following a divorce, the custody of a child up to 5 years remains with the mother.

### **How are inheritance rights affected?**

A distinct feature of the Bill is that it abolishes the coparcenary system governing ancestral property under the Hindu Succession Act, 1956. Thus, the same scheme of succession will now apply to both ancestral and self-acquired property for Hindus.

In the event of intestate succession, the Bill guarantees equal property rights for the spouse, children, and parents — a departure from existing personal laws that limit such rights. If there is no immediate family, the property will be equally divided among second-line relatives — first cousins from the paternal side. Others can also stake a claim if no eligible claimants are found.

### **Does the Bill criminalise Muslim personal law practices?**

Existing Muslim personal law practices governing marriage and divorce such as nikah halala, iddat, and triple talaq have been criminalised without explicitly naming them. For instance, Section 30(1) stipulates that the right of a person to remarry the divorced spouse can only be exercised without any condition, such as marrying a third person before such a marriage. This therefore prohibits the practice of nikah halala.

Section 32 further provides that anyone who “compels, abets or induces” to observe any such condition before remarriage will be punished with imprisonment up to three years and also be liable to pay a fine of ₹1 lakh.

### **What do experts have to say?**

The mandatory registration of live-in relationships is intrusive and definitely in breach of the fundamental right to privacy as it forces you to submit yourself to the state on something as intimate as a personal relationship.

Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have also appointed committees to initiate the formulation of a UCC. This effectively defeats the purpose of Article 44 since the Constitution framers did not intend for every State to have its own different version of a UCC.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

### **3. 'SWATI' (Science for Women-A Technology & Innovation) Portal launched**

#### **Why in News?**

Government of India today launched “Science for Women-A Technology & Innovation (SWATI)” Portal, aimed at creating a single online portal representing Indian Women and Girls in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics & Medicine)

The Portal is a complete interactive database; and the first-of-its-kind in India which is developed, hosted and maintained by the National Institute of Plant Genome Research (NIPGR), New Delhi.

#### **Objectives behind Portal**

The Portal will be beneficial towards dissemination of knowledge, new advances in fundamental science and role/importance of innovation and entrepreneurship development in strengthening the backbone of Atmanirbhar Bharat. This would also provide an opportunity to discuss and evolve a roadmap for 'Women in Science' & 'Science for Women'.

The other objectives of the SWATI Portal include to scale up the effort exponentially to include each and every Indian woman in science, across all career stages and subjects, spanning both Academia and the Industry enabling reliable and statistically significant long term research on the issues of equality, diversity and inclusivity in India; Inclusion of each and every Indian WiS, career stages, subjects, spanning both Academia and the Industry; Enabling reliable and statistically significant long term research on the issues of equality, diversity and inclusivity in India, developing active search engine and searchable database (Name, Affiliation, Area of Interest).

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance  
Source: The Hindu

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