

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The Supreme Court of India has directed the Delhi government to consider a permanent ban on firecrackers due to severe pollution levels during Deepavali.

- The court noted the lack of enforcement of existing bans and criticised recent amendments that weakened penal provisions.
- Authorities are required to submit affidavits explaining their failure to enforce the ban and their plans for future regulations.

SC to consider 'perpetual ban' on firecrackers in the national capital

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Delhi government to take a call on imposing a “perpetual ban” on the use of firecrackers in the national capital, noting that pollution reached an “all-time high” during Deepavali.

“The Government of Delhi may take a call on the perpetual ban on the use of firecrackers in Delhi,” the apex court recorded in its order. A Bench headed by Justice A.S. Oka indicated it would, on getting the Delhi government’s response, contemplate extending the much-flouted firecracker ban beyond the Deepavali season to cover other events and festive occasions, including weddings and even elections.



Safety risk: Vehicles move on a road amid low visibility due to smog during Deepavali in New Delhi on October 31. PTI

“There is no dispute the ban was hardly implemented. As an effect of non-implementation, the pollution levels in Delhi are at an all-time high, in fact, higher than during the Deepavali days of 2022 and 2023,” the court noted in its order, referring to an expert report from the

Centre for Science and Environment.

“The problem is the amendments that came into force in the Air Pollution Act from April 1, 2024... The penal provision has been taken away by the Government of India... violators need to only pay a penalty,” Justice Oka

observed orally. The apex court made the observation after taking cognisance of newspaper reports that a series of its orders from 2016, banning firecrackers in Delhi, had gone up in smoke during Deepavali.

To file affidavits

The court ordered the Delhi government and the Commissioner of Police to file affidavits explaining why the court’s ban was not enforced. The police chief has to detail the steps which were taken to enforce the “complete ban on firecrackers in Delhi”.

The court ordered the Delhi government and the Police Commissioner to reveal their plans to stop the sale and use of firecrackers in 2025. The affidavits have to be filed in a week.

Supreme Court’s Directive on Firecrackers in Delhi

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➡ Call for Perpetual Ban:

- The Supreme Court has urged the Delhi government to consider imposing a “perpetual ban” on the use of firecrackers in the national capital.
- This request comes in light of alarmingly high pollution levels during the Deepavali festival.

➡ Pollution Levels Noted:

- The court highlighted that pollution levels in Delhi have reached an “all-time high,” surpassing those recorded during Deepavali in 2022 and 2023.
- An expert report from the Centre for Science and Environment supports these claims.

➡ Concerns About Implementation:

- Justice A.S. Oka pointed out that the existing ban on firecrackers has been poorly enforced.
- The court expressed its intent to extend the ban beyond Deepavali to other festive occasions, including weddings and elections.

➡ Amendments to Air Pollution Act:

- The Supreme Court raised concerns regarding amendments to the Air Pollution Act that came into effect on April 1, 2024.
- These changes reportedly diminished penal measures, allowing violators to face only monetary penalties.

Implications of the Supreme Court's directive

➡ Pros:

- Improved Air Quality: A ban could significantly reduce air pollution, particularly during festive seasons, leading to better public health outcomes.
- Enhanced Public Awareness: It raises awareness about the environmental impacts of firecrackers, fostering a culture of responsible celebration.
- Legal Clarity: A clear directive from the Supreme Court may strengthen enforcement mechanisms and provide a legal framework for penalties against violators.

➡ Cons:

- Impact: The ban may adversely affect the livelihoods of those involved in the firecracker industry, including manufacturers and vendors.
- Enforcement Challenges: Ensuring compliance with the ban could be difficult, as past regulations have been widely flouted.
- Public Backlash: Resistance from communities that view firecrackers as integral to celebrations could lead to public discontent and non-compliance.

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After three years of restricted access due to the 2020 stand-off, the Indian Army has resumed patrolling in Depsang and Demchok in eastern Ladakh.

- The disengagement from these final friction points marks a return to the pre-April 2020 status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- This development aims to reinforce peace and stability in the region.

After Demchok, Indian Army resumes patrolling in Depsang

Disengagement was completed from the two friction points in Ladakh last Wednesday; patrolling in Demchok resumed a day later; ground commanders, of the ranks of Brigadier and below, had held meetings to work out modalities of patrols

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The Indian Army has successfully patrolled one of the five Patrolling Points in Depsang Ara of eastern Ladakh, the Leh-based 14 Corps announced late on Monday. This marks the resumption of patrolling in the area for the first time since disengagement was undertaken last week and after the stand-off that began in May 2020.

"Following the consensus reached between the Indian and Chinese Side for disengagement and resumption of patrolling in Depsang and Demchok, the Indian Army patrol to one of the patrolling points in Depsang was successfully conducted today. This is yet another positive step towards maintaining peace and tranquility on the LAC [Line of Actual Control]," the 14 Corps said in a post on X.

Patrolling Point 10 was accessed in the patrol as agreed by the two aides, sources said.

Last Wednesday, disengagement was completed



Resuming ties: Soldiers of the Indian and Chinese Armies exchanged greetings at Hot Springs on Deepavali in Leh last Thursday. Disengagement was completed from Demchok and Depsang in eastern Ladakh, last Wednesday. ANI

from Demchok and Depsang in eastern Ladakh, which were also the last two friction points of the 2020 stand-off, amid a return to the pre-April 2020 status quo.

Following this, the Army resumed patrolling in Demchok a day later.

Resumption of patrolling in Depsang means the Indian Army can carry out patrols up to Patrolling Points 10, 11, 11A, 12, and 13

in the area which it last managed to access in January 2020.

While Patrolling Points 11A, 12 and 13 are located on the Limit of Patrolling (LoP) area, 10 and 11 are located much before LoP. Depsang is also the place where the distance from the LoP to the LAC is the maximum.

With disengagement now completed from all the friction points, the next

step is to work out new patrolling norms along the LAC and resume patrolling at other friction points as well – Galwan, Patrolling Points 15 and 17A in Gogra Hotsprings area, and north and south banks of Pangong Tso – where currently buffer zones are in place.

Following completion of disengagement, both sides undertook verification to confirm it on the ground. Ground commanders, of

the ranks of Brigadier and below, held meetings last Wednesday to work out the modalities for patrolling at Depsang and Demchok.

However, given that there has been a stand-off at Demchok since 2017 and the latest agreement is for restoring the ground situation to pre-April 2020 situation, it is not clear up to what point the Army would get to patrol in the Demchok area.

Places In News:

➤ Depsang Plains

- Located in eastern Ladakh, the Depsang Plains are strategically significant due to their proximity to the Karakoram Pass, connecting Ladakh with China's Xinjiang region.

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Daily News Analysis

- Depsang has been a frequent point of contention due to its flat terrain, which allows for easy military movement.
- It was one of the major areas affected during the 2020 stand-off, and patrolling there has recently resumed.

➡ **Demchok**

- Situated in the southeastern part of Ladakh, Demchok is close to the LAC, with a population primarily consisting of nomadic herders.
- It has been a friction point with China since 2017, with tensions over infrastructure development and grazing rights.
- The recent disengagement agreement aims to return control to the pre-April 2020 status, though specific patrolling limits remain unclear.

➡ **Galwan Valley**

- This narrow valley lies near the confluence of the Galwan River and the Shyok River in Ladakh.
- The site witnessed a violent clash in June 2020, leading to casualties on both sides.
- Since then, buffer zones have been established here, and patrolling is yet to resume under new norms.

➡ **Gogra and Hot Springs**

- Gogra and Hot Springs are located northwest of Pangong Tso and are key areas along the LAC.
- Both areas saw significant troop build-ups and tensions during the 2020 stand-off.
- Disengagement agreements have created buffer zones, and resumption of patrolling here is under discussion.

➡ **Pangong Tso (Lake)**

- This high-altitude lake stretches from India to China, with roughly two-thirds of it under Chinese control.

➡ **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**

- The LAC serves as the de facto border between India and China, running through Ladakh in the western sector.
- Patrolling along the LAC has been a source of frequent tensions, with disputed areas and differing perceptions of the boundary on both sides.

➡ **Limit of Patrolling (LoP)**

- The LoP refers to the farthest points up to which Indian troops traditionally patrol, marking India's perception of the LAC.
- In Depsang, the LoP is notably distant from the LAC itself, underscoring the vast, disputed area and strategic concerns around patrolling rights.

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The news discusses the challenges faced by wealthy nations in funding global biodiversity conservation efforts, highlighting inadequate financial commitments at COP16.

- ➔ With growing environmental crises, the need for sustainable funding sources is critical.

COP29 Overview

- ➔ Following COP28, COP29 is scheduled to occur in Baku, Azerbaijan – continuing discussions on urgent climate financing needs.
- ➔ The summit aims to address the financial gaps that hinder effective climate action and sustainable development.
- ➔ Discussions will emphasise innovative funding solutions and international cooperation.

Funding Challenges

- ➔ Wealthy nations have hit a limit on their willingness to contribute to global conservation efforts, complicating the mobilisation of the targeted \$200 billion annually by 2030.
- ➔ Only \$30 billion is expected from developed countries, despite commitments made during the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework agreement.
- ➔ At COP16, nations collectively pledged merely \$163 million to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund, resulting in total contributions of around \$400 million, significantly short of the \$30 billion target.
- ➔ There has been a decline in foreign aid budgets, with development funding for nature conservation dropping from \$4.6 billion in 2015 to \$3.8 billion in 2022, as reported by the OECD.
- ➔ Countries are increasingly looking towards private funding sources to fill the financing gap.



Nations pledged \$163 million, bringing total contributions to \$400 million — far from the \$30 billion target. SERGEI GRITS/AP

COP29 will launch with looming funding gap

Reuters

Wealthy nations appeared to have hit a limit with how much they are willing to pay to conserve nature around the world, instead shifting their focus at the two-week U.N. biodiversity summit towards discussions of private money filling the funding gap.

At the COP16 negotiations in Cali, Colombia, countries failed to figure out how they would mobilise \$200 billion annually in conservation funding by 2030, including \$30 billion that would come directly from rich nations.

That money, pledged two years ago as part of the landmark Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework agreement, is meant to finance activities that boost nature, such as sustainable farming or patrolling wildlife reserves.

But there was no consensus as talks dragged on beyond the summit's scheduled end on November 2, during which dozens of delegations departed to catch flights. By Saturday morning's roll call, there was no longer a quorum among the nearly 200 nations for an agreement to pass, forcing organisers to suspend the meeting.

"I am both saddened and enraged by the non-outcome of COP16," said Shilpa Gautam, chief executive of project finance firm Opna.

"The wild thing about the nature financing discussions is that the numbers discussed are already a pittance."

Human activities such as farming, mining, and urban development are increasingly pushing nature into crisis, with one million or so plant and animal

European governments, including Germany and the Netherlands, have slashed their foreign aid budgets over the last year, while France and the U.K. are also cutting back

species thought to be at risk of extinction. Climate change is also adding to nature's woes by raising temperatures and disrupting weather cycles.

Countries will meet again in Azerbaijan next week for the COP29 climate summit, which again will be focused on the steep need for funding from wealthy nations to their poorer counterparts to help shoulder climate change.

Even before the talks broke down, developed nations had signalled an unwillingness to offer large amounts of cash.

European governments, including Germany and the Netherlands, have slashed their foreign aid budgets over the last year, while France and the U.K. are also cutting back.

Government development money specifically targeted at nature conservation abroad fell to \$3.8 billion in 2022 compared with \$4.6 billion in 2015, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

At COP16, U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres demanded that countries make significant new contributions to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund.

The response was muted. Nations at COP16 pledged \$163 million in contributions to the fund, bringing total contributions to roughly \$400 million — far from a major contribution to the \$30 billion target from nations by 2030.

The United States, which is not a party to the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, has not contributed.

"The public's money is already leveraged as much as we can," Florika Fink-Hooijer, the European Union's director general of environment, told

Page 15 : Prelims fact

China's Tiangong space station mission marks a significant achievement in its space exploration efforts, following successful lunar and Mars missions.

- The return of astronauts highlights China's ambitions to establish itself as a leader in global space activities by 2030.

Tiangong Space Station

- Tiangong, meaning "Heavenly Palace," is China's modular space station, completed in 2021.
- It orbits Earth at an altitude of approximately 340 to 450 kilometers.
- The station supports various scientific experiments and international collaborations in fields such as astronomy, biology, and materials science.
- Tiangong has hosted multiple crewed missions and is expected to be operational for over a decade.
- It plays a crucial role in China's goal to become a leading player in global space exploration.

Long March-2F Carrier Rocket

- The Long March-2F is a Chinese expendable launch vehicle primarily used for crewed missions to the Tiangong space station.
- It is capable of carrying payloads of up to 8.5 tons into low Earth orbit.
- The rocket features a two-stage design, with a strong emphasis on reliability and safety for human spaceflight.
- Its maiden flight occurred in 1999, and it has since successfully launched numerous missions, including Shenzhou crewed spacecraft.
- The Long March-2F is integral to China's expanding space capabilities and exploration ambitions.



A Long March-2F carrier rocket carrying three astronauts lifts off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre. FILE PHOTO

China's space station crew returns to earth after six months

Associated Press
BEIJING

Three Chinese astronauts returned to earth on Monday after a six-month stay on the Tiangong space station, part of China's effort to be a global leader in space exploration.

A parachute slowed their capsule's nighttime descent to a remote landing area in China's Inner Mongolia region. The crew emerged after touching down at 1.24 a.m.

In recent years, the country's space programme has brought back rocks from the moon and landed a rover on Mars. It aims to put a person on the moon by 2030, which would make China the second nation after the U.S. to do so.

The space station astronauts returned after welcoming a replacement three-person, one woman and two men, crew last week for the latest six-month mission.

A space agency official said in April that Tiangong had manoeuvred several times to avoid debris and had partially lost power when the solar wing's power cables were hit by debris, according to a report from the official Xinhua News Agency.

China is among the countries that have created space debris, including the reported break-up of a rocket stage in August during the launch of the first 18 satellites for a global internet service similar to Starlink, the still-growing constellation of satellites operated by Elon Musk's SpaceX.

Tiangong, which means Heavenly Palace, was completed two years ago and orbits the earth.

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In News : Iron Beam

Israel's 'Iron Beam', designed to use a high-power laser to down projectiles, will be operational within a year, according to reports.



About Iron Beam:

- The Iron Beam, also known as Magen or Light Shield, is a new laser-based missile defence system developed by Israel.
- It is a 100kW class High Energy Laser Weapon System (HELWS) that is expected to become the first operational system in its class.
- It is a directed-energy weapon air defence system that fires powerful beams of light that can destroy fast-moving projectiles.
- Built by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, Iron Beam was first unveiled in 2014.

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➡ Its operational range extends up to 7 km (4.3 miles).

Advantages:

- ➡ With a continuous energy supply for the laser, the advantage lies in never depleting ammunition, ensuring a sustained capability for defense.
- ➡ The absence of conventional ammunition will directly result in significant cost savings.
- ➡ Complementing Israel's Iron Dome, it can be integrated with a range of platforms and can become part of any multilayer defence system.

Disadvantages:

- ➡ Diminished effectiveness during restricted visibility, such as heavy cloud cover or adverse weather conditions.
- ➡ It cannot operate effectively in wet conditions—the more moisture in the atmosphere, the more water particles absorb the laser's energy.
- ➡ Iron Beam requires a direct line of sight between the system and its target, making its placement far more critical.
- ➡ It also has a much slower rate of fire, requiring five seconds or so to transmit sufficient energy to destroy its target.

Big Tech's fail — unsafe online spaces for women

Just after U.S. President Joe Biden's stepping away from the 2024 U.S. presidential race and his endorsement of U.S. Vice-President Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party nominee, Ms. Harris got swift support from notable political figures which included former President Barack Obama. But Ms. Harris's candidacy sparked significant political debate. Her campaign was also marred by AI-generated deepfakes and disinformation.

Even before the announcement of her candidacy, Ms. Harris was the target of memes and video content that focused on her mannerisms that generally showed her in a bad light. These attacks escalated after her candidacy was announced. They were personal, focusing on her birth, character, and integrity as an American. For instance, there was a manipulated video with her cloned voice that was shared by Elon Musk. She could be seen saying that "President Biden is senile"; that she does not "know the first thing about running the country" and that, as a woman and a person of colour, she is the "ultimate diversity hire".

In addition to these digital assaults, Ms. Harris faced relentless trolling, particularly from right-wing figures. Former U.S. President Donald Trump often mocked her manner of laughter and labelled her "crazy". Media personalities Megan Kelly and Ben Shapiro were explicit in their posts on how Ms. Harris moved to the top. Social media was flooded with derogatory jokes, sexualised images, and racist and sexist comments directed against her. A recent Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated video depicted Ms. Harris and Donald Trump in a fabricated romantic relationship. These AI-generated videos are not only violative of privacy but also deeply undermine the dignity of women. Despite user knowledge of such content being fake, their wide circulation suggests deep user engagement.

No isolated case

Ms. Harris's ordeal is not an isolated case. Women in power or those aspiring for high office face similar online harassment. When U.S. politician Nikki Haley, for example, was in the running in the Republican primaries, there were manipulated and explicit images of hers that were circulated online. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was a target, featuring in a deepfake and explicit video. In Bangladesh, deepfake images of women politicians Rumin Farhana and Nipun Roy were on social media just before the Bangladesh general election on January 7, 2024. Such content garnered millions of views.



Manish Tiwari

Director of the Institute for Governance, Policies and Politics, New Delhi, focusing on policy for societal good in emerging technology and health ecosystems

The U.S. presidential election campaign has again highlighted a key issue — of technology and online spaces posing a threat to the safety and the dignity of women

This demands the question: how and why do social media platforms allow such content to be posted and shared? What do the content moderators of media platforms do?

Big Tech's failure to curb the deluge of degrading content against women results in a disproportionate burden being imposed on women, impacting their identity, dignity and mental well-being. The nature of online abuse women face is also starkly different from the trolling or insults directed at men. While men may encounter misinformation and disinformation regarding their actions or duties, women face objectification, sexually explicit content and body shaming. Big Tech companies often dodge accountability by claiming that their platforms reflect upon users and that they cannot control it closely. They enjoy immunity from responsibility due to 'safe harbour' protections.

More an illusion of empowering women

Though technology is often praised as a tool for women's empowerment, AI and digital technologies appear anything but gender-neutral. Instead, they reflect societal biases and existing stereotypes. Rather than liberating women, AI can amplify entrenched biases and become a new tool for their abuse and harassment. With AI's rapid evolution, women face increased risks of digital abuse, violence, and threats. These systems, shaped by datasets infused with societal prejudices and developed mostly by men, often lack the inclusivity needed to challenge discrimination effectively. The representation of female staff in technology development (female AI developers) is also low in Meta and Google and OpenAI, according to data from Glass.ai.

Imagine the challenges faced by a serving woman Prime Minister, Ms. Meloni. Now think about the plight of ordinary women. Online harassment sees many women stopping to use digital devices. Or their families restrict their access to these devices, further hindering women's careers and public life. This is not the solution.

Creation and distribution platforms must take the responsibility for failing to curb the spread of harmful content. It is surprising that despite technological advancements, resources are not being invested in developing safety features or enhancing content moderation techniques. Labelling AI-generated content is not always effective. Often, harmful content needs to be removed entirely. For example, with sexually explicit content, the damage comes from sharing and viewing. What is the most troubling is the

owners of big tech themselves sharing misinformation and deepfake videos. While they should be allowed to have a political ideology and profess it, they should also realise the power they hold over millions who may not know fake from real.

Beyond clicks and likes

Big Tech should ensure that proper content moderation teams and safety researchers are not a liability but a necessity. The time taken to review reported pornography is often too long, causing further harm and violating platform policies. The burden should not fall on users to report and follow up on harmful content. Platforms must share the responsibility. Apps that offer explicit services causing harm to women should be critically reviewed and promptly removed from app stores.

Big Tech and policymakers need to resolve such incidents promptly. Women should also be encouraged to take proactive measures by reporting such incidents and taking necessary actions. In Ms. Meloni's case, she sought €1,00,000 in damages. Ms. Harris and her campaign team were able to turn the trolling attacks on their head and question the inherent misogyny of such online attacks. Can we think about huge fines in monetary terms and the limitation of platforms for a certain number of days and in certain geographical limits?

We need more women to be involved in developing technology and holding decision-making positions in tech companies. AI entrepreneur Mustafa Suleyman, in his book, *The Coming Wave*, says moving from technical to non-technical measures is the key.

To make online spaces safer for women, we need safety researchers and simulation exercises to test for gender biases, especially when AI is involved. Technical professionals can check data for biases, as a model is only as good as its training data, while simulations can assess potential risks. This will help to ensure fair, safe and ethical AI by design. Non-technical measures, laws, policies and governance structures must support these efforts.

Ensuring that technology is free from gender bias should not be the job of only feminists, social scientists, ethicists, or users. The responsibility should start with the tech companies which thrive on revenues from the content generated through user interfaces, developers, and algorithms. Governments and their regulatory bodies must set the guardrails to keep these digital spaces safe and fair for women.

GS Paper 02 : Social Justice – Vulnerable Sections

GS Paper 03 : Internal Security – Role of media and social networking sites.

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Discuss the impact of AI-generated deepfakes and digital disinformation on the political landscape, especially concerning gender-based online abuse. What measures should be taken by tech companies and policymakers to curb the spread of harmful content? (150 words/10m)

Context :

- Vice-President Kamala Harris's presidential candidacy has sparked political debate, marred by AI-generated deepfakes and disinformation targeting her character.
- This reflects a broader trend where women in power face gender-specific online harassment.
- The article calls for Big Tech accountability and stronger regulations to prevent digital abuse and ensure safe online spaces.

Targeting of Ms. Harris During Candidacy

- Early attacks: Even before the announcement of her candidacy, Ms. Harris was the target of memes and video content that focused on her mannerisms that generally showed her in a bad light.
 - These attacks escalated after her candidacy was announced.
 - They were personal, focusing on her birth, character, and integrity as an American.
- Manipulated content: For instance, there was a manipulated video with her cloned voice that was shared by Elon Musk.
 - She could be seen saying that "President Biden is senile"; that she does not "know the first thing about running the country" and that, as a woman and a person of colour, she is the "ultimate diversity hire".
- Relentless trolling: In addition to these digital assaults, Ms. Harris faced relentless trolling, particularly from right-wing figures.
 - Former U.S. President Donald Trump often mocked her manner of laughter and labelled her "crazy".
 - Media personalities Megan Kelly and Ben Shapiro were explicit in their posts on how Ms. Harris moved to the top.
- Derogatory content: Social media was flooded with derogatory jokes, sexualised images, and racist and sexist comments directed against her.
 - A recent Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated video depicted Ms. Harris and Donald Trump in a fabricated romantic relationship.
- Implications of AI-Generated content: These AI-generated videos are not only violative of privacy but also deeply undermine the dignity of women.

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- Despite user knowledge of such content being fake, their wide circulation suggests deep user engagement.

No isolated case

- Broader context of harassment: Ms. Harris's ordeal is not an isolated case.
 - Women in power or those aspiring for high office face similar online harassment.
- Examples of online abuse: When U.S. politician Nikki Haley, for example, was in the running in the Republican primaries, there were manipulated and explicit images of hers that were circulated online.
 - Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was a target, featuring in a deepfake and explicit video.
 - In Bangladesh, deepfake images of women politicians Rumin Farhana and Nipun Roy were on social media just before the Bangladesh general election on January 7, 2024.
 - Such content garnered millions of views.
- Questions regarding content moderation: This demands the question: how and why do social media platforms allow such content to be posted and shared?
 - What do the content moderators of media platforms do?
- Impact of online abuse: Big Tech's failure to curb the deluge of degrading content against women results in a disproportionate burden being imposed on women, impacting their identity, dignity and mental well-being.
 - The nature of online abuse women face is also starkly different from the trolling or insults directed at men.
 - While men may encounter misinformation and disinformation regarding their actions or duties, women face objectification, sexually explicit content and body shaming.
- Accountability of Big Tech: Big Tech companies often dodge accountability by claiming that their platforms reflect upon users and that they cannot control it closely.
 - They enjoy immunity from responsibility due to 'safe harbour' protections.

More an illusion of empowering women

- Misconceptions about technology: Though technology is often praised as a tool for women's empowerment, AI and digital technologies appear anything but gender-neutral.
 - Instead, they reflect societal biases and existing stereotypes.
 - Rather than liberating women, AI can amplify entrenched biases and become a new tool for their abuse and harassment.
- Risks faced by women: With AI's rapid evolution, women face increased risks of digital abuse, violence, and threats.
 - These systems, shaped by datasets infused with societal prejudices and developed mostly by men, often lack the inclusivity needed to challenge discrimination effectively.
- Representation in Tech: The representation of female staff in technology development (female AI developers) is also low in Meta and Google and OpenAI, according to data from Glass.ai.

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Daily News Analysis

- Impact on women leaders and ordinary women: Imagine the challenges faced by a serving woman Prime Minister, Ms. Meloni.
 - Now think about the plight of ordinary women.
 - Online harassment sees many women stopping to use digital devices.
 - Or their families restrict their access to these devices, further hindering women's careers and public life. This is not the solution.
- Responsibility of platforms: Creation and distribution platforms must take the responsibility for failing to curb the spread of harmful content.
 - It is surprising that despite technological advancements, resources are not being invested in developing safety features or enhancing content moderation techniques.
- Effectiveness of current measures: Labelling AI-generated content is not always effective.
 - Often, harmful content needs to be removed entirely. For example, with sexually explicit content, the damage comes from sharing and viewing.
- Misinformation from tech leaders: What is the most troubling is the owners of big tech themselves sharing misinformation and deepfake videos.
 - While they should be allowed to have a political ideology and profess it, they should also realise the power they hold over millions who may not know fake from real.

Beyond clicks and likes

- Necessity of content moderation: Big Tech should ensure that proper content moderation teams and safety researchers are not a liability but a necessity.
 - The time taken to review reported pornography is often too long, causing further harm and violating platform policies.
 - The burden should not fall on users to report and follow up on harmful content. Platforms must share the responsibility.
- Review of harmful Apps: Apps that offer explicit services causing harm to women should be critically reviewed and promptly removed from app stores.
- Role of policymakers and women: Big Tech and policymakers need to resolve such incidents promptly.
 - Women should also be encouraged to take proactive measures by reporting such incidents and taking necessary actions.
 - In Ms. Meloni's case, she sought €1,00,000 in damages.
 - Ms. Harris and her campaign team were able to turn the trolling attacks on their head and question the inherent misogyny of such online attacks.
- Potential penalties for platforms: Can we think about huge fines in monetary terms and the limitation of platforms for a certain number of days and in certain geographical limits?

Way Forward

- Increasing Female Representation in Tech: We need more women to be involved in developing technology and holding decision-making positions in tech companies.

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Daily News Analysis

- AI entrepreneur Mustafa Suleyman, in his book, *The Coming Wave*, says moving from technical to non-technical measures is the key.
- Safety measures and Bias testing: To make online spaces safer for women, we need safety researchers and simulation exercises to test for gender biases, especially when AI is involved.
 - Technical professionals can check data for biases, as a model is only as good as its training data, while simulations can assess potential risks.
 - This will help to ensure fair, safe and ethical AI by design. Non-technical measures, laws, policies and governance structures must support these efforts.

Conclusion

Ensuring that technology is free from gender bias should not be the job of only feminists, social scientists, ethicists, or users. The responsibility should start with the tech companies which thrive on revenues from the content generated through user interfaces, developers, and algorithms. Governments and their regulatory bodies must set the guardrails to keep these digital spaces safe and fair for women. Thus, it is key to prioritize women's safety in technology and digital spaces for all.



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