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Watching 'child sex abuse' material an offence: SC (24 September)

- The Supreme Court ruled that viewing, downloading, storing, or distributing child pornographic material is a criminal offense under the POCSO Act and the Information Technology (IT) Act.
- This decision came from an appeal by the NGO Just Right for Children Alliance against a Madras High Court ruling, which had said that mere possession or viewing of such material in private wasn't a crime.
- The Supreme Court disagreed, stating that the abuse of a child continues through the recording and distribution of such material, causing ongoing psychological harm to the victim.
- The court emphasized that these images and videos are not just pornography but evidence of child exploitation and abuse, worsening the trauma for the victims.
- The court urged Parliament to replace the term "child pornography" with "Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material" (CSEAM) to better reflect the crime's nature.
- The government was asked to pass an ordinance to enforce this change, and courts were directed to use the term CSEAM in their judgments.
- The court found that viewing or storing CSEAM is just as harmful as the actual abuse, as both involve the exploitation of children for sexual gratification.
- Section 15 of the POCSO Act criminalizes the storage and possession of child pornographic material, and the IT Act's Section 67B penalizes browsing, creating, or sharing such material.
- The court introduced the concept of "constructive possession", meaning a person is liable if they have any control or ability to manage or destroy such material, even through temporary actions like viewing or deleting links.
- Unknown links or automatic downloads of such material should not just be ignored; they should be reported to the authorities to prevent criminal liability.

'Secularism European concept introduced during Emergency' (24 September)

- Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi said secularism is a European concept that emerged from conflicts between the church and kings in Europe.
- He mentioned that Bharat (India) is a dharma-centric nation, and there was no such conflict in India, so secularism was not originally included in the Constitution.
- According to the Governor, the Constituent Assembly discussed secularism during the drafting of the Constitution and decided it was not necessary for India.
- The Governor explained that dharma in Bharat (India) is inclusive, and there was no reason to separate religion from state matters, unlike in Europe.

- He stated that secularism was added to the Constitution later, during the Emergency (1975-77), by an "insecure" Prime Minister to appease certain groups.
- The Governor highlighted how India is now re-emerging with pride in its cultural and spiritual heritage under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- He emphasized that in recent years, the country has seen comprehensive growth, especially benefiting the poor and lower middle-class.
- The Tamil Nadu Raj Bhavan issued a statement elaborating on these points, referring to the Sanatan Dharma as central to India's evolution.

Odisha all set to join Ayushman Bharat health coverage scheme (24 September)

- Odisha is preparing to join the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri - Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY), which provides a health cover of ₹5 lakh per family per year for hospital care.
- A senior Health Ministry official confirmed that some technical issues are being resolved before implementing the scheme in Odisha.
- Odisha is already running its own health scheme, which will continue alongside this Central scheme.
- Under the AB PM-JAY, the financial burden is shared between the Centre and the State.
- States like Punjab are being engaged to submit their audit reports (from 2019-2020 onwards), while Bihar has recently joined the scheme.
- 18 States have combined their State health schemes with AB PM-JAY. Some States like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, and Nagaland run their State employee schemes alongside the Central scheme.
- The integration of Karnataka's health scheme with the National Health Authority's IT platform is in progress.
- As of September 1, 2024, 29,648 hospitals, including 12,696 private hospitals, have been empanelled under the scheme. It is being implemented in 33 States and Union Territories, except Delhi, Odisha, and West Bengal.
- The scheme provides cashless hospital services to beneficiaries at empanelled hospitals across India, with no restrictions on family size, age, or gender.
- All pre-existing diseases are covered from day one, and the scheme offers comprehensive coverage for 1,949 medical procedures across 27 specialities, including general medicine, surgery, oncology, and cardiology.

A collective for young artists to learn nuances of different Koodiyattom styles (24 September)

- Cholliyattom is a collective of young Koodiyattom artists in Kerala, started during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It has grown into a platform where artists from different Koodiyattom styles come together to preserve the art form and share knowledge about different techniques.
- Recently, Cholliyattom organized the second edition of Natya Yauvanam-2024, a Koodiyattom festival, at Ammannur Gurukulam in association with the Dr. K.N Pisharody Smaraka Kathakali Club.
- Ammannur Madhav Chakyar, president of the collective, explained that the aim is to bring together young artists trained in different styles to experience and learn the nuances of the art.
- The goal is to ensure the traditions of Koodiyattom are passed on to future generations.
- Koodiyattom has different styles, including Kalamandalam or Painkulam style, Ammannur style, and Mani Gurukulam style.
- Though there are no major differences in costumes, there are slight changes in sign language and acting styles across different traditions.
- Koodiyattom was once restricted to temple performances in Kerala, but now, through outreach, artists from different backgrounds come together to work for a common cause.

Reform of global institutions must for development: Modi (24 September)

The success of humanity lies in our collective strength, he says, adding India ready to share its digital public infrastructure with the entire world

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke at the United Nations' 'Summit of the Future' conference.
- He emphasized that global peace depends on reforming global institutions.
- Modi suggested that success for humanity lies in collective efforts, not in conflicts.
- He hinted at the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict, calling for global peace and development.
- Modi stressed that reform in global institutions is essential to keep them relevant.

- He pointed out that making the African Union a permanent member of the G-20 at the New Delhi Summit was an important reform step.
- The UN adopted a plan called the Pact for the Future to address 21st-century challenges, which includes goals like UN reform, human rights, AI governance, and digital cooperation.
- India has been actively pushing for reforms in the UN, especially the Security Council, advocating for more permanent members, including India, Africa, and other regions.
- Modi mentioned emerging global security threats in cyber, maritime, and space domains.
- He also called for global digital governance that protects national security and offered to share India's digital public infrastructure with the world.
- Modi had meetings with the Indian diaspora and held bilateral meetings during his visit to the United States.

PM expresses India's unwavering support for people of Palestine (24 September)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged India's strong support for the people of Palestine during his talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in New York.
- This meeting took place after India abstained from a UN resolution calling on Israel to vacate the Occupied Palestinian Territories within 12 months.
- Modi discussed India's support for Palestine at the United Nations.
- India's decision to abstain from the vote was influenced by concerns about potential sanctions and arms embargoes on Israel.
- India's explanation for abstaining emphasized the need for the UN to foster dialogue between Israel and Palestine.
- Modi expressed concern over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and reaffirmed India's commitment to helping the people of Palestine, including ongoing humanitarian aid.
- He reiterated that a two-state solution is the only way to achieve peace and called for a ceasefire, release of hostages, and a return to diplomacy between Israel and Palestine.
- Modi also met with Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli to discuss topics like hydropower cooperation, people-to-people ties, and improving connectivity between the two countries.
- Modi held his first meeting with Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince of Kuwait, where they discussed mutual support in energy and food security.

Centre, State set to review scope of AFSPA in Manipur (24 September)

- The Centre and Manipur government are reviewing the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) as its six-month extension in the state ends on September 30.
- There are differing views on expanding AFSPA's coverage. It remains in the hill districts, but was withdrawn from valley districts starting in 2022 due to improved security.
- AFSPA was removed from Imphal municipal area in 2004.
- A Union official expressed concern over the rise in armed men, extortion, and abductions, and noted that the lack of AFSPA in the valley makes operations difficult for security forces.
- A State official argued that the situation is under control compared to the 1990s, with police actively making arrests—533 arrests in the last 16 months.
- Since ethnic violence between the Kuki-Zo and Meitei people began on May 3, 2023, 237 people have been killed. The Meitei live in the valley, while the Kuki-Zo and Nagas live in the hills.
- From January to July 2023, 136 security-related incidents and 57 abductions were reported. Insurgent groups, mostly operating from Myanmar, have gained influence due to the unrest.
- The Kuki-Zo militant groups are in a ceasefire agreement with the government, while eight Meitei insurgent groups have been banned.
- In November 2023, the Pambei faction of the United National Liberation Front, an armed valley-based group, signed a peace agreement.
- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is investigating a conspiracy involving Myanmar-based insurgents exploiting the ethnic unrest to wage war against the Indian government.
- Manipur's Chief Minister said he faced pressure from central agencies to reimpose AFSPA in the valley areas after May 2023, but he noted that AFSPA cannot guarantee perfect law and order conditions.

Robotic mules 'join' Army; drones, high-altitude tents under evaluation (24 September)

- The Army has procured and deployed 100 robotic mules in forward areas to assist with logistics, especially in high-altitude regions.
- Logistics drones are being tested to help streamline support and movement in difficult terrains, particularly in high-altitude areas.
- A new tent designed for high-altitude conditions, capable of withstanding temperatures as low as minus-40 degrees Celsius, is also being evaluated.
- These technologies were showcased at the Himtech symposium in Leh, which focused on high-altitude technologies.
- The robotic mule, procured under the fourth tranche of emergency procurements (EP), is a durable and agile ground robot designed for defense applications.
- The robotic mule can walk for up to three years, overcome obstacles, cross rivers, and recognize objects using electro-optics and infrared. It can carry a 15 kg payload and operate in extreme temperatures (minus-40 to 55 degrees Celsius).
- The Army requires advanced clothing and shelters for extreme high-altitude deployments, such as the Siachen glacier.
- At Himtech, a high-altitude habitat tent called "Peak Pods" was announced, designed for sub-zero temperatures and is currently being tested in locations like Leh, Daulat Beg Oldie, and Durbuk.

Laapataa Ladies is India's entry for Oscars (24 September)

- Laapataa Ladies, a satirical film about gender dynamics and patriarchy in rural India, is India's official entry for the 2025 Oscars.
- The film, directed by Kiran Rao, tells the story of two brides who get swapped during a train ride after their wedding in 2001.
- It was selected from a list of 29 films, including the Cannes winner All We Imagine As Light.
- The 13-member selection committee, headed by Assamese director Jahnu Barua, unanimously chose Laapataa Ladies for the Best International Film category at the Academy Awards.
- The film is produced by Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao.

Weighing in on business as usual with China (24 September)

- Recent media discussions suggest India and China might be easing tensions, with proposals for increased Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in India.
- This would represent a significant shift from India's current policy, which ties economic relations to border security issues.
- India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, mentioned that 75% of border disengagement issues with China are resolved, but militarization of the border remains a major concern.
- National Security Adviser Ajit Doval recently met with a Chinese official to discuss further disengagement, but no major breakthroughs were reported.
- India insists on restoring peace and tranquility at the border before normalizing relations with China, but the exact conditions for this restoration are unclear.
- After China's border transgressions in 2020, India is uncertain about what "normal" means, especially since Indian forces can't access 15 traditional patrolling points in Ladakh.
- There's a question of whether India is ready to accept the new status quo set by China.
- Despite these security issues, the Economic Survey 2024 suggests India should integrate into Chinese supply chains through investments rather than imports.
- Some economists believe that Chinese FDI could help fill investment gaps in India and strengthen global supply chain presence.
- However, many of these analyses overlook the complexities of India-China relations and the need for economic risk management regarding China.
- The potential benefits of closer economic ties with China and attracting their investments are being questioned.

China's demands

- Recent dialogues with Chinese officials acknowledged that the status quo has changed, and they expect India to accept this and normalize relations.
- China made four specific demands: fair treatment for Chinese companies, easier visa processes, direct flight resumption, and allowing Chinese journalists in India.
- India pointed out that these demands are just symptoms of deeper issues created by China that need to be resolved first.
- India observed that China is not ready to address border or other structural issues in their relationship, engaging instead in a strategy of attrition, hoping India will gradually accept the new reality in Eastern Ladakh.

- An opinion piece in the Global Times criticized India's diplomacy, highlighting China's negative perception of India's External Affairs Minister.
- China is unwilling to tackle India's significant trade deficit or the barriers Indian companies face in China.
- In 2023, India's trade deficit with China exceeded $105 billion, with Indian exports to China decreasing.
- India remains highly dependent on Chinese imports in critical sectors, creating vulnerabilities that China could exploit.
- Both the U.S. and China are focusing on securing their economies and reducing reliance on each other.
- A report indicates India is viewed as the top alternative investment destination to China among developing countries.
- If India integrates more with Chinese supply chains, it might deter global companies from seeing India as a viable alternative for global value chains.
- China is not a true market economy; recent policies emphasize state control and strategic objectives over market forces.
- China's goal to dominate future industries like electric vehicles and solar energy, along with its focus on exports instead of domestic consumption, may heighten tensions with India and other nations.

The game plan

- China is closely monitoring its companies' investments and technology exports to strengthen its domestic value chains and become essential in global tech production.
- Reports indicate that China is advising its carmakers to keep advanced electric vehicle technology within the country and to produce key components domestically, while exporting kits to foreign plants, with India being specifically noted.
- Historically, it's unrealistic to expect China to assist in building India's manufacturing capabilities; instead, Chinese firms often invest in sensitive sectors in India.
- This trend led to Press Note 3 in April 2020, which imposed restrictions on Chinese investments following border tensions.
- Allowing unrestricted access to Chinese companies could result in low-value investments and hinder industrial growth in sectors where China aims for global dominance.
- The idea that increasing Chinese FDI will reduce imports from China is not supported by evidence from other regions, like ASEAN, where imports from China actually increased despite significant investments.
- China has redirected its exports through countries like Vietnam and Mexico to avoid U.S. tariffs, but this loophole is being closed.
- India should adopt a careful and differentiated approach to its economic relations with China, recognizing that while it cannot completely separate from the Chinese economy, it can selectively allow Chinese investments based on its strengths and security interests.

India's defence exports and humanitarian law (24 September)

- The Supreme Court of India recently dismissed a public interest litigation asking the government to stop exporting defense equipment to Israel due to alleged war crimes in Gaza, stating that foreign policy is not within its jurisdiction.
- The issue raised by the PIL goes beyond Israel and relates to India's goal of becoming a major defense exporter.
- Some countries have restricted defense exports to Israel based on concerns over violations of international humanitarian law (IHL).
- For example, a Dutch court blocked the export of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel under EU regulations that prevent military exports if there's a risk of IHL violations.
- The UK government reviewed Israel's compliance with IHL and found a clear risk of serious violations if certain arms were exported.
- India lacks laws equivalent to the UK's Export Control Act or EU regulations that require assessing a country's compliance with IHL before exporting defense equipment.
- The Indian Foreign Trade Act, 1992, and the Weapons of Mass Destruction Act, 2005, allow the government to regulate defense exports based on national security and international obligations.
- However, Indian law does not require a review of the recipient country's IHL compliance before exporting, creating a legal gap.
- The Supreme Court has previously used international law to enhance domestic law, which could apply in this case to address the legal gap.
- This issue should be framed legally rather than as a foreign policy matter.
- The next step is to explore what international law says about arms trade and how it applies to India.

International law

- The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) aims to regulate the international trade of conventional arms.
- Article 6(3) of the ATT prohibits supplying arms if there is knowledge they would be used for war crimes.
- Article 7 requires countries to assess whether their exported arms could lead to serious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL).
- India is not a signatory to the ATT, so it is not bound by this treaty, although some of its provisions reflect customary international law.

- Under IHL, Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions, which is binding on India, requires states to respect and ensure respect for IHL.
- This means countries must not supply weapons if there is a reasonable expectation they will be used to violate the Geneva Conventions.
- Scholars suggest that the threshold for certainty regarding the misuse of exported weapons is quite high.
- When considering India's domestic laws (WMDA and FTA) alongside its IHL obligations, there is a clear duty not to supply weapons to countries likely to violate IHL.
- Instead of relying solely on international law for this obligation, it would be better for India to amend the WMDA and FTA to explicitly include assessments of IHL compliance for importing countries.
- Such amendments would enhance India's credibility as a responsible defense exporter.

Politicising the laddu (24 September)

The Tirupati laddu issue should be limited to one of quality control

- Allegations have surfaced about the adulteration of ghee used in Tirupati's famous laddu prasadam with "foreign fat."
- Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and his son Nara Lokesh, leaders of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), made these accusations against former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy of the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP).
- The issue has escalated, with BJP leaders calling for an independent investigation and former BJP MP Subramanian Swamy requesting a Supreme Court-monitored probe.
- Despite the allegations, devotees continue to visit the temple, and sales of the laddus remain unaffected.
- The timing of the accusations, close to state elections where the BJP faces challenges, raises suspicions about their political motivation and irresponsibility.
- A quality test by the Centre for Analysis and Learning in Livestock and Food (CALF) revealed potential contamination from various sources, but the extent of this contamination is unclear.
- Naidu announced the findings of the quality test several weeks after they were completed.
- Questions arise as to why the state government didn't send the samples to the National Food Laboratory (NFL) for final verification.
- An executive officer from the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) had previously indicated that A.R. Dairy, the supplier, would be blacklisted due to contamination.
- The controversy has led some to argue for removing temple administration from state control, but this is seen as opportunistic and unsupported by legal precedent.
- The focus should remain on quality control rather than allowing the issue to devolve into communal tensions.

Triumph squared (24 September)

India's chess double win was fashioned by its young generation of players

- India achieved a remarkable double gold at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest, a feat only accomplished by two other countries in history.
- The Indian women's team started as the top seed, while the men's team was the second seed in this prestigious event.
- Although the women faced some challenges towards the end, the men's team performed exceptionally well, finishing four points ahead of their closest rivals, the United States.
- The victories were primarily led by a talented group of young players from the "golden generation" of Indian chess, indicating a promising future for the sport.
- Individual gold medals were won by young players D. Gukesh, Arjun Erigaisi, Divya Deshmukh, and Vantika Agrawal.
- The Indian teams also featured Grandmaster siblings R. Praggnanandhaa and R. Vaishali.
- Notably, the women's team did not include Koneru Humpy, one of the strongest female players in chess history.
- India's depth in women's chess is not as strong as in men's, with fewer promising players outside the Olympiad teams.
- The success in Budapest should encourage the promotion of chess among girls to strengthen the women's game.
- Indian chess administration should organize more elite tournaments to attract top players, as many do not compete in India due to a lack of suitable events.
- Viswanathan Anand, a key figure in Indian chess, rarely played in home tournaments after becoming a global superstar.
- While the Tata Steel Chess India tournament exists, it focuses on rapid and blitz formats rather than classical chess.
- More government and corporate support could help Indian chess reach even greater heights.

How to enable transit oriented development (24 September)

Transport infrastructure is a prime driver of economic activity. As a case study of Bengaluru shows, improving accessibility to jobs, through safe and efficient transport modes, could significantly enhance workforce productivity

- Indian cities are undergoing a transportation revolution with ₹3 trillion planned for metro rail projects between 2022-2027.
- These investments aim to improve urban mobility and unlock significant economic potential.
- Public transportation investments can generate many jobs and provide economic returns 5-7 times higher than the initial cost.
- To maximize the benefits of mass transit, the Government of India approved the National Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Policy and Metro Rail Policy in 2017.
- The TOD policy encourages urban planning that integrates transport and land use, promoting sustainable growth.
- 27 Indian cities are currently building metro rail systems, and many others are developing rail- and bus-based mass rapid transit systems.
- Public policies and suburban development are making it harder for public transport to keep up with urban sprawl, leading to longer commutes, congestion, and pollution.
- Bengaluru is one of the world's most traffic-congested cities, with an annual social cost of ₹38,000 crore, which is 5% of the city's GDP (2018 figures).
- TOD can help solve these issues by promoting compact, mixed-use development and sustainable transport like walking, cycling, and mass transit.
- TOD reduces congestion and contributes to India's low-carbon growth goals by separating density from traffic and economic growth from resource use.
- WRI India's study on jobs near metro rail transit in Bengaluru highlights the need for integrated planning to bring jobs closer to transit systems for better accessibility and productivity.
- Improving job accessibility through safe and efficient transport can increase workforce productivity and participation.
- Being close to workplaces and having higher job densities boosts the use of public transit more than just residential density.
- Clustering job growth near transit hubs creates an "agglomeration effect" that improves innovation, productivity, and competitiveness.
- Concentrating jobs near transit also expands business reach, spurs local development, and increases public revenue that can be reinvested in infrastructure upgrades.
- A WRI India study analyzed job distribution in Bengaluru's metro area, focusing on manufacturing and service enterprises.
- The study looked at current and future job proximity to the metro network and provided recommendations for growing jobs near transit stations.
- There are around 0.2 million registered businesses in Bengaluru, employing 4.6 million workers, with the majority in the service sector.
- Large businesses (with 100+ employees) make up only 2% of total enterprises but provide 60% of jobs.
- Job density is highest in inner-city areas, especially in tech clusters like Whitefield and Electronic City, with densities ranging from 25,000 to 109,000 jobs per sq. km.
- Once metro expansions are completed (172 km), 28% of jobs will be within 500 meters of a metro station, 59% within 1 km, and 85% within 2 km.
- Many large job clusters are still disconnected from metro access, and most jobs are beyond a comfortable walking distance from stations, highlighting the need for better pedestrian infrastructure and feeder services.
- Enterprises often locate near each other due to market linkages and agglomeration benefits, with large businesses attracting smaller ones around them.
- Service businesses, benefiting from better access for employees and customers, tend to cluster near metro stations, while manufacturing businesses are less influenced by metro proximity.
- Many blue-collar workers live nearby and use walking, cycling, or public buses to commute, instead of relying on the metro.
- The metro has encouraged real estate growth, particularly for service businesses near metro stations.
- Large businesses face challenges in setting up near metro stations due to limited suitable properties, unfavourable regulations, and inadequate infrastructure.
- Inner-city areas have limited land availability for large-scale businesses, and existing buildings often don't meet the needs of bigger companies.
- Small plot sizes and strict regulations related to access roads, parking, and building density make it harder to redevelop inner-city areas.
- Combining plots from multiple owners for larger developments is difficult, risky, and costly.
- Higher property prices near metro stations tend to discourage smaller businesses, while larger businesses are more willing to invest.

- Market saturation and local resistance to further commercial development near metro stations can create challenges for businesses looking to locate there.

The way forward

- In global cities like Hong Kong, 57% of jobs are within 500 meters of transit stations, 84% within 1 km, and 96% within 2 km.
- Hong Kong has high transit usage (90% of motorized trips) and low car ownership (56 cars per 1,000 people).
- Between 1993 and 2011, Hong Kong's Gross Value Added per capita increased by 50%, while fuel consumption and carbon emissions decreased by 10%.
- Bengaluru's upcoming city master plan revision is a chance to set goals for increasing jobs near transit stations.
- The plan should prioritize areas near transit for job growth through renewal and densification, balancing market demand with environmental and community goals.
- Public policies can encourage businesses to locate near transit with incentives like extra development rights, fee/tax subsidies, and investment in economically depressed areas.
- The government can explore public-private partnerships and value capture financing to improve station areas.
- A nodal agency should be set up to coordinate stakeholders and manage Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) planning and implementation.
- The private sector can help guide commercial and industrial investments near transit stations.
- Partnerships between public and private sectors can enhance amenities, public spaces, and last-mile connectivity to transit stations.
- Transport infrastructure is key for economic growth, and India will continue investing in it to keep metropolitan cities globally competitive.
- The government should focus on increasing job densities near transit in its policies and planning, upgrading public infrastructure, and coordinating actions to promote low-carbon, compact, and connected city growth.

What is California's new anti-deepfake bill and can it stop manipulated political ads? (24 September)

Why did California governor Gavin Newsom sign bills to stop the use of deepfakes in political campaign advertisements? What is the Defending Democracy from Deepfake Deception Act of 2024? How have AI companies reacted?

- California's Governor Gavin Newsom promised action against deepfake AI-generated content after Elon Musk reposted a fake video of U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris.
- Newsom criticized Musk's post, and Musk responded by claiming parody is legal.
- On September 18, Newsom announced that he signed a bill making it illegal in California to knowingly distribute deceptive deepfake content in election campaigns.
- Newsom signed three bills aimed at tackling deepfakes in election-related content.
- The first bill (AB 2655) requires large online platforms to remove or label election-related deepfakes during specific periods.
- The second bill (AB 2839) extends the time frame in which election ads with deceptive AI-generated content cannot be distributed.
- The third bill (AB 2355) mandates that election ads with AI-altered content must disclose that fact.
- These bills give regulators and law enforcement the power to take action against such content or have it removed.
- Newsom stated that these measures are important to safeguard election integrity and prevent disinformation from undermining public trust.

How watertight are the bills?

- The new bills apply mainly to California and expand existing laws regarding election-related conduct.
- These laws prevent highly altered media from being circulated a certain number of days before or after elections in the state.
- Elon Musk claimed the governor's actions violate the U.S. Constitution, but some AI companies have already put filters in place to stop deepfakes of election candidates and public figures.
- AB-2655 is called the "Defending Democracy from Deepfake Deception Act of 2024" and requires large online platforms to block or label deceptive election-related content during specific periods before and after elections.
- Most jurisdictions, along with major search engines, have similar requirements to identify or watermark AI-generated images to prevent misinformation.
- Musk defended his sharing of a deepfake video of Kamala Harris as parody, and AB-2655 exempts parody or satire from its restrictions.
- However, the version of the video Musk shared on July 27 lacked any clear label or platform disclosures that indicated the content was fake.

What will happen if someone violates the regulations?

- It's unclear how the new bills will be enforced if someone violates the regulations, as they were signed just 50 days before the U.S. election.
- The effectiveness of these bills may be difficult to assess in such a short time.
- The penalties for non-compliance may not be very strict. For example, AB 2355 requires a disclosure for AI-altered content but notes that violating this is not considered a misdemeanor.
- While powerful individuals like Elon Musk may not be significantly impacted, the bills highlight the growing problem of AI-generated misinformation on platforms like X (formerly Twitter).
- X allows content to be shared with fewer restrictions compared to other platforms, and repeated violations could cause legal trouble for the platform, which may affect its relationship with advertisers.
- After the bills were signed, Musk once again shared the deepfake video of Kamala Harris, but this time it was clearly labeled as a parody.