Age-based Social Media Restrictions for Children

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Government policies and Initiatives*

Why in News?

Recently, states such as Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have been considering bans on social media use by children, amid growing global efforts to regulate minors' online access.

Key Developments in India

- **Karnataka Proposal –** Ban on social media use for children ***below 16 years*** announced in the State Budget.
- **Andhra Pradesh Proposal –** Plan to introduce regulations within 90 days restricting social media use for children ***below 13 years.***
- **Central Government Approach –** Government prefers ***graded restrictions rather than a total ban.***
- A separate law for regulating social media access for minors may be introduced in Parliament.
- **Age-Based Framework –** Centre is considering 3 age categories for differentiated restrictions.
    - **8–12 years –** Strictest controls and limited access.
    - **12–16 years –** Controlled and monitored access.
    - **16–18 years –** Relatively flexible access with safeguards.
- **Jurisdiction –** Regulation of the internet and digital intermediaries' ***exclusive domain of the Union Government.***

  Entry 31 in the Union List (List I) of the 7th Schedule gives Parliament exclusive legislative power over telecommunications and internet regulation.

- India's digital ecosystem is governed mainly through –
    - ***Information Technology Act, 2000***

    - ***Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021***
- Therefore, state-level bans may face jurisdictional and enforcement challenges due to overlap with central legislation.

- **Measures –** The possible regulatory measures include –
- Time-based access restrictions (e.g., limiting night-time log-ins).
- Daily usage limits for children.
- Mandatory parental consent for account creation.
- Age-verification mechanisms on platforms.

The Economic Survey 2025–26 recommended age-based limits on children's social media use and digital ads, along with promoting basic phones or education-only tablets with usage limits and content filters to reduce exposure to harmful material.

Global Developments

- **Australia –** *First country to enforce a minimum age of 16 for social media accounts*, requiring platforms to deactivate underage accounts.
- **Indonesia –** Announced plans to ban high-risk social media platforms for users below 16 years.
- **France –** Proposed banning social networks for children under 15 years in France.
- Some countries impose strict time limits on children's online gaming, such as in China.

References

1. IE | Age-based Social Media Restrictions for Children
2. IE | Graded age-based restrictions on social media for children

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