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Passive Euthanasia in India: Supreme Court Allows Withdrawal of Treatment for Harish Rana

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Why in News?

The Supreme Court of India permitted the first individual case of passive euthanasia in India.

The court allowed the withdrawal of artificial life support for Harish Rana, a 32-year-old man from Uttar Pradesh who has been in a vegetative state for over 12 years.

Supreme Court Decision:

The bench comprising J. B. Pardiwala and K. V. Viswanathan allowed the withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment.

The decision came after medical boards and family members agreed that continued clinically administered nutrition (CAN) should be discontinued.

The petition requesting withdrawal of life support was filed by Harish Rana's father.

Background of the Case:

Harish Rana suffered severe head injuries in 2013 after falling from a building.

Since then, he has remained in a persistent vegetative state with no meaningful interaction or recovery.

Doctors concluded that he has virtually no chance of recovery.

Legal Context: Passive Euthanasia in India:

In 2018, the Supreme Court of India legally recognised passive euthanasia under strict safeguards.

Passive euthanasia allows withdrawal of life support so that death occurs naturally.

However, active euthanasia (directly administering substances to cause death) remains illegal in India.

Importance of Living Will:

A living will is a legal document specifying a person's wishes regarding medical treatment in case of terminal illness.

Harish Rana did not have a living will, so the family had to seek court permission for withdrawal of life support.

Earlier Landmark Case:

The debate on euthanasia in India began with the Aruna Shanbaug case.

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She remained in a vegetative state for 42 years after a brutal assault.

In 2011, the Supreme Court of India rejected the plea for ending her life but recognized passive euthanasia under strict conditions.

She passed away in 2015 due to pneumonia.

Global Debate:

Supporters argue euthanasia allows patients to die with dignity and avoid prolonged suffering.

Opponents emphasize the sanctity of life and ethical concerns