

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.1381
TO BE ANSWERED ON 10-02-2021

FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

1381. SHRI BHAGWANTH KHUBA:

Will the Minister of Electronics and Information Technology be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government has framed any rules/guidelines to tackle fake news;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) the steps proposed to be taken by the Government for removal of fake news and hate speeches being circulated on social media?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE FOR ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(SHRI SANJAY DHOTRE)

(a) and (b): The Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 has provisions for removal of objectionable online content including fake news/misinformation. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules, 2011 notified under section 79 of the Act section require that the intermediaries, which includes social media platforms, shall observe due diligence while discharging their duties and shall inform the users of computer resources not to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, update or share any information that is harmful, objectionable, and unlawful in any way. Also, section 79 of the Act provides that intermediaries are required to disable/remove unlawful content relatable to Article 19(2) of Constitution, on being notified by appropriate government or its agency.

Further, section 69A of the IT Act, 2000 empowers Government to block any information generated, transmitted, received, stored or hosted in any computer resource in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above.

(c): Government has taken several steps to address the challenges of misinformation and rumours spreading via social media platforms. These, inter alia, include:

(i) Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has set up a dedicated cell (Counter Misinformation Unit) under Press Information Bureau (PIB) as a measure to counter fake news on policies, schemes, programs etc. by Government of India. The Unit has a presence on prominent social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. The information is also available on <https://pib.gov.in/factcheck.aspx>. The unit takes suo moto cognizance of fake news going viral on social media and also on basis of outside complaints.

(ii) MeitY regularly interacts with social media platforms on issues related to spread of fake news, misinformation/disinformation on Internet and takes action under section 69A of the IT

Act, as appropriate. MeitY has also asked other Central Government Ministries, State Governments and law enforcement agencies, being the appropriate Government or its agency, to approach social media platforms for removal of unlawful content relating to their specific laws. Social media platforms have implemented a number of steps to address the issue of fake news propagated using their platform.

(iii) MeitY through a program, namely, Information Security Education & Awareness (ISEA), has been creating awareness among users highlighting the importance of following the ethics while using Internet and advising them not to share rumors/fake news. A dedicated website for information security awareness (<https://www.infosecawareness.in>) provides relevant awareness material.

(iv) MeitY on 20.03.2020 issued an advisory to major social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and Helo wherein the Intermediaries were urged to:

- initiate awareness campaign on their platforms for the users not to upload/circulate any false news/misinformation concerning corona virus which are likely to create panic among public and disturb the public order and social tranquillity;
- take immediate action to disable /remove such content hosted on their platforms on priority basis;
- promote dissemination of authentic information related to corona virus as far as possible.
