GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1354
TO BE ANSWERED ON 22.09.2020

FAKE VIDEOS AND RUMOURS ON SOCIAL MEDIA DURING DELHI VIOLENCE

1354 DR. SANTANU SEN:

Will the Minister of Electronics and Information Technology be pleased to state:
(a) whether there has been any instances of spreading fake videos and rumours through social media during recent Delhi violence;
(b) if so, the details thereof along with number of such cases identified and the details of action taken in this regard;
(c) whether there is any plan to set up a fact checker website/cell intended to verify and inform common citizens regarding authenticity of viral videos/messages; and
(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

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

(a) and (b): 'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects as per the Constitution of India and States are primarily responsible for prevention, detection and investigation through their law enforcement machinery. The Law Enforcement Agencies take legal action against the cyber-crime offenders as per the provisions of applicable laws. Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) does not maintain such data.

(c) and (d): Cyber space is a complex environment of people, software, hardware and services on the Internet. With a borderless cyberspace coupled with the possibility of instant communication and anonymity, the potential for misuse of cyberspace and social media platforms for criminal activities is a global issue. There were media reports about social media platforms being misused to spread various cases of mob lynching, fake news and objectionable videos posted on social media and video sharing sites.
The Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 has provisions for removal of objectionable online content. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules 2011 notified under this 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 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.

Government has taken several steps to address the challenges of misinformation and rumors 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 lnstagram. 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. 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.

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