

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
LOK SABHA
STARRED QUESTION NO.*385
TO BE ANSWERED ON: 30.03.2022

AUTHENTICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

***385. SHRI ABDUL KHALEQUE:**

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

- (a) whether the Government is planning to bring a law which will ensure and authenticate the social media accounts;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether the Government is considering to authenticate social media accounts through Aadhaar, Voter Cards and other official documents to rein in fake news; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the details of the steps which the Government envisages to take in order to stop the spread of fake news?

ANSWER

MINISTER FOR ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(SHRI ASHWINI VAISHNAW)

- (a) to (d): A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. *385 FOR 30-03-2022 REGARDING AUTHENTICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

.....

(a) and (b): Keeping with the aim to have an Open, Safe & Trusted and Accountable Internet, Government has notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (IT Rules, 2021) under the Information Technology Act (IT Act), 2000 to make social media platforms accountable to their users and enhance user safety online. As per the said Rules, the significant social media intermediary (SSMI) shall enable users who register for their services from India, or use their services in India, to voluntarily verify their accounts by using any appropriate mechanism, including the active Indian mobile number of such users, and where any user voluntarily verifies their account, such user shall be provided with a demonstrable and visible mark of verification.

(c) and (d): There is no proposal at present with the Ministry to bring a separate law to ensure and authenticate all the social media accounts or for linking a Government identity with social media accounts of individuals.

Government is well aware of the risks and dangers posed by growing phenomena of fake news and dissemination of wrong information through various social media platforms. With Cyberspace being virtual, borderless, mostly anonymous and with anyone being able to post, share, communicate any message from anywhere across the world at any time, it is a global challenge to identify and stop spread of fake news on social media.

Government has taken several steps to address the challenges of misinformation and rumours spreading via various online media platforms including social media, news channels and other online portals. These, *inter alia*, include:

- (i) The above said IT Rules, 2021 published on 25th February, 2021 require that the intermediaries follow certain due diligence as prescribed. They are required to publish privacy policy and terms of use of their platform. They are required to inform their users not to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, update or share any information that is harmful, objectionable, and unlawful in any way. They are also required to remove any unlawful content related to Article 19(2) of the Constitution of India or violative of any law, as and when brought to their knowledge either through a court order or through a notice by appropriate government or its agency. The Rules also require that publishers of online news observe the Code of Ethics which includes adherence to :
 - Norms of Journalistic Conduct of the Press Council of India under the Press Council Act, 1978;
 - Programme Code under section 5 of the Cable Television Networks Regulation) Act, 1995;

- Content which is prohibited under any law for the time being in force shall not be published or transmitted.
- (ii) As per rule 4(2) of the above said Rules, a Significant Social Media Intermediary (SSMI) primarily providing messaging service are required to identify the first originator of the information for the purposes of prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution or punishment of an offence related to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order, or of incitement to an offence relating to the above, or in relation with rape, sexually explicit material or child sexual abuse material based on notice from lawful agencies or on the orders of the court.
- (iii) Under section 69A of the IT Act, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) does blocking of 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.
- (iv) A Fact Check Unit has been setup under Press Information Bureau of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in November, 2019. This Unit takes cognizance of fake news both suo-motu and by way of queries sent by citizens on its portal or through e-mail and whatsapp. The Unit responds to the relevant queries with correct information when the same pertains to Central Government or forwards them to States/UTs in other cases. The Unit also maintain social media accounts and posts cases of fake news, being busted, on the same on regular basis. The Fact Check Unit of PIB covers news on various media platforms, including electronic media.
- (v) 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 rumours/fake news. A dedicated website for information security awareness (<https://www.infosecawareness.in>) provides all the relevant awareness material.
- (vi) MeitY regularly interacts with popular social media intermediaries and issues advisories from time to time including advisories issued in March, 2020 and in May, 2021 to curb availability of fake news related to Covid-19.
