

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.649
TO BE ANSWERED ON: 20.11.2019

CURBING OF FAKE NEWS

649. SHRI GAURAV GOGOI:

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

- (a) whether there is a rise in sharing of fake news over social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government thereto;
- (c) whether these fake news have led to an increase in crimes against vulnerable groups and if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government thereto;
- (d) the steps taken/being taken by the Government to curb the generation and sharing of fake news on social media platforms; and
- (e) whether the Government proposes to regulate social media to contain the spread of fake news and consequential crimes and if so, the details thereof and the steps taken by the Government in this regard?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD)

(a),(b),(c),(d) and (e) : 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 are media reports about social media platforms being misused to spread rumours and fake news.

The Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 has provisions for removal of objectionable online content. Social media platforms are intermediaries as defined in the Act. Section 79 of the Act provides that intermediaries are required to disable/remove unlawful content on being notified by appropriate government or its agency. 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.

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 Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) as well as Police are in regular touch with various social media platforms to effectively address the issue of removal of objectionable content.
- (ii) MeitY took note of media reports about spread of fake news, misinformation/disinformation on Internet particularly using social media platforms. Social media platforms have implemented a number of steps to address the issue of fake news propagated using their platform.
- (iii) Ministry of Home affairs (MHA) has issued a number of advisories which includes advisory on untoward incidents in the name of protection of cows dated 09.08.2016, advisory on cyber-crime prevention and control dated 13.01.2018 and also an advisory on incidents of lynching by mobs in some States fueled by rumors of lifting/kidnapping of children dated 04.07.2018.
- (iv) 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 all the relevant awareness material.
- (v) MHA has created a Twitter Handle “Cyber Dost” to spread awareness on cyber safety and cyber security. MHA has also published a Handbook for Adolescents/Students on Cyber Safety.
