GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1929
TO BE ANSWERED ON: 03.07.2019

CIRCULATION OF MISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS

1929. SHRIMATI POONAM MAHAJAN:
 DR. NISHIKANT DUBEY:

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

(a)   whether Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter etc. social media platforms are being used for spreading misinformation and malicious content along with the fake news in the country;

(b)   if so, the details thereof and the action taken/being taken by the Government to curb such activities;

(c)   whether the Government proposes to lay down any strict guidelines/additional plan to curb such activities in the country; and

(d)   if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

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

(a)   and (b): 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 circulation of erroneous clips that induce panic or hate is a global issue. Government is committed to freedom of speech and expression and privacy of its citizens as enshrined in the constitution of India. Government does not monitor content appearing on internet. However, there are media reports about spread of fake news, misinformation/disinformation on Internet particularly using WhatsApp platform. Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) took note of this and issued notices to WhatsApp on 3.7.2018 and 19.7.2018. WhatsApp in their response conveyed a number of steps taken to address the issue of fake news propagated using their platform. In particular, they have shared the strategy of "Giving people the controls and information they need to stay safe" and "To work proactively to prevent misuse on WhatsApp".

(c) and (d): 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 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.

Further, 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.

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

(i) 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.

(ii) 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.

(iii) MeitY and MHA as well as Police are in regular touch with various social media platforms to effectively address the issue of removal of objectionable content.

(iv) MeitY through a program, namely, Information Security Education & Awareness (ISEA), has been highlighting the importance of following the ethics while using Internet and advice 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.

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