

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2728
TO BE ANSWERED ON 10.03.2021

FAKE NEWS AND OBJECTIONABLE PHOTOS / VIDEOS

2728. SHRI SUMEDHANAND SARASWATI:

- (a) whether the Government is aware of the various cases of circulation of fake news on print, electronic and social media and objectionable videos on various websites;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government thereto;
- (c) whether the Government is aware of the negative impact of these objectionable photos and videos on all sections of the society including children and if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government thereto;
- (d) the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government in this regard; and
- (e) the steps being taken by the Government to address the issue of circulation fake news, objectionable photos and videos on mobile and other social media platforms?

ANSWER

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

(a) to (c): 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 fake news and objectionable videos posted on print, electronic media, social media and video sharing sites.

'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.

(d) and (e): The Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 has provisions for removal of objectionable online content. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 notified under the Act, 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. The Rules also require that publishers of news shall observe the Code of Ethics which includes adherence to :

- (i) Norms of Journalistic Conduct of the Press Council of India under the Press Council Act, 1978;

- (ii) Programme Code under section 5 of the Cable Television Networks Regulation) Act, 1995;
- (iii) Content which is prohibited under any law for the time being in force shall not be published or transmitted.

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 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 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) Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (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.
