

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 483
TO BE ANSWERED ON 01.12.2021

FAKE NEWS

483 SHRI SHRINIWAS PATIL :

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

- (a) whether the Government has any mechanism to identify and stop the spread of fake news on social media platforms, news channels and online portals; and
- (b) if so, provide details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE FOR ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR)

(a) and (b): Government is well aware of the risk and danger posed by growing phenomena of fake news and dissemination of wrong information through various social media platform. Cyberspace has the unique characteristics of being virtual, borderless and anonymous. Anyone can post, share, communicate any message from anywhere across the world at any time. This makes it challenging to identify and stop spread of fake news on social media.

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

(i) Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), on 25.02.2021 has notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 under the Information Technology Act (IT Act), 2000. These Rules 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 news shall observe the Code of Ethics which includes adherence to :

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

(b) Programme Code under section 5 of the Cable Television Networks Regulation) Act, 1995;

(c) Content which is prohibited under any law for the time being in force shall not be published or transmitted.

(ii) Section 79 of the IT Act provides that intermediaries are required to disable/remove unlawful content relatable to Article 10(2) of the Constitution either through a court order or on being notified by appropriate government or its agency.

(iii) Under Section 69A of the IT Act, 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 maintains a twitter account @PIBFactcheck 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 rumors/fake news. A dedicated website for information security awareness (<https://www.infosecawareness.in>) provides all the relevant awareness material.
