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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS
AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(2024-25)**

EIGHTEENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING

REVIEW OF MECHANISM TO CURB FAKE NEWS

TWENTY SECOND REPORT

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

October, 2025/ Asvina 1947 (Saka)

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Presented to Hon'ble Speaker on 04.10.2025

LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

October, 2025/ Asvina 1947 (Saka)

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1.	Shri Y.M. Kandpal	—	Additional Secretary
2.	Smt. A. Jyothirmayi	—	Director
3.	Smt. Rinky Singh	—	Executive Officer

**Committee constituted w.e.f. 26th September, 2024 vide Para No.833 of Bulletin Part-II dated 26th September, 2024.
* Shri Saket Gokhale has been nominated vide Para No. 853 of Bulletin Part –II dated 03rd October, 2024.

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology (2024-25), having been authorized by the Committee do present this Twenty-second Report on the Subject 'Review of mechanism to curb Fake News' relating to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

2.   The Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology (2024-25) selected this subject for detailed examination and Report to the Parliament. The representatives of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting briefed the Committee on the subject on 21st November, 2024. On the same day, the Committee heard the views of the News Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA) and Editors Guild of India (EGI). On 7th May, 2025, the Committee heard the views of Hindustan Times, Indian Express, NDTV, News-18 Network and TV Today Network Ltd., as well as took evidence of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The Committee also received written submissions/replies from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Ministry of Communications (Department of Telecommunications), Press Council of India (PCI), NBDA, EGI, Hindustan Times, Indian Express, News-18 Network and TV Today Network Ltd.

3.   The Committee at their Sitting held on 9th September, 2025 considered and adopted the Report.

4.   The Committee wish to express their thanks to the representatives of MIB, MeitY, DoT, PCI, NBDA, EGI, Hindustan Times, Indian Express, NDTV, News-18 Network and TV Today Network Ltd., for furnishing written information/views and/or for appearing before the Committee, which was of great help in the examination of the subject.

5.   The Committee also place on record their appreciation for the invaluable assistance rendered by the officials of Lok Sabha Secretariat attached to the Committee.

6.   For facility of reference and convenience the Observations/Recommendations of the Committee have been printed in bold in Part-II of the Report.

NEW DELHI;   **DR. NISHIKANT DUBEY,**
11 September, 2025   **Chairperson,**
20 Bhadra, 1947 (Saka)   **Standing Committee on**
Communications and Information Technology.

REPORT
PART - I

I. **Introductory**

Digital communication technologies have witnessed tremendous growth across the world. Social and online media has enabled direct interaction between the Government and the citizens at an unimaginable scale and speed, thereby ensuring timely sharing of accurate information with the public. Today, all Ministries, Departments and organizations of the Government of India communicate directly with the citizens through social media. However, while contributing towards citizen empowerment and responsive governance, it has been observed that social media is also being misused by certain anti-social and anti-India actors for spreading rumours, fake news and false narratives.

2. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) is the focal point for policy and regulatory matters related to the Print Media, Private Broadcasting through Television and Radio, and for news on Digital Media. The Information released by the Ministry and its various media units is considered to be authentic, official and credible. Journalists, while closely analyzing and scrutinizing the information released by the Ministry, trust such information to be authentic. Being a disseminator of information on one hand and the media regulator on the other hand, the people of India look towards the Ministry as having the critical responsibility to create and maintain the balance between the fundamental right to free speech and expression, including the freedom of press, and the need to counter false and harmful content across various media formats.

3. In the last decade and a half, almost every individual has become a purveyor of news/information, and the conventional safeguards of editorial control have become non-existent. Consequently, there has been a massive proliferation of 'Fake News'. 'Fake News' and disinformation over the internet has emerged as a global challenge.

4. Giving an overview about 'Fake News', one of the stakeholders while deposing before the Committee, submitted as under:-

> "Fake news is not a new thing; it has always been there. But it was there in print, got magnified a little bit with the onset of electronic media, and then with the emergence of social media, I think it has become a huge problem now. I think the unfortunate thing is that it is only going to become far more difficult for all of us. It is because the kind of technologies that are now available to make things look like real, whether these are audio transcripts or video files, are so sophisticated that it is going to be very, very difficult for someone who is removed from the situation to understand what is happening. And I think,

this is where two very essential aspects of how journalism is practiced become important. The first one is contextualization. You need to have experienced reporters who understand what is happening in a particular area, who know people. Two, you need to have reporters on the ground and reporters who are capable of calling up people and verifying things before putting that out. Increasingly, the problem that you see, especially in social media, and to a large extent, even in online media, is that you have desk jockeys who are sitting and typing based on what they are seeing on social media, without either contextualizing it or without calling up people and verifying it".

5.   According to another stakeholder (Indian Express), there are two broad streams: mainstream media (newspapers, TV), digital news media; and user-generated content on social media (X, YouTube etc). Corporate media handles, IT cells of political parties; fact-checkers who check facts depending on how they vote; YouTubers; Insta Reels; bots, AI-driven algorithms, all can be sources of fake news.

a)   **Fake News**

6.   According to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the term 'Fake News' is not defined under any statute. It is commonly understood as information which is false or misleading and presented as news. The journalistic ethics and standards guide news organizations and journalists in maintaining accuracy, fairness, and impartiality before dissemination of any information.

7.   As per Press Council of India (PCI), 'Fake News' in general leads to spread of misinformation, disinformation that can result in defamation, public confusion and erode the credibility of media. On being asked about the definition of 'Fake news', PCI stated that they were not aware of any uniform definition for the same. However, according to the former Chairman, PCI, Fake News is defined as under:-

> "Fake news means news, story, information, data and reports which is or are wholly or partly false. No prudent person should or can justify the dissemination of fake news. Fake news is a global menace and if any Government intends to take remedial steps to check its spread, per se, there is nothing wrong or obnoxious about it, provided that the authority to decide the truthfulness or otherwise of an allegation of fake news is entrusted to an independent statutory body like, the Press Council of India. The complaint of fake news is registered as complaint by the Council. Such complaints are filed by an individual, the Government or any other aggrieved person and are dealt by the Council following the laid down procedure in the Press Council Act and Press Council (Procedure for Inquiry) Regulations, however, it is only in gross cases of fake news or repeated involvement in fake news dissemination that power to suspend or cancellation of accreditation of the journalists be resorted to. The allegations need to be determined by the Council before any action is called for".

8.   Following submissions have been made by some of the stakeholders regarding the definition of 'Fake News':-

Sl. No.	Organisation/ Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions with respect to *definition of Fake News*
1.	Editors Guild of India (EGI)	No universal definition exists. EGI recommends defining fake news as: *Deliberately fabricated or manipulated content disseminated with the intent to mislead or harm.*
2.	News Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA)	There is no clear and uniform definition of Fake News that is being followed by media/industry worldwide. Fake News is generally used to describe fabricated and factually inaccurate information. In fact, the term "fake news" is so ambiguous that it inaccurately subsumes within its fold "satire", "opinions", "criticism", "clickbait reporting", "biased reporting", "motivated propaganda" etc. As understood, the term may also be used to target and delegitimize the media. Even internationally, there seems to be no consensus on the definition of 'fake news'. A 2018 report by a group of independent High-level Group experts of the European Commission on the subject of "fake news and online disinformation" noted that the term fake news could be construed to include a "spectrum of information types". Therefore, the polysemic nature of "fake news" makes defining and identifying fake news difficult. Since there cannot be established definitive principles to define 'fake' news, it results in vagueness and makes it susceptible to grave abuse and misuse. In view of the above, fake news cannot be defined precisely and definitively.
3.	Hindustan Times	"There is no industry-wide definition of fake news. We would recommend a broad definition of fake news: False reports or Mis- or disinformation that could take the form of articles, photographs, video clips, which are disguised as real news, and which are aimed at fooling people or manipulating their opinion. The most important parameters in this are that these are 'disguised as real news' and are 'aimed at fooling people or manipulating opinions'. This will ensure that honest mistakes do not attract the same penalty as fake news".
4.	T.V. Today Network Limited	No industry-wide standard has been formulated on a strict and uniform definition of 'Fake News'. Fake News is usually synonymous and defined by the presence of hoax news, propaganda, bias, disinformation, naked assertion, click bait, deepfake etc. We propose following definition of the term 'Fake News' which is comprehensive and holistic: **"Fake News"** *shall mean any false, misleading, or distorted information created, disseminated or amplified with the intention to deceive the public and meets all the following*

		criteria:
		a. It presents itself as containing factual assertions about events, individuals, entities, or phenomena excluding opinions, satire, or parody clearly identifiable as such; and
		b. The information has the capacity to significantly mislead a reasonable person, based on objective evidence or the lack thereof; and
		c. The dissemination of such information has the potential to cause harm, including but not limited to: **(i)** *incitement to violence, hatred, or discrimination;* **(ii)** *disruption of public order or safety;* **(iii)** *undermining the integrity of democratic processes;* **(iv)** *causing significant harm to the reputation of individuals or entities; or* **(v)** *endangering public health.*
5.	Network-18	The term 'fake news' is typically used to describe information that is deliberately fabricated or factually incorrect. However, its usage has become so broad and imprecise that it often includes a variety of content such as satire, opinion pieces, criticism, clickbait, incorrect details, non-updated information, etc. Moreover, it is increasingly being wielded as a means to discredit and delegitimize the media. Hence, it is difficult to establish clear and definitive principles for defining "fake news," the term remains vague and open to significant abuse and misuse. Consequently, it is not possible to define fake news with precision or certainty.
6.	Indian Express	Its definition is crucial to any discussion on its regulation. Today, it is used to describe a staggering range of content in text, audio and video: content that is false; that has errors of fact; information that is unverified, be it health or financial "advice" by a non-expert, to a comment that denigrates the other side. It also includes news content where mistakes are made during the journalistic process; satire that exaggerates or uses falsehood as a narrative device; content created to deceive, mislead- either by humans or computer code, including AI-generated simulated videos.

9.   When asked about the parameters that could be considered while defining the term' Fake News', the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting replied as under:-

"While defining the term 'fake news', it can broadly be categorized in two categories- (1) that relating to the Government and (2) that relating to subjects not concerning Government. For fact-checking of information relating to the Government an FCU is presently operational under the Press Information Bureau. For the monitoring and fact checking of information on subjects not relating to the Government, the media industry across platforms has to put in place a strict mechanism with emphasis on self-regulation.

10.   To the same query, the response of the representative of Indian Express is as under:-

Any mechanism, in the name of curbing "fake news," should be informed by this profound social transformation. Indeed, it should acknowledge key

elements of "fake news"; its nature and creation; its publication and sharing; its assessment by users and their action; and, in the end, user digital literacy. That's why it involves all of us in this room, including, and significantly, the distinguished MPs themselves. Additionally, those not in this room, the child; her parents and teachers; and, of course, technology companies who write the algorithms that decide and influence how news is shared".

11.   Providing an overview about 'Fake News', NBDA during evidence stated that it has three parts and submitted the following:-

"**पहला हिस्सा वह फेक न्यूज़ है**, जिसके बारे में टीवी न्यूज़ चैनल्स को या जो डिजिटल प्लेटफॉर्म्स हैं, उनको, वहां जो फेक न्यूज़ होती है, उसके लिए जिम्मेदार ठहराया जाता है। ये रेगुलेटिड चैनल्स हैं। इन सबके पास एक सेल्फ रेगुलेशन का मेकेनिज्म है। |......xxx...xxx...xxx इसकी एक फ्लिप साइड है। फ्लिप साइड यह है कि एनबीडीएसए के अंदर वही चैनल्स आते हैं, जो एनबीडीए के मेंबर्स हैं। अगर किसी चैनल के खिलाफ ज्यादा शिकायतें आईं, उसको एनबीडीएसए ने पकड़ा, उसको सजा दी, तो वह हमारी मेंबरशिप से रिज़ाइन कर देता है। उसके बाद वह फ्री है। फिर वह कुछ भी कर सकता है, कुछ भी दिखा सकता है या कुछ भी काम कर सकता है, उसके ऊपर कोई रेगुलेशन नहीं है। यह प्रोसेस 16 सालों से चल रहा है।

फेक न्यूज़ का दूसरा पार्ट है, जहां पर कुछ लोग डेलिब्रेट तरीके से मिसइनफॉर्मेशन फैलाते हैं। उसके रीज़न्स पॉलिटिकल हो सकते हैं, उसके रीज़न्स सोशल हो सकते हैं! आजकल आप देखेंगे कि अगर किसी इलाके में अनरेस्ट होता है, तो वहां टीवी चैनल्स बंद नहीं किए जाते, अब इंटरनेट बंद किया जाता है। टीवी चैनल्स बरकरार रहते हैं। इंटरनेट क्यों बंद किया जाता है? क्योंकि ज्यादातर मिसइनफॉर्मेशन, ज्यादातर फेक न्यूज़ डिजिटल मीडिया के माध्यम से फैलती है और उसको रोकने के लिए उन इलाकों में इंटरनेट को रोकना पड़ता है। जो टीवी चैनल्स हैं, प्रॉडकास्टर्स, ब्रॉडकास्टर्स के जो डिजिटल फोरम्स हैं, वे बाय-एंड-लार्ज सेल्फ रेगुलेशन से या इंडिपेंडेंट रेगुलेशन से रेगुलेटिड हैं। लेकिन जो उसके तहत नहीं आते, उनके ऊपर कोई रेगुलेशन नहीं है। उनमें ज्यादातर डिजिटल मीडिया के एरियाज़ हैं। ये जो डिजिटल प्लेटफॉर्म्स हैं, इनमें फेसबुक भी है, इनमें यू-ट्यूब भी है, इनमें ट्विटर और जो भी उस तरह के प्लेटफॉर्म्स हैं, इनके ऊपर किसी का कोई कंट्रोल नहीं है। ...xxx....xxx....xxx......अब मैं इसके तीसरे एसपैक्ट पर आता हूं, जो कि सबसे गंभीर, सबसे सीरियस है। पहली बात मीडिया से रिलेटिड है, मीडिया के लोग केपेबल हैं, इनको हैंडल कर सकते हैं! दूसरी बात पॉलिटिकल लोगों से, समाज के लोगों से रिलेटिड है, वे भी हैंडल कर सकते हैं। लेकिन जब बात कॉमन आदमी पर आती है, उस आम आदमी पर, जिसके पास इन सबसे लड़ने का रिसोर्स नहीं है। जिसको प्रोटेक्शन देने की जिम्मेदारी पार्लियामेंट की है, जिसको प्रोटेक्शन देने की जिम्मेदारी सरकार की है और मीडिया की भी है। ये एआई कनवर्टेड वीडियोज़ हैं। मैं इसका भुक्तभोगी हूं, इसलिए मैं आपको बहुत डीटेल में बता सकता हूं, लेकिन मैं संक्षेप में दो-तीन बातें आपको बताऊंगा। एक वीडियो सर्कुलेट हुआ, जो कि मेरा वीडियो है, उसमें मैं डाइबिटीज़ की दवाई बेच रहा हूं। मुझे एक जगह उस्ताद अमजद अली साहब मिले। मुझे इस बात की जानकारी नहीं थी लेकिन उन्होंने मुझे कहा कि आपके पास भगवान का दिया सब कुछ है और यह कहा कि आप शुगर की दवाएं क्यों बेचते हैं? मैंने कहा कि वह मैं नहीं हूं, एआई के द्वारा किया गया है। उन्होंने कहा कि ठीक है, लेकिन आपको यह नहीं करना चाहिए। समाज में एक बहुत बड़ा वर्ग है, जिसे यह बात समझ नहीं आती है। डाक्टर नरेश त्रेहन और मेरे साथ उनकी बातचीत है जिसमें मैं उन्हें बता रहा हूं कि वेट कैसे कम करते हैं और लोग वे दवाएं खरीद रहे हैं। हाल ही में एक कंवर्सेशन मेरे और अमिताभ बच्चन साहब के बीच है। मैंने बहुत साल पहले उनका इंटरव्यू किया था। इस कंवर्सेशन में मेरा फेस है, अमिताभ जी का फेस है और मैं उनसे कह रहा हूं कि आपके घुटने का दर्द कैसा है। वे कह रहे हैं कि मैं आठ साल से परेशान था। आपने जो दवाई बताई – 'वे दवाई का नाम बताते हैं' मैंने उसका इस्तेमाल किया और मेरे घुटनों के दर्द में आराम है। लोग भरोसा करते हैं क्योंकि वे क्रेडिबल फेसेज को देखते हैं और इस तरह की चीजें स्प्रेड होती हैं।

तीसरा आस्पेक्ट इंवेस्टर्स का है। नारायण मूर्ति साहब के नाम से एक विडियो चल रहा है जिसमें वे बताते हैं कि फलां कम्पनी में इंवेस्ट करो, आपको पैसे डबल हो जाएंगे। मुम्बई में मेरी भाभी ने मुझे फोन करके कहा कि नारायण मूर्ति वाला विडियो मैंने देखा है और मैं इसमें इंवेस्ट करना चाहती हूं। मैंने कहा कि यह फेक विडियो है। उन्होंने कहा कि मैं तुमसे पैसा नहीं मांगूगी। तुम सिर्फ इतना बता दो कि इसमें कैसे इंवेस्ट करना है। इसके बाद उन्होंने मुझे एक और विडियो भेजा, जिसमें मुकेश अम्बानी उसी कम्पनी को प्रमोट कर रहे हैं। तीसरा रतन टाटा जी भी उसी इंवेस्टमेंट को प्रमोट कर रहे हैं। मैंने उन्हें बहुत समझाया कि यह फेक है और उसके बाद उन्होंने मुझे एक विडियो भेजा, जिसमें मैं भी उसी इंवेस्टमेंट को प्रमोट कर रहा हूं। आप देखें कि इसमें कितने लोगों ने अपनी जीवन भर की कमाई लगा दी और उनका पैसा गायब हो गया। कानून कहता है कि इस तरह का जो फेक विडियो, एआई जेनरेटेड है, इसे 36 से 42 घंटे के अंदर हटाना चाहिए लेकिन कोई नहीं हटाता

है। हम चिड्डियां लिखते रहते हैं लेकिन कोई एक्शन नहीं होता है। यदि 15-20 विडियो होती हैं तो उनमें से दो या तीन विडियो हटा देते हैं। ऐसी विडियोज को मिलियन एंड मिलियन व्यूज मिलते हैं। हमारे पास उसे रोकने का कोई तरीका नहीं है। पुलिस के पास इन विडियोज के लिए किसी को पकड़ने का कोई मैकेनिज्म नहीं है। हमने अपनी टीम बनाई। साइबर एक्सपर्ट्स को हायर किया। पता चला कि ये ज्यादातर विडियोज ग्वाटेमाला से जेनरेट हो रहे हैं और किसी तीसरी कंट्री से पोस्ट हो रहे हैं। आप उन्हें नहीं पकड़ सकते हैं। आप कोर्ट गए। कोर्ट ने कहा कि यह बहुत गंभीर बात है, लेकिन हम क्या करें? मैंने दिल्ली हाई कोर्ट में पिटिशन फाइल की है, जिसकी पिछले तीन महीने से सुनवाई हो रही है और इन तीन महीनों में न जाने कितने विडियोज लोगों तक पहुंच गए। मुझे परसों ही डॉक्टर त्रेहन ने बताया कि उनके और मेरे विडियोज में जो दवाई रिक्मेंड की गई है, वह खाकर कई लोग बीमार हो गए हैं। उन्होंने कहा कि अब मैं भी हाई कोर्ट के केस में शामिल होना चाहता हूं। जो डायबिटीज आदि बीमारियों की दूसरी दवाएं हैं, उनसे लोगों को कितना नुकसान होगा, इसका कोई अंदाजा हमारे पास नहीं है। किसी के पैसे का नुकसान होना, किसी के स्वास्थ्य का नुकसान होना और उसका नुकसान होना जिसके पास लड़ने का कोई साधन नहीं है और जो कहीं जा नहीं सकते हैं। नारायण मूर्ति, अमिताभ बच्चन और रजत शर्मा के फेस पर यकीन करके इंवेस्टमेंट करते हैं, उन्हें पता नहीं होता कि एआई के वे शिकार हो रहे हैं। ये कहां से जेनरेट होते हैं, मैंने आपको बताया है, लेकिन कोई जानकारी प्राप्त नहीं होती है। कोई पाकिस्तान से, ग्वाटेमाला से, नाइजीरिया से जेनरेट होता है। मिस इंफॉर्मेशन से थेफ्ट, लूट, ब्लैकमेल, हेल्थ और सिक्योरिटी, लोगों कहां रहते हैं, उन्हें कैसे पकड़ा जा सकता है, यह विडियोज उसके गवाह हैं। मैंने पुलिस वालों से बात की। उन्होंने कहा कि 14 से 15 साल के लड़के हैं। वे गन के साथ अपनी विडियो पोस्ट करते हैं, धमकी देते हैं और पुलिस कुछ नहीं कर सकती है क्योंकि वे माइनर हैं। मेरे हिसाब से यह पूरे मामले का सबसे सीरियस डायमेंशन है। माइनर गन कल्चर के साथ लोगों को थ्रेट करें, ब्लैकमेल करें, पैसा लूटने की बात करें और उसके लिए फेक विडियोज का इस्तेमाल। डिजिटल अरेस्ट होता है। पूरा का पूरा फेक पुलिस स्टेशन क्रिएट कर देते हैं और सीधे-साधे लोगों को बिलकुल पता नहीं चलता है। तीन-तीन, चार-चार दिन लोग डिजिटली अरेस्ट रहते हैं। हमने बहुत डिटेल में इंवेस्टीगेट किया है और कई केसेज को टीवी पर दिखाया भी है।

b) **Proliferation of Fake News and its causes**

12.   Proliferation of 'Fake News' is a significant issue in today's digital age. Several factors contribute to the spread of fake news, and it is challenging to quantify the exact volume being circulated daily due to the vastness of the internet. According to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, below are the key causes of fake news proliferation:-

  i. **Social Media Platforms:** Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram amplify content that garners engagement. Since sensational or emotionally charged content often generates more clicks, likes, and shares, these platforms' algorithms tend to prioritize such stories, which are sometimes fake or misleading.

  ii. **Lack of Media Literacy:** Many individuals do not have the necessary skills to critically assess the information they encounter online. This can include difficulty in distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources, or understanding how false information is crafted to appear credible.

13.   According to the Network-18, the main causes of fake news proliferation are:-

"Proliferation of Fake News is basically the wide spread or increased circulation of false, misleading, or fabricated information, often presented as if it were true news. Spreading of fake news is driven by a variety of complex and interrelated factors which include but are not limited to political polarization, economic incentives, algorithms that promote viral and sensational content, technologies like bots that amplify false information, cognitive biases, manipulation through AI-generated deepfakes, and the widespread lack of media literacy of public are all significant contributors to this issue".

14. According to the Editors Guild of India (EGI), the main causes of fake news proliferation are:-

    i. Rapid dissemination of unverified information via social media platforms.
    ii. Algorithmic amplification of sensationalist or divisive content.
    iii. Lack of digital and media literacy.

15. As per NBDA, the causes behind the proliferation of fake news are multifaceted and are driven by several key factors. Amongst these, political polarization, economy, algorithms, advertisements which reward viral and sensational content, technologies such as bots which amplify spread of fake news, cognitive biases, manipulation by Artificial Intelligence (AI) through deepfakes and lack of media literacy remain the main cause behind the proliferation of fake news. Some of the main causes of fake news proliferation are:-

    i. The Rise of Social Media: Social media platforms make it incredibly easy to share information (and misinformation) with a vast network with a single click. Algorithms often prioritize engagement, meaning sensational or controversial content, including fake news, can get amplified and reach a wider audience than factual reporting. Users tend to interact with like-minded individuals and content, creating echo chambers where fake news can circulate unchallenged. Filter bubbles further restrict the range of information people are exposed to, reinforcing existing biases.

    ii. Financial Incentives: Fake news, inter-alia, relies on sensational headlines, fabricated stories to attract clicks, which generate followers and advertising revenue for the creators.

    iii. Agendas: Some individuals or groups create and spread fake news to influence public opinion, damage political opponents, or advance specific agendas. This can be financially motivated through donations, support, or other forms of backing.

    iv. Psychological Factors: People are more likely to believe and share information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs, even if it is false. Fake news often targets strong emotions like anger, fear, or outrage, making people more likely to react and share without verifying the information.

    v. Technological Advancements: Technology is making it increasingly difficult to distinguish between real and fabricated content. Deepfakes (manipulated videos) and AI-generated text can create highly convincing but entirely false narratives. Further, bots and automated accounts on social media can be used to artificially inflate the reach of fake news, making it appear more popular and consequently, credible than it actually is.

  c)   **Challenges posed by 'Fake News'**

16. Some of the challenges posed by 'Fake News', as submitted by a few stakeholders, are as under:-

Sl. No.	Organisation/ Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions with respect to challenges posed by 'Fake News'
1.	Press Council of India (PCI)	Fake news in general leads to spread of misinformation, disinformation that can result in defamation, public confusion and erode the credibility of media. In order to address such matters, the Press Council of India has formulated the Norms of Journalistic Conduct to enlighten, encourage and guide media persons and aspiring journalist fraternity to value and practice ethical journalism by minimizing the amplification of fake news. The recent edition of Norms of Journalistic Conduct, 2022 is available on the Council's website @ www.presscouncil.nic.in. The relevant norms herein are Pre-Publication Verification (Norm 34); Conjecture, Comment and Fact (Norm 8) and Accuracy & Fairness (Norm 1); violating these norms culminates to spread of fake news.
2.	Hindustan Times	Fake news creates social and political problems. The main reasons for its proliferation is social media and intermediary platforms that enable its spread, and which have no accountability to facts.
3.	Indian Express	In a world that is driven by digital information, fake news, i.e., fake digital content, is a global challenge. The impact of false and manipulated information on individuals, societies, and government structures has been widely researched and documented. Many of these challenges apply to India as well. The problem of fake content and disinformation is closely connected with the development of digital media. The quick dissemination of information over the Internet creates unique and powerful vulnerabilities. The unprecedented increase in the volume of fake news, i.e., fake digital content, also has a direct correlation with the growth and spread of social media. All this is a concern for India, especially given our ongoing digital revolution and the proliferation of digital devices among citizens. In a polarised polity and society, from political players and their IT cells to activist groups and even anonymous voices, the clickbait advertising revenue model incentivises the propagation of fake digital content that is meant to inflame and provoke and/or mislead and harm. This becomes a natural home for fake news i.e. fake digital content as well. However, the robustness of our democracy and the wisdom that Indian voters have repeatedly shown in our elections suggest that this challenge need not be overstated, and it need not be assumed that citizens would passively allow themselves to be manipulated by disinformation or fake news.
4.	T.V. Today Network Limited	Fake News leads to loss of credibility of the news channels and the broadcasters. A common sensible person who is fed with fake information continuously would after a while not be able to differentiate between the real and fake news. It is sure to lead to credibility deficit as much as the news channels are

		concerned and the ultimate such enormous financial loss would be the death knell for the mainstream media.
		Fake News can influence the sentiments of people, election process and polarise the society in addition to creating a broad wedge between the social segments rendering it difficult to enter into any positive dialogue. For corporates, it can be equally ruinous as the same may result in insider trading and fall in the stock market prices.
		False news if spread via social media can also trigger strong emotional reactions like fear, hate or anger and that makes it more difficult for a person to critically analyze such news.
		To the latter part of the question it is stated that the prime reason for the spread of fake news predominantly in India is the low level of digital literacy of the users. With more than 60 Crores of online users, most of them lack the capacity to analyse information on the web. The same has been driven by affordable smartphones and data. Political agendas, communal prejudices and sensationalism are always a raging issue of the country and is further fuelled by social media algorithm that amplify the virality.
5.	Network-18	Proliferation of Fake News is basically the wide spread or increased circulation of false, misleading, or fabricated information, often presented as if it were true news. Spreading of fake news is driven by a variety of complex and interrelated factors which include but are not limited to political polarization, economic incentives, algorithms that promote viral and sensational content, technologies like bots that amplify false information, cognitive biases, manipulation through AI-generated deepfakes, and the widespread lack of media literacy of public are all significant contributors to this issue.

d) **Cases related to 'Fake News'**

17. When asked for the details of the cases of 'Fake News' handled by MIB in last 5 years (in all the three forms of Media — Print, Electronics and Digital), the Ministry replied as under:-

> "It is reiterated that the term 'Fake News' is not explicitly defined under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 and the Rules framed thereunder. However, Rule 6(1)(d) of the Programme Code under CTN Rules, 1994 provides that "No programme should be carried in cable service which contains anything obscene, defamatory, deliberate, false and suggestive innuendos and half truths. During last five years action was taken against broadcasters in 21 cases for violating Rule 6(1)(d) alongwith other provisions of Programme Code.

> The Government has notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media, Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 on 25.02.2021 which inter-alia provide for Code of Ethics for the publishers of news and

current affairs on digital media and publishers of online curated content (OTT platforms) along with a three-level institutional mechanism (Level -1 to III) for redressal of grievances relating to violation of the Code of Ethics by such publishers. This division has taken appropriate action on such complaints as per the Grievance Redressal Mechanism under the Rules.

PIB Fact Check Unit does not maintain data of fake news handles separately for each of the three platforms viz Print, Electronics, and Digital. However, it has received a total of 1,63,597 queries from 2 April 2020 to 30 April 2025, out of which only 53,155 were found to be relevant and suitable action was taken thereon".

18.   On being asked for the number of actionable queries that FCU responded to and number of fake news busted by it since its inception, following information was provided by MIB:-

Year	Number of actionable queries FCU has responded to	Number of Fake News Busted on @PIB Fact Check social media handles
2019	13954	17
2020		394
2021	15412	285
2022	8107	338
2023	6623	557
2024	6320	583
2025*	2037	105
Total	**52,453**	**2279**

*As of 31 March 2025

Social Media Statistics in respect of Fact Check Unit is as under:					
Platform	Twitter(X)	Instagram	Facebook	WhatsApp Channel	Telegram	Threads
Followers	323.3 K	97.1 K	62 K	29.2 K	17K	15.4 K

19.   While observing a consistent decline in the number of actionable queries that FCU responded and increase in the number of queries busted on @PIBFactCheck social media handles, MIB was asked to provide reasons for the same. To this, the Ministry replied as under:-

"The PIB Fact Check Unit (FCU), since its establishment, has played a vital role in countering misinformation related to Government policies and events. A significant surge in the number of queries began in 2019, coinciding with the global outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic triggered an overwhelming wave of misinformation, resulting in a spike in fact-check requests. Public reliance on verified Government communication led to an unprecedented volume of queries during 2020–21.

In the years since, while the total number of queries has gradually declined, the number of actionable cases has steadily increased, indicating that citizens are now better at identifying and reporting more credible instances of misinformation. This also indicates more awareness about the PIB Fact Check Unit as a credible and potent source for fighting fake news.

Public awareness has evolved, not reduced:

The initial surge in queries during the pandemic was driven by widespread uncertainty and panic. It can be a safe assumption that since then, public digital literacy has improved, and citizens have become more discerning about what constitutes misinformation. As a result, fewer false claims may be reaching the threshold that prompts reporting. This is also displayed in the rising following of fact-check unit on all platforms and wide publicity given to the fact checks by various news items.

Trust in the PIB Fact Check Unit remains intact:

The increase in actionable queries suggests that the public is submitting more relevant and verifiable cases, indicating continued engagement and trust in the PIB Fact Check Unit's role.

Despite a drop in total queries, the increase in fake news items busted reflects improved detection capabilities rather than a simple rise in misinformation alone. Several factors contribute to this:

- Enhanced Monitoring: The PIB Fact Check has strengthened its surveillance, allowing it to proactively identify and address fake news without relying solely on public queries.
- Better Targeting: The Unit is now more effective at distinguishing actionable cases, resulting in more high-impact busts."

The nature and volume of queries addressed by the FCU are inherently dynamic, influenced by the socio-political and public health environments at any given time. The sharp rise in fake news items "busted" by PIB Fact Check, from 2021 to 2024, despite a drop in citizen queries, suggests a combination of two key trends.

First, increased awareness about the PIB Fact Check Unit and its usefulness in public information hygiene and a better understanding of its ambit. This has caused more relevant cases to be reported.

Second, this increase also reflects improved detection mechanisms by PIB. The fact-checking unit has become more proactive, often taking suo-motu action by targeting entire YouTube channels and viral content without waiting for citizen queries. Therefore, the rise in busts is both a response to the growing awareness about misinformation and a result of enhanced institutional efforts to combat it".

20.   When asked to furnish details of the action taken against the cases that were labelled as 'Fake News', particularly that were dealt during the year 2024, the Ministry replied as under:-

"The PIB Fact Check Unit currently does not possess enforcement powers to take action against fake news. Its role is primarily limited to creating public awareness by identifying and flagging false or misleading information circulating on social media platforms. Therefore, after verifying the authenticity of news from authorized sources in Ministries/

Departments, FCU posts correct information on its social media platforms".

(i) Print Media

21.   In furtherance of its objectives, Press Council of India (PCI), under Section 13(2)(b) of the Press Council Act, 1978, has framed 'Norms of Journalistic Conduct' for adherence by the media for maintaining ethical standards in print media journalism and for journalists to practice the profession within ethical boundaries. These Norms have specific provisions relating to curbing of spread of fake news under its norms relating to 'Accuracy and fairness'. Under Section 13 of the Press Council Act 1978, PCI also takes cognizance on complaints in matters on the issues concerning freedom of Press and safeguarding of its high standards. Under Section 14 of the PCI Act, complaints violative of the ethical norms of journalism are adjudicated. The details of the cases filed and adjudicated under Section-13 and Section-14 of the PCI Act for the last 3 years is as under:-

Under Section-13				
SI. No.	Year	Cases Filed	Cases Adjudicated	Suo-Motu Cases
1.	2022-23	273	11	4
2.	2023-24	212	63	7
3.	2024-25	210	46	9

Under Section-14				
SI. No.	Year	Cases Filed	Cases Adjudicated	Suo-Motu Cases
1.	2022-23	865	29	4
2.	2023-24	775	103	24
3.	2024-25	898	41	21

22.   According to Press Council of India (PCI) during the last 3 years, they have taken suo-motu cognizance in 5 matters pertaining to fake news. Further, the data of complaints related to fake news filed and adjudicated in last three (3) years is as follows. PCI has stated that as the Council has no punitive powers, no record of compliance by media organisations is being maintained by the Press Council of India.

SI. No.	Year	Cases filed u/s 14		Cases Disposed Of	
		Total filed	Relating to Fake News	By way of Adjudication	Cases closed at Preliminary Stage (u/s 14)
				Relating to	

				Total	Fake News	Including Fake News
1.	2022-2023	865	233	29	03	693
2.	2023-2024	775	273	103	02	765
3.	2024-2025	903	371	41	23	424

23.   The Ministry was asked whether the cause for discrepancy between the number of cases filed and the number actually adjudicated was due to staff shortage/procedural delay/resource constraints. To this, the reply was as under:-

"There is no significant staff shortage in relation to sanctioned strength or resource constraints. However, it is apprised that the number of complaints mentioned are the registered complaints. Of these, a number of complaints are closed at preliminary stage by the Hon'ble Chairperson and do not figure in the list of cases adjudicated.

It is further apprised that on receipt of the complaint(s), the Council processes the same as per the complaint mechanism and procedures laid down in the Press Council Act, 1978.

A brief upon the prescribed procedure is as follows:-

(a) Complaint is registered under the relevant section(s) i.e U/s 13 (Complaints by the Press) and 14 (Complaints against the Press) of Press Council Act, 1978. The Complainant is required to comply with mandatory requirements under Regulation (3) of Press Council (Procedure for Inquiry) Regulation, 1979 within four (4) weeks.

In the absence of any reply, the matter is reviewed and a reminder is issued to the complainant asking him again to comply with the requirements within 2 (two) weeks.

If the communication has not been responded by the complainant; then a final reminder may be issued to the complainant for compliance on case-to-case basis.

Where a complainant does not comply with the requirements of Regulation (3), the Chairman may return the complaint under registered post acknowledgement due informing the complainant that the matter has been closed due to lack of compliance.

(b) The complaint may also be closed at preliminary stage due to following reasons:

(i) Upon analysing the complaint(s) at initial stage, if the matter is beyond the jurisdiction of the Council i.e. Digital/ Electronic/Social Media/Personal Dispute/Law & Order etc., the same is closed by Hon'ble Chairperson at preliminary stage and reported to the Council.

ii. If the matter is sub-judice in any court of law, the Council does not take cognizance and closes the same.

iii. If the complaint is received beyond the time limit (time barred) as per the Procedure for Inquiry Regulations, 1979, the matter is closed by Hon'ble Chairperson. However, the Hon'ble Chairman/Chairperson has discretionary power to condone the delay after considering the request of the complainant and case may be processed.

(iv) Complaints are also closed for lack of substance.

(c) Upon completion of all the mandatory requirements, a Show Cause Notice/Notice for Comments/Notice for Statement in reply is issued to the concerned respondent(s).

On receipt of the replies/written statement/counter comment (s), the same is shared with parties i.e. complainant and respondents.

(d) After ascertaining that the record is complete in all respects, the matter becomes ripe and is listed chronologically before the Inquiry Committee of the Council.

As per the procedure, as and when the meeting of Inquiry Committee is fixed an agenda of cases (list of cases) is prepared for listing before the Inquiry Committee. The list is prepared chronologically year-wise. However, the Council gives priority to the cases where it took Suo-motu cognizance regarding cases of curtailment of Press Freedom/assault or killing of a journalist/breach of journalistic norms of conduct.

(e) Proceedings of Inquiry Committee are open to public wherein the parties concerned are issued with notice for hearing, seeking their appearance on an appointed date, time, and venue through notice for hearings.

(f) The Council's complaint resolution mechanism closely parallels the operational methodology of Indian judicial courts. The Council's adjudicatory/disposal process requires meticulous examination of facts, evidence, and legal precedents.

(g) Cases that are listed for hearing may get adjourned for various reasons, on case-to-case basis as deemed fit by the Inquiry Committee, such as adjournment sought by either of the parties, pendency of response of either of the parties, implementation of certain measures.

Inquiry Committee also calls the reports from the concerned authorities/parties along with supporting documents, if any required to render the justice on record. It also passes directions in ongoing matters for compliance and adjourns the matter for ensuring the compliance by the parties.

(h) The Inquiry Committee after conducting hearing give its report which is then placed before the Council in its next meeting for its final decision. The powers of the Council are limited to warn, admonish and at the most censure. The Council by convention is headed by a Retd. Judge of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India and it comprises of twenty-eight other members.

The decision of the Council is forwarded to the concerned parties in the matter for follow up/information/compliance.

(i) It is apprised that during COVID Pandemic regular meetings of the Council could not be held. Last meeting of the Council was held on 10.02.2020 and the last meeting of Inquiry Committee was held on 25 & 26 February, 2020 during pandemic. Thereafter, meeting of the Council was held on 21 & 22 September, 2020 (Physically and virtually).

It is also apprised that in May, 2021 the term of 13th Press Council of India ended. The new Council i.e. 14th term was constituted on 05.10.2021. However, the term of the Chairman also ended on 21.11.2021.

The position of the Hon'ble Chairperson, Press Council of India was vacant from 21.11.2021 to 16.06.2022, due to which no meeting took place.

Presently, the re-constitution of the XVth term Council is under way. 14th term ended on October 5, 2024.

This has resulted in a backlog of cases".

24.   According to PCI, to deal with the cases of fake news, the PCI has a complaint mechanism. Further, under Clause 14(2) of the Press Council Act, 1978, if the Council

is of the opinion that it is necessary or expedient in the public interest so to do, it may require any newspaper to publish therein such manner as the Council thinks fit, any particulars relating to any inquiry under this section against a newspaper or news agency, an editor or a journalist working therein, including the name of such newspaper, news agency, editor or journalist.

25.   When asked to provide details of the plan/proposal to reduce backlog, the Ministry replied as under:-

(i)   Prioritization for cases marked important by Honb'le Chairperson
(ii)   Categorizing backlog items
(iii) Regular updation and review of complaints under process
(iv)   More frequent Inquiry Committee meetings to hear cases
(v)   Minimise adjournments of Inquiry Committee hearings and ratification meetings of Council.
(vi)   Determining time limit to clear the pendency.

26.   With respect to adjudicating system, the Ministry stated that its efficiency may be enhanced by following steps:-

(i)   Time limit between filing of complaint and matter becoming ripe for adjudication to be not more than 4 (four) months.
(ii)   Listing the matter before the Inquiry Committee by prioritizing them through date / year on which the complaint is filed, in chronological manner.
(iii) In order to clear the backlog, frequency of Inquiry Committee meetings has been increased. Each inquiry Committee meeting for at least three days on monthly basis and takes up minimum 20 cases per day.
(iv)   The Inquiry Committees to submit reports within 3(three) months.
(v)   Outstation meetings of Inquiry Committee are also already being conducted keeping in view number of cases from a particular region.
(vi)   Recommendation of the Inquiry Committee in each complaint case is being immediately listed before the Council in its next meeting for ratification. Then the adjudication is forwarded to the parties concerned promptly and uploaded on Council's website.

27.   For increasing the transparency in the disposal of complaints, the Ministry/PCI stated that following steps are being taken by the Council:-

(i)   Updating monthly statistics on official website of the Council.
(ii)   Complainant is updated about the developments of the matter through email, letter and telephonically.
(iii) For maintaining the transparency, the Council conducts public meetings of the Inquiry Committees.
(iv)   Website of the Council is updated with the decisions and adjudications of the Council.
(v)   Proper information to the parties concerned regarding their matter is

being issued time to time, meticulously by the Council.

(vi) Agendas of the Inquiry Committees, are being uploaded over the website of the Council, time to time for facilitating the parties and maintaining transparency.

(vii) A complaint mechanism software with online submission and tracking facility is being developed.

(viii) Implementation of e-office in PCI is under process, having electronic file tracking system.

(ii) Electronic Media

28. All Private satellite TV Channels are required to adhere to the Programme Code under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, in respect of their news content which inter alia provides that no contents which contains anything obscene, defamatory, deliberate, false and suggestive innuendos and half-truths is broadcast. The Cable Television Network Rules, 1994, as amended in 2021, provides for a three-tier grievance redressal mechanism to look into the complaints relating to the violation of the Programme Code by the TV channels. Appropriate action is taken where violation of Programme Code is found. The Central Government also issues Advisories to the TV Channels from time to time for adherence to the Programme Code. Year-wise details regarding action taken on matter against Pvt. Satellite TV Channels during 2019-2025 (Till 29.04.2025) is as under:-

Sl. No	Description	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
1.	Advisories to specific channels	29	01	05	07	14	03	1	60
2.	Warnings	39	04	25	06	17	01	-	92
3.	Orders for Apology Scrolls	30	-	11	39	05	-	-	83
4.	Off-air Orders	03	02	-	-	03	-	-	8
5.	Cancellation of permission	-	-	01	-	-	-	-	1
6.	Order for disclaimer	-	-	01	-	-	-	-	1
Total		101	07	43	52	37	04	01	245

(iii) Digital Media

29. For digital news publishers, the Government has notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 under Information Technology Act, 2000 on 25th February, 2021, which *inter-alia* provides for a Code of Ethics for adherence by digital news publishers and also a three-tier mechanism for redressal of grievance relating to Code of Ethics by them. The Code of Ethics applicable to the publishers of news and current affairs obligates such publishers to follow the following norms applicable to conventional news media i.e. Print and TV:

(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.

30.   Besides, Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 *inter-alia* empowers the Central Government to issue directions to any Government agency or an intermediary to block content 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 such matters. Under the provisions of Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 the Ministry issues directions for blocking of content of digital news publishers covered under the provisions of Section 69 A of Information Technology Act, 2000.   The request for blocking is considered as per the laid procedure in the IT Rules, 2021. After Notification of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 on 25.02.2021, 15 Writ Petitions have been filed in various High Courts challenging the maintainability of the Rules. Hon'ble Supreme Court vide order dated 22.03.2024 transferred all 15 Writ Petitions to Delhi High Court for further hearing. Presently, these petitions are heard by Delhi High Court. In two of these cases filed in Bombay High court in WP(L) NO.14172 of 2021 - Agij Promotion of Nineteen one a Media Pvt. Ltd. &Ors. vs. Union of India and PIL (L) No.14204 of 2021 - Nikhil Mangesh Wagle vs. Union of India, Hon'ble Bombay High Court vide interim order dated 14.08.2021 has stayed the operation of Rule 9(1) relating to the adherence of the Code of Ethics by the publishers of news and current affairs on digital media and OTT platforms; and Rule 9(3) relating to the three-level grievance redressal mechanism. SLPs has been filed in Supreme Court against this interim order.

31.   The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was asked to provide their view point on the judgement of a three-judge bench of the Bombay High Court which set aside Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of 'Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021' (as amended in 2023) that granted the power to a Central Government-appointed authority to determine that which is "fake", "false" or "misleading", and upon such determination, the social media intermediaries were

required to take action to "not host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share. To this, they replied as under:-

> "Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) amended rule 3(1)(b)(v) of IT Rules, 2021 *vide* notification dated 6th April, 2023 the IT Rules, 2021 to provide that the intermediary shall make reasonable efforts by itself, and to cause the users of its computer resource to not host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share any information that deceives or misleads the addressee about the origin of the message or knowingly and intentionally communicates any misinformation or information which is patently false and untrue or misleading in nature or, in respect of any business of the Central Government, is identified as fake or false or misleading by such Fact Check Unit of the Central Government as the Ministry may, by notification published in the Official Gazette, specify.
>
> The Bombay High Court, vide Order dated 26.09.2024, declared the amendment unconstitutional on grounds that it is violative of the provisions of Article 14, Article 19(1)(a) and Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution and the said Rule as amended is ultra vires the Act of 2000.
>
> It may be noted in this regard that Press Information Bureau (PIB) under Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is the nodal agency of the Government to disseminate information to the print, electronic and digital media on Government policies, programmes, initiatives and achievements both at central and regional levels. Given this situation the FCU in PIB seems to be the most appropriate agency for fact checking of false and misleading information relating to the Government. The Government feels that giving a statutory basis to the FCU under PIB, as proposed in the amendments to IT Rules, 2021 as above is necessary for checking fake news relating to its plans, programmes and initiatives. Accordingly, MeiTY is in the process of filing an SLP against the judgment of Bombay High Court".

32.   In the light of the above and considering the role of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in implementing 'IT Rules, 2021' a series of queries related to the subject were asked, which *inter-alia* included (i) Details of the legal provisions that currently empower MeitY to regulate or take action against the dissemination of 'Fake News'; (ii) Details of engagement between MeitY and social media as well as messaging platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, etc., aimed to prevent misinformation/Fake News; (iii) Views/suggestions on 'Safe Harbour' provisions used by social media platforms/intermediaries etc.; (iv) Views on the role of Digital platforms and algorithms involved in promoting 'Fake News; (v) Further action on the judgement of a three-judge

bench of the Bombay High Court which set aside Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the IT Rules 2021 (as amended in 2023); (vi) Suggestions for making Online Media more accountable; (vii) Existing coordination mechanisms between MeitY and other concerned Ministries for addressing the issue of 'Fake News'; etc. The response of MeitY is as under:-

> "As per entries 22A, 22B and 22C in the subjects distributed to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) in the Second Schedule to the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, the following matters are allocated to MIB:
> "VA. DIGITAL/ONLINE MEDIA
> 22A Films and Audio-Visual programmes/ content made available by online content providers/ publishers.
> 22B News and current affairs content on online platforms.
> 22C Online advertisements."
> (iii) Part III of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 ("IT Rules, 2021"), focusses on regulating digital news publishers and OTT platforms and this Part III is being administered by MIB.
> (iv) A Fact Check Unit (FCU) has been set up under Press Information Bureau, MIB in November, 2019 with the objective to counter dissemination of fake news & misinformation pertaining to the Government of India".

33.   The Department of Telecommunications was also asked to furnish details of the legal provisions that currently empower DoT to regulate or take action against the dissemination of 'Fake News'; and about the existing coordination mechanisms between DoT and other concerned Ministries for addressing the issue of 'Fake News'; etc. To this the Department of Telecommunications replied as under:-

> "Department of Telecommunications (DOT) issues instructions to Licensees having Internet Service Authorization to block/unblock access to the website(s), in the capacity of licensor, as per directions received from Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) under Section 69A of IT Act, 2000 and as per directions from the Hon'ble Courts in various Commercial Suits/Writ Petitions".

34.   On the role and coordination required with other Ministries/Organisations viz. Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Election Commission of India (ECI), etc., for checking the menace of Fake News, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting submitted as under:-

> "The Ministry is in support of developing a broader roadmap to curtail and control the spread of fake news or misinformation with involvement of MeitY, DoT etc. This needs to be done in broader consultation with stakeholders from the industry as well.
> The use of advanced tool like Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be useful in consultation with Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)

while tackling the spread of fake news. Such tools may be used for monitoring/verification of news etc. by the self-regulatory bodies and media organizations to leverage their scope and capacity.

Further, including media literacy as a part of formal education curriculum could be considered but a broader consultation in this regard need to be done by the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders".

II. Measures/Provisions/Mechanism to Curb Fake News

(d) Regulatory framework for curbing Fake News

35.   When asked to outline the procedure and specific Rule followed by Print Media, Electronic Media and Digital Media in identifying and curbing the Fake News, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting replied that the Government of India has statutory and institutional mechanisms in place to address fake news on various media platforms which are as under:-

"**A Fact Check Unit (FCU)** has been set up under Press Information Bureau under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in November, 2019 to counter fake news relating to the Central Government. After verifying the authenticity of news from authorised sources in Ministries/ Departments, FCU posts correct information on its social media platforms.

For Print Media, the newspapers have to adhere to "Norms of Journalistic Conduct" brought out by Press Council of India (PCI) which inter alia restrains publication of fake/defamatory/ misleading news. The Council holds inquiry into alleged violations of Norms, as per section 14 of the Act, and may warn, admonish or censure the newspaper, editors, journalists, etc. as the case may be.

Content on TV Channels is required to adhere to the Programme Code under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, which, inter alia, provides that no content which contains anything obscene, defamatory, deliberate, false and suggestive innuendos and half-truth is broadcast on private satellite TV channels. The Cable Television Network (Amendment) Rules 2021, provides for a three-tier grievance redressal mechanism to look into the complaints relating to the violation of the Code by the TV channels. Appropriate action is taken where violation of Programme Code is found.

For Digital News Publishers, Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021("IT Rules, 2021") provide for a Code of Ethics for the publishers of news and current affairs on digital media, which, inter alia, requires adherence to the Norms of Journalistic Conduct brought out by PCI and the Programme Code under Cable Television Network Regulation Act, 1995. The Rules provide for a Three Tier Grievance Redressal Mechanism   to look into complaints relating to violation of the Code. The Code of Ethics under IT Rules, however, has been stayed by the Bombay High Court vide their interim order dated 14.8.2021. The complaints relating to fake news received in

the Ministry are forwarded to the concerned news publishers, being Level-I of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism, for appropriate action under the IT Rules, 2021.

The Ministry takes appropriate action against circulation of fake news as per the provisions of the institutional mechanism as above, available for various media platforms. However, to augment the effectiveness of the efforts to check the spread of fake news there is a need for defining fake news and incorporating it in the existing regulatory mechanisms for print, electronic and digital media along with appropriate deterrent measures for such circulation of fake news. This is especially important for the news publishers on digital media as well as the users of social media platforms keeping in view the speed of spread of such news on digital/social media".

36. The Ministry also informed that the objective of the Fact Check Unit is to counter dissemination of fake news & misinformation pertaining to the Government of India and to provide people with an easy avenue to report suspicious and questionable information for fact-checking in this regard. Further, the details of the fact checking process adopted by the FCU was available on the website of the Press Information Bureau according to which they follow a FACT model – Find, Assess, Create and Target.

"Find: The PIB Fact Check Unit takes Suo Moto cognizance on Fact Checking as well as receives complaints on its website or Whatsapp Hotline.
Assess: The Unit segregates the received information after ascertaining whether it falls within the ambit of the Fact Check Unit. The relevant complaints are researched using various fact checking tools and verified through authentic government open-source information available only on Government websites, notices, circulars, documents, and e-gazettes.
Create: After verifying the authenticity of the received information from authorized sources, the Fact Check Unit utilizes the Information, Education & Communication (IEC) strategy to create awareness through creative content fit for dissemination on social media platforms.
Target: The PIB Fact Check Unit posts the content on its various social media platforms. Additionally, content may be reposted from other verified Government handles that have fact checked any information pertaining to Government of India. No personal handles will be reposted.

37. The representatives of the Ministry while deposing before the Committee, during evidence, submitted the following w.r.t Fact Check Unit:-

"As regards the Fact-Check Unit that we have established in the Press Information Bureau, I am using the word Press Information Bureau because currently the fact-check unit established under Government of India has been stayed by the hon. High Court. Under the Fact-Check Unit that we have established under the PIB, we have been doing a lot of fact-checking work. In fact, currently also our war-room is working round the clock as well as every second to ensure that a lot of fact-checking is done on misinformation that is being peddled by the inimical forces".

38. Pointing out the regulatory gaps with respect to the fake information and misinformation, the Ministry submitted the following during evidence:-

> "We have the Press Council Act of 1978 in respect of newspapers. We have the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act 1995 for television channels. We also have the Press and Registration of Periodicals Act 2023. We have the Information Technology Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code Rules 2021 for digital news publishers.
> There are regulatory frameworks in place for curbing fake news but as has been pointed out by the Committee in their earlier meetings, there are regulatory gaps currently and especially with respect to the fake information and misinformation that gets peddled on digital platforms".

39. On enquiring about the efforts made in identifying and curbing the Fake News, PCI submitted following:-

> "The Press Council of India is a quasi–judicial statutory authority established under an Act of Parliament with the twin objectives of maintaining the standards of journalism and preserving the freedom of press in India. The PCI has a complaint mechanism for dealing with the cases of fake/false/defamatory/misleading news wherein it takes suo-motu cognizance under Regulation 13 of Press Council (Procedure for Inquiry) Regulation, 1979, or under Clause 14(1) of the Press Council Act, 1978, on receipt of a complaint made to it or otherwise, if the Council has reason to believe that a newspaper or news agency has offended against the standards of journalistic ethics or public taste or that an editor or a working journalist has committed any professional misconduct, the Council, after giving the newspaper, or news agency, the editor or journalist concerned an opportunity of being heard, holds an inquiry in such manner as provided by regulations made under this Act and, if it is satisfied that it is necessary so to do, it may, for reasons to be recorded in writing, warn, admonish or censure the newspaper, the news agency, the editor or the journalist or disapprove the conduct of the editor or the journalist, as the case may be. ..xxx..xxx…xxx… As far as the Press Council of India is concerned, it has jurisdiction only over print media and for the print media, the Council has formulated the Norms of Journalistic Conduct to enlighten, encourage and guide media persons and aspiring media workers to value and practice ethical journalism, with its recent edition being the Norms of Journalistic Conduct, 2022. Therein, the relevant norms in the matter of fake news are Norm 1 – Accuracy & Fairness; Norm 8 – Conjecture, Comment and Fact; and Norm 34 – Pre–Publication Verification.
>
> Further, Article 19(2) of the Indian Constitution places reasonable restrictions on the Right to freedom of speech and expression in the interests of sovereignty and integrity of the country, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence."

40. Adding further on the issue, following was submitted by the PCI:-

> "The PCI while considering the matter regarding strategies and efforts to tackle fake news during its meeting held on 22.09.2022, gave 6 recommendations, one among them related to fact checking mechanism

which reads - 'There should be "Fact Checking mechanism" within the news media organization itself before publishing any news article'.

Further, the PCI while dealing with reference from Shri Kuldip Nayar regarding setting up of Media Commission as forwarded by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting on 15.02.2006, after in-depth deliberation supported the terms of reference envisaged by Shri Nayar alongwith additional suggestion, that to promote credibility and response to readers' reactions the institution of internal Ombudsmen may be strengthened/created in big newspapers. Newspapers with a minimum circulation (say 1 lakh per issue) may be required to appoint an Independent Ombudsmen".

41. Following response was given by NBDA, during evidence, for tackling issues related to Fake News:-

"अब सवाल यह है कि इससे निपटने के लिए क्या करें और इसके लिए हमने हाई कोर्ट में क्या सुझाव दिए। इंटरनेट प्लेटफार्म्स के पास डेडिकेटेड नोडल आफिसर होना चाहिए, जिसे कोई एकाउंटेबल बना सके। जिससे आप बात कर सकें। दूसरा इस सारे मैकेनिज्म में एकदम एक्शन होना चाहिए और छह घंटे में उस विडियो को डिलीट करें और उसके बाद जांच करें। पहले इंवेस्टीगेशन करें और फिर डिलीट करें, तो उसका नुकसान बहुत ज्यादा होता है। एक सुझाव यह है कि एआई जेनरेट करने वाले लोगों को लाइसेंस दिया जाए और उस लाइसेंस की टर्म्स एंड कंडिशन्स स्ट्रिंजेंट हों ताकि वे इस तरह की विडियो जेनरेट करके किसी को पालिटिकली, पर्सनली, फाइनेंशियली और सिक्योरिटी वाइज नुकसान न पहुंचा सके। फाइनली मैं कहना चाहता हूं कि इसे हम केवल इंडिया के संबंध में न देखें। It is a global problem world-over. हम जहां भी जाते हैं everywhere people are facing this. हमने अमरीका के इलेक्शन्स में देखा है। दोनों तरफ के कंडिडेट्स की तरफ से फेक विडियोज पोस्ट हुए। पूरे सिस्टम को प्रभावित करने की कोशिश की गई। कांटेन्ट बनाने वाले ग्लोबल सरफेस से ऑपरेट करते हैं, फाइनेंशियली फ्राड करने वाले भी ग्लोबली ऑपरेट करते हैं और जो अपराध करते हैं, वे भी ग्लोबली ऑपरेट करते हैं, इसलिए जब हम कानून की बात सोचें तो यह सोचें कि ग्लोबल प्रॉब्लम है और जो भी स्टैंड हम लें, उसमें दूसरे देशों को साथ में लेना होगा। भारत इसमें इनिशिएटिव लेकर शुरूआत कर सकता है लेकिन जब तक दूसरे मुल्क भी इसमें शामिल नहीं होंगे, तब तक इसके बारे में फाइनली कुछ कर पाना संभव नहीं होगा। धन्यवाद"।

42. Regarding the procedure and specific Rules followed by Print Media, Electronic Media, and Digital Media in identifying and curbing Fake News, following was submitted by Editors Guild of India (EGI):-

"**Print**: It is part of a well-established norms laid out drill to check and cross-verify every piece of information and satisfy its veracity. Then there are multiple layers of inbuilt vetting and gatekeeper mechanisms in each print organization. Any news, emanating from any medium is subjected to rigorous tests by cross-checking the development from the person (s) and or authorities (s) before deciding on its authenticity. Information that fails to pass the benchmarks is discarded as unconfirmed and inaccurate. Further, the print media is covered under the ambit of the Press Council of India, which is a quasi-judicial body with a clearly spelled-out code called 'Norms of Journalists Conduct'. The Council advises the press to follow these norms.
Broadcast: Besides the in-house fact-checking processes that each news broadcaster follows, the industry association of news broadcasters—News Broadcasters & Digital Association (NBDA)—has established the News Broadcasters & Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA), an independent body that regulates news broadcasting in India. The NBDSA enforces the NBDA's

Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards, adjudicates complaints about broadcasts, and ensures compliance with the Code of Conduct.

Digital Media: The digital editions of print publications as well as news broadcasters follow the same journalistic norms of editorial checks and fact-checking that are followed by them for print editions and for linear TV broadcasts respectively".

43.   On the same issue, Editors Guild of India (EGI) during evidence submitted that:

"The simple point being that there are already quite a few mechanisms across criminal and civil space, across IT Act to control any kind of content. Being the kind of democracy that we profess ourselves to be, we, as a GUILD, would like to lay down some first principles that any content regulation or any content monitoring should be in a way that it is not coercive and it is not Government control and where Government is the sole arbiter. The Government has put together a Fact-Checking Unit, the PIB run fact-checking unit. Per se the Fact-Checking Unit is a welcome step. It is important to check content, flag content, but where you give the same Fact-Checking Unit an authority to take down content, it becomes problematic. The recent Bombay High Court judgment has been very emphatic about the unconstitutionality of the Fact-Checking Unit with powers to order content take down primarily because the Government was the only arbiter, sole arbiter, about what is fake, what is misleading, or what is false. So, whatever mechanism that we think about should be in a manner where the Government is at best flagging content, Government is not taking on the onus of bringing down content. The Government should work with media industry, platforms, media players, to create an enabling mechanism where content remains safe for the public at large. Mr. Sharma has elaborated on the need for platforms to take greater responsibility. The GUILD wholeheartedly supports that suggestion. These platforms are making billions and billions of dollars of profits. The amount of money that they are investing in flagging content, in monitoring content is visibly very small, and miniscule. They need to put in far more effort, far more money, far more resources in scanning the online system and flagging problematic content. Again, we reiterate the word 'flagging'. They already have their own guidelines where they take down content on obscenity, child pornography and depiction of violence and they often take down. Our submission is that on the matter of fake news, content takedown has to be discouraged. Content flagging has to be the rule in a manner that you also explain why the content is false. I agree with Mr. Sharma that the response time has to be very quick. But the response time should not be mistaken for taking down of the content because then that also becomes a censorship power. Whilst we would not want the Government to be a censor, we would also not want the private entity to be a censor.

Especially, in the kind of democracy that we all want ourselves to be, the first and foremost recommendation is to create a far greater onus on platforms to devote money, energy, and resources, and have people who are accountable, who are approachable for any kind of grievances a user may have. This also applies to any blocking order, because many times blocking orders are issued and the person whose content has been blocked does not get any response. Why has their content been removed? It is like speaking into a black hole because you do not understand. You do not get a response. He (Mr. Sharma) is very right that on YouTube, they do not get a response.

So, whether you want to flag a content as wrong or whether your content has been pulled down, in both cases, transparency by the platforms has to be maintained. They have enough money. We all see the amount of profit they are generating. They need to put in far more money towards creating this mechanism".

44. Adding on the issue, EGI during evidence, submitted as under:-

"Finally, I think our recommendation will be that the Government should rethink some other laws that have been introduced because in an effort to solve a problem, which we understand is a genuine problem, the system has become extremely cumbersome. We should also recognize that in the end, governments come and change. Tools made by one government are misused by another government. So, we should not create systems which will be misused. This is our submission because there is a diverse group of parliamentarians here, not only at the national level but also at the state level, like the Central Government was putting in a Fact-Checking Unit; the Karnataka Government was putting in a Fact-Checking Unit. Our problem is that this is not something which is endemic to one establishment. The history of 80 years has been that the State has taken on greater onus. That is probably the intention of the State in other parts of the world also. In many democracies, in an excitement to control such content, they have created a censorship mechanism. Again, I am just reiterating that there should be transparency at the Government's level, transparency in detailing what is fake, transparency at the end of platforms for flagging content, more resources by the platforms for flagging content. Government is only to create an enabling mechanism, if at all by other bodies. Government should not be a part of any regulatory content monitoring mechanism. Already there is a very elaborate system. In fact, there is an urgent need to rethink 353 BNS and urgent need to re-evaluate Section 69 where take-down orders are being issued in a very opaque manner".

45. Regarding the initiatives taken by States/UTs to counter Fake News/Misinformation, following was submitted by EGI:-

"Certain States and Union Territories in India have implemented innovative initiatives to counter misinformation and fake news:
Maharashtra:
Launched the "MahaCyber" initiative to tackle online misinformation. Citizens can report fake news through a dedicated helpline number and online portal.
Karnataka:
Established a fact-checking team under the State Police's Cybercrime Division to monitor and address misinformation, particularly during elections and public health crises.
Kerala:
Initiated the "Satyameva Jayate" campaign to educate the public about fake news and promote media literacy through workshops and public awareness drives".

46. Following was submitted by the representative of NDTV, during evidence, with respect to laws related to 'Fake News':-

"मेरा आखिरी पॉइंट सिम्पल है। भारत में पर्याप्त कानून हैं। अगर उन्हें इफेक्टिव ढंग से लागू किया जाए तो कोई इंडिविजुअल किसी प्लेटफॉर्म पर ऐसी बात कहता है, जो मिस इंफॉर्मेशन की कैटेगरी में आता है तो हम उसको खत्म कर सकते हैं और उसके उपाय सजा से लेकर क्लेरिफिकेशन तक हैं। उसमें सब कुछ हो सकता है, डीफेमेशन तक हो सकता है।

सरकार इस पर कुछ न करे, यहां तक कि जो एफसीओ बना है, उसको ऑलरेडी मुम्बई हाइकोर्ट ने निरस्त कर दिया है। उस पर रोक लगा दी है। इसमें सेल्फ रेगुलेशन ही सबसे अच्छा और सम्मानजनक तरीका हो सकता है। हम लोगों के पास एक मैकेनिज्म है। जब शिकायतें आती हैं तो एक समय में हमें उनका समाधान करना पड़ता है। एनबीडीएसए को बताना पड़ता है और हम उससे बंधे हुए हैं। अच्छी बात यह है कि ज्यादातर जो बड़े संस्थान हैं, जिनको हम मैन स्ट्रीम मीडिया कहते हैं, वे उनका पालन भी करते हैं, लेकिन वहां पर भी एक समस्या है कि किसी ने एक बड़ी गलती की, उस पर एक छोटी सी माफी मांग ली और वे निकल गए। हम पॉलिटिकल या आइडियोलॉजिकल बातों को छोड़ दें...xxx...xxx हम उस एग्जाम्पल को लेते हैं। अगर उस दिन हमारा एनबीडीएसए, आप लोगों के कहने पर नहीं, बल्कि अपने आप यह कहता है यह बहुत गलत हुआ है और प्रॉमिनेंट्ली माफी मांगी जाए तो जिस दिन मुझे पूरे दिन टॉप हेडर में लगाकर कहना पड़ेगा कि आज हमने यह गलती की और इस खबर के लिए मैं माफी मांगता हूँ तो जो मेरी क्रेडिबिलिटी की कोस्ट है, मेरी शर्मिंदगी की, जो पब्लिक शेम की कोस्ट है, वह बहुत ज्यादा है। सिर्फ रेगुलेशन के जरिए अगर हम इन चीजों को अचीव करते हैं तो हम पब्लिक कन्वर्सेशन को बड़े पैमाने पर इंफ्लुएंस कर सकते हैं। जहां तक इंडिविजुअल क्रिएटर्स का सवाल है, जहां तक सोशल मीडिया प्लेटफॉर्म्स को रेगुलेट करने का सवाल है, इस बारे में मुझे लगता है कि यह बहुत कठिन कार्य है, लेकिन भारत जिस जगह पर खड़ा है, चूँकि अब दुनिया बदल गई है, उसमें भारत का राजनीतिक नेतृत्व मजबूती से जो कानून वह भारत के संगठनों पर एप्लाई करता है, अगर वही कानून उस पर एप्लाई करेगा तो यह समस्या बहुत तेजी से खत्म की जा सकती है"।

47. With respect to tools used by organisation to proactively identify and curb the spread of misinformation, following were submitted by different stakeholders:-

Sl. No.	Organisation/ Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions with respect to tools used by organisation to proactively identify and curb the spread of misinformation/'Fake News'
1.	Hindustan Times	We use the same simple fact checking tools most newsrooms use.
2.	T.V. Today Network Limited	Our Organisation uses tools such as Google Images to find visually similar images online, Google Fact check explorers as well as data bases maintained by International Fact Checking Network are also resorted to. We are also using AI tools to identify and verify the authenticity of any piece before its publication.
3.	PCI	The PCI has a complaint mechanism for dealing with the cases of fake/false/defamatory/misleading news wherein it takes suo-motu cognizance under Regulation 13 of Press Council (Procedure for Inquiry) Regulation, 1979, or under Clause 14(1) of the Press Council Act, 1978, on receipt of a complaint made to it or otherwise, if the Council has reason to believe that a newspaper or news agency has offended against the standards of journalistic ethics or public taste or that an editor or a working journalist has committed any

		professional misconduct, the Council, after giving the newspaper, or news agency, the editor or journalist concerned an opportunity of being heard, holds an inquiry in such manner as provided by regulations made under this Act and, if it is satisfied that it is necessary so to do, it may, for reasons to be recorded in writing, warn, admonish or censure the newspaper, the news agency, the editor or the journalist or disapprove the conduct of the editor or the journalist, as the case may be.

48.   Details were sought with respect to the organisations (apart from Fact Check Unit) that are involved in monitoring Fake News and related issues. To this NBDA stated that there are several organisations involved in monitoring Fake News which include independent fact-checkers and fact-check organisations, that are set up as a collaboration between industry stakeholders. They also stated that apart from independent Fact Checkers and Fact-check organisations, several media organisations have also set up their own Fact Check Units. On the same issue, Editors Guild of India submitted as under:-

> "Apart from the Fact Check Unit of the Press Information Bureau (PIB), several other organizations are actively involved in monitoring fake news and related issues in India. These include both independent organizations and collaborative initiatives with digital platforms, fact-checking agencies, and media organizations".

49.   Responding to a query related to the capacity of an organisation to handle the volume of Fake News circulated daily, NBDA submitted as under:-

> "It is NBDA's opinion that no single organization, government or private, would have the capacity to handle the volume of fake news, whether in the present or future. A collaboration between all the stakeholders, including the independent self-regulatory bodies and Fact Checkers, is the most effective method of controlling the proliferation of fake news.
> The issue with respect to volume of fake news is not as relevant in the context of organized media (e.g., Print, News Broadcasters and Online News Publishers) in view of the existence of regulatory oversight. The issue is more relevant from the perspective of dissemination of fake information online through unconventional media sources / providers. As such, it is submitted that the issue ought to be addressed through voluntary industry-led independent-self-regulatory bodies and can be supplemented by the Courts.
> In so far as, news broadcasters are concerned, they have permission to uplink and downlink from the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and are bound by its comprehensive framework, which is designed to promote ethical journalism and accurate reporting. The potential adverse consequence of losing credibility, acts as a strong deterrent against the deliberate dissemination of fake news for organized media. Further, industry bodies like the NBDA have established their own Code of Conduct and self-regulatory

mechanisms, adding another layer of accountability and promoting adherence to journalistic standards.

Reputable news organizations, especially those operating within the regulated framework, have a vested interest in maintaining their credibility and public trust. This leads them to invest in robust fact-checking processes. They typically have established editorial workflows that include rigorous verification procedures, often involving multiple independent sources to corroborate information before it's published or broadcast. Many larger media houses even dedicate resources to in-house fact-checking teams or desks, whose primary responsibility is to scrutinize information for accuracy and authenticity, further reducing the likelihood of inadvertently spreading fake news.

Journalists employed by established media organizations are typically trained in the core principles and ethics of journalism. This training emphasizes accuracy, objectivity, neutrality, fairness, and the importance of source verification. The professional practice involves diligently vetting sources, seeking corroboration from multiple independent sources, and attributing information accurately. This commitment to journalistic standards, instilled through formal education and reinforced by organizational culture, creates a professional environment that inherently discourages the careless or intentional spread of fake information.

Traditional media outlets operate under the constant gaze of public scrutiny. They are more likely to be held accountable by their audience for any inaccuracies or misleading information they disseminate. This awareness of audience feedback and the potential for public backlash incentivizes accuracy and responsible reporting. Moreover, the competitive nature of the media landscape plays a crucial role. Media houses are constantly striving to maintain their audience share and protect their reputation as reliable sources of news. This competitive pressure reinforces the importance of accurate and credible reporting, as any lapse in journalistic integrity can lead to a loss of audience trust and market share, further mitigating the risk of fake news gaining traction within these established organizations.

The best place to curb fake news is at the publisher level. That is where the organisation's internal policies and guidelines (being in conformity with the self-regulatory bodies such as NBDSA) assumes pivotal role. Hence, the self-regulatory mechanism ensures that the fake news is not further circulated and curbed in the first place".

50. When asked about the adequacy of the existing legislative provisions and mechanisms to tackle the menace of Fake News, the Ministry provided details of the provisions for Print, Electronic and Digital Media and submitted as under:-

"The Ministry takes appropriate action against circulation of fake news as per the provisions of the institutional mechanism as above, available for various media platforms. However, to augment the effectiveness of the efforts to check the spread of fake news there is a need for defining fake news and incorporating it in the existing regulatory mechanisms for print, electronic and digital media along with appropriate deterrent measures for such circulation of fake news. This is especially important for the news publishers on digital media as well as the users of social media platforms keeping in view the speed of spread of such news on digital/social media".

51.   With respect to the same issue, following has been submitted by PCI:-

"Though its not specific to fake news but Article 19(2) of the Indian Constitution allows for reasonable restrictions on the freedom of speech and expression, which is guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a). These restrictions are permissible in the interests of national security, sovereignty and integrity of the country, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

Further, the Council has formulated Norms of Journalistic Conduct.

Additionally, the Press Council of India in its submission dated 17.02.2025 before the Standing Committee on Communication and Information Technology on the subject 'Review of implementation of Laws related to all forms of Media' has proposed the following amendment to the Press Council Act, 1978 which can help prevent the dissemination of fake/false/misleading news.

Chapter III : POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL
CHANGES IN "POWER TO CENSURE "–
To ADD Four New Provisos To Section 14(2) :

(i) Provided that compliance with such directions shall be mandatory and binding upon the newspaper/periodical/news agency concerned.

(ii) Provided that in the event of non- compliance with the direction under this Section within the period specified, the Council may censure the newspaper/periodicals/ journalist concerned and/or direct the authorities of the State, for suspension of registration/stop release of advertisement to it till the gist of adjudication is published/ for the period specified by the Council.

(iii) Provided that on the award of two censures under this Section within a period of six months the Council may if it deems fit, ask the concerned authorities to suspend the registration of newspaper/periodical/news agency/ suspend the release of Government funded advertisement/ in case of editor or journalist, suspension of accreditation for a period not exceeding three months.

(iv) Directions of the Council should be complied by the authorities within a period of 15 days and action taken report may be filed before the PCI.

Reason for proposed amendment: Amendment to take care of cases of non-compliance of the decisions and directions of the Council".

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52.   Views of some of the stakeholders with respect to adequacy of the existing legislative provisions and mechanisms to tackle the challenges posed by 'Fake News' are as under:-

Sl. No.	Organisation/ Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions with respect to adequacy of the existing legislative provisions and mechanisms to tackle the menace of 'Fake News'
1.	MIB	The Government of India has statutory and institutional mechanisms in place to address fake news, on various media platforms. (Details are already provided in Para No.35 of this Report)
2.	Editors Guild of India (EGI)	Existing laws like the IT Act, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, are sufficient but face challenges such as: Ambiguity in definitions of fake news. **The subjectivity** of interpretation by the concerned authority and misuse of these laws by widespread and liberal use against content that is anti-establishment. This is especially concerning in the case of the use of criminal laws, as many provisions of erstwhile IPC (124A, 153 A and B, 295A, 298, 502, and 505), have been liberally used to file FIRs against journalists whose reporting has been critical of governing establishment. Now BNS has added to these laws, Section 353 (criminalizing misinformation), which also lends to subjective interpretation. Opaqueness in the use of the relevant provisions, often against principles of natural justice. Inconsistent enforcement practices. Stricter laws risk misuse for political suppression and could undermine free speech. Emphasis should be on strengthening self-regulation and enhancing existing enforcement mechanisms.
3.	T.V. Today Network Limited	The existing provisions for regulation of spread of fake/false news, as laid above, are sufficient to safeguard the interest of general public qua consumption of accurate news and information. However, the extent, the pace, and the language in which fake news is spreading, along with the low digital literacy and increasing content generation through AI, tend to outpace these efforts. Since fake news continues to proliferate faster on social media, enhanced technologies and AI solutions may be employed to identify fake news; collaboration with independent fact-checking organizations can be formalized in order to ensure better enforcement of the existing legal and regulatory framework to curb the spread of fake news. Further, there is a strong case for enacting stricter laws against the creators of fake news in India, but such measures should be carefully designed to balance the need for regulation and the freedom of speech and expression as guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a). For distributors – there is adequate regulation for dissemination and regulation of news – however, the enforcement of the same can be streamlined to reduce the volume of fake news by providing digital literacy

		to general public.
4.	Hindustan Times	Yes and no. Yes in terms of assigning responsibility and accountability to media. No because intermediaries, content providers and social media platforms are not covered by the law.
5.	Indian Express	Yes, there already exist adequate laws, rules and regulations, courts and statutory bodies which regulate news and editorial appearing in print media.
6.	Network-18	Given the powerful role journalism plays in shaping public discourse, industry bodies like the News Broadcasters & Digital Association (NBDA) have proactively instituted a self-regulatory framework. This includes a comprehensive Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards aimed at maintaining the highest standards of journalistic conduct. Core values such as accuracy, impartiality, neutrality, and objectivity form the foundation of this framework. The NBDA's Code of Conduct—which encompasses ethical codes, detailed guidelines, and periodic advisories—seeks to promote consistency and responsibility in news reporting among its member organizations. This Code and grievance redressal procedures are easily accessible on its official website, promoting transparency and enabling stakeholders to follow its guidelines with clarity and ease. Beyond self-regulation, various statutory provisions exist to address and deter the dissemination of fake or misleading news by both electronic and digital media outlets. Notably, Section 5 of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, read with Rule 6(1)(d) of the 1994 Rules, prohibits telecasting content that is obscene, defamatory, false, or suggestive of half-truths or innuendos. In the digital space, the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 apply to online news publishers. Moreover, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS) applies uniformly across media types—print, electronic, and digital—and includes key sections that address false or harmful information: • Section 175: Penalizes false statements during elections • Section 197(1)(d): Prohibits content damaging national integration • Section 212: Targets dissemination of incorrect information • Section 353: Addresses content that could incite public disorder In addition, other legislative instruments further support the fight against fake news and misinformation: • Representation of the People Act, 1951 (Section 123(4)) • Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (Section 53) • Disaster Management Act, 2005 (Section 54) • Consumer Protection Act, 2019: Regulates false or

| | | misleading claims in advertisements and deceptive pricing tactics
• Contempt of Courts Act, 1971: Prevents media reporting that may interfere with legal proceedings or lower public confidence in the judiciary
• ASCI Guidelines: Govern truthful advertising and prevent misleading promotion
In conclusion, we strongly believe that self-regulation is the most appropriate and efficient model for ensuring ethical journalism in a democratic society. To enhance its effectiveness, it may be beneficial to mandate participation in self-regulatory frameworks for all media entities, thereby fostering uniform adherence to high journalistic standards and a collective commitment to curbing fake news. |

53.	When PCI was asked to share their views on the need for effective mechanism to address the menace of Fake News, they replied as under:-

"Regarding the need for effective mechanism to address the menace of 'Fake News', the Former Chairman, PCI in his press note dated 03.04.2018 titled 'Response of Chairman on Fake News', defined fake news as 'news, story, information, data, and reports which is or are wholly or partly false.' He further stated that 'No prudent person should or can justify the dissemination of fake news. Fake news is a global menace and if any Government intends to take remedial steps to check its spread, per se, there is nothing wrong or obnoxious about it, provided that the authority to decide the truthfulness or otherwise of an allegation of fake news is entrusted to an independent statutory body like the Press Council of India.' He further stated the procedure how the complaints are dealt with at the PCI, which reads as 'The complaint of fake news is registered as complaint by the Council. Such complaints are filed by the individual, the Government or any other aggrieved person and are dealt by the Council following the laid down procedure in the Press Council Act and Press Council (Procedure for Inquiry) Regulations. However, it is only in gross cases of fake news or repeated involvement in fake news dissemination that power to suspend or cancellation of accreditation of the journalists be resorted to. The allegation needs to be determined by the Council before any action is called for.

Further, the Council made few recommendations in the matter of Strategies and efforts to tackle fake news which are as under:

a. There must be single organization specially to tackle the issue of fake news.
b. There should be "Fact Checking mechanism" within the news media organization itself before publishing any news article.
c. To create awareness among the Media Community concerning repercussion of publication of fake news.
d. Fake news disseminated on electronic platform may be brought under the purview of the Press Council of India until formation of the Media Council.

e. To implement mechanism to identify the generation/source point of fake news.

f. Recommendation may also be forwarded to the Ministry of Education for inclusion of media studies in academic curriculum".

54. On the need for amending the existing Acts/Rules/Guidelines related to Print Media for tackling the issue of 'Fake News', PCI replied as under:-

"Yes, there is a need for amending the existing Acts/Rules/Guidelines related to Print Media for tackling the issue of 'Fake News', to ensure compliance. The Press Council of India had proposed various amendments to the Press Council Act, 1978 before the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology on the subject 'Review of implementation of Laws related to all forms of Media' "[*The relevant suggestion may be referred in Para 51 of this Report*]".

55. On being asked whether there should be changes in the Press Council of India (PCI) Act, 1978, the Ministry replied as under:-

"The provisions of the Press Council Act and Rules made thereunder are reviewed from time to time and appropriate amendments /subordinate legislations are made for better implementation of the provisions of the Act to carry out its objectives".

56. On being asked whether stricter law was needed against the creator and distributors of Fake News, MIB submitted as under:-

"The Government of India has various statutory and institutional mechanisms in place to address the complaints relating to violation of Codes and Norms already existing for various media platforms viz. print media, electronic media and digital media. Besides the provisions under the laws pertaining to these media, certain new provisions in the recently enacted Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (Section 353) seek to address the issue of fake news from a criminal point of view. …xxxx…xxxx…xxxx.
To augment the effectiveness of the efforts to check the spread of fake news there is a need for defining fake news and incorporating it in the existing regulatory mechanisms for print, electronic and digital media alongwith appropriate deterrent measures for such circulation of fake news. This is especially important for the news publishers on digital media as well as the users of social media platforms keeping in view the speed of spread of such news on digital/social media.
However, bringing in a new law to address the specific problem of fake news or amendments in the existing laws applicable to different media platforms needs broader consultation and consensus building taking into account the provisions relating to the freedom of speech and expression in the Constitution".

57. Responding to a query as to whether there should be a centralized body to monitor the menace of Fake News or not, the Ministry replied as:-

"The problem of fake news can best be addressed by the media through a self-regulatory mechanism. As a general policy Government does not interfere with reporting of news across media and hence it may not be appropriate to have a direct role for the Government in monitoring of fake news as it simply means monitoring of all news. It is felt that the monitoring of fake news can best be addressed by the self regulatory mechanism of the industry stakeholders.

However, to augment the effectiveness of the efforts to check the spread of fake news there is a need for defining fake news and incorporating it in the existing regulatory mechanisms for print, electronic and digital media along with appropriate deterrent measures for such circulation of fake news. This is especially important for the news publishers on digital media as well as the users of social media platforms keeping in view the speed of spread of such news on digital/social media".

58.   Suggestions of MIB for having a well synchronized ecosystem to curb the menace of 'Fake News' in an effective way are as under:-

"The existing statutory and institutional mechanisms can be strengthened to address fake news, across media platforms by involving technology and AI to flag potentially fake news/ misleading content as a secondary layer of monitoring. The Digital Media being the primary source of fake news/ misinformation the social media intermediaries should be consulted before an effective mechanism could be developed to curb the menace of fake news. The Ministry is of the view that the menace of fake news can best be addressed by the media through a self-regulatory mechanism. Media literacy through public awareness campaigns can prove as an effective means to prevent the spread of fake news and sensitize citizens against sharing of unverified information.

The existing regulatory framework has different statutes for different media verticals such as the Press Council Act, 1978 for print media, Cable Television Network Regulation Act, 1995 for electronic media and Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 for news publishers on digital media as each platform is unique and distinctive in its own way".

59.   Responding to the same query, PCI submitted as under:-

"To make the Media more accountable w.r.t publishing Fake News/content, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and its departments namely, Central Bureau of Communication and Press Registrar General of India may consider taking stringent action in the matter".

60.   When asked to provide suggestions for making Media more accountable w.r.t Fake News/content, the Ministry replied as under:-

"It is felt that the monitoring of fake news can be addressed by the self-regulatory mechanism of the industry stakeholders. Investing in media literacy initiatives empowers audiences to critically assess information, reducing the spread of misinformation. Media can put in place effective fact-checking measures by verifying content before dissemination of information while also providing readers with accessible sources for verification while avoiding

sensationalism and adhering to the good practices of ethical journalism prescribed in the norms of journalistic conduct by the Press Council of India".

61.   On the issue of Self Regulation, MIB during evidence, submitted as under:-

"We are more interested in self-regulation. As Sir mentioned, in the Cable and Television Act, there is a clear-cut provision for self-regulatory bodies. As self-regulatory bodies, there are people who can register. We have two organizations which have registered under this Act. For members who are not part of any of these self-regulatory bodies, we have a provision in the Ministry called inter-departmental committee or IDC. There is a three-tier mechanism. First, we refer any complaint to the concerned channel. The channel has to respond. If the complainant is not happy with the response of the channel, he or she can go to the self-regulatory body. In case the channel is not part of any self-regulatory body, then the complaint is referred to the IDC. This is working really well in the Cable and Television Act. The only issue is that for members who are not part of self-regulatory bodies, the complainant can reach the IDC and there is clear-cut process. It is not an arbitrary process. The complainant and the concerned channel are called. There is complete hearing before the IDC".

(b) Self Regulatory Mechanism and Fake News

62.   The total number of TV channels permitted by MIB, as on 30.11.2024, is 919. Further, following two bodies have been registered at Level-II as Self Regulating Bodies by the Ministry under The Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules, 2021:

a) Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) with 318 TV channels as its members channels.
b) News Broadcasters Federation - Professional News Broadcasting Standards Authority" (NBF-PNBSA) with 58 TV channels as its members channels.

63.   While noting that 543 Channels were not Members with any Self regulatory Body (SRB), the Ministry was asked as to how they could be made a part of one or the other SRB. To this, they replied as under:-

"As per Rule 17(1)(iv) of the Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules, 2021, every broadcaster is required to be a member of a self-regulatory body (SRB) and comply with its terms and conditions. Accordingly, all broadcasters vide Ministry's letter dated 30.05.2023, were advised to become members of a self-regulatory body.
In this regard, it is further stated that permission for satellite TV channels is granted as per the Policy Guidelines for uplinking and downlinking of Television Channels and the permission letter inter-alia, includes the following conditions:
  i.   The permission holder company shall comply with the Programme and Advertisement Code prescribed under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 and rules framed there under.
  ii.   The permission holder company shall adhere codes/standards/guidelines/restrictions prescribed by the MIB,

Government of India for regulation of content on TV channels from time to time.

Further, para 11 (3)(c), 11(3)(e) & para 26 (4) of the Policy Guidelines, 2022 dated 09.11.2022 states as under:

Para 11(3)(c):"The applicant Company/LLP shall comply with the Programme and Advertising Code prescribed under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995."

Para 11 (3)(e):"It shall adhere to any other Code/ Standards, guidelines/ restriction prescribed by the Ministry for regulation of content on TV channels from time to time."

Para 26 (4): "The Central Government may, from time to time, issue general advisory for adherence to the Programme Code and Advertising Code and the various provisions of the Cable Television Network (Regulation) Act and Rules made there under, and such other advisory in relation to the Guidelines, and the channel shall comply with such advisory."

Therefore, rules 6 and 7 of the CTN Rules, 1994 (the Rules) in relation to sections 5 and 6 of the CTN Act, 1995, stipulates all the content in satellite TV channels must conform to the norms and standards prescribed in the Programme and Advertisement Code under the Rules. Accordingly, grievance and complaint redressal structure under these codes have to be always adhered to by the satellite TV channels".

64. To enhance the accountability of Broadcasters which are not affiliated with any SRB and to ensure the effective implementation of the three-tier grievance redressal mechanism, the Ministry submitted that a condition may be included in the uplinking/ downlinking permissions for satellite TV channels mandating broadcasters to either join an SRB registered with the Ministry or establish their own SRB and get it registered with the Ministry. When asked about the initiative taken in this regard, the Ministry informed about their letter to the Broadcasters dated 30.05.2023 and also submitted the following:-

"Further, rules 6 and 7 of the CTN Rules, 1994 (the Rules) in relation to sections 5 and 6 of the CTN Act, 1995, stipulates all the content in satellite TV channels must conform to the norms and standards prescribed in the Programme and Advertisement Code under the Rules".

65. Clarifying about the regulation for TV channels which are not part of any self regulatory body, NBDA during evidence, submitted as under:-

"Two questions were raised. One is about the regulated and unregulated members. NBDA is a voluntary organization. You can become a member but it is not mandatory by law. We encourage people to become a member; we encourage people to be regulated. But as I said, when they see that being under regulation is a problem, they prefer not to be a member. We have been asking the Ministry for almost 16 years that whether channels are members or not, they should be regulated by this self-regulation committee which we have created but we have no control over it. …xxxx….xxxx. It is not that those who are regulated don't do mischief. They make mistakes. But they are punished.

But those who are not members, there is no control. So, everyone comes under this and they become part of this self-regulation.

Sir, the issue is that we have been requesting the MIB that when you grant the licence to any person or organization for broadcasting, you have to give certain guidelines to them that they have to become member of x or y organization. We have been requesting them for years but our voice has not been heard. So, we would request this Committee to suggest that. If you are regulating us, this is also part of it, because this is self-regulation. Why don't you make this mandatory that whosoever gets the license to run any news channel, national or regional, is supposed to be guided by certain principles. That is what is not happening. If that happens, a lot of people who are regulated and yet not regulated will have to come under this".

66. The Ministry was asked to provide their comment/suggestion on the above-mentioned submission of NBDA made during the Sitting on 21.11.2024. To this, the reply was:

"It is stated in this regard that joining of any association is a voluntary act and such action of compelling to join an organisation affiliated with any Self Regulating Body by Ministry would amount to controlling the broadcasting sector, which is unwarranted. However, to enhance the accountability of broadcasters not affiliated with any SRB and to ensure the effective implementation of the three-tier grievance redressal mechanism, a condition may be included in the uplinking/ downlinking permissions for satellite TV channels. This condition may mandate broadcasters to either join an SRB registered with the Ministry or establish their own SRB comprising at least 40 broadcasters and get it registered with the Ministry…xxx…xxx..xxx.. Ministry has not received any request from NBDA for registration as a self-regulatory body at level –II under Rule 18 (2) of CTN Rules, 2021".

(c)   **Penal Provisions**

67. Regarding the Penal provisions for running/telecasting/printing Fake News, MIB submitted the following:-

"<u>Print Media:</u> As far as the dissemination of content in violation of the Norms of Journalistic conduct is concerned, the Press Council takes action under Section 14 of the Press Council Act, 1978 on receipt of a complaint against newspaper/magazine(s)/News agency(s) that allegedly indulged in violation of the Norms. **Upon being found guilty the Council warns, admonishes, censures and disapproves the conduct of the journalist(s).**

<u>Electronic Media:</u> In case of private satellite TV channels, penal actions for proven cases of violation of Programme and Advertising Code are as follows:

    i.   advising, warning, censuring, admonishing or reprimanding such broadcaster; or

   ii.   requiring an apology of such broadcaster; or

iii. requiring such broadcaster to include a warning card or a disclaimer; or

iv. requiring such broadcaster to delete or modify content or take the channel or a programme off-air for a specified time period where it is satisfied that such action is warranted, for reasons to be recorded in writing.

<u>Digital Media:</u> The IT Rules, 2021, notified under the Information Technology Act, 2000, provide for an institutional framework for content of digital news publisher. In this regard, section 45 of the Act provides that whoever contravenes any rules or regulations made under the Act, for the contravention of which no penalty has been separately provided, shall be liable to pay a compensation not exceeding twenty-five thousand rupees to the person affected by such contravention or a penalty not exceeding twenty-five thousand rupees".

68.   Following is the submission of NBDA with respect to the penal provisions for running/telecasting/printing Fake News:-

"As far as the Members of NBDA are concerned, Regulation 7 of the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations confer on NBDSA the power to impose penalties for violation of the Code of Conduct by the Broadcaster or Digital Publisher. The relevant portion of which is extracted below:
For the first violation issue/express –
    a. warning, admonish, censure, disapproval, regret, apology and/or
    b. impose a fine of upto Rs. 2 lacs
For the second violation issue/express –
    a. warning, admonish, censure, disapproval, regret, apology and/or
    b. impose a fine of upto Rs. 5 lacs
For the third violation issue/express –
    a. warning, admonish, censure, disapproval, regret, apology and/or
    b. impose a fine upto Rs. 10 lacs
For the fourth violation issue/express –
    a. warning, admonish, censure, disapproval, regret, apology and/or
    b. impose a fine upto 1% of the total annual turnover of the channel.
Provided such fine shall not exceed Rs.25 lakhs, in any given matter.
In addition to the above, on the fourth violation of the Code of Conduct, the Authority may direct a particular programme to be suspended for up to one week and/or direct the broadcaster to suspend the anchor for upto one month and/or issue any other direction as the Authority deems appropriate to the Broadcaster or Digital Publisher and/or recommend to the concerned authority for suspension/revocation of license of such broadcaster;
Provided that the fine imposed by the Authority shall be recovered from the concerned Broadcaster or Digital Publisher;
Provided that if the Authority holds that the Broadcaster or Digital Publisher has violated the Code of Conduct it will direct the Broadcaster/Digital Publisher to immediately remove or suitably edit the broadcast/publication from all Digital News Platforms, Social Media and Social Networking Sites;"
Apart from the above, several legislations provide penalties for fake news, which are given herein below:

A. Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023

Section 175 - False statement in connection with an election

Section 197(1)(d) - Imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration

Section 212 - Furnishing false information

Section 353 - Statements conducing to public mischief

B. Cable Television Network (Regulation) Act, 1995 read with Rule 6(1)(d) of the Cable Television Networks Rules, 1994

Section 19 - Power to prohibit transmission of certain programmes in public interest

Section 20 - Power to prohibit operation of cable television network in public interest.

C. Information Technology Act, 2000, Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public), Rules 2009 and IT Rules, 2021

Section 69A - Power to issue directions for blocking for public access of any information through any computer resource.

Section 79 - Exemption from liability of intermediary in certain cases

Rule 3 of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code), 2021 [IT Rules, 2021] provides for Due diligence by Intermediaries [relevant excerpt reproduced below]

Rule 7 - Non-observance of Rules".

69.   On the same issue of penal provisions for running/telecasting/printing Fake News, Editors Guild of India (EGI) submitted as under:-

"Section 353 of the newly enacted Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita criminalizes making, publishing, or circulating statements, false information, rumors, or reports, including through electronic means, with the intent or likelihood of causing various harmful outcomes. Punishment for spreading fake news includes imprisonment for up to three years, a fine, or both for offenses under section 353. …xxxx….xxxx….xxxx…. The Guild is of the firm view that any punitive action against misdeeds of Fake News, should not be in the realm of criminal law, and should be restricted to the civil domain. The appropriate response will be flagging and labeling fake news, naming and shaming, and in egregious cases, monetary fines to be a deterrent against such future acts or omissions".

70.   When asked whether fine imposed for running Fake News was deterrent enough, the Ministry replied as under:-

"In the absence of a clear definition of fake news and specific provisions in the rules governing content of different media verticals there is no penal provision specific to publication of fake news. As a result these rules fail to offer a credible deterrence to the publishers of fake new. Various legislative interventions like incorporating provisions relating to fake news in laws governing content on various media verticals, revisiting the safe harbor clause of the intermediaries etc. need to be considered to put in place a mechanism for deterring the publishers of fake news.

71.   With respect to same query, Editors Guild of India (EGI) submitted as under:-

"At present, there is no uniform code on this. xx…xxx…xxx.., there is a need for developing a consensus-driven code, along with appropriate measures to punish acts of publishing deliberate Fake News. xx…xxx…xxx..,, these punitive actions should be in the civil domain, with no criminal action. The amount of monetary fine is to be determined keeping in mind various factors- the size of the publishing entity, reach, recurrence of action, and the gravity or potential harm. This should all emerge from a consensus-building exercise between industry journalistic bodies and the Government".

72.   On enquiring whether similar treatment may be given for same offence committed by different Media, MIB replied as under:-

"The regulatory framework has different statutes for different media verticals, such as the Press Council Act, 1978 for print media, Cable Television Network Regulation Act, 1995 for electronic media and Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics. Code) Rules, 2021 for news publishers on digital media. Since the regulatory framework for these platforms emanate from different Acts/Rules there are some differences in the penal provisions as per the statement of objects and reasons of each of these statutes".

73.   The response of the TV Today Network, on the same query, is as under:-

"No, but the severity of damage caused by misinformation spread by newspaper would be more controlled in today's day and age when misinformation spread by social media could be far worse in terms of damage cause owing to its wide spreading nature".

[Ref: Q. No. 17 of Reply from TV Today Network]

74.   When asked whether the penal provisions, for publishing/running 'Fake News' in different forms of Media, are same for same nature of offence, following response was received from Hindustan Times:-

"Yes, it should be the same, but it isn't. The requirements are highest for print (PCI; statutory body); then comes electronic media; intermediaries and social media platforms get away with anything".

75.   On being asked if variation in penalty was needed for repeated offenders, following submissions were received from MIB and various stakeholders:-

Sl. No.	Organisation/ Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions with respect to need for variation in penalty for offenders of 'Fake News'
1.	MIB	At present the instances of fake news are considered as part of the overall violation of the Codes/Norms under laws governing different media verticals and are treated accordingly. There is no provision for graded penalties according to number of times of such violation.
2.	Hindustan Times	There needs to be a hierarchy of actions. 1. Warning plus public apology 2. Fines

		3. Suspensions 4. Complete blocking
3.	T.V. Today Network Limited	The CTN Amendment Act, 2024 under Section 16 provides for harsher penalties for repeated offenders, as hereinunder: "16 (1) Whoever contravenes any of the provisions of this Act shall be liable- (a) for the first contravention with advisory, or censure, or warning, or a penalty which may extend to twenty thousand rupees, or with both; (b) for every subsequent contravention within a period of three years, with advisory, or censure, or warning, or a penalty which may extend to one lakh rupees, or with both, by such designated officer, as may be prescribed. (2) The designated officer, may, for the reasons to be recorded in writing, by order, impose penalty referred to in sub-section (1): Provided that in cases of more than three contraventions over a period of three years, the designated officer, in addition to penalty referred to in sub-section (1), may, for the reasons to be recorded in writing, by order, suspend or revoke the registration granted…" Further, Regulation 7 of NBDA Regulations provides for the powers of to give modified punishments in cases of repeated offenders.
4.	Editors Guild of India (EGI)	Yes, EGI sees the need for variation in penalties for offenders based on the frequency of their offenses. A graduated penalty system would ensure that repeat offenders face more stringent consequences, encouraging compliance while maintaining fairness. **Proposed Approach:** First-Time Offenders: Penalty: Mild penalties, such as warnings, fines, or mandatory content removal. Reason: This would allow offenders to correct their behaviour without severe consequences. Repeat Offenders: Penalty: Increased fines, temporary partial bans. Reason: This would deter persistent violations and **encourage** platforms or individuals to implement stricter content moderation.
5.	Press Council of India (PCI)	PCI does not have punitive powers. Under the PCI Act, 1978, the maximum power that PCI has is to „Censure". Upon censuring a newspaper, the copy of adjudication is forwarded to the Central Bureau of Communication (CBC) for Central Government and concerned I&PRD and district administrations for State Governments. Thereupon, the CBC suspends the govt. advertisements issued to the particular newspaper for 15 days on first censure, for 1 month for second censure and 6 months for 3 or more censures by the PCI

76. When asked to share views w.r.t fixing accountability (Media House/ Editor/ Reporter/etc.) for publishing 'Fake News', the Indian Express, replied as under:-

"The Press & Registration of Periodicals Act lays down the responsibility for the selection of News content".

III.   Grievance Redressal Mechanism

77. Regarding the mechanism that was prevalent for general public to report about Fake News, the Ministry replied as under:-

"The Government of India has various statutory and institutional mechanisms in place to address fake news, on various media platforms viz. print media, electronic media and digital media, where action is taken on various complaints related to fake news are received from general public. Complaints relating to fake news can be made using the Grievance Redressal Mechanism available for various media under the provisions of Press Council Act, 1978 for print media, Cable Television Network Regulation Act, 1995 for electronic media and the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 for news on digital media.

People can also report fake news to PIB Fact Check Unit *via* the following mechanisms:
WhatsApp Hotline: Users can send messages to the dedicated WhatsApp number at **+918799711259** to report suspicious information or request fact-checking.
Email: Individuals can also send their queries or reports via email to **socialmedia[at]pib[dot]gov[dot]in.**
Website Portal: The public can visit the official PIB Fact Check portal at https://factcheck.pib.gov.in/ to report or request verification of potential fake news.
These platforms allow users to easily submit information for fact-checking and help in addressing misinformation".

78. Details of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism available against Fake News for common man against different Media platforms, as submitted by MIB are as under:-.

"Procedure for Print Media: The newspapers have to adhere to "Norms of Journalistic Conduct" brought out by Press Council of India (PCI) which inter alia restrains publication of fake/ defamatory/ misleading news. The Council holds inquiry into alleged violations of Norms, as per section 14 of the Act, and may warn, admonish or censure the newspaper, editors, journalists, etc. as the case may be. Any citizen can make a complaint against a newspaper for carrying content that is violative of the Norms of Journalistic Conduct. A complainant can also submit a complaint to the PCI on CPGRAM of the Government.
Procedure for private TV channels- All programmes telecast on private satellite TV channels are required to adhere to the Programme Code and Advertising Code enshrined in Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 and the Rules framed thereunder. The Programme Code inter-alia provides that 'No programme should be carried in the cable service which

contains anything obscene, defamatory, deliberate, false and suggestive innuendos and half truths'.

The Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules, 2021 provide for a statutory mechanism for redressal of grievances/ complaints of citizens relating to content broadcast by television channels. In order to ensure observance and adherence to the Programme Code and the Advertising Code by the broadcaster and to address the grievance or complaint, if any, relating thereto, the Rules provide a three-level complaint redressal structure as under:

    Level I - broadcasters;
    Level II - self-regulating bodies of the broadcasters; and
    Level III - Oversight mechanism by the Central Government.

As per the extant procedure, grievances regarding content on private satellite TV channels are addressed through the three-tier mechanism. At **Level I,** the broadcaster address the complaint. At **Level II**, it is referred to the broadcaster's self-regulatory body. If unresolved, the matter progresses to **Level III**, where it is reviewed by the IDC along with the channel's response. The TV channel is also given an opportunity for a personal hearing through its representative.

Procedure for Digital Media: The IT Rules, 2021 provide a three-level institutional framework for redressal of grievances related to the violation of Code of Ethics by news publishers on digital media and OTT platforms as under:

    Level I: Publisher
    Level II: Self-Regulatory Bodies of publishers
    Level III: Oversight Mechanism by the Central Government

A citizen can make a complaints initially to the respective publisher at Level-I".

79.   While noting that a citizen can make complaints initially to the respective publisher at Level-I, the Committee desired to know whether all the Publishers at Level-I have the mandatory Grievance redressal officer in place. To this, the Ministry replied as under:-

"The Ministry has information of approx. 4300 Digital News Publishers with robust Grievance Redressal mechanism in place. Further, Rule 9(1) relating to adherence of the Code of Ethics by the publishers of news and current affairs on digital media and OTT platforms; and **Rule 9(3) relating to the three-level grievance redressal mechanism have been stayed by Hon'ble Bombay High Court vide order dated 14.08.2021** in two cases filed in Bombay High Court in WP(L) NO.14172 of 2021 - Agij Promotion of Nineteen one a Media Pvt. Ltd.& Ors. vs. Union of India and PIL (L) No. NO.14204 OF 2021 -Nikhil Mangesh Wagle vs. Union of India. This Ministry filed SLPs in Supreme Court against these orders.

Hon'ble Supreme Court vide order dated 22.03.2024 transferred all 15 Writ Petitions challenging the maintainability of IT Rules, 2021 to Delhi High Court and all these related SLPs challenging the interim order passed by the High Court was also disposed of with the direction to make necessary prayers before the Delhi High Court".

80.   The updated status of the SLP, as provided by the Ministry are as under:-

"Hon'ble Supreme Court *vide* order dated 22.03.2024 transferred all 15 Writ Petitions to Delhi High Court and all these related SLPs challenging the interim order passed by the Bombay High Court was also disposed of with the direction to make necessary prayers before the Delhi High Court. Now all cases are pending before Hon'ble Delhi High Court.
The grievances received in the Ministry are transferred to the publishers of news and current affairs on digital media for resolution at Level-I of the three level grievance redressal mechanism but the resolution of the grievances by such publishers are voluntary in nature since the operation of Rule 9(1) relating to adherence of the Code of Ethics by the publishers of news and current affairs on digital media and OTT platforms; and Rule 9(3) relating to the three level grievance redressal mechanism have been stayed by Hon'ble Bombay High Court".

81.   Pointing out the lacuna in Grievance redressal w.r.t online platforms, News Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA) submitted the following during evidence:-

"तीसरा ऑप्शन यह है कि हम इनके खिलाफ शिकायत करें। फेसबुक के खिलाफ शिकायत करें या ट्विटर के खिलाफ शिकायत करें, लेकिन इनका कोई फेस नहीं है, इनका कोई रीप्रेजेंटेटिव नहीं है। उदाहरण के लिए फेसबुक के पहले इंडिया में रीप्रेजेंटेटिव्स रहते थे, इंडिविजुअल्स थे, अब कोई नहीं है, सबको हटा दिया गया, अब आपको एक मशीन से बात करनी है। वह मशीन जवाब देगी, नहीं देगी, क्या कहेगी, क्या नहीं कहेगी, उस पर किसी का कोई कंट्रोल नहीं है।

चौथा ऑप्शन आपके पास यह होता है कि आप कोर्ट में जाएं। जब कोर्ट में जाते हैं, तो कोर्ट तो दोनों साइड्स को सुनता है, फिर फैसला करता है। इसमें 15-20 दिनों का प्रोसेस लगता है। कई बार वे बगैर दूसरी साइड को सुने हुए, केस की गंभीरता को देखते हुए ऑर्डर दे देते हैं। लेकिन जितनी देर में कोर्ट का ऑर्डर आता है, उतनी देर में वह वीडियो वाइडस्प्रेड हो चुका होता है।

उसके बाद ये जो इंटरमिड्रीज़ हैं, फेसबुक है, यू-ट्यूब है, ये जो प्लेटफॉर्म्स हैं, ये कोर्ट के उस ऑर्डर को इंप्लिमेंट करने से इनकार कर देते हैं। फिर आप उनके खिलाफ कनटेम्प्ट फाइल करते हैं। फिर दोबारा कोर्ट जब उनको बुलाता है, तब वे उस ऑर्डर को इंप्लिमेंट करते हैं। लेकिन तब तक इतना डैमेज हो चुका हो चुका होता है, जिसके बारे में खबर फैलाई जा रही है, उसकी बहुत बदनामी हो चुकी होती है, उसको तरह-तरह से नुकसान हो चुका होता है"।

82.   Responding to a query related to online portal for registering complaints with respect to Fake News, Editors Guild of India (EGI) submitted as under:-

"To the best of our knowledge, there is none. The Guild recommends that an online portal be developed in collaboration with industry bodies like EGI, INS, NBDA, DNPA, DigiPub, AIM, as well as tech platforms. This portal would serve as a complaint registering mechanism. Complaints can then be forwarded to the various bodies for any action they may wish to take. This approach will be more effective if there is a network of recognized self-regulatory bodies to address these complaints, along with an enforcement mechanism in partnership with platforms, which would check and label content as problematic or fake".

(a) <u>Time taken to address the complaint</u>

83.   When asked about the approximate time taken to settle the issue, once the issue of Fake News is flagged by someone, the Ministry replied as under:-

> "Any person aggrieved by the content of a programme of a channel as not being in conformity with the Programme Code or the Advertising Code may file his complaint in writing to the broadcaster directly with specific details of the complaints i.e. Level - I. Further, any complaints received in the Ministry are also forwarded to the Broadcasters i.e. at Level – I for taking action in accordance with the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995. The broadcaster shall, within twenty-four hours of complaint being filed, generate and issue an acknowledgement to the complainant for his information and record.
> Rule 16(3) of the Cable Television Network (Amendment) Rules, 2021 provides that "Every complaint shall be dealt with in the following manner, namely": -
> (a) *the broadcaster shall dispose of the complaint and **inform the complainant of its decision within fifteen days of receipt of such complaint***;
>
> (b) *if the decision of the broadcaster is not communicated to the complainant within the stipulated period of fifteen days, or if the complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the broadcaster, he may prefer an appeal to the self-regulating body of which such broadcaster is a member, **within fifteen days therefrom***;
>
> (c) *the self-regulating body **shall dispose of the appeal within sixty days** of receipt of appeal and convey its decision in the form of a guidance or advisory to the broadcaster, and **inform the complainant of such decision within a period of fifteen days***;
>
> (d) *where the **complainant is not satisfied** with the decision of the self-regulating body, he may, **within fifteen days of such decision, prefer an appeal to the Central Government** for its consideration under the Oversight Mechanism referred to in rule 19.*
>
> The IDC meets periodically and hears complaints regarding violation or contravention of the Programme Code and the Advertising Code escalated to Level-III and makes recommendations such as advisory, warning, censuring, admonishing, run apology scrolls, take off air etc. The Central Government may, after taking into consideration the recommendations of the Committee, issue appropriate orders and directions under sub-section (3) of section 20 of the Act for compliance by the broadcaster".

84.   Regarding the time limit prescribed for PCI to act on complaints, the reply of the Ministry was:-

> "There is no time limit prescribed for Press Council of India to act on complaints. Such a time limit may be recommended, giving exception for procedural delays".

85. On being asked about the average time taken to adjudicate a complaint under Sections 13 and 14 of PCI Act, MIB reply was:-

> "Being a quasi-judicial authority with all powers of the civil court and on the other, in its advisory capacity; PCI guides the press as well as the authorities on any matter that may have a bearing on the freedom of the press and on preserving high standards of journalistic ethos.
> Complaint is registered under the relevant section (s) i.e. U/s 13 (Complaints by the Press) and 14 (Complaints against the Press) of Press Council Act, 1978. The Complainant is required to comply with mandatory requirements under Regulation (3) of Press Council (Procedure for Inquiry) Regulation, 1979 within four (4) weeks

86. When enquired whether, there is any mechanism to digitally track and notify complainants about the progress of the complaints, PCI replied as under:-

> "No, however, the Council is in process of developing complaint mechanism software with online complaint submission and tracking facility".

87. Considering the damage inflicted by Fake News in a short span of time, the Ministry was asked about the need to re-visit the process especially w.r.t the time taken to dispose off the case/to take action against a Channel/portal/paper. To this, they replied as under:-

> "The time limit for handling of grievances at various levels of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism in respect of the content of broadcasters has been prescribed keeping in view the principles of natural justice and taking into account the time required for processing of such grievance at these levels".

88. On the need to revisit the process, NBDA submitted:-

> "It may be noted that in 2024, NBDA has amended the Regulations to confer emergency powers on NBDSA....xxxx....xxxx....xxxx.... In view of the above regulation, wherein NBDSA can issue directions to remove content within 24 hours of the violation being brought to its notice, NBDA does not feel the necessity to re-visit the process especially w.r.t the time taken to dispose of the case/to take action against a Channel/Digital Publisher, which is a member of NBDA".

89. On being asked as to what could be done to reduce the response time for taking down the content which is flagged as 'Fake News', the response of the Ministry was:-

> "The Government as a general policy does not interfere with reporting of news across media and there is no such mandate of taking down the content as per the statutory provisions in place.
> However, in emergent situations, Section 20 of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, grants powers to the Central Government to regulate or prohibit the transmission or re-transmission of any channel or program in such situations where content poses a threat to sovereignty or integrity of India, security of India, friendly relations of India with any foreign State or public order, decency or morality. This section collectively ensures a robust

mechanism to address emergent situations promptly and maintain accountability in television broadcasting, safeguarding public interest and national integrity".

IV.   Artificial Intelligence, Algorithm and Fake News

(a) Artificial Intelligence and Fake News

90.   On being asked as to how AI can be used to flag content without infringing on freedom of expression, MIB replied as under:-

> "The technology of Artificial Intelligence is an evolving technology and works on use of pre-existing information available on internet and therefore, it is felt that in its present state of development it cannot be used for a subject as complicated as fact checking. AI could be used to flag potentially fake news/ misleading content for review by human intervention as a second layer of monitoring".

91.   Regarding the role and challenges associated with use of AI and Deepfakes in generating, detecting and preventing the spread of 'Fake News', the Ministry responded as under:-

> "Detecting fake news and identifying patterns of misinformation relating to functioning of Government requires use of various mechanisms to verify the information from the concerned credible sources in different Ministries/Departments. Use of AI could be integrated in the fact checking processes of FCU and Fact Checkers of the media organizations to augment their capabilities.
> The technology of Artificial Intelligence, however, is an evolving technology and works on use of pre-existing information available on internet and therefore, it is felt that in its present state of development cannot be used for a subject as complicated as fact checking. AI could be used to flag potentially fake news/ misleading content for review by human intervention as a second layer of monitoring.
>
> However, despite their potential, automated systems face several challenges. AI detection tools often struggle with hybrid content that blends real and false information, or with material in low-resource regional languages that lack sufficient training data. Additionally, bad actors constantly evolve their methods to bypass detection, and the speed at which fake content spreads online often outpace the ability to verify and counter it. Addressing these issues requires a multi-pronged approach: enhancing the accuracy of AI detection tools through multilingual training, fostering collaborations between fact-checkers and platforms, introducing legal safeguards against misuse, and launching public awareness campaigns to improve digital literacy. Together, these strategies can help balance the powerful yet complex role of AI in the battle against fake news".

92.   On the role of AI and Deepfakes in Fake News, following is the submission of Editors Guild of India (EGI):-

"Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deepfakes have significant potential in detecting and preventing the spread of fake news by providing sophisticated tools for verification, identifying manipulated content, and flagging misinformation in real time. Here's how they play a critical role:
  • AI for Text-based Fake News Detection
  • Natural Language Processing (NLP)
  • Fact-Checking Automation
  • Sentiment Analysis
  • AI in Image and Video Verification
  • Deepfake Detection
  • Image Forensics
  • Reverse Image Search
  • AI in Social Media Monitoring
  • Real-Time Monitoring and Content Flagging
  • Misinformation Detection and Tracking
  • Bot Detection
  • AI in Identifying Bias and Misinformation Patterns
  • Bias Detection
  • Fake News Pattern Recognition

Preventing the Spread of Fake News
  • Automated Moderation
  • AI-Enhanced Fact-Checking

Conclusion:

AI and Deepfakes represent both a challenge and an opportunity in the battle against fake news. On the one hand, AI's ability to analyze vast amounts of data and detect subtle inconsistencies in text, images, and video provides powerful tools for identifying misinformation before it spreads widely. On the other hand, the rise of Deepfakes and manipulated content necessitates advanced AI-driven solutions to ensure that the authenticity of media is preserved.

While AI can significantly enhance the detection and prevention of fake news, it must be applied with careful consideration to avoid bias and ensure that it doesn't infringe on freedom of expression. As these technologies evolve, their integration into broader media literacy efforts, collaboration with independent fact-checkers, and transparent regulatory frameworks will be crucial in effectively addressing the fake news problem".

93.   On the same issue, submission of Hindustan Times was:-

"As a recent paper put it "Artificial intelligence (AI) systems are playing an overarching role in the disinformation phenomenon our world is currently facing. Such systems boost the problem not only by increasing opportunities to create realistic AI-generated fake content, but also, and essentially, by facilitating the dissemination of disinformation to a targeted audience and at scale by malicious stakeholders".

94.   NBDA, on the role of AI and Deepfakes in generating, detecting and preventing the spread of 'Fake News', has submitted as under:-

"In this digital era, AI has ushered in remarkable innovation, with tech companies promising new features & products in respect of AI for which billions of dollars have been invested. However, as one sifts hype from reality, it is evident that currently, AI outputs are evolving. …xxxx…xxxx…xxxx. AI can further be deployed to understand the nuances between misinformation (unintentional spread of falsehoods) and disinformation (deliberate spread) – as is crucial for effective countermeasures, which could be facilitated by AI analysis of content. However, at the same time, the training data that is used for building large language models to understand and distinguish between fake news and opinion is very important. Therefore, theoretically, AI can be trained to detect linguistic patterns associated with fake news, such as obvious deviations from journalistic norms, for verifying sources and spotting manipulated media content and may appear as an ideal solution for content moderation, given the vast volume of information shared on social media platforms.

However, AI tools are not perfect, and society does not possess the same level of confidence in technology when it comes to complex decision-making. Automation may amplify human errors. Since AI are trained on datasets, they could suffer from the risk of bias, not being diverse and adequately representative, if the training data is flawed. Further, it is also possible for the programmers' inherent bias to be inadvertently included in the training data, leading AI to perpetuate those biases in its decision-making. …xxxx…xxxx…xxxx. There are also legal challenges associated with AI, particularly the violation of copyright in the data used for training large language models including for detection of fake news. In fact, there is already litigation pending in the USA and India concerning the violation of copyright by AI. To ensure that there is no adverse consequence for news publishers, it is essential that any use of AI including for detection of fake news should not violate the copyright held by publishers of online content. Further, it is reiterated that news publishers must be paid for any content that is used in training of large language models including for detection of fake news.

As a result, while AI may seem like a panacea for fake news, using AI for content moderation has to be clearly monitored to balance freedom of speech and expression and ethics with innovation. Robust guardrails, along with an incrementalist approach, should be adopted as far as the use of AI is concerned. In view of the drawbacks, a hybrid approach, which is a combination of technology-driven solutions and human judgment, may be effective in curbing fake news. The report of the EU DisinfoLab's annual conference, which took place in October 2024, also reiterates a balanced approach to tackle the challenges associated with digital disinformation, which combines AI innovation with expert oversight. It states that while *"AI's ability to streamline data analysis, enhance pattern detection, and forecast influence operations offers unprecedented accuracy, however, human verification remains crucial to ensure accuracy, reliability, and transparency in AI-driven investigations".* Some intermediaries have already adopted this hybrid approach to deal with content-related issues".

95.   Views of T.V. Today Network Limited, on the role of AI and Deepfakes in generating, detecting and preventing the spread of 'Fake News' is as under:-

> "AI Transforming the Indian Media Industry: …xxxx…xxxx…xxxx… Nearly 60% of media companies said in a survey that they are prepared to take advantage of AI. A recent EY-FICCI report on India's Media & Entertainment sector estimates use of AI will provide ₹ 45,000 crore boost to this segment by 2027.
> Risks and Misuses of AI: While media outfits such as the India Today Group, have been cautious and deliberate in adopting AI responsibly, there are several bad actors who have made a "bad use" of the Tech to earn quick money through deepfake videos, phishing emails, cyber-attacks and mushrooming of misinformation sites. Deepfake videos, images and audio are making it extremely hard for humans to tell real from fake. AI avatars looking and sounding too much like their human counterparts are already causing mistrust and frustration. This needs to be regulated.
> Responsible AI Use: Leveraging AI effectively involves the conscious and deliberate use of Tech with a focus on positive impact. Besides fixing the basics, the use of AI tech and its outputs need to become fully transparent through the use of labels, signatures, credentials, etc.
> Global Regulatory Efforts: Governments the world over are considering ways to regulate the use of AI to drive positive impact. The EU recently adopted the AI Act which happens to be the world's first comprehensive law governing the use of AI. Similarly, the government of India too is considering policies which allow AI to be used creatively, which delivers responsible AI for all. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) issued an advisory on 26 December 2023 for digital intermediaries and platforms. All social media platforms were required to comply with existing IT rules specifically focused on misinformation powered by AI and deepfakes".

96.   Following is the submission of Network-18 on the role of AI, Deepfakes and related issues:-

> "The rapid pace at which online content is created and shared has made tackling fake news a significant challenge. However, technological advances, particularly in AI, offer promising solutions.
> AI can revolutionize fact-checking by quickly analyzing patterns, sources, and claims to identify potential fake news. These AI tools can act as an early warning system, flagging misinformation before it becomes widespread. They can also detect duplicate claims across multiple platforms, helping fact-checkers prioritize efforts and focus on new misinformation.
> In India, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) has launched initiatives to detect fake news. Two key projects funded by MEITY are: the Fake Speech Detection using Deep Learning Framework, aimed at detecting fake speech and creating a verification platform, and the Design and Development of Software for Detecting Deepfake Videos and Images, which has led to the creation of a prototype tool by C-DAC Hyderabad and Kolkata to detect deepfakes".

97.   On being asked whether AI could distinguish between misinformation, disinformation, and satire, MIB responded as under:-

"The term "Fake news" is commonly understood as information which is false or misleading and presented as news. The FCU under PIB factchecks misinformation and disinformation being spread only relating to the functioning of the Central Government and does not cover the information genres like political satire etc.
The spectrum of issues around flow of information viz. information, disinformation, misinformation, fake information etc. first need to be defined and a working model be developed to segregate these in different categories. The use of tools like AI etc. could then be integrated in the processes of fact checking".

98.   The response of Editors Guild of India (EGI), to the same query, is as under:-

"AI often struggles with distinguishing satire from misinformation or disinformation, especially when the context, audience, or tone is ambiguous. The interpretation of intent remains a significant limitation, as AI lacks a human understanding of irony, humor, and cultural context".

99.   Regarding the challenges in using automated systems like AI and Deepfakes to identify Fake News, EGI submitted as under:-

"The key challenges in using AI to identify fake news include bias in training datasets, which can lead to inaccurate outcomes, and false positives/negatives that undermine user trust. Additionally, malicious actors continually develop evasion tactics, such as sophisticated misinformation techniques, while resource-intensive AI systems raise privacy concerns. These challenges can be addressed by conducting regular bias audits, improving datasets with diverse content, combining AI with human moderation, and investing in advanced NLP models capable of detecting subtle misinformation patterns. Collaborative public-private investments in AI tools can also help overcome resource limitations".

100.   On the challenges related to using AI and Deepfakes to identify Fake News, NBDA replied as under:-

 i.   The challenges in using automated systems like AI to identify Fake News are detailed hereunder:
 ii.   AI can fail to flag harmful content or incorrectly flag harmless content, thereby impinging free speech rights.
 iii.   It may result in over-censorship or suppression of free speech when AI mistakenly flag content popularly known as "false positives".
 iv.   There may be concerns about transparency and accountability, which may become challenging for digital news publishers to provide clear explanation as to why a certain content was flagged.
 v.   AI may lack contextual understanding.
 vi.   Biases have been inherent in the training of the large language model and in natural language programming.

101.   According to News Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA), the solution with respect to challenges witnessed while using automated systems like AI and Deepfakes to identify Fake News, are as under:-

a) These challenges may be combated by creating algorithms which strike a balance between free speech and censorship.
b) Any entity using AI in content related issues should be transparent and there should be a mechanism for an effective appeal process for aggrieved users in case of a false positive removal of content by AI.
c) Constant monitoring, improvement, updation of and refinement of AI models must be undertaken to keep abreast with the current political, economic and social landscape in content related issues, since content is evolving constantly.
d) Leveraging human-AI hybrid moderation systems can mitigate the shortcomings of fully automated approaches. Human moderators can provide context and judgment in cases where AI algorithms struggle, thereby ensuring a more nuanced and balanced approach to issues related to content.

102.   When asked whether labelling of the AI generated content should be made mandatory for facilitating its identification, MIB replied as under:-

"AI generated content can be labeled, primarily to ensure transparency, build trust and prevent the spread of misinformation. Such content through deepfakes or autogenerated misinformation on politically and socially sensitive matters can seriously mislead the public. However, in view of the Ministry's stance on self-regulation as the way forward the social media intermediaries and electronic media maybe consulted on the practicality towards implementation of such compulsory labeling and arrive at a mutual consensus before making it mandatory".

103.   Following were the responses from some of the stakeholders regarding labelling to be made mandatory for AI generated content for facilitating its identification:-

Sl. No.	Organisation/ Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions on labelling be made mandatory for AI generated content
1.	Hindustan Times	Yes. Labelling and disclosure is a best practice in media.
2.	T.V. Today Network Limited	Yes, it should be made mandatory for AI-generated content to be clearly labelled, primarily to ensure transparency, build trust, and prevent the spread of misinformation. In the context of news media, where credibility and accountability are paramount, audiences must be able to distinguish between human-authored journalism and machine-generated content. Labelling helps users evaluate the reliability and intent behind the information they consume, especially as AI-generated text, images, and videos increasingly mimic authentic human communication. Users are better able to understand the source and can take more informed decisions about the possible biases, correctness, and motive of the content. This is particularly

		critical in political or sensitive contexts, where deepfakes or autogenerated misinformation can seriously mislead the public. Mandatory labelling also serves as a safeguard against potential reputational risks for news organizations, helping maintain editorial integrity and ethical standards. Importantly, it facilitates accountability, making it easier to trace and respond to harmful or erroneous content. Lastly, labelling can assist with tracing the source of AI-generated content, which may be relevant for intellectual property rights if AI models are trained on copyrighted sources.
3.	Network-18	The implementation of mechanisms to label AI-generated content and flag suspected misinformation can empower users to make informed judgments about the credibility of what they see online. These voluntary yet impactful actions by platforms can contribute substantially to curbing the spread of misinformation, while upholding the principles of free speech and open dialogue.

104. When MIB was asked to provide comments/suggestions on the submission of NBDA made during the Sitting on 21.11.2024, wherein they had stated that the creator of Artificial Intelligence, Sam Altman, had delivered a speech, and he had requested Indian Government to have a certain regulatory body to take care of AI because there is no end to AI, the reply was as under:-

> "Further, to address the emerging challenges   in the cyberspace like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, deepfakes powered by AI, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) is seized of the matter and has issued advisories dated 26.12.2023 and 15.03.2024, reminding the intermediaries about their due-diligence obligations outlined under the IT Rules, 2021 and advising them on countering unlawful content including malicious 'synthetic media' and 'deepfakes'".

105. With respect to researches/projects that are going on for using AI in checking Fake News, following was the submission of NBDA:-

> "There are several ongoing research projects on using AI for checking fake news. In India, as per news reports and the status report submitted, pursuant to the Order of the Hon'ble Delhi High Court in W.P.(C) 15596/2023 and W.P.(C) 6560/2024, on 20th November 2024, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) has constituted a nine-member Committee on matters related to the 'issue of deepfakes'. Further, MEITY has funded two projects to detect fake news, which are currently underway, they are as follows:
> i. Fake Speech Detection using Deep Learning Framework
> The project was started in December 2021 and is set to conclude in December 2024. The objective of the project is to "*detect fake speech, create a web interface for detection software, and develop a "speaker verification software platform designed for testing any fake speech detection system*".

ii. Design and Development of Software for Detecting Deepfake Videos and Images

Under this project, C-DAC Hyderabad and Kolkata have developed a prototype tool to detect deepfakes.

Even internationally, there are several ongoing research projects on detecting AI-generated content and developing AI tools that facilitate the detection of fake news. Vera.ai, short for VERificiation Assisted by Artificial Intelligence, is an example of such a research project. The project harnesses the capabilities of fourteen experienced partner organizations, including leading research teams, technology experts, NGOs, the European Broadcasting Union and Deutsche Welle, to develop AI solutions to detect synthetic images, content and deepfakes.

AI4TRUST is an example of another EU-funded ongoing research project that aims to develop a hybrid system based on machine-human cooperation and advanced solutions based on AI to tackle disinformation. The project aims to make monitoring and flagging of high-risk content, including multi-lingual content possible on online social platforms in real-time for expert review by employing novel AI algorithms.

Another research project called HYBRIDS- Hybrid Intelligence to monitor, promote, and analyse transformation in good democracy practice, funded by the EU and the United Kingdom Research and Innovation, aims to combine human knowledge with AI to combat disinformation.

In the United States, the researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Lab (CSAIL) and the Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) have developed a new machine learning system to detect fake news and determine whether a news source is accurate or biased.

Apart from the projects mentioned above, there are several other research projects which are being conducted in respect of using AI to check Fake News".

106. On enquiring, whether Editors Guild of India (EGI) was aware of researches/projects that were going on for using AI in checking Fake News, they replied as under:-

"Yes, the Editors Guild of India (EGI) is aware of various research projects and initiatives that explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in combating fake news. AI and machine learning (ML) technologies are increasingly being employed to enhance the ability to detect, verify, and prevent the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Here are some key developments and projects in this field:
1. AI-based Fact-Checking Tools
Google Jigsaw's Perspective API
ClaimBuster
2. Deep Learning for Image and Video Verification
Fake News Detection on Social Media Using AI-based Image Verification
3. AI for Detecting Disinformation on Social Media
4. AI to Identify Misinformation Networks
5. AI-Powered Tools for Content Verification and Fact-Checking
InVID (Video and Image Verification Tool)

6. Collaboration between AI and Fact-Checking Networks
IFCN and AI Research Partnerships

Conclusion:

The Editors Guild of India (EGI) acknowledges the increasing role of AI in combating fake news, particularly in detecting misleading visual content, verifying claims, and identifying the networks responsible for spreading misinformation. AI technologies such as deep learning algorithms, natural language processing, and graph analysis are proving invaluable in the fight against fake news by providing more efficient and scalable solutions. However, while AI can aid in detection, it must be implemented with caution to avoid biases and ensure that the freedom of expression is not infringed upon. AI must complement human fact-checking".

(b) Algorithm and Fake News

107.   According to the Ministry, algorithms used by social media platforms play a critical role in shaping the flow of information. Since sensational content often generates more clicks, likes, and shares, these platforms' algorithms tend to prioritize such stories, which are sometimes fake or misleading. Because of this, Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram generally have a tendency to amplify Fake News.

108.   On being asked about the mechanism to address the above-mentioned concern, MIB replied as under:-

"The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) regarding the issue of AI governance and accountability, has informed that the Government is committed to ensure accountability, safety, and fairness while upholding human rights and privacy. This strategy includes robust regulatory frameworks, transparent AI governance, and independent oversight mechanisms to prevent bias, discrimination, and misuse. Further, the Government has approved an India's AI Mission as a comprehensive programme for leveraging transformative technologies to foster inclusion, innovation and adoption for social impact as well as to make India a global leader in the AI space and ensure responsible and transformational use of AI for all. The 'Safe and Trusted AI' pillar under the Mission emphasizes the need for responsible AI development, deployment and adoption and enables implementation of 'Responsible AI Projects' which include development of indigenous tools and frameworks, self-assessment checklists for innovators and other guidelines and governance frameworks".

109.   Following submissions have been made by some of the stakeholders regarding role of algorithm in Fake News:-

Sl. No.	Organisation/ Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions with respect to role of algorithm in Fake News
1.	Editors Guild of India (EGI)	"Algorithms, particularly those driven by engagement metrics, often prioritize sensational content, inadvertently amplifying fake news. This occurs because sensational or emotionally charged posts tend to attract more interactions, regardless of their accuracy. To minimize these risks, platforms should

		promote fact-checked content over purely engagement-driven metrics, introduce algorithmic transparency through regular audits, and redesign algorithms to expose users to diverse viewpoints, breaking the cycle of echo chambers".
2.	Hindustan Times	It is a dangerous trend. Social media companies and Big Tech should be treated like media companies, their safe harbour protection should be removed.
3.	T.V. Today Network Limited	Algorithms can produce a feedback loop that, if initiated, can greatly accelerate the dissemination of false information. Users are more likely to come across misleading content again after interacting with it. Their beliefs are simply reinforced by the constant appearance of false information in their feeds – both on online platforms and through WhatsApp. Additionally, when users share this content, their network which may include people they wouldn't have otherwise seen sees the same information. This network effect makes it difficult to stop the rapid spread of misinformation. To combat algorithm-driven deception, a multifaceted approach is required. Social media companies need to be held more responsible for the content that their algorithms suggest. It can be resolved by strengthening internal fact-checking procedures and enforcing more stringent content control requirements. Promoting critical thinking and educating consumers about the risks of misleading information are equally important. People must be able to recognise deceptive content and challenge its veracity. Combining these two strategies can lessen algorithms' detrimental influence on data integrity. At the same time, it is important for law enforcement to step in and take action against complaints regarding fake news and use of deep fakes.
4.	Network-18	Platforms should take a proactive approach in empowering their user base to combat the spread of misinformation by simplifying content reporting mechanisms. Making it easier for ordinary users to flag suspicious content can significantly enhance the speed at which platforms can address emerging threats. Simplified reporting systems will not only help in detecting fake news but also allow platforms to respond more swiftly to urgent issues, reducing the window of exposure for harmful content".
5.	Indian Express	Algorithms used by social media platforms play a critical role in shaping the flow of information. Since sensational content often generates more clicks, likes, and shares, these platforms' algorithms tend to prioritize such content, which are sometimes fake or misleading. Because of this Social Media platforms generally have a tendency to amplify fake news.

110.   When asked about the algorithms that are most effective in detecting fake news and identifying patterns of misinformation, MIB replied as under:-

> "Detecting fake news and identifying patterns of misinformation relating to functioning of Government requires use of various mechanisms to verify the information from the concerned credible sources in different

Ministries/Departments. Use of AI could be integrated in the fact checking processes of FCU and Fact Checkers of the media organizations to augment their capabilities".

111. On the same issue, Editors Guild of India (EGI) replied as under:-

"The most effective algorithms for detecting fake news and identifying patterns of misinformation include:
Natural Language Processing (NLP):
Transformer models (e.g., BERT, GPT): Analyze text structure, sentiment, and semantics to identify misleading patterns or inconsistencies. These models excel at detecting sensational language and context manipulation.
Support Vector Machines (SVM):
Used to classify text into fake or real categories by learning patterns from labeled datasets. It's effective in distinguishing between reliable and unreliable information based on features like word choice and sentence structure.
Decision Trees and Random Forests:
These models are used to classify articles based on various textual features (e.g., source reliability, keywords). They work well when trained on large datasets to identify specific misinformation patterns.
Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN):
Primarily used in image and video verification to detect manipulated visual content. CNNs can analyze pixel-level inconsistencies in images or deepfake videos to determine authenticity.
Recurrent Neural Networks (RNN) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM):
These are used for detecting patterns over sequences of text, which helps in identifying narrative inconsistencies or misleading timelines in fake news.
Graph-based Algorithms:
Graph Neural Networks (GNN) are used to analyze how misinformation spreads across social media networks. They identify patterns of coordinated campaigns and track the flow of misleading content.
These algorithms, when combined with human oversight and fact-checking efforts, form a robust approach to combating fake news".

V. Challenges associated with Fake News crossing international borders

112. On being asked about the challenges associated with Fake News crossing international borders, particularly with the rise of global social media platforms, MIB submitted as under:-

"Publishers of news and current affairs on digital media which host news relating to India, even if operating from outside the country, are subject to the IT Rules, 2021 and direction for blocking of access of their content falling under Section 69A of IT Act in India, can be issued by the Government.
Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 inter-alia empowers the Central Government to issue directions to any Government agency or an intermediary to block content 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 such matters.

Under the provisions of Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 the Ministry issues directions for blocking of content of digital news publishers covered under the provisions of Section 69A of Information Technology Act, 2000. The request for blocking is considered as per the laid procedure in the IT Rules, 2021. **The Ministry has in the past issued directions under this Section for blocking of access of content emanating from foreign jurisdictions in India".**

113. On the same issue, following are the submissions of Editors Guild of India and News Broadcasters and Digital Association:-

Sl. No.	Organisation/ Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions with respect to challenges associated with Fake News crossing international borders
1.	Editors Guild of India (EGI)	Challenges with Fake News Crossing International Borders: **Jurisdictional Issues:** Different countries have varying laws and regulations regarding misinformation, making it difficult to enforce global content moderation. **Language Barriers:** Fake news can spread across borders in different languages, requiring tailored detection tools that may not be universally effective. **Platform Control:** Global platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and WhatsApp can enable the rapid spread of misinformation across borders, but regulating this content consistently worldwide is challenging. **Cultural Differences:** What is considered misinformation in one country may be interpreted differently in another, complicating the global fight against fake news.
2.	News Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA)	Regulating speech on social media platforms that transcends geographical boundaries raises significant challenges from a regulatory perspective. It raises issues concerning jurisdiction, as the content available on digital platforms can reach multiple jurisdictions, each having its own legal requirements and issues. The right to freedom of speech and expression varies significantly across countries. For instance, in the United States of America, the First Amendment explicitly forbids Congress from enacting any laws abridging the freedom of speech and expression, including that of the press. Therefore, any content-based speech regulation in the US is presumed invalid, with the burden of proof shifting to the government. The Indian Constitution, on the other hand, does not confer an absolute right to freedom of speech and expression as it envisages reasonable restrictions on eight grounds under Article 19(2) that may be placed on the exercise of this right by law. Even the laws governing intermediaries significantly differ in several countries. The US offers more broad immunity to the intermediary, allowing them to regulate content on their platform as per their own policies, in India, a conditional immunity is given to the intermediaries provided they comply with the due diligence obligation.

| | | In view of the above, it is clear that globally, there are divergent laws, norms and practices for regulating content, geopolitical conditions, making transnational regulation of fake news difficult. |

114.   Regarding India's international collaboration for curbing fake news, MIB replied as under:-

"India is a member of UNESCO. Department of Higher Education under the Central Government has established an Indian National Commission for Cooperation (INCCU) with UNESCO having 05 Sub Commissions. The Sub Commission on Communication comes under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and is chaired by Secretary (I&B). This Sub Commission discusses issues related to mass media, journalist freedom etc. in the country. The outcomes of the meeting of Sub Commission on Communication forms the basis of India's position at UNESCO's General Conference".

115.   Following are the submissions of EGI and NBDA on international collaboration for curbing Fake News:-

Sl. No.	Organisation/ Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions with respect to international collaboration for curbing fake news
1.	Editors Guild of India (EGI)	**International Collaboration for Curbing Fake News:** There are several international initiatives to combat fake news, such as the EU's Digital Services Act and UNESCO's guidelines for tackling misinformation. **India's Role:** India has participated in global discussions on misinformation but has not yet fully established binding international standards for combating fake news. However, India has collaborated with other countries and global tech companies to share information and strengthen fact-checking efforts. For example, India engages with initiatives like the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) and IFCN (International Fact-Checking Network).]
2.	News Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA)	There are several international collaborations for curbing fake news. The Trusted News Initiative (TNI) is an example of such collaboration. Founded by the BBC, the initiative is a partnership that includes organisations from around the globe including; AP, AFP, BBC, CBC/Radio-Canada, European Broadcasting Union, Financial Times, Information Futures Lab, Google/YouTube, The Hindu, The Nation Media Group, Meta, Microsoft, Thomson Reuters, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Twitter, The Washington Post, Kompas – Indonesia, Dawn – Pakistan, Indian Express, NDTV – India, ABC – Australia, SBS – Australia, NHK – Japan. TNI works collectively to find solutions to tackle the problem of disinformation and build audience trust. Another example is the VERIFIED project which was launched in 2020 by the United Nations to combat the increasing spread of COVID-19 misinformation by increasing the volume and reach of trusted, accurate information. VERIFIED works with a range of civil

		society groups, media broadcasters, activists and companies around the world to help deliver verified information to millions of people.

116. When asked to furnish comments on the Bills/Acts of different countries in this regard, MIB responded as under:-

   (i) <u>UK's Online Safety Act 2023 (OSA):</u>
   The Online Safety Act (the OSA) was enacted on 26 October 2023. It establishes an extensive regulatory framework for online user-to-user service providers to prevent the proliferation of illegal content and activity online and of content and activity that is harmful to children, and to protect against fraudulent advertising.
   <u>Main Features:</u>
   (a) All the online platforms will have to show their processes in place to meet the requirements set out by the OSA. Ofcom will check how effective those processes are at protecting internet users from harm.
   (b) Ofcom will have powers to take action against companies which do not follow their new rules. Companies can be fined up to £18 million or 10 percent of their annual global turnover (whichever is greater) as per the provisions of OSA. Ofcom will also be able to hold companies and senior managers (where they are at fault) criminally liable if the provider fails to comply with Ofcom's enforcement notices in relation to specific child safety duties or to child sexual abuse and exploitation on their service.
   (c) In the most extreme cases, with the agreement of the courts, Ofcom will be able to require payment providers, advertisers and internet service providers to stop working with a site, preventing it from generating money or being accessed from the UK.
   (ii) <u>Singapore's Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act:</u>
   Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act was enacted on 1st February 2023 o tackle online harms and strengthen online safety for users.
   <u>Main Features of the Act:</u>
   (a) Online communication services will be required to block access by Singapore users to such egregious content where directed to do so by the Infocomm Media Development Authority ("IMDA"), within a stipulated timeline, which would generally be 'within hours', and that the timeline given will be proportionate to the potential harm of the content and will be expedited for more egregious content such as terrorism-related content.
   (b) Failure to comply with a blocking direction from the IMDA is an offence and may result in a fine of up to SGD 1 million.
   (c) In addition, the IMDA may designate certain online communications services as Regulated Online Communication Services ("ROCS"). ROCS would be those services with "significant reach". ROCS will be required to comply with additional Online Codes of Practice to be issued by IMDA.

117. Commenting on the above Acts, one of the stakeholders stated that both are aimed at protecting users, especially children and are not aimed at Fake News specifically.

118. On being asked whether, India could emulate any of the international best practices related to the regulation of misinformation or 'Fake News', one of the stakeholders replied as under:-

> "India is unique. Cheap data, which makes almost a billion people connected. And low levels of education and awareness. Thus, India should have its own law. The French law on Election Misinformation is a good law and could be looked at for some aspects".

VI.   Awareness/Training

119. Regarding initiatives of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) to generate awareness and literacy for identifying/detecting Fake News and reporting the same, following was submitted:-

> "The Fact Check Unit under PIB is doing fact checking only in respect of information pertaining to the Government.   In order to increase public awareness regarding the harmful effects of fake news and sensitize them against sharing of unverified information, PIB FCU uses engaging content in the form of memes and has also conducted campaigns such as #FACTREE, #CyberMonday, etc".

120. Noting that one of the causes of 'Fake News' proliferation, as submitted by the Ministry, was 'Lack of Media Literacy', the Ministry was asked about their plans for creating specific programme for generating and creating awareness amongst common man for identifying and taking action against Fake News/content. To this, they replied as under:-

> "Media literacy can best be achieved through creating public awareness regarding the harmful effects of fake news and sensitize citizens and other stakeholders against sharing of unverified information. This can be done through appropriate outreach activities for citizen engagement particularly for younger generation in association with educational institutions.
> In this regard, the PIB Fact Check Unit has spearheaded several initiatives to dispel myths, rumors, and false claims, while providing citizens with accurate and reliable information. Key initiatives include:
> 1. <u>PIB Factree</u> - In order to create awareness about safe internet practices among users, the unit will regularly produce creative infographics related to phishing scams, government job scams, financial frauds, fraudulent websites, etc.
> 2. <u>Crisps Videos</u> - PIB Fact Check creates short awareness videos to help people identify AI-generated images, recognize fake websites, and check if

their phone number is registered under someone else's name, among other topics.

3. <u>Awareness Posts</u> - PIB Fact Check creates awareness posts on topics such as how to spot fake news, how to report online fraud using the Chakshu facility, and information about the Cyber Swachhta Kendra and its role in promoting digital hygiene.

121. When asked whether the Ministry was contemplating to create awareness about Fake News at school/college level, following reply was submitted:-

"As far as creating awareness specifically at school/ college level is concerned, a broader consultation in this regard needs to be done by all concerned including the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders".

122. On being asked for view points for generating awareness about Fake News at school/college level, following suggestions have been received from the stakeholders:-

Sl. No.	Organisation/Stakeholders	Remarks/Suggestions with respect w.r.t generating awareness about Fake News at school/college level
1.	Editors Guild of India (EGI)	Yes, media literacy can and should be integrated into formal education curricula to equip students with critical skills to navigate misinformation and fake news.
2.	News Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA)	According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education, media literacy is the ability to use all kinds of communication to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act. Understanding underlying messages in web advertisements, making viral video content, and detecting native advertising are all examples of media literacy. Teaching media literacy should not be approached as something that is accomplished in a particular class, unit, or grade level. Instead, a comprehensive media literacy curriculum should extend throughout a student's entire educational journey and be taught through age and stage appropriate activities. At the ground level, the teachers, trainers, instructors and educators of primary and secondary schools, librarians, should be trained to develop the curriculum and guidelines for Media and Information Literacy. This can be done by adopting the following mechanisms, viz. identifying fake news; evaluating different perspectives by analyzing each source and looking for any biases on how the information is presented.
3.	Hindustan Times	Yes.
4.	T.V. Today Network Limited	Generating awareness about fake news at the school and college level is crucial, especially given the increasing consumption of digital media among the youth. The Council of Europe's campaign, "Free to Speak, Safe to Learn," emphasizes the importance of early education on identifying and addressing misinformation. Schools and colleges must adopt media literacy programs that teach students how to critically assess information, recognize misinformation, and use tools like reverse image searches and fact-checking websites. According to the

		campaign, it's not only about identifying fake news but also about fostering a mindset that encourages students to verify sources and be responsible digital citizens. By introducing such programs at the school and college level, we can ensure that students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the digital information landscape. It's essential to integrate these lessons into existing curricula and engage students in activities that actively involve them in detecting fake news. These initiatives must be tailored to age-appropriate levels and framed carefully to avoid spreading scepticism or undue distrust of media altogether. In doing so, educational institutions can play a pivotal role in creating a well-informed generation capable of critically engaging with the digital world.
5.	Network-18	Media literacy would increase the power of evaluation of individuals in all demographics to decipher the difference between fake news and factually correct news. It might also decrease the percentage of fake news being shared through public platforms. Media literacy should not be treated as a one-time lesson or confined to a specific class or grade. Instead, it should be an ongoing part of a student's education, integrated through developmentally appropriate activities across all stages of learning.

123.   Following was submitted by Editors Guild of India (EGI) on Media literacy during evidence:-

"The second aspect is media literacy. You had already pointed out that the Government is devoting resources to media literacy. I think that is a very encouraging move. We need to up the efforts of informing the general public on what is fake news. Like mutual fund association, the body does a lot of campaign on informing about hazards of mutual fund investment and so on in health domain and other sensitive domains. I think informing the general public on how to identify fake news itself is extremely important. The more money the Government can invest, the more it can ask the platform to invest. Regarding bodies like the GUILD, NBDA and any other alliances to create their own self-regulatory systems, it should be in a manner that there is a grievance redressal mechanism and it is a flagging mechanism. It is more of their own industry, own ombudsman. The Government should not be a party to it whatsoever. There are alliances like the fact-checking unit alliances. There is an international fact-checking network which has some guidelines. There is a fact-checking alliance in India which operates. I think enabling those partnerships is a very welcome move, ensuring that most of the partnerships come through, that the media companies itself become party to those fact-checking guidelines, enforce those fact-checking guidelines is extremely important".

124.   When suggestions were sought from Press Council of India (PCI) for generating and creating awareness amongst common man for identifying and taking action against Fake News/content, they replied as under:-

"To enhance awareness, the PCI carries out sustained Social Media campaigns by making regular updates of Norms on its official Social Media Handle – X.

Further, the Council while considering the matter regarding strategies and efforts to tackle fake news during its meeting held on 22.09.2022, recommended for inclusion of media studies in academic curriculum. Accordingly, communication thereupon was sent to the Ministry of Education vide letter dated 09.12.2022 for taking necessary action in the matter".

125. On the same query, the Hindustan Times, stated that there could be an awareness campaign on Fake News, with a strong emphasis on social media.

126. Regarding the need for training or for awareness programs to help journalists identify and avoid the publication of 'Fake News', following response was received from News Broadcasters and Digital Association (NBDA):-

"Yes, there is a need for training or awareness programs to help journalists identify and avoid the publication of 'Fake News'. Regarding the steps to be taken thereof, the Council while considering the matter regarding strategies and efforts to tackle fake news during its meeting held on 22.09.2022, made recommendations.

Encouraging media literacy is the most recommended countermeasure against fake news. Media Literacy is a learning process, which aims to develop and encourage critical thinking skills. While there can be many diverse approaches towards infusing media literacy, the common objective of these approaches should be to raise awareness amongst the citizens and thereby critical analysis skills about the media industry, the journalistic practices, known media manipulation techniques, the independent-industry-led self-regulatory mechanisms and increase familiarity with technology.

To realise the full potential of media literacy a collaborative approach is required, wherein all stakeholders contribute towards media literacy. Even Ofcom in its Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy has underscored the importance of collaboration involving collective effort of everyone from online platforms, parents, educators, third-sector organisations to broadcasters and others in advancing media literacy.

Further, it is also important to bear in mind that with evolving technology and media formats, there can be no single effective approach for achieving media literacy across different age groups and demographics and that media literacy is a lifelong process.

Therefore, the focus should not be on finding the most effective method of teaching media literacy rather the focus of any media literacy programmes should be on ensuring wide engagement and reach.

FactShala is a successful example of an organization running multiple media literacy programmes based on different objectives. FactShala was launched by Internews in collaboration with DataLEADS and financial support from Google.org and Google News Initiative. The organization has several initiatives to promote media literacy, which are given herein below:

     i. Train-the-trainer
     ii. University Network Programme
     iii. FactShala Zonal Hub

iv. FactShala Innovation Lab.

127. On the same query, the Hindustan Times, submitted as under:-

"Yes. Regular workshops, especially dealing with new technologies used in Fake News are important. Maybe MIB can coordinate these".

VII.   Miscellaneous

128. When asked about the plans for making intermediary platforms to take appropriate steps to remove 'Fake News' from their platforms on their own, the Ministry replied as under:-

"The Government as a general policy does not interfere with reporting of news across media and hence it may not be appropriate to have a direct role for the Government in monitoring of fake news as it simply means monitoring of all news. It is felt that the monitoring of fake news can best be addressed by the self-regulatory mechanism of the industry stakeholders.

However, Ministry has existing mechanism under Part-II of IT Rules, 2021 which cast obligation on intermediary platforms like YouTube, Facebook, etc to make reasonable efforts by itself and to cause the user of their computer resource to not host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, etc. knowingly and intentionally any information which is obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, invasive of another's privacy, including bodily privacy, insulting or harassing on the basis of gender, racially or ethnically objectionable, or that is harmful to child and any information which is patently false and untrue, and is written and published in any form with the intent to mislead or harass a person, entity or agency for financial gain or to cause any injury to any person".

129. On being asked as to what could be done to make social media and YouTube Channels to make more accountable w.r.t running Fake content/News, the following was submitted by EGI:-

"To make social media platforms and YouTube channels more accountable for fake content/news:
Transparency and Reporting:
Mandate transparency reports detailing content moderation practices and actions taken against fake news.
Strengthen Content Moderation:
Require platforms to adopt robust AI tools and partner with independent fact-checkers to identify and flag fake content.
User Reporting Mechanisms:
Ensure platforms have accessible tools for users to report misinformation, with clear timelines for response.
Algorithmic Accountability:
Enforce transparency in algorithms to prevent the promotion of fake content and encourage the prioritization of credible sources.
Graduated Penalties:
Introduce stricter fines and penalties for repeat violations, scaling up for platforms or channels consistently spreading fake news.

Independent Oversight:
Establish independent regulatory bodies to audit and review content moderation policies and practices regularly.
These measures would encourage responsibility while preserving free expression".

130.   Suggestions provided by Network-18 for curbing 'Fake News' in Print and Digital Media/Social media are as under:-

"With most news now consumed via mobile apps and social media, certain technological and procedural integrations can have positive impact on conduct of misinformation on these platforms. To counter this, social media platforms must partner with independent fact-checkers to verify content and promote credible, well-sourced information. This can be the replication of editorial ethics to assure correct information is distributed with the public.
Each social media platform has its own set of rules or guidelines, which can vary from one platform to another. These guidelines govern how the platform operates and how it handles user content, but they differ depending on the platform. To address the issue of fake news, social media platforms can leverage their unique set of rules and guidelines, along with technological tools, to curb the spread of misinformation.
Each social media platform can implement strict content moderation policies that specifically target misinformation".

131.   The Ministry were asked to provide comment on NBDA's statement that there is a need to think through the word 'safe harbour'. To this, the Ministry replied as under:-

"Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000 provides for exemption from liability of intermediary, subject to certain safeguards, for any third-party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted by him. The exemption from liability is commonly called as 'safe harbour'.

Sub-section (2) of Section 79 provides that the safe harbour provision shall apply if–
   a) the function of the intermediary is limited to providing access to a communication system over
   b) which information made available by third parties is transmitted or temporarily stored or hosted; or
   c) the intermediary does not–
      i.   initiate the transmission,
      ii.   select the receiver of the transmission, and
      iii. select or modify the information contained in the transmission;
   d) the intermediary observes due diligence while discharging his duties under this Act and also observes such other guidelines as the Central Government may prescribe in this behalf.
Sub-section (3) provides that the safe harbor **shall not apply if**–
   a) the intermediary has conspired or abetted or aided or induced, whether by threats or promise or otherwise in the commission of the unlawful act;
   b) upon receiving actual knowledge, or on being notified by the appropriate Government or its agency that any information, data or communication link residing in or connected to a computer resource

controlled by the intermediary is being used to commit the unlawful act, the intermediary fails to expeditiously remove or disable access to that material on that resource without vitiating the evidence in any manner.

Rule 3(1) of the IT Rules, 2021 provides for due diligence to be observed by an intermediary. In this context, sub-rule (d) of rule 3(1) relates to section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act and provides that **an intermediary shall not host, store, or publish any unlawful information upon receiving actual knowledge in the form of an order by a court of competent jurisdiction or being notified by the Appropriate Government** or its agency under section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act. This includes information prohibited under any law for the time being in force concerning the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency, morality, contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to an offense relating to these areas. Upon receiving such a court order or notification, the intermediary shall remove or disable access to the unlawful information within thirty-six hours.

Rule 7 of the IT Rules, 2021 provides that where an intermediary fails to observe the IT Rules, the provisions of sub-section (1) of section 79 of the Act shall not be applicable to such intermediary and **the intermediary shall be liable for punishment under any law for the time being in force, including the provisions of the IT Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.** Thus, failure to remove unlawful information can lead to loss of safe harbour for the intermediary, and it shall then be directly liable for the offense being committed by the unlawful content".

132. When asked for the Ministry's views on 'Safe Harbour' provisions used by intermediaries and the way they can be made more accountable, they replied as under:-

"Most of the digital news publishers are on major social media intermediary platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram etc. The revenue model of such platforms is such that the sensational and potentially fake content gets more traction on such platforms and the algorithms of such platform further amplifies such content. This is a vicious cycle and often lead to virality of fake news. On the other hand the intermediary platforms enjoy immunity from the third party liability of content posted on their platforms by users under Section 79 of IT Act, 2000, subject to complying with certain due diligence. In order to check the menace of fake news the due diligence for the intermediary platforms could be revisited requiring them to take appropriate steps to remove fake news from their platforms on their own. This will take away the incentives for the publishers of fake news on such platforms.

In this regard Hon'ble Minister of Information and Broadcasting (HMIB) while speaking on the occasion of 'National Press Day 2024 on 16th November, 2024, while calling for accountability in digital media to combat fake news and safeguard democracy, had suggested that in view of the changing media landscape and India's diverse cultural and social context there is a need for revisiting the 'Safe Harbour' provision for the social media intermediaries.

HMIB pointed out that algorithms driving digital platforms prioritise content that maximises engagement, incites strong reactions and, thereby, defines the revenue for the platform. These often amplify sensational or divisive narratives. Since such biases have social consequences, particularly in a

diverse nation like India, there is a need for platforms to come up with solutions to eliminate such biases".

133. With respect to 'Safe Harbour' clause of 'IT Rule, 2021', Hindustan Times stated that the 'safe harbour' protection should be removed. On the same issue, Network-18 submitted are as under:-

"Section 79 of the IT Act grants safe harbour protection to intermediaries, shielding them from liability. Removing this provision could lead to increased censorship on these intermediaries, particularly social media platforms.

The safe harbour provision under Section 79 is essential for intermediaries, as long as they don't initiate, select the recipients, or modify the information being transmitted. However, issues arise when major tech companies use algorithms to boost user engagement and increase ad revenue, inadvertently promoting the spread of fake news. To address this, promoting transparency in algorithms might be crucial to prevent the circulation of misinformation.
Social media platforms, leveraging their technological capabilities, can efficiently detect and eliminate bot accounts that spread misinformation. Algorithms should prioritize credible, verified content over mere engagement metrics to combat the spread of AI-generated fake news.

134. Sharing his view point on role of Big Tech companies and in Fake News, the representative of NDTV, during evidence, submitted:-

"बिग टेक की सच्चाई यह है कि हम कुछ नहीं कर सकते हैं। वह सरकारों के ऊपर है। यूके का Ofcom हो, चाहे एफसीसी ऑफ अमेरिका हो, चाहे सिंगापुर हो या चाहे ऑस्ट्रेलिया हो, वे सब इससे संघर्ष कर रहे हैं। जब तक कोई एक बड़ी सरकार, बड़े जज्बे के साथ एग्रीगेटर को यह नहीं बोलेगी कि मैं आपको पब्लिशर की तरह ट्रीट करूंगा या जैसे अभी आपने रिक्वेस्ट कर दी और उन्होंने यूट्यूब के चैनल्स हटा दिए, उस प्रकार से अगर ये एनफोर्समेंट मजबूत नहीं होंगे तो गंगोत्री बंद नहीं होगी। जब तक गंगोत्री बंद नहीं होगी, चूँकि हम लोगों से गलतियां होती है, लेकिन हम छोटे दोषी हैं। इंडिविजुअल्स बड़े दोषी हैं।
दूसरा, मैं आपको सेबी के उदाहरण से एक्सप्लेन करना चाहूंगा कि फाइनेंशियल इंफ्लुएंसर मार्केट में शेयर बाजार को लेकर कुछ भी कहते जा रहे थे। इनका कोई रेगुलेशन नहीं था। जब देखा गया कि ग्रे रेगुलेटरी एरिया है तो सेबी ने आकर कहा कि अगर आप एडवाइस दे रहे हैं तो अपने आपको रजिस्टर्ड कीजिए। जैसे हम लाइसेंस से बंधे हुए है, उसी तरीके से आप क्रिएटर्स का या इंफ्लुएंसर्स का क्या करेंगे? इसका एक समाधान सरकार को ढूंढना चाहिए। आपकी समिति इस पर जाहिर तौर पर कुछ अच्छे सुझाव दे सकती है"।

135. On a related issue, the Indian Express during evidence, submitted following:-

"I want to stick my neck out and say none of us in this room makes fake news. This is not the source of fake news as you yourself said in statistics that mainstream media does not make fake news. One big reason is and I am not saying that we are doing a wonderful job. We need to do a better job, but you know us. You know our name, our phone numbers, our company addresses, our income tax returns, our company file, etc. So, you know us

inside…xxx.xxx…We are not a black box. You can find out who the director or the owner or the editor of Indian Express is. Everything is in the public domain. It is much easier. If we do some fake news, you can call us and say 'this is wrong'. It is those who are in a black box and that is where big technologies companies come in. Everyone of us needs Facebook, Google etc. Ninety per cent of people who read the Indian Express read it on their phones. They go to Google. We don't know how a story reaches them. It is a black box. We don't understand why one story can reach 400 people and another story reaches 4,000 people or four million people. These are black boxes. So, my second point is to engage with big technology companies and see what they are doing. They share and disseminate; they may not upload. They don't write the story but they play a very big role in sharing what we call fake news. I am using the words 'fake news' here since that is the subject and that is the term being used".

PART II

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Introductory

1.   With advancement in technology, dissemination of 'Fake News'/misinformation is not only through the mainstream media (newspapers, TV) but also largely through digital news media and user-generated content on social media (X, YouTube etc). Spread of 'Fake News', though not unknown, is magnified with the onset of electronic media, proliferation of digital platforms and widespread use of social media. In the last decade and a half, almost every individual has become a purveyor of news/information and the conventional safeguards of editorial control have become almost non-existent. Consequently, there has been a massive proliferation of 'Fake News' and misinformation. Unchecked spread of misinformation in general and 'Fake News' in particular, have emerged as a global challenge as it pose a serious threat to (a) Public order - triggering strong emotional sentiments and confusion; (b) Democratic processes; (c) Individual reputation (defamation); (d) Insider trading/prices of the stock market; and (e) Credibility of media etc. Given the ongoing digital revolution and the rise in usage of digital devices in the Country, 'Fake News' is undoubtedly becoming a matter of concern.

        The Committee note that there are myriad complex and inter-related factors that contribute to the spread of 'Fake News' and misinformation due to reasons which, *inter-alia,* include (i) Low level of digital and media literacy; (ii) Rise of social media platforms; (iii) Technological developments; (iv) Political polarization and specific agendas of some individuals, parties or groups (to influence public opinion); (v) Financial Incentives (fabricated sensational stories attract more clicks and generate followers and advertising revenue for the creators); (vi) Algorithms that promote/amplify viral and sensational content; (vii) Technologies like Bots amplifying false information, cognitive biases, manipulation through AI-generated deepfakes, etc.

        Recognizing the impact and challenges associated with 'Fake News', the Committee felt the need to review and assess the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms to curb its menace. In the succeeding paragraphs, the Committee after detailed examination of the subject have made their

Observations/Recommendations on the existing regulatory/institutional frameworks/ mechanisms for addressing the issues related to 'Fake News'. The Committee feel that the issue requires a multi-faceted approach and combined efforts by individuals, Governments, Print as well as electronic media digital media growing and social media platforms in curbing the menace. The Government through various initiatives like Regulatory Framework, Fact Checking Initiatives, Technology Collaborations, Public Awareness campaigns and Media literacy would be able to tackle the spread of Fake News. The Committee desire that the hazards of 'Fake News'/misinformation need to be prevented so as to avoid misleading of common people, mental trauma to victims and in maintaining the credibility and freedom of all forms of Media. The Committee recommend the Ministry to act in right earnest through robust and comprehensive approach and provide details of the time bound action taken to address all the issues highlighted in the Report.

Need for defining 'Fake News'

2.   The Committee during the course of evidence found that the term 'Fake News' has not been defined under any statute. However, according to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Fake News is commonly understood as information which is false or misleading and presented as news. According to one of the Stakeholders, 'Fake News' is generally used to describe fabricated and factually inaccurate information and the term is so ambiguous that it inaccurately subsumes within its fold "satire", "opinions", "criticism", "clickbait reporting", "biased reporting", "motivated propaganda" etc., and the term may also be used to target and delegitimize the media. During examination of the subject, the Stakeholders apprised of the Committee that there is no uniform and clear definition for 'Fake news' which is being followed worldwide. According to the stakeholder(s), the polysemic nature of 'Fake News' makes it difficult to define and identify. Since the definitive principles cannot be established, 'Fake News' cannot be defined precisely and definitively and therefore results in vagueness and makes it susceptible to grave abuse and misuse. However, some of the Stakeholders suggested that there is a need for defining the term 'Fake News' as it is crucial to any discussion for its regulation. Definitions for Fake News, as proposed by some of the Stakeholders are:-

i. 'Fake News' means news, story, information, data and reports which is or are wholly or partly false;

ii. Fake news - Deliberately fabricated or manipulated content disseminated with the intent to mislead or harm;

iii. False reports or Mis- or disinformation that could take the form of articles, photographs, video clips, which are disguised as real news, and which are aimed at fooling people or manipulating their opinion. The most important parameters in this are that these are 'disguised as real news' and are 'aimed at fooling people or manipulating opinions';

iv. 'Fake News' shall mean any false, misleading, or distorted information created, disseminated or amplified with the intention to deceive the public and meets all the following criteria: (a) It presents itself as containing factual assertions about events, individuals, entities, or phenomena excluding opinions, satire, or parody clearly identifiable as such; and (b) The information has the capacity to significantly mislead a reasonable person, based on objective evidence or the lack thereof; and (c) The dissemination of such information that has the potential to cause harm, including but not limited to: (i) incitement to violence, hatred, or discrimination; (ii) disruption of public order or safety; (iii) undermining the integrity of democratic processes; (iv) causing significant harm to the reputation of individuals or entities; or (v) endangering public health.

In the light of the ambiguity related to the term misinformation/fake news, the Committee feel that there is a need for defining the term 'Fake News' per se in a subtle manner and incorporate suitable clauses in the existing regulatory mechanism for print, electronics and digital media while maintaining the delicate balance of combating misinformation and protecting freedom of speech and individual rights as guaranteed under the Constitution. The Committee also caution the Ministry to consider all the dimensions and parameters related to the term in consultation with the Stakeholders while arriving at its definition. The Committee may be apprised of the action taken in this direction.

Regulatory Mechanism for curbing Fake News

3. The Committee note that the objective of the Fact Check Unit under Press Information Bureau (PIB) is to counter dissemination of fake news and misinformation pertaining to the Government of India and to provide people with an easy avenue to report suspicious and questionable information for fact-checking by following FACT model (Find, Assess, Create and Target). The Committee also note that for Print Media - the newspapers have to adhere to

'Norms of Journalistic Conduct' brought out by Press Council of India (PCI).   So far as the contents shown on TV Channels there is Programme Code under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, are concerned it, *inter-alia,* provide that no content which contain anything obscene, defamatory, deliberate, false and suggestive innuendos and half-truth is broadcast on private satellite TV channels. Besides, TV channels are also required to follow 'The Cable Television Network (Amendment) Rules 2021'. For Digital News Publishers, 'Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021' ('IT Rules, 2021') provide for a Code of Ethics for the publishers of news and current affairs on digital media, which, *inter-alia*, requires adherence to the Norms of Journalistic Conduct brought out by PCI and the Programme Code under Cable Television Network Regulation Act, 1995. The Rules provide for a Three Tier Grievance Redressal Mechanism   to look into complaints relating to violation of the Code. However, Rule 9 (i) relating to adherence of the Code of Ethics by the publishers of news and current affairs on digital media and OTT platforms; and Rule 9(3) relating to the three level grievance redressal mechanism, have been stayed by the Bombay High Court vide their interim order dated 14.8.2021.

The complaints relating to fake news received in the Ministry are forwarded to the concerned news publishers, at Level-I of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism, for appropriate action under the IT Rules, 2021. The Ministry takes appropriate action against circulation of fake news as per the provisions of the institutional mechanism that are available for various media platforms. However, the Committee have been informed that in order to augment the effectiveness of the efforts to check the spread of fake news there is an urgent need for defining fake news and incorporating it in the existing regulatory mechanisms of print, electronic and digital media along with appropriate deterrent measures.

While responding about the strength of existing legislative provisions and mechanisms to tackle the menace of Fake News, some of the stakeholders have submitted that they are adequate. However, according to some of the stakeholders it is not adequate in terms of the fact that intermediaries, content providers and social media platforms are not covered by the law. The Committee understand that digital media does not fall only under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB). Regulation of digital as well as social media is a multi-

pronged effort, with distinct roles played by the MIB and MeitY, especially under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. It is beyond doubt that IT rules, 2021, divide digital media regulation between two Ministries. MIB (Part III) administers the Code of Ethics and three-tier grievance redressed mechanism for content published by digital news portals and (Over-The-Top) OTT streaming platforms. MeitY (Part II) oversees social media intermediaries and regulates user-generated content on platforms like You Tube, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). Since digital media operates on Information Technology platforms, MeitY's policies regarding cybersecurity and broader IT Act, 2000, provide overarching framework. The Committee, therefore, urge upon the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to augment their concerted efforts, in effectively dealing with the challenges and problems created by Fake News in digital as well as social media platforms, in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. In order to strengthen the Press Council of India Online Complaint Portal like CPGRAM should be developed. Similarly, there is a need to strengthen the Press Council of India. The Committee expect the Ministry to explore the option of having an independent centralized monitoring body with representatives from MeitY, all the forms of Media and stakeholders for adjudicating cross-platform fake news cases and recommend penalties. Further, since PCI has submitted that there is a need for amending the existing Acts/Rules/Guidelines related to Print Media for tackling the issue of 'Fake News', the Committee recommend the Ministry to set up the Committee of experts to suggest amendments in existing Acts/Rules/Guidelines like 'IT Act, 2000', 'The Cable Television Network (Regulation) Act 1995, etc. to address the misinformation or the fake news effectively. The Committee would like to be apprised of the views of the Ministry and action, initiated in this regard.

Role of Self-Regulatory Mechanism in curbing Fake News

4.   The Committee note that there are 919 TV channels permitted by MIB (as on 30.11.2024). Out of this, 318 TV channels are members of Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) and 58 are members with News Broadcasters Federation - Professional News Broadcasting Standards Authority" (NBF-PNBSA). While noting that 543 Channels were not members with any Self

Regulatory Body (SRB), the Committee wanted to know from the Ministry as to how they could be made part of one or the other SRB. To this, the Ministry informed that in order to ensure accountability of Broadcasters which are not affiliated with any SRB and to secure effective implementation of the three-tier grievance redressal mechanism, MIB have introduced a condition that may be included in the uplinking/downlinking permissions for satellite TV channels mandating broadcasters to either join an SRB registered with the Ministry or establish their own SRB and get it registered with them. Details in this regard, the Ministry had communicated to the Broadcasters on 30.05.2023. NBDA, informed the Committee that when the TV channels find that they are under regulation, they prefer not to be a member and in such a situation NBDA has no control over it. Against this backdrop, they have been requesting the Ministry, for almost last 16 years, that whether channels are members or not, they should be brought under the purview of NBDA and regulated by the Self-Regulation Body that MIB have created. The Committee are also given to understand that the Ministry has not received any request from NBDA for registration as a self-regulatory body at level –II under Rule 18 (2) of CTN Rules, 2021.

While acknowledging the support of most of the Stakeholders for Self-Regulatory Monitoring Mechanism to curb Fake News, the Committee feel that for making the system of Self-regulatory mechanism effective, all TV channels should be brought under its umbrella. While endorsing the suggestion of NBDA, the Committee appreciate the Ministry's initiative for inclusion of the condition in the uplinking/downlinking permissions for satellite TV channels mandating Broadcasters to either join an SRB registered with the Ministry or establish their own SRB and get it registered with them. The Committee are also of the view that having a fact checking mechanism and internal Ombudsman in almost all the media organisations will go a long way in strengthening the role of Self Regulatory mechanism and checking the menace of misinformation/Fake News. The Committee desire the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to ensure that fact checking mechanism and internal ombudsman should be made mandatory in all print, digital and electronic media organisations of the country.

Organizations/ Mechanism involved in Fact Checking

5.   The Committee note that apart from the Fact Check Unit (FCU) of the Press Information Bureau (PIB), there are several other organizations that are actively involved in monitoring Fake News and related issues in India. These include both independent organizations, collaborative initiatives with digital platforms, fact-checking agencies, and media organizations. The Committee were also given to understand that some organizations use tools to find visually similar images online as well as data bases maintained by International Fact Checking Network, etc., for checking the veracity of the information. The Committee note that despite the fact that there are so many independent fact-checkers, fact-check organizations and Fact Check Units of Media organisations, yet they work in isolation. Since no single organization, Government or Private, have the capacity to cross check and handle the large volume of fake news, the Committee are of the opinion that a collaborative effort among all the stakeholders to develop tools and technology for detecting Fake News/Misinformation would play a crucial role in curbing Fake News. The Ministry may apprise of the Committee about the action taken in this regard. Further, while noting the submission of MIB, that giving FCU (under PIB) a statutory basis is necessary for checking Fake News relating to the plans, programmes and initiatives of the Government, the Committee recommend the Ministry to explore its feasibility and apprise them about the same.

Cases related to Fake News

6.   The Committee were apprised that there was a Fact Check Unit under Press Information Bureau (PIB). But that PIB Fact Check Unit does not maintain data with respect to fake news separately for each of the three media platforms viz Print, Electronics, and Digital. As per the submissions, it is seen that a total of 1,63,597 queries were received from 2nd April 2020 to 30th April 2025, out of which only 53,155 were found to be relevant and suitable action was taken thereon. With respect to details of the cases of 'Fake News' handled by MIB in last 5 years, the Ministry informed that the term 'Fake News' is not explicitly defined under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 and the Rules framed thereunder. However, Rule 6(1)(d) of the Programme Code under CTN Rules, 1994

provides that 'No programme should be carried in cable service which contains anything obscene, defamatory, deliberate, false and suggestive innuendos and half truths'. During the last five years action was taken against broadcasters in 21 cases for violating Rule 6(1)(d) along with other provisions of Programme Code. With respect to Print Media, an analysis of the cases filed under Section-13 of the PCI Act for the last 3 years revealed that the number of cases filed during the year 2022–23 were 273 and the cases adjudicated were 11. Similarly, during the year 2023–24, it was 212 and 63, respectively and during the year 2024-25 they were 210 and 46, respectively. Further, an analysis of the cases filed under Section-14 of the PCI Act for the last 3 years revealed that number of cases filed during the year 2022–23 were 865 and the cases adjudicated were 29 whereas during the year 2023–24 they were 775 and 103, respectively and during the year 2024-25 they were 898 and 41, respectively. When asked to explain the reasons for lesser number of cases being adjudicated against those filed actually, the Ministry informed that during COVID Pandemic regular meetings of the Council could not be held. Further, the position of the Chairperson, Press Council of India was vacant from 21.11.2021 to 16.06.2022, due to which no meeting took place. The re-constitution of the 15th term Council was under way as the 14th term ended on October 5, 2024 and this has resulted in a backlog of cases. The Committee urge upon the Ministry to appoint Chairperson of the Press Council of India as soon as the vacancy arise in future.

Further with respect to electronic media, an analysis of the action taken on matter against Private Satellite TV Channels during 2019-2025 reveal that the number of cases have reduced over the years from 101 to 4. During the year, 2025 (till 29.04.2025), there was only 01 case. With respect to Digital News Publishers, the Committee note that the Government has notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 under Information Technology Act, 2000 on 25th February, 2021, which, *inter-alia,* provides for a Code of Ethics for adherence by digital news publishers and also a three-tier mechanism for redressal of grievances relating to Code of Ethics by them. Besides, Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, inter-alia, empowers the Central Government to issue directions to any Government agency or an intermediary to block content 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 such matters. The request for blocking is considered as per the laid down procedure in the IT Rules, 2021. The Committee have been informed that 15 Writ Petitions have been filed in various High Courts challenging the maintainability of the Rules. Hon'ble Supreme Court vide order dated 22.03.2024 transferred all 15 Writ Petitions to Delhi High Court for further hearing. While noting the plans/proposal of the Ministry to reduce backlog, the Committee recommend the Ministry to ensure frequent meetings of Inquiry Committee to hear cases and fix a time limit to clear pendency on a fast-track mode and also do categorise backlog items in order to expedite their disposal. The Ministry may apprise of the Committee about the outcome of the action taken in this regard.

<u>Penal Provisions related to Fake News</u>

7. While examining the penal provisions that were prevalent for telecasting/printing Fake News, the Committee note that it varied for each Media. For Print Media - upon being found guilty the Press Council of India (PCI) could warn, admonish, censure and disapprove the conduct of the journalist(s). For Electronic Media (private satellite TV channels) penal actions for proven cases of violation of Programme and Advertising Code include advising, warning, censuring, admonishing or reprimanding such broadcaster/requiring an apology, or content removal or taking the channel/programme off-air for a specified time period. Digital Media being governed by IT Act/Rules allows for mild penalties like ₹25,000 and blocking under Section 69A.

The Ministry has informed that in the absence of a clear definition of 'Fake News' and specific provisions in the rules governing content of different media verticals there is no penal provision specific to publication of fake news. The Committee were also informed by one of the Stakeholders that currently there is no uniform code on this and there is a need for developing a consensus-driven code, along with appropriate measures to punish acts of publishing Fake News deliberately. It was also stated that these punitive actions should be in the civil domain, with no need for criminal action. Besides, the amount of monetary fine is to be determined keeping in view various factors- like the size of the publishing entity, its reach, recurrence of action, and the gravity or potential harm. As far as

the Members of NBDA are concerned, Regulation 7 of the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations confer on NBDSA the power to impose penalties for violation of the Code of Conduct by the Broadcaster or Digital Publisher and it includes; for the first violation issue/express – (a) warning, admonishment, censure, disapproval, regret, apology and/or (b) impose a fine of upto Rs. 2 lakhs and this keeps increasing in case of second (Rs 5 lakhs), third (Rs 10 lakhs) and for fourth violation wherein the fine is upto 1% of the total annual turnover of the channel, provided such fine shall not exceed Rs. 25 lakhs.

On a related issue, some of the stakeholders submitted that there needs to be a variation in penalty for repeated offenders, which may vary from warning-apology-fine-suspension-to complete blocking/taking the channel off Air. It has also been noted that there are graded penalty system for different forms of media, ranging from mild warning to levying fines culminating upto ₹25 lakh and license revocation. The Committee are of the opinion that the amount of fine can be increased so as to make it deterrent enough for creators/ publishers of fake news. The Committee desire that there is a need for clearly assigning accountability of Editors/Content heads for editorial control; of Owners/Publishers for institutional failures, of Intermediaries/Platforms, etc., for peddling 'Fake News'. There is also a need to amend the penal provisions for publishing/telecasting Fake News in relevant Act/Rules/Guidelines for each form of Media (print, Electronic, Digital). The Ministry may explore the feasibility of cancelling the accreditation of a journalist/creator who is found guilty of creating and/or propagating 'Fake News'. Needless to say, all these should involve and emerge from a consensus-building exercise among media bodies and the relevant stakeholders.

Grievance Redressal Mechanism

8.   With respect to Grievance Redressal mechanism, the Ministry have informed that there are various statutory and institutional mechanisms available to address the menace of fake news, on various media platforms viz. print media, electronic media and digital media. For grievances related to Print Media any citizen can complain against a newspaper for carrying content that is violative of the Norms of Journalistic Conduct. A complainant can also submit a complaint to the PCI on Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAM) of the Government. For Electronic Media, the Rule under the Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules, 2021 provide for a three-level complaint redressal structure. The procedure for Digital Media under the Information

Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 provides for a three-level institutional framework for redressal of grievances related to the violation of Code of Ethics by news publishers on digital media and OTT platforms. People can also report fake news to PIB Fact Check Unit via the various mechanisms which include (i) WhatsApp Hotline: Users can send messages to the dedicated number at +918799711259 to report suspicious information or request fact-checking; (ii) Email: Individuals can also send their queries or reports via email to socialmedia.pib.gov.in; (iii) The public can also visit the official PIB Fact Check portal at https://factcheck.pib.gov.in/ to report or request verification of potential fake news. These platforms allow users to easily submit information for fact-checking and help in addressing misinformation.

With respect to grievance redressal mechanism for AI-generated videos, one of the Stakeholders informed that according to the law fake videos must be removed within 36 to 42 hours, but no one removes them. They are in circulation, but no action is taken and out of 15-20 videos only two or three get removed. In the meantime, these videos get millions of views as they do not have ways to stop them. Even Police have no mechanism to hold anyone responsible for these videos as they are sometimes generated outside the Country. Considering the damage inflicted by Fake News in a short span of time, the Ministry was asked about the need to re-visit the process especially w.r.t the time taken to dispose off the case/to take action against a Channel/portal/print media. To this, they informed that the time limit for handling of grievances at various levels of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism in respect of the content of broadcasters has been prescribed keeping in view the principles of natural justice and taking into account the time required for processing of such grievance at these levels.

Further, with respect to time taken to settle the complaint, the Committee note that there is no time limit prescribed for Press Council of India to act on complaints and according to PCI such a time limit may be recommended, giving exception for procedural delays. Further, under PCI Act, the Complainant is required to comply with mandatory requirements under Regulation (3) of Press Council (Procedure for Inquiry) Regulation, 1979 within four (4) weeks. The Committee also note that currently, there is no mechanism to digitally track and notify complainants about the progress of the complaints in PCI. However, while

appreciating the fact that PCI is in process of developing complaint mechanism software with online complaint submission and tracking facility, the Committee would like to be kept apprised of the same. Further, while noting the prevalent situation with respect viral videos of fake news, the Committee urge the Ministry to formulate concrete Time-Bound Grievance Redressal Framework and implement digital tracking system of the grievances/complaints on the lines of PCI initiative. The Ministry may also look into the feasibility of the following and apprise the Committee accordingly:

(i) Prescribe a time limit for PCI Complaint Resolution Mechanism;
(ii) Have unified digital portal for grievance redressal w.r.t 'Fake News/misinformation;
(iii) Emulate best practices of international standard/certain States/Union Territories that dedicated helpline number/portal to counter misinformation and fake news;
(iv) Impress upon Social Media Platforms to strengthen their grievance redressal mechanism through helpline number or other recourse for dealing with cases of Fake News; and
(v) Increase public awareness about the existing Grievance Redressal Channels/mechanism to prevent misinformation/Fake News.

Artificial Intelligence and Fake News

9.   The Committee note that advances in technology, particularly in Artificial Intelligence (AI), offer promising solutions to address issues related to Fake news. However, according to the Ministry, Artificial Intelligence is an evolving technology and works on use of pre-existing information available on internet and therefore, in its present state of development it cannot be used for a subject as complicated as fact checking. But AI could be used to flag potentially fake news/ misleading content for review by human intervention as a second layer of monitoring. During examination of the subject, several examples of personal experience of stakeholders were a revelation as to how AI could be used to create videos of fake news and misinformation particularly because no information was available with the stakeholders with respect to AI generated videos or news.

The Committee note that various research projects and initiatives are exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in combating fake news. AI and machine learning (ML) technologies are increasingly being employed to enhance the ability to detect, verify, and prevent the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Some key developments and projects in this field include (i) AI-

based Fact-Checking Tools; (ii) Deep Learning for Image and Video Verification: Fake News Detection on Social Media Using AI-based Image; (iii) AI for Detecting Disinformation on Social Media; (iv) AI to Identify Misinformation Networks; (v) AI-Powered Tools for Content Verification and Fact-Checking; (vi) Collaboration between AI and Fact-Checking Networks; etc. The Committee also note that the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has constituted a nine-member Committee to examine problems related to the 'issue of deepfakes'. Further, two projects to detect fake news, which are currently underway are (i) Fake Speech Detection using Deep Learning Framework and (ii) Design and Development of Software for Detecting Deepfake Videos and Images. The Committee were apprised that internationally there are several ongoing research projects on detecting AI-generated content and developing AI tools that facilitate the detection of fake news.

The Committee note and acknowledge the role of AI in combating Fake News, particularly in detecting misleading visual content, verifying claims, and identifying the networks responsible for spreading misinformation. The Committee, appreciate the research projects and initiatives which are exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in combating fake news, particularly by MeitY. The Committee are also aware how AI can be used to create 'Fake News/Misinformation. Thus, with a word of caution, the Committee advocate for a balanced approach for using AI to curb Fake News wherein AI tools are leveraged with human oversight. The Committee also urge for close coordination between the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), and other concerned Ministries/Departments to develop concrete legal and technological solutions for identifying and prosecuting individuals and entities responsible for disseminating AI-generated fake news. The Committee recommend for inter-Ministerial coordination for exploring the feasibility of Licensing requirements for AI content creators and Mandatory labelling of AI-generated videos and content, and apprise them about the action taken in the matter accordingly.

Challenges associated with Fake News crossing international borders

10.   The Committee have been informed that there are certain issues associated with Fake News crossing international borders like (i) Jurisdictional Issues: different countries have varying laws and regulations regarding misinformation, making it difficult to enforce global content moderation; (ii) Language Barriers: Fake news can spread across borders in different languages, requiring tailored detection tools that may not be universally effective; (iii) Platform Control: Global platforms can enable the rapid spread of misinformation across borders, but regulating this content consistently worldwide is challenging; (iv) Cultural Differences: What is considered misinformation in one country may be interpreted differently in another, complicating the global fight against fake news. Further, the Committee have been informed that regulating speech on social media platforms that transcends geographical boundaries raises significant challenges from a regulatory perspective as it raises issues concerning jurisdiction. Besides, globally, there are divergent laws, norms and practices for regulating content, geopolitical conditions, making transnational regulation of fake news difficult. The Ministry have informed that the Publishers of news and current affairs on Digital media, which host news relating to India, even if operating from outside the Country are subject to the 'IT Rules, 2021' and direction for blocking of access of their content falling under Section 69A of 'IT Act' in India, can be issued by the Government. The request for blocking is considered as per the laid down procedure in the IT Rules, 2021. The Committee note that in the past, the Ministry has issued directions under this Section for blocking access to content emanating from foreign jurisdictions in India.

        With respect to international collaboration for curbing fake news, the Committee have been informed that India is a member of UNESCO. Department of Higher Education under the Central Government has established an Indian National Commission for Cooperation (INCCU) with UNESCO having 05 Sub Commissions. The Sub Commission on Communication comes under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and is Chaired by Secretary (I&B). This Sub Commission discusses issues related to mass media, journalist freedom etc., in the Country. The Committee also learnt that there are several international initiatives to combat fake news, such as the EU's Digital Services Act and

UNESCO's guidelines for tackling misinformation and India has participated in global discussions on misinformation but has not yet fully established binding international standards for combating fake news. However, India has collaborated with other countries and global tech companies to share information and strengthen fact-checking efforts. When asked whether India could emulate any of the international best practices related to the regulation of misinformation or 'Fake News', one of the stakeholders submitted that India should have its own law, and the French law on Election Misinformation was a good law which could be looked upto for some aspects. The Committee, while acknowledging the complexities involved in fake news crossing borders feel that apart from Inter-Ministerial collaboration at national level and multi-lateral cooperation with international bodies following may also be considered to address the concerns related to Cross-Border Fake News and they may be apprised accordingly:

(i) The Ministry may emulate best practices adopted by other countries, for example like French Law on Election Misinformation, etc with a perspective of dealing with Fake News in India;

(ii) To have a small but a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Task Force to deal with issues related to cross-border misinformation/Fake News with representatives from the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and eminent legal experts in the field; and

(iii) To conduct nation-wide campaigns to educate citizens about the risks of cross-border fake news, especially in regional languages.

Awareness/Training/Media literacy

11.   The Committee note that Fact Check Unit under PIB, which does fact checking only in respect of information pertaining to the Government, uses engaging content in the form of memes/Crisp Videos/Awareness Posts and has also conducted campaigns such as #FACTREE, #CyberMonday, etc., to increase public awareness about the baneful effects of fake news and sensitize them against sharing of unverified information. The Committee also note that Media organisations have their own awareness and training programmes for journalists and public at large. It is also learnt that to enhance awareness, the PCI carries out sustained Social Media campaigns by making regular updates of Norms on its official Social Media Handle - X. Further, the Council while considering the matter

regarding strategies and efforts to tackle fake news during its meeting held on 22.09.2022, had also recommended for inclusion of media studies in academic curriculum. Accordingly, communication was sent by PCI to the Ministry of Education *vide* letter dated 09.12.2022 for taking necessary action in the matter.

Further, while noting that one of the causes of 'Fake News' proliferation was 'Lack of Media Literacy', the Ministry was asked about their initiatives for creating specific programme for generating and creating awareness. To this, MIB informed that Media literacy can best be achieved through creating public awareness of the harmful effects of fake news and sensitizing citizens and other stakeholders against sharing of unverified information. This can be done through appropriate outreach activities for citizen engagement particularly for younger generation in association with educational institutions. While considering the aspect of creating awareness about Fake News, during examination of the subject, all the stakeholders unanimously agreed for having curriculum for Media literacy at school/college levels.

The Committee while appreciating the initiatives taken to promote media literacy/generating awareness regarding Fake news/ misinformation opine that all the stakeholders may mandatorily conduct workshops for generating awareness and take initiatives for wider engagements about fake news. The Committee also recommend for having broader consultations with all the concerned stakeholders including Ministry of Education. While noting that there are many ways to impart media literacy, the Committee urge that media literacy beginning at School/College level can have far reaching effect and play a crucial role on young minds. The Committee, therefore, call upon the Ministry to consider, during their consultation with stakeholders, a comprehensive media literacy curriculum which can be designed for the educational journey of a students. Training the teachers, instructors, librarian, etc., at the school level can also be considered. Besides, public awareness campaign, guidelines and frameworks for media literacy are essential for encouraging critical thinking. The Committee may be apprised of the concrete outcome of the deliberations in this regard. The Ministry may also apprise the Committee about the concrete action taken by the Ministry of Education with respect to the suggestions of PCI for having media studies included in the curriculum for the children.

<u>Social media, Algorithm and Fake News/Misinformation</u>

12.   During examination of the subject, most of the stakeholders raised concern with respect to 'Safe Harbour' clause under Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000 that provides for exemption from liability of intermediary, subject to certain safeguards, for any third-party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted by him. It was also learnt that for most of the digital news publishers on major social media intermediary platforms, the revenue model is such that the sensational and potentially fake content gets more traction and the algorithms of such platform further amplifies such content. The Ministry also informed that algorithms used by social media platforms significantly influence how the information spreads online. Since sensational and emotionally charged content tends to attract higher engagement, social media platforms often prioritize such content, which sometimes are fake or misleading. During examination of the subject, most of the stakeholders expressed their concern related to amplification of fake news through algorithmic biases because this vicious cycle often leads to virality of fake news.

In this regard, the Ministry also informed that the Hon'ble Minister of Information and Broadcasting (HMIB) on one occasion had called for accountability in digital media to combat fake news and safeguard democracy and had suggested that in changing media landscape and India's diverse social and cultural context, there is a need for revisiting the 'Safe Harbour' provision for the social media intermediaries. The Committee were also given to understand that the Minister had pointed out that algorithms driving digital platforms prioritises content that maximises engagement, inciting strong reactions and, thereby, defining the revenue for the platform. Since such biases have social consequences, particularly in a diverse nation like India, there is a need for platforms to come up with solutions to eliminate such biases.

While noting the concerns relating to the intermediary platforms and Big Tech companies, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) was asked to provide their views/suggestions with respect to issues related to the subject and regarding user generated content. However, MeitY did not provide any suggestion, instead it merely stated that under the given Rule/Act, the subject falls under MIB. Considering the technological advancements, the Committee note the complex and inter-sectoral issues involved in dissemination

of misinformation/Fake News and thereby calls for coordination between not only different stakeholders of Media, but also among different Ministries/Departments. The Committee, therefore, urge MIB to ensure an inter-Ministerial coordination mechanism among all those concerned. Further, for making social media/intermediary platforms more accountable w.r.t peddling Fake content/News, the Committee endorse the view that for enforcing transparency in algorithms, introduce stricter fines, and penalties for repeat offenders, establish independent regulatory body, use technological tools like AI to curb the spread of misinformation, etc. The Ministry may apprise of the Committee about the future course of action/action taken by them to address the concerns/suggestions made by the Hon'ble Minister of Information and Broadcasting regarding 'Safe Harbour' clause and other related issues. Besides, the Committee urge the Ministry to explore ways and means to address the concerns associated with algorithm biases and its role in amplifying Fake News and apprise them in this regard. The Committee also recommend the Ministry to look into the feasibility of following and apprise them accordingly:

(i) To work with MeitY and other stakeholders and bring out a solution to address the issues related to Big Tech Companies and individual content creators or influencers;

(ii) The Ministry may come out with concrete solutions with respect to intermediaries/publishers particularly to deal with 'Safe Harbour';

(iii) To have a dedicated Nodal officer (in India) in the Big tech companies; etc.

<table>
<tr><td>NEW DELHI;</td><td>DR. NISHIKANT DUBEY,</td></tr>
<tr><td>11 September, 2025</td><td>Chairperson,</td></tr>
<tr><td>20 Bhadra, 1947 (Saka)</td><td>Standing Committee on
Communications and Information Technology.</td></tr>
</table>

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (2024-25)**

MINUTES OF THE SIXTH SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee sat on Wednesday, the 21st November, 2024 from 1100 hours to 1328 hours in Committee Room No. '1', Extension to Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Dr. Nishikant Dubey - Chairperson

MEMBERS

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Anil Baluni
3. Dr. Rabindra Narayan Behera
4. Shri S. Supongmeren Jamir
5. Shri Arun Kumar Sagar
6. Shri Devesh Shakya
7. Shri Vishnu Datt Sharma
8. Shri Rajesh Verma

Rajya Sabha

9. Shri Saket Gokhale
10. Smt. Priyanka Chaturvedi
11. Shri V. Vijayendra Prasad
12. Shri K.T.S. Tulsi

Secretariat

1.	Shri Y. M. Kandpal	-	Joint Secretary
2.	Smt. A. Jyothirmayi	-	Director
2.	Shri Rajesh Mohan	-	Deputy Secretary

LIST OF WITNESSES

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting		
Sl. No.	Name	Designation
1.	Shri C. Senthil Rajan	JS (IP&A)
2.	Shri B. Narayanan	Dir. General, New Media Wing
3.	Ms. Mattu J. P. Singh	Dir. General, PIB
News Broadcasting and Digital Association (NBDA)		
1.	Shri Rajat Sharma	President, NBDA
2.	Smt. Anuradha Prasad Shukla	Board Member
3.	Smt. Annie Joseph	Secretary General
Editors Guild of India (EGI)		
1.	Shri Anant Nath	President
2.	Shri Ruben Banerjee	General Secretary
3.	Shri K. V. Prasad	Treasurer

(After the witnesses were called in)

2.   At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the representatives of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, News Broadcasting and Digital Association (NBDA), Editors Guild of India and other officials accompanying them to the Sitting of the Committee convened to examine the subject 'Review mechanism to curb Fake News' relating to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

3.   Drawing attention to the menace of fake news, the Chairperson highlighted its impact on different spheres of individual's life. Elaborating further on the issue, he expounded the impact of fabricated stories, doctored images, misleading headlines, false narratives, etc, on election, identity theft, communal violence, false claims about cures, vaccines or spread of virus led to confusion with people rejecting legitimate health advice in favour of unverified rumours during COVID pandemic, etc. While acknowledging the efforts of Government for setting up the Fact Check Unit (FCU) and for curbing the spread of misinformation, he stated that despite all the efforts of the Government, NGOs, Educational institutions and media outlets, tackling/curbing Fake News in India still remained as a challenge. He also emphasized that with rapid advancement in AI technologies, deepfakes content could be created and distributed across borders with ease and it was difficult for any single country's legal system to address the issue comprehensively. To counter this he felt the need for a multi-faceted approach, including stronger national and international regulations, international cooperation and harmonisation of legal frameworks, improved media literacy, greater accountability from social media platforms, active public participation to verify and responsibly sharing information, etc. While seeking views on the subject from MIB, NBDA and EGI, he asked NBDA and EGI to also submit their proposals on the amendments in 'The Broadcasters Regulation Bill, 2023'.

4.   Thereafter, the President, NBDA, expressed his views on the subject. Dwelling on the issue of fake news, he broadly categorized   the menace of fake news under following categories
 (i) Media Channels (ii) Digital media platforms and (iii) AI converted videos and their impact on common man.

5.   He stated that while media channels are self/independently regulated and most of them come under some regulatory bodies like NBDA who are empowered to take action either suo moto or based on some complaint against such channels who are found guilty of spreading fake news/misinformation yet, there is a flip side to this mechanism that the member channels are free to leave this body any time if they feel aggrieved by the decision of NBDA. To deal with this issue, he opined that all channels should be brought under some sort of regulation/regulatory mechanism   to fix their accountability . While elaborating on the role of digital media and AI converted videos in spreading fake news/misinformation he stated that they have a big role in spreading fake news/misinformation and common man find no remedy against them either in cyber cell or in these platforms who are often faceless and the Government has no direct control over them. He admitted that by the time an aggrieved party gets justice from court, a lot of damage is already caused to his reputation. He, therefore, felt the need for a suitable legislation by the Government to protect common man from such acts who has no resources to fight against them.

6.   While concluding his presentation, he put forward some suggestions like (i) to have a dedicated Nodal Officer/face for Internet Platforms; (ii) to take immediate action for deleting fake News/videos within 6 hrs pending further investigation; (iii) to grant license with stringent Rules to AI generator; and (iv) to look for a solution from a global perspective rather than at National level.

7.   Thereafter, the President, EGI, while presenting his views on the subject, stated that in India there was no absolute freedom of speech as Article 19(2) has eight/nine exceptions. He also submitted that our legal system permitted maximum checks and balances in both civil and criminal domain. Citing certain provisions like Section 353 of 'Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)' and Section 69 of 'Information Technology Act, 2000' he pointed out that the blocking power was opaque and suggested Government should not be coercive. To deal with the issue, he made some suggestions which, *inter-alia,* included: (i) Government should identify Fake content/News; (ii) Government should work with Industry; (iii) Response time should be quick; (iv) Media platforms should put in more resources/energy/money in flagging fake content; (v) Transparency should be maintained in flagging and taking down fake content; (vi) Need of Media Literacy to enable public to identify Fake News; (vii) Media bodies should create Self Regulatory system for Grievance Redressal Mechanism and for flagging but without involvement of Government; (viii) To have international alliances/collaborations, etc.

8.   The Members then sought clarifications on various issues which, *inter-alia,* included; (i) Mechanism for fixing responsibility of the Channels/Media which are not part of any of the Self Regulatory bodies; (ii) Online portal for registering complaints with respect to Fake News; (iii) Time taken to settle the issue of Fake News after it is flagged; (iv) Cases/Complaints (relating to Fake News) dealt by the Ministry/Inter-Departmental Committee; (iv) Channels that were taken Off-Air for telecasting Fake News; (v) Mechanism, cases and other issues related to Fact Check Units of PIB/MIB; (vi) Guidelines set for editorials for running/telecasting/printing News; (vii) Adequacy of penal provisions for Fake News and need for variation in penalty for repeated offenders; (viii) Grievance Redressal Mechanism for common man; (ix) Measures for creating awareness amongst common man for identifying and taking action against Fake News/content; (x) Mechanism to fact check the News run by Government Agencies; (xi) Instances when self regulations by Journalists/TV Broadcasters fail and Courts had to intervene; (xii) Relevance of Press Council of India (PCI) and 'The PCI Act, 1978'; (xiii) 'Safe Harbour' provisions used by intermediaries and need for making intermediaries more accountable; (xiv) Role of Artificial Intelligence in Fake News and their impact; (xv) Need for having global collaboration for tackling the menace of Fake News; (xvi) Need for enacting Bills/Acts to regulate online service providers/independent Youtube creators more or less similar to that one   brought by various other countries like UK, Singapore, etc.

9.   The representatives of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), NBDA and EGI responded to most of the queries raised by the Members. The Chairperson, then, directed that written replies to points on which information were not readily available may be furnished to the Committee within ten days.

10.   Thereafter, the Chairperson thanked the representatives of MIB, NBDA and EGI for deposing before the Committee.

The witnesses then withdrew.

A copy of verbatim record of the proceedings was kept on record.

The Committee, then, adjourned.

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (2024-25)**

MINUTES OF THE NINTEENTH SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee sat on Wednesday, the 7th May, 2025 from 1100 hours to 1223 hours in Main Committee Room, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Dr. Nishikant Dubey - Chairperson

MEMBERS

Lok Sabha

2. Dr. Rabindra Narayan Behera
3. Shri Anup Sanjay Dhotre
4. Shri S. Supongmeren Jamir
5. Shri Shafi Parambil
6. Shri M. K. Vishnu Prasad
7. Ms. Kangna Ranaut
8. Shri Radheshyam Rathiya
9. Shri Ramasahayam Raghuram Reddy
10. Shri Devesh Shakya
11. Shri Rajesh Verma

Rajya Sabha

12. Shri Saket Gokhale
13. Shri Amar Pal Maurya
14. Dr. Sasmit Patra
15. Shri Kartikeya Sharma

Secretariat

1.	Shri Y. M. Kandpal	-	Additional Secretary
2.	Smt. A. Jyothirmayi	-	Director
3.	Shri Amrish Kumar	-	Deputy Secretary
4.	Shri Rajesh Mohan	-	Deputy Secretary

LIST OF WITNESSES

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

Sl. No.	Name	Designation
1.	Shri Sanjay Jaju	Secretary, MIB
2.	Shri C. Senthil Rajan	JS (IP&A)
3.	Shri Santosh Kumar	ADG, PIB
4.	Shri G. Venkata Subbaiah	Director, MIB
5.	Shri Amarendra Singh	Director, MIB

HINDUSTAN TIMES

1.	Shri Sukumar Ranganathan	Editor-in-Chief
2.	Shri Saubhadra Chatterjee	Senior Editor

INDIAN EXPRESS

1.	Shri Raj Kamal Jha	Chief Editor

NDTV

2.	Shri Sanjay Pugalia	Executive Director
3.	Shri Nikhil Guliani	Chief Legal & Regulatory Officer

NEWS-18 NETWORK

1.	Shri Brajesh Kumar Singh	Group Editor-Integration &Convergence
2.	Shri Gautam Dubey	Head Legal Counsel
3.	Shri Ankit Singh	Lead- Regulatory

TV TODAY NETWORK LTD

1.	Shri Supriya Prasad	News Director
2.	Ms. Poulomi Mrinal Saha	Senior Editor- Group Synergy and Special Projects
3.	Shri Balkrishna	Executive Editor- Fact Check

11.   At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members to the Sitting of the Committee convened to have evidence of the representatives of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) and other Stakeholders related to Media Industry in connection with the examination of the subject 'Review of mechanism to curb Fake News'. Thereafter, he informed the Members about the request made by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to conclude the Sitting early, due to their pre-occupation with aftermath of 'Operation Sindoor', a military operation against Pakistan post Phalgam attack and the request was acceded to by the Committee.

(After the witnesses were called in)

12.   Thereafter, the Chairperson welcomed the representatives of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), Hindustan Times, The Indian Express, NDTV, News-18 Network and TV Today Network Ltd., and other officials accompanying them to the Sitting of the Committee. Drawing attention to the request of MIB to conclude the Sitting early, the Chairperson informed the Ministry and Stakeholders that since all the stakeholders were present for the Sitting, they might present their views in brief before the Committee. Further, recalling the terror attack on 22nd April, 2025 in Pahalgam

(Jammu & Kashmir) and the befitting reply of India under 'Operation Sindoor', the Committee placed on record their appreciation for the brave action by Indian armed forces to protect the dignity of our Nation. The Chairperson, then, recalled that the Committee had already heard the views of News Broadcasting and Digital Association (NBDA) and Editors Guild of India (EGI) on this subject on 21st November, 2024. Drawing attention to the unimaginable damage created by Fake News he described how at times in order to increase the TRP ratings a few Electronic Media indulge in airing exaggerated content and unverified news. He highlighted how Fake news lead to deception and fraud, enabled scams, impersonation, falsified evidence, damaged personal and professional credibility and result in national security threats as well as reduction in trust in legitimate evidence complicating truth verification. He also highlighted Clickbait stories that are deliberately fabricated to gain more website visitors and increase advertising revenue for websites. Voicing public concern, he expressed that people expected MIB to maintain balance between the Fundamental Right (Right to free speech and expression and the Freedom of Press) and the need to counter false and harmful content across various media forms. Subsequently, he dealt with the role and function of Fact Check Unit (FCU) under PIB; Norms of Journalistic Conduct under 'Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995'; Amended version of Cable Television Network Rule'; 'IT Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code Rules 21'; Social media platforms as the dominant source of misinformation; etc. Recalling the commitment of the Minister, MeitY with respect to addressing fake news and deep fake, the Chairperson emphasized on the need to adopt a multifaceted approach, public awareness, media literacy and technological intervention and stated that encouraging critical thinking and fact-checking habits among citizens is vital to reduce the blind sharing of misinformation. Thereafter, he asked the Stakeholders to apprise about the problems being faced by them in handling, detecting, preventing Fake News along with the suggestions to strengthen the existing laws/ rules to curb the proliferation of Fake News on Print, Electronic, Digital, Social Media. The Stakeholders were also asked to enlighten the Committee about the challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence in spreading false narratives and the ways and means to curb them.

13.   After that, the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), briefed the Committee about the advent of social media and online platforms, battling Fake News and misinformation that had acquired an absolutely new dimension which were being used by both anti-social as well as anti-India actors for spreading rumours, fake news, false narratives, misinformation, disinformation. Highlighting the responsibility of MIB - the task of disseminating right information about Government policies and administering the Acts that are passed by the Parliament - he expounded about the action taken to curb Fake News under the existing Acts and Guidelines for the Print, Electronic and Digital Media *viz*. 'The Press Council Act of 1978', 'The Press and Registration of Periodicals Act 2023', 'The Cable Television Networks Regulation Act 1995', 'The Information Technology Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics

Code Rules 2021', etc. and also informed about the work done by the Fact-Check Unit [established in the Press Information Bureau (PIB)] on misinformation that is being peddled by the inimical forces.

14.   Subsequently, the Editor-in-Chief, Hindustan Times, pointed out that 'Fake News' has been there in Print Media. However, with the onset of Electronic Media it got magnified and with the emergence of Social Media it became a huge problem. He also stated that because of technologies, audio transcripts or video files are made to look like real and therefore two very essential aspects of journalism become important. The first one is contextualization and second one is to have reporters on the ground for calling up people and verifying things before putting it out. In Social media and to a large extent, even in online media, there are desk jockeys who are sitting and typing based on what they are seeing on social media, without either contextualizing it or without calling up people and verifying it. He, then, gave a brief of the rules followed by Hindustan Times before telecasting News, as well as about their data unit which looks into primary data. He pointed out that there was a need to address the problem associated with regulating/controlling Big Tech companies which the entire world is currently facing.

15.   Thereafter, the Senior Editor (Group Synergy and Special Projects), from India Today Group, pointed out the challenges of social media proliferation, deep fakes, AI-generated videos and misinformation that does the rounds because of economic incentives attached and algorithms which probably amplify information. She informed about Media Literacy and issues related to Big Techs and about the checks and balances followed by their television channels like Aaj Tak, India Today, Good News Today, or digital portals like Lallantop, etc. While submitting about the various tools used by them for doing background check, she stated that they had their own Fact Check Unit. Adding further, the head of their Fact-Check Unit informed the Committee that 'Today Group' was the first big media organization in the Country which established a separate fact-check desk department in 2018 and it operated in four languages. He also informed that they run a WhatsApp channel which is the biggest not only in India but also in the world. He also added that they also run a separate desk where anybody could send matter to verify, and then they would revert.

16.   Subsequently, the Group Editor (Integration & Convergence), News-18 Network, acknowledged 'Fake News' as a serious and growing threat, especially in the age of AI and deepfakes and stated that Media's contribution to 'Fake News' is less than 25%. He, then, explained about their multi-layered mechanism involved in checking and cross-checking the news at several levels and about the regular Workshops organized for this. He also stated that there were other existing mechanisms which included institutions like the Press Council of India for the Press; NBDA for Digital and Broadcast, 'Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), IT Acts, etc. While emphasizing that Network-18 is committed to responsible journalism and safeguarding national interests, he stated that

a fine balance is required between the freedom of the press and the responsibility of Media which could be achieved through existing laws and self-regulatory bodies.

17.   Thereafter, Executive Director, NDTV, began with the explanation for the fake video of couple dancing circulated on social media after the Pahalgam tragedy, and stated that everyone had become victims of insecure news and rumors circulating on social media. He emphasized that their channel never picks up the story from social media without checking it 2-3 times and therefore they make minimal mistakes. In the wave of social media, news rooms have become insecure and in the race to be first, despite being skeptical, news are picked up thinking that everyone will bear the brunt/get admonished. He also stated that some things, however, can only be addressed through education and awareness. Regarding Big Tech, he stated that to ensure their accountability, Government has to act strongly by treating aggregators as publishers else there would be no deterrence. While citing the example of SEBI, which brought the financial influencers under regulation by requiring registration, he suggested that a similar model could be applied to content creators and influencers. He also stated that India already had sufficient laws and self-regulatory mechanism which if implemented effectively could achieve accountability. As for individual creators and regulating social media platforms, he submitted that it was a very challenging task. However, considering where India stood today, if the law that is applied to Indian organizations is also applied to these platforms, then this problem could be resolved very quickly.

18.   Thereafter, the Chief Editor, Indian Express, presented four points on the subject. Firstly, he stated that 'Fake news' is a strong term and that there is a need to have a clear definition of it because not all mistakes in journalism qualify as Fake News as there is a difference between deliberate misinformation and genuine editorial errors. Secondly, mainstream media does not make 'Fake News' and they are not black box as the Media Houses/Editors are reachable. Citing an example, he stated that one story/news reaching million viewers and other only few hundred, therefore there is a need to engage with big technology companies as they have a vital role in disseminating information/Fake News/in amplification of misinformation. Thirdly, he stated that while 'Fake News' is a challenge, India's digital landscape has few positives like it has one billion smartphones, record voter turnout, booming UPI usage and previously unheard voices now being heard. So, there was a need to strike a balance when regulation is thought about. Fourthly, he requested the elected representatives to reach out to the youngsters in schools and colleges for increasing 'Media literacy' because 'Fake News' is a deluge as lot of them is not made by human beings instead they are made by chatbots, codes, etc., in some other Country. He stated that any regulation should keep in mind that all the youngsters are going to grow up with the phones in their hand and to make them safe, school boards may introduce a course in

4th, 5th or 6th grade on how to filter information. He concluded with the example of sending their Editors to schools to talk to students.

19.   The Members, then, discussed various related issues which *inter-alia* included (i) Accountability of Media and the need for a dedicated discussion on the role of Media in character assassination of women; (ii) Mechanism and details of the action taken against reporters targeting individuals in local news, sometimes due to personal reasons, caste or local pressure: (iii) Seeking views/concrete suggestions from Media Houses for shaping legislation; (iv) Lack of definition of 'Fake News' in the legal framework; (v) Need for hearing Platforms as they take 90–95% of advertisement revenues and yet have no accountability; (vi) Need for hearing all the related stakeholders; (vii) Need for rule/regulation for Reporters and Journalists who use their personal social media handles for disseminating news as that does not come under the ambit of NBDA because that is their personal handle; (viii) Need for guidelines/rule/regulation for publishing the News citing anonymous source; (ix) Need for having increased punitive measures against anyone who is involved, whether it is Publishers or a Broadcaster; (x) Need for having strong law to deal with 'Fake News' run without facts and just based on source; (xi) Need for deciding the fixation of responsibility - whether it should be the Media House or the Editors or the Reporters on the ground; (xii) Need for discussing various issues while defining 'Fake News' like how much of the News is fake and how much is not or who would define it – Legislators/ the Parliament/ News Channels or who would interpret/decide it as 'Fake News' or the percentage of information required to be fake for News to be considered as Fake; (xiii) Need for large scale awareness programme for curbing Fake News; (xiv) Need for balancing Freedom of Expression and responsibility of Media; (xv) Need to rethink about having TRP system for Channels; (xvi) Ministry/Government to avoid News or information quoting sources; etc. In response to Members suggestion to call other related Stakeholders for discussion, the Chairperson clarified that the Committee have already heard NBDA and EGI on 21.11.2024.

20.   The Chairperson, then, directed the representatives of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) and Stakeholders from Media Industry that written replies to points on which information were not readily available may be furnished to the Committee within ten days. Thereafter, the Chairperson thanked the representatives of MIB, Hindustan Times, The Indian Express, NDTV, News-18 Network and TV Today Network Ltd for deposing before the Committee.

The witnesses then withdrew.

A copy of verbatim record of the proceedings was kept on record.

The Committee, then, adjourned.

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (2024-25)**

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY- SECOND SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee sat on Tuesday, the 9th September, 2025 from 1500 hours to 1635 hours in Committee Room 'C', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Dr. Nishikant Dubey- Chairperson

Lok Sabha

2. Shri C. N. Annadurai
3. Dr. Rabindra Narayan Behera
4. Shri Anup Sanjay Dhotre
5. Shri Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer
6. Shri Sanjay Haribhau Jadhav
7. Shri S. Supongmeren Jamir
8. Smt. Poonamben Hematbhai Maadam
9. Shri G. Kumar Naik
10. Shri Shafi Parambil
11. Dr. M.K. Vishnu Prasad
12. Shri Radheshyam Rathiya
13. Shri Ramasahayam Raghuram Reddy
14. Shri Arun Kumar Sagar
15. Shri Devesh Shakya
16. Shri Vishnu Datt Sharma

Rajya Sabha

17. Smt. Priyanka Chaturvedi
18. Shri Amar Pal Maurya
19. Shri Kartikeya Sharma
20. Shri Lahar Singh Siroya
21. Shri K.T.S. Tulsi

Secretariat

1. Shri Y. M. Kandpal   -   Additional Secretary
2. Smt. A. Jyothirmayi   -   Director
3. Shri Amrish Kumar   -   Deputy Secretary
4. Shri Rajesh Mohan   -   Deputy Secretary

2.   At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members to the Sitting of the Committee convened to consider and adopt two Draft Subject Reports relating to (i) Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and (ii) Ministry of Information and Broadcasting ,respectively, under the jurisdiction of the Committee and to have evidence of the representatives of Department of Telecommunications, DBN, BSNL, PGCIL, RAILTEL, Bharti Airtel, RJIL and CSC E- Governance Services India Ltd. on the Subject **'Review of the performance of Schemes/ Projects under Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN) implemented by Public and Private Sectors'.**

3.   The Committee, then, took up the following two draft Reports for consideration and adopted the same with slight modifications:-

(i)   **XXXX………..XXXX…….XXXX…….XXXX….XXXX…..XXXX….XXXX….XXXX…**

(ii)   Draft Report on the Subject **'Review of Mechanism to curb Fake News'** relating to Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

4.   The Committee also authorized Chairperson to finalize the draft Reports and present them to the Hon'ble Speaker under Direction 71 A and seek orders for printing, publication and circulation of the Reports under Rule 280 of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.

5.   **XXXX………..XXXX…….XXXX…….XXXX….XXXX…..XXXX….XXXX….XXXX…**

6.   **XXXX………..XXXX…….XXXX…….XXXX….XXXX…..XXXX….XXXX….XXXX…**

7.   **XXXX………..XXXX…….XXXX…….XXXX….XXXX…..XXXX….XXXX….XXXX…**

The witnesses then withdrew.

A copy of verbatim record of the proceedings was kept on record.

The Committee, then, adjourned.

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XXXX- Matter not related to this Report.