



Wednesday, Nov 15, 2023

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Centre considers seeking access to anonymised data of big tech firms

A platform proposed by IT Ministry working group may hold this data

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New Delhi | Updated: November 15, 2023 07:31 IST





The Centre's idea is that big tech companies have reaped dividends by building algorithms on the basis of Indians' non-personal data, and that they cannot claim exclusive ownership over it.

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Centre considers seeking access to anonymised data of big tech firms

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The Centre is considering issuing a directive to big tech companies like Facebook, Google and Amazon to share anonymised personal data in their possession with a government-backed database, The Indian Express has learnt.

The move, if finalised, could see these companies claim intellectual property rights over such data, and initiate discussions around the ownership of such data. The government has long been interested in this issue since such datasets form the bedrock of artificial intelligence (AI) models.

Under the upcoming **Digital India Bill**, the successor to the Information Technology Act, 2000, the IT Ministry is understood to have added a provision which will mandate big tech companies to deposit all the non-personal data they hold to the India datasets platform, a senior government official said, requesting anonymity since the draft is not public yet.

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In its most basic form, anonymised personal data, or non-personal data, is any data set that does not contain personally identifiable information. It could include aggregated information, such as the overall health data of a particular demography, weather and climate data of an area, and traffic data, among others.

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“We all sign a contract with these companies when we join their platform, which includes their terms of service and privacy policy. The Digital India Bill will propose that under the terms of service, when a user agrees that a company can use their anonymised personal data, that particular information will mandatorily have to be deposited to the India datasets platform,” the official said.



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The Centre’s idea is that big tech companies have reaped dividends by building algorithms on the basis of Indians’ non-personal data, and that they cannot claim exclusive ownership over it.

The Digital India Bill is a key part of a comprehensive legal framework which encompasses various legislative measures such as the recently-notified Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, the draft Indian Telecommunication Bill, 2022, and a policy addressing the governance of non-personal data. The Bill, however, is unlikely to be released this year.

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As per a report released in October by a working group constituted by the IT Ministry, the India datasets program is a “unified national data sharing and exchange platform to enable various data sharing and exchange use cases of all stakeholders including but not limited to Central/State/UT Governments, public sector undertaking, private sector companies, industry bodies, MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) and startups, academia and researchers, civil society and media organisations, open technology communities, etc.”

Non-personal data held by the Indian datasets platform could also be monetised, the report suggests. The platform, as per the report, will play a crucial role in boosting the artificial intelligence ecosystem in India by providing a “robust foundation” for data-driven innovation and development.

In May 2022, the IT Ministry had released the draft National Data Governance Framework Policy under which it merely “encouraged” private companies to share non-personal data with startups and Indian researchers.

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During a press briefing earlier in October this year, Minister of State for IT, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, had signalled a change in the government’s stance on non-personal data ownership. Responding to a question by [The Indian Express](#) about whether the government has changed its position from encouraging private companies to share non-personal data with the datasets platform, he said, “I can not yet tell you what that is, but certainly there has been a change in our stance.”

The idea of harnessing economic benefits from aggregated non-personal datasets was first proposed by a MeitY-appointed committee chaired by Infosys co-founder Kris Gopalakrishnan.

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In a draft report of January 2021, the committee recommended the identification of certain “high value datasets” which could be shared for the purpose of encouraging innovation and ensuring national security.

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First published on: 15-11-2023 at 04:04 IST

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