

Examining current provisions, need for new legal framework to regulate content: I&B Ministry

I&B Ministry told the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology that while certain provisions exist under the current laws, there is a growing demand for a stricter and effective legal framework

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Representative image | Photo Credit: AP

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry is examining the existing statutory provisions and the need for a new legal framework to regulate "harmful" content amid complaints of "obscenity and violence" being shown on digital platforms.

In its reply to a parliamentary panel, the Ministry said there is a growing concern in the society that the constitutional right of "freedom of expression is being misused to showcase obscene and violent content on digital platforms".

Legal framework to regulate content

It told the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology headed by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey that while certain provisions exist under the current laws, there is a growing demand for a stricter and effective legal framework to regulate such harmful content.

It said, "This ministry has taken note of these developments and is in process of examining current statutory provisions and need for a new legal framework." The ministry said that many high courts and the Supreme Court, MPs and statutory bodies like the National Commission of Women have spoken on the issue, which has made headlines after the crass comments of social media influencer Ranveer Allahbadia drew wide condemnation.

While the Supreme Court granted him protection from arrest, it also made very critical observations over his comments.

The ministry told the committee, which will hold its next meeting on February 25, that it will submit a detailed note after due deliberations.

The committee had asked the ministry on February 13 regarding the amendments needed in the existing laws to clamp down on controversial content in the wake of the emergence of new technology and media platforms.

Unlike the conventional print and electronic content, which are covered under specific laws, new media services powered by internet such as OTT platforms or YouTube have no specific regulatory framework, triggering demands for amending the laws.

While there have been some concern that authorities may use new provisions to censor content for extraneous reasons, frequent outrage triggered by episodes like the one involving Allahbadia have given rise to the demand for strengthening the legal framework through amendments in the existing laws or enacting new ones.