



Character challenge

CruX: The Centre's directive to Twitter to remove the 'manipulated media' tag on posts is illegal.

Highlights:

1. The Government of India's directive to microblogging platform Twitter that it removes the label 'manipulated media' from certain posts shared by functionaries of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), including Union Ministers, has no legal leg to stand on.
2. But it reveals that the Government of India is willing to go to any lengths to empower BJP functionaries to tarnish political opponents and misinform the public. The BJP functionaries circulated on Twitter what they called a 'toolkit' prepared by Congress to disparage the government.
3. Congress has filed a police complaint that the BJP functionaries forged a document that does not exist. It has also written to Twitter to permanently suspend the accounts of those who circulated the forged documents.
4. Twitter has not complied with the Centre's directive, and at least six handles of BJP functionaries now have posts with the tag 'manipulated media'. The reasoning behind the directive, in the absence of any legal provision to cite, by the Government of India is baffling.
5. It has argued that the labelling was a "prejudged, prejudiced and a deliberate attempt to colour the investigation by local law enforcement agency". By this metric, a private company must allow what it has determined as problematic content until a state agency concurs.

IT act:

1. Twitter has a publicised policy that it may label tweets that include media that have been deceptively altered or fabricated. It could use its own mechanism or use third-party services to make that determination.
2. Twitter is a private entity whose relationship with users is guided by its terms of services. The IT Act that empowers the government to regulate content does not give it the power to order the removal of a label.
3. Additionally, the government move raises serious concerns regarding arbitrary censorship and transparency. The Centre's desperation to control any discussion on its failures, and shift the focus to the Opposition is leading to such situations that embarrass a democracy.