

UNION GOVT. ROLLS BACK DATA PROTECTION BILL

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“A new draft which will be in sync with the principles of privacy and Supreme Court guidelines will be prepared rapidly,” Union Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who moved for the withdrawal of the Bill in the House, told *The Hindu*. He said that the new Bill would fit into the comprehensive legal framework with reference to the suggestions made by the Joint Committee of Parliament (JCP).

Stating the reasons for the withdrawal, the government said “The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, was deliberated in great detail by the JCP. Eighty-one amendments were proposed and 12 recommendations were made towards the comprehensive legal framework on digital ecosystem. Considering the report of the JCP, a comprehensive legal framework is being worked upon. Hence, it is proposed to withdraw The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, and present a new Bill that fits into the comprehensive legal framework.”

The JCP on the Personal Data Protection Bill had submitted a 542-page report with 93 recommendations and 81 amendments to the Bill in December 2021. The panel, headed by BJP MP P.P. Chaudhary, had recommended 97 corrections and improvements to the Bill.

Key discussions

The key discussions in the panel were based on whether the proposed Data Protection Authority should get constitutional status and whether the States should have their own Data Protection Authorities. The Opposition had alleged that the penalty provisions on fiduciaries if they breach or process data in an unauthorised manner were watered down despite their objections.

On the decision of the Centre to withdraw the Bill, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said there was pressure from the U.S. against the report of the JCP. “Both Ashwini Vaishnaw and Rajeev Chandrasekhar [the Ministers for Telecommunications and IT] were members of the Joint Committee. They are now Ministers. Perhaps their views have changed,” Mr. Ramesh, who was also a member of the panel, said.

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