

## 'GOVT. WELCOMES DISSENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA'

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: IT, Internet and Communications

Union Communications and Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said on Thursday that climate activist Disha Ravi's arrest was based on law and order and it is under judicial process. He added that the House should consider "should some people abuse social media internationally to defame India to promote secessionism".

Replying to a question by Congress member G.C. Chandrashekar regarding Ms. Ravi's arrest for editing a 'toolkit' about the farmers' protest, Mr. Prasad said, "India is proud to have nearly 140 crore social media users. LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook are free to do business in India. They have empowered ordinary Indians. The government welcomes dissent. The issue is not of use of social media, the issue is of abuse and misuse of social media ... Internet is a powerful invention of the human mind, but it should not become the monopoly of a few. And we have taken a position, any attempt to create imperialism of Internet by a few companies is not acceptable."

He said the government welcomes criticism on social media, but "some people who sermonise and do not provide their identity ... then these guidelines ensure that social media companies will ask them to voluntarily verify their identities".

The Ministry recently released the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which specify that "due diligence" should be followed by all intermediaries, including social media intermediaries.

Mr. Prasad also said his department works in close coordination with the Election Commission. "The Election Commission has set up a dedicated cell to weed out fake news, fake media designed to influence (voters)," he said, adding that Cambridge Analytica has been banned and a CBI probe is going on against the U.K.-based data analytics firm.

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