Draft amendments to IT Rules, 2021

Why in news?

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has floated a fresh draft of amendments to the Information Technology Rules, 2021.

What are the proposed amendments to the IT Rules, 2021?

- **Grievance Appellate Committees**- The draft proposes to create government-appointed appeal committees to review and possibly reverse content moderation decisions taken by social media companies.
- It will be created by the Central government consisting of a Chairperson and such other Members.
- Currently, the only recourse a user has against companies' content decisions is to approach the courts.
- As per the draft, in case a user is not satisfied with the decision taken by a company's grievance officer, they can appeal it before the government appellate committee.
- **Additional responsibilities** - The draft also suggests placing additional responsibilities on grievance officers appointed by social media companies.
- If a user complains about content which is patently false, infringes copyright, threatens the integrity of India, etc., the grievance officer will have to address it within 72 hours rather than the current 15 day period.

To know more about Grievance Appellate Committees, click here

What is the need of the amendment?

- The goals of these rules are to ensure an open, safe, trusted and accountable internet for all Indian internet users and digital nagriks.
- These rules enable in creating a new sense of accountability amongst intermediaries to their users especially within big tech platforms.
- The proposed amendments will ensure that Constitutional rights of Indian citizens are not contravened.
- Since the grievance officers of intermediaries either do not address the grievances satisfactorily or fairly, the need for an appellate forum has been proposed to protect the rights and interests of users.
- Unlawful and harmful information violative of their own terms and conditions shall be quickly removed when reported by users.
- It also provides the users a reasonable opportunity to respond in case of significant social media platforms.

What are the concerns raised around the proposals?

- **Overriding the decisions**- The proposal to set up government-appointed committees has triggered concerns about the government overriding social media platforms' content decisions.
- **Direct scrutiny**- The proposal seeks to subject content on social media to the direct scrutiny of the Government.
- **Curbing the dissent**- The proposal will help to tighten the Government's grip on messaging on social media intermediaries thus serving as a tool to curb the dissent.

References

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-it-rules-2021-amendments-social-media-explained-7958000/
2. https://www.meity.gov.in/writereaddata/files/Press%20Note%20dated%206%20June%2022%20and%20Proposed%20draft%20amendment%20to%20IT%20Rules%202021.pdf

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