Fake News Crackdown - The Flaws

What is the issue?

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- The onus for curtailing the fake news menace is disproportionally being shifted on the social media platforms.
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- It needs to be recognized that a collaborative approach addressing both the technology and social sides is needed.
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Why is the government’s approach to address the problem flawed?

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- Fake news and rumour mongering through social media has reached epic proportions in recent times with deadly consequences.
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- In this context, the government has adopted a flawed approach in resolving the ongoing security crisis due to fake news being circulated on social media.
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- Notably, social media platforms like WhatsApp are being disproportionately pressured into accepting the blame for the malice.
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- They are also being burdened with finding a solution for mob lynching incidences, which isn’t their main domain.
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- Further, in their focus to trace the origin of fake news, government has been calling for undoing the encryption, which might violate the privacy of millions.
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- Notably, as user data is highly sought after by unscrupulous elements, it is important to have a system that is completely encrypted end-to-end.
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What is the government’s stand on data privacy?

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- Policy makers have taken a contradictory stance with regard to data issues.
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- On one hand they want digital players such as Facebook to plug data leaks but on the other they are asking WhatsApp to give access to specific user data.
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- Even more dangerous is the attempts by the Centre to block applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Telegram on security grounds.
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- If such a mechanism is put in place, there is always the possibility of regimes misusing the system to bulldoze privacy and freedom of speech.
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What is the way ahead?

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- Rather than deploying strong-arm tactics on technology providers alone, the Centre needs to try addressing problem at the consumer end too.
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- The Centre itself needs to send strong signals that it is serious about addressing rumour mongering and lynching incidences.
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- This can be done by seriously pursuing those who have already been caught pushing out fake messages to cause social disharmony.
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- The State policing machinery has to be empowered to catch anyone responsible for circulating fake messages, irrespective of political affiliations.
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- On their part, technology companies should do more in creating awareness and educating users about fake messages.
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- WhatsApp is coming up with various innovative ideas to curtail the spread

of fake news, but much remains to be done in this regard.
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Source: Business Line

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