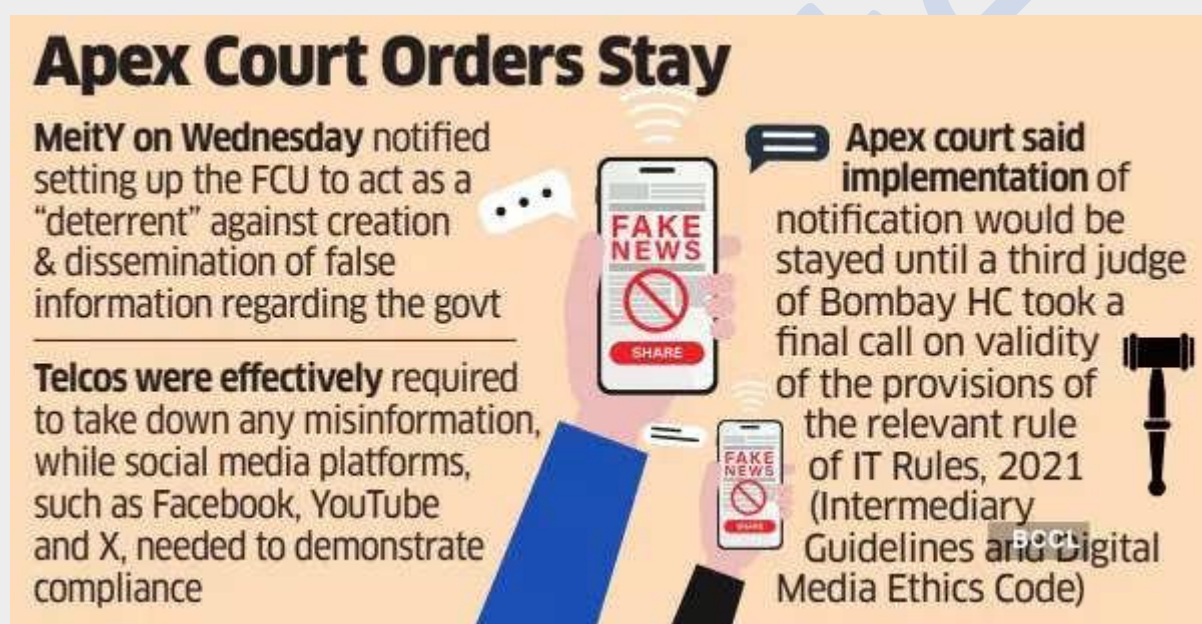


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## 1. Why SC has stayed Govt's 'Fact Check Unit' for now

### Why in News?

The Supreme Court recently stayed the operation of the amended Information Technology (IT) Rules, which empowered the government to identify "fake news" on social media platforms through a "Fact Check Unit" (FCU).



The Union Electronics and IT Ministry had notified the FCU on March 20, as a statutory body under the Press Information Bureau with powers to flag what it believes is false information related to the central government and its agencies on social media sites.

The amendment to the IT Rules, 2021, which allowed the Ministry to appoint the FCU, were notified in April 2023. On January 31 this year, a two-judge Bench of the HC gave a split verdict on a challenge to the Rules.

A third judge who was assigned to give an opinion on the split verdict is yet to give his final decision. However, on March 11, the third judge declined to stay the setting up of the FCU — and on March 13, the division Bench said by a 2-1 majority that it would not stay the notification of the FCU.

### The amended Rules

The amendment to The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 notified in April 2023 did two things: first, they brought in a legal framework for the online gaming eco-system and second, more crucially, introduced a legal

mechanism for the government to fact-check online content pertaining to “government business”

Among other things, the Rules made it obligatory on intermediaries like social media platforms “to not to publish, share or host fake, false or misleading information in respect of any business of the Central Government”.

The changes raised concern that the FCU will make the government the “sole arbiter of truth” in respect of any business related to itself.

Subsequently, the rules were challenged before the Bombay High Court.

### **Question before HC**

The petitioners, including standup comedian Kunal Kamra; Association of Indian Magazines, Editors Guild of India, news channel TV18 Broadcast Limited, and Bennett, Coleman & Company Limited challenged Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the IT Rules 2021 as being violative of Article 14, Article 19(1)(a) and (g), and Article 21 of the Constitution, and Section 79 and the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act).

The amendment to Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the IT Rules 2021 essentially expanded the general term “fake news” to include fake news involving government business.

This provision, when enacted in 2021, referred to “...any information which is patently false or misleading in nature but may reasonably be perceived as a fact”. By the 2023 amendment, after the word “nature”, the words “or, in respect of any business of the Central Government, is identified as fake or false or misleading by such fact check unit of the Central Government as the Ministry may, by notification published in the Official Gazette, specify” were inserted.

The petitioners argued before the court that this would have a “chilling effect” upon the freedom of speech and expression.

Section 69 of the IT Act empowers the government to issue directions to block public access to any information through any computer resource. The Rules were framed essentially in exercise of this power.

However, no rule-making or legislation-making powers can be exercised by Parliament in a manner that is contrary to Part III of the Constitution, which deals with fundamental rights. The Bombay High Court examined if these Rules were violative of free speech, and were arbitrary in nature.

### **HC ruling and after**

On 31 January, a division Bench comprising delivered a split verdict in the case. While one judge struck down the amended rules, other judge upheld them.

Since a split verdict was delivered, as per rules of the Bombay High Court, the case had to be heard afresh by a third judge whose opinion would create a majority and bring about a 2-1 verdict. On February 7, Bombay HC assigned another judge as the third judge in the case.

However, before beginning a substantial hearing, the third judge had to decide if the Rules were to be stayed. After the central government told the court that the Rules were yet to be notified in the official gazette, the third judge refused to grant an interim stay on the amended Rules.

Thereafter, an appeal was filed before the Supreme Court against the rejection of interim stay. However, just a day before the SC was to hear the appeal against rejection of stay, the Centre notified the 2023 Rules in the official gazette. With Lok Sabha elections less than a month away, the Rules are crucial for the government's engagement with news about "government business".

### **What the SC said**

A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud has stayed the amended Rules until the Bombay High Court reaches a final conclusion.

Dictating a short order, the CJI observed that the issue before the court is whether the status quo should be allowed to change when one judge has completely struck down the notification.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

## **2. India to generate 600 kilotonnes of solar waste by 2030**

### **Why in news?**

India generated about 100 kilotonnes (kt) of solar waste in the financial year (FY) 2022-2023, according to a new study. The amount of solar waste produced by the country is expected to reach 600 kt by 2030, the study said.

The analysis, 'Enabling a Circular Economy in India's Solar Industry – Assessing the Solar Waste Quantum', was done by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), a climate think tank.

The current solar capacity of India stands at 66.7 GW as of March 2023 — it has increased by 23 times in the past 10 years — and is slated to jump to 292 GW of installed solar capacity by 2030. Therefore, the management of solar waste is crucial for environmental, economic, and social reasons.

### **But first, what is solar waste?**

Solar waste refers to the waste generated during the manufacturing of solar modules and waste from the field (project lifetime), according to the study.

Manufacturing involves two streams of waste, including the scrap that's produced and the waste generated from PV modules failing quality tests. Meanwhile, waste from the field involves three streams of waste. One, waste generated during transporting and handling — the damaged modules are considered as waste. Two, waste produced due to the damage

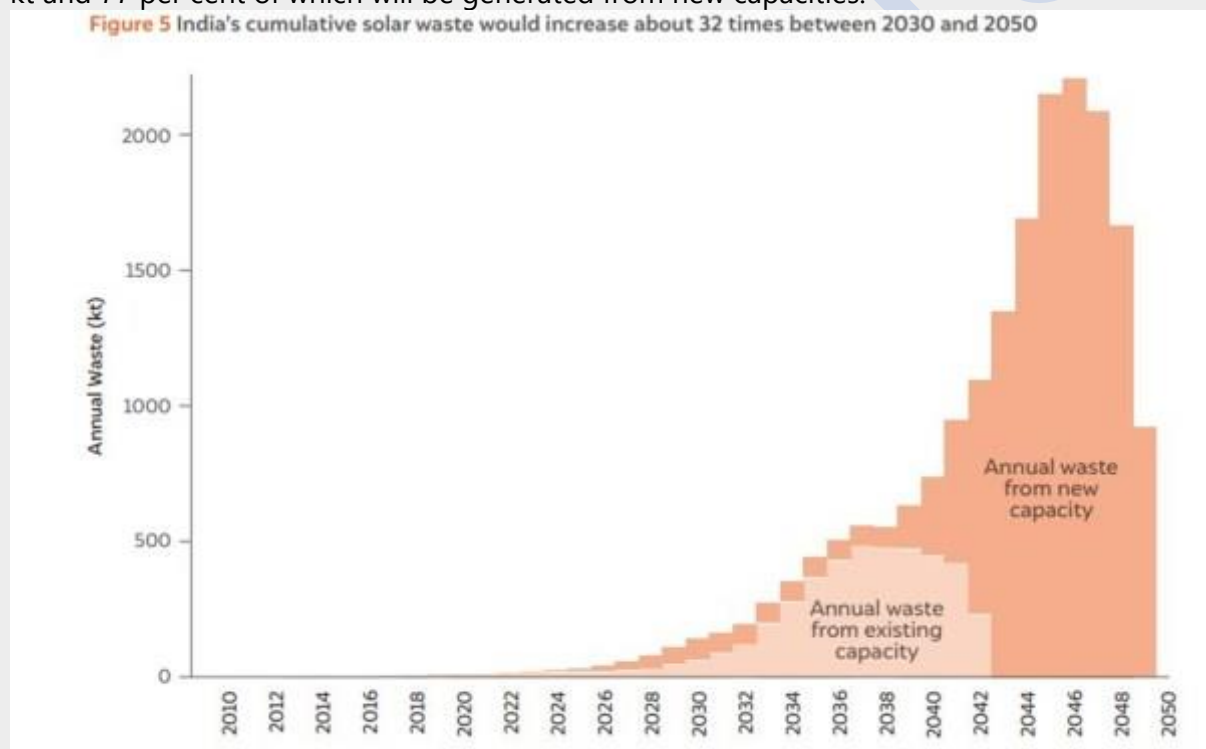
incurred by solar modules during their lifetime. Three, when the modules reach their end-of-life and are not usable anymore.

The study only focused on waste from the field (project lifetime) category and excluded waste generated during manufacturing.

### What are the findings of the study?

By 2030, India's current installed solar capacity will generate about 340 kt — three times more than the present. Around 67 per cent of this waste is expected to be produced by five states, including Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh. This is because these five states currently have more solar capacity than other states and therefore, will produce more solar waste.

The cumulative waste from existing and new capacity (deployed between FY24 and FY30) will reach about 600 kt by 2030, according to the report. By 2050, it will increase to about 19,000 kt and 77 per cent of which will be generated from new capacities.



Credit: Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

As the discarded modules contain minerals such as silicon, copper, tellurium, and cadmium — which have been classified as critical minerals for the country's economic development and national security by the Indian government — the study focused on them also. The 340 kt waste expected to be produced by 2030 would consist of 10 kt of silicon, 12-18 tonnes of silver, and 16 tonnes of cadmium and tellurium.

### How to deal with solar waste?

The report gave several recommendations for managing solar waste. It urged the policymakers to maintain a comprehensive database of the installed solar capacity, which would help in estimating solar waste in the following years. The report also said the policymakers should incentivise recyclers, and push stakeholders to effectively manage the growing solar waste.

The report talked about two broad ways of recycling solar panels. First is conventional recycling or bulk material recycling, which involves mechanical processes like crushing, sieving, and shearing of the waste. While the majority of recycled materials consist of glass, aluminium, and copper, more valuable materials like silver and silicon cannot be recovered through this method.

The other way of recycling is known as high-value recycling. It involves the use of a combination of mechanical, chemical, and thermal processes to recycle the modules. Unlike conventional recycling, this method can recover silver and silicon also with the help of chemical processes.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

### 3. What is Nvidia's Project GR00T, designed to create AI-powered humanoid robots

#### Why in News?

AI chip leader Nvidia announced Project GR00T or Generalist Robot 00 Technology, which promises to revolutionise the evolution of humanoid robots.

The project aims to empower humanoid robots with human-like understanding and movement using Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Nvidia's announcement comes a few days after another AI robotics company, Figure AI, showcased its humanoid robot, Figure 01. Powered by ChatGPT. Figure 01 can follow instructions and assist with tasks like cleaning up and handing over objects.



#### What is Project GR00T?

Project GR00T is essentially a general-purpose foundation model for humanoid robots. It is at the vanguard of Nvidia's efforts to drive breakthroughs in robotics and embodied AI (robots, virtual assistants, or other intelligent systems that can interact with and learn from a physical environment).

Project GR00T stands for Generalist Robot 00 Technology. Robots built on this platform are designed to understand natural language and emulate movements by observing human actions, such as instantly learning coordination, dexterity, and other skills. This can help the robots navigate and engage with the real world around them.

#### What does all of this mean?

On the face of it, job loss seems imminent, with humanoid robots potentially capable of handling various hazardous as well as repetitive tasks. For instance, Nvidia's collaboration with healthcare company Hippocratic AI to develop AI-powered healthcare agents can put some

nurses' jobs at risk. However, many point out that the humanoid robots can aid humans and make their lives more comfortable, instead of replacing them.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: The Indian Express

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