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1. Why has the draft Broadcast Services Bill 2024 raised concerns of freedom of speech?

Why in News?

In a draft law, shared with a handful of industry stakeholders in a watermarked format to prevent leaking of the copy to a wider audience, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has proposed introducing onerous regulations on independent creators of news events on platforms like YouTube, Instagram and X – sparking concerns over freedom of speech and expression and the government's powers to regulate it.



In the draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2024, shared with stakeholders a few weeks ago, the ministry is understood to have expanded its remit from OTT content and digital news to include social media accounts and online video creators compared to a version of the draft law which was released publicly in November 2023. The new version also

defines a "digital news broadcaster" in sweeping terms, and requires prior registration with the government to prescribing standards for content evaluation.

How does the draft bill seek to include YouTube creators under its remit? What are the requirements proposed on social media companies? How have other countries gone about their broadcasting laws?

How does the government want to regulate independent news creators online?

In the 2023 version of the draft, the Bill defined news and current affairs programmes as: "(i) newly-received or noteworthy audio, visual or audio-visual programmes or live programmes, including analysis, about recent events primarily of socio-political, economic or cultural nature, or (ii) any programmes transmitted or retransmitted on broadcasting network, where the context, purpose, import and meaning of such programmes implies so."

However, in the 2024 draft has a new category called "digital news broadcaster" or "publisher of news and current affairs content" has been created, and defined as "any person who broadcasts news and current affairs programme through an online paper, news portal, website,

social media intermediary, or other similar medium as part of a systematic business, professional, or commercial activity but excluding replica e-papers.”

The term ‘systematic activity’ has also been defined to mean any structured or organised activity that involves an element of planning, method, continuity or persistence – broadly vague terms which could be made to mean anything and gives the executive a long leash over enforceability.

What legal obligations will independent creators have?

Now, if a creator is categorised as a digital news broadcaster, they must ‘intimate’ the Ministry of Information and broadcasting (MIB) about their work and existence. They will also have to form one or more content evaluation committees (CEC) at their own expense – and “strive to make” the committee diverse by including individuals with a knowledge of different social groups, women, child welfare, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minorities. The names of people in their CEC will also have to be shared with the government. All digital news broadcasters must intimate the MIB.

The penalty to not appoint such a committee is hefty under the current draft – news creators who do not intimate the Central Government names, credentials and other details of members of their CEC will be fined Rs 50 lakh in the first contravention, and Rs 2.5 crore for subsequent violations in the next three years. The draft Bill allows the government to “exempt a distinct class of players or a group for avoiding genuine hardship”, which suggests that some stakeholders might be exempted from the purview of the Bill.

A senior government official explained that as the rules stand today, online content creators will have to issue an intimation to the government within a month about their operation and if they have appointed a content evaluation committee (CEC) – which they have to set up at their own cost. “As per our thought process right now, there will be a simple application which such broadcasters have to fill and send to the government,” a second government official said.

Why does the government want to regulate independent news creators?

It is understood that some of the big Indian creators of current affairs and news content on YouTube are on the government’s radar. To be sure, as per the current wording under the Bill, even foreign creators may fall under its ambit, although enforcing Indian content regulations on them could be challenging.

A senior government official said one key reason behind the significant expansion of scope in the current draft Bill compared to the version which was released for public consultation in November 2023 has been the “role a number of independent content creators played in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls”.

“There were a number of instances where creators made videos on current affairs which made some sensational claims about the government and its senior leaders in the run up to the elections. That’s when it was decided that there has to be an accountability measure for these creators as well, to create a level-playing field between mainstream press and independent creators,” the official said.

This change in attitude is also evident from the swift moves the government has made in reshaping the draft version of the Bill. On June 4, the day the election results were announced, the Ministry sent a notice to stakeholders regarding a meeting on the draft Bill. Since then, industry executives said at least six meetings have taken place with the Ministry.

What will social media companies need to do under the Bill?

The draft says that online intermediaries like Facebook, YouTube, and X are exempted from liability for third-party content, if:

- the function of the intermediary is limited to providing access to a communication system over which information made available by third parties is transmitted or temporarily stored or hosted;
- the intermediary does not initiate the transmission;
- the intermediary does not select or modify the information, except in compliance with government orders;
- the intermediary observes due diligence while discharging his duties under this Act and observes other prescribed guidelines.

The Bill also has criminal liability provisions for social media companies if they do not provide information “pertaining to OTT Broadcasters and Digital News Broadcasters” on its platforms for compliance.

How does the proposed law compare to other countries?

In Singapore, both traditional broadcasters, and over the top (OTT) content providers fall under the country’s broadcasting law. Under the country’s copyright law, OTT platforms are regulated and they require a licence from a regulator, although licensees do not have the same level of obligations as other television services.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

2. Bio-bitumen for the roads of the future



Bitumen is distilled from crude oil and suitable for binding other materials



Asphalt is a mixture of bitumen and sand, used for road construction

Tar is a viscous black liquid that is distilled from coal or wood

Why in News?

Bitumen is a by-product of oil production and is used to bind the surfaces of paved roads. Some researchers, concerned about its environmental impacts and future supply if petroleum refining slows down, have started to develop alternatives: bio-bitumen.

Bitumen

Every year the EU produces around 15 million tonnes of bitumen. Most of this is mixed with aggregates such as crushed rock, sand and gravel to create asphalt –

the sticky bitumen binds it all together – to build roads. Around 90 per cent of all paved roads

are surfaced with asphalt and in the EU more than 200 million tonnes of this composite material is produced annually. Bitumen is a very thick liquid form of crude oil. It does occur naturally, but the stuff used as a binder in asphalt is a by-product of oil refining.

Bio-bitumen

In the Netherlands there are now test bio-based roads and cycle paths, paved with a bitumen-like product made from the natural binder lignin. These include a section of road on an industrial site – used daily by cars and heavy trucks, some minor roads, and a cycle path at Wageningen University & Research, which is in three sections, each produced using a different lignin-based bio-bitumen.

How it is made?

Lignin is a structural polymer in plants and trees that is released as a waste product from a number of industrial processes. The Dutch demonstration projects use lignin from various sources, including different types of paper pulp production and a bio-refinery that produces cellulosic ethanol from straw. The bio-based asphalt binders were created by blending the different lignins from the various waste streams to achieve the required properties.

Bio-Bitumen Utilisation in Indian Road Infrastructure

Ministry has sanctioned two (02) research projects, one each to IIT Roorkee, and Central Road Research Institute (CRRI) New Delhi in collaboration with Indian Institute of Petroleum (IIP) Dehradun to evaluate bio-bitumen in the laboratory and to assess the long-term performance of pavement constructed with bio-bitumen.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: PIB

3. What's causing Antarctica's deep-winter heatwave, what could be its fallout?

Why in News?

For the second time in two years, a record-breaking heatwave is sweeping through Antarctica at the height of its winter season. Ground temperatures have been 10 degrees Celsius higher than normal on average since mid-July, and up to 28 degrees higher on certain days.

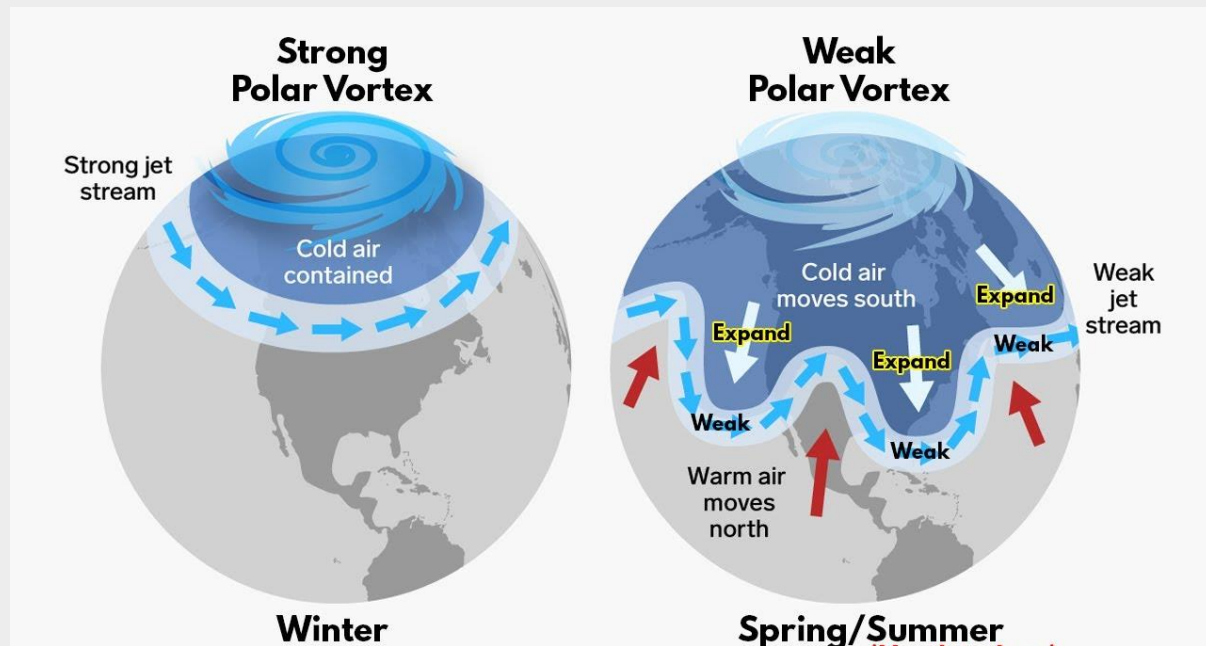
Reasons for heatwave

1. Weakening of Polar Vortex: Scientists believe that the higher temperatures are mainly a consequence of the weakening of the polar vortex, the band of cold air and low-pressure systems that spins around the poles of the Earth in the stratosphere.

The vortex usually remains strong and stable during winter in the southern hemisphere — keeping cold air trapped over Antarctica and not letting hot air come in — but it has been disturbed this year by large-scale atmospheric waves (periodic disturbances in the fields of atmospheric variables).

Due to this, the vortex released trapped cold air, and opened the door for warmer air to enter the region. As this warmer air travelled downwards from the upper atmosphere, it caused an increase in temperatures.

A weakened southern hemisphere vortex is a rare event that is only expected to occur once every two decades on average.



2. Reduction in Antarctic ice: Several other factors — including the reduction of the extent of the Antarctic sea ice — could also be at play. In June, the extent of Antarctic sea ice was the second-lowest ever for that time of year — a little more than the extent recorded in June 2023, the lowest ever. Sea ice plays a crucial role in keeping temperatures down in the polar regions, as its bright, white surface reflects more sunlight (solar energy) back to space than liquid water. Sea ice also ensures that the air remains cool by acting as a barrier between the cold air and the relatively warmer water below.

The possible fallout

1. Rise in level of oceans: Antarctica's hot winter will likely lead to further losses of the Antarctic Ice Sheet (the world's other major ice sheet is the Greenland Ice Sheet) that can potentially raise global sea levels by hundreds of feet.

The Antarctic Ice Sheet, a glacier covering 98% of the Antarctic continent, holds more than 60% of the world's total freshwater. If entirely melted, it can submerge coastal cities and reshape the world's map. A sea level rise of only a few feet will displace the roughly 230 million people who live within about 3 feet of the high tide line today, according to a report by the environmental organisation Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition.

2. Impact on global ocean circulation system: Rising temperatures will also impact the global ocean circulation system, which regulates climate by storing and transporting heat, carbon, nutrients, and freshwater around the world. A 2023 study published in the journal *Nature* showed that the melting ice in Antarctica is slowing down this circulation. The freshwater from melting ice reduces the salinity and density of the surface water and diminishes the downward flow to the ocean's bottom, the analysis said.

A slower global ocean circulation system will lead to oceans absorbing less heat and CO₂, intensify global warming, and increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events like floods and droughts.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment

Source: Indian Express

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