

Sansad TV Perspective: Addressing Citizens' Grievances

In the series Sansad TV Perspective, we bring you an analysis of the discussion featured on the insightful programme 'Perspective' on Sansad TV, on various important topics affecting India and also the world. This analysis will help you immensely for the [IAS exam](#), especially the mains exam, where a well-rounded understanding of topics is a prerequisite for writing answers that fetch good marks.

In this article, we feature the discussion on the topic: 'Addressing Citizens' Grievances'.

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5CLhMx4q-c>

Anchor: Vishal Dahiya

Guests:

1. Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology of India
2. Brijesh Singh, Additional Director General of Police, Govt. of Maharashtra
3. Amit Dubey, Data Technology Expert

Context: The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2022 were notified by the Government of India.

Highlights of the discussion:

- Introduction
- Grievance Appellate Committee
- Significance of Amendments
- Other government initiatives

Introduction:

- The Central Government on 27th January 2023 notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2022, making it mandatory for social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc. to comply with the provisions of the Constitution of India.
- The tweaked IT rules have also paved the way for the setting up of three grievance appellate panels, which will settle issues that users may have against the way social media platforms initially addressed their complaints regarding content and other matters. The grievance committees will be able to review content moderation.

For more information on IT Rules 2021, read here: [New Social Media Rules](#)

Grievance Appellate Committee:

- The Centre established three Grievance Appellate Committees (GAC) based on the amended Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (IT Rules 2021).
- Each committee will have three members.
- It is an institution that has been specifically designed for emerging cyber laws to address the issues of accountability of social media platforms to digital users ('digital naagriks').
- The GAC is a crucial element of the overall policy and legal framework to ensure that the Internet in India is Open, Safe & Trusted, and Accountable.
- The GAC was required because large numbers of grievances were left unaddressed or unsatisfactorily addressed by Internet intermediaries. It is expected that the GAC will create a culture of responsiveness among all Internet platforms and intermediaries toward their consumers.
- It will be a virtual digital platform that will operate only online and digitally, wherein the entire appeal process, from the filing of an appeal to the decision, shall be conducted digitally.
- It will be an alternative avenue for grievance redressal apart from the courts and ensure that the constitutional rights of Indian citizens are not contravened by any big-tech platform by ensuring new accountability standards for Significant Social Media Intermediaries (SSMI).
- However, the citizens of India are always free to approach the courts.
- It is a citizen-friendly and faster process of grievance redressal.

Response of Social Media Intermediaries to GAC:

- The decision to establish GAC was arrived at through extensive consultation with all the stakeholders.
- It should be noted that [Social Media](#) Platforms enjoyed a lack of scrutiny and accountability for a very long time and thus there was some initial resistance from the industry. The industry later realized its responsibility of providing safe, secure, transparent, and trusted internet facilities to approximately 83 crore consumers.
- Initially, government efforts were also mischaracterized as attempts to control and moderate online content. However, the government has continuously pitched for making Internet services accessible to every citizen in a conducive and enabling environment.
- Once these platforms realize that there are shared goals between the government and industries, there will be more acceptance of such policies and frameworks.
- The SSMI was also reluctant due to technical issues as their platforms are AI-based and adapted to the US Standards. A large number of changes are required to adopt Indian norms.

Significance of the Amendments:

- The government of India is playing the role of an enabler by essentially laying out the frameworks and moving swiftly in the direction of safe and transparent Internet.
- There is an increasing realization across the world that the Internet apart from having several benefits, also has many ramifications.
- Many countries like the United States, the [European Union](#), and the United Kingdom have made legislation to protect their citizens online.
- India has been pitching for digital public goods and the Internet being an important element in this direction needs to be safe, secure, open, accountable, and transparent.
- The GAC is the final point in the three-tier architecture of grievance redressal (the initial being the Social Media Platforms themselves).
- The GAC will empower the users because many complaints of the users like defamation, impersonation, false information, etc. were inadequately and untimely addressed by the social media platforms.
- The dedicated panel of GAC will provide a logical conclusion to many queries. It will also penalize the social media intermediaries for delay or inaction.
- The complainant will also be analyzed for the authenticity of the complaint.
- Even the law enforcement agencies of India were not satisfied with the response and cooperation of the SSIMs to deal with various cases.
- The social media platforms placed the company policies and guidelines above the sovereignty of the nation.
- The Intermediary Guidelines now create a mandatory obligation on social media intermediaries to cooperate with the law enforcement agencies of India and provide them with appropriate information in a time-bound manner.

Other Efforts of the Government to make the Internet Safe, Secure, Free, and Open:

- It was highlighted that governments will launch rules permitting online gaming and regulating online betting.
- Consultation on the [Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Bill](#) is complete and will be tabled in Parliament.
- The Indian government will bring forth a draft of the Digital India Act for public consultation. This would be a successor to the 22-year-old IT Act.
- The young population will be provided with an enabling environment that not only protects their rights but also provides them with new opportunities to grow.

Conclusion:

Though the mechanism is still not perfect, it is a good step in the right direction. The regulatory mechanism and framework should continuously evolve with new and emerging technologies. A leaf from legislation across the world can also help in making the Internet safe and better.