Social Media Communications Hub

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A petition has been filed and accepted in the Supreme Court against a proposal by the Centre to set up a Social Media Communications Hub.

What is the Proposed Social Media Communications Hub?

- It will be a platform that will allow the government to keep an eye on all social media platforms — Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn etc — and try to get a sense of the public mood, with the capability to track an individual's public posts across platforms.
- It will have the ability to collect digital media chatter from all core social media platforms and provide real-time "insights, metrics and other valuable data" to the government.
- The objective is to gauge and analyze the public sentiment towards various government policies and announcements, and track influencers.
- The platform will be able to operate in different languages such as English, Hindi, Urdu, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Punjabi, Tamil and Chinese, German, French, and Arabic.

What are the Concerns around the Social Media Hub?

- Concerns have been expressed about legality, privacy, and freedom of speech, If social media platforms are monitored, and there is a possibility of India 'moving to a surveillance state'.
- Concerns have been raised about the project as illegal and unconstitutional and are contrary to the right to privacy and freedom of speech and expression.
- Since it lacks any legislative backing, oversight, and accountability; there is a possibility to profile and database social media users; and whereby it can lead to abuse of power.

- The Supreme Court in a 2017 judgment upheld privacy as a fundamental right. The judgment stated that, if the posting on social media websites are meant for only a certain audience, then it cannot be said that the general public has a right to somehow access that information and make use of it. (India Is Not A Surveillance State: SC)

What is the Government's stand?

- The government intends to only assess public sentiment on social media as it is a public domain and, hence, the notion that the tool will be used for mass surveillance or snooping is purely misplaced.
- Companies use such tools to find out what is the public sentiment around a particular product and the government claims it wants to only adopt a similar pattern.