

Important Vocab for the Editorial

1. redress (verb) – rectify, correct, put right, set right, reform, sort out, deal with.
2. grievance (noun) – complaint, criticism, problem, objection/protest.
3. compliance (noun) – conformity, observation, adherence.
4. unsettling (adjective) – disturbing, upsetting, distressing.
5. end up (phrasal verb) – come/appear, find oneself (to a particular course of action in the end).
6. leverage (noun) – influence, authority, sway, control, say, dominance, advantage.
7. intermediary (noun) – social media website, eCommerce website, blogging platform, search engine, discussion board, etc.
8. implications (noun) – consequence/outcome, ramification, repercussion.
9. freedom of expression (noun) – the ability of an individual or group of individuals to express their beliefs, thoughts, ideas, and emotions about different issues *free* from government censorship, restraint, or legal penalty.
10. right to information (RTI) (noun) – It empowers every citizen to seek any information from the Government, promotes transparency and accountability in the working of the Government.
11. The Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (noun) – the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 has been framed in exercise of powers under section 87 (2) of the Information Technology Act, 2000 and in supersession of the earlier Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules 2011. It empowers ordinary users of social media, embodying a mechanism for the redressal and timely resolution of their grievances. Rules about digital media and OTT focuses more on in house and self-regulation mechanism whereby a robust grievance redressal mechanism has been provided while upholding journalistic and creative freedom. The guidelines have been framed keeping in mind the difference between viewership in a theatre and television as compared to watching it on the Internet.
12. oversight (noun as modifier) – monitoring, supervision, surveillance, inspection.
13. mechanism (noun) – procedure, process, method/technique.
14. progressive (adjective) – forward-looking, forward-thinking, dynamic.
15. liberal (adjective) – progressive, forward-thinking, broad-minded.
16. seek (verb) – ask for, appeal, request, demand.
17. address (verb) – tackle, deal with, attend to, try to sort out.
18. misapprehension (noun) – mistake, error, misinterpretation, illusion.
19. curb (verb) – control, contain, restrict, limit.
20. freedom of speech (noun) – the right to express opinions without government interference.
21. soft tone (noun) – soft attitude/mode of expression.
22. notwithstanding (conjunction) – although, in spite of the fact that, despite the fact that, even though.
23. streaming (noun) – a process of transmitting or receiving (data, especially video and audio material) over the internet.

24. **adhere to** (verb) – abide by, follow, obey, comply with.
25. **cumbersome** (adjective) – complicated, complex; awkward/hard to deal with.
26. **three-tier** (noun) – three-level, three-layer.
27. **regulation** (noun) – supervision, policing, overseeing, monitoring, inspection.
28. **apex** (noun) – top, the highest point.
29. **in itself** (phrase) – of itself, by itself, as such.
30. **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
31. **all along** (phrase) – from the beginning, all the time.
32. **self-regulate** (verb) – regulate oneself without external intervention.
33. **chilling** (adjective) – frightening, terrifying, disturbing/horrifying.
34. **pertain to** (verb) – concern, relate to, be connected with.
35. **purview** (noun) – outlook, perspective, perception.
36. **Information Technology Act** (noun) – it is an Act of the Indian Parliament notified on 17 October 2000. It is the primary law in India dealing with cybercrime and electronic commerce.
37. **regulatory** (adjective) – supervisory, managerial, controlling.
38. **ambit** (noun) – limits, scope, purview.
39. **legislative** (adjective) – relating to legislation; involving or relating to the process of making and passing laws.
40. **flag** (verb) – indicate, identify, point out.
41. **seek** (verb) – try, aim, attempt.
42. **with respect to** (phrase) – concerning, regarding, relating to, with reference to.
43. **adherence** (noun) – compliance, observance, conformity.
44. **Code of Ethics** (noun) – a guide of principles designed to help professionals conduct business honestly and with integrity.
45. **among other things** (phrase) – used to indicate that there are several more things like the one mentioned, but that you do not intend to mention them all.
46. **norms of journalistic conduct** (noun) – compiled in a compendium (manual) titled “Norms of Journalistic Conduct”, the norms act as a reference guide in varying circumstances for the journalists.
47. **compile** (verb) – organize, arrange, put together, collate, assemble.
48. **Press Council of India (PCI)** (noun) – a statutory, adjudicating organization in India formed in 1966 by its parliament. It is the self-regulatory watchdog of the press, for the press and by the press, that operates under the Press Council Act of 1978.
49. **Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995** (noun) – An Act to regulate the operation of cable television networks in the country and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
50. **encounter** (verb) – experience, come up against, come across, be faced with.
51. **per se** (adverb) – in itself, of itself, by itself, as such, intrinsically.
52. **vicious** (adjective) – spiteful, menacing, heinous, hostile, hate-filled.
53. **furnish** (verb) – provide, present, give.
54. **take up** (phrasal verb) – accept, say yes to, agree to, accede to, adopt; engage in, become involved in.
55. **complainant** (noun) – litigator, appellant, claimant, plaintiff.
56. **dissatisfied** (adjective) – discontented, unsatisfied, disappointed, disquieted, unhappy.

57. **escalate** (verb) – rise, intensify.
58. **inter-** (prefix) – between.
59. **set up** (phrasal verb) – establish, start/begin, inaugurate, create.
60. **compliance burden** (noun) – regulatory burden.
61. **entity** (noun) – organization, institution, establishment, outfit.
62. **floodgate** (noun) – something which is restraining/holding back/stifling an outflow of something else.
63. **open the floodgates** (phrase) – to make something easier for a lot of things to happen (or) to make it possible for a lot of people to start doing something that was not permitted previously.
64. **intervention** (noun) – the process of intervening in something; involvement, interference, intrusion, meddling.
65. **potential** (noun) – possibilities, potentiality, prospects.
66. **trigger** (noun) – cause, reason; an event that causes a particular action/process.
67. **offence** (noun) – attack, onslaught, assault; crime, illegal/unlawful act, misdeed, wrongdoing.
68. **encrypted** (adjective) – concealed/hidden with secret code.
69. **there is no denying** (phrase) – it is undoubtedly true.
70. **highlight** (verb) – underline, underscore, emphasize, call attention to.
71. **pornography** (noun) – obscene or indecent digital material (movies, pictures, magazines, etc.,) that show or describe sexual matters in order to cause sexual excitement.
72. **imagery** (noun) – image.
73. **besides** (preposition/linking adverb) – in addition to, as well, apart from.
74. **tighten** (verb) – make stricter, make more rigorous, make more stringent, stiffen, toughen.
75. **inevitable** (adjective) – unavoidable, inescapable, bound to happen, sure to happen, unpreventable.
76. **given** (preposition) – considering, taking into account, bearing in mind.
77. **implant** (verb) – instil, inculcate, insinuate, introduce.
78. **counterproductive** (adjective) – harmful, damaging, dangerous/destructive.
79. **guard** (verb) – protect, watch over, look after, keep an eye on, take care of.
80. **excesses** (noun) – uncontrolled behaviour; unrestricted conduct; extreme, violent actions which are unacceptable.
81. **the scheme of things** (phrase) – in the way things normally/generally happen or arranged to happen (when compared with/related to other things) in a particular situation; a general view of the situation as a whole.
82. **advocate** (verb) – recommend, advise, uphold, support, back.
83. **free pass** (noun) – (unrestricted) approval.
84. **in place** (phrase) – set up, established, arranged.
85. **uniform** (adjective) – identical, similar, equal.
86. **far from** (phrase) – not, not at all, nowhere near.
87. **appetite** (noun) – longing, yearning, strong desire/liking.
88. **vital** (adjective) – key, essential, important.
89. **run-in** (noun) – fight, quarrel, disagreement, argument, dispute, difference of opinion.

90. **defy** (verb) – resist, take a stand against, confront.
91. **handle** (noun) – a person’s username on a social media platform.
92. **environment** (noun) – situation.
93. **nightmare** (noun) – very unpleasant or frightening experience; ordeal, horror, torment.
94. **casualty** (noun) – victim.
95. **predator** (noun) – a person who is cruelly exploiting other people. (an animal that hunts and kills other animals for food).

The **new rules introduced by the Centre** last week **to regulate all types of digital platforms**, with the idea of redressing user grievances and ensuring compliance with the law, are deeply unsettling as they will end up giving the government a good deal of leverage over online news publishers and intermediaries. This holds troubling implications for freedom of expression and right to information. Electronics and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, while launching **The Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**, presented it as a “soft-touch oversight mechanism”. A government press note termed it “progressive” and “liberal”. It also claimed the rules seek to “address people’s varied concerns while removing any misapprehension about curbing creativity and freedom of speech and expression”. The soft tone notwithstanding, these rules force digital news publishers and video streaming services to adhere to a cumbersome **three-tier structure of regulation**, with a government committee at its apex. This, in itself, is unprecedented in a country where the news media have been given the space all along to self-regulate, based on the mature understanding that any government presence could have a chilling effect on free speech and conversations. That the new rules pertain only to digital news media, and not to the whole of the news media, hardly provides comfort, as the former is increasingly becoming a prime source of news and views. Further, it is of significant concern that the purview of the **IT Act, 2000**, has been expanded to bring digital news media under its regulatory ambit without legislative action, which digital liberties organisations such as the **Internet Freedom Foundation** have **flagged**.

The three-tier regulatory mechanism will seek to redress complaints with respect to the digital platforms’ adherence to a Code of Ethics, which among other things includes the **‘Norms of Journalistic Conduct’**, compiled by the Press Council of India, the Programme Code of the **Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act**, as also a negative list of content that shall not be published (essentially what one would encounter under law as reasonable restrictions to free speech). While there is not much that is wrong with the Code of Ethics *per se*, what is problematic is that it will take little to bring this regulatory mechanism to vicious life. According to the rules, “Any person having a grievance regarding content published by a publisher in relation to the Code of Ethics may furnish his grievance on the grievance mechanism established by the publisher.” So, literally anyone could force a digital platform to take up any issue. It has to be taken up first, under the new rules, by the digital platform’s grievance officer. If there is no resolution or if the complainant is dissatisfied, this can be escalated to a “self-regulating” body of publishers. This can then be escalated to the highest level, the government’s Oversight Mechanism, according to which an inter-departmental committee will be set up to address the grievance.

Apart from imposing a compliance burden on digital publishers — many are small entities — this also opens the floodgates for all kinds of interventions. The potential for misuse is enormous.

The new rules have increased the compliance burden for social media platforms too. The bigger of these platforms will have to appoint chief compliance officers, to ensure the rules and the laws are adhered to, and a nodal officer, with whom the law enforcement agencies will be coordinating, apart from a grievance officer. Such platforms in the messaging space will have to “enable the identification of the first originator of the information on its computer resource” based on a judicial order. Thus, the rules require messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Signal to trace problematic messages to the originator. While the triggers for a judicial order that require such an identification are serious offences, it raises uneasy questions about how such apps will be able to adhere to such orders, as their messages are encrypted end-to-end. There is no denying that there are problems with online content, which the government has rightly highlighted now. Its release has referred to a 2018 Supreme Court observation that the government “may frame necessary guidelines to eliminate child pornography, rape and gangrape imageries, videos and sites in content hosting platforms and other applications”, besides making a mention of discussions in Parliament about social media misuse and fake news.

Some amount of tightening of policy is inevitable given new challenges. But it would be wrong to imagine that by implanting itself in the grievance redress process or by making platforms share more information, the government can solve these problems. It could prove counterproductive in a country where the citizens still do not have a data privacy law to guard themselves against excesses committed by any party. Regulation has an important place in the scheme of things, and no one advocates giving a free pass to the digital platforms. But then, as this newspaper argued earlier, the laws to combat unlawful content are already in place. What is required is their uniform application. It is also far from reassuring that this government has had an uneasy, sometimes unpleasant, relationship with media in general. The appetite for criticism, so vital in a democracy, is just not there. Some weeks ago, the government had a run-in with Twitter after it defied orders to ban certain hashtags and handles. And given an environment where people are sensitive to content, the regulatory mechanism could become an operational nightmare. Worse, the casualties could be creativity and freedom of expression. The government would like to see itself as a watchdog of digital content in the larger public interest, but it comes across as a predator.