

Grievance appellate committees to address users' complaints against internet-based platforms

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In news— The Union government has notified the formation of three grievance appellate committees that will address users' complaints against social media and other internet-based platforms.

About the grievance appellate committees(GACs)-

- According to the notification, issued recently each of the three grievance appellate committees (GACs) will have **a chairperson, two whole-time members from different government entities**, and retired senior executives from the industry for a term of three years from the date of assumption of office.
- They are **empowered to oversee and revoke content moderation-related decisions taken by these platforms.**
- Keeping in view the transition period required for the intermediaries as per their requests and technical requirements, the GACs' online platform will be operational from March 1, 2023.

1st panel-

- It will be **chaired by the chief executive officer of the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre** under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Retired Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Ashutosh Shukla, and Punjab National Bank's (PNB) former chief general manager and chief information officer Sunil Soni have been appointed as the whole-time members of the panel.

2nd panel-

- It will be **chaired by the joint secretary in charge of the Policy and Administration Division** in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- Indian Navy's retired Commodore Sunil Kumar Gupta, and Kavindra Sharma, the former vice-president (consulting) of L&T Infotech, have been appointed as the whole-time members of this panel.

3rd panel-

- It will be **chaired by Kavita Bhatia, a senior scientist at the Ministry of Electronics and IT.**
- Former traffic service officer of the Indian Railways Sanjay Goel, and former managing director and chief executive officer of IDBI Intech Krishnagiri Ragothamarao have been appointed whole-time members of the third panel.

The role of the panels-

- In October 2022, the government notified that it will start the process of selecting GACs amid criticism from civil society activists, who had raised concerns about the government's involvement in the appeals process.
- The government had initially said that it would be open to social media companies setting up a self regulatory body provided that it found the body's functioning satisfactory.
- What the changes essentially mean is that **in case a user is not satisfied with the content moderation decision taken by a social company's grievance officer, they can appeal that decision before the proposed government-appointed appeals committee.**
- The government's initial proposal had stemmed from users' complaints about being deplatformed, or being removed from social media sites, without companies

giving them an adequate avenue of hearing.

- **GACs can also seek assistance from people who may have adequate expertise** and experience in a subject matter while dealing with users' appeals.
- The GACs will **adopt an "online dispute resolution mechanism"** where the entire appeal process, from its filing to the final decision, will be done online.
- Social media companies will also have to compile every order passed by the GACs and report them on their respective websites.
- Any person aggrieved by a decision of the grievance officer of a social media intermediary will be allowed to file an appeal to the GAC within a period of 30 days.
- **The GAC will have to deal with the appeal and resolve it within a month of the receipt of the appeal.**