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SC Verdict on Delhi Assembly's Committee Powers

Why in news?

The Supreme Court, in a recent verdict, upheld the authority of a committee of the Delhi Assembly to summon a senior official of Facebook.

What is the case about?

- Facebook India vice-president Ajit Mohan was repeatedly summoned by Delhi Assembly's Committee on Peace and Harmony.
- This was in relations to misinformation on the Delhi riots of 2020.
- Facebook argued before the Supreme Court that this was a case of overreach.
- Because, Delhi's law and order came under the central government.
- This was also the position taken by the central government.
- It argued that the Delhi Assembly had no jurisdiction in this matter.
- Facebook also pointed out that it was governed by the IT Act of Parliament.
- So, it said no State government has a role with it.

What has the Court said?

- The Supreme Court upheld the Committee's summon.
- While doing so, the Court observed the following:
 - a. The Assembly does not only perform the function of legislating.
 - b. There are many other aspects of governance which can form part of the essential functions of the Legislative Assembly and consequently the committee.
- It implies that the "inquisitorial" and "recommendatory" powers of a House could be used for better governance.
- But the Court also cautioned the committee from "transgressing into any fields reserved for the Union Government".
- Besides, the Court noted that misinformation on social media could ultimately affect the governance of States.
- It refused the view that social media intermediaries were merely a platform for exchange of ideas without performing any significant role themselves.

What is the significance of the verdict?

- The verdict comes amid a long phase of discordance over legislative turf between the central government and the Delhi government.
- It also comes at a time when social media intermediaries are legally fighting some aspects of the [new IT rules](#) that govern them.
- So, the verdict increases the responsibility of the social media intermediaries towards the many legislatures and not just the Union.
- The verdict now opens the gates for scrutiny of social media platforms by other States as well.
- It is a nuanced recognition of the extent of powers of State Assemblies in matters regulated by an Act of Parliament.

Source: The Hindu



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