

Business Standard

Opposition MPs demand parl committee vetting of data protection bill

In a meeting held on Wednesday, members from the ruling side proposed the standing committee to adopt the draft report

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Parliament (Photo: PTI)

Some members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology have demanded examination of the final version of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill.

They also called for holding back its enactment till the panel submits its report.

The department-related standing committee is expected to submit its draft report on citizens' data security and privacy within two days.

The report includes standing committee members' suggestions on the draft DPDP Bill, 2022, which was released for public consultation last year.

The development comes days after the Union Cabinet approved the much-awaited law on data privacy with an aim to table it in Parliament during the ongoing monsoon session. If granted, the examination may delay the enactment of the Bill, which has gone through multiple iterations in the last five years.

In a meeting held on Wednesday, members from the ruling party proposed to the standing committee to adopt the draft report.

However, Opposition MPs walked out of the meeting demanding to see the final version of the Bill before submitting the committee's views on it.

MPs John Brittas of the CPI(M), Karti Chidambaram of the Congress and Mahua Moitra and Jawhar Sircar of Trinamool Congress strongly opposed the proposal to pass the draft report without attaching the DPDP Bill. This was the third meeting of the committee on data privacy.

“All Opposition members walked out of the meeting of the standing committee because BJP's Nishi Kant Dubey and Anil Agarwal demanded that we adopt the data protection Bill — without giving us a chance to examine the final Bill. Opposition members demanded postponement to examine the latest Bill — as it has gone through many changes earlier and we must see the present Bill,” Sircar, an MP in Rajya Sabha, told Business Standard.

The offices of Dubey and Agarwal did not comment on the issue.

“We have suggested that the data protection board should include more subject specialists and judicial experts instead of government-appointed members. The Opposition members demanded to see the final version of the report and time to examine it,” Sircar said. He added that the Opposition may issue a dissent note if the committee approves the report in absentia.

During the consultation process, the government received as many as 21,666 suggestions from industry stakeholders and legal experts.

“I raised the issue that, in the last version, the government was destroying the watchdog called the Data Protection Board by packing it with its men rather than judicial and independent persons. My other objection was that temporary consent to use personal data (in case of illness etc) given to a data fiduciary cannot be shared with others without my consent. The government is not guaranteeing this,” Sircar said.

The Bill is likely to include provisions such as deemed consent in exceptional cases. Here, a platform would not need to take the consent of users before collecting their data. It may also allow the government to exempt its departments from the provisions of the Act. The Opposition MPs are against these provisions.

“The committee has been discussing the provisions in the draft Bill for a few months. Some of the members who walked out today were not present in the previous meeting. Thus, they are not aware of the discussions. The chairman has told the aggrieved MPs to submit their suggestions and we will incorporate all of it,” a government official said.

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