

# Army cell to counter social media misuse

Will identify, monitor fake messages against forces

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Alarmed at misuse of social media to spread falsehoods about the Indian Army and its personnel, top military commanders led by Army Chief General Bipin Rawat have discussed the issue of setting up a dedicated cell that will identify, monitor and inspect fake and inflammatory messages against the Army.

The aim is to nail and expose those with malicious intent and bring them to book, sources told *The Tribune*.

The cell will work round the clock to counter any propaganda. The Army presently has a small (three-officer) social media team but that is not enough. The top Army commanders who are meeting in Delhi (October 9 to 15), have been apprised of the seriousness of the situation.

The Army believes “too much” of wrong information has been spread on the Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. The misuse of social media is part of asymmetric warfare (from across border) aimed at lowering the morale of the

## NAILING CULPRITS

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Army through rumours and falsehood. These messages exaggerate issues and tell half-truth.

A possible trigger was in June when fake and morphed videos showing “strong action” by the Army in Kashmir were circulated on WhatsApp.

Some of these videos were not even shot in India, but were passed off as new “policy” in Kashmir. Such fake videos showing “strong action” were seen as propaganda from Pakistan, which was eyeing to discredit the Indian Army during the then

ongoing session of the United Nations Human Right Council (UNHRC).

Videos of the Army bringing down houses, mishandling people and dragging terrorists were all fake. These videos are a soft and oblique way to spread a false narrative of human rights violations.

Last year, falsehood was spread saying “one rank, one pension” was only for officers and how the 7th CPC delayed all benefits to jawans, but not officers.

Then came two fake letters circulated listing emoluments of the 7th Central Pay Commission. One of these had the complete format of a government gazette. The Ministry of Defence had to intervene and deny having issued any such letter.

The Army was also alerted about a message on WhatsApp with phone numbers of leading TV channels exhorting jawans to share videos and audio recordings of any act of corruption or exploitation with media houses. Army men are not allowed to have media contact unless authorised in writing.