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Maharashtra Government Restricts Social Media Use by State Employees, Faces Criticism

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The Maharashtra government has issued a directive prohibiting its employees from criticising government policies or engaging in personal promotion on social media. The circular, dated July 28, mandates that state personnel maintain separate official and

personal accounts and refrain from using certain unspecified applications for work-related communication.

The notification outlines that the move is intended to uphold the rules governing the conduct of public servants, particularly regarding their public behaviour on digital platforms. It reiterates that any breach of the directive could lead to disciplinary action under existing service conduct regulations.

According to the directive, employees must avoid sharing or posting content online that could be interpreted as critical of the administration's decisions, leadership, or broader policy framework. While existing service rules already require government workers to maintain political neutrality, this order extends those obligations more clearly to online behaviour.

Supporters of the decision argue that it reinforces institutional discipline and maintains the non-partisan nature of the civil service. They contend that unauthorised or critical commentary by serving officials on public forums risks eroding administrative cohesion and could be misused for political messaging or misinformation.

However, the policy has attracted criticism from certain political figures. Opposition MP Pratibha Dhanorkar, representing Chandrapur, called the move "unconstitutional" and claimed it infringes on the right to freedom of expression. She alleged that restricting civil servants' speech undermines democratic engagement and discourages transparency within the public sector.

Legal analysts suggest that the directive must be examined in the context of Article 19 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech with reasonable restrictions. They note that government employees, while entitled to certain rights as citizens, are also subject to unique responsibilities, particularly concerning public communication and neutrality in governance.

The directive does not specify which applications are prohibited but instructs departments to enforce separation between personal and professional digital conduct. The move reflects growing concern among state authorities over the role of social media in shaping public narratives and influencing perceptions of government functioning.

As the directive gains national attention, it has sparked discussion over how far administrative control over employees' online expression should extend. The state government has not indicated any plans to withdraw or amend the order at this time