
Donald Trump Weighs Order To Investigate Google, Facebook: Report

23/09/2018



Washington: President Donald Trump is weighing an executive order that would open federal antitrust and criminal probes into Google, Facebook and other social media firms, US media said Saturday, though the White House promptly distanced itself from the reports.

Last month, Trump stepped up his attacks on big tech companies, warning them to be "careful," and slamming what he called "rigged" internet search results.

The US president had complained that Google searches for "Trump news" brought up mostly negative stories about him.

Google strongly rejected any bias claims.

The White House's draft executive order focuses on alleged "bias" at the companies.

"Executive departments and agencies with authorities that could be used to enhance competition among online platforms (agencies) shall... use those authorities to promote competition and ensure that no online platform exercises market power in a way that harms consumers, including through the exercise of bias," read a draft of the report circulated by US media.

"Not later than 30 days from the date of this order, agencies shall submit to the Director of the National Economic Council an initial list of (1) actions each agency can potentially take to protect competition among online platforms and address online platform bias."

The text also demands that federal agencies investigate any potential "violation of the antitrust laws" by an online platform.

However, The Washington Post cited three White House aides as saying they did not write the draft order and did not know its origins, while a senior official said the document existed but had yet to go through the formal process controlled by the staff secretary.

"Although the White House is concerned about the conduct of online platforms and their impact on society, this document is not the result of an official White House policymaking process," deputy White House spokeswoman Lindsey Waters was quoted as saying.

Google and other internet firms have long faced complaints about search results, which are based on algorithms that can take into account user browsing history, location and other factors.

But technology and media analysts say there is little evidence to suggest Google skews results for political reasons. And if they did, the president would have little recourse under the constitution's free speech protections.
