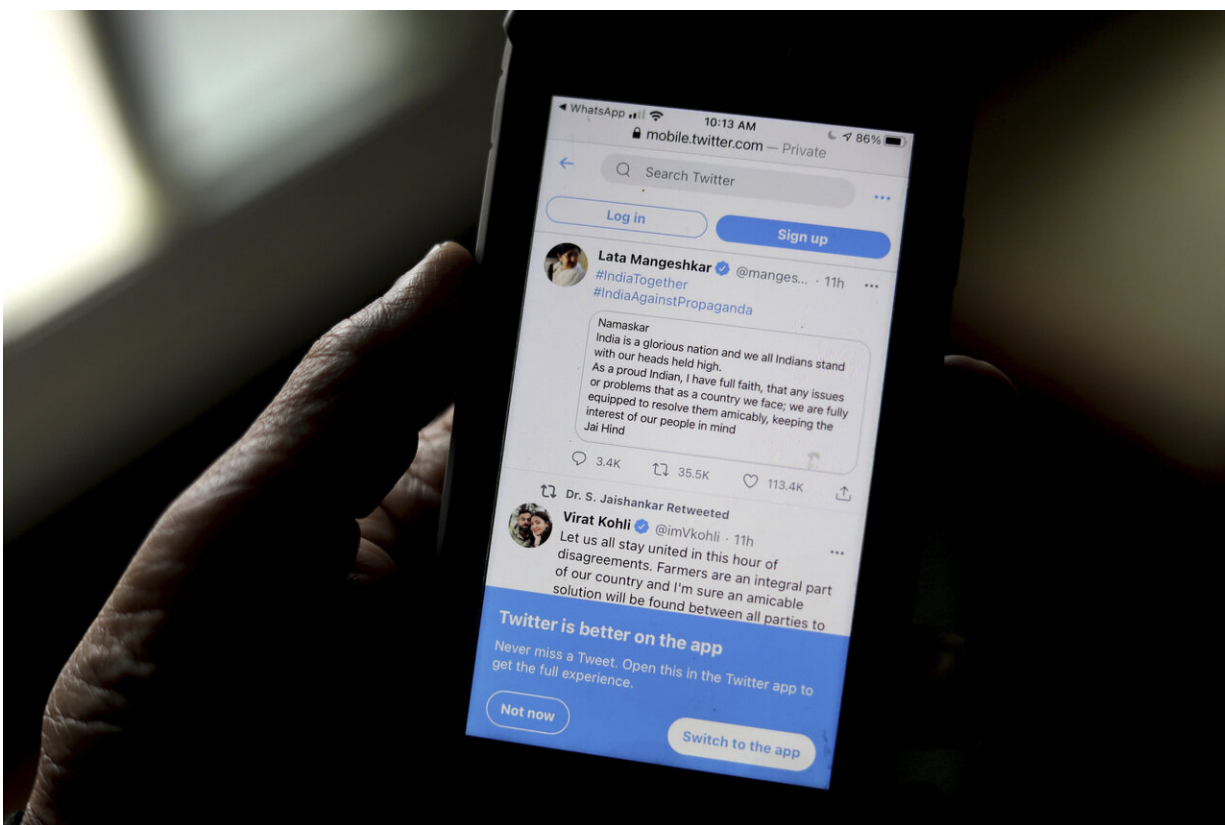


India's top court takes up social media content

February 12 2021, by Ashok Sharma



A man reads tweets by Indian celebrities, one of the many backing the Indian government, on his mobile in New Delhi, India, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2021. It took just one tweet from pop star Rihanna to anger the Indian government and supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party, after she tweeted about the farmer protests that have gripped India. Critics say the government has used the massive demonstrations to escalate a crackdown on free speech, detaining journalists and freezing Twitter accounts. Hundreds of Indian Twitter accounts, including those of news websites, activists and a farmers' union, were suspended

on Monday. (AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

India's top court on Friday sought the government and Twitter's response to a petition seeking a mechanism to check fake news, hate messages and what officials consider seditious and incendiary content on social media platforms.

The case highlights a standoff between the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and free speech advocates who criticize the ruling party for trying to silence opponents.

The government recently asked Twitter to block hundreds of accounts and posts that it says have been spreading misinformation and provocative content linked to farmers who have been protesting agricultural laws since November on the outskirts of New Delhi.

Ashwini Kumar Dubey, attorney for petitioner Vinit Goenka, told the court that there were hundreds of fake Twitter handles and Facebook accounts in the name of eminent people and dignitaries that were being used to tarnish the image of opponents and the Indian government.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule on the petition after getting responses from the government and Twitter.

The New Delhi Television news channel said the government has drawn up draft rules to regulate [social media](#), streaming and digital news content, which will include a code of ethics and a mechanism to report inappropriate content and ask for its removal. The proposed rules haven't been made public.

On Thursday, Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad

said in Parliament that Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn would have to follow the Indian Constitution. He warned the social media websites of "strict action" if they were "misused to spread [fake news](#) and fuel violence."

Twitter refused to fully comply with last week's [government](#) order to remove some accounts, including those of [news organizations](#), journalists, activists and politicians, citing its "principles of defending protected speech and freedom of expression."

Twitter has temporarily blocked some accounts but only within India.

"We will continue to advocate for the right of free expression on behalf of the people we serve. We are exploring options under Indian law—both for Twitter and for the accounts that have been impacted. We remain committed to safeguarding the health of the conversation occurring on Twitter, and strongly believe that the tweets should flow." Twitter said.

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