

Twitter censored tweets critical of India's handling of the pandemic at its government's request

Twitter has removed more than 50 tweets critical of the Indian government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, and did so at the request of the Indian government. First reported by Indian news site *MediaNama*, the Indian government sent Twitter an emergency order on Friday to censor 52 tweets, according to a disclosure notice on the Lumen database. The censored accounts include a sitting member of India's Parliament, two filmmakers, an actor, and a West Bengal state minister.

A Twitter spokesperson said in an email to *The Verge* that the company may make certain tweets unable to be viewed by people within India if the tweets violate local law. Twitter says it notified account holders before it withheld content to make them aware that the action was taken in response to a legal request from the government of India.

"When we receive a valid legal request, we review it under both the Twitter Rules and local law. If the content violates Twitter's Rules, the content will be removed from the service," according to the Twitter spokesperson. "If it is determined to be illegal in a particular jurisdiction, but not in violation of the Twitter Rules, we may withhold access to the content in India only. In all cases, we notify the account holder directly so they're aware that we've received a legal order pertaining to the account."

It isn't the first time that Twitter has bowed to pressure

from the Indian government. During protests by farmers in February, the company permanently blocked more than 500 accounts and removed others from being visible within India. The Indian government issued a notice of noncompliance to the company, the *New York Times* reported at the time, which could have meant jail time for Twitter's employees in India if the company had refused. Among the accounts suspended in February was Indian news magazine *The Caravan* (which was later reinstated):

Indian law restricts the publication of material that the government considers defamatory, or which could incite violence. According to the Lumen notice, one of the tweets that was censored in India (but which is still visible outside the country) was this one from West Bengal state minister Moloy Ghatak, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of downplaying the seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic.

"India will never forgive PM @narendramodi for underplaying the corona situation in the country and letting so many people die due to mismanagement. At a time when India is going through a health crisis, PM chose to export millions of vaccine to other nations," the tweet reads.

India is in the midst of a second wave of COVID-19 cases, which has made ventilators, medicine, and oxygen scarce. According to the Johns Hopkins coronavirus resource center, India reported 346,786 new cases of the coronavirus on Friday, a new record high, and 2,624 deaths, also a new record. Less than 1.5 percent of the country's population has been fully vaccinated.

<https://www.theverge.com/2021/4/24/22400976/twitter-removed-tweets-critical-india-censor-coronavirus>