

Twitter steps up war with India

Says can't comply with all of govt's requests on content removal

REUTERS, New Delhi

US social media giant Twitter locked horns with India yesterday saying a government order to remove some accounts was not consistent with Indian law while politicians urged followers to switch to rival local app Koo.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has ordered Twitter to remove more than 1,100 accounts and posts which it says are spreading misinformation about widespread protests by farmers against new agricultural laws.

In a blog post yesterday, Twitter said it did not fully comply with some requests as it believed they were not in line with Indian law.

"In keeping with our principles of defending protected speech and freedom of expression, we have not taken any action on accounts that consist of news media entities, journalists, activists, and politicians," it said.

The move puts the company and its executives at the centre of a political firestorm. The government has threatened legal action which could result in fines or imprisonment for Twitter officials responsible for implementing government directives.

It also comes after Twitter's top lobbyist in India, Mahima Kaul, resigned while the company scrambles to contain a growing public relations crisis.

Public opinion in one of Twitter's key markets is split. Some lawyers say Twitter must comply or challenge the order in court while activists blame the government for using legal provisions to curb free speech.

For Twitter, the stakes are high in a country of 1.3 billion where it has millions of users and is ardently used by Modi, his cabinet ministers and other leaders to communicate with the public. Twitter does not publish the number of Indian users.



General view of the place where members of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) conduct a rescue operation, after a part of a glacier broke away, in Tapovan in the northern state of Uttarakhand, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Two killed as blasts rock Afghan capital

AFP, Kabul

At least two people, including a local police chief, were killed after multiple bomb blasts rocked the Afghan capital early yesterday, officials said.

The latest violence in Kabul follows a pattern of attacks during morning rush-hour traffic targeting prominent Afghans including politicians, journalists, activists and judges.

In a separate blast targeting a vehicle in the same district wounded four people, officials said.

A third blast targeted a police vehicle in Paghman district on the outskirts of Kabul. Authorities did not say if the blasts were caused by so-called "sticky bombs" attached to the vehicles, or roadside improvised explosive devices.

Wednesday's blasts came a day after militants shot dead four government employees in an ambush in the capital. No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attacks.

GLACIER DISASTER IN INDIA

Anger as hopes fade for missing

AFP

Dozens of angry and desperate relatives of about 30 people trapped in a tunnel since a glacier disaster in India jostled with police yesterday as hopes faded that they would be found alive.

More than 170 people were still missing after a barrage of water and debris hurtled with terrifying speed and power down a valley on Sunday morning, sweeping away bridges and roads and hitting two hydroelectric plants. Thirty-two bodies have been found so far, officials said yesterday. It may take days for more bodies to be recovered under the tonnes of rocks and other debris and the thick blanket of grey mud.

The main focus of the massive rescue operation, under way day and night since Sunday, is a tunnel near a severely damaged hydroelectric plant that was under construction at

Tapovan in Uttarakhand state.

Workers there have been battling their way through hundreds of tonnes of sludge, boulders and other obstacles to try and reach between 25 and 35 people who rescuers hope are still alive in air pockets.

"As time passes, the chances of finding them are reducing. But miracles do happen," Piyooch Rautela, a senior state disaster relief official told AFP.

Outside there were medical teams on standby with oxygen cylinders and stretchers, as well as increasingly desperate and enraged relatives.

There have been no signs that their loved ones are still alive.

"This entire rescue operation is a joke," Sanjay Pant, whose 24-year-old electrical engineer brother Abhishek was in the tunnel, told AFP.

"Authorities are not showing any urgency to rescue those trapped. Another day and we will have to give

up hope," said Santosh whose brother-in-law Sanjay was also in the tunnel.

"They cannot survive too long in the tunnel even if they are alive now. There is no air, water or food inside and it is freezing cold inside the tunnel. Only God can save them."

Twenty-five of the bodies recovered so far were yet to be identified. Many of the victims are poor workers from different parts of India.

The cause of the disaster is thought to have been a chunk of glacier breaking off.

Glaciers have been melting rapidly in the Himalayan region because of global warming, and experts predict similar catastrophes in the future.

Building activity for dams, the dredging of riverbeds for sand and the clearing of forests for new roads -- some to beef up defence on the Chinese border, others for Hindu pilgrims -- are other factors.

Don't rely on US Covid intel

Says WHO expert; curbs tightened in Europe; J&J CEO says annual shots may be needed for next several years

AGENCIES

A WHO expert sent to China to probe the coronavirus hit out at US intelligence on Covid-19 as his team headed home with few answers about the origin of a pandemic that was forcing more clampdowns in some of the hardest-hit parts of the world.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was set to seek an extension of strict virus curbs, as the European Commission chief prepared to defend the stumbling vaccination rollout in the continent -- which accounts for a third of the 2.3 million Covid-19 deaths worldwide.

The coronavirus has infected close to 107 million people, devastating the global economy, and questions over the handling of the initial outbreak in central China sparked an intense diplomatic row between Washington and Beijing.

The WHO mission to the ground zero city of Wuhan wrapped up Tuesday without any concrete answers, with Washington again expressing scepticism about China's transparency and cooperation.

But WHO team member Peter Daszak tweeted: "Please don't rely too much on US intel: increasingly disengaged under Trump & frankly wrong on many aspects."

China had repeatedly delayed the

WHO trip, and bristled at accusations of a lack of transparency. Beijing warned Washington not to "politicise" the mission after the White House demanded a "robust" probe.

The WHO team did not identify which animal transferred the coronavirus to humans, but said there was no indication it was circulating in



Wuhan before December 2019, when the first official cases were recorded. WHO expert Peter Ben Embarek also scotched the controversial theory that the virus may have leaked from a lab in Wuhan.

The team also didn't rule out the possibility that he virus could have originated outside of China.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was due to explain the EU's vaccine strategy to the European Parliament in Brussels on Wednesday, with the bloc's leadership under growing pressure.

A stricter lockdown will be imposed in Greece from today -- in particular in the Athens region.

Immunisation efforts are being ramped in other parts of the world with a number of vaccines.

Peru on Tuesday began administering shots developed by China's Sinopharm, while Argentina approved the Indian-made version of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

South Korea yesterday also authorised the AstraZeneca shot for people aged 18 and above, including over-65s. A number of European countries have not authorised the AstraZeneca vaccine for the elderly -- considered the demographic most vulnerable to Covid-19.

Meanwhile, Johnson & Johnson Chief Executive Officer Alex Gorsky told CNBC on Tuesday that people may need to get vaccinated against Covid-19 annually over the next several years, like seasonal flu shots.

"Unfortunately, as (the virus) spreads it can also mutate," he said in an interview.

"Every time it mutates, it's almost like another click of the dial so to speak where we can see another variant, another mutation that can have an impact on its ability to fend off antibodies or to have a different kind of response not only to a therapeutic but also to a vaccine," he added.

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Four detained under Thai lese majeste

AFP, Bangkok

A Thai court has denied bail to four prominent democracy activists after they were indicted for violating the kingdom's royal defamation law -- the first formal charges laid against the leaders of a movement calling for reforms to the monarchy.

Demonstrations in Bangkok last year against the government of former army chief Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha drew tens of thousands at their peak, with many calling for changes to the country's once unassailable royal family.

Criticism of the monarchy is taboo due to harsh lese majeste laws that carry penalties of up to 15 years in jail per charge.

Since the movement kicked off in July, more than 50 protesters have been hit with the charge, but authorities have allowed all to be bailed.

But that changed Tuesday when four major faces of the movement were indicted at Bangkok's Criminal Court and were denied bail. The four were also indicted for sedition -- which carries a maximum penalty of seven years in jail -- as well as violating anti-gathering rules and other laws.

Among them is student activist Parit Chiwarak, also known as Penguin, and human rights lawyer Anon Numpu -- arguably the two most well-known faces of the movement.

১০০ তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকী

উপলক্ষে

The Daily Star

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