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DELHI UNION OF JOURNALISTS (Regd.)

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Press Release

Hindustan ko bolne do, says DUJ

The Delhi Union of Journalists expresses alarm at the growing misuse of the Information Technology Rules, 2021 to shut down social media accounts and platforms. In a blatant move the Information & Broadcasting Ministry has ordered YouTube to take down the channel Bolta Hindustan on April 4, 2024 under Rule 15(2).

The Rule 15(2) entitles the Ministry to direct social media platforms to block content. Google, which owns YouTube, informed Bolta Hindustan that the channel was being removed at the behest of the Ministry but provided no reasons for the action.

Transparency is of the essence in a democracy. The Ministry as well as Google must immediately provide the grounds for the action against Bolta Hindustan. In law it is a basic principle that an accused person or entity must be provided the full reasons for any charges against them.

Two months ago Bolta Hindustan's Instagram account had been arbitrarily deleted. The Delhi Union of Journalists demands that these accounts be restored.

We note that such shutdowns of social media channels and handles are becoming frequent. On February 27, 2024 the Facebook account of Article19-India had been restricted. On November 27, 2023 YouTube abruptly terminated the channel Media Star World but restored it after protests. In August 2023 the social media handles of Gaon Savera, a news website that reports on rural India, were blocked under instruction from the government. Journalist Mandeep Punia said the action to block his Facebook and X accounts was probably to stop his extensive coverage of the farmers' agitation. Similarly the website and social media accounts of The Kashmir Walla were withheld in India in August 2023. There are several other instances that smack of arbitrariness.

Meanwhile TV Today has challenged the power of intermediaries to remove a platform user's access to an account, after the Instagram account of Harper's Bazaar India was blocked on a third party copyright complaint.

It is evident that the IT Rules, 2021 infringe both citizens' and organisations' basic right of free expression.

The Delhi Union of Journalists also regrets that other forms of intimidation are being used against journalists e.g. BJP leader and senior advocate Gaurav Bhatia has filed on April 5, 2024 a defamation suit in the Delhi High Court against YouTubers Navin Kumar of Article-19, Neelu Vyas of News Launcher, Professor Akhil Swamy, BBI News and comedian Rajeev Nigam. The others who Bhatia is suing include some eight X (Twitter) handles, those of Sandeep Singh, Vijay Yadav, Netaflix, Sunita Jadhav, parody account of actor Pankaj Tripathi, Dawood Nadaf, Drkhatra and Virus Baba India Wala.

Bhatia was allegedly roughed up by lawyers at Karkardooma court in Delhi on March 20, 2024 and he demands that all the reports and commentary on the incident be taken down as they are defamatory and damaging to his reputation.

We urge greater tolerance of views and opinions of all shades as long as they do not constitute hate speech or incite violence.

Sd/-

Sujata Madhok

President

Sd/-

S.K.Pande

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General Secretary