

Meta 'mistakenly' blocked CJP spokesperson's WhatsApp account amid content-blocking allegations.



Synopsis

CJP founder says party's Instagram is withheld in India; users claim content on student protest getting shadow-banned

New Delhi: **Meta**'s automated systems "mistakenly" suspended the WhatsApp account of Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) spokesperson Saurav Das, people aware of the matter said Wednesday, even as the **CJP** accused the social media company of blocking its handle and taking down posts related to its ongoing protest.

Das' account has since been restored, they told ET on Wednesday, adding that Meta didn't receive any government directive to block the account.

Later in the day, CJP founder **Abhijeet Dipke** wrote on X that the party's official Instagram account had been withheld in India. Instagram displayed a notice saying the account was unavailable in India in compliance with a legal request to restrict the content.

Officials said the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has received takedown requests for some content linked to the protests, as the information was deemed unlawful. However, it hasn't received or processed any takedown orders for senior figures associated with the protests, they said.

Meta did not respond to ET's request for comment.

Meanwhile, some social media users and content creators complained that photos and videos from the CJP-led student protest in Delhi were getting shadow-banned on Instagram without an explanation or alert from Meta.

"Certain stories are now restricted and display the message 'sensitive content', even when there is nothing sensitive in them. These include clips from television broadcasts and similar content," **Internet Freedom Foundation** founder and lawyer Apar Gupta told ET.

Multiple users said Meta has marked content from the CJP and politician Anish Gawande's posts as 'sensitive content'.

"While this is a limited form of transparency, the fact that a restriction is being placed on content, the application of the content standard itself is not disclosed. We are urging Meta to disclose why this is being done," Gupta said.

Legal and policy experts flagged a steady rise in government requests to remove or block online content, saying it has intensified concerns over how India's content-blocking powers are being exercised. Experts told ET that while the legal threshold under Section 69A remains unchanged, authorities are increasingly using a combination of Section 69A, Section 79 of the IT Act and the IT Rules to regulate online content, with platforms facing growing pressure to comply.

Under Section 69A, the government can issue takedown orders to protect national security, public order and the sovereignty of India. Section 79 offers safe harbour protection to intermediaries like social media platforms; however, they lose this immunity if they fail to remove content upon receiving 'actual knowledge' of its unlawful nature.

"If you look at the transparency reports published by major platforms, the overall trend is fairly clear. Government requests for content removal and access restrictions have increased over the years, suggesting a much more active use of content regulation than we saw a few years ago," said Nikhil Narendran, partner at law firm Trilegal.

Experts said while the legal threshold under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act has not changed, the manner in which the provision is being used has evolved. "What appears to have changed is the breadth and frequency with which these grounds, particularly public order, are being invoked," said Ankit Sahni, partner at Ajay Sahni & Associates.

Sahni said Section 69A was conceived as an exceptional power requiring a direct and reasoned connection between online content and one of the statutory grounds for blocking. “In practice, however, blocking directions increasingly appear to extend to individual posts, parody accounts, journalistic content and criticism connected with protests or political events,” he said.

Criticism of the government, reporting on protests and content that genuinely threatens public order are legally distinct categories and “should not be collapsed merely because the content is politically sensitive or capable of becoming viral”, he said.

Narendran also agreed the provision is increasingly being used in situations beyond what was originally contemplated when it was enacted, raising concerns that the government is stretching the scope of its powers under the IT Act.

Experts also pointed out that while Section 69A remains the principal legal provision for blocking content, authorities are increasingly relying on Section 79 of the IT Act and the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules to seek content removals.

“Section 69A remains the government’s principal blocking power, but it now operates alongside a broader set of legal and administrative mechanisms,” said Kazim Rizvi, founding director of The Dialogue, pointing to increasing use of Section 79 notices, court orders and other legal directions. “Platforms now operate within a substantially more demanding compliance environment,” Rizvi said, adding that shorter compliance timelines and the risk of losing safe harbour protections leave companies with little time for legal review before acting on government notices.