

Democracy withheld? Satirical X handles critical of govt blocked in India

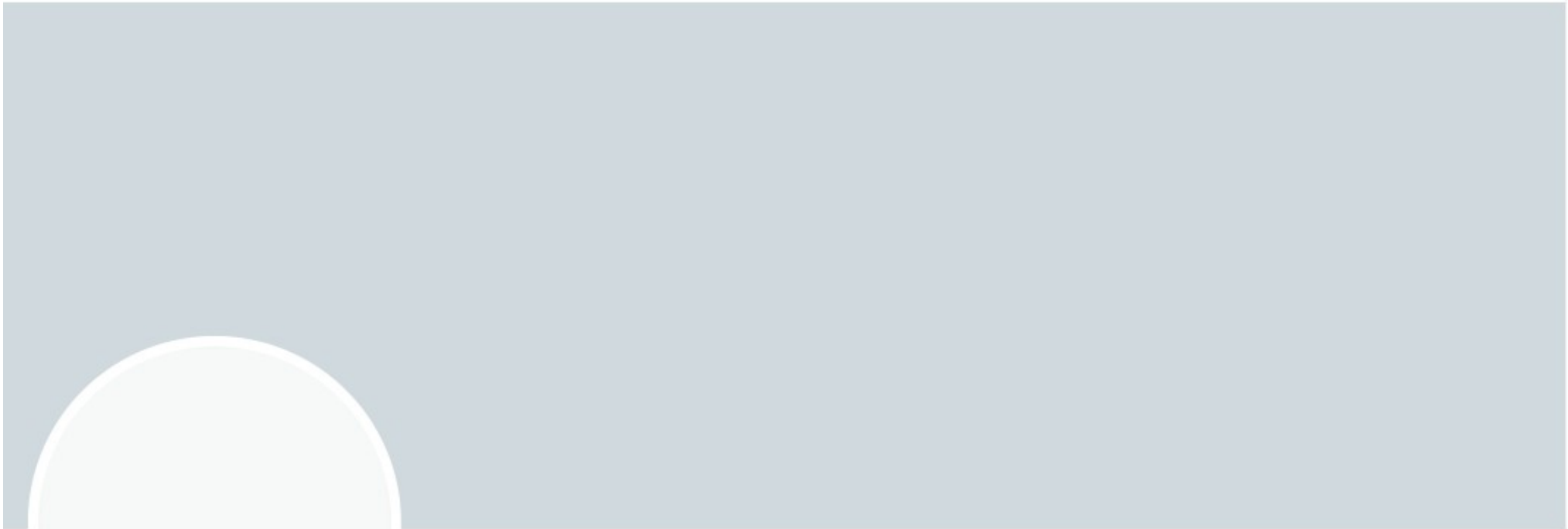
Oishani Bhattacharya

On March 18, several X accounts — many of which frequently posted satirical or parody content critical of the BJP government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi — were withheld in India. The list includes popular parody handles such as @Nehr_who, @DrNimoYadav, @indian_armada and @DuckKiBaat, along with accounts of independent journalists and activists like Sandeep Singh (@ActivistSandeep), Manish RJ (@mrjethwani_) and Dr Ranjan (@Doc_RGM).

Attempting to access these profiles now displays a message stating that the account “has been withheld in India in response to a legal demand.” Below are a few instances:



Profile



@DrNimoYadav

Account Withheld

[@DrNimoYadav](#) has been withheld in IN in response to a legal demand. [Learn more.](#)

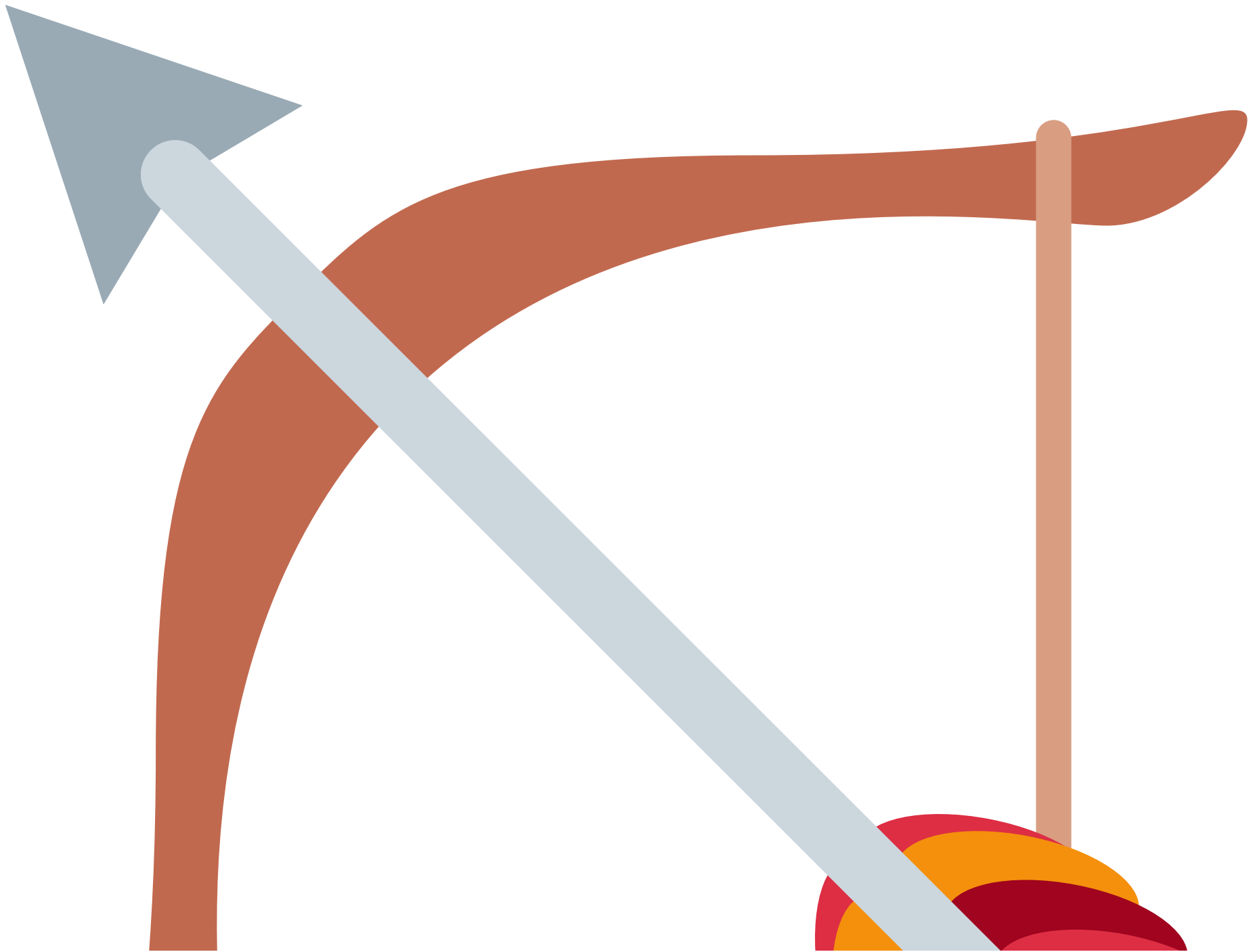
The suspensions come at a time when the ongoing US–Israel–Iran conflict is dominating public discourse, alongside reports of possible impacts on India, including over the supply of cooking gas (LPG), emerging from several parts of the country. While the specific grounds for withholding these accounts have not been disclosed, many of the affected users had been actively commenting on the Union government’s position on the current conflict, the Israel– Hamas war, and issues of communal polarization in India.

Another well-known parody account, [@RoflGandhi_](#), said it received a notice from X stating that the Rajasthan Police had flagged one of its posts for violating Indian law. The post featured an AI-generated image of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un with a white beard, dressed in a kurta and a saffron scarf.

I have been informed that [@PoliceRajasthan](#) thinks that I have violated the ‘Indian Law’ by posting an AI Generated pic of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un. They seem to be concerned about a dictator’s image.

Putting it here, so that you all know why I disappeared suddenly. pic.twitter.com/CgolZFPxpT

— Rofl Gandhi 2.0





Commentary (@RoflGandhi_) [March 20, 2026](#)

On March 19, the Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), a digital rights advocacy organisation, issued a statement expressing concern over the suspension of several anti-establishment X accounts. It noted, “The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) is concerned by continuing reports of posts and accounts being withheld in India on Facebook, X and Instagram, including satire and criticism of the government. Recent reporting shows users receiving generic ‘withheld in India’ notices or emails under Section 69A from social media platforms, with little or no explanation, while independent reporting has documented takedowns affecting speech that appears political, satirical, or critical rather than clearly unlawful.”

The organisation further urged the Union government to “halt any move to decentralise Section 69A blocking powers further, publish blocking orders only as per the letter and spirit of the Shreya Singhal judgement, and ensure timely notice to affected users with clear grounds and avenues for remedy.”

IFF statement against the Alarming Escalation of Social Media Censorship and Proposed Expansion of Takedown Powers

New Delhi, March 19, 2026

The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) is concerned by continuing reports of posts and accounts being withheld in India on Facebook, X and...

— Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) (@internetfreedom) [March 19, 2026](#)

Several opposition leaders have criticised what they describe as the abrupt suspension of X accounts critical of the BJP government.

Congress’s social media and digital platforms chairperson, Supriya Shrinata, took to X on March 19 to flag the issue, tagging several of the accounts that have been withheld in India.

From content being randomly blocked and deleted, now social media accounts are being withheld in India [@Nher_who](#) [@DrNimoYadav](#) [@ActivistSandeep](#) [@mrjethwani](#) [@indian_armada](#) [@Doc_RGM](#) [@DuckKiBaat](#)

are the latest among several others to be withheld

This is unacceptable

Coward PM

— Supriya Shrinete (@SupriyaShrinete) [March 19, 2026](#)

Alt News reached out to retired Prasar Bharati CEO and former MP Jawhar Sircar. He said this was typically how a government acted when it was in decline and was on the way out. Sircar was also a member of Parliamentary Standing Committee on IT & Telecom.

“Between July and December of 2023, they introduced a series of amendments, this includes amendments in the Cinematograph Act, Telecom Act, Data Protection Act, and Information Technology Act. In the case of the Cinematograph Act, they claimed that the changes were being brought forth to deal with piracy, but in reality, it is for censorship. Similarly, the Data Protection Act, which should have actually provided protection to consumers from big tech, if turned out to be hardly protecting the users; instead, it has become a big laathi that the government is holding by controlling RTI through a mischievous clause,” Sircar said.

“The Telecom Act was rushed through Parliament in barely two hours. 146 Opposition MPs had been suspended, and we all walked out in protest. That is when the government passed the act without any debate. These are dangerous instruments that have been introduced one after another. Previously, only the IT Act was used to tighten the screws from all sides on social media platforms to take down material critical of the government and the government went after specific dissenters. Now, on panic mode, government has ramped up this weapon as well,” added Sircar, who was the Union culture secretary from 2008 to 2012. He also held part-time charge of I&B ministry twice.

Sircar added, “In fact, it is a propitious sign as this shows a government is totally desperate. This is how a government in decline acts.”

We also spoke to the individual who runs the X handle @DrNimoYadav. “My account has been under the radar of the BJP IT cell for a long time, and that’s why this time they went for it. I am taking legal action, I am filing a writ petition in the court today,” they told Alt News.

Pranesh Prakash, co-founder of the Centre for Internet and Society and a policy researcher, compiled a list of X accounts which had been blocked at the request of the Indian government. The list included accounts which haven’t been accessible from an Indian IP address since May 5, 2025 and included 316 usernames. It can be accessed [here](#).

When Power Fears Humour

Satire and humour have long been integral to political discourse, offering a way to question authority, puncture power, and make complex realities legible to a wider public. From Lysistrata, where Aristophanes used comedy to critique war and statecraft, to Gulliver’s Travels by Jonathan Swift, satire has thrived as a tool of dissent disguised as wit. In the 20th Century, works like Animal Farm by George Orwell continued the tradition, exposing political hypocrisy through allegory rather than direct polemic.

Satire and humour allow citizens to engage with power asymmetries, often saying what cannot be said plainly. Political cartoons, parody accounts, and satirical commentary operate in this space. And political satire often depends on exaggeration, irony, and even provocation, something democracies

have historically accommodated, since the freedom to mock is intertwined with the freedom to dissent.

It is an irony of sorts that when a government seeks to clamp down on satire — whether through censorship, legal action, or intimidation — it only recognizes its power to challenge authority and shape public opinion.

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