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ALL INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE

K.C. Venugopal.
General Secretary

24, AKBAR ROAD,
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August 18, 2020

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg

Chairman & CEO, Facebook Inc.

Menlo Park, California, USA 94025

Ref: Wall Street Journal article titled “Facebook’s Hate-Speech Rules Collide With Indian Politics” dated August 14, 2020.

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

Hope you and your family are keeping well amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

This communication is on behalf of India’s principal opposition political party, the Indian National Congress.

We are sure you would have read the front-page story in the Wall Street Journal on August 14, 2020 about Facebook India’s blatant biases and dubious practices in content regulation. There are clear charges in the article against the leadership of Facebook India of favouring one political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), consistently and being complicit in propagating hate speech by political leaders belonging to the BJP.

Specifically, the article states “***Ms. Das*** (of Facebook India) ***has provided the BJP with favorable treatment on election-related issues***”.

This is a damning and serious allegation of Facebook India’s interference in India’s electoral democracy. Further, the article quotes a Facebook Inc. spokesman, Mr. Andy Stone, acknowledging the implicit biases of Facebook India’s leadership. It also points out that Facebook India deleted the hate speech posts after investigative inquiries by the Wall Street Journal, which, if true, is a clear admission of guilt.



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As India's oldest political party that fought for the nation's freedom and established India's electoral democracy through universal adult franchise, it is deeply disturbing to note that your company may be a willing participant in thwarting the very rights and values that our founding leaders sacrificed their lives for.

As you are well aware, India is one of the biggest markets in terms of users for Facebook and Whatsapp. Therefore, the expectations of social and moral responsibility of Facebook are even higher in nations such as ours.

While we were deeply disappointed to read the Wall Street Journal article, we must acknowledge that it was not a surprise revelation. The Congress party has repeatedly raised the issue of bias with many executives of Facebook and Whatsapp. In one of such meetings, I also participated and raised multiple concerns to mostly deaf ears. To add, other political parties have also raised this issue in India's Parliament. A very detailed investigative story on Facebook's India operations was carried out in November 2018 by another news media organisation that detailed several other individuals in Facebook India's leadership team and their close proximity to the ruling establishment, a copy of which is attached to this letter.

We believe it is still not too late to course correct and make amends. The starting point for a remedial action is a thorough and impartial investigation and inquiry into the Facebook India operations and practices. Permit us to humbly suggest the following course of action:

1. Set up a high-level inquiry by Facebook Headquarters into the Facebook India leadership team and their operations and submit a report to the board of Facebook Inc. within a reasonable period of time such as one/two months. This report should also be made public.
2. Publish and make transparent all instances of hate speech posts since 2014 that were allowed on the platform. The WSJ article mentions hate speech of at least three other politicians that were wilfully permitted by Facebook India. On a closer perusal, you will find thousands of such insidious posts.



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3. Until the completion of the internal investigation and submission of the report, please consider to lead Facebook India operations by a new team so as to not influence the investigation.

Separately, the Congress party has also demanded Parliamentary Committee Probe in India to be initiated to probe this very serious issue of Facebook's interference in the world's largest electoral democracy. We must also point out that the Congress party is joined by other leading political parties in expressing this apprehension and fear over Facebook's purported role in manipulating India's electoral democracy.

You will appreciate that this is a matter of grave concern to our nation and to the world. We sincerely hope that you will give this issue the utmost priority for resolution and win back the trust and confidence of the 400 million Indians that use Facebook and Whatsapp.

Thank You

K.C. Venugopal

General Secretary, Organisation

Indian National Congress