

AUSTRALIA TO TOUGHEN LAWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. AP Rod McGuirk

Australia pledged on Saturday to introduce new laws that could see social media executives jailed and tech giants fined billions for failing to remove extremist material from their platforms.

The tough new legislation will be brought to Parliament next week as Canberra pushes for social media companies to prevent their platforms from being “weaponised” by terrorists in the wake of the Christchurch mosque attacks.

Facebook said it “quickly” removed a staggering 1.5 million videos of the white supremacist massacre livestreamed on the social media platform.

A 17-minute video of the March 15 rampage that claimed the lives of 50 people was widely available online and experts said it was easily retrievable several hours after the attack. “Big social media companies have a responsibility to take every possible action to ensure their technology products are not exploited by murderous terrorists,” Prime Minister Scott Morrison said in a statement.

Mr. Morrison, who met with a number of tech firms on Tuesday said Australia would encourage other G20 nations to hold social media firms to account. Attorney-General Christian Porter said the new laws would make it a criminal offence for platforms not to “expeditiously” take down “abhorrent violent material” like terror attacks, murder or rape. Executives could face up to three years in prison for failing to do so, he added, while social media platforms would face fines of up to 10% of their annual turnover.

“Mainstream media that broadcast such material would be putting their licence at risk and there is no reason why social media platforms should be treated any differently,” Mr. Porter said. The government was so far “underwhelmed” by the response from tech giants at their Tuesday meeting with Mr. Morrison, Communications Minister Mitch Fifield told reporters Saturday.

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