

APPROPRIATE STRATEGY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA BANNING MORE CHINA APPS INCLUDING PUBG

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: E-governance - applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential incl. Aadhaar & Digital power

The [blocking of a hundred more Chinese mobile applications](#) suggests that the Indian government, not for the first time in recent months, wants to make it amply clear that it will not shy away from leveraging its position as a massive market for technology in dealing with potentially dangerous geopolitical issues. Since June, when border tensions between India and China turned ugly, the government has till now stepped in thrice to block many Chinese applications in one go. In the latest such decision, on Wednesday, it blocked 118 apps, including the widely popular gaming app, PUBG, as well as WeChat Work and Baidu, owing to these being “prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of State and public order”. Over 200 Chinese apps, which were accessed by millions of Indian users, have been blocked in all till date. The decision has been taken based on several complaints, a press release said, of these apps “stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users’ data in an unauthorized manner to servers which have locations outside India”. It could be argued that loss of access to the Indian market will sharply affect the ambitions of the Internet giants emerging from China, but it remains to be seen if this tech-side intervention is effective as a counter in a geopolitical fight. Also, how far can India go to keep the Chinese players, who are well entrenched in the global tech supply chain, off the Indian market without prejudicing its own growth?

It is difficult to argue against decisions that are taken on the plank of national security, especially one arrived at by invoking the government’s power under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, a section upheld by the courts previously. But it would be well argued that the Indian approach should have followed due process, where the focus was on ensuring compliance with the law. Instead, the Indian response to complaints has been to straight away block these apps en masse. Meanwhile, millions of Indians who were engaging with these platforms, some gainfully, have to scramble for alternatives. To add to this, the [data protection law](#), a dire need in this age, is not yet there. All this does not bode well for a country with aspirations of global leadership of tech, an industry which thrives on global networks and rules. Ironically, China, which for years has unleashed widespread censorship of information and kept apps from outside off its Internet, has found a rare chance to take the moral high ground. It has [criticised India's move](#), accusing it of “abusing the concept of national security”. The last thing India needs is to be compared with China as far as its Internet regulation goes. It certainly needs a more considered approach to tech regulation.

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