The Twitter Deal

What is the issue?

Elon Musk reached an agreement to buy Twitter for roughly 44 billion dollar, promising a privatization to promote free speech.

What is the deal about?

- In the past several years, the billionaire Elon Musk often questioned Twitter for censoring some voices and accused Twitter's terms and guidelines for tweeting information related to coronavirus.
- Elon Musk had said that he wanted to buy Twitter outright, taking it private to restore its commitment to free speech.
- Earlier this month, Musk purchased a 9.2% stake in Twitter.
- The company's board has resisted this and deployed the "poison pill" mechanism.
- And now, Elon Musk has finally bought 100% stake in Twitter for approximately 44 billion dollar, around 54.20 dollar per share, and all of it in cash.

What changes are expected?

- **Free speech**- Free speech is essential to a functioning democracy.
- The right to free speech is believed to be the first thing Musk would solve as the owner of Twitter.
- **Edit option**- Earlier this month, the Twitter said that it will test the edit option with Twitter Blue subscribers first, followed by a stable release.
- Musk could help in the early release of the edit button.
- **Spam accounts**- In 2020, Musk's account was among high-profile Twitter accounts that were hacked to push a bitcoin scam.
- Musk is expected to remove spam accounts or spambots, which as per him is Twitter's most annoying thing.

What are India's "reasonable restrictions" on free speech?

- **Article 19(1)(a)-** It gives all citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression.
- By the Constitution (First Amendment) Act, 1951, "reasonable restrictions" were placed on the fundamental right to free speech under certain conditions.
- The reasonable restrictions can be imposed
    - in the interests of the security of the State
    - friendly relations with foreign States
    - public order
    - decency or morality
    - in relation to contempt of court
    - defamation or incitement to an offence
- **Section 69(A) of the IT Act, 2000**- As per the act, the Ministry of Electronics and

Information Technology (MeitY) can ask any social media intermediary to take down content that violates the law and Constitution of India.
- It gives the ministry the power to issue emergency orders which can be challenged in a court of law only after the intermediary has done as requested by the ministry.
- Non-compliance can result in a jail term.
- **The IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**- It mandates due diligence by intermediaries with regard to content and requires them to appoint a resident chief compliance officer.

What are the implications for Musk's maximalist ideas on free speech?

- **Free speech**- The free speech is understood differently by people belonging to different political ideologies.
- **Open-source model**- Musk has said that Twitter's algorithm should be based on an open-source model, so that users will have insight on which tweets are promoted and which are hidden on users' timelines.
- Making such a change in Twitter's software would lay bare the role that computer programmes play in policing content posted on the platform.
- Conservatives in the West have repeatedly complained that Twitter's algorithm is biased against them.
- **Defeating bots**- Musk's idea of defeating bots and providing every human-operated Twitter account with a verification badge may also prove to be a difficult task.
- The proof of identity that would be required for his proposal to verify all users can be copied or faked and defeating bots could consume a lot of resources.

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