

Internet blockade in Pakistan continues

May 21 2010, By CHRIS BRUMMITT , Associated Press Writer



Pakistani women participate in a rally against a Facebook page, in Islamabad, Pakistan, Thursday, May 20, 2010. Pakistan government ordered Internet service providers to block the social networking site amid anger over a page that encourages users to post images of Islam's Prophet Muhammad. (AP Photo/B.K.Bangash)

(AP) -- Pakistan acknowledged the "suffering" caused by its bans on Facebook and YouTube, but said it would only consider restoring the websites if they take down pages considered offensive to Islam, the information technology ministry said Friday.

The government has asked both sites to block the offending pages and was expecting a reply soon, Najibullah Malik, the secretary at the ministry said. Facebook has said that may be a solution, but did not specify if it - or the Pakistani government - should restrict the content.

Other sites have also been affected in the country as officials scramble

to block content related to a Facebook page called "Everybody Draw Mohammed Day!" which encourages users to post images of Islam's [Prophet Muhammad](#), purportedly in support of [freedom of speech](#).

Most Muslims regard depictions of the prophet, even favorable ones, as blasphemous.

Wikipedia's English-language site and the Flickr photo-sharing site were also sporadically unavailable Friday.

Malik said the government had no option but to shut down Facebook on Wednesday after a court order to do so.

"We know some people are suffering because of this blockade, but we have to obey the court order in letter and spirit," Malik said.

It was not the first time depictions of the prophet have angered Muslims. In 2005, cartoons of Muhammad appeared in a Danish newspaper, sparking protests and riots from Muslims around the world, including in Pakistan, where the protests turned violent.

There have been several rallies against Facebook in recent days.

Others - mostly members of the more secular, educated elite - accused the government of blocking freedom of expression and hurting small businesses that use Facebook for marketing. Many questioned need for the entire [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) sites to be blocked, instead of individual pages.

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