

Pakistani court orders gov't to block Facebook

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Pakistani students hold a rally against Facebook page "Everybody Draw Mohammed Day!" in Islamabad, Pakistan on Wednesday, May 19, 2010. A Pakistani court ordered the government to block the popular social networking website Facebook temporarily because of a controversial page that encourages users to submit images of Islam's Prophet Muhammad, a senior legal official said. (AP Photo/Anjum Naveed)

(AP) -- A Pakistani court ordered the government Wednesday to block Facebook because of a page that encourages users to post images of Islam's Prophet Muhammad, a senior legal official said.

The page on the social networking site has generated criticism in Pakistan and elsewhere because Islam prohibits any images of the prophet. A series of cartoons of the prophet published in a Danish newspaper in 2005 sparked violent protests and death threats against the cartoonists.

The Facebook page "Everybody Draw Mohammed Day!" encourages users to post images of the prophet on May 20 to protest threats made by a radical Muslim group against the creators of "South Park" for depicting Muhammad in a bear suit during an episode earlier this year.

"We are not trying to slander the average Muslim," said the information section of the Facebook page, which was still accessible Wednesday morning. "We simply want to show the extremists that threaten to harm people because of their Mohammad depictions that we're not afraid of them. That they can't take away our right to [freedom of speech](#) by trying to scare us into silence."

In an attempt to respond to domestic criticism, the Pakistani government ordered Internet service providers in the country to block the page Tuesday, said Khurram Ali, a spokesman for the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority, which regulates the telecommunications network in the country.

But a group of Islamic lawyers asked the Lahore High Court on Wednesday to order the government to fully block Facebook because the site had allowed the page to be posted in the first place, said the deputy attorney general of Punjab province, Naveed Inayat Malik.

The court complied with the request by the Islamic Lawyers Forum and ordered the government to temporarily block the site until May 31, Malik said. Lawyers outside the courtroom hailed the ruling, chanting "down with Facebook."

Naguib Malik, secretary of the Ministry of Information Technology, said he has instructed the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority to implement the court ruling. It will now order the Internet service providers to block the site, he said.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the controversial [Facebook](#) page had been blocked, and access to the site itself was sporadic.

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