

US calls for Internet freedom amid India plan

December 8 2011



An activist of Bhagat Singh Kranti Sena protests outside the residence of Communications and IT Minister Kapil Sibal in New Delhi on December 7, 2011. India has asked internet companies like Facebook and Google to screen content that is uploaded on various sites, triggering a major uproar against the move.

The United States called for freedom of expression on the Internet after the [India said](#) it planned to find ways to ban offensive content before it is posted.

India vowed to pursue the restrictions after major [Internet firms](#) such as [Facebook](#) and [Google](#) -- nearly all of them based in the United States -- said that they were unable to screen content before it goes online.

"We are concerned about any effort to curtail freedom of expression on

the Internet," State Department spokesman Mark Toner told reporters, while carefully avoiding any direct criticism of proposals in India.

Toner said that Secretary of State [Hillary Clinton](#) would speak at length about [Internet freedom](#) in an address Friday in The Hague.

"Secretary Clinton has called on the global community to protect freedoms of expression, association and assembly in the online world as we do in the regular world," Toner said. "We uphold those beliefs."

Indian Communications Minister Kapil Sibal insisted Tuesday that the world's largest democracy supported free speech but said websites such as Facebook, Google and Yahoo had "had images which could be an insult to Indians."

Sibal pointed to fake images of naked politicians and religious figures. News reports said he complained specifically about a site that targeted Sonia Gandhi, the president of his ruling Congress party.

Clinton has already delivered two major speeches on Internet freedom in which she has pushed for an end to restrictions around the world, warning that nations that suppress online activity will pay an economic cost.

The United States has sought warmer relations with India in recent years and is generally cautious about any statement that could cause friction.

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