

# Google, Facebook remove content on India's order

February 6 2012, By KATY DAIGLE , Associated Press

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Google India has removed web pages deemed offensive to Indian political and religious leaders to comply with a court case that has raised censorship fears in the world's largest democracy, media reported Monday.

The action follows weeks of intense government pressure for 22 Internet giants to remove photographs, videos or text considered "anti-religious" or "anti-social."

A New Delhi court Monday gave Facebook, [Google](#), [YouTube](#) and Blogspot and the other sites two weeks to present further plans for policing their networks, according to the Press Trust of India.

For India's more than 100 million Internet users, the government says, U.S. Internet standards are not acceptable.

The case highlights the difficulty India faces in balancing conservative religious and political sentiments with its hope that freewheeling Internet discourse and technology will help spur the economy and boost living standards for its 1.2 billion people.

Google India did not say Monday which sites were removed but had said it would be willing to go after anything that violated local law or its own standards.

Indian officials have been incensed by material insulting to Prime

Minister Manmohan Singh, ruling Congress party leader Sonia Gandhi and religious groups, including illustrations showing Singh and Gandhi in compromising positions and pigs running through Mecca, Islam's holiest city.

"There is no question of any censorship," Communications Minister Sachin Pilot said in Bangalore. "They all have to operate within the laws of the country. ... There must be responsible behavior on both sides."

Anyone hurt by online content should be able to seek legal redress, he said. The government has warned it has evidence to prosecute 21 sites for offenses of "promoting enmity between classes and causing prejudice to national integration."

The government has asked the sites to set a voluntary framework to keep offensive material off the Internet.

[Facebook](#) India submitted a compliance report to the court Monday, but it also joined Yahoo and Microsoft in questioning its inclusion in the case, saying no specific complaints had been presented against them, PTI reported. The sites did not immediately comment after the hearing.

Prosecutors, who sued on behalf of a Muslim religious leader who accused companies of hosting pages that disparage Islam, said they would provide the companies with all relevant documents. The court gave the companies 15 more days to report back.

India is Facebook's third-fastest growing market, after the U.S. and Indonesia. The California-based company, with \$3.7 billion in revenues last year, has seen its hoped-for launch in China held back by rules requiring censorship of material seen by the Chinese government as objectionable or obscene.

The issue of country-specific censorship sparked global outcry in recent weeks, after Twitter said it would allow tweets to be deleted in countries where the content breaks local law.

Twitter insisted the new policy would help freedom of expression and transparency by preventing the entire site from being blocked. But dissidents and activists who have embraced Twitter in their campaigns accused the site of betraying free speech.

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