

India drops ban on online porn after backlash

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India has reversed a controversial order banning hundreds of porn websites, a government official said Wednesday, after accusations of heavy-handed censorship in the world's largest democracy.

On Saturday, telecommunication authorities had directed Internet

service providers (ISPs) to block 857 websites on "morality and decency" grounds and to curb child pornography, the first of its crackdown on online pornography in the country.

But the ban drew criticism and public ridicule, forcing the government to cancel the order late Tuesday and direct the ISPs to allow access to the banned websites, except those containing child porn.

"ISPs are free to allow access to the previously banned websites, which do not have child pornographic content," N. N. Kaul, spokesman for the government's telecoms department, told AFP.

Although the government has cancelled the order, some service providers said they would not lift the block until they have more clarity as the new order puts the onus of them to prevent access to child pornography.

"This is very vague order. There is no clarity and until we don't get clear answers, we will keep the websites blocked," Rajesh Chharia, head of the Internet Service Providers Association of India, told AFP.

Authorities had argued the ban was necessary after India's top court voiced concern last month about the government's failure to block access to [child pornography](#) on the Internet.

According to the adult site Pornhub, India was its fourth largest source of traffic behind the United States, Britain and Canada in 2014.

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India has been accused of heavy-handed online censorship in the past, including in 2012 when it ordered 300 webpages, images and links on

[social media networks](#) such as Facebook and Twitter blocked.

It said they were being used to spread rumours that were fuelling ethnic tensions.

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