

# Nepal social media bill sparks freedom of speech concerns

February 20 2019

---



Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have millions of users in Nepal, whose population of about 30 million has an internet penetration of about 57 percent

Nepal's government on Wednesday tabled draft legislation that would

impose harsh penalties for "improper" social media posts, igniting concerns it could be used to suppress freedom of speech and stifle dissent.

Under the proposed law, the government would have the power to block [social media platforms](#) like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube unless they register in Nepal.

And social media posts deemed defamatory or against national sovereignty could be punished with up to five years in jail and a fine of 1.5 million Nepalese rupees (\$13,000).

No timetable was given for passing the bill, but activists have described it as an attempt to shackle criticism of the powerful communist government, which has a two-thirds majority in parliament.

"The bill is against the freedom of expression and justice as it criminalises online expression," Tara Nath Dahal of Freedom Forum, a media freedom organisation, told AFP.

The government has defended the bill, saying it is needed to ensure data and internet security.

"The bill was registered to manage social networking sites because the challenges caused by such sites are increasing," information minister Gokul Prasad Baskota told parliament.

Under the proposed law, the government can also instruct social network site operators to remove posts. Failure to do so could lead to a three-year jail term and a 30,000-rupee fine.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has called on the government to address concerns raised by rights groups.

"The proposed law put forward by the Nepal government is a blatant attempt to control and muzzle freedom of expression on social [media](#)," it said in a statement.

"Freedom of expression is guaranteed in the Nepal constitution, and this must be respected and protected by the government."

The ruling party has shown increasing intolerance for dissent since its landslide victory in 2017.

Another law barring [civil servants](#) from criticising [government](#) policies on [social media](#) was tabled earlier this month.

A popular folk singer was forced to take down a satirical anti-corruption song from YouTube last week after pressure from ruling party cadres.

Nepal, with a population of about 30 million, has an internet penetration of 57 percent.

Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have millions of users in the South Asian nation.

© 2019 AFP

Citation: Nepal social media bill sparks freedom of speech concerns (2019, February 20) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-02-nepal-social-media-bill-freedom.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--