

YouTube launches Pakistani version, paving way for lifting ban

January 13 2016



YouTube was blocked in Pakistan after "Innocence of Muslims" was uploaded, an American-made film that depicted the Prophet Mohammed as a thuggish deviant and triggered protests across the Muslim world

Google has launched a localised version of YouTube in Pakistan, potentially paving the way for the country's top court to lift a ban on the site over "blasphemous content".

The site was blocked after "Innocence of Muslims" was uploaded, an American-made film that depicted the Prophet Mohammed as a thuggish deviant and triggered protests across the Muslim world—including in Pakistan, where more than 20 people died in demonstrations.

Google said Tuesday users in Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka would see a new YouTube homepage featuring local content in native languages.

YouTube, owned by California-based Google, has already launched similar initiatives in dozens of other countries.

The Supreme Court's ban in place since September 2012 applied to YouTube's global and localised sites.

The new site, youtube.com.pk, is currently live but inaccessible inside Pakistan, and the government and Google hope its creation will mean the Supreme Court will lift the ban, even if only partially.

Content on the local site can still be regulated, and a senior government official told AFP Wednesday Pakistan's telecommunication authority could ask Google to remove content it deems objectionable.

If Google complies, it could meet a condition set by the Supreme Court for lifting the ban.

"The understanding is that on the localised version offensive and blasphemous content could be blocked by Google on the government's request," the official said.

A Google spokesman confirmed that governments are allowed to request the removal of YouTube videos that violate local laws.

"We have clear community guidelines, and when videos violate those

rules, we remove them," the spokesman said.

But the Internet giant said it would review requests before taking videos down.

"Government requests to remove content will continue to be tracked and included in our Transparency Report."

Islamabad has been in intermittent talks with Google for several years over the issue, another source close to the matter said, without providing a specific timeframe for the unveiling of YouTube Pakistan.

"We are in a very near-term sort of thing. The roadblocks have been removed," the source said.

A Supreme Court official meanwhile said the next court hearing about the [ban](#) is in two weeks.

Users in Pakistan continue to access YouTube using proxy servers and Virtual Private Networks.

Blasphemy is a contentious issue in Pakistan and the country has seen violent riots sparked by [content](#) considered offensive to Islam.

In 2010 Pakistan shut down Facebook for nearly two weeks over its hosting of allegedly blasphemous pages. It continues to restrict thousands of online links.

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Citation: YouTube launches Pakistani version, paving way for lifting ban (2016, January 13) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2016-01-youtube-pakistani-version-paving.html>

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