

## News and Current Events :: Pakistan Widens Online Ban to Include YouTube

### Pakistan Widens Online Ban to Include YouTube, on: 2010/5/20 12:23

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — Pakistani authorities broadened a ban on social networking sites on Thursday, blocking YouTube and about 450 individual Web pages over what it described as “growing sacrilegious content.”

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority blocked YouTube after a special Internet monitoring unit within the agency determined that “objectionable content” was increasing, according to a spokesman, Khurram Mehran.

“Earlier we were blocking the links,” he said of YouTube, “but when content increased we had to block the whole Web site.” The ban, which also included certain pages on the Flickr and Wikipedia sites, occurred a day after access to Facebook was suspended on orders from a Pakistani court. An Islamic lawyers group won that injunction, arguing that a contest started by users for drawings of the Prophet Muhammad — whose depiction is considered blasphemous by some Muslims — was offensive.

The ruling demonstrated the power of hard-line Islamic groups in Pakistan. Although they rarely garner many votes in elections and represent a minority of this country’s population, the groups are often able to impose their will on the more peaceful majority by claiming a defense of Islam.

Social networking sites are extremely popular in Pakistan, a country of 170 million, where more than 60 percent of the population is under the age of 25. Pakistan has about 25 million Internet users, almost all of them young, according to Adnan Rehmat, a media analyst in Islamabad.

The Telecommunication Authority said in a statement that the ban was “in line with the constitution of Pakistan, the wishes of the people of Pakistan.”

On Wednesday the court said its ruling would remain in effect until May 31, but Mr. Mehran said on Thursday it would continue until the administrators of sites removed the offending material.

Scott Rudin, a spokesman for YouTube, which is owned by Google, said the company was investigating the shutdown and hoped to restore service as soon as possible. “YouTube offers citizens the world over a vital window on cultures and societies, and we believe people should not be denied access to information via video,” he said in a statement.

Cartoons of Muhammad published in a Danish newspaper in 2005 sparked violent protests by Muslims around the world, including in Pakistan.

Pakistan is not the only country to ban access to Web sites. China routinely controls users’ access to many sites, and was locked for months in a battle with Google over censorship controls. Earlier this year, Google relocated its Chinese-language search engine to Hong Kong. In Turkey, authorities have imposed a sweeping ban for months at a time on YouTube, because of what authorities described as material offensive to the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The authorities in Thailand also blocked YouTube in 2007 over video content that officials said was disrespectful of the king.

But Internet users often find ways to circumvent such blocks. Twitter, another networking site, remained open, and Pakistanis used it to express their views of the suspension.

“God save this country,” one said, “lunatics are running it.”