

Religious attack on free speech in India

Posted: Wed, 4th Jan 2012

A Judge in India has given social websites, including Google and Facebook, six weeks to remove all 'anti-religious' content.

In what is being seen as a religious crackdown on free speech, the Delhi court ordered 22 social networking sites, including Yahoo and Microsoft, to wipe the 'objectionable' and 'defamatory' contents and file compliance reports by February 6, 2012.

The complaint was filed by Mufti Aijaz Arshad Qasmi who had objected to a number of images on the websites which he complained would cause "irreparable loss and injury to the people who are offended by them".

He argued that some of the images defamed Hindu gods, Prophet Mohammed and other religious figures.

IT Minister Kapil Sibal says he is not censoring internet users, but wants to remove degrading images. The court order demands the sites remove photographs, videos or texts that might offend religious sentiments. He has recently held talks with representatives of the companies about how to stop the posting of what religious leaders find "offensive".

Mr Sibal said: 'There were some demeaning, degrading, clearly pornographic depictions of gods and goddesses which no reasonable, sensible person anywhere in the world would accept, on any site.'

The minister insisted he was not smothering free speech but was suggesting screening possible 'incendiary' material.

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