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## India Dismisses Charges of Internet Censorship

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

The government in India is defending itself against charges of Internet censorship. The move comes after the government last week asked companies like Facebook and Twitter to block more than three hundred websites.

Officials accused the websites of posting edited images and videos of earthquake victims. They said the websites falsely claimed that the images were Muslim victims caught in recent ethnic conflict in India's northeastern Assam state and Burma. A number of the images were reportedly uploaded from Pakistan.

Officials said the panic that resulted caused thousands of Hindu immigrants to flee the area. They feared that Muslims would answer the false reports with attacks of their own.

Cyber law expert, lawyer Pawan Duggal says this is the first time the Internet and mobile-phone technology have been used to create fear in a community.

PAWAN DUGGAL: "India has to wake up to the need for putting cyber security as the number-one priority for the nation. Unfortunately, India does not even have a national cyber-security policy. The nation does not have any plan of action, should this kind of emergency happen again. India needs to have its own cyber army of cyber warriors."

On Friday, India's Communication and Information Technology Minister Kapil Sibal dismissed charges that the government is trying to censor social media. But he said the misuse of social media has to be prevented.

Pranesh Prakash is program manager at the Bangalore-based Center for Internet and Society. He says some of the web pages that have been blocked included official news websites.

PRANESH PRAKASH: "I am not questioning the motivations of the government which in this current case seemed to be above board. We found that most of the material that they have complained about is actually stuff that is communal. But I do feel that the government went overboard in doing so, that it has also curbed legitimate reportage."

He says some of the websites were uploaded by people trying to let others know that the images were false.

The government in India has called on social media companies to come up with a plan to keep offensive material off the web. Last year, it passed a law that requires companies to remove so-called "objectionable content" when requested to do so.

A Google Transparency report says that last year India topped the list of countries that make such requests. Supporters of online freedom have expressed concern that India may be restricting web freedom.

About one hundred million people in India use the Internet - the third-largest number of net users in the world. About seven hundred million people have mobile phones.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report. I'm Steve Ember.