

Sibal in net, tweeples cry foul

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 6

The government decision to ask social networking sites to pre-screen user content unleashed a wave of criticism in the cyber space with users complaining that this is a step towards censorship.

'Kapil Sibal', 'free speech' and 'freedom of speech' were one of India's most tweeted topic on Tuesday.

"Kapil Sibal hints at China like censorship on Google, Facebook and twitter, it should not be accepted," wrote Aditya Parankusam. Media personality Pritish Nandy said that Mr Sibal is making the same mistake Siddhartha Shankar Ray did to provoke the Emergency.

"Another Mrs G paid the price for it," wrote Mr Nandy on his Twitter account.

Former Ficci president and member of Parliament Rajeev Chandrasekhar tweeted, "He is very very wrong in trying to bring to India the Chinese model of controlling internet

Self-regulation a must, says Digvijay

Congress leader Digvijay Singh backed telecom minister Kapil Sibal's drive against offensive and defamatory content on internet sites, saying that the service providers should observe self regulation. Mr Singh said freedom of expression does not mean allowing vilest abuses against anyone, who has been himself a victim of such content,

said that he was not in favour of a ban but for the service providers to ensure that they do not allow their platform to be used for maligning the image of anyone. He said that freedom of expression does not mean allowing vilest abuses against anyone.



Doomed to fail."

However, Mr Sibal got support from Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. But Opposition leaders, including BJP MP Varun Gandhi, slammed the government move.

Mr Tharoor wrote that he spoke to Mr Sibal. "He assured me he opposes political censorship. Concern is regarding communally inflammatory images

and language which he described. Have to say I support Kapil Sibal on the examples he gave me: deeply offensive material about religions and communities that could incite riots," said Mr Tharoor.

The MP from Thiruvananthapuram said that he understands Facebook is indeed taking down some pages that Mr Sibal showed them.

"Pretty vile stuff. Sadly public didn't object to

them first. I reject censorship. Art, literature and political opinion are sacrosanct. But inflammatory communal incitement is like a match at a petrol pump," he added.

Echoing similar sentiments, Mr Abdullah wrote, "I hate the idea of censorship but have seen for myself how dangerous inflammatory content on Facebook and YouTube can be. We want the luxury of free speech but not the burden of responsibility for how we use that freedom. Something will have to give."

The chief minister further wrote: "If push came to shove I'd come down on the side of freedom of speech but its one of those freedoms that has me worried unfortunately."

Mr Gandhi, on the other hand, said that Internet is the only truly democratic medium that is free of "vested interests, media owners and paid-off journos".

"Can see why Kapil Sibal wants to gag it," the young BJP leader wrote.

'NATIONAL INTEREST AT RISK'

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, DEC. 6

The strong stand taken by websites, including Yahoo and YouTube, to protect their privacy sometimes hurt the national interests, according to government officials involved in IT security.

They claim there have been instances when email service providers have refused to give data of terror suspects.

According to Indian Computer Emergency Response Team officials, email services providers like Yahoo even refused to give data of suspects during the high court blast in Delhi.

"We asked for data after the Delhi blast as it is an issue of national sovereignty. Even in such cases information was not given. Yahoo has gone to the high court," claimed the official. He

said in the event of terror attacks, it becomes very difficult for security agencies to work if data is not given to them. "Police have to find the details. Websites are not ready to help even then," said the official.

Another official said that whenever the government calls a meeting, senior officials from such companies never turn up and pay no heed to the concerns of the government.

"It is the juniors who come. This is not good," the official said.

Officials said that in November, YouTube refused government requests to remove a video clips which showed people being converted to Christianity in Srinagar. The clip evoked strong protests from the majority Muslim community in Jammu and Kashmir.