

Uganda moves to tighten control of social media

Uganda's government has proposed a bill to tighten controls over social media, a minister said on Friday, weeks after an enforced election day shutdown triggered widespread criticism.

"The bill is intended to regulate what goes on in the communication sector for the good of Ugandans and their security," minister for the presidency Frank Tumwebaze told AFP.

"The aim of this bill is to amend the Uganda Communications Act 2013 by removing the requirement for the sector minister to seek parliamentary approval in regulating the communication sector," he said.



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Tumwebaze said Uganda's parliament -- which is dominated by the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party -- would have to approve the bill removing parliamentary approval.

Opposition politicians have criticised the proposals but Tumwebaze insisted the new regulations are "not that strict" and were necessary to curb the "misuse" of social media with, "people posting irresponsible statements, inciting the population, which as government is a threat to our national security."

The government blocked social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook during February's elections citing unspecified "national security" concerns. The vote saw President Yoweri Museveni sweep to his fifth election victory with 61 percent of

ballots.

Observers said the cards were heavily stacked against Museveni's opponents, as the 71-year-old's grip on his party and country -- and his access to state resources -- meant the result was never in any doubt.

Failed presidential challenger, ex-prime minister Amama Mbabazi, has launched a petition challenging Museveni's victory at the Supreme Court citing voter bribery and intimidation.

Museveni's closest rival, opposition chief Kizza Besigye, was arrested multiple times during the election and was blocked from making a similar petition.

Several journalists have also been arrested covering protests, and Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Friday warned of a continued crackdown on the opposition and media.

"The police are violating the opposition's and the media's basic rights protected under international law as well as under Uganda's constitution," HRW researcher Maria Burnett said.

"That those who peacefully express critical views can be arbitrarily arrested, detained, and beaten makes everyone vulnerable to abuse," she said.

Source: AFP

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