

First non-Latin Internet domain names activated

May 6 2010, By TAREK EL-TABLAZY , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Three Mideast countries have become the first to get Internet addresses entirely in non-Latin characters.

Domain names in Arabic for Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were added to the Internet's master directories on Wednesday, following final approval last month by the [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers](#), or ICANN. It's the first major change to the Internet domain name system since its creation in the 1980s.

Registrations for websites to use those names are to begin soon. On Thursday, Egypt granted three companies approval to register names using the country's new Arabic suffix.

Until now, websites had to end their addresses with ".com" or another string using Latin characters. That meant businesses and government agencies still had to use [Latin characters](#) on billboards and advertisements, even if they were targeting populations with no familiarity with English or other languages that use the Latin script.

Non-Latin characters were sometimes permitted for the portions of the Internet address before the suffix. But Arabic websites generally haven't had that option because Arabic characters are written right to left, conflicting with Latin suffixes written left to right.

"Introducing Arabic [domain names](#) is a milestone in Internet history," Egyptian Communication and Information Technology Minister Tarek

Kamel said in a statement. "This great step will open up new horizons for e-services in Egypt" as well as boosting the number of online users and enabling Internet service providers to enter new markets by "eliminating language barriers."

ICANN, which cleared the way for non-Latin suffixes in October after years of debate, said the Mideast shows growth potential, with just a fifth of the populations online, on average.

Egypt will keep its ".eg" suffix in Latin and will offer ".masr" in Arabic alongside that. Masr is the country's name in Arabic. Kamel said TE Data, Vodafone Data and Link Registrar were selected to begin selling name registrations under the Arabic suffix.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and the [United Arab Emirates](#) will offer their countries' names in Arabic.

A suffix for Russia in Cyrillic is expected to be added to the master list soon, having received ICANN's final clearance last month as well.

Proposals for several others have received preliminary approval and should be activated by year's end. They include suffixes for Jordan, Qatar, Tunisia and the Palestinian territories in Arabic, Hong Kong in Chinese, Thailand in Thai and Sri Lanka in Sinhalese and Tamil.

ICANN said it has received a total of 21 requests for such domains representing 11 languages since it began accepting applications in November.

Amr Badawi, the head of Egypt's National Telecom Regulatory Authority, said domain registrations under the new Arabic script will begin this month.

The Saudi Center for Network Information, which manages the country's suffixes, said registrations for the Arabic equivalent of Saudi Arabia will be held in two stages. Those for the government and businesses will begin this month, and individuals will be able to start in late September.

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