Iran denies has plan to cut Internet access

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File photo shows an Iranian surfing the Internet at a cafe in Tehran. Iran has denied online reports surfacing Tuesday that it plans to cut access to the Internet in August and replace it with a national intranet, according to a statement by the ministry of communication and information technology.

Iran has denied online reports surfacing Tuesday that it plans to cut access to the Internet in August and replace it with a national intranet, according to a statement by the ministry of communication and information technology.

The reports derived from a supposed interview with Communications Minister Reza Taghipour published on April 1 that was in fact a hoax, the ministry said in the statement on its own site www.ict.gov.ir -- which itself was not accessible outside of Iran.

"The report is in no way confirmed by the ministry" and is "completely baseless," the ministry statement said.

The hoax report quoted Taghipour saying that Iran would from August launch a "clean internet" that would block popular services like Google and Hotmail and replace them with government-sponsored search engines and e-mail services.

The ministry statement slammed the false report as serving "the propaganda wing of the West and providing its hostile media with a pretext emanating from a baseless claim."

Iran, however, does have plans to establish a "national information network" billed as a totally closed system that would function like a sort of intranet for the Islamic republic.

Taghipour said in early April that the plan would be fully implemented by March 2013.

But he did not explain whether access to the Internet would be cut, or whether Iran's "national information network" would exist alongside the world wide web.

Iran in any case currently censors millions of websites deemed un-Islamic, and has from time to time imposed temporary additional restrictions.

The last time it did so, in February, popular e-mail services such as Gmail, Hotmail and Yahoo were cut or slowed to an unusable speed for Iran's 33 million web users.

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