

Tajikistan orders Twitter ban

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"The (government) [communications service](#) has sent Internet companies a huge list of 131 sites that must be blocked in the country from Monday," said Asomiddin Atojev, the head of the Tajik association of

Internet providers.

"The list includes [social networking](#) sites that are actively used by Tajik Internet users including government officials," Atoyev said.

Among the blocked sites are V Kontakte, or In Touch, and Odnoklassniki, or [Classmates](#), the most popular [social networking sites](#) in Russia with many users in the ex-Soviet Union, and Mail.ru, an email service.

"We don't understand the criteria for drawing up the list and what they are pursuing. The communications service does not give reasons in its letter for blocking the sites," Atoyev said.

No official at the communications service was available for comment on Saturday.

The Central Asian country bordering Afghanistan lifted only this month a ban on [Facebook](#), which was blocked from late November for almost two weeks on the order of the same state-run communications service.

The service said it blocked Facebook because of a "deluge of lies" and "insults to the head of state and government members."

But after urging from the United States, the authorities unblocked Facebook in December, saying they had been carrying out "preventative technical" work.

Several news sites, including regional portals Fergana.ru and Centrasia.ru and Russia's state-owned news agency RIA Novosti, have been blocked in Tajikistan for months.

Local media in Tajikistan avoids criticising President Emomali Rahmon, who has led the country since 1992, fearing government checks and

closure of their publications.

Tajikistan, the poorest ex-Soviet country, has a population of around eight million people, of whom around one million work in Russia, often as labourers. The money they send back home accounts for 40 percent of the country's GDP.

The country will hold presidential elections next year and many fear the authorities will tighten control on the Internet.

"The next presidential elections will be held in Tajikistan in November 2013, and this will bring even more harsh control of Internet resources and independent media," predicted the head of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan, Nuriddin Karshiboyev.

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