

Saudi says Internet apps break the rules

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Saudi police cars are parked outside the Al-rajhi mosque in central Riyadh, on March 11, 2011. Saudi Arabia has warned of "suitable measures" if providers of Internet messenger applications such as WhatsApp fail to comply with its rules, days after the industry said authorities wanted to control such traffic.

Saudi Arabia warned Sunday of "suitable measures" if providers of Internet messenger applications such as WhatsApp fail to comply with its rules, days after the industry [said](#) authorities wanted to control such traffic.

"Some telecom applications over the [Internet protocol](#) currently do not

meet the regulatory conditions" in the kingdom, said the Communications and Information Technology Commission in a statement carried by the official SPA state news agency.

These applications include WhatsApp, Skype and Viber, and allow text and [audio communication](#) over the Internet.

The commission has told service providers in Saudi Arabia to work with the developers of such applications to "quickly meet the regulatory conditions," but it did not specify how they violate the rules in the ultra-conservative country.

"The commission will take suitable measures regarding these applications and services if those conditions are not met," it said, in a veiled threat to ban the programs.

Industry sources said this week that the authorities had asked telecom operators to furnish a means of control that would allow censorship in the absolute monarchy. One source said the providers had been given a week to comply.

An industry source said [telecom operators](#) were behind the move, accusing the Saudi Telecommunications Co. (STC), along with Mobily and Zain, of asking the commission to impose censorship because of the "damage" caused by free applications.

In the neighbouring [United Arab Emirates](#), most Skype applications and Viber calls are blocked, but WhatsApp messenger remains accessible.

The two Gulf neighbours in 2010 threatened to ban BlackBerry instant messaging and demanded that the company install local servers to censor the service.

[Instant messaging services](#) on BlackBerry remain uninterrupted, but it is not clear how far the Canadian smartphone manufacturer went to comply.

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