

Pakistan's Sindh to block Skype, WhatsApp

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A Pakistani computer user at an internet cafe in Islamabad on May 19, 2010

Pakistan's southern Sindh province will block access to online communication networks including Skype and WhatsApp for three months in a bid to curb terrorism, officials said Thursday.

"We regret the inconvenience to the users but we are compelled to ban those networks for three months" in the province, Sindh's Information Minister Sharjeel Memon told AFP.

He said the decision to block cyber networks including Skype, WhatsApp, Tango and Viber was taken over security reasons, but refused to elaborate.

A police official said the online applications were frequently being used by "terrorists and criminal elements".

Security agencies have recently sought to crackdown on a relentless spate of targeted murders and extortions in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and financial hub.

A local official said that the provincial government will request the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to block the networks in Sindh for three months.

The PTA is a state-run regulatory body that is authorised to restrict or impose bans on Internet usage.

Pakistan shutdown access to YouTube in September last year after the video sharing website failed to take down an anti-Islam film that had sparked furious protests across the Muslim world.

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