

Report: Iran court orders Instagram blocked

May 23 2014, by Ali Akbar Dareini



This Dec. 6, 2013 file image posted on his official Instagram account shows Iranian President Hassan Rouhani hiking in the Tochal mountain area north of Tehran, Iran. A court in Iran has ordered that the photo-sharing app Instagram be blocked in the Islamic Republic over privacy concerns, the semiofficial Mehr news agency reported Friday, May 22, 2014. (AP Photo/Office of Hassan Rouhani via Instagram, File)

An Iranian court ordered that the photo-sharing app Instagram be blocked over privacy concerns, a semiofficial news agency reported Friday, the latest in a series of websites to be banned in the Islamic Republic.

The agency said a court order, stemming from a private lawsuit, had been given to Iran's Ministry of Telecommunications to ban the site. However, users in the capital, Tehran, still could access the application around noon Friday. Some previous reports in Iran of websites and Internet applications being blocked never materialized.

Officials with Instagram Inc. declined to comment Friday.

However, Instagram's owner Facebook is already banned in the country, along with other social websites like Twitter and YouTube. That's despite senior government leaders like Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif being active on Twitter. There are even Instagram accounts in the names of moderate President Hassan Rouhani and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

While top officials have unfettered access to [social media](#), Iran's youth and technological-savvy citizens use proxy servers or other workarounds to bypass the controls.



This Dec. 6, 2013 file image posted on his official Instagram account shows Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, third from right, talking with hikers in the Tochal mountain area north of Tehran, Iran. The caption for the post reads, "what makes hiking even more pleasant at Tochal are the many women and men who stop to say hi and share their dreams & concerns." A court in Iran has ordered that the photo-sharing app Instagram be blocked in the Islamic Republic over privacy concerns, the semiofficial Mehr news agency reported Friday, May 22, 2014. (AP Photo/Office of Hassan Rouhani via Instagram, File)

Social media has offered a new way for Rouhani and his administration

to reach out to the West as it negotiates with world powers over the country's contested nuclear program. Rouhani himself has opposed blocking social network sites before authorities create local alternatives.

"We should see the cyberworld as an opportunity," Rouhani said last week, according to the official IRNA news agency. "Why are we so shaky? Why don't we trust our youth?"

Hard-liners, meanwhile, accuse Rouhani of failing to stop the spread of what they deem as "decadent" Western culture in Iran. Earlier this week, police arrested and showed six young Iranian on state television over them posting online a video showing them dancing to the Pharrell Williams' song "Happy." Last week, hard-liners marched over women not being significantly veiled and dressing provocatively.

Online, that battle continues. Iran's police chief said last year that the Islamic Republic was developing new software to control [social networking sites](#), though it is unclear whether it was ever put to use.

In 2012, Iran created the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, tasked with preventing harm to Iranians who go online. Khamenei, who has the final say on all state matters, ordered the creation of the council in order to fight what he called a "culture invasion" aimed at undermining the Islamic Republic.

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