

Iran denies it summoned Facebook CEO to court (Update)

May 28 2014

An Iranian prosecutor Wednesday denied reports that a local judge ordered Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg to appear in court to answer complaints by individuals who say Facebook-owned applications Instagram and Whatsapp violate their privacy.

Shiraz Chief Prosecutor Ali Alghasimehr was quoted by the official IRNA news agency as saying Zuckerberg has not been summoned to court and Facebook-owned applications Instagram and Whatsapp remain permitted.

A day earlier, semiofficial ISNA news agency had quoted Ruhollah Momen Nasab, an information technology official with the paramilitary Basij force, as saying that the unnamed judge summoned Zuckerberg to court and also ordered the two apps blocked.

It would be highly unlikely that Zuckerberg would appear in an Iranian court since there is no extradition treaty between Iran and the United States. Some Iranian courts have in recent years issued similar rulings that could not be carried out.

Users in the capital, Tehran, still could access both applications around noon Wednesday. In Iran, websites and Internet applications have sometimes been reported blocked but remained operational.

Facebook is already officially banned in the country, along with other social websites like Twitter and YouTube as well as their mobile apps.

However, many Iranians use proxy servers to access banned websites and applications, and some senior leaders such as Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif are active on Twitter.

IRNA's Wednesday report said complaints by individuals have been filed against Instagram and Whatsapp and that those lawsuits are under investigation but no rulings have been issued.

The administration of moderate President Hassan Rouhani is opposed to blocking such websites before authorities create local alternatives. Social media has offered a new way for him and his administration to reach out to the West as it negotiates with world powers over the country's contested nuclear program.

"We should see the cyber world 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.

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