

Indonesia limits access to Telegram app, readies total ban

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The messaging app Telegram is displayed on a smartphone, Saturday, July 15, 2017, in Bangkok, Thailand. Indonesia says it's blocking web versions of the Telegram instant messaging app and will block the app completely if it continues to be a forum for radical propaganda and violent militants. (AP Photo)

Indonesia says it's blocking web versions of the encrypted Telegram instant messaging app and will block the app completely if it continues

to be a forum for radical propaganda and violent militants.

The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology said in a statement Friday evening that it has asked internet companies in the world's most populous Muslim nation to block access to 11 addresses that the web version is available through.

It said "this blocking must be done" because many channels in the service are used to recruit Indonesians into militant groups and to spread hate and methods for carrying out attacks including bomb making.

Samuel Pangerapan, the director general of informatics applications at the ministry, said they are preparing for the complete closure of Telegram in Indonesia if it does not develop procedures to block unlawful content.

The measures against Telegram come as Southeast Asian nations are stepping up efforts to combat Islamic radicalism following the capture of the southern Philippine city of Marawi by IS-linked militants.

Nearly two months after the initial assault, Philippine forces are still battling to regain complete control of the city. Experts fear the southern Philippines could become a new base for IS, including Indonesian and Malaysian militants returning from the Middle East, as an international coalition retakes territory held by IS in Syria and Iraq.

But the government move has sparked a public outcry in Indonesia, with Twitter and Facebook exploding with negative comments and some people reporting they were unable to access the web.telegram.org domain. Indonesians are among of the world's biggest users of social media.

Telegram did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Suspected militants arrested by Indonesian police recently have told authorities that they have communicated with fellow members of their group via Telegram and received orders and directions to carry out attacks through the app, including from Bahrin Naim, an Indonesian with the Islamic State group in Syria accused of orchestrating several attacks in the past 18 months.

Founded in 2013 by Russian brothers Nikolai and Pavel Durov, Telegram is a free messaging service that can be used as a smartphone app and on computers through a web interface or desktop messenger. Its strong encryption has contributed to its popularity with those concerned about privacy and secure communications in the digital era but also made it useful to militant groups and other criminal elements.

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