

Iranians up in arms as Apple removes top apps

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This file picture taken on July 09, 2017 shows employees at an e-commerce site's offices in the Iranian capital Tehran

Iranians were joined by two ministers Saturday in protesting after Apple removed popular apps from its store, a move the American company says was made to comply with US sanctions.

"Today, respecting consumers' rights is a basic principle which Apple

has not followed," Information and Communication Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi tweeted, promising to "legally pursue" the case.

"IT should be used for making human life better and comfortable not a tool for discrimination between countries," he wrote.

Jahromi said later Saturday on Instagram that he and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif were working together to address the issue.

The hashtag #StopRemovingIranianApps has been trending on Iranian social media for several days, after Apple removed at least 10 of the country's most popular apps from its online [store](#).

Those now missing include Amazon-style shopping apps Digikala and Bamilo, ride-hailing apps Snapp and Tap30, discount store Takhfifan and a brunch delivery service called Delion.

"We are unable to include your app on the App Store," a message sent to some of those companies reportedly said.

"Under the US sanctions regulations, the App Store cannot host, distribute, or do business with apps or developers connected to certain US embargoed countries."

The United States lifted some sanctions on Iran, particularly in the aviation sector, under a 2015 nuclear deal that saw Tehran limit its atomic programme.

But American individuals and companies are still barred from doing any business with Iranians because of much older and non-nuclear related sanctions on the Islamic republic.

'On the right track'

"There are removed apps which did not have financial transactions, and due to sanctions, some of them were registered in countries other than Iran too," Azari Jahromi tweeted.

"The US does not sanction our weak points. They sanction our points of strength... This should make us country officials support this field," he said in a video published on the government's website.

"The recent action by the US shows we are on the right track... because they fear us and are removing these (apps)".

Some Iranian apps in the same category of those that have been removed are still available on the [app store](#).

Iran's youthful and well-connected population own some 40 million smart phones, six million of them iPhones, the government-owned Iran Daily newspaper reported.

"Apple has not provided any clear answers to our messages," the daily on Saturday quoted Mehdi Taghizadeh, vice chairman at Delion, as saying.

More than 4,500 Iranian netizens have signed an online petition urging Apple chief executive Tim Cook "to recognise our rights as Apple customers".

"I've always been an Apple user, but despite preferring them... I'm now going to switch to Android," a user going by the name Xerexes wrote on Twitter.

"Technology is best when it brings people together. We shouldn't limit or keep others from using and developing it!" tweeted Ferial Govashiri,

who used to work as a personal assistant to former US president Barack Obama and is now at Netflix.

Owners of devices that run on Android can still download Iranian apps from the online store for Google, also an American company, but they are still unable to use paid apps in the country.

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