

Iran bans government bodies from using foreign message apps

April 18 2018, by Amir Vahdat



A man uses his cell phone while walking on a sidewalk in downtown Tehran, Iran, Wednesday, April 18, 2018. Iranian state TV reported Wednesday that government bodies have been barred from using foreign messaging apps. State TV said the ban was imposed by the Presidential Office on all public institutions. It was not clear if the ban applied to civil servants outside of work hours. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

Iran's presidency has banned all government bodies from using foreign-based messaging apps to communicate with citizens, state media

reported Wednesday, after economic protests organized through such apps shook the country earlier this year.

Chief among those apps is Telegram, used by over 40 million Iranians for everything from benign conversations to commerce and political campaigning. Iranians using Telegram, which describes itself as an encrypted message service, helped spread the word about the protests in December and January.

Telegram channels run on behalf of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri were already shut down Wednesday.

A report on the website of Iran's state television broadcaster said the ban affected all public institutions. It was not clear if the ban applied to civil servants outside of work hours. The report did not elaborate on penalties for violating the ban.

Last month, officials said Iran would block Telegram for reasons of national security in response to the protests, which saw 25 people killed and nearly 5,000 reportedly arrested.

Authorities temporarily shut down Telegram during the protests, though many continued to access it through proxies and [virtual private networks](#).

The move against Telegram suggests Iran may try to introduce its own government-approved, or "halal," version of the messaging app, something long demanded by hard-liners. Already, Iran heavily restricts internet access and blocks social media websites like Facebook and Twitter.

Iran has said foreign messaging apps can get licenses from authorities to operate if they transfer their databases into the country. Privacy experts

worry that could more easily expose users' private communications to government spying.

Khamenei, however, has stressed that invading people's privacy is religiously forbidden.

Iran's move also comes after a Russian court on Friday ordered Telegram to be blocked after the company refused to share its encryption data with authorities.

Telegram CEO Pavel Durov responded to the ruling by writing on Twitter: "Privacy is not for sale, and human rights should not be compromised out of fear or greed."

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Citation: Iran bans government bodies from using foreign message apps (2018, April 18)
retrieved 3 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2018-04-iran-bodies-foreign-message-apps.html>

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