

US urges social media platforms to block Iran officials

Author:

AFP

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Sat, 2019-11-23 21:37

WASHINGTON: The US State Department on Saturday called on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to suspend the accounts of Iranian government leaders until Tehran re-establishes internet coverage throughout the riot-torn country. The government imposed a near-total Internet blackout more than a week ago amid violent protests.

Special Representative for Iran Hook urges [@Facebook](#), [@instagram](#), and [@Twitter](#) to suspend the accounts of the Iranian regime's leadership, who've shamelessly used social media to spew propaganda while shutting down the internet for ordinary Iranians. [#Internet4Iran](#) [#IranProtests](#) pic.twitter.com/8rM0d0tadC

– Department of State (@StateDept) [November 23, 2019](#)

"It is a deeply hypocritical regime," Brian Hook, special US representative for Iran, said in an interview with Bloomberg posted on the official State Department Twitter account.

"It shuts down the internet while its government continues to use all of these social media accounts.

"So one of the things that we are calling on are social media companies like Facebook and Instagram and Twitter to shut down the accounts of Supreme Leader Khamenei, the Foreign Minister Zarif and President Rouhani until they restore the internet to their own people."

Demonstrations erupted in Iran on Nov. 15, a few hours after the shock announcement of a decision to raise gasoline prices at the pump by up to 200 percent in the sanctions-hit country.

The following day the government drastically restricted Iranians' access to the internet in a step seen as aimed at curbing the spread of videos of the violent protests.

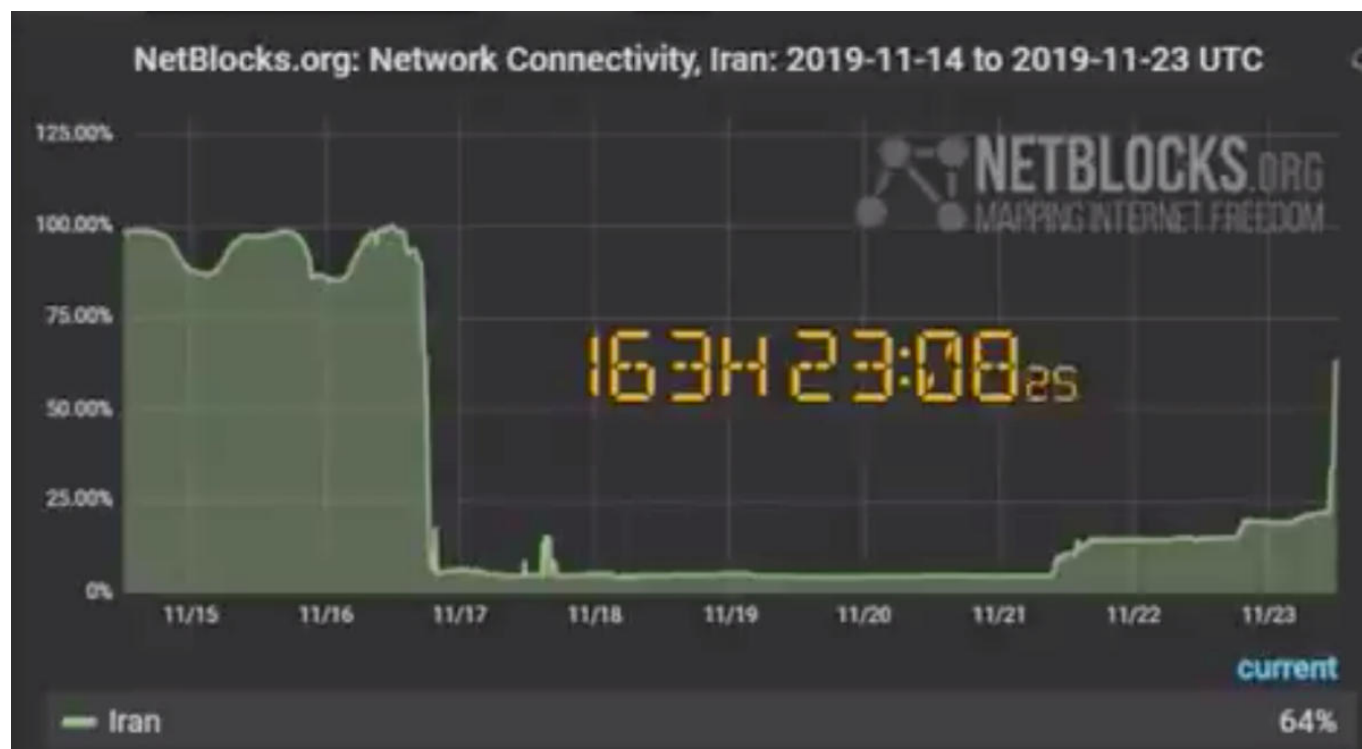
Five people have died in those protests by official government count, though Amnesty International has put the total at more than 100.

"The regime shut down the internet because they're trying to hide all of the death and tragedy that the regime has been inflicting on thousands of protesters around the country," Hook said.

Facebook, Instagram and Twitter did not immediately respond to a request for comment from AFP.

On Friday, the United States imposed sanctions on Iranian communications minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi for what it said was his role in the “vast censorship” of the internet.

In a tweet Friday translated into Farsi, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo invited any Iranian who witnessed government “repression” to send documentation to the US, promising it would sanction any abuses.



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Al-Jubeir calls for ‘deterrence not appeasement’ to halt Iranian aggression towards Saudi Arabia
US sanctions Iran minister over Internet censorship

[Iraq to close nine TV stations for ‘inciting violence’](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-11-23 23:59

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) has decided to warn five TV channels, and close nine, for “violating articles of media licensing regulations,” and “publishing content inciting violence” during coverage of demonstrations, observers told Arab News on Saturday.

Baghdad and nine southern Shiite-dominated provinces have witnessed repeated anti-government demonstrations since Oct. 1. More than 350 demonstrators have been killed and about 16,000 others injured, after security forces began to use live bullets and tear gas canisters.

Local and foreign media have played a pivotal role in documenting and exposing abuses suffered by demonstrators, despite authorities blocking the internet for two weeks in Baghdad and several southern governorates. Social media platforms have also been censored for more than a month.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi and his allies believe that some media outlets "are working to sustain the momentum of the demonstrations and incite demonstrators against the government." The overthrow of the government and the holding of early national parliamentary elections preceded by the changing electoral law, is at the top of the list of demands from demonstrators.

The CMC is the organization responsible for regulating the media and communications in Iraq. It was established in 2004 and, according to the Iraqi constitution, is an independent body not affiliated with the government. However, the majority of its decisions "indicate the full dependence of the government" observers have said.

According to sources, the CMC forced internet and mobile companies to disconnect services to their customers in protest-hit areas and block social networks.

The latest CMC decision saw the closure of the nine local and Arabic TV stations and warnings given to five others "for violating the regularities of media licensing rules."

Dijla, Sharqiya, Al-Arabiya, Al-Hadath and Alhurra Iraq were among the stations that had to close their offices in Iraq, while Sky News Arabia, Al-Sumaria and Rudaw were among those warned.

The Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, a non-profit organization that monitors abuses against journalists, said in a statement issued on Saturday that it had seen an internal memorandum sent by the CMC to the offices of Abdul Mahdi and the interior minister, recommending the closures and citing the other channels for mishandling coverage of the demonstrations.

"We are used to seeing the CMC lining up every time with the government (against journalists). It is an independent body and its board of trustees is subject to partisan quotas like all government bodies and institutions," Ziyad Al-Ajaili, the head of the observatory, told Arab News.

"The closure and warning decisions issued by the CMC are not the first ... The body has a bad record in dealing with the media."

The CMC told Arab News that it does not punish any media in a "qualitative" manner, and that it followed a globally approved media code of conduct that is included in the terms of the work permit granted to the media.

The CMC also said that it dealt with media outlets that violate the terms of the license "amicably" before resorting to warnings and closures, and that it has not yet "publicly" made any new decisions regarding the 14 channels mentioned.

"No decision has been announced so far. There have been irregularities and there have been warnings, but no action has been taken yet and there is no announcement on the matter to date," a senior CMC official told Arab News. "As colleagues, we first talk amicably with the journalist or the media concerned before we take any legal action."



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Protester shot dead and dozens wounded in Iraq Shooting strife: Amir Jasim captures Iraq's uprising

[Iraqi minister suspected of fraud in Sweden](#)

Sat, 2019-11-23 21:40

HELSINKI: Swedish media reports say Iraq's defense minister, who holds dual Iraqi-Swedish citizenship, is suspected of illegally receiving benefits in Sweden.

Local media, citing a Swedish defense official, reported that Najah Al-Shammari claimed child and housing support for years despite living in Baghdad. Al-Shammari and Swedish officials weren't immediately available for comment.

Swedish news agency TT said Friday that Al-Shammari, who assumed his post in June, is registered to live in a Stockholm suburb.

Swedish newspaper Expressen reported Saturday he moved to Sweden in 2011, received citizenship in 2015 and was reported to authorities, along with his

wife, earlier this month for suspected benefits fraud. He allegedly continued to claim social payments years after returning to Iraq. Al-Shammari served as a Major General in the Iraqi Army and served under former dictator Saddam Hussein. Sweden and its Nordic neighbors are known for providing generous social benefits.



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On Iraq visit, US VP Pence reassures Kurds and discusses protests with premier
Shooting strife: Amir Jasim captures Iraq's uprising

[More than 80 detained in Algiers protest, says rights group](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-11-23 00:04

ALGIERS: Authorities arrested more than 80 people during a night-time protest in the Algerian capital, a prisoners' rights group said on Friday.

Demonstrators have been protesting against next month's presidential election which they allege aims to cement in power a political elite linked to former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Bouteflika quit in April after popular pressure.

The CNLD prisoners' rights committee said most of those detained in Thursday night's protest were taken to police stations in the suburbs of Algiers.

Hundreds of Algerians had turned out for the second night in a row to voice their anger over the presidential poll set for Dec. 12.

They did so hours after an examining magistrate charged 29 people arrested during a similar protest on Wednesday night with holding an "unauthorized gathering."

Five candidates are to contest next month's election after the ailing Bouteflika, 82, was forced to step down after mass demonstrations in February against his bid for a fifth term.

Algeria has since seen weekly protests demanding major reforms to a political system that has been in place since independence from France in 1962.

On Friday, several hundred people had already gathered in central Algiers hours before the start of the 40th weekly protests, journalists posted on social networks.

Dozens of people have been arrested since the election campaign began last Sunday. Four were sentenced on Monday to 18 months in jail and 14 received suspended terms for disrupting a meeting.

"This is a campaign of repression, not an election campaign," chanted protesters seen in video footage released online by the independent news site TSA.



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Algeria to cap wheat imports in bid to save foreign currency
Algerian court detains former minister over corruption allegations

[Israel faces the uncertainty of post-Netanyahu era](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-22 23:48

AMMAN: It is unclear whether we are witnessing the final chapter of the era of Israel's longest-standing prime minister but his days of glory appear to be over.

Dian Butto, a Palestinian American lawyer and former member of the Palestinian negotiating team, said that the era of Netanyahu as the sole ruler of Israeli politics is certainly over.

Butto, who is teaching international law at Harvard University, said that for the last few years the general thinking in Israel was that "there is no alternative to Netanyahu."

Butto also expected that the demise of Netanyahu would be felt within his Likud party.

“Until recently elections slogans said that Netanyahu and the Likud is good for Israel and that Netanyahu and Trump are in a different league. But with Netanyahu gone politically the Likud party will be shaken to its core.”

International war

Mohammed Wattad, a senior analyst working on the Arabs 48 news site in Haifa, said that the days of calling Netanyahu the king of Israel are over, but his disappearance will not be immediate.

“True, the corruption indictment against Netanyahu ends the rule of the King of Israel, but he will continue to hold on to the seat of the prime minister as long as possible.”

Wattad said Netanyahu had created an international war within Israeli society by putting into question the very basis of the government’s social religious and political existence.

“Some analysts believe that the corruption that Netanyahu represents is much more threatening to Israeli society than the Iranian nuclear threat.”

However, Haifa University political science professor Michel Oun believed that it is too early to count Netanyahu out.

Immunity

“He has said he will continue in his position as long as he can and that he is the victim of a coup. I think the legal case will continue for three to four years and unless his immunity is lifted it will be impossible to remove him from his position as a member of Knesset until a judgment is made and enforced.”

Johnny Mansour, a Haifa-based historian and political science lecturer at Beit Berl College in Israel, said that Netanyahu will stay in the job and he listed five different scenarios for the future:

- * he resigns and continues as head of a caretaker government
- * 2/3 of the Knesset asks that his immunity be lifted, which is very difficult since he heads a coalition of 55 out of 120 members
- * a coup takes place in the Likud and the party will collapse.
- * a new war breaks possibly in the north and he will stay in power.
- * in the absence of a coalition agreement a third election takes place.



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Israel braces for political fight after Netanyahu indictment
Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu charged in corruption cases but vows to carry on