

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/iran-government-develops-national-03-08-2011,40738.html>

Middle East & North Africa - Iran

Political tension

## Government develops "National Internet" to combat international Internet's impact

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Communication and information technology minister Reza Taqipour Anvari announced at the start of July that the first phase of a "National Internet," also called "Clean Internet," will get under way at the end of August, offering an 8 Mbps speed broadband connection that will later rise to 20 Mbps and a national search engine called "Ya Haq" (Oh Just One) to be launched in early 2012. The project's aim is to "better manage national emails and information gathering within the country and to improve security," he said. Surveillance of dissidents' email will inevitably increase.

Online social networks are used in Iran to resist government repression and circulate independent news and information, despite the severity of the censorship system. This new project will reinforce censorship and surveillance of netizens. It consists of an Intranet designed ultimately to replace the international Internet and to discriminate between ordinary citizens and the "elite" (banks, ministries and big companies), which will continue to have access to the international Internet.

The new project does not seem very advisable from the economic viewpoint as this technological step backwards could dissuade certain countries from investing in Iran. It shows that the regime wants to impose total censorship on all sectors involved in disseminated information.

The United States let it be known in June that it is developing a "shadow Internet" or "Internet in a suitcase" that will enable someone in an oppressive country to create an independent connection to the international Internet, one that would work even if the government had shut down the national Internet. Iran reacted to the news by taking a generally tougher line and by announcing that it had the means to block this technology.

The regime continues to demonize new media as the tools of foreign interests. Several officials have described social networks and the Internet as "means of subversion" in recent days. Intelligence minister Heydar Moslehi referred on 29 July to "society's vulnerability to social networks introduced in the country by the enemy." Two days before that, interior minister Mostafa Najari said "satellites and Facebook are the electronic means of a 'soft war' by the West to cause the Iranian family's collapse."

Reporters Without Borders has meanwhile learned that Foad Sadehghi, the editor of the Ayandehnews website, was arrested on 27 July. He was previously arrested at the website's office on 12 February, and was released on bail on 2 March. Ayandehnews has been blocked several times since the June 2009 elections for posting reports about demonstrations or defiance of government directives.

The blogger **Maryam Bahraman** continues to be held nearly two months after her arrest at her home in Shiraz, in the southern province of Fars, on 11 May, when a mobile phone, a computer, books and other personal effects were seized.

The reason for her arrest is not known, but she had presented a report on women's access to new information technologies to the United Nations in New York in February and she previously played a leading role in the "One Million Signatures" campaign for changes to laws that discriminate against women.

She spent 50 days in solitary confinement before being transferred to the women's wing of

Shiraz prison. Her arrest was part of a wave of arrests of women journalists, bloggers and activists including the photographer **Maryam Madj**, the documentary filmmaker **Mahnaz Mohammadi** and the actress and filmmaker **Pegah Ahangarani**. Madj, Mohammadi and Ahangarani were all freed on bail pending trial.

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