



Iran: Progress on National Intranet



Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi, minister of Information and Communications Technology.
Source: Tasnim News Agency via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mohammad-Javad_Azari_Jahromi.jpg, CC BY 4.0

OE Watch Commentary: In 1993, Iran became only the second country in the Middle East (after Israel) to connect to the internet. President Mohammed Khatami's administration invested in connecting cities with fiber-optic cables and by 2005, Iranian internet usage had surged to over six million users. Internet cafes proliferated, especially in the second half of the decade. But with the tremendous growth in internet usage came a decline in the Iranian leadership's ability to control the information and news available to the public.

The 1999 student protests- followed two years later by mass protests sparked by a diaspora television report suggesting the Iranian government had ordered their national team to throw a World Cup qualifier - convinced Iranian authorities that they needed to better control the internet. The government licensed all internet service providers and reduced speed to give itself more time to react to rumors or news it simply disliked. After the 2009 post-election unrest, government censorship increased, leading Iranians to turn to virtual private networks (VPN). Between July 2010 and July 2011, for example, Freedom House reported one VPN provider reported a ten-fold increase in their use within Iran, as Iranians sought to circumvent government restrictions on social media sites like Facebook. A 2014 report by the Islamic Republic's Ministry of Youth and Sports found more than two-thirds of Iranian youth used VPNs.

As Iranian authorities repeatedly failed to control internet use, Iranian politicians and security experts increasingly began to discuss a national intranet. According to the excerpted article from *Donya-e Eqtesad*, Iran's chief financial newspaper, Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi, Iran's minister of Information and Communications Technology (who, at age 37, is also the Islamic Republic's youngest minister), gives a progress report on the creation of the national intranet. As the article notes, "80 percent of the Ministry of Communication's responsibility is [to] create a

national infrastructure of networks." In practice, this also means internal manufacturing of all components necessary for indigenous broadband. This, in turn, suggests that Iranian efforts to create an intranet which is physically distinct from the internet are well in progress. Such an intranet will rely less on software and firewalls to keep outside influences out, and more on physical separation.

This may not be satisfying to Iran's younger population seeking connectivity to the outside world, but the ministry answers more to the demands of the Supreme Leader than the wishes of the broader populace. Still, an intranet without content will likely be poorly used. The *Donya-e Eqtesad* article suggests that this component of Iranian strategy remains unresolved. The article quotes Reza Amali, Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution as saying: "The Ministry of Communications says that now that they have prepared the infrastructure, [but] who will provide the content and services? This is the missing piece." Broadly speaking, there appears little discussion among regime power centers as to how to force Iranians to embrace ideological content in which they have little or no interest. (For background, see: "Comprehensive Legal System for the Country's Internet and Cyberspace," in the October 2017 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

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Source: "Maarafi Chehar Peruzheh dar Roz Jihani Ertibatat (Introducing Four Projects on Global Communications Day)," *Donya-e Eqtesad*, 20 May 2019. <https://donya-e-eqtesad.com/4612>

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The Minister of Information and Communications Technology, at the ceremony for the celebration of Global Communications Day, mentioned that the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology ushered in a boom of production of digital services this year. He said: "The boom in production and the expansion of digital services is of extreme importance to our society, because the expansion of the digital economy is laid out in the plan for the country's development." He continued on to say: "With our coworkers at the telecommunications syndicate and with the use of a computer program that was built two and a half years ago, we were able to achieve 70 percent self-sufficiency in the development of broadband equipment. Much of the Iran-made equipment was presented at the exhibition yesterday. Now we are able to supply Iranian-made broadband equipment to four provinces. The tremendous growth in the inter-provincial network transmission, which for many years had halted, has developed as a result of Iranian skills and knowledge.

The Minister of Information and Communications Technology specified that: "Now up to 30 percent of equipment related to mobile broadband is Iran-made. In other words, we are able to produce 30 percent of the equipment related to mobile broadband. This growth indicator is noteworthy but not satisfactory. Of course, networks have recently grown. Our fixed bandwidth is a huge leap in progress and gives us great hope. According to the "ICT" Technology Resource report, our colleagues within the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology should work harder to grow these percentages and witness the growth of production of communications....

At this ceremony, Reza Amali, Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution said: "80 percent of the Ministry of Communication's responsibility is in creating a national infrastructure of networks. Services and content are still missing and no one has yet spearheaded those projects.... "Communications are an important pillar in the National Information Network. With the skills of the Ministry of Communications, this network fortunately has progressed by over 80 percent. Its budget was 12.5 trillion tomans [\$3.75 billion] and received 8.5 trillion tomans from the private sector. Amali noted the significant contribution of the private sector to the National Information Network and said, "We have a group on this network that showed us that we did not look at the network with integrated knowledge. The Ministry of Communications says that now that they have prepared the infrastructure, who will provide the content and services? This is the missing piece.