Iranians in an internet cafe in Tehran

Iranians Face Large Internet Rate Increases Due To Inflation

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Internet companies in Iran have petitioned the government to increase their broadband and mobile tariffs by 100%, according to Faraz Daily, a pro-reform website.

This request comes at a time when users are experiencing low-quality connections and are forced to pay for expensive Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and anti-filtering software to avoid the censorship imposed by the government.

For more than two decades, the clerical government has blocked thousands of websites and in recent year, most social media platforms. It also offers very slow Internet connection and often cuts service during protests.

Iran's Information and Communications Technology Minister, Issa Zarepour, stated on Monday that the increase in internet service rates has not yet been decided. He also reiterated his usual response to the issue by insisting that the increase would only happen "if the providers improve the internet quality". But users have long suspected that slow traffic is related to government actions and draconian controls.

Also, the adamant stance he takes on "better quality" might not be entirely genuine. **Shargh Daily** reported last month that Zarepour publicly opposes increasing Internet rates but behind the scenes is following up on it, neglecting the quality altogether.

photo : Mohammadhosein Movahedinejad

Iran's Information and Communications Technology Minister, Issa Zarepour

While President Ebrahim Raeisi promised free internet for the lowest income groups during his inauguration in 2021, the number of limitations on internet access and the price have gradually increased.

With these constraints in place, Iranian citizens are deprived of access to free information. Raisi's hardliner government has increased censorship. Numerous foreign and domestic websites, including reputable news outlets and social media platforms, have been added to the government blocking scheme.

The spiral of censorship measures has intensified since the beginning of the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement last year.

According to **Freedom House**, Iran was the Middle East's worst country for internet freedom in 2023 due mainly to severe and overzealous responses by authorities to nationwide protests.

However, the internet shutdowns and the filtering of popular messaging apps used by citizens continued even after protests subsided.

Legislators, such as **Javad Nikbin**, have alluded to a connection between those lobbying for internet censorship and those marketing tools that circumvent censorship, such as VPNs.

Lawmaker Jalal Rashidi Kouchi estimated that the financial turnover of VPN providers in Iran amounts to approximately 800 million to 1 billion dollars annually.

According to Kouchi, if the minimum monthly price of a VPN in Iran is $2, the country's citizens would be compelled to spend approximately **$480 million annually** to circumvent the regime's bans on such services as Instagram and WhatsApp.

But that is not the end of the story. Having a VPN active on your system will result in more data usage since some of that data is consumed by the VPN.

That amount according to the Farazdaily website means half of the traffic you buy from providers is consumed solely by using a VPN. And since the current administration has imposed more limitations, users are already paying more. Not just for more VPN but also more traffic.

With the providers asking for an increase in rates, consumers will be forced to pay yet another fee for **"the most expensive low-quality service in Iran"**.

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