

One Social Network With A Rebellious Message

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is the third report for the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), on the freedom of internet use in the Arab world. The report, which comes three years after the second report, tackles the issue of freedom of the internet use in 20 Arab countries including Somalia and Mauritania. This is nine more countries than the first report, *The Internet In the Arab World...A New Place for Repression*, and two more than the second report, *An Unyielding Opponent: The Internet and the Arab governments*.

In addition, this report looks at four tools (blogs, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter) provided by the internet during the past years. The final part of the report is about how the Arab internet activists used those tools, in addition to the usual means, in their struggle for democracy.

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Facts and Numbers

Communications and Internet in the Arab world as of 2009

- Number of Arab internet users: 58 million.
- Number of mobile phones in the Arab world: about 176 million.
- Number of landlines in the Arab world: about 34 million.
- Number of Facebook users in the Arab world: about 12 million.
- Number of Arabic blogs: about 600,000, active blogs: 150,000.
- Largest number of internet cafés and cyber clubs: 16,000 in Algeria.
- Largest number of internet users: 15 million in Egypt.
- Least number of internet users: 60,000 in Mauritania.
- Countries most intensely using Facebook: Egypt, Lebanon and Algeria.
- Highest number of mobile phone lines: 7.5 million, in UAE.
- Highest percentage of internet users, compared to population: 2.86 million in UAE, i.e. more than 50% percent of the total population.
- Countries most intensely monitoring internet: Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.
- Countries most repressive of internet activists: Egypt.
- Best countries dealing with internet: Lebanon and Algeria.
- Best country in internet services: Morocco.
- Countries most intensely tapping communications: Lebanon and Egypt.
- Countries hosting majority of extremist sites: Saudi Arabia.
- Countries hosting majority of secular sites secular: Morocco, Lebanon and Egypt.

- Best communities of online bloggers and activists: Morocco.
- Countries most intensely using YouTube: Egypt.

Introduction

The internet in the Arab world has a snowball effect; now that the snowball is rolling, it can no longer be stopped. Getting bigger and stronger, it is bound to crush down all obstacles.

In addition, to the stress caused by the Arab bloggers, a new forum was opened for Arab activists; Facebook. Arab activists have been using Facebook in the utmost creative way to support the democracy movement in the region, a region that has one of the highest rates of repression in the world. Unlike other regions where oppressive countries (like China, Iran and Burma) represent the exception, oppression can be found everywhere in the Arab world.

The number of Arab internet users interested in political affairs does not exceed a few thousands, mainly represented by internet activists and bloggers, out of 58 million internet users in the Arab world. As few as they are, they have succeeded in shedding some light on the corruption and repression of the Arab governments and dictatorships. The Arab governments have tried numerous ways to silence those activists with no success. So, now these governments stand helplessly in front of the power of these activists and the support they have gained from the public.

Getting Back at Journalists and Bloggers

Arab governments and their security agencies have been censoring and cracking down on traditional mass media such as newspapers (TV stations and satellite channels) seizing newspapers' issues and stopping the emissions of TV channels. However, it's hard to have the same control over the internet. The Arab governments can only ban or block a website after its content

has been published, usually through RSS feature. Even if the website is bloc, governments cannot block its information; it can be found on other websites or blogs. For these frustrated governments, the only way to stop bloggers or activists is to punish and prosecute them. In fact, the number of the prosecuted and assaulted bloggers and internet activists largely outnumbered journalists, who also face the government's repression. The difference between these two forms of repression is that journalists are penalized prior to publishing or airing their material, by simply seizing publications or not airing TV show, while bloggers and internet activists face repression after posting their work on the internet. Internet activists represent the largest number of prisoners of conscience in many countries, like Egypt, Syria and Tunisia.

Substantial Profits and Development Losses

It is very rare to find an Arab government without a ministry for communications and information. There is always a ministry that monitors this sector that includes internet and telephone services, both landlines and mobiles. This sector represents to the Arab governments a profitable business and whatever side affects it has, the citizens using to express their opinions and protest politically, it can be dealt with by the security agencies. The security agencies filter web content, block websites, tap phone lines and punish any rebels to the rule of the government.

Regardless of the statements issues or the conferences organized by the ministries of communications, Arab governments do not have a genuine interest in using this new technological revolution to create and develop a diversified, documented and reliable Arab

content on the internet.

For example, Telecom Egypt's revenue for the first nine months of 2009, ending in 30/9/2009, is 7742 million Egyptian pounds achieving a 3 % increase from the same period last year. The gross profit was 4175 million Egyptian pounds making a net profit of 2576 million Egyptian pounds in only nine months . At the same time, the Ministry of Communications threatened to take penal measures against mobile phone companies trying to offer cheaper service for its clients . In addition, there were around 100 cases of abduction and torture, and rape against internet activists in 2008. Therefore, Arab states don't develop or participate in making technology but rather consume it.

In a study issued by one of the leading centers in political and strategic research in the United States, RAND Institute, it was stated that "the information revolution is real, and there is a small chance that this revolution would reach non-democratic communities. In these communities, this technology faces dictatorship that either abandons information technology and communication in their countries lagging behind, or allows this technology putting their regimes at the risk of withering away. In fact, the autocratic regimes have no choice but to give in and make way for the technology wave" .

A few Arab governments are striving to catch up with this technological revolution and become associated with it, such as the UAE and Kuwait. However, the aspiration of these governments is to increase the number of websites or increase their content. They miss that the technological revolution is measured by the change induced in society at cultural, and political, social and economic level. Nevertheless, this objective

was achieved successfully by Arab internet activists.

This was stated in RAND Institute study: "The information revolution is not a game where you can pick and choose. All countries, nations, cults and cultures should be able to gain the fruits of this revolution. The fundamental part of the information revolution, the indispensable part, is freedom of expression, exchange of information and a universal access to information."

Of course, the greatest hypocrite would not claim that the Arab governments respect or support freedom of expression or the right to access and circulate information. Consequently, the gap between Arab governments and internet activists is widening day after day. Governments are satisfied by taking the role of a policeman after these activists, while the activists are striving, through the use of the internet, for a democratic life.

chapter 1 (Internet in The Arab World)

UAE

We are Open... to Blocking

The UAE Telecommunications Regulatory Authority which has identified 500 words that allow it to block pornographic sites . Dahi Khalfan Tamim, Commander in Chief of Dubai Police commenting on his campaign to block YouTube in the UAE at a Doha Center for Press Freedoms press conference

Overview

The UAE is the second largest Gulf economy after Saudi Arabia. It has worked over the years to establish its position as a regional economic and technology leader, especially Dubai, which compensates the lack of oil resources with various economic projects, focusing on real estate, tourism and technology. The Dubai principality (emirate) hosts the Middle East's most prominent information technology hub at the Dubai Internet City which was inaugurated in 2000 to bring together technology industries in one location. The Dubai Media City was established founded in 2001 and hosts a number of Arab and global media organizations. The government pledged to respect Media City staff's freedom of expression. However, Media City administration cooperates with the government on laws to ensure that free expression is "responsible and accurate".

The Internet

About 4.5 million people live in the UAE, the majority of whom are expatriates. population of the UAE is about 4,5 million people,

mostly citizens of other countries. By late 2007 the average annual per capital income in the UAE exceeded US\$40,000

A report was issued in February 2009 with relation to the telecommunications sector showing that the number of mobile users exceeded 7.5 million with a 192% prevalence rate , while 10% of the population use mobile phone Internet . The number of land lines was 1.365 million in 2008 and the UAE ranked first among Arab country in the number of Internet users compared to the population.

In mid-2009 the number of Internet users exceeded 2.86 million; over 50% of the total population, while high-speed Internet users reached 11% of the total population for the same year .

The increase in Internet users in the UAE created a very active virtual society through forums and blogs addressing issues that concern UAE citizens. Some of the forums achieved success through addressing sensitive topics usually not discussed in UAE. Daring discussions crossed some red lines and led to the closure of one of the forums and the imprisonment of its owner and an administrator. This also resulted in an increase in the number of bloggers who use free blogging sites, such as Maktoob, Blogspot, Union of bloggers (Kashkool), etc..

Until recently, Etisalat has been monopolizing the UAE's telecommunications sector since 1971. However, the situation changed in 2003 with Federal Decree 3 of 2003 regulating the telecommunications sector which put an end to Etisalat's monopoly, allowing a partial liberalization of the telecommunications sector and paving the way for a private operator to enter the market. In 2006 the Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Company was officially licensed as the

second telecom operator and Etisalat's sole competitor in the UAE in all service areas, such as GSM, land lines and Internet .

Introducing a new operator constitutes a step toward the sector's complete liberalization by 2015 .

Telecommunications Law and the Internet

The UAE's telecommunications sector's Public Regulatory Authority was established in accordance with Federal Decree³ of 2003) and Cabinet Resolution 42/23 m) of 2008. UAE telecommunications laws prohibit companies and individuals from providing telecommunications services without license from the regulatory authority. The regulatory authority prepares the state's telecommunications strategic plans, manages licensing, renewal, cancellation and suspension, and determines service rates for the sector and others. Internet voice communications with countries outside the UAE are prohibited.

In its attempt to cover the legislative gap in communications, a syndrome in many Arab countries, the UAE issued a set of e-legislations. The set began by local law² of 2002 regulating e-transactions and e-commerce. It was followed four years later by Federal Law 1 of 2006 regulating e-transactions and e-commerce, as well as Federal Law 2 of 2006) on IT felonies. Finally, Law 36 of 2006 was issued amending some provisions of the law of evidence in civil and commercial transactions.

The Law of IT Felonies is the first Arab law in this area. Its articles cover a wide range of crimes, including hacking, money laundering, human trafficking and other crimes committed using the Internet or technology tools. The law has many loose articles, such as rendering criminal "disturbing public order and public morals," the penalty of which is a maximum of five years in prison .

Another example is

"any one encroaching on the principles, values, family [...], shall be punished by imprisonment for no less than a year and/or a fine no less than ED50,000 ."

As well as the text stating the imprisonment or a fine or either for anyone who abused a sacred or ritual of any religion where these rituals are protected by Islamic law [...]. The penalty shall not exceed 7 years if the crime included defiance of Islam or advocating for another religion [...] or called to an idea or concept which would involve any of the above .

The 1980 Press Law of 1980 penalizes any material "criticizing the UAE Ruler or leaders," "offends Islam or the regime," "threatens the supreme national interests," or "mock the leaders of friendly Arab or Muslim countries". Offenders face imprisonment or a fine and risk suspension of their newspapers .

However, the UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin-Rashid Al-Maktoum issued a decree to prevent the imprisonment of journalists for publication issues on 25 September 2007. The decision was welcome in both Arab countries and on the international level.. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information described the decision as "a step forward at a time when a wave of animosity against freedom of expression and the press sweeps the Arab world" .

Nevertheless, in September 2008 an Emirati newspaper published the new press law characteristics under the title "media activities regulatory project." The project included e-papers and e-broadcasting. The definitions section stated that "prints are all...writings, graphics, musical pieces, images, or other means of

expression, whether written, audio or video, as long as they are portable by any means; electronic or digital, or any other."

Blocking, control and confiscation

The UAE experiences an outstanding contradiction between mottos and reality that would attract investment to information technology and communications, as well as encourage citizens to use Internet for this purpose. At the same time, the UAE extensively blocks thousands of sites that are "undesirable" for religious, cultural or even political reasons at times, while the government claims that only pornographic sites are blocked. The idea of excessive monitoring reached the Internet as part of the framework which governs the operation of traditional media in the UAE.

The official declaration on blocking pornographic sites often does not stand up to the test of reality. This is clear in the document issued by the TRA's Internet filtering policy which leaked to Wiki Leaks (www.wikileaks.org). The document was named "filtering policy" (Internet Content Filtering Policy - Doc. Version 1.0, Issue date: 24/9/ 2006). The document defines prohibited content as "content challenging public interest, public morality, public order and national security, national reconciliation, and Islamic morals, or content prohibited by the laws of the United Arab Emirates and their regulations. "

The document specified 11 site types to be blocked: proxy, criminal, dating, drugs, pornography and gambling, hacking, anti-Islamic or those that express hatred of Islam or advocate conversion to other religions, as well as deceptive and misleading sites that aim to obtain personal information, communication via

Internet protocols, and terrorism sites. This is in addition to sites blocked by the government for any other reasons where the regulatory authority enforces the blocking.

The large scale prohibition on Internet in the UAE cannot be precisely specified. The Open Net Initiative, in its 2004-2005 report on the status of the Internet in the United Arab Emirates, stated that it has listed 8,713 UAE sites, 1,347 of which, 15.4%, were blocked. This was described in the report as "excessive blocking". The blog www.emarati.katib.org lists some of the blocked sites in the UAE.

Until recently, blocking existed only through Etisalat. Instead of unblocking sites on the Etisalat network, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority imposed the same block on Du, is implemented by Etisalat, ending years of smooth access to all Internet sites from within the free zones and on development projects abroad, which are located on Nakheel and Emaar in Dubai. Du is the Internet and telecom service provider for both. On 14 April 2008 Du joined UAE proxy after sending a text message to all subscribers saying: "We would like to inform you that as of 14/4/2008 all websites which include content not in compliance with the UAE's moral, social and cultural values will be blocked. "

Mohamed Ghanim Al-Ghanim, TRA Board Member and Director General declared: "We are pleased with the response of Internet service providers in the UAE, Etisalat and Du, to TRA's Internet access policy, including the introduction of a mechanism to review user complaints, observations, comments and messages on new the policy and procedures. This warning contrasts with the rules for operation through which media companies and big businesses in

free zones are granted uncensored Internet access, a policy aimed at attracting investment.

Despite the community's support for the UAE's policy of blocking sites, the most recent poll by Khaleej newspaper showed that 95.5% do not support filtering. The questionnaire, which included men and women, students, housewives, doctors, engineers, workers and other categories of citizens and expatriates, showed that most of them do not support blocking and claimed their natural right to self-monitoring, while 40.5% of them preferred blocking some websites the content of which they view as against customs and traditions.

TRA-imposed restrictions over web sites include voice over Internet Protocol calls (VoIP), in particular through Skype software. Telecommunications companies are concerned it may incur huge losses. The site www.skype.com is blocked in the UAE to prevent users from downloading the program and using it to make international calls.

TRA also blocked the site www.pc2call.com which provides Internet access to the GSM network. Visitor would read the traditional "this site is blocked," but in some cases a message appears saying: "Network Error" (tcp_error) instead. UAE press and some web sites published news about people arrested and charged with making illegal VoIP calls.

Majan issue

Freedom of opinion and expression in the UAE experienced a major relapse when the Ras al-Khaimah local authorities closed down the forum www.majan.net and fabricated many charges of libel and defamation against the owner Mohamed Al-Shehhi and

his colleague Khalid Asly. Al-Shehhi was detained for about 55 days, while Asly was detained for about two weeks. On 8 August 2007 the Ras al-Khaimah court sentenced Mohammed Rashid Al-Shehhi in case 751/ 2007 to one year of prison, a UAED50,000 fine and a compensation to a government official of UAED20,000. Asly was sentenced to five months in prison after the director of Ras Al Khaimah Medical zone filed a complaint against the online forum claiming he was subjected to verbal abuse and slander by a participant who used a pseudonym.

As Al-Shehhi and Asly were jailed a chain of lawsuits on Majan, reaching six cases, led in first instance rulings to a total of four years in prison, and fines amounting to UAED18,0000, as well as the permanent closure of Majan. One of the complainants later withdrew her case.

The Court based its ruling on article 16 of the Code of Federal Law 2 of 2006. However, the ruling against Asly was amended as per the Penal Code. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information described the case as "a severe blow to freedom of expression in the UAE."

Many international human rights organizations condemned the closure, trial and imprisonment of the site owner and his colleague and demanded their immediate release, dropping all charges against the forum and unconditionally reopening it.

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, Reporters Without Borders and other international organizations supported the Majan case. Disappointingly, the UAE's Assembly of Journalists did not take any action regarding the issue. The Majan story, which caused the UAE great embarrassment internationally, did not end. After more than five months, on 20/01/2008, the Ras

al-Khaimah Court of Appeal canceled all proceedings and sentences against Majan.net, the owner and his colleague. Similarly, a UAE citizen filed a defamation case against the Soqour al-Imarat forum claiming he was insulted on the site. The complainant did not have evidence to his claim, nor did he ask the site manager to delete the alleged insult. The case was referred the court for decision. However, the website owner's father paid UAED20,000 to the complainant to drop the case.

In what the Telecom Regulatory Authority considered positive progress, on 5/10/2008, and since the launch of the Internet access management policy, TRA unblocked about 1,000 websites, equivalent to 25% of the blocked sites.

However, this was followed by a rapid relapse where the UAE authorities blocked the blog <http://mujarad-ensan.maktoobblog.com/> on 12/10/2008 immediately after publishing an article titled "Laugh with me and cheer, our economy is booming".

The article addressed the effects of the global economic crisis on the UAE, an issue denied by official media. The article said: "I do not know the impact of the global crisis on our economy, but I know that we lack transparency and I believe that we do not live on an island in this world. While some still brag about how attractive our market is to foreign investment and the advantage of free acquisition for foreigners, I find them now denying any effect of the crisis on the UAE." The support campaign to the blog let UAE authorities to reconsider its decision and unblock it about ten days later.

Police E- patrols

On 30/10 2008, Dubai police announced the launch of e-patrols to

monitor any irregularities or crimes and track criminals on sites, chat rooms and forums. Emirates Al-Youm newspaper quoted Major General Khamis Mattar Mazzina, Deputy Commander in Chief of Dubai Police, saying: "The Cyber Crime Department created forums under pseudonyms involving a large number of members. They work through e-patrols affiliated to the Administration of Investigations and CID. Forum members, who are e-patrol staff, would connect with users in chat rooms. He said that the number of cases that the Dubai Police Electronic Investigation Department reviewed during 2009 was 222 cases, including 87 cases of fraud and financial crimes, 38 hacking cases, 92 cases of defamation and blackmail, and five cases of fake sites to extort users.

At the UN Human Rights Council's periodic review of human rights practices the UAE submitted its national report on 4/12/2008 which stressed on the State's respect for freedom of opinion and expression.

The report did not mention any of the violation incidents, only mentioning the positive points without any of the negative ones. Norway made several recommendations during the discussion of the UAE report, including "canceling the imprisonment of journalists for press cases, a modern law of publications and publishing, issuing new laws to protect the freedom of expression and the right to establish unions in line with international human rights laws and lift blocks on websites in order to reach a legislation complying with international laws."

However, the UAE rejected all of the recommendations, especially those concerning issuing a modern Printing and Publishing law and unblocking websites. About 1,000 sites were blocked,

according to discussions. In this session on 19/3/2009 the UAE human rights report was accepted. The UAE stated its responses to the recommendations made by the 74 member countries of the Council. The UAE accepted 36, expressed reservations against 30 and held eight recommendations for study.

After several campaigns against "immoral satellite channels," "the campaign against homosexuals" and other campaigns, the Dubai Police Commander in Chief and Chairman of the Juvenile Welfare Association, Lieutenant General Dahi Khalfan launched a new campaign on 9/3/2009 for boycotting YouTube which contains the largest video library on the net.

In his speech to the General Assembly of the Juvenile Welfare Association Dahi said: "YouTube stirs hatred between the sons of one homeland," noting that he saw "strange" content that cannot be permitted to circulate as it defies the ethics and traditions of society." He called Etisalat for an initiative to prevent "pornographic content and any content that provokes sectarian strife." YouTube is visited by millions daily.

When asked about the contradiction of this campaign with the continued calls to increase the margin of personal freedoms regarding information exchange on the net, Khalfan told Emirates Al-Youm: "Broadcasting pornographic content and offensive ideas is not freedom. A line must be drawn between content presented to Arab and Muslim countries and content provided to the West because of culture differences." Immediately after the announcement of the Khalfan's YouTube campaign, Internet activists, as well as electronic forum members and attendees declared their rejection of the campaign, stating that it directly challenged their personal freedoms and deprived them of an

important online source of knowledge and entertainment.

In the follow-up on his campaign, Khalfan declared to local UAE newspapers that he regretted the campaign's failure to block YouTube. He deeply regretted the decline of the telecommunications company or the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority to block the site that contains pornographic scenes which contradict with the ethics of community and harm youth, especially weak ones."

This declaration came after the UAE news agency published the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority's clarifications on the issue of blocking YouTube. The TRA said: "The TRA's recently issued Internet access policy is very clear in defining the categories of blocked content. ISPs published the policy on their websites. Thus, sites not fulfilling the specified categories and which do not break the policy terms will not be blocked."

Regarding YouTube, the TRA declared it had blocked "some content" violating the policy.

Dahi Khalfan held a meeting with a TRA delegation. Both parties agreed on blocking more than 500 key words that may lead to accessing immoral sites as of that day.

This campaign to boycott YouTube launched by the Commander in Chief of Dubai Police, and the subsequent identification of 500 key word to be blocked were criticized by Doha Center for Media Freedoms. The Center sent a letter to YouTube owner Google asking them not to affirm censorship and blocking of YouTube. The Center also requested that the Dubai Police Department publish the 500 words to make sure they actually block pornographic websites only.

The Doha Center letter was sent after the Dubai Police met with

Google representatives on 2 April 2009 where the Vice Commander of Dubai Police mentioned that “the police will coordinate with the TRA and use the latest technology to protect young people, the builders of the future.”

However, Google replied that there was no intension of blocking YouTube, denying alleged claims of site monitoring. . This was followed by the Doha Center letter to Google which gave rise to several disagreements between the Dubai Police Commander Dahi Khalfan Tamim and Doha Media Freedoms Center.

Large scale Internet prohibition in the UAE often causes problems, especially when public services sites useful to thousands of users are blocked for unknown or unconvincing reasons. An example is Flickr which stores pictures for free which is used by thousands of bloggers to store images that appear on blogs. Blocking the site raised protest waves. However, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority recently stated that: "The site does not have technical tools for partial blocking of indecent content like YouTube and Facebook, so it was mandatory to block the whole site."

The forum Al-Hewar Almotamaden (Civilized Dialogue), www.rezgar.com, an Arabic site hosted in Europe, is also blocked in the UAE. The site declares itself as “the first independent daily secular leftist newspaper in the Arab world." It is visited by millions of Arabs daily. Site administrators described the blocking of the site as an attempt to prevent human thought and spread ignorance, extremism and hatred. One UAE official explained that blocking is irrelevant to site contents. He added that it was because one of the writers. .

The blog Mowaten Emarati (Emirati Citizen) is blocked in the UAE for various reasons, but having adult content is not one of them.

More surprising is that the UAE turns to arresting jurists and activists.

The founder of "The rights of the people of UAE" site, Hassan Dokki, was charged with "raping a maid" only two months after launching his site. The court of first instance sentenced him to 10 years in prison. This sentence was reduced to six months in the appeal. The trial displayed many encroachments and interventions and was criticized in the UAE and internationally by many human rights activists.

Many activists believe that the fabrication of the charge against Dokki was purely political. The forensic medical report showed no evidence of rape. It is evident that Dokki addressed many topics that are considered red lines in the UAE.

Internet cafes

Internet cafés are not significant in the lives of UAE citizens due to the abundance of computers and easy Internet access from work or home.

The majority of the visitors of these public cafés are foreigners and Asians living in the UAE. The cafés are located in shopping centers, restaurants, etc. However, a recent increase in the number of customers, particularly students, who visit Internet cafés that offer WiFi (wireless Internet services) has been observed..

The UAE hosts students from various countries, especially those whose families live in various Middle East countries.

There are no available statistics about the number of Internet cafés in the UAE, but it was estimated to exceed 600 according in 2006. . Although a new legislation was issued requiring the registration of names of internet café customers in UAE and

mandating that they register their personal information and show identity documents bearing their image, none of that has been enforced to this day.

Despite the standardization of procedures regulating Internet café operation in the UAE, implementation varies from principality to another.

In Ajman, for example, regulations require that cafés lie on a main commercial street in an accessible area. The area of café must be proportional to the number of computers. Interior design must allow for privacy and space so that monitoring staff can pass by customers or do their monitoring work from a distance.

New regulations also prevent the use of dark glass for café windows to blocking vision.. Family sections are not allowed and the Internet service is restricted to the ground floor. Moreover, smoking and customers below 18 years of age are not allowed in cafés.

Jordan

Formal Freedom

Overview

Jordan does not have a decent human rights record except when compared with neighboring countries, being a torture transit country where prisoners are "shipped" to extract forced confessions. However, Jordan enjoys relative telecommunications and Internet freedom.

According to official statistics , the unemployment rate in Jordan reached 13% in 2007, 14% were under the poverty line, and the illiteracy rate of citizens above 15 years of age was 8%.

According to the 2004 census, the Jordanian population reached 5.6 million, with a total of 400,000 foreigners, 38,000 of which are Syrians, 40,000 Iraqi, 115,000 Palestinian, 112,000 Egyptian and 60,000 Asian.

Jordan received 700,000 Iraqi refugees causing an unexpected population increment reaching 6.3 million in 2009

Telecommunication and the Internet

Jordan is among Arab countries that witness rapid growth in telecommunications and Internet services. It is almost the pioneer Arab country in privatizing this sector and endorsing an open market policy, all for better customer service.

This sector is administered by the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission established by Law 13 of 1995 as an independent government body. It became independent when the Ministry of Post and Transport became the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology in 2002.

Jordan moved rapidly toward liberalizing this sector in a leading

step in the Arab world. There are currently four telecommunications operators in Jordan: Zein, Orange, Omniyah and Express, in addition to two companies land line service providers.

In 1997, the Institute of Wire and Wireless Communications became the Jordanian Telecommunications Company, fully owned by the government. Company shares were sold gradually till France Telecom eventually became the major share holder by the end of 2006.

In 1999, MobileCom Albatraa was licensed to provide GSM services, followed by Omniyah at the end of 2004.

The beginning of 2005 marked the end of the Jordanian Telecommunications Company provision of land line services which were liberalized. Jordanian-Bahraini Batleco was licensed to provide landline services.

This rapid rate of liberalizing the telecommunications market and the ensuing competition were certain to lead to lower prices. Cell phone subscribers reached 4.7 million in 2007 and increased to reach 5.3 million in 2008, a prevalence rate of 91%, whereas landlines subscribers reached 519,000 .

Investments in both branches of this sector reached JD88 million (US\$124.2 million) in 2008, in addition to JD22 million invested in Internet services. The telecommunications sector contributes 10% to Jordan's GNP. In addition, the Jordanian Telecommunications Company (51% owned by France Telecom) bought the Bahraini company Speed of Light in a step to expand into Arab and Gulf markets .

Internet Users

According to official statistics, the number of Internet users grew from 1.3% in 2001 to 4% in 2008 amounting to 230,000 subscribers. The years 2006 to 2008 witnessed a leap in the number of users from 770,000 to 1.5 million users . The Internet prevalence rate in Jordan is 26 % which makes Jordan one of the leading Arab countries in Internet usage. Recent reports say the 2009 rate has reached 33%.

As observers stated, this is a direct result of competition and the rates war between service providers 2007. One of the main reasons behind the low rates of Internet usage was the unwritten deal between service providers to maintain prices that maximize their profits. Despite the many online education courses and programs provided by private and official education institutes, the ADSL service remained unaffordable to most Jordanians .

In June 2007 Orange introduced itself as an affiliate to the Jordanian Telecommunications Company which made a considerable difference as Orange reduced the ADSL annual subscription to 12 piastres (16 cents) per day for a bandwidth of 128 KB and higher. Batelco stepped in and offered 10 piastres. Omnyiah and Zein competed for wireless Internet rates. However, they are still high. A 256 Kb/sec service would have cost JD300 in mid-2007 whereas in 2009 the 512m Kb/sec (almost double the speed) costs JD200 (prices before tax).

The king is said to have been behind reducing the rates as he was not pleased with the performance of this important sector of Jordan's telecommunications market .

However, download limits are upsetting most clients. It is similar to

the system the Egyptian government attempted to introduce but faced enormous objection.

The Telecommunications and Internet Legal Environment

The telecommunications and Internet sector in Jordan is bound by law 13 of 1995 and its amendment 8 of 2008. However, as usual, the law and its amendment do not mention the Internet, electronic publishing or computer-related crimes.

Articles of the law detail the expected performance of the Ministry of Telecommunications and the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, and the tasks assigned to both. The law endorses open market policies and principles, licenses and quality assurance, etc.

However, there is a chapter that deals with crimes and penalties in which an article -Article 71- prescribes a punishment of one month to one year in prison and/or a fine of anyone who publishes or distributes the content of any communication on a local or a public network or the content of a phone call which he learnt by virtue of his job or that they illegally recorded.

Generally speaking, most of the articles of this chapter are applicable to the Internet as a means of communication listed in the preface to the law . Another example is article 75 that punishes those who send threats, insults or sexual content by any means of communication.

The Telecommunication Regulatory Commission took an important step in 2006–2008 when it built a customer database for cell phone users and stopped sales operations unless contract data fields were filled. A similar step was taken in Egypt targeting accessing the data of political opponents and putting them under

surveillance. In Jordan, 4.2 million lines (85%) were registered until 2008 .

In addition to the Law of 1995 and its amendment of 2005, there are two important documents that are as powerful as the Law. The first is the global government telecommunications, post and information technology sector vision. The second is the document of 2007. Both were issued by the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, being the entity responsible for setting the telecommunications sector policy as per the 1995 law. Both documents were approved by the Cabinet.

The document of 2003 set the policy to be followed by the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission and all parties concerned in order to liberalize the telecommunications sector and promote competitiveness. A whole chapter is dedicated to the Internet market. It states that "the government realizes quite clearly the risks of accessing illegal or unethical content. Acquired experience dictates that censoring is one useless measure the government is unwilling to take .

The document of 2007 is a development on the document of 2003 as a response to market needs. The point of interest is that the document contains more detailed articles regarding the government Internet policy. It states that "the government still does not consider content control to be a necessity. Self control is the most suitable. However , if self control is lacking, government intervention may be called for ."

The document suggests a modern media work team consisting of the Media Supreme Council, clerks from the Ministry of Telecommunications, the Telecommunicaitons Regulatory Commission and the Media Commission. The team "would assess

the significance of government intervention in modern media, except the Internet. The report then stresses that government control over modern media should be minimal".

The document of 2007 stated that the government intended to:

1- Merge the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission and the Media Commission.

2- Issue a Unified Telecommunications Law .

3- Issue computer-related crimes and information protection laws .

The document recommended reducing Internet rates by eliminating taxes on PCs and Internet services. In addition, it projected a market penetration rate of 50% for ADSL in the following five years .

These steps are extremely satisfactory and provide a leading example to other Arab governments. However, the document contains a rather worrying article "the government, through the executive authorities, in collaboration with Internet service providers and hosting companies, will make sure to eliminate any Internet content hosted in Jordan that is illegal according to the Penal Code in a way that complies with legal proceedings and protection policies. Jordan will cooperate with other countries to regulate non-Jordanian hosted content according to Jordanian laws, yet the Jordanian government does not suggest regulating Internet content ".

The confusing language of the article raises concern about Internet publishing freedom. The article authorizes that executive authorities (which include the police and intelligence services) to delete illegal content without court permission. Though the phrase implies that court permission is required ("in a way that complies with legal proceedings"), the wording is elastic and vague.

Implementation should be monitored implementation as it is the only criterion.

Moreover, Jordan's Penal Code is nothing to be proud of. It should not be enforced as is against reporters and bloggers as it is a threat to freedom of expression.

Censorship, Blocking and Detention

Jordan is one country that is consistent in words and deeds. It is classified as a country that does not systematically blocks Internet content. However, freedom of expression is always threatened in Jordan.

No precise news is available about site blocking in Jordan except in very rare cases. Skype, www.skype.com, was temporarily blocked several times for "security reasons ". The site is available now in Jordan. However, Arab Times , www.ArabTimes.com, is still invisible in many Arab countries as it bitterly criticizes the royal family.

Aside from blocking, it is widely believed that the Internet is monitored by Jordanian security authorities . There is plenty of evidence to that. On 12/3/2008 Ammon News Agency, www.ammon.net, published an article by Randa Habib, a veteran reporter, criticizing a government official. One hour later the article was removed. It was then republished the following week on the site. The site experienced technical difficulties and as a result it was inaccessible to most Jordanian visitors for 33 hours. The site administration declared it was inaccessible but did not announce the reason .

In October 2008 the municipal chief of Amman decided to block 600 local and foreign news sites to his subordinates at Amman's

municipal secretariat under the pretext of facilitating network traffic and that those sites were irrelevant to the work environment. The real reason is believed to be the bitter criticism of the municipal secretariat on electronic newspapers .

Another serious development was the decision of the print and publication circles to subject all Jordanian websites and electronic papers to the amendments of the law of publications that the parliament approved in September 2007 after four-year arguments.

The decision was widely resented in the press and human rights circles in Jordan and worldwide. In addition to technical difficulties related to implementation, , many Jordanian sites and e-papers are hosted abroad.

The Print and Publication Circle declared its decision a few days after the parliament approved the law, in addition to the policy document issued during the same period in May 2007. These incidents leave observers too skeptic to give the Jordanian government the benefit of doubt.

Moreover, the decision was announced immediately after several Jordanian sites had gained popularity, including the following sites:

www.amman.net

www.ammon.net

www.donianews.net

www.sarayanews.com

www.assawsana.com

www.marayanews.com

www.samaalordon.net

<http://www.jordanianissues.blogspot.com>

Many more sites were affected by this decision. Observers call it the Second Jordanian Press Tsunami. The first took place immediately after the Publications Law in 1993 .

Amendments to the Print and Publications Law proved defective when applied to the printed press . After lengthy arguments the parliament approved by a slight majority the abolishment of imprisoning reporters in press-related crimes but upheld the legislation to imprison reporters according to the Penal Code or any of the other 24 laws dealing with press work. Moreover, large fines were introduced to the law .

The amendments prohibited the following:

- 1- All that is meant to ridicule or offend religions protected by the Constitution
- 2- Any text, graphics, symbols or otherwise that is offensive to prophets and messengers.
- 3- All that is offensive to religious sentiments or stirs ethnic or racial strife.
- 4- All that humiliates individuals and their personal freedoms or any content providing false information about them.

Tens of reporters were tried and face imprisonment in accordance with Article 181 of the 1960 Penal Code. The Article defines insult and libel in a manner that is not applicable to press work.

Two months after enforcing the Publications Law on websites, in October 2007, Ahmed Owaidi Al-Abidi was sentenced to two years of prison and fined because of an article he wrote that was published on the Jordan National Movement website, www.jordannationalmovement.com. He was accused of "undermining the State" .

In the same month Mohamed Al-Zoheiry, known as Al-Qaeda poet,

was sentenced to 18 months in prison for offending the dignity of the King. Al-Zoheiry wrote poetry in support of Al-Qaeda in many forums .

Haitham Al-Qariuti in 2007 also was sentenced to seven years after being convicted of using the Internet since 1998 to learn to manufacture explosives. He was eventually acquitted by the Court of Cassation .

Although the article prohibiting criticism of the King and the royal family was repealed in 1999 from the Print and Publications Law, all papers, especially printed ones, practice too much self censorship. This is clear in e-papeers where veneration and idolizing paragraphs are abundant. Some bloggers even post links to the royal family website on their pages.

A poll involving 512 reporters showed that 94% practice self censorship, particularly when writing about the army, security services, sex and religion . The same poll showed that the most restricting laws to media freedom to be the Penal Code (83.8%), security services (82.7%) and the Law of Publications (80%).

Blogs in Jordan

Blogs started in Jordan on 19/11/2005, the day that three Amman hotels were bombed. Bloggers covered the events completely with photography and video whereas classical media were not allowed to cover or broadcast due to security restrictions. However, blogs needed more time to prove their significance and gain trust and credibility .

No accurate statistics about blogs are available in Jordan as hosting companies refuse to reveal customer-related information for marketing reasons and because there is no bucket for

Jordanian blogs like Omranya which lists thousands of Egyptian blogs.

Bloggging has flourished in Jordan in the past two years. Many popular blogs have evolved.

Facebook ranked third after Google and Yahoo as the most visited sites in Jordan. This implies the intense traffic on Facebook in Jordan till the start of 2008, when Jordanian users outnumbered Egyptians and Mexicans despite the major population difference . This boom was quantitative rather than qualitative. Jordan's blogosphere remained of marginal effect and did not represent a burden to the government or the regime as it did not address political issues. It remained detached, lacked information and consisted mostly of personal notes. English blogs are more daring and informative than classical media but of limited effect because of their scarcity and the language barrier .

Observers and researchers almost agree that the Jordanian experience in bloggging is a political failure as it does not address Jordan's public affairs , while others describe Jordanian blogs as a numerical phenomenon and illogical increment which was not coupled with qualitative growth .

Veteran writer and researcher Marc Lynch suggests that the reason behind the tranquility of Jordanian blogs is the immaturity of the party experience as bloggers lack the necessary political maturity and awareness to be able to reflect political opinion and vision . Others attribute the tranquility to cultural and political emptiness and indifference to public affairs.

An IREX independent study showed that 3% of Internet users visit blogs .

Jordan was the first Arab country to establish a blogger

organization, a step that aroused criticism and arguments and was not welcomed among bloggers as blogging is in essence free and unstructured. However, it is too early to judge the consequences. Accordingly, the royal family seems to be following closely and even contributing to this blogging boom.. On his blog, Black Iris, Naseem Tarawna wrote about the King's interview with Petra channel on 2/7/2008. The King commented on the post in English as follows:

"Thank you all for your feedback and comments. I am very happy and proud to see so many responsible citizens engaging in this dialogue. People must not be afraid to express their opinions without using aliases. We are a country of freedom, tolerance, diversity and openness, and everyone has the right to express their thoughts – no matter what they are – in an atmosphere of respect, so long as they are not personally offending others, attempting character assassination or undermining the nation's interest. Your comments only indicate how deeply you care about Jordan and its future and I am happy that we are partners in the development process."

The King posted a similar comment on Addustour newspaper's site:

Queen Rania also launched a special channel on YouTube . In March 2007 the Queen revealed glimpses of her life on her Twitter account where she gained 789,324 followers in five months' time.

The Queen follows 41 Twitter subscribers .

This royal interest in blogging is due to the "tameness" of Jordanian blogs. Most bloggers would totally agree with the royal couple in their political views.

Moreover, blogging in Jordan is, despite lagging behind, enjoys a

large common area with the printed press and e-press. Many bloggers work as reporters or article editors while others started working in e-papers before or after being bloggers.

For example, Mohamed Omar is a reporter in Al-Bawaba, an e-press trainer and a blogger <http://mohomar.com>. Though he stopped addressing political issues in his blog, it has grown very popular. Many writers welcomed it. The blog, which started in 2006, was among the first in Jordan.

There is also the blog of Kamel Nosairat, <http://kamel-nsirat.maktoobblog.com>, which received 2.5 million visits between 2006 and 2009.

Other examples include the following:

Hashem Ghanem who worked in e-press before being a blogger, <http://hishamm126.maktoobblog.com>

Yasser Abuhilaleh , AlJazeera correspondent,
abuhilaleh.maktoobblog.com

Writer Ibrahim Gharaibeh, gharaibeh7.maktoobblog.com

Reporter Omar Shaheen, omarshaheen.maktoobblog.com

Some of these are very successful and popular bloggers, while others are not that outstanding based on the number of visitors and comments even if the blogger is a media figure.

These bloggers are examples of the link between e-press, blogging and printed press. Only Jordan has this number of middle-aged bloggers and e-reporters which could be due to strict control over printed press which pushed them to seek freedom on the Internet.

Following are some of Jordan's significant blogs:

- <http://www.jordanwatch.net>, Batter Mohamed Werdem, one of the few Jordanian news blog

- <http://osamaa.com/blog>, Osama Al-Romh, nominated for the German channel DW award.
- <http://askadenia.net>, Ammer Al-Khalily, a Jordanian who lives in UAE. His blog is quite popular.

Following are some English Jordanian Blogs:

- <http://www.360east.com> is the oldest and most popular blog (launched in 2003). Ahmed Hmeidh, the owner, focuses on IT.
- <http://www.black-iris.com> is a diversified blog that receives a lot of visits. Its owner Nasim Tarawna and two other bloggers launched a citizen press site, hiber (ink): www.7iber.com/blog which is mostly in English.

Women's voice is hardly heard in the world of blogging. Only a few women decided to blog and reveal their identity, including:

- Natasha Tynes: www.natashatynes.org
- Khalda: www.anolitasmind.com

The most significant women's blog is called Grass, <http://grassgrassgrass.wordpress.com>. It is written by a divorced woman using a nickname. Grass addresses women's problems in an admirably daring and outspoken way.

Most Jordanian blogs are hosted on Arabic engines, like Maktoob, a Jordanian engine said to cooperate with Jordanian intelligence services. Maktoob was bought by Yahoo for US\$85 million .

Internet Cafés

Jordan hosts the largest number of Internet cafés in the Arab world. Shafiq Archidat street, the university street, next to Yarmuk university in Irbid was mentioned in the Guinness book of records as the highest populated street with net cafés in the whole world. It is a two-km long street that hosts 160 net cafés .

Net café business declines considerably during the last few years after Internet rates were reduced. Rates were the main reason for the demand on Internet cafés. In the early 2000s, which mark the beginning of the Internet café business in Jordan, hourly rates reached 60 - 70 piastres (US\$0.85).

Yet Internet cafés continue to be a major service outlet. A study shows that 30% have Internet connections at home, while 27% go to Internet cafés .

Though a flourishing business, the government made the most peculiar decisions, the most recent of which in March 2008 when the Ministry of Interior ordered the installation of surveillance systems in all cafés under the pretext of security reasons to monitor clients .

In addition to cameras, security instructions dictate the filling out of detailed client data forms which include the name, phone number, login time, café IP and a list of the sites each client visits!!

All cafés are to also block all sites about sex, drugs and site which insult religions.

The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission issued the first such instructions in 2000. Instructions allowed only Jordaninas with no criminal record to own cafés. Client ages were lowered from 16 to 13.

The Ministry of Interior interferes in this business because the law authorizes it to close down cafés if more than one violation was observed. Sources said that 95% of the cafés do not follow instructions .

Nevertheless, many café owners admit they do not follow instructions, particularly those related to preventing clients from visiting certain sites, recording client data and not accepting

children as the majority of clients are children who spend hours playing games.

For example, net café owner Mahmoud Nemr considered those instructions "mere words". In reality there is no control over most cafés where children below 13 do enter to play games .

Clients say they enjoy complete freedom at cafés. Should there be any restrictions they leave at once to another café and would never return . This is what Shadi Hissein, 23, and Haitham Sammour, 25, said. They would also visit sex sites as long as they want to without giving their names or ID card numbers. If the owner insisted they leave to another café .

Most interesting is the VIP net service where clients enjoy privacy for a higher price. They are seated inside a relatively quiet glass partition equipped with a good IT set consisting of a quick PC, a printer and a scanner .

It is ironic to learn that the Public Security Department warned citizens against leaving their wireless connections unprotected. In its statement the Department warned citizens that they will be held responsible for any felony committed using their unprotected wireless connections .

The news was not highlighted as should be in Jordanian media despite its alarming nature. It implies that any innocent Internet subscriber could be taken to court for a crime they didn't commit.

Bahrain

A Façade of Democracy

Overview

In the beginning of the millennium, Bahrain's King Hamad Bin-Isa Al-Khalifa introduced new reforms. These reforms, however, failed to introduce real change related to political openness. The Bahraini government seems to be taking steps backwards when it comes to freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Through a series of legislations and decrees, the government tightened its grip on all sorts of outlets available for Bahrainis to express their views and beliefs. Bahrain's process of 'democratization' seems to be headed in the opposite direction.

The Telecommunications and Internet Sector

In 2007 Bahrain was ranked the highest Arab country on the Digital Opportunity Index (DOI) . Accordingly, the OpenNet Initiative Report declared Bahrain an "ICT leader in the region". Furthermore, Bahrain's connectivity score is the highest in the Gulf region . The number of Bahraini Internet users has risen from 40,000 in 2000 (5.95% of the population) to 250,000 in 2008 (33% of the population). The significant increase in fixed telephone lines, mobiles and internet services made it easier for Bahrainis to access the net. ICT development is also due to development in the telecom market. In November 2008 Mena Telecom introduced its WiMAX network that covers all of Bahrain. With the new network Bahrainis obtained high speed wireless voice and data services. As Bahrain became one of the most connected countries to the Internet, Bahrainis found a new medium to express their opinion

and beliefs reconnecting with one another. Consequently, the Bahraini Internet community became very active. About 535 websites were established which focus on 25 different topics. Out of these websites there are 200 blogs, the majority of the authors of which choose to stay anonymous. A lot of Bahrainis found in the Internet a refuge where they can express sensitive issues in their country and find information not offered in other mediums.

Censoring and Blocking the Internet

The Bahraini government used legislation to restrict, or even eliminate, freedom on the Internet. In 2002 the government issued a press law (law 47 of 2002) by royal decree allowing the prosecution of journalists and activists for allegedly defaming government officials, insulting the King, or inciting hatred against the government. Electronic media was forcibly inserted into the 2002 press law, allowing the government to control the Internet on the basis of a very vague legislation. As a result, the government can block websites and prosecute their administrators on grounds of the content of their websites.

The government passed another legislation, the Telecommunications Law, in the same year. It introduces penalties for the 'unlawful' use of the Internet, specifically targeting Internet material that the government views as 'offensive' to public policy or public morality.

Furthermore, on January 5, 2009 the Ministry of Information decreed that it can order the blocking of a website without referring the case to a court. The decree also requires Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to "prohibit any means that allow access to sites blocked by the ministry, whether by Internet address, use of a

proxy server or any other means.” Another decree was issued on January 14, 2009 demanding all ISPs to block pornographic websites or websites the material of which may incite violence, hatred or sectarianism.

As a result of these legislations and decrees, Sheikha Mai bent Mahamed Al-Khalifa (member of the royal family) launched a campaign in the beginning early 2009 as the newly appointed Minister of Culture and Information. The campaign was declared to be against “pornographic websites that offend public morality.” On August 24, 2009, an order was issued by Mohammed Al-banki, the newly appointed Minister of Information undersecretary, to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) to block 1,040 websites.

The campaign, however, did not target only pornographic websites but expanded to include a variety of websites. The first websites to be blocked under the new campaign was the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information website. This reflects a policy of blocking any websites that are critical of the government, royal family or the parliament. This includes websites of Bahraini public forums, human rights organizations, political opposition movements and online newspapers. The government also blocked leftist and secular websites, in addition to websites that are against Islam or call for the conversion of Muslims . The blocking policy also reached blogs, pages from Facebook and YouTube, Wikipedia and Google Translate (since it was used as a proxy to access blocked websites). Interestingly, Google Earth was also blocked to prevent Bahrainis from viewing the places of the royal family.

The number of the blocked websites until now is still unknown. However, activists estimate to be around 100 websites.

Prisoners for the Internet

The government of Bahrain now prosecutes bloggers and journalists for speaking out against the government or the royal family or for merely doing their job. Three journalists from Al-Saheefa, a banned electronic newspaper, were charged with defaming the director of an elderly care center in an article published in the newspaper. In addition, the Municipalities and Agricultural Affairs Minister filed a criminal libel complaint against blogger Mahmood Al-Yousif because the latter criticized the minister for commending how the government dealt with the 2007 flood in Bahrain.

Furthermore, the government banned any media discussion of the 2006 "Bandargate" case. The decision was affirmed by the Higher Criminal Court on November 27. Several websites were shut down and blocked after mentioning the case in 2006. Salah Al-Bandar, Sudanese-born British citizen, wrote Al-Bandar report that claimed election fraud and the participation of members of the royal family and well-known politicians in the creation of an anti-Shiite sectarian conflict. On April 19, 2007 Al -Bandar, who was deported in 2006, was convicted in absentia and sentenced to four years in prison and a 100 dinar fine.

Tunisia

Taming the Internet

Overview

Since its independence in 1956, Tunisia has made considerable achievements in education, health care and women's rights.

Tunisia has succeeded in establishing a rare kind of political and economic stability in the Arab region. These achievements were not paralleled with any political reform that match what Ben Ali described as the "maturity of my people," in the announcement of November 7th, 1987, the date of his "medical" coup on Bu-Rgeiba.

In fact, Tunisia is ranked as one of the most repressed countries in the Arab world and worldwide. The Constitutional Democratic Congregation, the ruling party and heir to the New Free Constitutional Party, still dominates political life since the thirties of the 20th century. The ruling party is steadily pushing towards more political prohibition and isolation, undermining and aborting all reform efforts exerted by opposition parties, labor unions or civil society institutions.

Connecting to Internet

In 1991 Tunisia was the first Arab country to introduce the Internet. The service, however, was not made available publicly until 1996 under strict measures. Net café customers were required show their ID cards and net café computers registered all user activities. Log files provide evidence of customer visits to "dangerous sites" and may be held legally responsible and face long prison terms according to Presidential Decree 501 issued on 14/3/1997.

Chapter 13 of the Decree states that “the minister of communications is entitled at all times to monitor compliance with the terms and use of services through authorized assistants at any time and by any available means ”.

Net café license owners bear full legal responsibility for monitoring their clients.

Moreover, law 75, known as the Anti- Terrorism Law, included chapters that classify freedom of opinion the use of symbols, pictures or slogans to refer to a person or organization, calling for a demonstration or meeting or writing articles as terrorist actions.

Tunisia currently has over 3,200,000 Internet users, 46,000 of whom subscribe to the services provided by 12 Internet companies , owned by influential figures, such as Global Net and Plant which are managed by Ben-Ali’s two daughters.

This monopoly rendered it difficult to Internet users to complain about these companies’ poor services which include sudden service interruption without explanation or justification, in addition to monitoring information exchange.

These practices prompted users to wage a virtual war against monitoring and censorship. In July 2008 a number of Tunisian bloggers created a Facebook group that called upon the Tunisian authorities to end restrictive practices November 4th a national free blogging day .

In July 2009 the same group launched the White Blog campaign demanding e-media freedom to liberate e-media . In the same month, rights’ activists Salah Eddin Al-Jurchi and Mohamed Al-Kumani addressed an open letter to Ben-Ali requesting his personal intervention to end Internet censorship.

Blocking, Piracy and Sabotage

Internet conditions in Tunisia are no better than those of freedoms, particularly political and press freedoms. Internet users suffer even more than politicians and reporters if they happen to be ordinary citizens with no protection or immunity from legal proceedings.

In their book "The Regent of Carthage: The Hand Clasping Tunisia," French reporters Nicolas Beau and Catherine Graciet criticize the power enjoyed by the family of Ben-Ali's wife Leila Trabelsi. The reporters say: "The Interior Ministry has dedicated a center in Slambu, a suburb to the north of the capital Tunisia, to monitor the Internet.

Site blocking, piracy and vandalism represent a systematic policy in Tunisia. In addition to sites and blogs blocked for years, such as Tunis News, Fajr News, Kalima, PDP Info which speaks on behalf of the Democratic Progressive Party, Nahda Info, Judge Mukhtar al-Yahyawi's Tunisia Watch blog, Nawah and Sabil Online, as well as the personal sites of political opponents, such as Al-Monsef Al-Marzuki, and sites of international human rights organizations, including ANHRI and RSF.

The list of blocked sites is updated according to how "dangerous" their content is deemed. The Tunisian Education Investor site was blocked in September 2009 right after posting a downloadable pdf link to the book "When I discovered that Tunisia is No Longer a Country of Freedom".

On the other hand, Tunisian authorities are annoyed by the popularity that social sites enjoy as they provide space for venting and alternative forums for freedom of expression.

In September 2008 Ben-Ali "intervened" to allow Facebook in Tunisia after the authorities blocked it for no declared reason.

Ziad Al-Hani, member of the Tunisian National Reporters' Union Executive Board, filed a lawsuit against the Tunisian Internet agency's decision to block Facebook .

On the other hand, the Tunisian government blocked video exchange applications, such as YouTube and Daily Motion alleging the presence of pornographic content.

Some "disrupting" sites are continuously hacked. In 2007 and 2008 at least 16 hacking incidents were monitored. Almost all users who suffered hacking accused the Tunisian government. In 2009 the sites of Al-Monsef Al-Marzuki and Fajr News were hacked and stopped operating for several days.

In addition to blocking and hacking, sites and blogs are still prone to vandalism through advanced piracy techniques where sites are hacked and their content completely deleted in the absence of means to secure it. The Tunisia Watch blog, for example, was hacked in September 2009, all posts were deleted and judge Mukhtar Al-Yahyawy lost years of work. Yahyawy was dismissed after publishing a letter to Ben-Ali requesting judiciary independence guarantees .

The blog of Ziad Al-Hani was blocked tens of times. He had to create new blog each time to deliver the message to the maximum number of readers and visitors.

The Facebook Curse

As previously mentioned, it took a presidential intervention to allow Facebook in Tunisia. However, this did not put an end to the pressures to which users are exposed. Tunisia witnessed the first Facebook-related case in July 2009 when Khadija Al-Arfawi, a university professor, was convicted of distributing foreign

publications that stir the public and sentenced to eight months in prison. Al-Arfawi had only forwarded a warning against child kidnapping in Tunisia to some of her friends on Facebook.

On the other hand, activists, independent reporters and political opponents, including Jamal Al_Hani, Salim Baja, Ziad Al-Hani, Bassam Bounnini, Mokhtar A-Yahyawi and Italian refugee and businessman Fawzi Al-Mahbuli, accused the Tunisian government of hacking their Facebook accounts .

The government used Facebook to defame and ridicule opponents by faking accounts in their names then using the account to defame state figures to taint opponents, in additions to threatening messages, defamatory posts and insulting articles, an original Tunisian authority technique.

Using the Internet to settle scores

Tunisia's security authorities, since the growth in the number of Internet users, have resorted to building sites to defame opponents, rights activists and indepentreporters. Administratos of such sites, such as the Belmakshuf and Biladi sites, usually use aliases. While a number of pro-regime journalists use their real names as is the case in the Kelma Hurra and Assyasiya sites.

Well-known female activist and Tunisian journalist

Sihem Bensedrine accuses media figures close to power of attracting and containing young reporters who had been working at her e-paper Kalima and using them to defame her and other opposition figures on the Internet. .

In July 2009 a group of opposition and civil society figures, including Sihem Bensedrine, An-Nahda movement leader Rached Al-Ghanouchi and lawyer Radia Al-Nasrawi denounced the

"Tunisian government's defamation campaign launched through private newspapers and suspicious websites financed by public funds.". Signatories of the statement declared their "intention to resort to international justice in countries that enjoy independent judiciaries to pursue the offenders regardless of their positions." . Another case demonstrates how various authority wings use the Internet to settle scores. Salim bin-Baga's blog, hosted on the French site Bakchich , and which is usually in Tunisia, was unblocked for several days when Salim disclosed a social scandal related to Ben-Ali's son-in-law, who some people consider the most prominent potential successor to Ben-Ali.

Internet Prisoners

Tunisian authorities released lawyer and activist Mohamed Abbu on 24 July 2007. Abbu was framed for "physically assaulting a female colleague," following a series of Internet articles he had published in 2004 where he criticized Tunisia's human rights record. The authorities banned him from traveling for two years after his release. After a worldwide campaign Abbu's name was lifted from the travel ban list and added to the list of government opponents to be targeted by defamation e-campaigns.

The authorities also released blogger Ali Ramzi Bel-Tibi after two years in prison after he was convicted of joining a fundamentalist group because he visited sites classified as "inciting violence." Bel-Tibi is still pursued and watched by Tunisia's security authorities. In addition to imprisoning retired university professor Al-Arfawi, as previously mentioned, in May 2009 a Tunisian court sentenced Mariam Al-Zawagi to six years in prison in accordance with the Anti-Terrorism Law. Prosecution accused 22-year old Mariam of

belonging to a terrorist group. Her lawyers said she had only visited some sites and collected donations for victims of the Israeli offensive against Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009.

Algeria

Freedom is Possible Only Virtually

"The Internet is an open window, its like oxygen to me, I would suffocate otherwise. Here [in the internet world] I spend two hours a day, this is my only relief." This is what a 20 year old man said to Al Afaq website .

Overview

All the Arab governments have weak parliament and fabricated elections; where presidents sweep the majority of the votes. This is made possible after constitutional amendments are passed to allowing them to stay in power for life.

The last elections in Algeria were in April 2009. As expected, the Algerian President Abdul Aziz BouTeflika effortlessly won his third term. Opposition parties and other organizations that have boycotted the p elections were called traitors .

It seems that for the European Union chooses stability, which is based on impunity, poverty and corruption, over democracy, which might bring Islamists to power. The United States, also, is "blinded by its quest for stability." It tries to please everyone; it usually expresses regrets about the practices of the Algerian government and claims of fraud, while, at the same time, welcomes America's friend and stresses the importance of cooperating with him.

Similarly, during the parliamentary elections of 2007, the ruling party, the party of the Algerian President, received support even from the Islamists, known in the past as the "radicals", who waged a tough war in the past against the government!

Therefore, following the models of its Arab neighbors, east and

west, it was quite natural to start talking about the inheritance of power, the Algerian way, where the president's brother, Said Bouteflika, will be the successor to the current president, Abdul Aziz BouTeflika.

Telecommunications and Internet

The telecommunications sector is growing rapidly in Algeria. This growth, in countries of repressive regimes, brings with it new critics of the government. The internet opened a window of opportunity for Algerians to express their frustration and uncover the corruption in their communities.

Approximately 95% of Algerians have mobile phones; 32 million users out of population of 34 million. As for landline telephones, users do not exceed three million; this which is less than 9% of the population. This small percentage limits the number of internet users, who have increased significantly, yet, they still constitute a small percentage of the population. The 4.1 million internet users constitute only 12% of the population. This ranks Algeria among the counties with low penetration rate, though this number is 80 times the number of users in 2000 .

Algeria is almost the only country in which the service providers were affected by reducing service rates. When the government reduced the rates by 50 %, the Internet Service Provider (ISP) decreased from 35 to 20 companies. According to ISP, they were “bankrupt with significant losses due to price reduction”. The Minister of Post and Information Technologies and Information about Telecommunications, Hamid BuSaleh, said in response to this statement, "the internet rate reduction enabled the government to increase the number of internet users”. He added, “a committee was founded to reduce rates and develop a pricing policy that

matches the purchasing power of citizens” .

Although, the Algerian government acknowledges the disadvantages of the internet in the country, still it seeks to increase the number of internet users. Even though, the government does not approve the work of activists on the internet, this is not its biggest problem. The huge number of unidentified mobile phone users, which is nearly three million users, is a much bigger threat to the government. The regime believes that it increases the level of crime in country. According to Mohammed BelFodil, chairman of Regulatory Authority monitoring the cellular phone market in Algeria, stated that "the authority asked the mobile phone companies in Algeria, to have a complete customer data base, otherwise, they'll have to cut off the service automatically ”. In Algeria, it is possible to get a SIM card for 50 Dinars (less than \$1) from markets and peddlers .

Although, the Algerian government had welcomed the privatization of the telecommunications sector in Algeria, the privatization process had been delayed more than once. This resulted in limiting the number of internet users. Algerie Telecom monopolizes the internet market in Algeria.

Blocking and Monitoring

In Algeria, a significant percentage of internet users, 75%, regards the internet as “an important tool”, according to a national study published on 17/9/2009. In a survey conducted by MedCom and Idiatech, more than 90% , out of 6000 internet users, said that they "cannot survive without accessing the internet at least once every day”. Most users spend an average of two hours in front of the computer .

In December 2008, the Algerian cabinet, seeking a legal way out,

approved the Cyber Crime Bill. The bill identifies procedures for internet monitoring and to encounter virtual crimes . The government gave the usual justification: protecting values and morals, as well as, protecting children from pornographic websites. The Algerian journalist, Chawki Amari, wrote in Al Watan newspaper about this law that "knowing the repressive nature of the Algerian regime, what is being said about fighting cyber crimes is only a cover to monitor internet forums, blogs and e-newsletters...anything that is not within the hands of the authority ."

Despite the repressive nature of the Algerian government towards its critics in the press and writers of the opposition, and despite the monitoring and censorship on the internet, only a limited number of sites were blocked. Some of those were radical Islamic websites, such as AlQaeda site , and the Network of Arab Atheists website, <http://www.el7ad.com/smf/index.php>.

The printed press remains the most widely distributed, influential and thereby the most targeted by the government. The two newspapers with the highest distribution rates are Algerian, El Sherouk and Al Khabar, distributing more than 500,000 copies daily . However, in the future, the repressive nature of the government might be shifted from the printed press to the internet. This is especially the case after the Algerian President expressed how he was impressed by the practices of Algeria's neighbor from the east, Tunisia, against internet activists. President BouTeflika declared that "Tunisia is an esteemed model of democracy". This was around the same time when the Algerian government decided to block Facebook, a decision in which the government retreated from later following an order from the President. However, this is

related to the fact that internet users, who are increasing day by day, realize the potential of the internet to be used in their battle against oppression and corruption, like the activist in Egypt and Morocco.

Internet Cafés

In a country where the number of the unemployed is about 1,250,000 Algerians, out of the 10 million Algerians in the workforce, the widespread internet cafes become the most reasonable and appropriate sanctuary for all. Internet cafés customers' interests vary to include chat, social networks, jihadist and pornographic websites. The large number of internet cafés, reaching more than 16,000 cafés , is becoming a big concern to the Algerian government.

Since, the Cyber Crime Bill was introduced in December 2008, the temporary truce between the Algerian government and internet cafés' owners and managers ended. The truce disregard the security regulations imposed on internet cafés owners, like registry with names of the customers, their national identification numbers or a copy of it. The new bill now restores the control of the security forces over internet cafés, especially with conservatives and Islamists calling for control over these cafés. Now, it is mandatory to fix surveillance cameras to monitor customers, especially after the government had succeeded in arresting some young people who have been recruited through the internet in these cafés.

Internet Cases

Algeria has a small number of internet users compared to many Arab countries. However, it has the same repressive policies targeting internet activists violating their freedom of expression.

Abdul Salam Baroudi, writer of the blog Bilad Tilmisan, was the first Algerian blogger to be prosecuted and tried in Algeria in June 2007 . This is after he posted an article criticizing the Director of Religious Affairs and Endowments, in Tlemcan state, for issuing a decision prohibiting imams of Tlemcan from dealing with the local radio station. The decision came after the local radio refused to deal with him.

After, he was referred to court , Baroudi wrote , " my case is a case of freedom of opinion; I expressed my opinion in an article about an official, who considers his qualifications above all doubts and that he is too holy, too great to be criticized."

Baroudi's case had stirred considerable attention, particularly from Arab human rights organizations and bloggers. Since this case was the last case of its kind in Algeria, there is hope that Algeria will be among the few Arab countries that respect freedom of expression on the internet. This is especially the case after the court has acquitted Baroudi from the charges, a victory to freedom of expression. The courts have not witnessed more cases against internet activists.

Saudi Arabia

A Window on Freedom

"I decided not to be "a good citizen" and to stand with the prisoners, orphans, the poor, young women and the elderly, the oppressed and the grieving and terrified".

Saudi blogger, Fouad Al-Farhan who was arrested by the Saudi authorities from December 2007 till April 2008.

Overview

Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 by Abdul-Aziz Al Saud and named after him. The Al Saud family, which has ruled the kingdom since then, is one of the most autocratic regimes in the world and King Abdullah was listed among the ten worst dictators in the world in 2007, 2008 and 2009 .

Reporters without Borders classified Saudi Arabia as one of the anti-Internet countries in 2009. The 12-country list also included China, Iran, Tunisia and Egypt.

Saudi Arabia's population of about 28 million are mostly Sunni Muslims. There is a considerable number of Shiites but they suffer from persecution as the Al Sauds do not recognize the freedom of religion.

Telecommunications and the Internet

The number of land lines in Saudi Arabia is about 4,100,000 lines, while mobile phone subscribers reached about 36 million, exceeding the population by more than 44% .

The number of internet users grew significantly to reach 7.2 million.

The Internet was first introduced in Saudi Arabia in 1994. In 1999 the Internet Services Unit was established in the King Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology to control the city's Internet service .

Internet regulation was transferred from King Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology. The Cabinet decree 229 dated 27 September 2004 transferred all tasks to both the Communications and Information Technology Authority and to licensed Internet service providers. Thus, the mentioned authority was put in charge of regulating Internet services in the Kingdom, as well as filtering sites, while licensed companies provide data services and operational functions of the international gateway. Each such company would build a gateway of its own and compete with the others to provide services to link to international companies providing Internet services. The actual handover was not until 2006 .

Since broadband (ADSL) was introduced in 2001 by the Saudi Telecom Company, STC, as a single provider, as well as several other licensed companies, Saudi users have been suffering from poor service and endless waiting lists. Users also suffered from slow downloading, high prices and poor customer service and technical support.

Hence, dial up was the most commonly-used service in the kingdom until recently.

In July 2009 STC sent a strong statement to the Saudi press threatening to withdraw its ads from newspapers critical of the company or its services after a newspaper published a cartoon on STC Internet services.

At the same time STC reduced service rates and promised ADSL

clients a better service. Thus, STC succeeded in silencing critical voices of the press and turned them into advocates for its projects. However, user complaints could not be silenced. Users voiced their complaints on net forums and newspaper sites.

Filtering, Control and Murder

The Saudi regime is one of the most Internet controlling Arab regimes, causing major operational difficulties to means of communication, radio and television and print houses because of the monitoring policy.

Internet monitoring policy started by Cabinet decree in 2001 which prohibited any content it defined as opposed to the policies of the state, the ruling regime, heads of state, threatens foreign relations, social peace or stirs up sedition among citizens .

A few years ago Internet content was monitored by the Internet Services Unit of the King Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology before being passed on to the Communications and Information Technology Authority.

Sites are blocked according to the following guidelines:

- 1- Sites considered as contradicting with ethics and morals, pornographic and gay sites, as well as sites that contain any sexual material.
- 2- Political and human rights sites and sites addressing social or religious issues which the authorities consider as contradicting with social and religious values and morals in the Kingdom. Such sites are blocked by the Ministry of Interior.

Considering the enormous influence of STC and the Saudi Ministry of Interior's full control over power, the blocking of websites does not follow any pattern, especially with the mutual support between

the Ministry and Islamist militants. This is clearly reflected in the fatwa issued by a well-known sheikh to block Facebook. Moreover, a Saudi citizen killed his daughter in August 2007 after “catching” her chatting with a young man on Facebook .

In January 2008, Saudi Arabia introduced new laws to control the use of technology to guard against terrorism, fraud, child pornography, defamation, the violation of religious values and disrespect of common decency. The Cabinet approved a 16-article law on information technology which imposes a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment and a fine of five million riyals against individuals administering websites that support terrorist organizations.

The law also punished those convicted with financial or information fraud or violating the private lives of other with up to three years in prison and a fine of 500,000 riyals.

The new law also regulates the religious and social use of information and communication technology .Those who produce and distribute content that contradicts with the general laws, religious values and common decency stand to face a sentence of up to five years in prison and a fine of three million riyals, as well as those who use information technology for promoting child pornography .

Blocking Blogs

Interest in blogging in Saudi Arabia started in 2005. The estimated number of active blogs, according to projections in 2009, reached 10,000 Arabic and English blogs.

Blogs address different issues, social issues that disclose Saudi society problems, and political issues, inevitably leading to

addressing reform, human rights and the status of women .

Saudi bloggers launched many campaigns to introduce change to Saudi society, such as campaigns on women's rights, marriage expenses and the submission of women to men (the Mehrem issue).

Not surprisingly, recent studies say that 50% of Saudi bloggers are women , as they are forced into absence from any political or media appearances. For women, blogs are the only, virtual, way out.

Saudi blogs were not subject to surveillance and perosecution until the summer of 2006 when the blocking started.

The “blogger” site was blocked, then unblocked while screening some of its graphics . This was followed by the blocking of Saudi Eve, then Saudi Jeans <http://saudijeans.org/> where Saudi blogger Ahmed Al-Omran writes. It is an English blog that was unblocked at a later date.

In 2007, Saudi authorities threatened some bloggers and forced them to stop blogging. Some, like Fuad Al-Farhan, Ragol AlHorreya and Mashi Sah, have stopped. However, Al-Farhan resumed blogging before being later arrested, as well as the other two who resumed blogging for a short time.

Prisoners of the Internet

Fouad Al-Farhan

A resident of Jeddah, he is one of the first Saudi bloggers who wrote their real names. He blogs about human rights in the Kingdom. He defended the ten reformers who were detained without trial in February 2007 after signing a petition calling for political and constitutional reform. The Ministry of Interior

announced that they were arrested on charges of "terrorist financing".

Al-Farhan wrote on 16 June, 2007 about a sitin which Saudi women were requested to join demanding a stop to torturing their detained husbands and a fair trial. The husbands were accused of joining extremist groups. Al-Farhan called for the of those wives . Shortly before his arrest in December 2007 Fuad Al-Farhan wrote a letter in which he said :

"I learned that there is an official directive of the Ministry of the Interior to prosecute me. I know I will be arrested any time during the next two weeks as I wrote about political prisoners a while ago. They think I'm launching a solidarity campaign to support their cause which is change and reform. All I did was write some articles, put up banners and ask other bloggers to do the same. I was asked to be flexible and write an apology. However, I do not know what I should be apologizing for: saying that government allegations accusing reformers of being terrorism supporters are untrue?"

Fuad Al-Farhan was arrested on 11 December 2007. He was 32 years old. Saudi authorities did not charge Al-Farhan, nor did they provide any reasons for his arrest and refused to allow him to hire a lawyer or receive visits except for his father's visit for a quarter of an hour in January 2008.

Saudi bloggers, as well as Arab human rights organizations, including the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information and Reporters without Borders launched a campaign demanding Al-Farhan's release. He was released on 26 April 2008 after serving 145 days behind bars .

Al-Farhan stopped blogging after his release. In response to a question about his detention, he said : "Prior to the "mission", a word I prefer to "detention," I used to post these word at the top of my blog:"In search of freedom, dignity, equality, Shura, and all of the missing Islamic values for a better life. My "mission" is done and now I am a stronger believer in those words".

As to whether he would resume blogging, he said he needed time to rearrange his life before he does.

Youssef Ashmawy

Youssef, 26 years old, was arrested on 24 August, 2008. He is an Egyptian Internet activist and programmer who worked in the Yanabee Al-Taqniya Foundation in Riyadh.As a result of his proficiency, he became a reliable expert. The Saudi Foreign Ministry assigned him to implement a project.One day Ashmawi was asked to visit the traffic department to complete some papers for his driver's license and he never returned. His family learned that a security vehicle took him to an unknown location. ANHRI's Legal Aid Unit for Freedom of Expression submitted official correspondence to the Egyptian Prosecutor General, the Egyptian Embassy in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Foreign Ministry, and human rights organizations in Saudi Arabia. All these bodies were indifferent to the issue as if it were normal for a citizen to be kidnapped and imprisoned without being informed of the charges against them or allowed to notify their families or lawyers of their detention place and the charges against them, if any.

ANHRI and Youssef's family became certain that the Egyptian security is aware of Youssef's abduction by the Saudi security authority. Failure to take action to protect him or follow up on his

legal position has encouraged the Saudi security into more insistence on ignoring the law.

Primarily, the ANHRI was under the impression that Youssef's abduction in August 2008 was related to the incident announced by the Saudi Ministry of Interior of arresting five young people active on a net forum. Yet looking into Youssef's page on Facebook this possibility was excluded. On his profile, Youssef had no more than very ordinary posts and photos of friends of both sexes.

Informally, ANHRI and the family learnt that Youssef was being held in Hayer prison in Riyadh without specific charges and that he was detained because the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior in Saudi assumed that Youssef had access to classified information while carrying out work for the Foreign Ministry. The easiest action was to imprison him, especially with the prior knowledge that the Egyptian government, as usual, shows no interest in the legal status of Egyptian prisoners in Saudi Arabia. At the time of writing this report Youssef remains a prisoner without formal charges .

Raafat Al-Ghanim

Saudi authorities arrested Syrian blogger Raafat Al-Ghanim on 29 July 2009 and took him to an unknown location. Al-Ghanim is 25 years old, resident of Saudi Arabia and owner of the blog Defaf, <http://www.elaphblog.com/raafat>. Raafat Al-Ghanim, who lived with his family in Saudi Arabia, was called in with his father to the department of passports in Riyadh. Immediately after stepping in, investigation department members arrested him and took him to

an unknown place. That same evening , the police raided his home and seized the young man's hard disk.

Al-Ghanem writes in some Saudi and Syrian forums and criticizes some social and political issues in both countries. He signed a petition addressed to the Saudi King demanding the release of blogger Otaibi and writer Khaled Al-Omair. Both were detained at the beginning of 2009 for intending to organize a demonstration in Riyadh calling for an end to the war on Gaza. The petition was signed by about a hundred Arab writers, media figures and a number of Arab human rights organizations. Al-Ghanim is also known for his criticism of the practices of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. He is still detained till the time of writing this report in September 2009 .

Internet Cafés

Regulations governing internet cafés in Saudi Arabia and the directives distributed to Internet café owners include a number of points instructing users to use the service in line with religion and national regulations and refrain from anything that goes against such instructions.

The instructions prohibit the use of the Internet for anything that "affects the sanctity of Islam and Sharia or public morals, or that is against the state and its security or considered a call to disrupt social peace or stir citizens, as well as all that would favor crime, advocate or incite to the abuse of others in any way." They also prohibit "all that involves libel or defamation of individuals." They stress "refraining from using e-mail to exchange information that conflicts with religion or national systems." .

The Ministry of Interior imposed severe restrictions on Internet cafés in Saudi. In addition to other restrictions already imposed on Internet use, Internet café owners are required to install hidden cameras in cafés and record the names and identities of users, in addition to limiting Internet use to licensed phone lines in the café. The most recent directives issued on 15 April 2009.

1. Install hidden cameras.
2. Provide a manual log of clients' names and identities.
3. Refrain from using any means of connection to Internet except those licensed by the service provider.
4. Prepaid cards or unlicensed satellite Internet are not allowed.
5. Each café must hire a Saudi citizen.
6. No minors should be allowed into the café.
7. Internet cafés are required to close at midnight.
8. Only phone lines licensed to the café, not those licensed to the owner or others, can be used to access Internet .

Sudan

Getting There

Overview

During the next few months, Sudan will undergo an important historical transition. The first real elections will take place in Sudan in 20 years. Sudan will hold six electoral processes; presidential, parliamentary, the presidency of Southern Sudan, the governors of different districts, the parliamentary elections of the south and the elections of the states' assemblies. This election is not only important because it is the first of its kind since 1986, but also because of the strong participation of the opposition parties in it. It is expected to witness the participation of more than twenty opposition parties in confrontation with the ruling National Congress Party. Furthermore, the election will give an indication to the support the Sudanese are willing to give the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir, to face the arrest warrant issued against him by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Moreover, the election will shed some light on the referendum regarding the secession of Southern Sudan, which is due in January 2011 according to the Peace Agreement signed in 2005.

In spite of the repeated delays caused by the National Electoral Commission of Sudan (the body responsible to supervise the arrangements for the election), the elections will be held. The Sudanese regime cannot withstand internal pressure, in addition, to the external pressure that it is going through due to the ICC arrest warrant. The regime needs this election to gain some legitimacy which could offer some protection against the ICC. The

only way the Sudanese would forgive the repressive past of al-Bashir is by offering them democratic elections. Sudanese, now, refuse to go back to the era of dictatorship.

Telecommunications Sector and the Internet

The numbers of landline telephones and even mobile phones in Sudan is very modest. Out of a population of 40 million; there are no more than 3.66 million landlines and about 19 million mobile phone lines. Yet, these figures reflect a significant increase in telecommunication in Sudan. In 2006, the number of landlines was 1.5 million lines and mobile lines were only 5 millions.

There are five major companies that have been controlling the telecommunications sector, whether landlines or mobile phones.

The companies are Sudan Telecommunications Company (Sudatel), Canar Telecom, Sudanese Mobile Telephone (Zain), MTN (Arriba), and Sudatel for mobile phones (A Sudanese Service).

The number of internet users in Sudan has reached 4.2 million users , a significant increase from 1.14 million users in 2006. This means that the number of telephone and internet users has doubled several times in the past three years.

Many Sudanese rely on the internet to overcome the obstacles that impede their access to information or to overcome the censorship imposed by the Sudanese regime, especially after the issuance of arrest warrant against al-Bashir. Some journalists explain this grim situation; they state that although in Sudan there are around 60 daily newspapers, they distribute only 1.5 copies, equivalent to the distribution of one newspaper in Algeria.

Therefore, the internet opens the door to get around censorship

and police confiscations. In addition, the internet does not only offer all what local newspapers offer from information and ideas, but also offers information about regions that are beyond the reach of those newspapers.

Sudanese youth took advantage of the telecommunications sector in an innovative way. It has helped create jobs opportunities, which became very popular, like investing in telecommunication cards.

Some young people buy a prepaid telecommunication cards with a reduced price, then, recharging the credit his/her, gaining some profit in the end. (eg, purchasing a card for \$ 48 pounds to charge the line with the amount of 50 pounds, and when charged by a number of mobile lines, the profit margin in each card is the amount of 2 pounds and so on).

On the other hand, the poverty that forced the Sudanese youth to create these job, it can also result in turning Sudan into an electronic waste cemetery. Sudan would have to import used computers that are in an extremely poor condition. These computers will add to the pollution if they are burned or dismantled. Consequently, this will lead to an environmental disaster in the long run in Sudan. The only two countries that import used computer, in spite of the risks, are Egypt and Sudan.

Internet cafes

Although, Sudan has a limited number of internet users and its citizens live in difficult conditions, it has good internet service, envied for it by countries with better conditions. This increased the popularity of internet cafés that strive to provide good prices. The number of internet cafés in Sudan is about 4 thousand cafes spread all over the major cities. This number does not include

cafés in Darfur (where the Darfur crisis occurred). Moreover, there is no available information on internet cafés established by the Sudanese government for its citizens.

No complaints reached the Arabic Network about restrictions imposed on internet cafés owners, or on the visitors of these cafes in Sudan. This is a credit for the Sudanese government. It seems that the government is keen to intensify efforts, so far, to crack down only on the printed media only.

Blocking and Censorship;

In July 22, 2008, a message appeared for the browsers of the prominent and universally known website, YouTube, in Sudan, stating that the National Authority for Communications has banned the website without giving any reasons for such an action. Internet activists, in Sudan, who are fond of this website, launched a campaign demanding lifting the block on YouTube and on the popular Sudanese website, Sudanese Online. In addition, an internet activist hacked into the National Authority for Communications' website where he left a statement explaining that his action was to protest the closure of the Sudanese authorities to YouTube , a website that displays and exchange video files between members. He stated that he gives the authority 48 hours to lift the ban of YouTube ; otherwise, he would destroy all the system of filtering the websites owned by the Authority.

Blocking websites is neither consistent nor cruel in Sudan, like other Arab countries like Saudi Arabia or Tunisia, but it does exist anyway even if only few websites were blocked. The most famous website that has been blocked over and over by the government is the blog, Unmasking, <http://unmasking.wordpress.com/>. It is a

secular blog created by the blogger, Imad al-Din al-Dabbagh, who is one of the first and boldest Sudanese bloggers. For example, although, the government belongs to the extremist Islamist movement, he writes critically and sarcastically about the movement.

A State Blocks Websites and a Website Blocks a State!

Maybe, it is the first time that the situation is reversed; it is normal to find states and governments block some websites, but Sudan has become one of the few countries that has been by a website. Microsoft website decided to block five states from reaching its Messenger, the chat service of the website. These are the states that are boycotted by the American government. They include: Iran, Sudan, Syria, Cuba and North Korea. It's not clear whether Microsoft has volunteered to do so or it had received orders to block those states.

Internet Prisoners;

In March 5th , 2009, the Sudanese authorities arrested the internet activist, Abdul Hakim Abdul Rahman, after writing an article that supports the decision of the ICC to arrest the Sudanese President, Omar Al-Bashir at famous website, the Nubian Forum, <http://www.nubian-forum.com/vb> . The security services seized the password of Abdul Hakim in the forum and have deleted more than 300 topics written by activists on the website. Later, the website staff corrected the mistake by changing the passwords.

Abdul Hakim Abdul Rahman was arrested in the Sudanese city of Dongola after just few hours of writing in favor of the Criminal Court warrant to arrest Al-Bashir. The arrest is part of a series of police brutality against Sudanese citizens.

As a result of a major campaign launched by Internet activists and some journalists, along with the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, Hakim has been released. There is no other information on other Internet activists jailed in Sudan.

Somalia

"The Google search engine - May God glorify it - will complain about my desperate and diligent attempts to find Somali blogs. It is truly annoying ... nobody writes! Everybody is busy bearing arms! There is no time for a pen that will not change anything!"

Female Somali blogger Farah in her blog Dandanat Afrikiya

<http://fara782.wordpress.com>

Overview

With the exception of the geographic meaning, Somalia did not experience the modern concept of the state during the past two decades except for fleeting moments due to the lack of a strong central government, the successive civil wars, occupation, disasters and conflicts that still plague the country.

After gaining independence in July 1960 Somalia witnessed a number of crucial events, including the 1969 military coup led by General Mohamed Siad Barre, until the civil war broke out in 1991, followed by the northern part of country declaring independence under the name of Somaliland. Although Somaliland is a state that enjoys relative stability, no country has recognized it to date. In 1998 Puntland region in the East also declared independence unilaterally.

In 2000 Abdel-Qader Sallad was chosen president and a prime minister was named after faction talks in Cairo, thus forming the first government since 1991. The government, however, was short-lived with the Ethiopian-supported war lords declaring their wish to form the government. This led the country down a chaotic path once more until the Kenya Agreement was reached to form a transitional government in 2004. Islamist Courts suddenly

appeared in 2006 and controlled large parts of the country. These courts were in turn defeated with the entry of US politically-backed Ethiopian forces.

A state of turmoil now prevails in the country since the election of moderate Islamist Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, former Islamist Courts Union (ICU) leader as president in January 2009. Part of the ICU split away led by Hassan Oweiss. The fighting is still raging between government forces on the one hand and the followers of Oweiss and the Young Mujahideen Movement (YMM) on the other. YMM refuse to acknowledge the government's legitimacy. They demand the removal of all African troops and the enforcement of their vision of Islamic Sharia.

Somalia is located in the African Horn in Southeast Africa. It has a population of 10 million where the Somali ethnic group represents 85% in addition to minorities representing the remaining 15%, of which the Pantu are the best known. Somali and Arabic are the official languages, but a large percentage of the population speaks English and Italian because of former colonization. The majority of the population is Muslim with a Christian minority. Somalia joined the League of Arab States in 1974.

The Internet and Telecommunications Sector

Despite the absence of a government for two decades and the destruction of the infrastructure during the civil war, Somalia enjoys one of the most active telecommunications sectors in Africa and the Sub-Saharan region. The large Somali Diaspora in the Gulf, Europe and other parts of the world contributed to investment in the sector.

The number of local media, including newspapers, radio and

television stations has increased, although the radio continues to be the country's leading media with tens of local radio stations, in addition to the Somali-speaking BBC which enjoys major credibility among the public.

Fixed lines in Somalia reached about 100,000, while mobile lines reached 600,000 in 2007. Although the civil war destroyed all telephone lines between 1991 and 1993, installing a land line currently takes three days while it still takes months or even years in neighboring countries. Line installation costs no more than US\$10 per month, with free local calls. International calls are the cheapest in Africa.

The secret lies in the end of the government's monopoly of the telecommunications sector after the fall of the government and the end of the state's role. Citizen needs for telecommunication services was met with unrestricted investor freedom to establish their businesses. There are currently about 10 telecom companies competing in an unregulated environment governed only by a price war. They do not have to pay taxes or fees to obtain licenses, bribe ministry employees, etc..

On the other hand, telecom companies are not exposed to substantial threats from the armed factions because they realize that attacking these companies would cause a communication breakdown in Somalia. Moreover, these companies do not interfere in the political game. Despite the absence of laws or a national justice system, subscribers pay their bills regularly, as affirmed by Abdallah Mohamed Hassan, a Telecom Somalia official, in accordance with Somali clan traditions.

This situation despite its successes, was not ideal because the role of government and a regime is important in several aspects.

For example, subscribers were not able to call each other across companies. This prompted the United Nations representative in UN Development Programme (UNDP) to persuade the companies, the majority of the offices of which are in Dubai, to sign an agreement with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for the formation of a Somali Telecom Association in November 1998. The Association's Secretary General Abdul-Ghani Jama said: "The situation was like a game without a referee."

Thus, the volunteer organization becomes a nucleus to form a telecommunications regulatory organization in the country, performing statistics and activities similar to the work of telecommunications organizations in other countries, as well as represent Somalia in international conferences.

Internet users in Somalia reached about 100,000 in 2007.

Although the figure is small compared to the population, there was a 44.9% rate of increase during the period from 2000 till 2007, registering the highest rate of increase in Africa. Thus, the Internet prevalence rate in Somalia becomes about 1%. Somalia was the last African country to introduce the Internet in 2000. Until 2003 there was only 75 Somali sites online.

A number of companies currently provide Internet services, the most significant of which is the Global Internet Company which was established by the alliance of three telecommunications companies. Company manager Abdul-Kader Hassan said that within the range of 1.5 km from downtown Mogadishu subscribers –often Internet cafés- enjoy a 150 Mb/S connection through cable. In the rest of Mogadishu wireless speed reaches 11 Mb/S. Internet use growth rate is supported by the presence of between one and three million Somalis in Europe, America and the Gulf. The

Internet represents the cheapest means for them to contact their families.

This growth, however, is extremely fragile and vulnerable to fundamental fluctuations, as was the case in 2001 when the Internet was cut off completely down in Somalia for two months after the US placed Somalia Internet and Al-Barakat on the list of companies charged with funding Al-Qaeda and prevented these ISPs from receiving Internet service. This measure deprived Somalis, including UN institutions and relief organizations, from Internet connections for quite some time. Internet cafés also closed down.

A similar incident took place in 2007 but only for several hours when a government forces ordered the closure of Global Internet Company, the main Internet provider in Somalia, before the company resumed work after the withdrawal of the troops.

The Legal Environment Regulating Communications and the Internet

Somalia had several constitutions, most notably the 1969 Constitution brought about by General Mohamed Siad Barre a few days after the coup he led. However, since the outbreak of civil war in 1991 there was no sustainable legislation or law. Barre's regime was an authoritarian dictatorship but the mentioned Constitution provided for freedom of expression and belief "under the law," as well as providing for "the freedom and confidentiality of written correspondence and all means of communication," an article absent from many Arab constitutions.

In any event, the mentioned Constitution is no longer valid. Under the current situation in Somalia, laws regulating the

telecommunications and Internet sectors are the least of the worries of those in charge of the country now. These two sectors are almost primitive till now despite promising growth.

In 2002 the transitional government (TGF) has tried to impose a strict press law but it was met with strong opposition and the authorities withdrew it. Journalists currently work in an environment that lacks a law.

The provinces of Puntland and Somaliland have their own special governments and laws, but freedom of the press is limited in general, and the coverage of political issues is extremely dangerous.

The majority of Somalis - even in urban areas - were still loyal to customary law where tribal leaders play the role of judges. This law, known as Xeer, has no written legal articles. Disputes are rather resolved by the leaders. Many Somalis trust this system more than formal justice, even in the territory of Somaliland which has a constitution and a judiciary. This system forces Internet subscribers to pay company bills.

Monitoring, blocking and detention

The Somali Government or ISP monitoring or control of Internet content was not detected. The main reason behind this is that efforts are focused on re-establishing infrastructure and providing Internet to the population.

However, the previous information must be taken with caution, taking into account the harassment and violations against journalists in Somalia in general. Somalia ranks high in press freedom violations in the world. Reporters without Borders classified Somalia as the deadliest country in Africa for journalists

in 2008.

Violations include all forms of closure of institutions, the confiscation of newspapers, murder, intimidation and detention.

Although the mentioned violations are mostly committed by members of the armed factions, successive government authorities committed a fair share.

Radio employees bore the brunt of threats, murder and institution closure because radio services represent Somalia's main media.

Somalia's Justice Monitoring Association monitored the murder of four journalists, in addition to 15 of the most prominent radio personnel giving up the profession due to hazardous conditions in the first quarter of 2009.

There is a documented case of detention for Internet use where journalist Abdel-Ghani Ismail Jo was detained when the President of the Somali Red Crescent in Somaliland complained about a report that Joe had written about the misdistribution of food by staff.

With the expanding use of the Internet as media, it is not unlikely that violations include journalists and potential bloggers.

Somali blogs and sites

News sites are still limited and relatively ineffective in Somalia.

Their importance lies in their being the most significant window that provides the Somali Diaspora with news about conditions in their country. It can be confidently predicted that the Internet is poised to become the number one player in Somali media as soon as a sufficient telecommunications infrastructure is made available, given its advantages over other media.

A study was conducted on the emergence of Internet sites as

alternative media competing in Somalia. It monitored about 300 Somali sites until 2007, mostly run by the Somali Diaspora, in addition to traditional media attempts to build their own websites. The most famous such sites is www.hiiraan.com. It is a news site run by Somali immigrants visited mainly by people from Europe, America and Canada. It offers content in both Somali and English. Another successful website is www.dayniile.com which provides daily news only in the Somali language. There is also the site belonging to cartoonist Amin Amir www.aminarts.com, the cartoon drawings of whom gained political acclaim and which enjoys high traffic.

There are several other small to medium content websites which enjoy several hundred visits, such as the Hornafrik radio site www.hornafrik.com, the oldest in Somalia; www.somalilandtimes.net, an English version of Somaliland's most popular newspaper Haatuf; as well as the sites www.somaliweyn.org, www.somaliland.org, www.allpuntland.com and www.somalitalk.com.

Similar sites have recently increased dramatically. They mainly use the Somali and English languages, while Arabic rarely used. The sites mostly copy from news agencies without correspondents on the ground. The sites also provide lists of other Somali sites. Many stop updating or are completely closed after a while.

The Somali society is an oral community as the Somali language was only put into writing in 1972 when it was written in Latin characters. This is one of the main reasons that the radio to date represents Somalia's main media.

Somali blogs are very few, mostly run by young migrants in the West. There are more girl than male bloggers, and blogging

remains removed from politics and ineffective in general. Blogs are dominated by the English language. Bloggers talk about their social conditions, the challenges of living in the Diaspora, in addition to the common theme represented in the desire for the return of peace to Somalia and anger against armed groups and warlords.

A typical example of blogs is the blog Native Female <http://nativefemale.blogspot.com> run by a female Somali student in studying in the UK. Other blogs include <http://leypot.blogspot.com> run by a girl studying in the United States who writes under the name Troubled Sleep, <http://arladii.wordpress.com> written under the name East African Philosopher where a young man writes under the name Om and a girl under the name Hmalik. This latter blog enjoys a large number of visits.

The writings in these blogs reflect that their owners have integrated into their Western communities relatively far from Somalia's terrible reality. For example, a girl in Britain writing under the name Black Muslim Female, <http://naimauk84.blogspot.com>, discusses how she chose her wedding dress. At the same time observers of these blogs notice clear religious interests among many of the bloggers.

There is a very popular blog by a girl named Adele who talks about the challenges a veiled girl meets while trying to find a job in the United States . The blog no longer exists.

The BBC monitored a wave of angry blogs against Ethiopia's military intervention in Somalia. This event indeed was among the Somali blogosphere recurring themes.

Some blogs are used in political conflicts in Somalia, such as the

Ahmed Kowek blog <http://waridaad.blogspot.com> run by a civil society activist residing in Canada who writes with others to try and prove the existence of the territory of Somaliland as an independent state. Islamist extremists use other blogs to disseminate their ideas. With the exception of the above-mentioned topics, politics are not very popular in the Somali blogosphere.

Arabic-language Somali blogs are almost non-existent. Some are hosted on the Maktoob site, such as the Mohamed bin Dhahir al-Zulei'l's blog <http://alrabab.maktoobblog.com>, and Aisha Shukry's blog <http://aamay.maktoobblog.com>, which receives a large number of comments.

Farah, on her blog African Tunes "Dandanat" <http://fara782.wordpress.com> summarizes the matter saying: "I was deeply disappointed. A search for Somali Bloggers on the Internet did not yield any results! The Google search engine - May God glorify it -, will complain about my desperate and diligent attempts to find Somali blogs. It is truly annoying! We are all qualified to become president, regardless of whether on a chair or on foot. Everybody have their political opinion on events in my country, everybody including my grandmother whom I have not met. They have tactical analysis of the approaches of factions or the factional government, if we can call it that, but nobody writes! Everybody is busy bearing arms! There is no time for a pen that will not change anything!"

Unlike blogging, there is a limited number of social networking sites and active forums, the best known is www.somaliaonline.com managed by a number of immigrant youth and contains the most important and most active online Somali forum with hundreds of

thousands of interventions, especially the political. It is a popular destination for foreign media looking for the echo of events and different Somali opinions. Another important site, www.somalilife.com, is mainly a social site that includes a forum where about 30,000 members write. The form of a very similar site, www.somalinet.com, includes 80,000 members and 160,000 topics. The latter two sites include sections for blogs, videos and dating. The latter site is only in the Somali language.

Within this context, Somali clans and tribes have built a large number of sites with the aim of not only communication between tribal members in Somalia and abroad, but also to guide and manage tribes and disseminate their values and poems. However, many of these sites are weak or stopped functioning.

Internet cafés

Internet cafés are all over Somalia, in the capital, Mogadishu, and other cities. They are estimated at about 235, increasing at the rate of 15.6% every year. The cafes are a profitable business as most Somalis do not have computers, home phones and other required logistics to have Internet at home.

Somalis use these cafés to communicate with family members abroad, as well as for study research, etc. Some press reports point out the spread chatting among the youth and adolescents through such outlets, particularly in the Somaliland territory which enjoys a relatively stable security situation. A report mentions the popularity of cafes among girls attempting to seek husbands abroad to help them immigrate.

Conclusion:

- Somalia lacks a developed telecommunications infrastructure

which renders it extremely underdeveloped when compared to most Arab countries.

- The telecommunications and Internet sector has witnessed rapid growth since the mid-nineties. This accelerated growth rate is expected to continue exponentially as soon as the country's security situation improves.
- There is no evidence that the government or companies block or control Internet content, but journalists and writers – regardless of where they write – face the most dangerous environment in Africa which threatens their professions and even their lives.
- Tribal customary law Xeer remains the environment which includes a judicial system that most Somalis respect.
- Somali news sites have recently increased, although the majority have weak to medium impact, with a few exceptions. Blogs are scattered and far from politics as a whole. They are dominated by the English language and most bloggers are women.
- Internet café business is profitable due to the difficulty in extending home connections.

Syria

Online Syria, Offline Syrians

Overview

In the first quarter of 1963 Syria's National Council for Revolutionary Command issued military order 2 "declaring the emergency state in all Syrian territories starting from the 8/3/1963 until further notice."

For more than 46 years since that date the "further notice" has not seen the light. Syria's state of emergency and its enforcement laws are the oldest and longest running in the world. Nevertheless, Syria's government-owned newspapers, which make up the majority of Syrian newspapers, surround citizens with headlines praising Syria's democracy and freedom although the imposed state of emergency means that Syrian activists and government opposition continue to be subject to unfair trials which lead to their imprisonment.. The few months of openness following Bashar al-Asad's succeeding his father to power were no more than an exception that affirms the rule.

The Telecommunications and Internet Sector

The number of Internet users in Syria reached about 30,000 in 2000 and increased by over 100 times after only nine years.

During this period the conditions for receiving Internet services changed dramatically. Previously applicants were required to submit a copy of their ID, submit a filled out application form to the customer service center including their names, their parents's names, the number of the government-issued ID, date and place of birth, profession, username and password.

The situation is very different now. Any citizen can subscribe to the pre-paid Internet service by buying a pre-paid card from any bookshop to telecommunications store. The cards contain user instructions that do not require the registration of user data. User data are already registered in their land line contract information. The number of Internet users currently exceeds 3.5 million, about 16.7% of Syria's population of 21.7 million and nearly equal to the 17% land line owners; as most Syrian users depend on dial-up Internet connections. However, it would be wrong to assume that the Internet user:line ratio is 1:1. In 2007 only 8.7% of Syrians had personal computers indicating that a considerable number of Syrians accessed the Internet from internet cafés.

Broadband subscribers reached 11,100, an extremely marginal percentage of only 0.05%. The ADSL service is the hardest to obtain and the most expensive in the Middle East. Cell phone prevalence is weak, as well, reaching about 33.24%. In 2009 two mobile carriers started providing Internet services via mobile phones (3G). However, the number of users is still very limited.

Internet Services

The Syrian Organization for Information (SOI, Al-Oula) and the Syrian Telecommunications Establishment (STE) control Internet services in Syria. In 2005 the first private Internet Service Provider (ISP), AYA, was established. Other private companies followed, such as Sawa, Elcom, Easyzone and Zadnet.

ISPs operate by virtue of a tentative memorandum of understanding they sign with STE through which they acquire bandwidth and portals. The number of ISPs now reached nine companies. Their description as "private" companies does not

mean they are independent. They operate as service retailers, buying the service from STE to give them commercial names then selling them to customers .

This policy had two important results. All ISP connections, including Internet access via mobile phones, go through two government portals: SOI and STE. The authorities played an important role in centralizing the Internet's infrastructure to facilitate censorship. Moreover, the number of Internet users is rapidly increasing while the Internet infrastructure only experienced slight development. Thus, despite the apparent increase in ISPs, they all use the same infrastructure. The infrastructure built to serve 200,000 users is currently supplying 17 times that number. As a result, connections are continuously disconnected and it takes endless attempts and patience to connect . It also causes many bottlenecks and slows down the net. This situation has become familiar to Syrian Internet users. It is very difficult to send emails larger than 1 megabyte.

Syria has connected to the Internet through a 239-km marine cable through Cyprus since 1995. The cable capacity is extremely limited at 622 Mbps. In November 2008 STE and the Cypriot Institute of Communication signed protocols to upgrade the cable, increase the capacity (bandwidth), in addition to making a feasibility study for a new marine cable. These protocols, however, have not been implemented yet .

The ADSL service was introduced in 2003 at extremely high prices. Though the prices have been considerably reduced since then, the use of ADSL is still very limited for two reasons. The absence of sufficient infrastructure in all areas, and the considerably high prices which render the service unaffordable to

most Syrians. A connection of 1MB speed costs SL3400 (approximately \$70) in a country where the average monthly income is \$200.

The ADSL service remained unavailable for a long time due to the unavailability of fixed Internet lines. Despite the promises of the former Minister of Communications to provide one million new lines by 2007 via the Syrian German Company, in addition to 280,000 wireless subscriptions , nothing has changed. Chinese company Hua-wi was awarded a contract to install 33,000 ADSL cables, a figure which fell short of the increasing demand.

Both GSM companies, Syria Tel and MTN, have started in early 2009 to provide Internet service via cell phones (3G internet access). However, the service only attracted a few subscribers due to its high prices of SL2000 per 1Gbyte , approximately equal to US\$40 per 1Gbyte.

The use of satellite Internet access is illegal in all cases except for incoming information to ensure that all information passes through government portals. Satellite Internet access that includes incoming and outgoing data is only allowed through a legal permit and security approval .

The government makes it extremely hard for those wishing to establish Internet cafés. Owners must obtain the approval of both STE and the Ministry of Interior. Moreover, café are required to obtain user information .

Censorship and Blocking Policy

Syrian government Internet censorship is no news. Blocking and filtering websites is a common practice. The Syrian government has extended the list of blocked websites since the end of 2008 .

The authorities do not deny blocking Israeli, fundamentalist Islamist, Muslim Brotherhood sites, as well as Kurdish sites that demand Kurdish national rights . As a result, most Syrian Internet users exercise self-censorship. This includes refraining from writing and commenting on the Internet or visiting any of the blocked websites .

Open Net Initiative (ONI) annual report research results, published in July 2009, show that websites containing political content, ways to evade government censorship or safe browsing techniques are completely blocked. Meanwhile, according to ONI's report, websites dealing with sensitive topics, socially or for security reasons, are selectively blocked by security . Website blocking measures of are far from transparent. In addition, none of the Internet service providers disclose information about their blocking and filtering policy.

Syrians use proxy websites and several ways to access blocked websites, preferably at Internet cafés . Authorities use a program purchased from a Canadian company, Platinum Inc , to impose Internet censorship and control. The software suggests blocking certain websites depending on key words found on the sites. It also performs deep packet inspection on incoming and outgoing information through both government portals where all "undesired" content is blocked or filtered.

Since 2005 the Syrian government adopted a policy of encouraging and supporting pro-government websites in an attempt to spread the government's point of view on the Internet. The coverage on these websites depends for information on the official Syrian News Agency, SANA. Examples of these websites are Syria News, Al-Gamal, Sada Suria and Sham Press. These

websites are usually recommended to foreign reporters by ministries and officials .

On 18 November 2007 the famous website Facebook was blocked in Syria under the pretext that Israel uses it to infiltrate Syrian society. Syria's official newspapers led a campaign against Facebook describing it as an Israeli network . Afterwards, in 2008, the government blocked the famous Arabic blogging website Maktoub.

By the end of 2008 website blocking increased. Syrian, Arab, and international websites, especially those popular among the youth, were blocked. Among the 225 blocked websites were YouTube, Blogspot, Amazon and Skype. According to a survey conducted by the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, more than 225 websites have been blocked.

Not only did the authorities block websites, but they have also managed to close many websites through threatening and pressuring their owners. Miraat Suria (Syria's Mirror) and Syrian Life have been closed "voluntarily" in 2006 and 2007 respectively .

First Lawsuit against Blocking in Syria

Appeals by website owners against the government is almost impossible because the website blocking policy lacks transparency. None of the blocking decisions were taken by a court order and the body responsible for blocking websites is usually unknown.

Nevertheless, on 6 November 2007 lawyer Abdullah Al-Ali, owner and administrator of Al-Nazaha site, filed a lawsuit against the Minister of Telecommunications and Technology with the Damascus Administrative Court requesting that his site be

unblocked. Al-Ali received an official response (number 11939/42/H) from the Ministry stating that Al-Nazaha site was blocked in accordance with order of branch number 225 in the incoming fax dated 3/10/2007 . The body responsible for the blocking was no longer a secret. "Branch number 225" is the branch responsible for the military telecommunications network affiliated to military intelligence. This was the first time the Syrian government admitted that military intelligence is responsible for blocking and censoring the internet.

Internet Prisoners in Syria

Although, Syria's Constitution grants citizens freedom of expression and there is no law regarding e-publishing, the Syrian authorities continue to pursue and arrest Internet users for what they publish on the Internet. The Syrian government relies on the Syrian Penal Code to suppress Internet users' freedom . More than 20 prisoners of conscience are in jail for having published their opinions on the Internet . This led the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) to rank the Syrian government third on its list of the ten worst governments in treating bloggers .

There are 11 prisoners detained in Syrian prisons merely for having expressed their opinions on the Internet. Seven of these prisoners are serving sentences between five and seven years for administering the blog Al- Dameer Al-Souri . Another prisoner, blogger Tarek Byassi, was sentenced to three years. Another blogger, Kareem Arbaji, was sentenced to three years for "publishing false news". The prisoners also include the two writers Firas Saad (sentenced to four years) and Habib Saleh (sentenced to three years). This is the third time that Saleh is imprisoned; two

of which were for e-publishing .

On 27 February 2008 writer Osama Edward Qario was detained for nine days for an article he had published on his blog. He was released after being forced to close his blog . In March 2008 writer Mohamed Badee Dak El-Bab was arrested and sentenced to six months in prison, also for having published an article online . In August 2008 lawyer Abdullah Al- Ali, owner and administrator of Al-Nazaha news site, was arrested for 12 days. This was after Al Ali filed a lawsuit against the Minister of Telecommunications and Technology requesting that his site be unblocked. He, too, was only released after being forced to close his site

Internet Users' Privacy and Safety in Syria

Syrian Telecom homepage announces that "communications and information technology are confidential and no one is allowed to access their content, except in cases permitted by the laws and regulations and in accordance with a formal request submitted to the relevant authority" .

However, this cannot be further from the truth. Anonymously comments on websites, example of privacy on the Internet, is prohibited by direct orders from security bodies and officials.

On 25 July 2007 former Minister of Telecommunications Amr Salem announced a decision by the prime minister stating that all website administrators were required to "publish the names of article authors and those posting comments clearly and in detail.". Failure to comply with this exposes administrators to penalties and inability to access their sites.. Second time violators risk a permanent ban. On 18 September 2007 the ministry carried out its threats blocking Damas Post news website for 24 hours .

Internet Cafés

In March 2008 security officers verbally ordered Internet café owners to register all visitors' data and to keep daily records of each client's full name, mother's name, ID or passport number, the number of the PC used and the log in and log out times. Café owners were forced to hand in these records to the security authorities .

The arrest of Internet café clients is not unfamiliar in Syria. The authorities demand that owners spy on clients and report those who browse "undesired" content. In late 2006 Ahd Al-Hindy and a relative were arrested in a Damascus Internet café. They were released after a month . In February 2009 the correspondent of Menassat site was arrested in an Internet café in Hems and was released after several hours .

Iraq

Going Nowhere

Overview

The violence rate in Iraq has finally started to decline this year allowing Iraqis to live their lives in a relatively normal way. The election, conducted in January 2009, although was stipulated by some to be forged, added stability to the Iraqi society that has been missing before and after the 2003 invasion.

Iraq has been discovering the internet, since the fall of Saddam Hussein, with the outmost freedom. The internet has opened a new window to the world for the Iraqi people. Although, the Iraqi internet service seems to be facing many problems, more and more Iraqis, especially young ones, are using the internet today. However, the new government's censorship plan on the internet would soon put an end to this newly found freedom.

Communication and Internet Sector

"Iraqis are internet addicts" . This is how a local newspaper described the Iraqis new love; their love for the internet. The number of internet users in Iraq has increased significantly since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Internet users in Iraq reached, at the end of June 2009, over 275,000 users ; a 22 % increase since 2000 where 21,000 Iraqis only were internet users. The number of internet users has been increasing because they can now access the internet via satellite. Furthermore, 1.5 million Iraqis have internet access in their homes, while, 17.5 million Iraqis have cell phones through companies like Zain, Asia Cell, Etisaluna, Korek Telecom. The most important landline telephone companies are

Etisalat, Iraq's Post and Communication Company.

The internet is becoming so popular in Iraq that the United Nations (UN) chose the internet as the media to encourage the Iraqi people to vote in their country's provincial elections in 2009. The UN-supported blog website, "Vote for Iraq", turned out to be a success. But, why did the internet become so important in the life of the Iraqi people? It goes without saying, that in times of war; people find it difficult to make sure that their beloved ones are safe, to keep up with local and global news, to get entertainment or to find love and friendship. The internet, in these difficult times in Iraq, offers the Iraqi people, especially young ones, a fast and easy way to acquire all of this. Iraqis being trapped in a war zone find refuge in the internet that offers them a parallel universe.

Although, the internet brings satisfaction to the Iraqis, it is also part of their ongoing struggle. This is because the internet is becoming an important tool in what is known as the "information warfare" in Iraq. Both the coalition forces and the militias in Iraq deploy the internet to win the psychological warfare in Iraq. In the Open Net Initiative on Iraq, it is stated that "the Internet continues to be a battleground for coalition forces and insurgent groups".

The internet is also used by the Iraqis as well as British soldiers to publicize their grievances during the war. Iraqi blogs and websites have been important tools in bringing to the world an Iraqi perspective and account on the occupation of their country. On the other hand, British soldiers have used the internet to show to the unjust conditions they face in Iraq, using websites like YouTube.

The Internet Café (Cybercafé)

As a result of the poor infrastructure, the blockade, the armed

conflict between the militias and the US forces, the internet service still faces severe problems in Iraq. Internet users complain of the weakness of the network, its inconsistencies, the continuous electricity block out in the country and the high prices internet companies charge them for the service. High speed internet access is only accessible through internet cafés and some governmental institutions.

However, countries, like Iran and the United States, have offered a helping hand to Iraq in order for it to develop its internet system. Iran has allocated \$ 1 billion for the development of the communication sector in Iraq. Furthermore, Iran has agreed to connect Iraq with a marine cable passing through its regional water. While, A US State Department delegation, accompanied by 9 senior representatives of American technology companies (including Twitter, WordPress, YouTube, Google and AT&T), arrived in Iraq in April 2009. The delegation is part of the Strategic Framework Agreement between the US and Iraq. According to the American State Department Bureau of Public Affairs press release, the purpose of the delegation is to “explore new opportunities to support Iraqi government and non-government stakeholders in Iraq’s emerging new media industry”.

Although, internet users are growing in Iraq, the percentage of the population that access the internet is still very small. Only 5% of the Iraqi population have internet access at home. Iraqis regard internet service at home as “bad service” (the reasons are discussed above). Internet cafés offer a good alternative to the problem. Internet cafés offer good internet service and the privacy needed to surf the internet freely; clients are offered isolated rooms or cabins. This sense of privacy has been highly

appreciated by young Iraqi men (who make up the majority of the internet cafes clients). Actually, according to the survey conducted by the Iraqi newspaper Kul El Iraq, 10 % of internet cafés clients have internet access at home. The reason is that these young men found in these cafés the privacy that they didn't find at home. However, a censorship plan on the internet was announced by the Iraqi government, in July 2009, to ban online contents that are regarded as "violent" or "immoral". Jaleel Nejm, an internet café owner, "since the plan has been announced, our customers have been declining. If things stay the way they are, I might have to do what other internet café owners are now doing: download proxy programs in an attempt to access the blocked websites. I just don't want to lose any of my customers."

Advocates of freedom of speech have expressed their concern heavily criticizing the new bill. Journalistic Freedom Observatory (JFO) stated "the core and the most essential values of human rights are the individuals' rights to express their opinions freely." JFO was shocked to see that expressing one's opinion is considered by some to be a crime.

The Prime Minister cracks down on Kitabat website

Prime Minister Nour al-Maliki sued the Iraqi news website Kitabat for publishing an article, in January 2009, which accused him of using his position to get jobs for his relatives. A Baghdad court ordered Kitabat to pay 1 billion dinars (630,000 Euros) in damages on 18 May 2009.

The ruling raised a lot of anger and frustration, especially since the Prime Minister used to work in journalism himself; he used to supervise the publishing of Al Muqef newspaper in Damascus in

Syria prior to the year of 2003.

The Prime Minister later withdrew his lawsuit against the website after an appeal from the Iraqi Journalists' Syndicate calling him to reconsider his decision. Al-Maliki stated that his decision of withdrawal was "to give the website a chance to admit their mistake or to acquire a more credible, impartial and nationalistic coverage." He added that "sometimes the internet loses the human touch due to what is published on some websites"

Oman

Expecting the Worst

Overview

Upon overthrowing his father Said bin-Taimur on 25 June 1970, the first words of Sultan Qaboos of Oman in his speech after taking over power were:, "I promise you to make my first priority to modernize the government, my first goal to remove all unnecessary commands from which you suffer," promising his people to restore the prestigious Oman.

Oman has two legislative bodies, the Shura Council and the State Council in addition to the Cabinet, the role of which is limited to implementing state policy and making recommendations to the Sultan on political, economic and social development matters .

The Sultan appoints the Prime Minister, defines duties and authorities, and determines the allowances and retirement of the deputy prime minister and ministers during and after their term of office .

Sultan Qaboos issued a number of principles of foreign policy for Oman, those which determine the stances and policies of the Sultanate on various issues as Oman endorses a policy of good relations with its neighbors and non-interference in the internal affairs of any state.

The most significant feature of Omani internal affairs is that there is no constitution approved by a Constituent Assembly. On the other hand, some forces of society are suppressed and deprived of their right to express their opinion in accordance with the Press and Publications Law.

Omani internal politics are known for utter closeness on traditions

and stereotypes and keeping isolated from external factors regarding community heritage .

Telecommunications and the Internet

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority was established in accordance with Royal Decree 30 of 2002 to carry out the telecommunications sector development policy and to play a regulatory role and maintain the interests of all parties, including issuing licenses for new companies that wish to work in this vital sector.

There are many telecommunications companies in Oman, the most significant of which are Nawrus Communications, a private sector Omani-Qatari-Norwegian company; Oman Telecom (Omantel) and Oman Mobile Telecommunications Company (Oman Mobile).

Omantel has offered 30% of its shares on the Muscat Stock Market for public subscription in a series of steps to increase the company's capital, expand networks, establish new transmission stations, increase marketing channels and introduce innovative services at reduced prices to maintain the competitive edge of Omantel and Oman Mobile companies in terms of Internet and GSM services in the Sultanate.

Omantel is the largest telecommunications company in Oman. It monopolizes local and international telephone service, GSM and Internet .

An international study published in late 2007 confirmed that the rates of high-speed Internet (ADSL) in Oman are among the lowest in the 17 Arab countries.

The study, prepared and analyzed by the Jordan-based Arab

Advisory Group, stated that ADSL technology is still the main technique used in high-speed Internet service in the Arab world. In an attempt to develop its services, Omantel signed an agreement with the Chinese company Huawei Technologies aiming at making a relative leap in high-speed Internet services to provide multi-purpose telecommunications services in all Oman using broadband technology.

According to the latest Oman Telecom Regulatory Authority statistics the number of land line subscribers reached 269,876, while the number of mobile phone subscribers reached 3,713,966 compared to only 0.5 million in late 2007.

According to the Internet Stats World website, the number of Internet users reached 469,000 of 3.4 million Omanis. Internet users increased by 421% from 2000 to 2009.%

Internet Cafés

Article 20 of the Telecommunications Regulatory Act states that “no person shall establish or operate a telecommunications system or service except after being licensed in accordance with the provisions set forth in this act, unless exempt in accordance with the regulations issued for this purpose. ”.

The wording of the article is very vague and rather elastic as the type of prohibited communication is not specified.

Article 53 of the same law states that “whoever undertakes, aids or incites another in the establishment or operation of a communications system or in the provision of telecommunications service without a license or using devices or systems not certified by the telecommunications regulatory authority shall be punished by an imprisonment term no more than two years or a fine that

does not exceed 50,000 riyals or both.”

The Sultan Qaboos University Communication and Information Research Center, in cooperation with the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority conducted a study on gender discrimination in the use of digital information and communication technology in Oman. The study showed that about 54% of Internet users in Oman are males while 46% are females. Internet demand and access is highly dependent on the availability of computers, landlines and outlets such as Internet cafés. The survey showed that the average per capita expenditure on Internet services in Oman is OR3 (about US\$7.8) per month.

Neither the Oman national statistics site, , a pilot project providing economic and social statistics; nor the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, which provides statistics about Internet users and phone lines in Oman, have clear figures on the number of Internet cafés in Oman.

Filtering and Censorship

In the absence of independent press and media, Internet forums and news sites, the Internet provides a virtual opportunity to address administrative and financial corruption, discuss development policies, reveal daily injustices, call for freedom, provide ideas and solutions as seen by the citizens deprived of participating in political life and freedom of expression.

This movement to boost freedom of expression has upset the authorities which targeted Internet activists.

In this context, the blog Mamnoa Men Al-Kalam (Prohibited from talking) published that “expression is under control and faces threats and harassment. There is no freedom of expression, press

or basic freedoms. Demonstrations are prohibited, as well as the establishing of newspapers which has to be approved by the Cabinet chaired by Sultan Qaboos. Publishing is subject to many controls. NGOs are subject to a restrictive primitive law and must be approved by security authorities.” In 2008 blogging started in Oman and despite being short-lived and the scarcity of bloggers, they are pursued and persecuted.

The study conducted by 4 major international universities showed the increase of government controls on Internet all over the world, threatening civil and personal freedoms. Seven developing countries were added to the list of the most controlling over the social networking sites: Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

While another study conducted recently in 16 countries in the middle east and north Africa, by the "Open Net Initiative," said that Oman is one of the leading countries to screen and filter web content as well as block many sites because they contained “inappropriate” content from a political, social or religious perspective.

In November 2007, upon the publishing an article on corruption incidents in the public prosecution commission, Said Al-Rashidi, administrator of Oman Network, Oman's most popular site (250,000 visitors per month), was detained in poor conditions with a number of bloggers who were also detained for short periods before they were bailed out. Their IDs were seized and they were banned from travel. Requests that lawyers attend investigations were declined. Investigations were later concluded. However, their goal was achieved and the message of intimidation was delivered. Said Al-Rashidi refrained from web activity for a long period after

that.

Over the period of seven years, the Oman Network forum grew to become the most popular Omani site, with 10,000 visitors. Forum editors, though using pseudonyms, were imprisoned, detained, prevented from writing and threatened with trials.

"The aim is to silence free voices in Oman, those which strongly criticize some influential government figures.

For every governmental body there exists a virtual correspondent who reports corruption incidents.

"So Sabla forum is troublesome and must be silenced," said one of the supervisors of the political forum.

Internet Prisoners

Although blogging in Oman is new, it is considerably active. It is flourishing at a faster rate compared to blogging in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Blogging in Oman focuses on local issues, which makes it very close to blogging in Egypt.

At the same time public forums flood the Oman Virtual space, especially after the violations against their administrators. Recently Ali Zouaydi was sentenced to one month probation and a fine of US\$250. He was charged with publishing classified government material on Sabla forums.

Zouaydi had allowed the publishing of an English article by an anonymous writer criticizing Omantel. He was acquitted of another charge for an article related to alleged corruption in Oman Telecommunications Company. Zouaydi was released after 11 days of detention pending interrogations.

The classified document that Zouaydi published contained a directive from the Cabinet to the Omani Ministry of Information to

restrict criticism Omani citizen criticism of some officials on a radio program that is now suspended.

During the period of detention pending trial, 45 Arab human rights organizations appealed to Sultan Qaboos to use his constitutional authorities to stop Zouaydi's trial. Zouaydi stood to serve four years in prison, though his charges pertained to freedom of expression and exchange of information. International media took interest in Zouaydi's trial as an example of animosity to freedom of expression.

Interactive sites such as Sabla, Farq and Al-Hara Al-Omaniya represent the only outlets for discussing local affairs, although publishing takes place under pseudonyms. But this would not stop Omani authorities from arresting and questioning site users.

The blog "I wish I had wings" published that the Ministry of Information undersecretary sent official letters to several departments in the Ministry of Information and other government bodies urging them to reduce the margin of media freedom, claiming that such freedom is harmful to state institutions.

According to the blog, the Information Ministry is doing what it believes is right, which is suppressing the freedom of expression, holding others accountable for their opinion and restricting their rights to freedoms and giving them instructions on what to say and when to be silent.

The blog "Omani Mamnoa Men Al-Kalam" (Omani prohibited from talking) said that "expression is under control and facing threats and harassment. There is no freedom of expression, press or basic freedoms. Demonstrations are prohibited, as well as the establishing of newspapers which has to be approved by the

Cabinet chaired by Sultan Qaboos. Publishing is subject to many controls. NGOs are governed by a restrictive, primitive law backward and must be approved by security authorities.”

In 2008 Oman’s blogging movement was born and despite its short life and the scarcity of bloggers, bloggers are pursued and persecuted. It gets worse when bloggers are known as was the case with Hamad Al-Ghaithi whom security forced to change posts on his blog. This renders blogging extremely vulnerable and always at stake. Thus, the anonymity of some Omani bloggers would be a fair and wise decision.

Security authorities monitor Internet users on forums and blogs, permanently and systematically pursues them with attacks on personal freedoms and puts them to trial. In addition, bloggers’ lives are threatened, prevented from writing and pursued at their jobs, which threatens their means of living.

According to Katib blogs the situation of bloggers and websites is deteriorating with time, especially political and economic sites. State violations are on the rise, a situation that requires that bloggers, and forum and news site administrators find a technique to counter such violations.

Qatar

Unqualified Internet Guards

Overview

"Qatar is creatively expanding outside its border ". This declaration by veteran reporter Mohamed Hassanein Heikal is the closest description to Qatar's reality in recent years.

The Qatari regime's continuous attempts to expand its role as a political and economic player in the region are obvious, starting with the successful mediation between conflicting Lebanese parties in 2008 –which represented a major political success-, the continuous mediation in the Darfur file, talks about its support of the deposed government in Gaza, and another mediation in Yemen.

Add to the above Qatar's hosting of a major event as the Asian Olympics (ASIAD 2006) and applying to host the 2018 World Cup. Moreover, Qatar inaugurated the largest Islamic art museum in November 2008. All these achievements were preceded by owning Al-Jazeera, the most significant satellite news channel in the region.

Despite its small area and its recent establishment as an independent state in 1971, the State of Qatar is still achieving steady economic growth and quick wide scale broad urban development that may qualify Qatar as Dubai's runner up in the Gulf area. Qatar was helped by its enormous profits earned through the major increase in oil prices, in addition to its continuing attempts to diversify the sources of its income. Qatar enjoys the second highest per capita income worldwide .

Similar to the rest of the Arab world, Qatar's population is rapidly

increasing. The latest census issued in the spring of 2009 stated the population reached 1.6 million, with Qataris representing about less than one third . Although Qatar is divided into municipalities, 90% of its inhabitants live in the capital Doha. Prince Hamad bin-Khalifa Al-Thani still heads the state since his peaceful coup against his father in 1995.

The Internet and Communications Sector

Qatar has achieved steady progress in adopting information and communication technology applications in all areas of every day's life. The sector is supervised by the Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology. The Council was founded by Emiri decree in 2004. Prior to the Council Qatar had no particular entity or ministry responsible for the Communications sector.

The Council's declared efforts mainly focus on expanding Qatar's communications infrastructure, promoting its use, customer protection and increasing competitiveness. Towards this end, several campaigns were launched to promote Internet use, including the "Free Internet Parks ," as well as the "Digitalization..Your Daily Life" and "Click" campaigns which aim, among other things, to encourage citizens to link to e-government services and link children to the Internet...

The mentality that runs the Council(www.ict.gov.qa) is demonstrated when we learn that it communicates with its public through social websites, like Facebook, Twitter, Delicious, Digg and Flickr. The site contains orientation material on the previously mentioned Web 2.0 tools that may even promote their use. It held a conference in January 2009 about merging press and technology

which was attended by many bloggers and reporters. The Council's secretary general Hessa Al-Jaber cited Al-Jazeera talk, a pilot blog launched from Qatar as an attempt at state–public cooperation.

This declared approach may be due to the Council's enjoying a quas-independent status from the government, in addition to the fact that foreign experts head a number of its sectors.

In 2009 the Council published "The Digital Scene in Qatar," the first report of its kind in Qatar , and a pioneer report in the Arab world. The report pointed out Qatar's progress to occupy the 29th position among 132 countries included in the 2008-2009 Global Information Technology report.

The above-mentioned report ranks Qatar as the second in Arab countries regarding computer owners for every 100 citizens and the third regarding internet users compared to population count. In mid-2009, internet users were 440,000 amounting to 27% of the population.

In 2008, cell phone users reached 121% of the population. This percent drops to 98% when foreign workers are counted. About 83% of Qatar's homes have landlines.

Until recently, Qtel dominated the communications services market. In 2008 Vodafone was awarded the second mobile phone license and started operating in March 2009 in response to many citizen complaints to the government . Citizens expressed relief about the second company's entrance to the market. Supreme Telecommunications Council Secretary Hissa al-Jaber announced plans to offer a second fixed phone license within months.

An official report about internet prevalence in Qatar showed that 42% of Qataris believe the high price of connecting the Internet to

be the main obstacle facing the spread of the Internet, while 33% believed that more significant impediment is the lack of skills. . An independent study concluded that high Internet subscription prices is the main obstacle preventing women from using the net . It may be safe to deduce that the same applies for men one way or another.

Internet services's are always high because Qtel monopolizes Qatar's telecommunications. For example, Qatari subscribers pay QR200 (about US\$60) per month for 512 Kbyte/second Internet access. In June 2009 Qtel doubled Internet speed for free for all subscribers. According to Qtel officials, broadband subscribers do not exceed 140,000.

Though some public places provide free Internet access, there are complaints that it is not available in specific areas, according to some citizens who reported to Al-Sharq newspaper that the service was unavailable in the Rayan area

Qtel announced the completion of the test phase for the fiber optic domestic network that offers speeds up to 50 Mbyte/sec .

However, it is difficult to imagine a decrease in rates with Qtel monopolizing the market, particularly taking into consideration that competition flared and prices decreased after Vodafone's entry to Qatar's market.

The second drawback of the monopoly is that Qtel is headed by a member of the royal family, Sheik Abdullah bin-Mohamed bin-Masood Al-Thani. This means that the Internet is, even if theoretically, in the hands of the government.

The Legal Environment Regulating Tecomunications And the Internet

Prince Hamad bin-Khalifa Al-Thani brought a more liberal regime than his father's. The first constitution was drafted in 2003 prescribing individual privacy and prohibiting privacy violation except in accordance with the law (Article 37). Article 48 guarantees freedom of the press and publication within the legal framework. However, the Constitution mentioned nothing about the Internet or the legality of political parties, although it mentioned the right to establish organizations (Article 45) and the right to congregate (Article 44).

Communications Law 34 of 2006 was issued, followed by the Executive Regulations in August 2009. However, their articles do not include any mention of the Internet and electronic publishing, as if they do not exist.

Articles 2 and 3 of the mentioned law defining the tasks and competencies of the Supreme Council for Telecommunications do not mention the term "Internet" at all. Instead, the Regulations focused on licensing, consumer protection, frequency management, interconnectivity, access, rate and tariff regulation, coding and numbering, etc.

The most significant challenge is the elasticity of the phrasing. The Executive Regulations' definitions section mentioned that wherever it is mentioned, the service denotes: " any form of sending, transmitting or receiving symbols, signs, writing, text, graphics, pictures, sound or any other notification that a telecommunications company provides to a third party ." This definition could apply to the Internet when necessary.

There are two groups of sub-items with a broader scope: item 6 of Article 66 states that any person using "the wire and wireless communications network" or allowing such use for the purpose of

disrupting, aggravation or insulting another "may be punished by a fine or up to one year in prison".

Item 7 of Article 66 also states that "anyone who uses a wire or wireless communications service or facility in a manner that violates this or other laws will be punished in the same manner".

The ambiguous phrasing of both articles restricts , even if theoretically, the freedom of Internet users .

Blocking and Censorship

Although there is no clear legal text allowing Internet control or site blocking, there are three red lines in site blocking in Qatar:

pornography, anti-Islam sites and sites criticizing Gulf policies, particularly Qatar's prince and his wife. This is not all.

All the above is "classic" and existed in Qatar ever since the introduction of Internet services. Contrary to expectations, after Qatar's alleged adoption of press freedom and the founding of the Doha Center for Media Freedom in April 2008, Internet control has been on the rise.

Apart from pornographic sites, the authorities block homosexual sites. They also block proxy sites which can be used to break blocking and allow anonymous browsing.

Following are examples of blocked proxy sites:

<http://www.vtunnel.com>

<http://www.proxeasy.com>

<http://www.torproject.org>

The last site aims to provide Internet activists with an opportunity to avoid pursuit and control.

The other type of sites are anti-Islam site, such as

www.islamexplained.com.

The third group of sites are those critical of the royal family, such

as:www.arabtimes.com. This site is blocked in Qatar most probably because of its criticism of the Prince and his wife. The Supreme Council for Telecommunications prohibited VOIP through Paltalk or any other program. Major objections and pressure pushed the Council to allow the use of the Voip application only for individual purposes. Paltalk remained blocked. This was not enough for the Qatari authorities. The new competitor with the three red lines -which have acquired a force of law by custom- is the mood of Qtel employees, technology errors, or both! Many reports monitor the blocking of tens of sites in a manner that reflects arbitrary behavior and the absence of the least bit of caring about how the technology installed to filter the Internet at Qtel works. There is plenty of evidence to this.

On the Qatarliving site a woman tagging herself butterfly wrote a letter to "Mister Sheikh Qtel " saying she was not able to browse some sites and the familiar message was displayed "this site is blocked because it includes content prohibited in Qatar". Butterfly added that she was mature enough to need patronizing or be subject to patriarchal control. In most cases the blocked sites are free of the three prohibitions and yet the reason for blocking is not disclosed.

On the qatarvisitor blog, a male anonymous writer wonders about the need for censoring. He wrote that Qtel decided to block children's cartoons because they contained a pig character . The story began on Qatarliving which published pictures from a storybook a blogger had bought for his young daughter from a bookstore on Jarir street. At home he discovered that pigs in all pages were glossed over with a black marker. Qtel decided to block the pig pictures after the news spread on Qatari sites and

blogs.

On qatarvisitor the writer says that Qatar is not that smart about site blocking and that many "innocent" sites were blocked. Sending emails and complaints to Qtel has proved ineffective as it gave no response.

For example, the following sites were blocked without clear reasons:

Search engine <http://www.torrentspy.com>,

<http://www.flurl.com> for video transmission,

<http://www.newgrounds.com> for games,

More questions arose about the role of the Supreme Council for Telecommunications in blocking after it assumed its tasks. The Council denied being responsible and mentioned Qtel as the entity responsible according to executive orders.

In February 2009 the ICT Council ran a public poll about site blocking, an apparently positive step, stressing that ICT is not legally authorized to regulate Internet content. Poll results will be handed to Qtel for guidance as advisory information. An interview with an ICT official clarified that the site blocking policy was to continue. However, the target is to correctly screen undesired content with less mistakes, in addition to providing a complaint utility that ensures complaints against site blocking receive answers. Complainants may resort to ICT if no they receive no answer from service providers.

The screening policy was introduced to business Internet, not just home Internet as most schools subscribe to business Internet and there is no screening utility available at schools.

In essence, ICT denial of site blocking responsibility is quite unreasonable as government-owned Qtel is Qatar's sole ISP.

Based on the authority hierarchy, the Council is responsible for site blocking. The following question awaits an answer: would the introduction of another ISP that does not block any indicate that site blocking is the provider's decision?

The previous question shows that ICT is as responsible as as Qtel for site blocking. Poll results, as expected, came in favor of site blocking. Another question arises about the poll sponsor which is a governmental entity where transparency and neutrality are a major concern.

The message delivered from repeated official declarations is the need for screening techniques to avoid blocking "innocent" sites. This matches the declarations of Qtel's Public Relations Manager Abdullah Al-Motawa,

These declarations represent an attempt to cover their ugly face. More than one official declared that Qtel blocks sites that criticize state officials (royal family members) claiming that site content involves alleged accusations and fabrications not criticism.

Another incident that reveals that Qtel officials view themselves as society's guardians took place when the site Aswat Alamia announced in February 2009 blocking the site www.tagged.com in Qatar. A Qatar resident activist called Nigel Gurley commented that he sent a complaint to Qtel and received the reply that site blocking aims to protect the virtues of society. Al-Motawaa, said that it was the company's duty to care for society.

This duty is the reason why sites about sexual health, AIDS, circumcision, contraception, social programs, piracy are listed as "undesirable" sites that Qtel employees feel responsible to block. Wikipedia prevented Qatari bloggers from editing its material probably due to Qtel's blocking techniques which gives all Qatari

users apparently the same IP address. Thus, Wikipedia was skeptical of Qatari posts. The site administration mandated that Qatari users first register with Wikipedia before being eligible to edit posts. Eventually, Wikipedia managed to overcome this problem.

Blogging in Qatar

Generally speaking blogging is not popular among Qatari citizens. All blogs in Qatar are owned by foreigners working in Qatar, the majority of which are in English.

This is partly because the Qatari society is extremely limited. Qatari citizens makeup less than one-third of the population. Another reason is that Qatar is a peripheral country not affected with social and political movements as is the case with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Moreover, Qatari society is more attracted to the previously mentioned prevailing forum culture. Examples include www.Qatarshares.com, an economic site with 28,000 subscribers reflecting public interest in the economy. The forum contains social sections but no political ones.

For local and international football, <http://www.al3nabi.com>, a forum with 84,000 members. This forum has sections for computer and literature but nothing about politics.

There is a number of Qatari blogs, the most well known of which is www.qatarliving.com, created in 2005. It is more like a public blog in which many members would post topics and comments. Most members use nicknames and write in English. The site is a social network for non-Qataris who work in Qatar. It is clear that politics is not of interest to anyone on that blog. It is a site that reflects the Qatari life style.

There is also www.aljazeerataalk.net, a site created by Arab residents in Qatar. The site was awarded by the German radio and RSF as the best Arabic blog in 2007. The awards encouraged the site to post the famous gold logo of aljazeera which promoted the site even more. Though the site is not an affiliate of the Jazeera channel, the channel supports the site editors with training courses on e-press.

There is also Aisha Al-Kawary's blog <http://aisha-alkuwari.net>. Aisha was one of the bloggers who were invited to attend the Press and Technology Conference in January 2009.

Other blogs include:

A Philippine worker's chronicles and hardships in Qatar:

<http://direkjap.blogspot.com>. He has now moved to Hong Kong.

An Indian working in Qatar created the blog:

<http://bombaylives.blogspot.com>

An anonymous foreigner in Qatar created the famous blog

<http://qatarvisitor.blogspot.com>

Another anonymous foreigner in Qatar created

<http://aljazeerainsider.blogspot.com>, but stopped blogging a while ago.

Qatar Sucks, <http://www.qatarsucks.com>, is a site that discloses violations against citizens and foreigners in Qatar.

No detention cases against bloggers were recorded in Qatar.

Qatar apparently is a country that welcomes bloggers from all over the world. This is evident in the many conferences, forums and workshops sponsored by AlJazeera which host Arab intellectuals and bloggers. These activities represent continuous efforts of the Qatari regime to expand its influence in the area.

It would be too naïve to believe that blogging in Qatar is not

controlled. A report by RSF mentioned that Qtel has the means to tap messages on the internet.

However, the authorities turn a blind eye because these blogs criticize the royal family in English.

Internet cafés

A visitor to Qatar searching for an Internet café would need to take a long walk till they find one. There are not many Internet cafés as Qataris access Internet at home or at work. However, the Internet business started in Qatar in cafés where most users were non-Qataris.

For locals and foreigners alike, pornographic sites are what take them to Internet cafés, according to café staff.

No rules or legislation regulate the management of Internet cafés, leaving Qatari conservatives skeptic of café visits due to the uncensored content available there.

Qatari press is full of warnings against these cafés. Some reports would reach the level of inciting against the free Internet use.

Editors of such reports cannot be given the benefit of the doubt. Some reports mention that cafés attract customers by offering pornographic content. Other reports request blocking sites that ridicule religion.

While all Internet cafés tend to offer a considerable level of privacy through partitions, some Qataris request the removal of these partitions as a means of firmer control.

In fact, a few reports reflected awareness of the elastic and dangerous phrase "protecting virtue" and suggested alternatives to avoid the negative effects of the Internet, such as raising awareness at schools, boosting religious awareness, better

parent–child relations and family communication.

Another important aspect for café customers is communicating with family and friends abroad using audio and video at reasonable rates. Press reports said that cafés provide an affordable alternative for low income foreign workers in Qatar to connect with their families. cafés get crowded during feasts with foreigners of all ages. However, cafés rates remain high, forcing feast customers to limit their café visits to feasts and special occasions.

Kuwait

Cruel Blocking with Soft Hands

"I tried to access Al Zakera website (<http://www.alzakera.eu/>), but, I found it blocked in Kuwait. It is just a website that publishes critical philosophical and historical articles... I was shocked for a few seconds, then, I remembered I was in Kuwait ”.

Overview

Despite the absence of a law regulating or ensuring the existence of political parties, Kuwait has a mature political life and a strong parliament that includes parliamentary blocks for all political currents from right to left, whether Islamic, nationalist or secular. The Kuwaiti Parliament reflects the different backgrounds in the Kuwaiti street.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed in Kuwait except when it comes to the Crown Prince and the royal family. In addition, Political conflicts in Kuwait reflect a political maturity, lacking in most Arab countries. There is a fair parliamentary elections and independent press. The only two shortcomings of the Kuwaiti government is their disregard to the Bedoun problem and the recent police repression against internet users.

In 2008, the population of Kuwait was about 3.4 million inhabitants, 1.1 million of those are Kuwaitis and the rest are expatriates . Accordingly, Kuwaitis make up less than one third of the population.

Telecommunications and Internet Sector

Although, there are many telecommunications companies in Kuwait, including mobile and internet service, they all have been heavily criticized by their users. The Ministry of Communications also received a fair share of the blame. Users accuse it of complicity for the high rates, bad service, and irrational arbitrary site blocking.

In 2008, the total number of landlines in Kuwait reached about 541,000 lines , while the number of mobile phone users reached 3.22 million users , approximately 95% of the population of Kuwait. As for internet users, they have reached one million in June 2009 , one of the highest rates in the Arab world. If Internet Service Providers (ISPs) reduce its prices, the number of users would increase significantly. This can happen as a result of the campaigns launched by internet users or through an intervention from the Ministry of Communication in support of internet users. Every few months, the main telecommunications and ISP providers in Kuwait (Zain, Viva, Wataniya, Quality, Fast Teleco, Kems and United Network) regularly announce the high profits they make. Despite, rate reduction from time to time, the rates are still high- the rate per minute is 40 fils (equivalent to 14 U.S. cents).

As for the internet subscription, rates remain extremely high. The lowest annual subscription in one of the technology exhibitions for ADSL 512 Kbps was KD 110 (equivalent to \$ 410) offered by Kem's. While, the United Network offers it for KD 129 (equivalent to \$ 480). Hence, it's no surprise that many internet users, bloggers and forums visitors, from to time, organize campaigns

against ISPs; against their high prices, bad service and blocking websites.

Internet Cafés

It's not an overstatement to say that the internet cafés are undesirable spots in Kuwait. Under the pretext of controlling adult websites, cafés are subject to continuous security inspections.

Despite the scarcity of these cafés in Kuwait now, inspections are still ongoing.

Security raids on internet cafés have other benefits like arresting illegal foreign labor in Kuwait, where most of the clients of these cafés are migrants who cannot afford computers or high priced internet access. Many go to internet cafés to contact their families, spend their leisure time or to look for a job, but, they get arrested instead. It is very common in Kuwait to hear news about an internet café raided associated with the arrest of a number of immigrants or workers having no work permits .

Moreover, Islamists are continuously condemning these cafés.

Islamists managed to reduce internet cafés an opportunity for young people to view adult content, thus, smearing the image of internet cafés to that of a brothel. They overlook advantages of these cafés, especially in a developing society like Kuwait.

As a result, the number of internet cafés in Kuwait decreased significantly, despite the increase in the number of internet users.

The number of internet cafés decreased from 300, in 2002, to 160.

Despite the fact that the number of internet users in Kuwait in 2002 did not exceed 200,000 users.

Blocking

"Learn to laugh at horrible misfortune". This is an Arabic proverb

that fits the policy of blocking websites in Kuwait, or rather the lack of policy and rules governing the whole process.

Many governmental entities have blocking authorities in Kuwait, like the ministry of transportation and the ministry of interior.

However, a bigger threat comes from the ISPs policy of blocking that follows the ideological background of its owners, whether religious or political. Walid Al Qallaf, sales manager of Quality Net, stated that "the decision to block some websites was initiated by our company. We hired a foreign company specialized to trace bad websites on a daily basis, report to us and update our lists of these websites on a weekly basis. It is very difficult to control the internet and these websites that change their address to avoid blocking. A few months after implementing the blocking policy in QualityNet, the Ministry issued a decision to block unwanted sites" . He added, "however, there are many ways to get around this blocking policy". Indeed, blocking did not prevent anyone from accessing a website or a blog. On the contrary, the blog, Nawafco, which proudly announced that it has been blocked by at least five Kuwaiti companies, the number of its visitors were doubled. Its owner, who calls himself, "Ein Maftouha" (an open eye), stated that "Ironically, the number of visitors to my humble blog had doubled right after the decision was taken to block by ISPs. In addition, voluntary youth campaigns were launched in support of freedom of expression ".

Fahd A. says that "it seems that ISP work with each other in blocking websites, some aim at Islamic websites, like Wataniya and Viva, while, others, like Fast Teleco and Kems, target secular websites ."

Although many of the blocked sites are eventually unblocked,

three sites are still suffering:

1- Hamid AlAli site ,<http://www.h-alali.org/>,

2- The Kuwaiti liberal network ,<http://www.secularkuwait.net/>,

3- "Ana Muslim" site ,<http://www.muslim.net/vb/index.php>,

Ana Muslim is still blocked by authorities, while, the Kuwait's liberal network site has been hacked and vandalized by some Islamists.

Censorship...still a crime

On 20/9/2009, Al Rai newspaper published that the ministry of interior has "a complete list of names, identification numbers and addresses of citizens and residents who deal with adult websites."

Major General Abdul Hameed Al Awadi, director general of the criminal investigation department, stated that "the administration is watching the porn websites and their visitors. They will be summoned where appropriate measures will be taken against them."

Answering a question about the privacy and rights of internet users, Al Awadi said, "Accessing such sites is immoral. Some citizens resent the existence of such sites". He pointed out that there is coordination between the general director of criminal investigations and the ministry of transportation to control such websites .

The statement of general Al Awadi are no more than words that does not justify the crime his committing, violating the privacy of internet users'. Despite the usual justification given of combating "porn sites", this is still a crime. According to Kuwait's constitution, article 39, guaranteed the freedom of correspondence and communication that are not to be tapped or monitored, regardless of its usage, without permission from the general prosecutor or the

judiciary.

Several members of the Kuwaiti Parliament upheld this right when blogs were censored by the Kuwaiti authorities. The Minister of Transportation denied any censorship on blogs, stating that his aim is to censor blogs but to preserve national unity and ensure the safety of the community .

The active political life in Kuwait; the active parliament and a strong blogging movement, has protected Kuwait, so far, from turning into another Saudi Arabia or Tunisia.

Internet Prisoners and the State Security Service

On one of the most popular Kuwaiti forums, on 21/8/2006, one of the members wrote that he was surprised for the arrest of an Egyptian blogger , news which many members of the forum denounced and expressed how proud they are that Kuwait had not reached that level of repression.

However, on the same date of the following year, internet users in Kuwait were shocked to hear that two internet activists were not only arrested, but also physically assaulted violently. An article was posted on Al Umah website criticizing the prince of Kuwait. Though, the administrator, Bashar AlSayegh, removed the article, the security found it an excuse to arrest him. He was abducted together with Jassim Al Qames on 19/8/2007. They were both beaten and ill treated.

As usual, after two nights of detention and intimidation for both activists, security officials denied any abduction or assault committed making a statement to the media asserting the Ministry's respect to the law. After that, Sayegh thanks the ministry of interior, "for kidnapping and assaulting". Allegedly, security

forces claimed that Sayegh cooperated, possibly forced to, to identify the author of the article. The author, Nayef AlAjami, who is an officer's assistance at the ministry of defense, expressed his regrets saying that his goal was "national and economic interests, perhaps, I was too enthusiastic that I might overstated but I never meant any disrespect" .

Lebanon

Eyes are watching

Overview

Lebanon is considered to be the most modernized and liberal country in the Arab world on the social level. Third of its citizens are living abroad. Lebanon, however, continues to be the battle ground for political and sectarian conflicts. There are two fronts controlling the scene in Lebanon. The first front, supportive of what is known as El Mowaella, consists mainly of the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and is led in Lebanon by the Future Movement (El Mustaqbal). The opposing front, supportive of the opposition in Lebanon, consists of Iran, Syria, a lot of leftist powers and most of the Arab nation and is led in Lebanon by Hizbollah. There is more freedom of expression and more respect for citizens political and civil rights in Lebanon than in any other Arab country. The sectarian division in the country is probably the reason for this openness. However, freedom of expression abuses and other abuses, although infrequent, are the most dangerous in the region. One will not find a prisoner of conscience in Lebanon; however, one will find many people assassinated for expressing their opinions. Political assassination is the most common freedom of expression abuses in Lebanon, especially to journalists. Assassins usually do not receive any punishment.

The Communication and Internet Sector

For the 4.2 Lebanese citizens, there are 2.26 million mobile lines but only 900 landlines. As for Internet service in Lebanon, it has developed greatly lately. The number of Internet Service Providers (ISP) has increased from 11 in 2006 to 15 . Also, Internet users

have reached 945 thousands users; 23.5 percent of the population.

Lebanon was ranked third for the most expensive telephone number. A unique number (70707070) was sold for 450 thousand dollars to a Lebanese citizen. Accordingly, Saad El Barak, Board Chairman of GILF and the Executive Director of Zain, a telecommunication company based in Kuwait, said to the Lebanese newspaper El Akhbar (News) “you will not find better mobile users than the Lebanese. Lebanese have creative ways to communicate with each other; hence, they are the best users of communication devices.” Ironically, this expensive telephone line will probably be tapped.

The question is not who taps the telephone lines but who run these operations

“Telephone tapping is not monopolized by the government. Actually, telephone tapping is exercised by many Western and Arab security forces. In Beirut, alone, there are dozens of telephone tapping stations controlled by different countries. Telephones that are usually tapped are those of officials, ministries, political parties, organizations and public and prominent figures.”

The Telecommunication Ministry in Lebanon is very important; more important than any telecommunication ministry in the Arab world. This importance was one of the main reasons for the sectarian conflict that erupted in Lebanon in 2008 and could have led to another civil war. The Mowaella front and the Future Movement (the group known as 14th of March) demanded dismantling the communication network of Hizbollah and when

Hizbollah strongly refused, an armed conflict erupted between forces of the majority and the opposition.

- But, why is it so important?

There is a simple answer to this question: telephone tapping, which is rooted so deeply in Lebanon, denies any official, politician or any citizen from his/her right of privacy. Accordingly, a member of the Reform and Change coalition stated “the question is not who taps the telephone lines but who runs these operations.”

During the presentation of the report of the Telecommunication Ministry for March 2009, the minister stated that “the security forces are greedy and deviate from the law” criticizing the Lebanese Council of Ministries for extending the telephone tapping period stressing that telephone tapping is a breach of the law.

Furthermore, the parties announced that the Ministry of Telecommunications was one of main obstacles that delayed and prevented the formation of national unity government in Lebanon for more the four months. Regardless of whether this was an actual obstacle or not, the Ministry of Telecommunications came out of this conflict as one of the most important and fundamental ministries for political, financial and security reasons.

Unraveling what was called “internet station” in area of El Barook, afterwards called “El Barook scandal”, grabbed the attention of the public. Now, telephone tapping in Lebanon can not only be done by countries like Israel, Cyprus and Syria but has reached an illegal internet market (makes up for 50% of the market). A very simple technique was used, microwave waves was directed to national internet centers in neighboring countries like Syria, Israel or Cyprus. The illegal market receives all the information (everything passing through the TRAFIC) from the networks of

these countries' internet centers (Node); information that is originally coming from Lebanon. Interestingly, these companies although known to the government, they are above the law since they are protected by the local political powers.

Telephone tapping is a widespread phenomenon; no official can escape this censorship, in a country where there is a political and sectarian tension that can lead to an armed conflict. This is why this ministry is so important and it's also why Hizbollah insists on having its own communication network navigating away from the telephone tapping agencies. It's clear that if Hizbollah was under the surveillance of these agencies, these could bring serious repercussions on the organization.

Internet Cafés

Internet cafés are increasing rapidly in every street in Lebanon which makes it difficult to estimate their exact number. In these cafés, prices range from 2 to 6 thousand Liras (\$ 1.3 to 4). In touristic cafés, however, Wi-Fi service is offered free for its customers. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) did not receive any complaints from Internet cafés customers about any imposed any censorship.

Censoring and Blocking the Internet

Lebanon is the only Arab country that clearly declares which fields will be subject to censorship on the internet. These are "promoting for Israel and slandering religion". These are the only fields are censored in Lebanon as ANHRI has no detected any website that has been blocked for another reason. However, religious group have been discussing censorship over a sensitive issue: "the

publishing of pornographic photos and promoting customs unfamiliar religiously and traditionally.”

Libya

Proxy Is the Word

“It is the right of Arab governments to monitor these sites. This is their right. Their role is restricted to monitoring as not all opposition sites are fair. Moreover, the government monitors its local newspapers, why not external sites!”

Hala Al-Musrati, President of the Arab Organization for Electronic Media

Overview

Libya's regime, led by Colonel Muammar Qaddafi since he came to power, has passed hundreds of new laws in various areas, some of which directly related to public freedoms and the exercise of political activity, while others were related to cultural and economic issues. These laws reflect Qaddafi's resolve to secure himself against any rival powers through preparing legal justification that allow him to repress and exclude them. The mentioned laws were not passed by the relevant legislative authority but by an executive authority represented in the Revolutionary Command Council. Moreover, they were used against Libyans as a sword of Damocles, depriving them of their legitimate fundamental rights.

On 1 June 2009 the Libyan government decided to nationalize Libya's few private-owned news media, which until then were controlled by Al-Ghad, a company launched by Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi's son, Seif al-Islam. The government decree explained that the media institutions would continue to operate but

would be overseen by a new "National Center for Media Services." Libya was ranked 160 of 173 in Reporters without Borders press freedom index.

Telecommunications and the Internet

The Internet was introduced into Libya through a political decision that Qaddafi declared during the Millennium speech. He called for this action to provide Libya's youth with a work market. A few years later Libya's General Telecommunications Authority was established by virtue of the General People's Committee decree 293 of 2006 headed by the head of state's son Mohamed Muammar Qaddafi. The Authority is responsible for following-up the services and activities of the post and telecommunications and the enforcement of related legislation, as well as preparing technical specifications and standards for communication systems, supervising telecommunications networks, systems and satellite services, and taking all legal measures against telecommunications and post service violations. The Authority also supervises the following Internet service providers:

Libyana , Al-Madar Al-Jadid, the General Company for Post and Telecommunications and Al-Jeel Al-Jadid Technology Company. Libya is also among the African countries with highest mobile phone usage rates with over 6.2 million users, the equivalent of 116% of the population

A report issued by the General Authority for Telecommunications included some plans to develop of Internet services and showed a limited increase in the number of subscribers and the rate Internet use. The report attributed this to the lack of e-government applications, e-business and the use of credit cards over the net.

The Authority's report sought to affirm its efforts to improve Internet services and provision in Libya's different regions through a number of national projects, including the data center project which aims to improve and develop Internet use in Libya, reduce Internet data consumption and increase users.

Project implementation started in 2008, in addition to the high-speed Internet (DSL) project for individuals and companies. The project aims to introduce the high-speed Internet service into most Libyan towns and villages with a total capacity of up to 200,000 lines adopting the latest technologies. The number of DSL subscribers reached only about 36,000 with total revenue of about LD14 million during the one-year period from September 2007 since the project was launched till September 2008, in addition to some other projects that aim to provide wireless Internet coverage all over Libya .

Despite these projects promoted by the Authority, which in appearance aim to develop Information Technology services in Libya, the number of Internet users did not witness significant growth since 2004 due to corruption and administrative weakness in government institutions, as well as repression and the fear of security backlash against critics. Thus, the prevalence of Information Technology, let alone its culture and practice among individual citizens, is only significant among the youth who are the Internet's real public. Internet access still primarily depends on Internet cafes, university computer centers and a few institutions where employees can access the web.

Google Insight indicators show that Libyans are among the most likely to look for entertainment in the Arab region. Recreation

keywords topped the list of Libyans' interests, as well as the intense use of expressions like Libya, public committees, Al-Fateh University, Al-Watan Al-Libya, and Libya Al-Ghad, as well as some news sites, such as Al-Jazeera, and sites like YouTube and game sites, forums, and others .

This could be attributed to the space that Internet provides where Libyan citizens can escape the blackout imposed by the regime on sources of information and knowledge.

Internet cafés

More than 4,000 internet cafés are currently open in Libya , clustered in major cities, such as Tripoli and Benghazi. It became known that under the regime's strict control of the media, there is no vent for Libyans especially the young, but to use the Internet as a means to access knowledge, to communicate and express visions.

However, this takes place under heavy state control where Libyan citizens, when using the Internet as a source of information, are certain that state security monitors all internet cafés, and imposes strict conditions on cafés owners to prevent users from browsing the many political opposition sites mainly hosted in Europe and America.

Individuals who visit the mentioned sites risk investigation. Despite Internet availability on a large scale in Libya and the increasing number of Internet cafés, several indications point out that security authorities watch closely and harass users .

On the other hand, there is a trend, especially among intellectuals and writers, to join social networking programs, such as Facebook, as they found it an easy way to connect with activists and

intellectuals worldwide. There are several Libya-related Facebook groups that discuss many political and social issues.

The number of Libyans who join Facebook increased notably to reach almost 40,000. On the other hand, Twitter and mobile Internet are not yet popular, as Libya's GSM networks have not reached the sufficient capacity for such services.

Pursuit, monitoring and blocking

In addition to the large scale site blocking, which includes all of the opposition sites, the Libyan regime attempts to hamper Libyan opposition abroad.

Periodically updated lists of prohibited sites are handed to Internet café owners.

Popular site Libya Al-Youm, known for active local interaction, was recently added to the list.

Other sites were also blocked, such as Libya, Akhbar Libya, Libya Al-Mukhtar, Jabhat Al-Inqaz, Libya Manara, and Libya Mustakbal. Blocked sites can be accessed via satellite and through proxies on the web.

Some sites were recently hacked and the direct involvement of some government authorities is suspected. These sites are Jeel Libya, Akhbar Libya, Shafafia, Montada Attanmiya and Jabhat Al-Inqaz.

Fortunately, all the mentioned sites recovered. All acts of sabotage and piracy that took place in 2008 carry the government's fingerprints as the government was annoyed by some articles and some reader comments on some interactive sites.

Interestingly, although blocked, these sites are experiencing increasing demand from local users, especially young people who

prefer relatively free open sites to official newspaper sites which are almost deserted . Libya is one of the first Arab countries that have blocked opposition sites under the pretext that they stir social unrest.

Libyan Internet users are the most intense users of proxy sites in a clear attempt to overcome blocking.

Blocking, censoring and seizing in Libya is not the end of the story. There is also the manipulation and deceit. The regime launched some misleading sites, such as Nidaa Al-Gaddfai, to create a false, rosy impression of Libya . The site is sponsored by Gaddafi International Charity and Development Association chaired by Gaddafi's son Seif Al-Islam. The purpose of the site is to report violations of human rights and freedoms by filing complaints via e-mail. However, the site started broadcasting videos of some of the regime's opponents depicting them as conspirators and agents planning a coup, threatening social peace and dragging the country to a humanitarian disaster, in order to discredit them and to provide reasons for violating their rights.

This site broadcast two videos, one of Sheikh Mohammed Al-Beshti and the other for Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tholothy, negating any intention on part of the regime to reveal the truth about violations committed against political opponents due to their political ideas. The two videos held the victims responsible and represented them as offenders. Scenes of the videos were shown as a justification for the trial of these victims, providing misleading details to the public via speeches of both Sheikhs .

The Internet speaks of silent crimes

On the other hand, Internet plays a vital role in exposing the

regime's violations. In December 2008 the Libyan town of Yafern was attacked by the security services and the revolutionary youth organizations which raided the homes of Libyan citizens who demanded the right to their Amazigh identity. Administrators of Tault site aired the raid on Yafern's unarmed citizens live, which helped expose the Libyan regime's crimes to the world.

Internet Prisoners

Abd Al-Nasser Younis Muftah Al-Rabasi is still a prisoner since he was arrested in 2002 after publishing his book "Chaos! Chaos! Corruption! Corruption! The Suicide of Reason in Libya" in the Arab Times www.arabtimes.com. The Exceptional People's Court sentenced him to 15 years in prison in 2003. It seems he was not only sentenced due to the political criticism in the book, but because the book title also mimics that of Gaddafi's book "Village! Village! Land! Land! The Suicide of An Astronaut".

Egypt

All This Hostility!

"Yes, we allow security agencies to tap the citizens' personal calls, whether through mobile phones or landlines, this is case all over the world".

Tarek Kamel, Egyptian Minister of Communications, naturally .

Overview

For twenty eight years, Egypt has been ruled by Mubarak. Twenty years of an emergency state, torture and unfair trails. Democracy is declared by all the pro-government newspapers and only a small minority denies its existence. A minority that includes lawyers, judges, journalists, students, workers, farmers, doctors, university professors, engineers, clerks and Egypt's poor. Apart from those, all other Egyptians are quite happy with such democracy and are truly thankful to God for it. Those happy Egyptians have nothing to do with Kefaya movement, the 6th of April strike, labor strikes, farmers' uprisings or pensioners' protests.

No one complains of poverty or hunger. This is evident in the overly populated prisons, which Egyptians go to it voluntarily, without being forced by the State Security Services. The State Security Services is loved by Egyptians. They feel its presence, whether they're awake or sleeping.

The opening quotation of this report, by the Ministry of Communication, shows clearly that the Ministry of Communications' role, like the Ministry of Interior, aims to serve the public.

The Ministry of Interior has been serving the people for many years by putting them in prisons to be taken care of and to vote for them in any elections. The Ministry of Communications taps their calls, to know their thoughts and dreams, and make them come true!

The Telecommunications Sector and the Internet

By the end of August 2009, the number of mobile phone users in Egypt reached 51.5 million users. These users are divided on three companies: Mobinil: 23.8 million users, Vodafone: 21.5 million users, and the most recent, Etisalat: 6.2 million users. By the end of 2009, the number is expected to exceed 55 million users.

The number of landlines is 9.6 million monopolized by the state-owned company, Telecom Egypt. Telecom Egypt owns the most important ISP, TE Data, which has more than half the ADSL market share. The number of internet users tripled from 5 million users, in 2006, to 15 million users in 2009 .

The increasing number of internet users and their skillful use of the internet, especially young bloggers, have contributed to the democracy struggle in Egypt. This development prompted the Egyptian government to take new measures to limit the number of internet users, while, increasing its profits. The Ministry of Communications proposed The Fair Download policy. The policy aimed to limit monthly downloads to 2 GB for the ADSL speed of 264 Kb under the pretext of fighting illegal connections . The Ministry retreated from this policy in summer 2007; however, it proposed the same policy again in 2009. Internet users fiercely campaigned against this new attempt. The media called it the “the

internet users revolution”; many internet users called through forums and social networking websites called for boycotting the web on 10/8/2009 protested the free download policy proposed by the government and the ISPs.

The strong opposition led the Minister of Communications to admit that "illegal internet connections are not the problem, rather it is the increasing the internet usage” . This declaration prompted the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, ANHRI, to call on the ministry of communications to abandon the policy of greed when dealing with internet users .

Internet Cafés

In February 2009, the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics in Egypt stated that the number of internet cafés reached 4597 cafés and the total number of clients per week for these cafés is 804,270 clients with an average of 175 clients per café per week. While, the number of IT clubs was around 1776 clubs offering internet service to about 190,016 users per week .

ANHRI states that these figures include only the cafés that are registered. The total number internet cafés exceeds these figures. A lot of internet café’ owners avoid registration to evade bureaucratic complications and police encroachments upon internet cafés owners, especially in heavily populated districts. In addition, the middle class cafés offers wireless network, Wi-Fi, but those were not included in the study either.

On 9/8/2008, ANHRI uncovered that these cafés owners cooperate with the Ministry of Interior in violating the privacy of their clients. In these cafés, customers have fill out a form with their names, e-mails and phone number in order to access the

internet. This information is given to the Ministry of Information enabling it to control the personal data of internet users violating their privacy.

As a result of ANHRI's statement, tensions started to appear between the Ministry of Interior and the owners of these cafés. The Ministry stated that the cafés offered this information voluntary! On the other hand, the owners of those cafés admitted that they could not disregard security instructions. Consequently, the Ministry decided to back down from this illegal procedure. However, there are still a number of abuses, especially in poor areas. The police fabricate charges to close down a café or to force its workers to become informants to the police.

Blocking and Control

Egypt abandoned the policy of blocking websites which practiced by most Arab countries. However, the Egyptian government oppresses and intimidates internet activist in every possible way. This includes wiretapping, abduction, detention and torture of these activists.

Wiretapping and Privacy Violation:

In Egypt, where the police control all bodies and agencies, the telecommunications and internet sector is not an exception. However, controlling these sectors requires the cooperation of companies and staff in this field!

Indeed, three main service providers in Egypt are known to be cooperating with security. They violate the privacy of users' and the sanctity of correspondence and calls, particularly of Egyptian political activists and reformers.

The three companies are, the state-owned Telecom Egypt that

monopolizes landline service and is a major shareholder in the prime internet service provider TE Data. The minister of communications declared his vision on monitoring and wiretapping saying "we allow tapping as is part of the state's role ". He added that "wiretapping is not a simple matter; it is governed by rules and special technological capabilities. Although, the Ministry allows for some security agencies to tap calls, the state does not have the capacity to tap the calls of 40 million mobile phone subscribers ". Since, the state does not have the capacity to spy on millions of mobile phone users, the second company, Vodafone, regularly hands over the data of customers who organize demonstrations against the government, like the bread riots .

Furthermore, Mobinil and Link, both owned by the same person, cards that are purchased at touristic cafés in order to access the internet violates the privacy of the customers of these cafés.

Clients have to fill in their names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses. The destination of this information is well known .

1. Torture and Physical Assault

Internet activists in Egypt are not excluded from the systematic and wide ranged torture of security services. Dozens of bloggers and activists of the 6th April movement had suffered torture and ill-treatment as a result of their intense work to expose corruption and repression. Examples of those tortures activists:

- Ahmed Maher, founder of the 6th April group on FaceBook.
- Daaa Gad owner of the blog Sout El Ghadeb;
<http://soutgadeb.blogspot.com>,
- Mohamed Adel , owner of the blog Meit; <http://43arb.info/meit>,
- Ahmed Duma , owner of the blog Shaeer Ikwani;
<http://ikhwan->

poet.maktoobblog.com

- Kareem Beheiri, owner of the blog Egyworkers;

<http://egyworkers.blogspot.com>,

- The blogger, Kareem Amer, was tortured in prison , like many others who were tortured because of what they wrote on the internet.

2. Arresting Bloggers and Internet Activists

The Egyptian government tries to convince the West that the emergency law is used only against terrorists and drug dealers.

However, this is far from the truth. Mossad Abu Fajr , Hani Nazeer, Diao Gad, Abdul Aziz Hijazi, Shawky Ragab, Hani Abdul Rahman and Mohammed Refaat were arrested just for blogging and advocating for democracy.

3. Libel And Defamation

Many bloggers were charged of libel and defamation because of something they wrote on the internet. For example, the blogger Tamer Mabrouk, from Port Said city, owner of the blog Al Hakika El Masriya, <http://elhakika.blogspot.com>, was accused of libel and defamation for writing about a chemical discharging chemicals in the lake of Manzala lake causing deadly pollution. The famous bloggers, Manal and Alaa, owners of the blog Manal and Alaa, www.manalaa.net, were also accused of libel and defamation.

Furthermore, Journalist, Ahmed Seif El-Nasr of Fayoum window, <http://www.fayoumwindow.net>, was accused of a fabricated insult and libel charge.

While, the number of fabricated libel cases against bloggers and internet activists is increasing, some of the bloggers are exposed to defamation and libel campaigns from some officials who just

remain at large with no punishment. The blogger, Wael Abbas, has been subjected to an unfair smear campaign by a senior officer, General Ahmed Diaa Aldin, who instead of being punished for his unjust accusations against Abbas and for insulting and defaming him on TV programs, the Egyptian government rewarded him by appointing him governor of Minya .

4. Seizing Computers

Every police raid, whether legal or illegal (the latter is the most common), against internet activists, must result in seizing their computers that often disappear and never recovered. The Ministry of Interior does not try to find the place of those belongings which increases the corruption in the Ministry. Examples of bloggers whose computers have been seized are: Mohamed Adel, AbdAlAziz Mujahid, Wael Abbas, Mohammed Yakut, Reda AbdAlRahman, Khalifa Obaid and Mohammed Refaat. It is claimed that the Ministry of Interior started a secret investigation about the computers that were seized from the homes of those activists or in airports, like Wael Abbas, but, ANHRI cannot affirm such information yet.

Site blocking Lawsuits:

During the past three years, Egypt has witnessed two important cases which have had significant impact on the freedom of internet use in the country:

1. Judge Abdel Fattah Murad and the case of blocking 49 websites:

In December 2006, ANHRI issued its second report on the

freedom of internet use in the Arab world under the title An Unyielding Opponent: The Internet and the Arab governments. The report was printed, distributed and posted on ANHRI's website .

In February 2007, while searching the market for legal references that may help in Kareem Amer's case, ANHRI's lawyers purchased a book for the judge Murad entitled Scientific and Legal Principles of Blogs on the Internet. It was a surprise to find that dozens of pages were an exact replica of ANHRI's report published in December 2006. The lawyers tried to persuade Judge Murad to apologize for such dishonest reproduction, an intellectual property crime, a charge so degrading for a judge and a PhD holder.

However, The judge refused and began fabricating cases against ANHRI at first and then against several bloggers and human rights organizations who have expressed solidarity with ANHRI and supported its right to punish the judge for violating intellectual property. ,

The judge fabricated a new important case. He requested the blocking of 21 websites including e-papers, blogs, and local and international human rights organizations sites. Those websites published the intellectual property crime committed by Murad and a copy of ANHRI's report. Murad claimed in his case against the Ministry of Communication that those websites should be blocked as they "support terrorism" and "smear the state's reputation"

As a result, bloggers and activists launched a counter campaign uncovering Murad's crime. So, he decided to increase the number of websites to be blocked to 49. However, the decision of the Administrative Court was a strong blow to the judge and to internet police that supported him. The case was rejected and the court upheld the freedom of expression in Egypt .

The Supreme Administrative Court is still reviewing the appeal submitted by Murad who tried to cover his intellectual property crime by another crime against freedom of expression on the Internet.

2. Blocking Adult Websites

On 12/5/2009, the Administrative Court issued a decision, in regards to a case filed by an Islamist attorney, demanding the Ministry of Communications to block adult websites on the internet in Egypt without defining adult websites or the body responsible for blocking these websites. Defining pornography will be left to clerks in the Ministry. This may lead to the blocking of historical, literary and artistic websites. A site may be blocked because of an image, a word or a verse from a poem.

Although, the minister of communications declared that blocking all these websites is difficult, conservatives, extremists and the enemies of the internet have started to put pressure on the Egyptian government to implementing the court's decision even before the Supreme Administrative Court has reviewed the submitted appeal.

Mauritania

Looking for a better life, Virtually

Overview

In less than 25 years, Mauritania witnessed more than 15 coup d'état attempts. Even President Maaouiya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, who came to power through a coup, in 1984, had to step down when another coup in 2005. The international community has followed the events in Mauritania with great interest, especially after the General Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, abdicated his position voluntarily, to organize the first multi-party elections in the history of the country. However, civilian rule did not last long. In August 2008, a new coup, led by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, toppled the elected President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. The elections in July 2009 did not legitimize the rule of Ould Abdel Aziz. The lack of political stability had a negative impact on every aspect of the life in Mauritania, including the Internet.

Telecommunication and the Internet:

The internet was introduced in Mauritania during the mid nineties in the 19th century. In 1997, there was only one company, Top Technologies, which was connected to the internet. However, in 2002, there was a wider spread of the internet service. The latest figures show that the number of internet users is about 60 thousands users. Despite the relatively small number of users, which is about 1.9% of the total population, it represents a 1200 percent increase from 2000. Back then, the number did not exceed 5 thousands users .

There are three main reasons for these modest numbers. First, the literacy rate does not exceed 41%, which is one of the lowest rates in the world. Second, most of Mauritania's population lives in rural areas that lack the infrastructure needed for the spread of communications. Third, in a country where the per capita income does not exceed 928 US Dollars, the price of Internet service is expensive. The price of the service for one hour in any internet café is almost 300 Ouguiya (equivalent to \$3) . As for the monthly subscription, the regular rates for the hour with slow speed reaches 5 Ouguiya, while the cost of the monthly fees for the high speed system, ADSL, is 25,500 Ouguiya (equivalent to \$100) .

These constraints, which prevent the citizens of possessing modern communication technologies, hindered the access of information offered by independent news websites as well as blogs. Although these websites offer much needed information (in a country that has been lacking stability for years and has been living in a media blackout, especially when it comes to the presidential cabinet, military and security systems), the visitors of these websites are very few. For example, the blog, "The Scandals of Mauritanian Police" , which began in September, 2008, only have 6945 visitors. Even though, international new agencies relied on the new reports of this website that was supported by pictures. Moreover, the number of visitors for the major Mauritanian websites in Mauritania is insignificant, compared with larger numbers from abroad, as indicated on Alexa website (it is not very accurate but can be used as an indicator).

Also, the previously mentioned constraints led to an insignificant presence of Mauritania on the internet, since websites and blogs are very few. Furthermore, websites face technical problems which

often lead to a failure in updating their content or bring their work to a halt. In August 2009, Al Alam agency stopped its work for technical reasons .

Blocking and censorship;

Legally, the Mauritanian Constitution guarantees individual and group rights to all citizens. Although, the Constitution has been revised repeatedly in the last years due to the political instability in the country, article ten still has not been changed. This article guarantees the freedom of thought, expression and the intellectual, artistic and scientific creativity .

With the exception of blocking the Takadomi website, the Mauritanian authorities did not have a comprehensive approach to blocking websites with "disturbing" content. This is mainly because there are only a handful of news and political websites. Moreover, the number of Internet users is still very modest, so, those websites can not have a strong influence on public opinion. Regarding the blocking of the Takadomi website, which has become the most important source of information on the Mauritanian affairs, a judicial decision justified the blocking accusing staff of the website of "publishing stories containing libel, defamation, slander" . This is one of the very few blocking cases since the spread of the Internet in Mauritania.

On the other hand, opposition and independent figures accuse the security system of establishing a special unit to follow-up what is being published on the internet and to respond harshly to it, in case the story is not pro the governmental policies .

“Prisoners of the Internet”:

Cases of imprisoning bloggers and writers on the internet have

increased in Mauritania since new political developments took place when President Ould Tay was overthrown, in 2005. One of the most famous cases is the arrest of Abu Abbas Ould Abraham, who used to write for the Takadomi website. He was arrested, in March 2009, and was released during the same month . Abraham was arrested for writing articles that criticized the performance of the military council. In a protest, organized by journalists to denounce this arrest, the photographer of the electronic website, Desert Media, Habib Ould Mohamed Amin, has been beaten, kicked and dragged in the streets by police officers .

Furthermore, the writer and supervisor of the Takadomi website, Hanafi Ould Dhah, was arrested in June 2009. Before his arrest, the Mauritanian authorities tried to issue an international arrest warrant against him, when he was residing in the United States . In August, Ould Dhah was sentenced to six months in prison and had to pay a 30 thousand Ouguiya fine, in addition, to the legal fees. The charges were “defamation and slander” against the former presidential candidate, Ibrahima Mokhtar Sar The defense of Ould Dhah listed so many violations against their client, since July 2009, including holding him in pre-trial detention for a longer period than the period allowed by the Mauritanian law . This detention is also a breach to Mauritanian Press Law; which prohibit pre-trial detention to give journalists a chance to prepare their arguments and find support for their statements .

In March 2008, the State Security detained the reporter of Manassat website, Mohamed Salem, in Nouakchott, without permission from the prosecution. He was released after hours of detention and interrogation .

The Mauritanian Bloggers Union:

To face this increasing number of arrests and abuses, the Union of Mauritanian Bloggers was established in March 2008 . Since its establishment, the Union has been working on defending the rights of bloggers and has expressed its anger regarding the government's abuses against bloggers. In one of the Union's statement, it is stated: "It is a shame that every few months, we need to launch a solidarity campaign supporting a detained journalist, writer or an activist abducted or being persecuted! At a time, when rulers boast about democracy, respect for individual freedom, human rights and the right for citizens to be informed, as a right stated and guaranteed in the Constitution". The Union, which includes more than 400 blogs, plays a big role in challenging the campaigns that target the opposition voices in the country. It also aims to empower freedom of expression and the right to access information via several sources .

Despite, difficult living conditions and many restrictions imposed on Internet users in Mauritania, the Internet has provided great opportunities for young people to live a better life even if it's a virtual one. A young Mauritanian man says that "the internet community is a beautiful one; where all the differences between people disappear and there is more freedom and equality" . However, things did not change for parties and political forces that suffer from many restrictions. For example, the Union of Socialist Forces Party used the Internet to gain supporters and challenge the ban imposed on it .

Morocco

High Price for Freedom

Overview:

The year 2009 is the tenth year of King Mohammed VI rule. During this decade, some achievements have been made, but at the same time there had been many failures in important fields. The reign of the young king was characterized, since its beginning, with positive changes like the release of detainees and giving more political freedom and the establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission. The commission investigates cases of victims of human rights abuses during the era known as the “years of lead”. Also, during King Mohamed’s reign, there has been media freedom and greater efforts have been made to amend laws that do not recognize women’s rights.

However, during the past two years, those reforms almost disappeared. In addition, many human rights violations that are occurring are not addressed by the government. In the area of political freedom, the authorities dissolved the Civilized Alternative political party against charges that have been proved true yet. On the other hand, the party of a friend of the King won the 2009 elections with 80% of the votes. At the same time, press freedom and freedom of expression have deteriorated dramatically. There has been unexpected rise in violations, closure and confiscation of newspapers and TV channels, along with the many cases brought against journalists and bloggers .

At the social level, in an attempt to protest problems that have existed for many year; there has been demonstrations by non-

partisan entities such as those made by the people of Sidi Ifni, as well as, demonstrations and sit-ins by unemployed universities graduates, in the country where the statistics indicate that the population exceeds 31 million.

Telecommunications Sector and the Internet:

Morocco is one of the Arab countries that are relatively advanced in implementing significant reforms in that field, especially in quantitative terms. That sector is being organized by The National Agency to Regulate Telecommunications (ANRT), an entity independent from the Ministry of Telecommunication founded in 1998 to oversee liberalization of the sector from state monopoly. According to official statistics issued by the Agency in June 2009, there are about 3.27 million subscribers to landlines telephones, almost 10% of the population, compared to about 4.4% in 2004. The figure shows a satisfactory growth after the liberation from the government monopoly over landlines. This figure includes the so-called telephones with limited mobility, which was introduced in 2007.

As for mobile phones, the subscribers reached 23,5 million subscribers distributed on three companies: 14.3 million with Maroc Telecom, 8.63 million with MIDI Telecom and 612 thousand subscribers to WANA.

The total number of Internet users in Morocco at the end of September 2009 reached about 10.3 million users. This indicates that the number of users tripled since the year 2006.

Internet users in Morocco are suffering the high prices of the service. Even after the end of the monopoly of Maroc Telecom to the internet market, there are many complaints regarding the

quality of service provided, particularly from the Maroc Telecom. Moreover, many news reports and blog posts discussed how the slow internet service which is interrupted occasionally.

Some experts explain of why ADSL service is limited in Morocco to the high prices of the services. Another reason is companies' interest to make quick profits. This is the opinion of the technical expert Yahya Yahyaoui . Yahyaoui explains that this has to with the way the sector was privatized; it went from being monopolized by the government to being monopolized by the companies. The values of competition, therefore, are lost in this situation and needs to be restored. Other experts have criticized foreign companies control over the sector.

The Moroccan government issued 53-05 Law to regulate electronic certification and cryptography, in 2007. Morocco is one of the few Arab countries that have passed legislations concerning electronic authentication.

In general, the Moroccan Constitution -despite its defaults- has guaranteed the right to "freedom of opinion, of expression in all its forms, and of public gathering" and "secrecy of personal correspondence shall be preserved". But the press laws and the law of Audiovisual Communication provide many loopholes through which the government can intimidate and prosecute writers, newspapers and channels. Some bloggers have already been subject to the penalties provided under the law of the press.

Internet cafés:

Internet cafés are still popular in Morocco among young people of both sexes, especially with the continued rise in internet subscriptions fees. In addition, internet cafés represent a relatively

easy and inexpensive business for young people.

Some young people spend hours at these cafés staying for hours enjoying the privacy provided by these cafés. This is especially true for young girls; a news report uncovered that internet cafés enabled them to stay out late at night contrary to social traditions. There are several reasons behind young people's attraction towards internet cafés. Some go there to finish their research studies, others communicate with friends and family, at the same time and others are obsessively interested in pornographic websites . However, some reports show that some of internet cafés owners prevent their visitors from accessing these websites. Visitors enjoy some freedom in these cafés; they are not subjected to any attempts to identify their identities or the websites they visit. However, after the suicide bombings that occurred in 2007, internet cafés were under heavy surveillance by the security forces. During this period, the number of visitors of internet cafés decreased significantly. Nevertheless, the popularity of internet cafés in other cities of Morocco seemed was not affected by the incident.

Censorship and blocking:

People, in Moroco, access the internet freely. Also, the government does not have a systematic policy of blocking websites. Reports show the government stopped blocking websites that supports the independence of the Moroccan Sahara or the Polisario Front . Yet, the past months witnessed many freedom of expression abuses; the prosecution of several journalists and bloggers.

To the Moroccan government, there are some lines that should not

be crossed; mainly the monarchy, the royal family, the issues of Sahara, the Polisario and Islam. However, authorities lately showed little tolerance even when regarding issues other than the ones mentioned above.

However, the Moroccan government does not have a fixed position towards those issues. This is evident when the YouTube website; www.youtube.com, was blocked in 2007. It was believed that the blocking decision came as a result of broadcasting videos supporting the independence of Sahara. Later, Maroc Telecom declared that the blocking was due to a technical glitch.

There are still some blocked websites in Morocco. Examples of these blocked websites: a blog spot known as Live Journal, www.livejournal.com, some proxy websites and websites for anonymous browsing, such as www.anonymizer.com. Moreover, the opposition group, Al Adl w El Ihsan, accused the authority of repeatedly blocking its website in 2009. The opposition group stated that the authorities have not only blocked the main website of the group, www.aljamaa.com, but also the website of its leader Abdel-Salam Yassin www.yassine.net, and the website of his daughter, Nadia Yassine, along with the website of women in the group.

Prisoners of the Internet:

Early in 2008, the engineer, Fouad Mourtada, was arrested by authorities. Authorities accused him of impersonating the King's brother, Moulay Rachid, on the famous social networking website Facebook, www.facebook.com. He was sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment, in addition to an imposed fine. The majority of Moroccans considered the sentence to be cruel and

disproportionate .

After many humanitarian appeals, the king issues a royal pardon releasing Mourtada after spending only 43 days in prison.

However, this case is still a setback for the Moroccan regime. In addition, it showed that the internet is under the surveillance of the security services. Questions were raised about how did they knew the account holder and how did they find out his address and personal information.

The other famous case was the detention of the blogger, Mohammed Raji. A fine was imposed on Raji, in addition to a 2 year prison sentence. He was the first Moroccan blogger to be arrested for what he wrote. He was charged with criticizing the king. Raji had criticized "how the Moroccan King is encouraging Moroccans to be dependent" in an article published in Hespress newspaper, <http://hespress.com/article-erraji.html>. The Court of Appeal, however, ordered the release of Raji, in September 2008. In another case, the journalist and blogger, Hassan Berhun, was sentenced to 6 months in prison, in March 2009, for having published a petition denouncing corruption and demanding the prosecution of those who are involved in the escape of a top drug trafficker from the city of Tetouan. The case shows that more and more issue are regarded now by the government as off-limits. Berhun received a royal pardon a few months before the end of his sentence .

Blogging in Morocco:

Morocco has one of the most active blogoshperes in the Arab world. This might because of the active social and cultural life in Morocco and the relative political freedom

Some news reports mark 2006 as the beginning of blogging in Morocco along with the rapid spread of ADSL. Maybe, the repressive actions of the government led to the increase of blogs in Morocco.

At the beginning, like in other Arab countries particularly the Gulf, social and personal blogs prevailed. Nevertheless, recently, public and political blogs has taken the lead discussing almost public and political issues. The majority of bloggers exercise self censorship especially when it comes to issues regarding the royal regime or the independence of the Western desert.

One of the famous blogs that started early and had a clear interest in public affairs, is www.mshjiouij.com, which was established in the beginning of the year 2006. Recently, Mohammed Hijouij announced his full engagement to the professional blogging through a new domain; [http:// miolog.com](http://miolog.com)

There is also the blog of the young journalist and novelist, Mustafa Bakkali, www.elbakkali.com, which received a large number of votes in the contest BOBs world of blogging. The same blogger also founded the blog; www.rafdona.wordpress.com, which rejects normalization with Israel in the Arab world. The blog of young woman Leila www.lailalalami.com/blog, is an example of the marriage of what is personal and what is public in the blogosphere.

Targuist Sniper:

One can also notice the cultural diversity and independence of the blogs in Morocco and the inability of the political currents to turn them to be more partisan. Until this moment, for example, no one knows the identity of the blogger known as Targuist sniper, who gained international reputation for his videos on YouTube . These

videos show gendarmes while receiving bribes from citizens on the street. These has been watched over a million times.

The authorities have launched raid campaigns and investigation into the city of Targuist, to which the blogger belongs, in an attempt to arrest him, but they failed to find him.

Although, some people oppose any attempts to regulate blogging, the Moroccan bloggers decided, after a long period of preparation, to establish an Assembly to organize themselves. The first meeting of the Association of Moroccan Bloggers was in April 2009. The association is chaired by prominent blogger Said Benjebli, owner of the blog: A salute to struggle.

The establishment of that Association has helped in the development of the bloggers campaign to defend freedom of expression in Morocco. Though, it just started, the Bloggers Association gained importance and credibility because of its activities and the members' ability to communicate with the Moroccan public.

Yemen

Patriarchal Internet

Overview

A few years ago, Yemen entered a crucial stage of its history where the gap between North and South has been growing due to the unfair distribution of the country's wealth.

This led to the clash between government forces and the Huthi insurgents.

Riots and the absence of security reflected unprecedented rates of poverty, illiteracy, the absence of means of development and the deterioration of the infrastructure, including the field of communications technology.

This dim scene is accompanied with the lack of political freedom.

The general situation is characterized by marginal freedoms, including the Internet. This is evident in the uneven distribution of Internet cafés in provinces and crackdowns against bloggers and e-publishers.

The telecommunications and Internet sector

Yemeni telecommunications witnessed a major leap in 2009 where the number of telephone lines reached 199,685 at the end of the first half of the year compared with 3,548 lines in 1999.

In mid-2009 Internet subscribers reached 369,643 . This figure is one of the lowest in the Arab world and the world. This is due mainly to the high illiteracy rate of 39%, according to official sources.

Internet prices are quite high, ranging between YR4,000 (US\$ 19)

to YR6,000 (US\$ 30).These are high rates compared to annual per capita income which does not exceed US\$450.

Prices are high because the two ISPs TeleYemen and YemenNet have monopolized the service since Internet was introduced..

However, formal studies show that Yemen could have to 15 companies.

This has prompted numerous citizens, bloggers and independent journalists to launch a national protest campaign against poor Internet services .

The campaign urged the Yemeni government to improve the service, stop blocking websites and reduce Internet service prices .

In response, the Yemeni government blocked the campaign site itself in February 2009.

Yemen is witnessing the unique phenomenon of a decreasing number websites and an increase in hosting rates, especially for those sites hosted by the national portal Yemen Net. The number of sites hosted by the portal dropped to about 460 in 2008 from 915 in 2007 .Some attribute this to the blocking policy and the many onerous conditions imposed on site owners or applicants.

The Yemeni Constitution explicitly provides for "freedom and confidentiality of post, telephone and telegraph and other means of communication.", It affirms that they "may not be monitored, inspected, disclosed, delayed or confiscated except in cases specified by law and only by court order."

Blocking in the name of the law

The Internet, as well as independent newspapers in Yemen are among the most prominent forums of opposition to political and social conditions. They represent the most effective means to

confront political repression.

Figures demonstrate this as the Marib Video site receives more than 600 visits per week with a member list that reached 700 in a short period, particularly after the riots in the south in 2009. On the other hand, the number of visitors to News Yemen, an important site that reports on the press and freedom of expression, exceeded 14 million in 2008.

Authorities are trying to limit the impact of the web as an alternative to traditional sources of information by controlling it in various ways, particularly through a set of punitive laws against dissidents and independents in Yemen.

In March 2009 the government submitted a legislation concerning the right to access information and to build websites. The draft was misleading and lacked clarity. It included prison sentences, some of which reach six years for anyone "trying to extract or publish prohibited content," according to the government's view .

The authorities also launched a campaign to block news sites, hack them and delete all content, claiming they stir the public and incite violence and terrorism. The sites the Yemeni authorities targeted included Sons of the South, Al-Taif Network News, Free Yemen, Shamsan News, Dali Gate of the South, Abyan Forum and Hadramout News.

The Yemen Portal published a list of blocked sites to which it had access. It managed to publish the contents of the blocked sites. As a result, the Yemen Portal itself was blocked. However, its owner managed to create a program to free all blocked sites. He called it Al-Kasser (the breaker).

Yemeni authorities deliberately blocked the most popular sites that

host blogs to prevent bloggers from publishing their articles and pictures and information exchange .

With the blocking of the Jordanian site Maktoob , Yemeni bloggers use aliases for fear of prosecution, pursuit or abduction. Examples are the sites Thamood, Hadramout Hope, and Free Voice From Sanaa.

Due to frequent attacks, some sites and blogs clustered to start a campaign to resist blocking Yemeni websites. The campaign's official website monitors encroachments and violations against sites. The site also publishes techniques to allow browsing blocked content .

Prisoners of the Internet

Under the undeclared state of emergency enforced by the Yemeni authorities, it has become very easy to hunt down free writers on the web in many ways. The most common method is kidnapping by "civilians".

In September 2009 unknown persons kidnapped Mohammed Al-Maqaleh, an e-journalist at Al-Ishtraki (The Socialist) after he published articles critical of government performance in security issues. Yemeni opposition accused Yemen's national security of the kidnapping .

In May 2009 the police arrested Yemeni reporter Fuad Rashid, editor of the e-paper Mukalla Press , and Yahia Bamehfuz, former editor of Hadramout News, without giving any reasons .

Another example is the continued harassment of journalist, blogger and editor of Al-Shoura Net Abdul-Karim al-Khaiwani who spent a year in prison because of his writings criticizing the regime. He was released in 2005 by presidential pardon.

In June 2008 Khaiwani was sentenced to six years in prison for "terrorism and scheming with the rebels of the Sana'a Second Cell" . He was kidnapped several times in 2007 and banned from travel. Khaiwani wrote critical articles that annoyed the regime, such as the Ead Al Jolous and Ali Katyusha.

In October 2009 a new approach was introduced into Yemen's e-space to harass annoying voices. Editor of Ittijah Net Zbeen Ayed Attia accused "certain departments" of trying to assassinate him and fabricate cases against him to prevent him from disclosing facts through his journalistic work .

Internet cafés and attempts to demonize the web

According to the Yemeni News Agency the number of Internet cafés reached around 984 as of June 2009 .

Cafés experience "organizational" campaigns which seek to "oblige cafés to observe regulations and provide a complete and integrated database to facilitate dealing with the Public Institution for Telecommunications, business centers and Internet cafés ."

The Yemeni community still views Internet cafés with suspicion and mistrust. According to observers, the Internet is a means to access immoral sites and is considered unsafe for the young people .

However, many Yemenis are skeptical of this unfair government image aiming to drive citizens away from the Internet which even calls Internet users sinners.

In August 2007 the official news agency Sabaa conducted a survey that showed that 70% of the respondents were young people seeking pornographic sites .

The continued crackdowns in pro-government papers against sites

like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and DailyMotion provide further evidence of the Yemeni regime's fear that ordinary citizens would access information and news from independent sources beyond their control.

Patriarchal Internet: Women are not welcome

The modest logistic resources and low number of Internet users had a negative impact on women users in Yemen, rendering them invisible.

Official figures show that illiterate Yemeni women represent over 70%. This explains women's absence from the Internet scene.

Female computer science students are 489 compared to 2,915 male students. The number of women employed in the public sector in the field of computer and communication technologies does not exceed 78 out of 88,000 females in other areas .

Female bloggers are almost non-existent due to extreme poverty that renders owning a computer and an Internet connection quite beyond reach. In addition, girl presence in Internet cafés goes totally against conservative Yemeni society patriarchal traditions. The official website of the Yemeni Women's Union, one of the most prominent Yemeni web sites is a positive point in favor of Yemeni women. The site was censored and even hacked several times for publishing articles and positions that bothered the regime.

chapter 2 (Arab Internet Activists Tools)

Arabic Blogs

Overview

It never occurred to the Arab regimes , being as repressive as could be, that their ambitious plans to modernize the communications infrastructure to attract and increase investments in information technology and increase the number of internet users, will back fire. Those plans have resulted in a generation of bloggers and internet activists that bitterly criticize those regimes and stand against various violations and corruption and push forward for change.

Blogging started in 1999, it began to spread and have impact since spring 2003 with the American invasion of Iraq. Arabic blogs emerged in 2004. Starting in 2005, they were widely spread with the start of a political movement in the region and calls for change and reform, in which bloggers have played a prominent role and took part in advocating for change and raising political awareness, especially in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria.

Egyptian bloggers took the initiative, and were able to stretch the margin of freedom of expression in defiance to the Egyptian regime, by discussing political and social issues were considered previously as taboos. They managed to break the fear among a large segment of internet users, mostly young people and encourage them to positive political participation.

Blogging in the Arab world

The number of Arabic blogs, according to the report of the

Information Decision Support Center of the Egyptian cabinet, is about 490,000 until mid-2008

Arabic blogs are hosted on different websites most important of which is www.blogger.com, which is owned by Google. In addition, to websites like www.wordpress.com, the website www.maktoobblog.com, an Arabic website that hosted in mid-2009 more than 91,000 blog from all Arab countries . As well as, some other websites that provide blogging service, such as Elaph, Jeeran , Katib, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information and the blogs of the famous couple, Manal and Alaa.

According to estimates of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, which specializes in freedom of expression in the media and the internet, there are about 600,000 Arabic blogs. However, the active blogs are actually no more than 25%.

Arabic blogs can be classified quantitatively and per country. Egypt has the largest number of blogs that make up one third of the Arabic blogs, followed by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Morocco.

The blogging space is divided between the community of Egyptian secular bloggers and reformists and another that represents a gathering of writers supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is defined as "illegal" and banned by the Egyptian regime. Yet, it can be found repeatedly on the internet through young bloggers who declare their membership of the group and express their ideas spread through blogs and launch campaigns to defend Muslim Brotherhood detainees. In addition to other blogs that belongs to the Brotherhood that varies between literary and social blogs.

The Egyptian bloggers aim to break the political constraints through their blogs, which are renowned for its bitter criticism of the government in spite of the government's repression on them. In

Saudi Arabia, blogging is focusing on personal rather than political matters. In Kuwait, the majority of blogs are in English. The Syrian blogs are quite similar to Saudi Arabia when it comes to the topic. The Moroccan blogs use a mix of the Arabic and French language. However, some bloggers who discussed political issues and revealed corruption cases served prison terms in Syria, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia.

Arab bloggers use Web 2.0 and they link their blogs in various websites such as YouTube , Wikipedia and news websites such as Aljazeera.net and the BBC, followed by Al-Arabiya, and most recently the social networking website Facebook.

The age group that most widely uses blogs is between 25 -35 years amounting 45% of the Arab population. The Arab bloggers over 35 years are 9%, while females represent 34% of Arab bloggers. The highest ratio for female bloggers compared to male bloggers is in Egypt in the age group from 18 to 24 years, amounting 47% and the proportion of female bloggers in Saudi Arabia is 46% of Saudi bloggers . 83% of the Arab bloggers live in their homeland and often use aliases, especially among female bloggers.

In general, Arab bloggers write about local political issues and criticize the ruling regimes. They also discuss personal and religious issues which are among the main issues discussed and debated on Arab blogs. Human rights issues are also one of the most common issues discussed on blogs. An issue that all Arabic blogs and all Arab bloggers are all against is siege of Gaza, and the Israeli attack on Gaza, in December 2008 -January 2009.

Arabic Blogs: Voice Of The Voiceless

Blogging helped the various religious groups to emerge and represent their case to the Arab public opinion. For example, the Baha'is have used blogging to display their case and defend their religious freedoms. The most famous Baha'i blog is An Egyptian Baha'i, <http://egyptianbahai.wordpress.com>, owned by an Egyptian young man in his thirties born in a Baha'i family. In his blog he discussed the problems facing him particularly obtaining official papers as well as lack of tolerance and resentment he feels when he declares that he is Baha'i.

The blogger, Randa El Hoassani, her blog:

<http://rands1957.spaces.live.com/blog>, is an Egyptian Baha'i activist. She was born in Port Said in a Baha'i family of the fourth-generation. In 1972, She was imprisoned when she was 14 years, for a month, with other Baha'is for contempt of religions

Blogging has also helped the emergence of a number of codes for homosexuals since 2006, which allowed gays to express themselves and their point of view and confirm their presence in the Arab and Muslim communities in a realistic way rather than the stereotypical image that novels and films have been feeding the public over the years, prior to internet. The most famous of such blogs are:

- <http://gayweekly.blogspot.com/> : a Kuwaiti blog
- <http://saudigayboy.blogspot.com/> : a Saudi blog
- The blog Kareem Diary <http://kareemazmy.blogspot.com>
- Diaries of a lesbian woman.

Cases disclosed by bloggers

Arab bloggers managed to play a key role in the political field pressuring the authority to act on several issues, such as torture in

Egypt which became an attitude during the reign of Hosni Mubarak. It is practiced by police officers against citizens as punishment or to extract confessions or just as a show of power. Bloggers revealed incidents of torture and posted videos that show police officers torturing people in police stations. The most famous scene is the torturing of Emad AlKabir, a driver, who was tortured and raped with a stick by the police officer, Islam Nabih. The scene was recorded with a cell phone to humiliate Emad between his friends and neighbors. The scene propagated till it was posted on several blogs at the end of 2006. Among those blogs was that of Wael Abbass, www.misrdigital.com. Satellite media and the printed press were forced to discuss this incident , which turned to a public opinion case. The case ended with an unprecedented verdict; the officer Islam Nabih and Reda Fathi, the secretary of police, were sentenced to 3 years in prison .

Other issues that bloggers have recorded and also turned to cases of public opinion:

- The issue of sexual harassment in Egypt; the blogs of Wael Abbas and Malek Mustafa , <http://malek-x.net> posted videos of sexual harassment, that occurred in downtown Cairo during Al Fitr feast in 2006, displaying of groups of girls being harassed. The videos stirred a lot of debate on satellite channels and newspapers, and resulted in highlighting the failure of police in protecting victims of harassment despite their presence in large numbers downtown at the same time of the incident. The Egyptian Ministry of Interior tried to deny those incidents even existed but a number of eyewitnesses and bloggers brought undeniable evidence that made the ministry take preventive measures .
- In Morocco, the blogger, Targuist Sniper, managed to disclose

corruption of Moroccan police and the Moroccan Royal Gendarmerie in 2007, where he recorded a number of bribes - receiving scenes and posted them on YouTube , after which they spread on blogs and were debated on international media.

Unfortunately, this blogger was targeted by the police in Morocco.

- The success of the Algerian blogger, Rahalia whose job is sorting newspaper articles and delivering them to the Algerian Parliament Media Commission. As simple as it may seem, his job allowed him to access the archive of officials' announcements, decisions and related articles leading him to arrive at contradictions, manipulations and lies of official statements. He started writing articles on a limited scale on the internet uncovering those lies. Those articles, were all over the Algerian cyberspace and were successful to bring about change. Rahalia addressed the president himself, through his highly credible articles and documented writings, demanding him to freeze "the hydrocarbon law", a project to privatize the state oil companies. The president announced before the cabinet that he was sure that this law was full of irregularities

- Other countries also witnessed a significant role for blogs in highlighting events and important political crises, such as Darfur crisis. The blog, Shabab Darfur, is one of the main sources that displayed the real situation in Darfur.

- Marahin blog , <http://saltowayyah.katib.org/>, in Oman, and Mowaten Emarati , <http://emarati.katib.org/>, in the UAE, as well as the famous blog of Mahmoud Youssef in Bahrain ([http://mahmood.tv /](http://mahmood.tv/)) as well as Moroccan blog; Ahjiouj.

Examples of violations against Arab bloggers

The Arab world is of the worst regions in the world in internet monitoring. Arab bloggers and activists are detained, prosecuted and even tortured. Arab countries are always on the list of internet enemies prepared by Reporters Without Borders. In its report of 2009, which included 12 countries in the world defined as "internet enemies", 4 Arab countries were listed: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Syria.

There are dozens if not hundreds of bloggers who have been arrested and detained under the emergency laws, and even abducted and tortured, including:

- The Egyptian blogger Ahmed Mohsen, 26 years, owner of the blog: Fatth Eineik , <http://eyestillopen.blogspot.com>, who was arrested in May 2009 and charged with "abusing the democratic atmosphere to overthrow the government" . ANHRI described this charge as a black comedy.
- The Moroccan blogger; Mohammed Al Raji, was convicted and sentenced to prison because of an article he wrote that criticized royal behavior which he considers encouraging people to be reliant and passive.
- Karim Arabji, from Syria, he wrote an article criticizing the Syrian authorities. Consequently, on 13/9/2009, Karim was sentenced to three years in prison for "spreading false news that weakens the sentiment of the nation".
- The Saudi, Fouad AlFarhan, is one of the famous bloggers. His blog is entitled Dean of Saudi Bloggers. He is known for his

elegant writings and serious advocacy for reform in his blog , <http://www.alfarhan.org>. His slogan is "in search for freedom, dignity, justice, equality, Shura , and all Islamic lost values for Raghad and Khattab". He was detained by Saudi authorities for five months without charges and was never put on trial. Afterwards, he was released without giving any reasons for his arrest or release.

- Rafat AlGhanem, a Syrian blogger living in Saudi Arabia, was arrested in July 2009 by Saudi security, without justification, and is still detained.

And many more:

- The Egyptian Mossad Abu Fajr, owner of the blog, <http://wednane3ish.katib.org/>, is one of the main callers to stop discrimination against the Egyptian Bedouins of Sinai. Several charges have been fabricated against him by security. After investigations, the general prosecutor released him. Yet, security services arrested him again under the emergency law and he is still detained till this date in spite of more than 15 release orders that have been issued
- Abdel Moneim Mahmoud, a blogger and journalist, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was arrested, tortured several times and banned from travel. He was arrested allegedly for “disrupting public security”. The Arabic Network believes that the most important cause for detaining Moneim Mahmoud is to smear the good image of any member of Muslim Brotherhood group not what the government is claiming. In his blog, Moneim displays a

different profile than the one provided by the government. He defends secularism and different ideologies, reveals torture crimes and participates in campaigns to support freedom of expression. Such an image is one which the Egyptian government is not willing to reveal .

Some Egyptian bloggers are still detained , the most famous case is the blogger Kareem Amer, who was arrested in November 2006 and sentenced in February 2007 for 4 years; 3 years for insulting the Islamic religion and 1 year for insulting the President. Kareem should be released in November 2010. He is serving his sentence at Borg Al Arab prison in Alexandria. Kareem Amer has been tortured in prison and is still subjected to harassment. He was deprived of visits several times in 2009.

In 2007, an Egyptian judge filed a case for blocking 51 blogs and websites on the internet, claiming they were terrorist websites and detrimental to the state, the police and the President. This law suit is an attempt to block all blogs and websites that revealed the judge's theft of ANHRI report on the freedom to use Internet in the Arab world in 2006. The case has been refused in December 2007 .

In Tunisia, in August 2008, the Tunisian blogger; Zied El Heni, filed a lawsuit against the Tunisian Internet Agency for blocking Facebook until the website was unblocked on 2/9/2008.

Under the spotlight: Sami Ben Gharbia

Quiet a character, an intense blogger, and a strong defender of democracy. He managed to turn the internet into a tool to resist the autocratic regime in Tunisia. A lot of Arab bloggers followed him

and non Arabs learned from him. He is inspiration to many since he is so creative in using the internet to expose oppression and corruption of the Tunisian dictatorship. His story started by escaping from Tunisia through Libya, Niger, Chad, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iran in order to finally reach Netherlands, where he received political asylum .

This is Sami Ben Gharbia , the Tunisian blogger, creator of the map of Tunisian prisons , in which are used many Internet techniques in which he excels in order to show the cruel penal policy, which rendered Tunisia among the top states in the number of prisoners per population. The Tunisian government denied all punitive practices. However, the truth that Ghariba uncovered show that there are two version of Tunisia; the first Tunisia is the green one where tourists enjoys, provided that they shut up completely and have money, the other one is the a big prison for all opponents and human rights activist or even those concerned with the country. Second Tunisia raises some questions, where an answer will not be found, but rather silencing the mouth that uttered the question.

Sami Ben Gharbia uses the Internet creatively to expose corruption and the dark side of Tunisia. He introduced a film that traces the Tunisian presidential plane and its suspicious use in things not related to state affairs.

No wonder, Ben Gharbia has become a target for campaigns of slander and for fierce attack from the Tunisian government officials, agents, informants in overseas embassies.

By launching such campaigns they convey the message to their masters in Tunisia, they are doing their homework, no matter how

these campaigns would lack sincerity or credibility. Some official told Gamal Eid, executive director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights, "Sami Ben Gharbia is a sincere young man who loves his country. He does not create or fabricate any of these scandals, he only reveals them" .

Ben Gharbia also revealed that, Ezz Al Din Hammadi, director of the tourist office at the Tunisian Embassy in Washington, reserved the domain name of presidential campaign of 2009 for the candidate Zein El Abidine Ben Ali since 2004, precisely 25 days only after the "victory" of Ben Ali in the presidential elections held on 24/102004.

As well as logging more than 80 domain names mostly all related to media, political and tourist structures in Tunisia! Ben Gharbia considered this the first semi-formal appeal to President Ben Ali to get nominate .

Facebook

Background

Were Facebook a state it would have been the fourth largest in terms of population. It is ruled by a 25-year old. Mark Zuckerberg did not realize the major leap he had created online, particularly within the so-called social networks when he participated with his university colleagues at the time Dustin Moskowitz and Chris Hughes who majored in computer science to establish the Facebook as a social network in 2004.

He then allowed in members from the universities of Stanford, Columbia and Yale. Thus, the site expanded and opened up to all of Boston's schools and Ivy League universities. Gradually, it became accessible to many universities in Canada and the United States. On 26 September 2006 the site opened its doors to all individuals aged 13 or older who have working email addresses. Membership then expanded until it included over 250 million users worldwide in July 2009.

In October 2008 Facebook administrators announced the choice of Dublin, Ireland, as an international headquarters.

Facebook Nature and Characteristics

Facebook is a Web 2.0 social networking website. Membership is free. It is run by Facebook Limited Liability Company. Users can join city, work, school or regional networks to communicate and interact with others. Users can also add people to their friend lists and send messages, as well as update their personal files and introduce themselves to friends.

Facebook has a number of features that allow users to communicate with each other. These features include the "Wall," a

space on each user's profile page that allows friends to send different messages to the user. There is also the "Poke" feature which allows users to send a poke to attract attention to each other. It is a notification to the user that a friend is greeting them. The "Photos" feature enables users to download albums and photos from their computers to the site. The "Status" feature allows users to notify friends of their whereabouts and what they are doing at any given moment.

Any user who can view another's profile can also view their wall depending on the privacy settings. In July 2007 Facebook allowed the possibility of attaching messages that contain more than just text to the wall.

Over time, Facebook started adding many new features. On 6 September 2006 the News Feed was announced. The News Feed appears on the Home page for all users, highlighting some information, such as changes to user profiles, upcoming events and user friends' birthdays. This feature was initially met with dissatisfaction, as some complained of poor organization and unwanted data, while others expressed fears that this may facilitate tracking their personal activities, such as changes in their relationships, various events and chats. In response, Zuckerberg apologized for the site's failure to provide appropriate features that can help maintain the privacy of individuals. Since then, users have the ability to control the type of data they share spontaneously with friends. Moreover, users can prevent their friends from viewing updates regarding specific activities, such as profile changes, their wall messages and recently added friends. The Facebook Notes feature was introduced on 22 August 2006, a feature related to blogging that allows the addition of marks and

images. Users were later able to import blogs from Zhanga, Live Journal, blogger and other blogging sites. During 7 April 2008 week, Facebook launched an application that allows instant messaging to communication networks using the Comet program. It was called Chat and allows users to communicate with their friends. It is similar in function to desktop instant messaging (chat). Facebook currently ranks fifth globally in terms of user visits. It is also among the most famous sites in terms of image upload which reach up to 14 million pictures daily.

A few months ago many countries started recognizing Facebook in courts. In December 2008 the Supreme Court of the Australian capital's County acknowledged Facebook as a valid protocol to serve court notices to defendants. This may be the first court ruling worldwide that recognizes summons served through Facebook as legally binding. In March 2009 New Zealand's Supreme Court judge David Gindal authorized Axe Market Garden Company to submit the legal papers incriminating defendant Craig Axe through Facebook.

On the other hand, in Italy, the emergence of pro-mafia groups caused the State concern. This led the government, following a brief debate, to hasten to issue a law that would require ISPs to restrict access to entire sites in case the sites refused to remove illegal content. The Attorney-General can require such deletions in case a site is suspected of publishing "incriminating statements, whether in defense or as incitement to crime." The Senate approved the amendment on February 5, 2008, which is expected to be approved without change by the Senate's other legislative body before becoming effective immediately.

Facebook and other sites, including Google, criticized this

amendment stressing its dire consequences for the freedom of expression for those users who did not violate any laws.

Characteristics of Arab presence on Facebook

The increasing demand on Facebook among Arab youth, particularly after the introduction of some modifications and adapting it to allow the use of the Arabic language contributed to the increase of its use in the Arab region. Facebook contributed to the success of the 6th April Movement strike which started with a Facebook group as its communication capacity exceeds all that provided by classic Internet communication means, such as Messenger, mailing groups, forums etc. Facebook allows the highest levels of communication.

The number Arab users on Facebook until September 2009 approached 12 million , a large number for a site that was not known to Arabs before 2006.

Following are the most important uses of Facebook in the Arab world:

1. Entertainment

Facebook fulfilled public need for entertainment and communication due to the magnitude of interesting applications. Some very successful groups emerged which achieved great popularity at the level of entertainment. As example is the group called "Sorry, Shombongo!! The Egyptian Campaign in Favor of the Speaking Monkey," the members of which reached 17,637. It is a group that mocks the ads of a mobile phone company. Another example is a group called "Doomsday Newspaper Headlines," which makes fun through imagining the headlines of Egyptian

government, opposition and independent newspapers on Doomsday.

2. Politics and religion

The other side of Facebook use is directed toward a social nature, which tends to be either political or reform-minded in the Arab world. The religious use of Facebook may preach and advocate for religion, recall its teachings when dealing at the virtual environment level, or urge people to do good and practices relief activities that aim to help the poor and those in need.

There is a growing trend within Facebook to invest it in relief and charitable work. This trend moves toward achieving charity objectives, such as providing the poor with appropriate winter clothes, donate blood, feed the poor and contribute to associations and organizations that help the poor. For example, there are groups called "I, too, want to do good," "Humanitarian action for good," and "Palestinian Medical Relief."

There are those who use Facebook to achieve a social goal under a religious banner. There is also an overlap between political and relief activists who raise the Islamic banner, and activists who raise a purely religious banner. Christian Arab Facebook members rarely mix the religious and the political. However, it is not rare to find Christians raising the relief banner.

For example, there different groups were created under the name "Everything but God's Prophet," the members of which reached 192,009, the "Jesus Christ" group the members of which reached 32,506, or the group "Each good deed receives a ten-fold reward." Some groups that support some current issues were created, such as the Muslims for Andrew and Mario, in addition to groups that

disagree with Muslims Brotherhood, such as the group "We don't want the Muslim Brotherhood."

Facebook as a virtual environment for freedoms

Facebook offered great potential as it has created a virtual environment for activists to exercise their freedoms. Thus, Facebook had an obvious impact on Arab public opinion. It has become some governments' arch "enemy" as they failed to control it, particularly that it has become one of the main tools and platforms upon which political powers and activists relied to enrich the spirit of enthusiasm among users in general, and youth in particular, as the group that uses the Internet most.

Egypt's 6th April Movement as a model

Egypt was among the Arab first countries to use Facebook. The Egypt network includes about 845,000 members. It is the third site most visited by Egyptians. Facebook affected Egypt's political life after some youth announced their solidarity with the workers' strike on 6th April 2008. They adopted journalist Magdy Ahmed Hussein's idea of a general strike in Egypt not restricted to workers only.

The movement started by forming groups to spread the strike idea through messages. A young Egyptian female called Israa Abdel-Fattah created the group where she called for the 6th April 2008 strike. Over 71,000 persons joined the group. On the other hand, a young man called Karim al-Sayyad created another group called "Yes to Gamal Mubarak" rejecting the strike idea and supporting Egypt's President's son Gamal Mubarak.

The 6th April Group enjoyed incredible success whereas the group supporting Gamal Mubarak failed painfully. This prompted some of

Egypt's opposition parties and movements to support the strike idea , such as the Real Estate Tax employees' movement, the education sector administrative and education movement, Egypt's Bar Association and the university professors' 9th March Movement, in addition to some intellectuals, bloggers and Internet activists. The strike idea spread in a short time throughout Egypt under the slogan: "Stay at home." They also called for demonstrations in several places in Cairo, Alexandria and Mehalla. A number of members were detained about the strike. The reactions of human rights organizations to the movement varied.

Egypt's ruling party on Facebook

The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) realized the importance of the Internet as a weapon which has become a chronic headache, particularly after it sparked the famous strike, the 6th April Movement and the movement against succession or those opposed to the NDP. Thus, new counter-groups emerged that started a dialogue and debate about the nomination of Gamal Mubarak for president, including the following:

- Yes or no to the Gamal Mubarak for president
- Gamal Mubarak, why not? No idea before?
- Mubarak is the best currently to rule Egypt, and Gamal to succeed him. Express your point of view
- Who wants Gamal as president?
- Why not Gamal for president?

Due to the novelty of the use of Internet as a means to promote the ruling party in Egypt, the results are not clear yet. However, the experiment itself shows its reputation and impact which may prompt other Arab parties and ruling regimes to follow the pro-

democracy movement example, particularly after the success in adding this site to the most significant tools for change and political struggle.

Blocking Facebook

Some countries prohibited Facebook access due to its nature that allows free entry and use to everyone. Governments used to depriving their people of freedoms or tools that support these freedoms, it was blocked in Syria under the claim that some citizens use it to incite campaigns against the authorities.

Moreover, the Syrian government announced it feared Israeli infiltration of social networks In Syria through Facebook!

It was surprising that the dictatorship in Tunisia allowed Facebook without restrictions. It quickly remedied that reverting to its habit and blocked Facebook in August 2008. In response, a journalist filed the first lawsuit of its kind in Tunisia demanding that Facebook be unblocked before the Tunisian president issue directions to allow access to Tunisian users.

A spokesman for the UAE Telecommunications Regulatory Authority announced the prohibition of Facebook's dating section, while allowing access to other sections.

The Palestinian cause on Facebook

It was logical for Facebook to become party to the historic conflict between the Palestinians and the Israeli occupation, as was the case with other important sites on the Internet.

Facebook recently began to play an important political role. It became a new arena for this political conflict on the Palestinian cause. Yediot Ahronot wrote that Jewish settlers were angered that Facebook listed them as residents of Palestine, prompting the

site to allow users to change that to Israel.

According to female Jordanian blogger Rasha Abdullah, "many groups addressed prominent Palestinian figures, such as Mahmoud Darwish, Naji Al-Ali, George Habash, Ghassan Kanafani, Yasser Arafat, Haidar Abdel-Shafi. Their fans did not restrict themselves to just creating one group for each, tens of groups were created for most of them, particularly Naji Al-Ali who was chosen, along with his symbolic character Handhala, as the symbols for most Palestinian Facebook users.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict was not restricted to Facebook groups, but extended to applications available to all participants, including the flags, topped by the Palestinian, and the "I am Palestinian" application where Palestinian members can add the flag and decorate their pages with pictures of Palestinian cities, a map of Palestine and pictures of against the occupation. There is also the Causes application where donations are collected for Palestinians, including Free Palestine, the Right of Return for Palestinian Refugees and tens of others. There is also the Fans application which allows the selection of certain figures admired by Facebook members, the most notable were Naji Al-Ali, Mahmoud Darwish, Marwan Barghouti, Ghassan Kanafani, and even singers whose names were linked to the Palestinian cause, including Marcel Khalifa and Naseer Shamma.

Moreover, there are the invitations to Palestinian art events inside Palestine and in exile, in addition to groups which chose to address the issue through comedy, including the groups of Abu-Fayek, the Palestinian expressions group, and other groups which celebrate Palestinian rural expressions and dialect. Finally, Palestinian artist paintings are circulated, including the paintings of

artists such as Ismail Shammout. Tammam Al-Ak-hal. Naji Al-Ali's caricatures, as well as slogans, the most prominent of which are photos of the Argentinean fighter Che Guevara wearing a Palestinian scarf.

Twitter

O people, my mother and I are been attacked right now in our house by a neighboring police major and his brother. They injured my head and broke one of my teeth. Police corruption has reached my home.

This was a text message sent by the activist and blogger, Wael Abbas, from his mobile phone to more than 2500 people around the world in a few seconds, via Twitter.

The incident of attacking the famous Egyptian blogger was very important and what was equally important was the way he used to disseminate the news of assaulting him among large number of friends, whether bloggers or journalists or human rights activists in Egypt and abroad, every second.

Wael reported the entire incident; from the beginning of the attack, to the complaint he filed to the general prosecutor, to the investigation done regarding the incident and its conclusion. This was all made possible because of this new and important service which the world knows now as "Twitter".

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a popular communication tool in the world of social networking. Twitter provides a micro-blogging service; subscribers can send a text message from any mobile phone to any Twitter subscriber almost for free through the website.

A Twitter subscriber can send message to all friends, acquaintances and whoever wants to be updated with his/her news. For example, BBC covered the attack on Wael Abbas,

before any other media channel, because it was among those who have registered to follow up Wael Abbas's news posted on Twitter.

The Start of Twitter

The idea of Twitter began when Jack Dorsey wanted to be informed with what all his friends are doing at all times. So, he told his friends about the idea and they decided to create a prototype of the website to see whether or not it will work out.

In the beginning of the year 2006, the website appeared as a research project conducted by the American company, Obvious, in San Francisco. It was officially launched in October 2006, then, the company decided to make it an independent company under the name Twitter, in April 2007.

What are you doing now?

This is the question that anyone has to answer to become a Twitter member. This question has to be answered in a maximum of 140 words; it's almost the same length of a SMS, after logging to the main page to create an account. When the subscriber presses 'send', his/her message reaches all his/her friends or followers on their mobiles and their Twitter accounts simultaneously. This only costs the same price of a short SMS. In addition, you receive the messages of all people you asked to "follow" on your mobile phone and your Twitter home page.

The emergence of Twitter has changed the media scene in the world. Twitter transformed from being just a means for social networking into a means to mobilize support for opposition and activists. It is used to mobilize people or for obtaining information, like what happened in the U.S. and Iranian elections. It has also become an important tool in the hands of reporters to cover any

significant events on the ground, like protests and demonstrations, every moment, using only their mobile phone and their Twitter account.

Like many political leaders around the world wanted to create their own blogs in order to communicate with their supporters, a lot of people join Twitter in order to inform their acquaintances and followers with their most recent news rapidly.

The Twitter Revolution

This is the most common expression describing the popular uprising that accompanied the Iranian elections at the beginning of the summer of this year. Maybe the tremendous growth of the messages sent via Twitter is partly because of the role Twitter played in this popular uprising.

Before the elections, the Iranian government has imposed extremely restrictive regulations on mass media (local and satellite TV channels, and local newspapers), with the exception of mass media supportive of President Ahmadinejad. Moreover, Tehran imposed restrictions on international newspapers and the use of all modern technologies, like the Internet. Also, international news agencies were prevented from covering the elections and the events that followed it, like the demonstrations and arrests. Facebook website was blocked days before the elections in order to prevent the opposition from mobilizing their supporters.

In the face of this media blackout, the new generation of supporters of the opposition candidate, Moussaoui, did not find any means to communicate and share news and information but Twitter. They began a major campaign on Twitter to mobilize

supporters of Moussaoui and organize and scheduling demonstrations. For example, the sent a message saying: “alert...Moussaoui's rally is still on time at five o'clock in the evening”. By those text messages sent via Twitter, they also managed to uncover the crimes and gross violations perpetrated by the Iranian police, like raiding houses and arrests. This made the voice of the Iranian opposition reach the world.

The Iranian government found itself in a difficult position. Unlike most websites, imposing censorship on Twitter will not work due to its various applications on mobile phones. A message sent by an activist in Iran, via their mobiles, will be seen by millions abroad through Twitter.

As a result, the Iranian government announced it would summon to court any person who uses Twitter to send information about the Iranian elections. In addition, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard warned against the use of technological devices, like Twitter, to stir up riots or demonstrations.

Unprecedented growth

At the beginning of November 2009, the total number of messages transmitted via Twitter reached more than five billion messages. The number increased in December to reach 6 billion messages; this means that 1 billion messages are sent via Twitter monthly.

Twitter and Arab Internet activists

Although, Twitter users, worldwide, did not exceeded six million, at the beginning of this year, their commitment to the website resulted in an increase in the number of users to reach 1 billion. It is expected that the number would reach 350 million within two years; in 2011.

Despite the successful use of the website by some Arab activists, this use is still within the limits of individual cases. Twitter failed to become as effective forums, blogs, and later Facebook.

Besides, the successful cases of activists in the Arab world using Twitter, a recent study by "Spot on Public Relations" stated that "about 60% of Twitter users in the Middle East and North Africa are bloggers and 90% of the users are using Facebook. Moreover, there is a significant increase in the number of journalists joining Twitter. The study added that; "over 75% of Twitter users in the Middle East and North Africa are also participating in "LinkedIn", and more than 70% said that they use Twitter every day, while 96% stated that in the future, they will use it on once a day if not more". This data shows that Twitter is developing in the region .

In addition, to the previously mentioned case of Wael Abbas, some people Tweeted actively during the famous 6th of April strike in 2008. Bloggers wanted to report the developments and the arrests that have been taking place. For example, the American journalist, James Buck, informed everyone that he was arrested while covering the strike. Buck was able to update everyone with the news of his, every moment, until he was released.

The tremendous capabilities of this website enable it to play a major role, as big as the role played by blogs and Facebook, in supporting democracy in the Arab world.

YouTube and Flickr

YouTube

None of the three young men, Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Kareem, who met in San Francisco, have thought that their idea to send video clips of a large volume over the internet will become one of the most important applications of the internet today, despite its recent establishment (2005).

After one year of the launch of this website, YouTube , it turned to be among the top ten viewed websites world wide. At the end of December, 2008, the number of video clips seen by Americans on YouTube was about 5.4 billion video clips. The website as of this date contains only 520 video clip ; which means that there are clips that have been viewed thousands of times, if not millions.

Arabs and YouTube

Arab internet activists, especially bloggers, did not miss such an opportunity to broadcast audio and video clips of every day life in Arab countries. These scenes will not possibly be aired on Arabic media, which are mostly controlled by Arabic governments, specifically if it's about prohibited topics such as advocating for democracy or disclosing corruption or repression swarming the Arab world.

Perhaps, the most famous Egyptian torture case, known as Emad Al Kabir and Islam Nabih, about a police officer, Islam Nabih, who sexually abused a van driver, Al Kabir. Police staff recorded the rape scene (which was done by a stick) in order to send it via Bluetooth to the driver's friends and neighbors to cause him more humiliation. The clip reached the mobile phone of the blogger,

Mohamed Khaled (of the DemaghMak blog), who posted it on his blog. Wael Abbas, a well-known Egyptian blogger, posted the video on his blog, Misr Digital. The independent weekly paper, Al Fajr, found out about the story and published it. The aggressor, the police officer, was put on trial and sentenced to 3 years in prison. This incident was a turning point of how the public views torture. Now, what human rights organizations have been saying that torture is a systematic policy of the ministry of interior was finally realized by the public. This disclosure opened the door for broadcasting every day life scenes in all aspects. The number of views of this torture video exceeded 12 million.

Fake Porn Scenes Viewed By Millions

Following the discovery of the capabilities of YouTube , it was not only used to expose corruption in the Arab world, but to broadcast sex video clips as well.

Pornographic scenes within YouTube are the most viewed websites around the world. In the Arab world, where sex is prohibited, they have become the target of millions of Arab visitors where they search for the sex scenes whether from a movie or from real life.

One clip was entitled "Rape of a tanned Girl" brought more than 7.5 million viewers, however, it was actually about three young Egyptian young men laughing, as if mocking the viewers and browsers . The word "rape" was the real attraction of this huge traffic. The scene held hundreds of comments, mostly insults by frustrated visitors, who were looking for real sex scenes; a need of which they are so deprived.

War on YouTube

Blocking is useless. This is the lesson learnt by many Arab governments, so they finally decided to use YouTube for their own interest. They hired some internet users to change the classical unpleasant images of some regimes. For instance, the Saudi authorities paid some users to delete "inappropriate" content on YouTube , through launching a campaign called "cleansing YouTube " deleting all scenes that insults the Saudi royal family . In Kuwait, Kuwaiti bloggers launched "The Battle of YouTube " campaign to mock a call from the parliament member, Mohammad Al Mateiry, to block YouTube " as religious and national duty". According to Al Mateiry, the website contains pornographic or anti-Islam content.

The blog, Ketaba Mesmaria, stated that this call is similar to clerics call in Saudi Arabia in the last century against wireless devices in Saudi Arabia and the radio, a call which was defeated eventually by the voice of reason and call for freedom

YouTube, the Most Blocked Website

Although, YouTube has been launched recently, only 4 years ago, but it is becoming the most blocked website in various countries around the world, if not the most ever.

It was blocked in many countries (such as Turkey, Thailand, UAE, Syria, Pakistan, Tunisia, Sudan, Indonesia, Bahrain, Kuwait...etc.). Although, some of these countries and others have blocked it for only a few days, the declared reasons were mostly due to the "pornographic content".

YouTube has stated explicitly, in the second item of terms of use, that the uploading pornographic scenes was not allowed.

However, YouTube , major corporations and many countries, finally, gave in and announced that they lost the war with YouTube users, who manipulated this condition in many ways, by splitting videos or giving them different names, which led finally to uploading porn scenes. It is to be noted that a huge amount of video clips is posted on the website, more than thousands of clips every minute.

Flickr

Flickr is an application website of Web 2.0. It allows users to upload their photos to be displayed in galleries with themes tailored to different photos. This rendered Flickr a favorite website for most professional photographers of the world, journalists and activists in the Arab world.

Flickr was created in 2002 by Ludi Corporation in Vancouver, Canada. The Beta pilot version was launched in February 2004. In March 2005, Yahoo bought Ludi Corporation and Flickr. In a week, starting from 28/6/2005, all content was moved from Canada to servers in the US. Hence, all Flickr material was subject to U.S. laws. In May 2006, Flickr websites implemented some changes in the design and allowed users to participate in the development

Not the Best for Arabs

Although, Flickr is among the top websites in the world, it is not among the websites most commonly used in the Arab world. One of the reasons may be the limited space for free images; there are 200 images only for uncharged use. For more images, it charges \$25 per image. Though, it could be affordable for some, it is still difficult for young people to pay online as the method of payment is by using credit card. Most internet websites would not accept

credit cards from Arab countries.

For this important reason, news in closed communities, such as the Arab world, travel fast. However, millions of Arab internet users know that Flickr has deleted the images of the famous Egyptian blogger, Hossam el-Hamalawy, of the Israeli war on Gaza at the end of December 2008 and the beginning of January 2009, despite that it is known that Flickr has a two year deletion policy.

However, some Arab activists became experts in the use of Flickr such as the leftist blogger, Hossam el-Hamalawy, owner of the blog, Arabawy. Hossam is among the most famous Flickr users in advocating for political reform movements in the Arab world. The political background of Hossam is his motive for this effective use of Flickr. His gallery on Flickr contains 92 albums having more than 2000 images. It is a real pleasure to visit his well organized albums which in effect speak well for his ideas

The success of the Hossam Hamalawy's gallery is due to his proficiency in Flickr use, as well as the high credibility of his images, whether its scenes of protests or faces of people he knows, and how he displays them. On the other hand, the National Democratic Party failed to make a success on Flickr. The NDP gallery on Flickr contained images of the conference of November 2009, 90% of them are of Gamal Mubarak. Though, the images were carefully chosen, yet no comments were posted. Since the internet is a free space, the Arab internet users only seek truthful and credible information not official information and images like the NDP's.

Flickr Blocked

Unfortunately, the UAE was one of two countries who have blocked Flickr; the other country is Saudi Arabia!

What really made UAE's internet users' wonder why Saudi Arabia would lift its block of the website, while the UAE is still insists on blocking the website?

Publications of ANHRI

Some of them are available for free at the network headquarter

1-The Internet In the Arab World

A New Space of Repression?

2-Web Design for Civil Society Institutes

3-Electronic Media and Human Rights

4-Implacable Adversaries: Arab Governments and the Internet

5-Who Pays the Price? Advertisements in the Egyptian Press

6-Insult and Libel And Freedom of Opinion and Expression

7-Freedom of Opinion and Expression in Egypt "2007 Annual

Report"

8-Human Rights.. Basic Information

9-The right to life

10-Map of Islamic Movements In Egypt

11-Demonstrations of Freedom of Expression 1909

12-Freedom of Opinion and Expression in Egypt "2007 Annual Report

13-Behind The Walls of Fear Fayoum Under Siege

14-Right to life Juvenile Execution

15-Freedom of the Press in Egypt

