

Popular "Pokemon Go" game has been banned in Iran

By Saeed Kamali Dehghan, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.11.16
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Iranians play on the "Pokemon Go" app in Tehran's Mellat Park on August 3, 2016. Iran was quick to ban the global gaming craze but, as with many of the Islamic republic's Internet controls, tech-savvy youngsters have carried on regardless. Photo: ATTA KENARE/AFP/Getty Images

Iran has forbidden the use of the smartphone game "Pokemon Go." It is the first country to do so. Iran claimed it was concerned about the game's use of real maps. The game uses a smartphone's GPS and camera to make Pokemon characters appear on a player's screen.

Abolhasa Firouzabadi is in charge of watching how the Internet is used in Iran. He said that before a game can be played in Iran, the creators need to ask for permission. According to him, the makers of "Pokemon Go" have not asked for permission.

Government Thinks Game Is Dangerous

A government official, Abdolsamad Khorramabadi, said the game was dangerous to the country. He added that Iran's intelligence agency, which works to keep the country safe, agreed.

"Pokemon Go" quickly became a success with Iran's young people. The game has grown famous across the globe since its release last month.

Officials in Iran had previously hinted that they may allow the game. However, they said that the game must store its information inside the country. They also want certain places that appear in the game to be removed. The makers of "Pokemon Go" have not followed their instructions.

Blocks Aren't Very Successful

Blocking websites and online services is common in Iran. This has not stopped users from going on blocked apps and websites, though. They use special software that allows them to get around state restrictions. When a block is introduced, millions of users will often switch from one platform to another. The success of the messaging app Telegram, which is used by 1 in 4 Iranians, is proof of that.

The websites Facebook and Twitter are also blocked, but millions of Iranians use them. Officials have switched to smart filtering. They do not block the entire website. Instead, they only block posts or messages that they think are inappropriate.

Using anti-filtering software slows down the Internet. Therefore, it may not be possible to use the software when playing "Pokemon Go."

The decision on filtering does not rest only in the government's hands. Other decision-making groups, like Iran's courts, may go against Hassan Rouhani. He is the current president of Iran. These branches can affect whether a website or game gets blocked.

Jokes About The Ban

Mana Neyestani is a well-known Iranian artist. He reacted to the decision by drawing a cartoon. It shows a "Pokemon Go" character running from the Iranian police.

One Iranian user joked on Twitter that it was hard to pay attention on the streets of Iran. The user said you have to hunt for Pokemon and also look out for the police.

Quiz

- 1 Based on the article, why does the government want to block certain games and websites?
- (A) The government says it wants to keep the country safe from danger.
 - (B) The government says too many people are already using the Internet.
 - (C) The government says certain websites slow down its internet system.
 - (D) The government says it wants its young people to focus on the real world.
- 2 Read the section "Blocks Aren't Very Successful." Select the sentence that BEST supports the idea that many Iranians use websites and apps that the government blocks.
- (A) Blocking websites and online services is common in Iran.
 - (B) The success of the messaging app Telegram, which is used by 1 in 4 Iranians, is proof of that.
 - (C) Officials have switched to smart filtering
 - (D) Using anti-filtering software slows down the Internet.
- 3 Which sentence from the article BEST supports the idea that Iranian citizens do NOT take all of the government's rules seriously?
- (A) Blocking websites and online services is common in Iran.
 - (B) When a block is introduced, millions of users will often switch from one platform to another.
 - (C) Using anti-filtering software slows down the Internet.
 - (D) The decision on filtering does not rest only in the government's hands.
- 4 Based on the section "Jokes About The Ban," which of the following statements would both the Iranian cartoonist and the Twitter user be MOST likely to agree with?
- (A) The citizens of Iran should never obey their government.
 - (B) The government should not tell people if they can play "Pokemon Go" or not.
 - (C) "Pokemon Go" is a serious danger to Iranian safety.
 - (D) Iranians should stop using apps like Telegram to get around government blocks.

Answer Key

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