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U.S. tests technology to break foreign Web censorship

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By [Jim Finkle](#)

BOSTON (Reuters) - The U.S. government is covertly testing technology in China and Iran that lets residents break through screens set up by their governments to limit access to news on the Internet.

The "feed over email" (FOE) system delivers news, podcasts and data via technology that evades web-screening protocols of restrictive regimes, said Ken Berman, head of IT at the U.S. government's Broadcasting Board of Governors, which is testing the system.

The news feeds are sent through email accounts including those operated by Google Inc, Microsoft Corp's Hotmail and Yahoo Inc.

"We have people testing it in China and Iran," said Berman, whose agency runs Voice of America. He provided few details on the new system, which is in the early stages of testing. He said some secrecy was important to avoid detection by the two governments.

The Internet has become a powerful tool for citizens in countries where governments regularly censor news media, enabling them to learn about and react to major social and political events.

Young Iranians used social networking services Facebook and Twitter as well as mobile phones to coordinate protests and report on demonstrations in the wake of the country's disputed presidential election in June.

In May, ahead of the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the Chinese government blocked access to Twitter and Hotmail.

Sho Ho, who helped develop FOE, said in an email that the system could be tweaked easily to work on most types of mobile phones.

The U.S. government also offers a free service that allows overseas users to access virtually any site on the Internet, including those opposing the United States.

"We don't make any political statement about what people visit," Berman said. "We are trying to impart the value: 'The more you know, the better.' People can look for themselves."

In addition to China and Iran, targets for the FOE technology include Myanmar, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam, he said.

Berman, however, said there would be modest filtering of pornography on the system. "There is a limit to how much (U.S.) taxpayers should have to pay for," he said.

(Reporting by Jim Finkle, editing by Matthew Bigg and Paul Simao)

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