

Cuba authorizes Internet access for emerging private companies

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The Cuban government has authorized the state telecom company to provide Internet access to the country's budding private cooperatives, the Cuban News Agency reported Friday.

Communications Minister Maimir Mesa Ramos instructed Etecsa to start the service on June 29, according to the news agency.

Internet access will be provided via modems and only to the cooperative's location, to avoid service being transferred to third parties.

Internet services has been available in Cuba since 1996, but only via satellite as the country was banned from using undersea cables under the U.S. trade embargo.

Since 2011, the island has been connected to an optical fiber cable laid from Venezuela, its main political and economic ally.

In 2013, Etecsa inaugurated Cuba's first cyber cafes though Cubans have complained about the high rate per hour of 4.5 Cuban convertible pesos, almost a quarter of the average monthly salaries.

Home Internet access is so far only available to certain professionals, such as officials, doctors and journalists.

The authorities claimed that the restriction was due to infrastructure deficiencies, and service would be gradually expanded to the general public.