Jihadi software promises secure Web contacts

DUBAI (Reuters) - An Islamist Web site often used by al Qaeda supporters carried updated encryption software on Friday which it said would help Islamic militants communicate with greater security on the Internet.

The Mujahideen Secrets 2 was promoted as "the first Islamic program for secure communications through networks with the highest technical level of encoding."

The software, available free on the password-protected Ekhlaas.org site which often carries al Qaeda messages, is a newer version of Mujahideen Secrets issued in early 2007 by the Global Islamic Media Front, an al Qaeda-linked Web-based group.

"This special edition of the software was developed and issued by ... Ekhlaas in order to support the mujahideen (holy war fighters) in general and the (al Qaeda-linked group) Islamic State in Iraq in particular," the site said.

The efficacy of the new Arabic-language software to ensure secure e-mail and other communications could not be immediately gauged. But some security experts had warned that the wide distribution of its earlier version among Islamists and Arabic-speaking hackers could prove significant.

Al Qaeda supporters widely use the Internet to spread the group's statements through hundreds of Islamist sites where anyone can post messages. Al Qaeda-linked groups also set up their own sites, which frequently have to move after being shut by Internet service providers.

Al Qaeda's own media arm, As-Sahab, has become increasingly sophisticated in recent years. It issued 97 audio and video Web messages in 2007 compared with just 6 in 2002, according to IntelCenter (intelcenter.com), a U.S.-based group that monitors Islamist sites.

Al Qaeda and other groups have increasingly turned to the Internet to win young
Muslims over to their fight against Western countries and Western-backed governments.

(Reporting by Firouz Sedarat; Editing by Giles Elgood)