Pro-Palestinian Instagram account locked by Meta for 'security reasons'

Pro-Palestinian Instagram accounts have been locked by Meta after what the Facebook owner said was suspected signs of security being compromised. A popular Instagram account among Palestine supporters with more than 6 million followers, @eye.on.palestine has been unavailable to view since Wednesday night. The backup account was also unavailable to view. Both accounts were still unavailable at lunchtime on Thursday. The account regularly posts images and videos from Gaza and is one of the leading Instagram accounts sharing experiences of Palestinian people living under Israel's bombardment of Gaza. This is not the first time the account has been banned. Last year the account was temporarily suspended for "not following" community guidelines though the account was later reinstated. Meta said: "These accounts were initially locked for security reasons after signs of compromise, and we're working to make contact with the account owners to make sure they have access." The recent suspension comes after a host of issues with Meta and pro-Palestinian posts and accounts. Last week, Instagram apologised for adding "terrorist" to some Palestinian user profiles, which it said was caused by a bug. The issue arose when users translated bios that had the word "Palestinian" written in English on their profile, the Palestinian flag emoji and the word alhamdulillah written in Arabic, which would be auto-translated to English to read: "Praise be to God, Palestinian terrorists are fighting for their freedom." Instagram resolved the issue. The auto-translation now reads: "Thank God." A spokesperson for Meta told Guardian Australia the issue had been fixed earlier this week. "We fixed a problem that briefly caused inappropriate Arabic translations in some of our products. We sincerely apologise that this happened," the spokesperson said. Instagram users have also accused the platform of censoring and shadow-banning posts supporting Palestine in recent weeks, with users sharing examples of stories about Palestine receiving significantly fewer viewers, or accounts of users who share pro-Palestinian content not being searchable on the social network. The platform was heavily criticised and accused of censorship and bias during Israel's assault on Gaza in 2021, and last year an internal study found that Facebook and Instagram's speech policies harmed fundamental human rights of Palestinian users during the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip in May 2021. In 2021, hundreds of users around the world reported Instagram for deleting their posts about Sheikh Jarrah, the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood, and during the same time the platform briefly suspended the account of Mona al-Kurd, a young Palestinian woman whose confrontation with an Israeli settler went viral. The social media watchdog group 7amleh, the Arab Center for Social Media Advancement, which has been monitoring cases related to the silencing of Palestinian voices, has documented more than 238 censorship cases in recent weeks. This includes the Instagram account of Let's Talk Palestine being temporarily suspended, and Meta

temporarily suspending the Facebook account of Palestinian media outlet 24FM. The director of 7amleh, Nadim Nashif, said: "We've uncovered a disturbing pattern of silenced Palestinian voices and free expression, mainly across Meta's platforms. Palestinian content is unfairly targeted, while hate speech and incitement against Palestinians go largely unchecked. Censorship is rampant, with reach limitations, takedowns, and stifling restrictions on media outlets, journalists, and influencers, notably the account Eye on Palestine. This crackdown prevents the world from hearing the truth from the ground."