

US relays concern to China over web filtering software

June 22 2009



People pass an internet cafe in Beijing in 2007. The US has expressed concern over a new rule that all computers sold in China be rigged with Internet filtering software, a US official said.

The United States has expressed concern over a new rule that all computers sold in China be rigged with Internet filtering software, a US official said here Monday, amid fears for online freedom.

Computer makers have been told that all personal computers sold from July 1 must be shipped with anti-pornography software, a move that trade and rights groups say is a bid by Beijing to further tighten Internet controls.

"We had a preliminary meeting with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) and the Ministry of Commerce on

Friday to lay out our concerns," Richard Buangan, spokesman for the US embassy in Beijing, told AFP.

"And part of that is (about) engaging in more dialogue to address these concerns."

With the world's largest online population of nearly 300 million people, [China](#) has a history of blocking sites it deems politically unacceptable or offensive, a system that is dubbed the "Great firewall of China".

Overseas and domestic [Internet users](#) have viewed the new software rule as an attempt by China to filter sensitive websites, but state-run press has defended it as necessary to prevent youngsters from accessing pornographic websites.

It has also pointed out that users can choose whether to load the software -- called Green Dam Youth Escort -- onto their computers or not.

Buangan would not comment on the exact content of the Friday meetings, but said the United States was concerned for freedom of expression, including Internet freedom.

"We think that any attempt to restrict free flow of information is incompatible with China's aspirations to build a modern, information-based society," he said.

MIIT, which is responsible for regulation of the Internet, would not comment on the issue when contacted by AFP, and the commerce ministry spokesman was not immediately available.

The news comes amid online calls for an Internet boycott on July 1 that are circulating widely on micro-blogging services Twitter and Fanfou, its Chinese equivalent, as well as blogs on popular web portal sina.com.

Netizens are urging people to stop all online activities that day, including Internet work, news, chat, blogs and games, and to refuse to receive or send emails "to make July 1 become Commemoration of the Internet day."

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