China hackers crash Aussie film festival website

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Chinese hackers crashed the website of Australia's biggest film festival, organisers said, escalating tensions over a visit here by the exiled Uighur leader Rebiya Kadeer, seen here in Tokyo this week.

Chinese hackers crashed the website of Australia's biggest film festival, organisers said on Saturday, escalating tensions over a visit here by the exiled leader of the Uighur minority.

Online bookings for the Melbourne International Film Festival had to be shut down after the site was bombarded with phony purchases which resulted in the entire program being sold out, said festival spokeswoman Asha Holmes.

A Chinese citizen living in the United States had alerted organisers to the viral campaign, which originated from a website in China titled "A Call to Action to All Chinese People", said Holmes.

The site explained how to set up a fake profile to buy tickets, and aimed to crash the festival's site in protest against its screening of "Ten Conditions of Love" and its hosting of the documentary's subject, Uighur leader Rebiya Kadeer.

"It's a very pointed attempt to shut down the system, which has been quite effective," Holmes told AFP.

"We have had to shut down our online site and ask everyone to book at the physical box office or on the phone."

The scam aimed "to protest and sabotage the Melbourne International Film Festival because the festival invited Rebiya Kadeer, the exiled Uighur leader from Washington DC," the man who first raised the alarm wrote, in an email seen by AFP.

"Really, we imagine that until we withdraw the film (about Kadeer), which we are not going to do, this kind of activity will continue," Holmes said.

China has labelled the US-based Muslim minority leader a "criminal" and accuses her of masterminding the July 5 Xinjiang riots that left at least 197 people dead and 1,600 injured.

Canberra has rebuffed Chinese objections to the visit by Kadeer, saying she is not a "terrorist" and there is no reason to exclude her.

All Chinese language films were withdrawn from the festival in protest, and Hong Kong and Taipei's trade offices both pulled their sponsorship.

China summoned Australia's ambassador to the foreign ministry in Beijing to protest Kadeer's visit, according to state media there.

Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun told Ambassador Geoff Raby that Australia must not allow Kadeer to engage in any anti-Chinese separatist activities during her visit, the official Xinhua news agency reported late Friday.

Australia should "immediately correct its wrongdoings", it said, apparently referring to Canberra's decision to issue a visa to the 62-year-old grandmother and Nobel Peace Prize candidate.

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