

Belarus to toughen control over Internet

December 30 2009, By YURAS KARMANAU , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Belarus' authoritarian leader is promising to toughen regulation of the Internet and its users in an apparent effort to exert control over the last fully free medium in the former Soviet state.

"We will identify any person who disseminates lies and dirt, and will make them answer strictly to the law," President Alexander Lukashenko said Wednesday.

He told journalists that a new Internet bill, proposed Tuesday, would require the registration and identification of all online publications and of each Web user, including visitors to Internet cafes. Web service providers would have to report this information to police, courts and special services.

Lukashenko has ruled Belarus with an iron fist since 1994, weeding out opposition and dissidents. All television channels and most print [media](#) have become state-controlled, and many of the independent newspapers ordered closed have taken refuge in cyberspace.

Last June, Belarus adopted a media bill that allowed the government to close Web sites without warning and imprison journalists for reproducing foreign media reports.

Lukashenko won a third term in 2006 in an election that Western governments deemed fraudulent.

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