

Google searches in China blocked despite censorship halt

March 23 2010, by Robert Saiget

Chinese access to websites covering highly sensitive topics such as Tibet remained blocked Tuesday despite Google's decision to stop censoring its Chinese-language search engine.

The US web giant said Monday it would no longer filter results on China-based Google.cn and was redirecting mainland Chinese users to an uncensored site in Hong Kong -- effectively closing down the mainland site.

Searches from mainland computers on subjects such as "June 4" -- referring to the 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy protests -- and the outlawed spiritual group Falungong drew the message: "Internet Explorer cannot display the web page".

Even when a list of results came up for other sensitive key words such as "Tibet riot" and "Amnesty International", not all the sites could be opened and triggered the response "cannot display the website".

Websites of organisations deemed by China's ruling Communist Party to be hostile to the nation -- such as the Epoch Times, Peacehall and groups supporting the Tiananmen Democracy Movement -- were all still blocked.

Popular websites such as Google's video-sharing service [YouTube](#) were also still inaccessible from Beijing despite the re-routing through Google.com.hk.

The same searches on Google.com.hk from computers in Hong Kong displayed full results -- suggesting that China was itself using its "Great Firewall" of [web censorship](#) to keep users from having unfettered Internet access.

Google's action came two months after it said it had been the victim of cyberattacks originating from China and warned it could leave the country, but it said Tuesday it was "business as usual" at the Beijing headquarters.

The spat added to tensions between Beijing and Washington which are at loggerheads on a host of issues including Taiwan, Tibet, trade and the value of the Chinese currency.

"Earlier today we stopped censoring our search services -- Google Search, Google News, and Google Images -- on Google.cn," Google chief legal officer David Drummond said in a post on the company's official blog.

"Users visiting Google.cn are now being redirected to Google.com.hk, where we are offering uncensored search in simplified Chinese, specifically designed for users in mainland China and delivered via our servers in Hong Kong."

Drummond said Google hoped China would respect its decision "though we are well aware that it could at any time block access to our services" and that the company would be "carefully monitoring" the situation.

Google has said it plans to maintain its sales, research and development teams in China, which has the world's largest online population at 384 million.

China however had swiftly denounced the move, saying [Google](#) had

"violated its written promise" and was "totally wrong" to stop censoring its Chinese language search engine and to blame Beijing for alleged hacker attacks.

The government in the former British colony of Hong Kong, which operates under the principle of "One Country, Two Systems", said there were no restrictions on website access, "including Hong Kong based websites from [China](#)."

It said Hong Kong "does not censor the content of websites and fully respects the freedom of information and the free flow of information."

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