

# China could force web users to disclose real names

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A chinese man plays on the computer in an internet cafe in Beijing on February 2010. China could introduce a system requiring web users to provide their real names before posting comments online, state media reported Wednesday, as authorities move to tighten control over the Internet.

China could introduce a system requiring web users to provide their real names before posting comments online, state media reported Wednesday, as authorities move to tighten control over the Internet.

Administrators of major websites in China, who are responsible for screening online postings, are already required to register their real names, the China Daily said.

"We are also exploring an identity authentication system for users of online bulletin board systems," Wang Chen, the head of the State

Council Information Office, was quoted as saying.

Wang, who is also the vice head of the ruling Communist Party's propaganda department, did not specify when the system would be introduced or how it would work.

[Web users](#) currently have to log on to major news portals before sending postings -- effectively banning anonymous comments. But they are not yet required to provide their real names to the websites in the first place.

Wang's comments marked the first time the central government has confirmed it was pushing for an online real-name registration system, the report said.

The issue has sparked fierce debate in China since it was first raised several years ago, amid concerns over the impact on freedom of speech and privacy.

The number of online users in China, already the largest in the world, has reached 404 million, accounting for almost a third of the country's population, official data showed.

Beijing operates an extensive system of [Internet censorship](#) -- sometimes dubbed the "Great Firewall of China" -- aimed at filtering out any information deemed politically sensitive or harmful.

China's web users have nevertheless turned the Internet into a forum for citizens to express their opinions -- some of them anti-government -- in a way rarely seen in a country where the traditional media is under strict control.

Last Thursday, [China](#) tightened its controversial state secrets law, holding Internet and mobile phone operators responsible for informing

on their customers.

The law, which has in the past been used to jail high-profile dissidents, stipulates that Internet and mobile phone operators must cooperate with the demands of the police, reports said.

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