

China vows faster, cheaper Internet

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China has the world's largest [number of Internet users](#) at half a billion, but Beijing maintains strict controls over content and recently it launched a crackdown on microblogs after rumours spread of a coup.

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology pledged to increase speed and lower prices, saying the Internet played a role in economic development, according to a document posted on its website late Sunday.

China last year investigated government-owned [China Telecom](#) and [China Unicom](#), which reportedly control two-thirds of broadband Internet access in China, over monopoly claims and complaints over high prices.

No punishment was publicly announced, but both companies vowed to lower prices after the probe. China Telecom said it would cut prices for the public by 35 percent over five years.

Fees charged by [Internet access service](#) providers are as much as three to four times higher than countries such as the United States, Britain and Japan, a government think-tank claimed last year.

But the [average speed](#) of its broadband services is less than one-tenth that of those countries.

Under the new plan, the ministry said it wants to bring Internet access to China's lagging western provinces, rural areas and poverty-stricken regions.

It set a target this year of adding 20 million households using fixed-line Internet to the existing 156 million nationwide.

China's commercial capital of Shanghai from Sunday began offering discounts of up to 30 percent on Internet charges to public housing tenants, state media said Monday.

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