

China looks to boost Internet limits on microblogs

June 7 2012, by ELAINE KURTENBACH

(AP) — China plans to stiffen restrictions on Internet service providers as it seeks even greater control over the opinions voiced on the country's lively microblogs and other web forums.

A list of proposed changes to Beijing's Internet law released by the Cabinet on Thursday includes blogs, Twitter-like microblogs and online forums.

In December, China began requiring real name registration for nearly all microblog services on a city by city basis, though compliance has been patchy.

The latest regulations appear to be aimed at beefing up enforcement by requiring companies to cooperate with police and threatening criminal punishment and loss of business licenses for failure to comply.

The National Internet Information Office said in a statement Thursday that the requirement for microblogs helped curb illegal web activity and promote online trust and should be expanded to cover blogs and online discussion forums.

Companies providing such services must be licensed and must guarantee that those using them be registered with their real identities, say the guidelines.

The rules require Internet companies to keep logs for 12 months and to

provide technical assistance to the police and national security agencies.

[China](#) has more than 500 million Internet users, the most of any country in the world. Internet sites that are deemed politically destabilizing or pornographic are routinely blocked, and the government blocked Twitter and Facebook after they were instrumental in anti-government protests in Iran two years ago.

It has instead encouraged homegrown alternatives in the apparent belief that domestic companies would be more responsive to government demands, but microblogs have been widely used to share information not available in the state media.

Authorities have been pressuring Internet companies to control them or risk losing the right to operate in a fast-growing market.

Late last month, the microblogging site Sina Weibo, which has more than 300 million registered users, introduced new rules that could see users banned for posting about sensitive political topics. In late March it banned commenting for three days amid a high-level political crisis.

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