

# Google chief says Internet freedom key for Myanmar

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Google chairman Eric Schmidt speaks during a conference at a technology park in Yangon on March 22, 2013. Schmidt said Google was working hard to establish a local online presence in Myanmar "which should happen quite soon."

Google chairman Eric Schmidt has some advice for Myanmar's budding web community—don't let the government control the Internet.

With "something extraordinary" set to happen in the long-isolated country as it opens up, the role of the authorities should be to enable the

private sector to build the country's telecommunications sector, he said Friday.

But "try to keep the government out of regulating the Internet. Every government I know only wants nice things on the Internet," he told local entrepreneurs and students during a visit to the former army-ruled country.

Schmidt said [Google](#) was working hard to establish a local online presence in Myanmar "which should happen quite soon."

For years Myanmar's paranoid junta blocked websites such as [Gmail](#) and [YouTube](#).

Following the end of military rule two years ago, however, the long-isolated country now has a small but flourishing Internet community.

Web users have witnessed a dramatic transformation, with once-blocked exile media websites now accessible along with [social networking sites](#) that have become wildly popular, particularly among young Burmese.

"I've been travelling the world witnessing early stage development of the Internet," Schmidt said.

"I was in post-Kadhafi Libya, Afghanistan of course. I was even in North Korea, which is a truly wacky place. And I'm convinced that you all are in for the ride of your life right now," he said.

Schmidt said the Myanmar government had made an "incredibly important political decision" to open up.

"The Internet will make it impossible to go back. The Internet, once in place, guarantees that communication and empowerment become the law

and the practice of your country."

Myanmar's old military rulers had a history of interfering with the Internet and web users in the country formerly known as Burma were in the past forced to use proxy servers to skirt website bans.

During monk-led protests in 2007, Myanmar's citizens used the Internet to leak extensive accounts and video to the outside world, prompting the regime to tighten its control.

Schmidt said he would urge Myanmar to continue down the path of openness when he meets its reformist leaders during his trip.

"What I'll say to your government is that they've made a courageous step to open up the country. Now they have to follow through with it. The best way to follow through with it is to promote the Internet in all its forms," he said.

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