

China mulls privacy protection, further curbs on Internet

July 8 2015, by Didi Tang

Chinese authorities have proposed a sweeping but vaguely worded Internet security law that would strengthen protection of private information, ban hacking activities and also allow authorities to restrict Internet access to maintain public order.

The National People's Congress, the country's highest legislative body, released the text of the proposed law on Wednesday. It said a legislative panel gave the proposal its first reading in June and that it is seeking [public](#) comment until Aug. 5.

China's government considers cybersecurity to be crucial to [national security](#), and espouses the concept of Internet sovereignty, treating its portion of cyberspace as its territory.

The proposed law says Internet operators must take necessary steps to close security loopholes to prevent possible cyberattacks. It also criminalizes any hacking activity.

The draft says Internet operators are obligated to protect users' personal data. It also requires that users register their real names to receive Internet service.

"China is faced with severe challenges in terms of cybersecurity, such as cybercrimes and breach of personal information," said Tang Lan of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations. "So the paramount concern of this law is security."

"Any country has jurisdiction over its Internet infrastructure, data, and behaviors by its people," Tang said. "The country has the mandate to make public policies over its Web—independently and in accordance with its own laws."

Yet, members of the Chinese public are worried that their right to speech may be further curtailed in the name of national security.

China already has some of the most restrictive Internet controls. It blocks popular Web sites such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and various Google services. Search results are severely filtered to scrub out information deemed offensive to the authorities, and online posts are routinely removed if they are considered to have potential to unsettle the public.

Recently, Pu Zhiqiang, a prominent rights lawyer, was indicted on criminal charges of fanning ethnic hatred and provoking trouble for online comments that questioned China's ethnic policies and mocked some public figures.

Communications have been cut off in China's restive Xinjiang region when authorities tried to suppress information on violent ethnic clashes there.

The draft law says access to the Internet can be restricted when there is a threat to public security, a clause that has raised concerns because it does not define what constitutes a threat.

"The worry is that it could be applied to normal environmental protests or incidents when the public is venting dissatisfaction," said Hu Xindou, a Beijing-based economist. "A bad law that restricts public rights could be disastrous."

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