

China Internet czar defends web censorship policies

December 9 2015



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China's Internet chief fiercely defended his country's strict management of the web Wednesday, saying that censorship of content Beijing deems illegal is necessary to protect online freedoms.

The comments come a week before the country convenes its second "World Internet Conference", an event whose version 1.0 last year was greeted with derision by many who questioned China's motives.

The conference is part of China's push to sell the idea of "internet sovereignty", a concept that stands at odds with a vision of the Internet as a free and open global commons.

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The policy is one facet of Beijing's strict limits on freedom of expression, and rights groups say it uses state security as a pretence to crack down on political dissent.

Through its Internet controls, China strives to "manage well the relationship between freedom and order", Lu Wei said during a press briefing in Beijing ahead of the conference.

"Freedom is our goal and order is our means," he said. "Freedom without order doesn't exist."

The idea is one China has studied from "developed countries in the West" Lu said, adding that "there isn't a country in the whole world where Internet content isn't managed".

Lu is a powerful figure both at home and abroad, where he has commanded the attention of global technology firms eager for a piece of the Chinese market.

An October report by the American pro-democracy think tank Freedom House found that China has the most restrictive Internet policies of 65

countries studied, ranking below Iran and Syria.

Nonetheless companies such as LinkedIn have agreed to censor their content in exchange for access to the country, while Facebook and other banned companies have lined up to offer the hand of friendship to China's top leaders.

When President Xi Jinping visited the US in September Lu appeared along with the head of state in the front row of a "family photo" of America's tech giants, including Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg.

Restrictions 'protect users'

While "the Chinese government has indeed expanded its power to control prominent problems online", Lu said, it has used its capabilities to control crime, pornography, and "rumours"—a euphemism that can be applied to everything from misinformation to political speech.-

The restrictions, Lu said, are for "protecting internet users' [legal rights](#) and interests."

"You can't say that what's managed, isn't free," he said. "Freedom can't be built on the suffering of others, or built on others' lack of freedom."

This year's World Internet Conference will be attended by a handful of high-profile politicians from countries which have been criticised for their records on freedom of speech, including Pakistan's prime minister Nawaz Sharif and Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev.

Chinese President Xi Jinping will headline the event, which will take place in the scenic eastern town of Wuzhen.

In the lead-up to last year's meeting, Amnesty International said "China's Internet model is one of extreme control and suppression".

The country's regulation of cyberspace has since grown stricter thanks to the passage of new online "security" regulations earlier this year, part of a sweeping package of laws aimed at tightening state control over a wide range of domains.

The rules, Lu said, were intended to protect national prerogatives, as well as the "legal rights and interests of global enterprises in China".

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Citation: China Internet czar defends web censorship policies (2015, December 9) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-12-china-internet-czar-defends-web.html>

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