

Australian census back online 2 days after cyberattack

August 11 2016, by Rod Mcguirk

Australia's first attempt to conduct a census online resumed Thursday almost two days after it shut down due to what an angry prime minister described as system failures that left it vulnerable to cyberattack.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull blamed failures of the Australian Bureau of Statics and systems provider IBM after the 470 million Australian dollar (\$360 million) national survey was taken offline on Tuesday. The bureau removed the site because a digital shield failed to block traffic from a fourth denial-of-service attack that came from somewhere overseas.

"These denial-of-service attacks are absolutely commonplace, they are highly predictable, they were inevitably going to happen to the census website," Turnbull told Sydney Radio 2GB early Thursday.

"Measures that ought to have been in place to prevent these denial-of-service attacks interfering with access to the website were not put in place—that is a fact, that was a failure. That was compounded by some ... technical hardware failures and inadequate redundancy," he said.

He said the system failures had been rectified at his personal direction under the supervision of government's top electronic security and intelligence agency, Australian Signals Directorate.

The Bureau of Statistics tweeted that the website was available again almost 43 hours after it was shut down.

"Thanks for your patience. We apologize for the inconvenience," the bureau said.

Turnbull said there were "very big issues" for both the Bureau of Statistics and IBM.

"I, too, am very angry about this," Turnbull said.

IBM, the global technology giant based in Armonk, New York, did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday.

The Bureau of Statistics said 2.3 million Australians, including Turnbull, managed to access the site before it was shut down. Another 3.7 million traditional paper forms have been mailed to households.

Another 5 million households among Australia's population of 24 million are expected to file their forms online.

Australian National University demographer Liz Allen said she had also been denied access to the website and feared public frustration would adversely affect the results.

The opposition blamed underfunding for the failure, saying it would reduce responses to the census and compromise the results.

The government had recently considered cutting costs by following the United States in holding a census every 10 years. Instead, Australia opted to maintain its five-year time frame, but attempted to save AU\$100 million by conducting most of the survey online.

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