# China directs users to approved VPNs as firewall tightens

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A man uses a computer in an internet cafe in Beijing: China is tightening controls by curbing the use of VPNs

China vowed Tuesday to force both local and foreign companies and individuals to use only government-approved software to access the

global internet, as overseas firms fear losing unrestricted online services under an impending deadline.

International companies and individuals have been fretting for months over whether Beijing would enforce new regulations curbing the use of [virtual private networks](#) (VPN).

The content accessible on China's domestic [internet](#) is highly restricted. Google, Facebook and other foreign websites such as the New York Times and the BBC, and some email services, are blocked by the country's Great Firewall of censorship.

One way to bypass the controls is by using a VPN, which can allow users to [access](#) the unfiltered [global internet](#). This is where authorities are cracking down.

In January last year the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) announced it would be banning the use of unlicensed VPNs, with a deadline of March 31, 2018 to complete the crackdown.

MIIT chief engineer Zhang Feng told a news conference Tuesday that unapproved VPN operators are the target of the regulations.

For those "VPNs which unlawfully conduct cross-border operational activities, we want to regulate this", Zhang said.

Many foreign individuals and businesses currently use VPN services unapproved by Chinese regulators. They are on tenterhooks as to whether China will shut down these service providers.

The inability to access certain online tools, internet censorship and cybersecurity are major headaches for [foreign companies](#), according to a survey of US companies conducted by the American Chamber of

Commerce in China and released Tuesday.

Last summer tech giant Apple restricted its Chinese customers' access to VPNs in the country, removing dozens of apps from its app store.

In December, a man in southern China was sentenced to five and a half years in prison for selling a VPN service on Alibaba's Taobao and other marketplaces.

The new rules drive customers who want to access the global internet to approved state providers like China Mobile and China Unicom.

Those who want to access the global internet "can rent lines or networks from business operators which have set up international entry and exit ports in accordance with the law", Zhang said.

He dismissed concerns that using China's state-approved providers could jeopardise the security of business and individual data.

"These telecommunications enterprises only provide you with a channel, or a network, and are not able to see information related to your business," he said.

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