

China delays plan on 'Internet filter'

AFP, Beijing

China has delayed a plan requiring that all new computers come with a Chinese-made Internet filtering software programme, state media reported yesterday, hours before it was to take effect.

China had planned to implement the controversial rule beginning Wednesday but it has been postponed, the official Xinhua news agency said, citing the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

"The pre-installation was delayed as some computer producers said such a massive installation demanded extra time," Xinhua said, quoting an unnamed ministry spokesman.

The spokesman did not give a new timetable for the software to be installed.

"The ministry would also keep on soliciting opinions to perfect the pre-installation plan," he was quoted saying.

The move is likely to be hailed by foreign and domestic critics who have accused the government of trying to increase already tight controls over the Internet.

These claims were rejected by the spokesman, Xinhua said, quoting him as saying assertions in some foreign media that the software was an intrusion of privacy were "groundless" and "irresponsible".

Computer makers had been told that from July 1, they must either pre-install the Green Dam Youth Escort software or include it on a disc accompanying all new personal computers sold in the country.

The United States and European Union, industry groups, Internet freedom advocates and even some Chinese state media reports had criticised the plan as a new threat to Internet freedom in China, which has the world's largest online population at roughly 300 million.

Beijing has consistently countered that the filter is designed to shelter youngsters from pornography and violence, and give parents control over what their children view online.

China has a history of blocking sites carrying politically sensitive topics such as the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown on democracy protesters, the banned Falungong spiritual movement, or criticism of the government.

China's Communist Party censors have struggled in recent years to keep pace with an explosion of online content, which is often the only outlet for ordinary Chinese to vent concerns about official corruption and government abuses.

Authorities have typically couched periodic clampdowns in terms of halting the spread of obscene material.

But last week, US Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and US Trade Representative Ron Kirk said the rule may violate World Trade Organisation regulations while the European Commission called it "unacceptable".

Researchers at the University of Michigan who examined the software also said it contained serious security vulnerabilities that could allow outside parties to take control of computers running it via remote access.

It added that the software's text filter blocked words that included phrases considered politically sensitive to authorities.

Some Chinese Web users had called for a boycott of all online activities on the July 1 roll-out of the regulation.

Spillover effects

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He said police might call the jhoot traders of the area and search for those now hiding.

GAP, H and M, Tesco, Oskos and Floreal are the major clients of Ha-Meem Sweater, Sanjeev said, adding that they have already talked to their clients about the incident. "Our buyers have extended all cooperation towards us," he said.

The factory has had full orders even at this time of recession and the annual turnover of the unit is \$7 million.

Sanjeev said they would pay their workers on July 9.

Meanwhile, the situation has returned to normal in the area.

Ismail Hossain, managing director of nearby Sharmin Group, said they resumed production yesterday. He said he had asked their workers to stop production when outsiders set fire on Ha-Meem Sweater factory.

compressor.

Earlier, Petrobangla very oddly invited Chevron representatives to a meeting between Petrobangla and ADB to discuss future loans for compressors.

At the meeting, the ADB team promised a US\$ 350m loan for a national gas access improvement project. Under this loan, ADB would provide US\$ 100 m for two compressors, as suggested by the chairman.

The Chairman argued that Chevron has recovered their work cost from Jalalabad, Moulavibazar and Bibiyana gas fields, and those fields now supply gas worth US\$ 28 to 30 m per month. After the compressor is installed, and Chevron recovers its investment from sales, the income from gas sales would be an additional US\$ 2.5 to 3 million each month.

Meanwhile, Petrobangla has granted Chevron Bangladesh Blocks 13 and 14 Ltd permission to conduct a 3D seismic survey approximately 135 square kilometres beyond the current ring fence, in order to better understand the size of the Jalalabad field.

This expansion of the concession area will include a portion of Block 13, which was earlier relinquished by Chevron.

Jalalabad field is playing a pivotal role in supporting Petrobangla meet the current energy need of the country. The purpose of the seismic survey is to ascertain whether the field has additional production capacity.

Labour leaders

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control workers using local politicians and jhute businessmen instead of listening to their demands," said Mir Abul Kalam Azad, general secretary of Swadhin Bangla Garments Sramik Karmachari Federation.

"Without any logical ground owners do not like trade union which might have mitigated the unrest in the sector substantially," he added.

"Owners want to suppress the movement themselves thus causing unrest among workers as they never return with their demands unmet as was the case this time," he said.

"This movement cannot be called labour movement. This movement was waged against a totally different perspective. This movement is totally different and distinctive from the earlier one," said Sirazul Islam Rony, coordinator of Bangladesh Garments Worker Unity Council.

According to the leaders the unrest erupted in the S Suhi Sweater Factory on Saturday after a jhute businessman, also a Bangladesh Chhatra League activist, in the area tried to control workers of the factory on behalf of the owner.

"Incident of unrest are taking place in sweater factories in large number as wages of the labours vary from one production to another in a sweater factory. And somehow workers are being repressed somewhere," said Rokeya Sultana Anju, president of Jatiya Garments Sramik Kote.

The leaders suggested the government should immediately announce that it will bring the killers of workers to book, investigate the killings, give compensation to the affected families and take initiatives to solve their problem.

They also emphasised the need for introducing the provision of trade union in the labour law, hiking workers' wage and ensuring cooperation from both the government and opposition in resolving the crisis.

"Workers need a place to express their demands and it is also a necessity for the owners to take decisions after consulting with workers. Neither the government nor the owners addressed the matter with proper attention," said Ruhul Amin, general secretary of Garment Sramik Trade Union Kendra.

Thousands

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Ha-Meem Group management said they will have to shed jobs from their sweater factories due to a shortage of machines, accommodation problems and dwindling supply of raw materials.

AK Azad, managing director of the group, told The Daily Star, "All three of our sweater factory buildings have gone up in smoke."

He said preliminary estimate suggests their losses would go beyond Tk 100 crore mark.

Director (administration) Brig Gen (ret) Mohammad Ali Mandal said, "We are now trying to resume production in two adjacent buildings with the salvaged machines and raw materials. There, we may employ around 2,000 workers."

He however said it won't be possible to retain the rest 2,000 workers as they are not able to work in woven garment factories that emerged unscathed from the arson.

Queried how they will go about job-shedding, Ha-Meem's MD said, "The workers would be relieved of their jobs through motivation so they understand the situation and do not get angry."

According to the rules, all their dues will be paid within July 10, he added.

Officer-in-Charge of Ashulia Police Station Monwar Hossain told The Daily Star that they had filed a case against 3,000 people, mostly unnamed, for the arson attack on Ha-Meem Group and other factories.

No arrest was made as of filing the report at 9:00pm.

The OC said over 2,000 additional police forces were deployed in the area on Monday night. Now that the situation has improved, most of them have been withdrawn.

Some 50 policemen were posted in front of the Ha-Meem Group complex to ensure security.

Ha-Meem Group MD has alleged that his factories could have been saved, had the police swung to action and additional forces been sent in.

Aila-hit farmers

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repairing some extensively damaged embankments may not be possible in time, he added.

A number of government and NGO officials also fear a large part of the damaged embankments may not be repaired.

"Around a quarter kilometre embankment by the Ramnabadi river in Kalapara merged into the river. I don't think this could be repaired shortly," said Niruttam Kumar Sarker, upazila agriculture officer of Kalapara, Patuakhali.

He said in Patuakhali alone over 40,000 hectares of land was inundated by saline waters because of the damaged embankments.

"If the dams are not repaired and brackish water flows during high tides, farmers cannot grow Aman crops," he added.

An NGO official in Satkhira said major breaches on the dam in Gabura union could not be repaired yet.

Thousands of people in Gabura are still staying on the embankment, he said, adding, "They are selling livestock, whatever they still have, at

cheap rates as they cannot feed them. These people have become very vulnerable."

Shahidul Islam, national consultant for Food and Agriculture Organization, said during a recent visit to the Aila-hit areas he found the farmers are leading a miserable life.

"They missed Aus and are going to miss Aman if the embankments are not repaired," he observed.

Developing saline-tolerant varieties is a must for the coastal districts, Shahidul said, adding the authorities must develop the coast's irrigation system for Boro production. Farmers hardly produce Boro in the coast where there is over 10-lakh hectares of arable land.

Meanwhile, the government has decided to provide seeds and fertilisers worth Tk 1,016 each for Aman production to cover 3 lakh farmers.

However, speculations are rife that the move may hardly work.

"Saline water will remain and silt with tides would destroy Aman if embankments remain in the miserable shape," comments an agriculturalist in Patuakhali.

Navy reacts

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Ali briefed newsmen and revealed some of the problems and plans of the navy quoting the report placed before the parliamentary body.

On behalf of navy, the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate in a letter sent to the editors of 25 national dailies "advised" them to take its views before reporting on "sensitive" development plans for the naval force. The Daily Star received its copy of the letter on Friday.

The letter says the attention of the naval HQ was drawn to the news reports published recently on the development plans of the force. In a report, the navy placed its development plans to the parliamentary body concerned, it reads.

"As the existing problems in navy and its development plans are important for the state and are very sensitive, publication of such news items without taking the views of the ISPR is not desirable," the letter adds.

Copies of the letter were forwarded to the Armed Forces Division under the PMO, secretariats of the chiefs of the army, navy and air force, naval intelligence and the headquarters of the Directorate General of the Forces Intelligence.

Asked about the letter, Idris Ali on Sunday told The Daily Star the navy report contained no secret.

"As public representatives we're working for the people and the people have every right to know about the defence forces. We have made public what we thought was good," Idris, also former defence secretary, said.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Lt Gen (ret) Mahbubur Rahman, who was chief of the parliamentary standing committee on defence ministry in last parliament, expressed surprise at the navy letter.

"I read the news carried by different dailies. I found no secret regarding state security in navy's development plans. Rather I felt good that the parliamentary body has

Food, disaster

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25 percent in the budget. The five percent regulatory duty on mobile sets has been waived.

The proposed 5 percent customs duty on the import of newspaper has been reduced to 3 percent.

The budget for FY10 has been formulated mainly in the light of the Awami League's election manifesto. Safety net, measures for facing aftermath of recession, attracting investment has been stressed in the budget.

On the other hand, the budget targets the rich in an attempt to earn additional revenue and stop tax evasion. A part of the additional revenue will come from the GDP growth.

Attempts were made in tax structure so that the tax burden does not fall much on the poor. As a result, prices of essentials did not go up after the budget was placed.

Both the prime minister and the finance minister have urged all including government officials concerned to work from day one of the new fiscal year to properly implement the budget.

BNP to join JS

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'appropriate atmosphere' is ensured in parliament, it asserted.

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Farroque read out the statement at a press briefing at the parliament's media centre.

"We want to remind that the role of ruling party to approve of the opposition party is the spirit of the parliamentary democracy. They [ruling party] should not forget that their existence and tenure will come to an end if there is no opposition party in Parliament," it said.

The BNPP strongly criticised the ruling party lawmakers' recent remarks on late president Ziaur Rahman and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

The BNP-led opposition lawmakers remain absent in the budget session of the House. In absence of the main opposition lawmakers, the budget for new fiscal year that began today was passed in Parliament yesterday.

It was learnt that most of the BNP-led opposition lawmakers were willing to join the budget session to take the opportunity of participating in the budget discussion. But they could not do so as BNP high commands as well as BNP chairperson were rigid not to join the House after the government cancelled the allocation of BNP chairperson's cantonment residence, a number of BNP lawmakers said.

Zainul Abidin in his BNPP statement claimed that they want to cooperate the government from the very beginning of the ninth parliament, but the government did not agree to accept it.

"The speaker did not resolve the seating arrangement for the front row despite of his assurance. Besides, the government's behavior towards the opposition leaders is not decent," alleged BNPP.

Shajahan Siraj

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16, 2007 for committing the offences.

Rahima in her complaint alleged that the accused had evaded a huge amount of tax upon his income for several years.

He gave false information to the income tax department about his income and expenditure and did not show his income tax returns, it said.

THE CASE

A special court on April 22 last year sentenced Siraj to 13 years' imprisonment in a case filed against him for amassing wealth through illegal means and concealing wealth statement to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The court also fined him Tk 10 lakh, in default, to serve one year more in jail. The court directed the authorities concerned to confiscate his property worth Tk 3.75 crore, which was not match up with his income.

ACC Assistant Director Khairul Huda filed the case against Shajahan Siraj and his wife on September 24, 2007 for concealing information about property worth around Tk 4 lakh.

Manju

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Manju was sent to jail on surrender before a Dhaka court in compliance with the Supreme Court directives.

Later on June 3, he was released from jail after securing bail.

UP chairman

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BNP at a house in the city's Maddhya Badda area around 7:30am and seized his licensed pistol and eleven bullets.

On June 9, some local people encircled Monir Hossain in Lohar Bridge area when he was passing through it by his private car at about 1:45pm.

The UP chairman was then locked in an altercation with them and at one stage, he pulled his pistol and sprayed five to six rounds of bullet on them, leaving Mohammad Hasan, 18, dead on the spot and another wounded.

After the firing, Monir fled the scene by his private car. In reprisal, agitating people attacked the residence of the chairman and set fire to his garage and damaged his private car.

They also torched an umbrella factory, owned by a brother of Monir, at Nurbag.

Monir at DB office told the reporters that he did not kill the man as he sprayed bullets on them only for dispersing them.

Taliban scrap

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"This accord is being scrapped because of Pakistan's failure to stop the American drone attacks in North and South Waziristan," Bahadur spokesman Ahmadullah Ahmadi told The Associated Press via phone Monday. "Since the army is attacking us in North and South Waziristan, we will also attack them."

Various militant groups operate under the Taliban banner in Pakistan, but do not always see eye to eye. The ending of the peace deal could be a sign of greater unity in the face of a common enemy now that the Pakistani military has stepped up its operations against insurgents.

On Monday, army spokesman Maj Gen Athar Abbas said the weekend ambush was unprovoked and warned the government reserved the right to retaliate, specifically against tribes that harbour militants. Abbas was not available for comment Tuesday about the scrapping of the deal.

The US has frequently launched missile strikes in North and South Waziristan, attacks American officials say have killed several top al-Qaeda fighters. Pakistan publicly protests the strikes as violations of its sovereignty, though many observers suspect the two countries have a secret deal allowing the strikes.

Pakistan's armed forces are gearing up for a major military offensive in South Waziristan, a hotbed for al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters. The region is the main base for Mehsud, who is blamed in numerous suicide attacks in the country and has been accused in the killing of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

Troops also are pursuing an offensive in the north-west's Swat Valley following the breaking down of a peace pact there.

The army says it has killed around 1,600 militants in Swat and surrounding districts in the past two months.

Meanwhile, a bomb killed at least four people and wounded five others yesterday near a hotel in Pakistan's restive province of Baluchistan bordering

Afghanistan and Iran, police said.

The blast occurred in Kalat district on the main highway linking the provincial capital Quetta to Pakistan's financial hub Karachi.

"Four people were killed and five others were injured," Kalat police chief Nazir Kurd told AFP.

According to initial reports and witnesses, the bomb exploded near a hotel along the highway when a white Suzuki car pulled up, Nazir said.

"It is not clear whether the bomb was planted in the car or on the roadside," he said. Police suspect the target was trucks carrying supplies for Nato forces in Afghanistan.

"Some trucks carrying Nato supplies were also stopping over at the hotel for tea or lunch and we suspect that the bomb was targeted at them. However, no damage was caused to any truck," the police official said.

Among the dead were the hotel owner and the driver of a small truck, he said.

No group claimed immediate responsibility for the incident, but southwestern Baluchistan is rife with Islamist militancy, sectarian violence and regional insurgency.

Hundreds of people have died since Baluch rebels rose up in 2004 demanding political autonomy and a greater share of profits from the region's wealth of natural resources.

Pakistan has been hit recently by multiple bomb blasts that authorities have blamed on Islamist militants trying to exact revenge for a deadly military offensive against the Taliban in the northwest.

Nato and US-led forces in landlocked Afghanistan are hugely dependent on Pakistan for supplies and equipment, about 80 percent of which is transported through this troubled country.

Man shot

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collecting the money from the members of the cooperative. Swapan was going to deposit the amount to Rupali Bank's Moghbazar branch from his Dilu road office.

A case has been filed in this connection.

Child survives

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Arfachad Salim, a rescue coordinator for the Comoros Red Crescent, confirmed that the child was alive and added that local fishermen had also found wreckage, passengers handbags and other effects.

In Sanaa, Yemenia's deputy managing director for operations Mohammed al-Sumairi said three bodies had also been recovered.

The long gruelling Flight IY 626 had started in Paris early Monday and made stops in Marseille, Sanaa and Djibouti before heading to Moroni.

Moroni international airport control tower lost contact with the jet just before it was due to land amid bad weather, airport director Hadji Mmadi Ali told AFP.

French civil aviation officials said 66 passengers were French. Three small babies were also among the passengers, officials said. France sent two navy ships and a plane from its nearby Indian Ocean territories to help the rescue.

"Bodies were seen floating on the surface of the water and a fuel slick was also spotted about 16 or 17 nautical miles from Moroni," senior Yemeni civil aviation official Mohammad Abdel Kader told reporters in Sanaa.

Kader said the wind was blowing in gusts of up to 70 miles (115 kilometres) an hour when the disaster happened.

"Weather conditions were bad," he said. "The sea was rough."

The Yemenia flight left Sanaa at 9:45pm (1845 GMT) on Monday and contact was lost at 1:51am on Tuesday (2251 GMT Monday), Kader said.

"Yemenia regrets to announce the missing of its flight No IY626 from Sanaa to Moroni with 142 passengers and 11 crew onboard Airbus 310-300," the airline announced on its website.

Airbus, which is still reeling from the crash of an Air France A330-320 into the Atlantic on June 1 with 228 people on board, set up a crisis cell straight away and sent investigators to the Comoros.

No cause has yet been announced for the Air France disaster. The black box flight

recorders have yet to be found and their signal is due to stop emitting on July 2.

The European plane maker said the jet, which crashed off Moroni was made in 1990 and had been operated by Yemenia since 1999.

France's Transport Minister Dominique Bussereau said inspectors had noted numerous faults on the Yemenia jet and the airline was being closely monitored by EU authorities.

"The A310 in question had been inspected in France in 2007 by the DGAC (French civil aviation authority) and a certain number of faults had been noted," Dominique Bussereau.

"The plane had not since then reappeared in our country," he told i-tele news.

Yemenia was not on an EU blacklist "but was being subjected to closer inspection by us and was due to soon be heard by the security committee of the European Union," he said.

Airbus said in a statement the jet had accumulated approximately 51,900 hours in the air from some 17,300 flights.

Yemen Airways was founded in 1961 before the formation in 1978 of Yemenia, which is 51 percent owned by the Yemeni government and 49 percent by Saudi Arabia, according to its website.

The Yemenia flight started at Paris Charles de Gaulle on Monday morning, using a more modern Airbus A330-200 for the first legs of the journey.

The plane flew to Marseille in southern France, where there is a large Comoran community, and then went on to Sanaa. There were about 100 passengers on board when it left Marseille, Yemeni civil aviation official Kader said.

In the Yemen capital, people from various Arab states joined the flight and the passengers changed to the Airbus A310, which first flew to Djibouti.

A crisis task force was set up at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport while psychologists were on hand at Marseille's airport to comfort the families of passengers on the plane.