
Net regulator warns Google it must comply with Chinese law

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CHINA'S top Internet regulator yesterday warned Google against flouting the country's laws, insisting that the company must obey laws or "pay the consequences."

"If you want to do something that disobeys Chinese law and regulations, you are unfriendly, you are irresponsible and you will have to pay the consequences," Li Yizhong, Minister of Industry and Information Technology, said on the sidelines of the annual session of National People's Congress.

Li gave no details of Beijing's talks with Google over the search engine's January announcement that it planned to stop complying with Internet censorship rules and might close its China-based site.

"Whether they leave or not is up to them," Li said. "But if they leave, China's Internet market is still going to develop."

China has the world's most populous Internet market, with 384 million people online. Google has about 35 percent of the Chinese search market since it launched google.cn about three years ago, compared with about 60 percent for local rival Baidu Inc.

China encourages Internet use for education and business but tries to block access to material deemed subversive or pornographic.

Li insisted the government needs to censor Internet content to protect the rights of the country and its people.

"If there is information that harms stability or the people, of course we will have to block it," he said.

Google's chief executive, Eric Schmidt, said on Wednesday he hoped to announce soon a result to talks on offering an uncensored search engine in China.

"Google has made its case, both publicly and privately," Li said, but did not confirm directly that his ministry was in talks with Google.

Speaking in the United Arab Emirates, Schmidt declined to provide specifics or predict how long the discussions would last.

Even if Google is shut down, Google wants to keep a Beijing development center, advertising sales offices and a fledgling mobile phone business in China, according to a person familiar with the company's thinking.

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