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The China Post

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New technology may foil PRC attempts at censorship efforts

Wednesday, March 12, 2003

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Washington, D.C., The China Post

Internet users in mainland China are unable to access information on such subjects as Taiwan, democracy, Tibet, Falun Gong and even some major news sites like the BBC and CNN, as the government tightens its censorship of Web sites that are deemed to be "inappropriate" for mainland citizens. But a newly released technology might change all that.

Once fully developed, the Six/Four System, named after the date of the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 4, 1989 and just approved for export by the U.S. Department of Commerce, would allow mainland Internet users, and anyone else who wishes to avoid detection, to access information almost anywhere on the Internet.

Developed by an international group of computer hackers called Hactivismo, Six/Four is a "peer-to-peer" system that accesses information via a series of computers and employs virtual private networking.

Used by financial organizations to perform secure transactions, this software also allows users to surf the Internet anonymously.

In addition, Hactivismo requires that information be routed by licensed administrators who would be able to prevent abuse of the system.

"Potentially (Six/Four) will render the 'Firewall' system redundant and mean that state censorship is ultimately impossible," remarked Greg Walton, an independent researcher, human rights activist and an expert on the mainland's Internet censorship.

Walton believes that Six/Four will be better able to disguise the nature of Internet traffic than other anti-censorship software such as "Triangle Boy" and "Peekabooty" but the software has, so far, only been released to potential developers of the technology.

Only in about 12 months, according to Walton, once the system has been developed into a user-friendly software application and has amassed sufficient users outside of mainland China, will it be possible to judge the effectiveness of the technology in circumventing Beijing's increasingly advanced Internet censorship.

With some estimates suggesting that the mainland has an Internet police force numbering as many as 40,000 people, solely devoted to monitoring the activities of mainland Internet users, only time will tell whether a handful of secretive computer hackers really can outwit the mainland government.

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