When the Net goes dark and silent

David Lee

Focus

China's efforts to block Web site access are wrapped in secrecy, writes Benjamin Edelman.

A more transparent approach would provide recourse against accidental blocking.

Late in August, Internet users in China received an unusual alert on their access to an accountancy site. The alert informed users that the site had been blocked because of "national interests." It was the latest in a series of such alerts, the result of a multihoming network that serves as a damaged network link. As a result, a user is prevented from accessing a site or blocked from accessing a site.

A Chinese request refers to blocking a specific page, often deletes a page or page content. However, it is possible that the server or a damaged network system gives an error message, in Arabic, that access has been prohibited.

The result of a multihoming network is that a site's server does not respond, that access is blocked. In the US, the site is accessible to all Internet users.

In China, access is blocked to some sites, such as Britannica Int'l (FH) and Henley Mgmt. College / MBA.

Some 39 "suspected criminals" were arrested at the main Beijing railway station after their faces were scanned by software that monitors the entire body of users boarding trains.

Nortel's involvement in surveillance is less than the public knows, said Agence France-Presse. Nortel has worked with China's telecommunications and the global security infrastructure.

The technology firms' image was kind of anarchic but in reality they were after huge profit margins.