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News portals 'should strike right balance'

Net media operators can contribute to social harmony by being responsible

By Zhao Huanxin

KUNMING: What happens in the virtual world has a strong bearing in the real world, so Internet media operators as well as surfers should be aware of the consequences and be more responsible.

That was the message delivered by officials and experts attending the 2006 Forum on Internet Media of China, which opened yesterday in the capital of Yunnan Province.

The two-day forum is sponsored by www.chinadaily.com.cn, the largest English-language news portal in China, whose page views average 6.5 million a day.

"The Internet media should play a bigger role in promoting social harmony," said Vice-Minister of the State Council Information Office Cai Mingzhao.

He listed some problems associated with the Net in the country, including online fraud and gambling, and the spread of obscene and false information — which "poisons the environment for the Web's development and harms the credibility of Internet media."

Citing figures from the Illegal and Malicious Information Reporting Centre, which was set up by the Internet Society of China in 2004, Cai said residents had about 350,000 complaints, of which nearly two-thirds were about obscenity and pornography.

"Internet media operators should run their websites according to the law," Cai said. "They should also conscientiously shoulder their social responsibility by providing healthy and lawful information and building credibility."

Min Dahong, a senior Internet researcher who has followed the Web's expansion in China since the country was first wired in 1994,

said offensive online behaviour has drawn widespread attention. They include explicit violent acts — such as torturing a cat to death — and invading privacy.

"This has greatly upset people," Min said. "For the sake of healthy development of the Internet, users need to strike a balance between freedom and obligations."

Vice-Minister of Information Industry Xi Guohua said at the forum that just as "society needs management and regulation, so do the Internet and information networks."

"The purpose of management and regulation is for promoting the Web's further growth, rather than impeding it."

The number of netizens in China is reported to have reached 123 million at the end of June, and the country will soon surpass the

United States to become the world's largest Internet user.

After securing nearly 100 per cent telephone penetration in most villages, the country is striving to ensure that every township has access to the Internet in the next five years, Xi said.

China Daily Editor-in-Chief Zhu Ling told the opening ceremony that since cyberspace is very open and free, it is more challenging to build harmony online than offline.

He urged Internet media to take their social responsibility seriously and contribute to the healthy development of society.

Nearly 300 participants from at least 100 news websites, Web portals and service providers at the annual forum also discussed how traditional media can co-exist with new media; and how innovation in technology and service can facilitate further expansion of the Internet.

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Students at a primary school in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, display their hand-made red ribbons — an international symbol of AIDS awareness — yesterday on the eve of World AIDS Day. China had 650,000 HIV carriers, including 75,000 AIDS patients at the end of last year, according to the government estimates. LIU LI

Condom use to be promoted among gays

By Wu Jiao

A five-year project will be launched next year to significantly raise condom usage among gays to curb the rising number of HIV/AIDS infections, a top official has said.

"Prevention efforts among gays will be key to the country's AIDS control. They need collaboration between government departments and grassroots organizations," said Wu Zunyou, director of the AIDS prevention bureau affiliated to the Chinese Disease Prevention and Control Centre (CDC).

The target is to raise condom usage to 70 per cent, said Wu. A survey covering 526 gays in Beijing shows only 20 per cent use protection all the time.

Gay sex contributed to 7.3 per cent of reported infections nationwide, according to the CDC. The main causes are drug users sharing needles and unsafe heterosexual sex.

In the first 10 months of the year, 39,644 people were officially reported to have been infected with HIV, the Ministry of Health said last week. While a total of 183,733 people have

been officially reported to have contracted HIV, the ministry estimated the actual figure at the end of last year to be around 650,000.

The ministry also estimates that at least 1 per cent of the country's 5-10 million sexually-active gay people in the 18-49 age group have contracted HIV/AIDS.

Many gays, out of societal pressure, choose to marry women. "This has led to the risk of them spreading the disease to people around them," Wu said on Wednesday during an online interview on www.sohu.com conducted in conjunction with today's World AIDS Day.

Also, the CDC and the AIDS Intervention Centre in Beijing's Chaoyang District will jointly launch a project next year on prevention through peer education among gays. The project will be replicated in five cities every year.

It will record personal informa-



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tion such as age, profession, feelings, health condition, condom usage and reaction towards discrimination.

Starting this month, the Chaoyang District intervention centre will offer free medical checks regularly to gays in Beijing, reportedly home to 300,000 gay people with 3 per cent of them infected with HIV.

To promote safe sex, one of the country's leading condom-makers has launched a custom-made condom for gays.

Tao Ran, manager of Gobon Condom Factory in Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, said that the company would employ a special marketing strategy involving gay volunteers and online sales

to promote the product.

In addition to these efforts, some AIDS experts see a more tolerant society as a cornerstone for ensuring the mental and physical health of gays.

According to Zhang Beichuan, a professor on AIDS studies at Qingdao University, many free medical projects are shunned by gays because of social discrimination.

"If the governments are more tolerant towards them, the projects will attract more gay people for medical treatment, which in turn will benefit the whole society," said Zhang.

He proposed that legal marriages be allowed among gays and a special law banning discrimination enacted.

A recent survey conducted by Zhang, covering 2,000 gays in nine cities, shows that 60 per cent of them suffer from the fact they are gays; and 10 per cent were so badly affected they wanted to take their own lives.

The reasons for contemplating suicide included broken relationships with gay partners, social discrimination and unhappy marriages with women.

Japan's defence upgrading approved

Japan's powerful lower house of parliament yesterday approved a bill to upgrade Japan's Defence Agency to a full ministry so as to bolster the agency's status within the government.

Currently, Japan's military is strictly constrained by the country's pacifist constitution — which Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has vowed to revise. The Defence Agency is part of the Cabinet Office rather than a separate ministry.

The bill was passed by the house's security committee earlier yesterday and is to be sent to the other chamber for further debate and a separate vote in coming weeks. But yesterday's passage by the lower house makes the bill's enactment almost certain because of the ruling bloc's domination in both houses.

The bill would make the defence forces' overseas peacekeeping activities a part of its regular duties, in addition to defence and disaster relief at home. Their overseas relief and humanitarian missions under United Nations' auspices are currently outside of the defence forces' core activities.

Chinese analysts yesterday expressed concern over the move, saying it would violate Japan's pacifist post-World War II constitution, which prohibits the use of force in solving international disputes.

Lu Yaodong, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the upgrading would lead to a transformation in the role of Japanese defence forces.

He said the bill would make overseas missions a regular part of the Japanese armed forces duties, potentially heightening regional tension amid ongoing attempts to address the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula.

In a bid to boost its international profile, Japan sent non-combat troops to southern Iraq to help rebuild that country. Japan also approved late last month a one-year extension of its naval mission in the Indian Ocean to support the US-led anti-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan.

Both operations were criticized by some in Japan as violating the nation's constitution, which prohibits the use of force in solving international disputes.

"The bill would knock the bottom out of Japan's security policy and trample on the Article 9 (pacifist) clause of the constitution," said opposition Communist Party lawmaker Seiken Akamine. "The bill merely aims to send the defence forces abroad to back US-led war."

The agency is expected to become a ministry early next year.

Also yesterday, Japanese Foreign Minister Tarō Aso said Japan has the technological know-how to produce a nuclear weapon, but has no immediate plans to do so.

Speaking to a parliamentary committee, he repeated the official government position that the country's pacifist constitution, which allows for the country to defend itself, does not forbid possession of an atomic bomb for defence purposes.

Xinhua

Agencies - China Daily

Nation will continue to adhere to family planning policy

China will continue to adhere to the family planning policy in the long run, the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee said at a conference in Beijing yesterday.

The conference, presided by General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee Hu Jintao, described family planning as a key factor in

economic and social development.

The meeting urged continued research on population development strategies, improvement of population quality based on a low birthrate, better technological and service levels in family planning and reining in a rising gender imbalance.

The focus of population and family planning efforts must shift from

purely controlling the numbers to stabilizing the low birthrate, it said.

China would now have had 400 million more people if the policy decreeing most couples to have only one child had not been put in place, official statistics show.

The country's population officially reached 1.3 billion in January last year.

Formulated in the early 1970s, the family planning policy encourages late marriages and childbearing.

Yesterday's meeting also decided to convene the annual Central Working Conference on the Economy in the near future.

Although remarkable achievements have been made in the economic realm this year, some

deep-rooted problems including an imbalanced economic structure and an inefficient growth pattern have not been effectively addressed, the meeting said.

The government should continue to improve its economic macro-control policies next year, further boost reform and opening-up, step up conservation of resources and

better protect the environment, the meeting said.

It called for further efforts to push forward economic growth in a fast and sound manner so as to create a good environment for the 17th CPC National Congress scheduled for the latter half of next year.

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He walked the Wall, now talks the walk

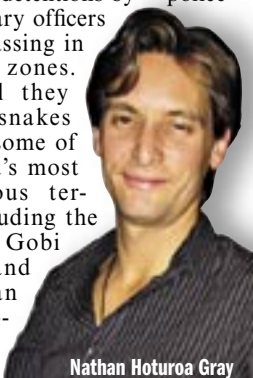
SPOTLIGHT
By ERIK NILSSON

A Maori lawyer from New Zealand, a Malaysian Buddhist monk, an Argentinean photojournalist, an Italian recording artist and a Kiwi-American Mormon golfer.

The roster sounds like the casting call for a bad joke rather than a true adventure story. But instead of walking into a bar, in 2000, this intrepid five-some became the first foreigners to walk and document the 4,000-kilometre span of the Great Wall between Jiayuguan and Shanhaiguan passes.

Along the way, they faced starvation, thirst, snakes, blizzards, lightning, -20 C to 40 C temperatures and detentions by police and military officers for trespassing in military zones.

The wall they walked snakes through some of the world's most treacherous terrain, including the scorched Gobi Desert and more than 2,000 kilometres of craggy



Nathan Hoturoa Gray

mountains.

"My initial incentive was to be the first Westerner to walk and document the Great Wall," said Nathan Hoturoa Gray, the 32-year-old lawyer from Wellington, New Zealand. "However, as time went on, it became a journey to honour the builders and Chinese civilization."

Gray is now touring China to promote his newly released book about his nine-month Great Walk, "First Pass Under Heaven." The book shot up to 10th place on the "All New Zealand Non-Fiction Best Sellers List" when Penguin released it in August.

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