

**BEHOLD ! WAP IS HERE !**

The Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) continues, doggedly, to try to control the Press, that of the print media and that of the Internet.

This is akin to farting against thunder.

It is, also, counter-productive insofar as it hampers the proliferation of the Internet – which is the way of the future.

Notwithstanding the impenetrable bureaucracy of the most populous country in the world, regulations, promulgated in the PRC in respect of foreign ownership of Internet portals, will hamper development of the Web in the PRC.

In addition, the natural extension of the above is that Internet portal operators enjoy no legal protection under the law, because, inter alia, there are no laws to protect e-commerce transactions, save those transactions which are executed by and with the blessings of the State.

The knock-on effect is that investment in IT (Information Technology) in the PRC is limited; it will continue to be so.

This, in effect, will come to mean that new jobs in IT will, also, be limited in the PRC.

The stable political environment in the PRC, however, is conducive to forward thinking, especially in the field of the IT, except that fear, from on high in Beijing, tends to curb the thinking of those, who should be spearheading regulatory legislation as the framework of *'tomorrow's world'*.

The lack of objective and impartial thinking is hampering progress in the PRC; and, it will continue to do so in the years to come.

The possibility of a change in the PRC Government is nil – at least, at this juncture.

However, the situation in many other Asian countries, with regard of the proliferation of the Web, is even worse because in those countries (a) there is no stable government machinery (b) there is widespread corruption that permeates nearly every facet of life (c) there is no effective legislation to regulate the Web and, it follows, (d) e-commerce cannot be regulated, effectively.

Some of these countries include the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam and Malaysia.

And so the highly unequal distribution of possibilities of using ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and participating in its efficiency gains widens – and will continue to widen.

Mobile telephony will, no doubt, lead to thwarting certain governments' avowed intent to stymie the spread of certain information, but such censorial intentions are doomed to failure.

It is expected that mobile telephony in the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and Singapore, in spite of the governments of these 2 regions, will, probably, reach 85 percent and 75 percent, respectively, before the end of this year.

The lack to adequate infrastructure in the PRC, proper, however, inhibits such wide penetration, which, probably, will come in at about 10 percent (with luck) by the end of the year, barring any new legislation that could restrain the spread of the mobile telephone.

And this, always, is a potential problem with regard to authoritarian governments because, at the drop of the hat, they have the power to enact new rules in order to fill the void when proper and effective legislation is not in place.

Alternatively, these governments enact rules and/or legislation, aimed at inhibiting the spread of certain types of information which, in these governments' opinions, may lead the populous away from the chosen path of government thinking.

Singapore, recently, enacted draconian legislation, which had the effect of locking out of the Internet all that that authoritarian government deemed to be of a certain political – and, naturally, unwanted – leaning.

The legislation resulted in Sintercom, which operated chatrooms in contrast to the Singapore Government's genre chatrooms, in having to close down after 8 years of operation.

The Singapore legislation was said to be aimed at amending The Parliamentary Elections Act.

Under the new law, it is an offence to publish election material without full identification of the publisher and the target of the information.

Those found guilty under the legislation face a year in jail and a maximum fine of \$S1,000.

Singapore's politics has been dominated since its independence in 1965 by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, now termed Senior Minister.

His son, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, today, calls the shots – with Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, nodding in assent when required.

Assistant Professor Indrajit Banerjee, Nanyang Technological University, Communication Studies Department, was credited with having stated that the new Singapore legislation was '*an extension of the controls*' (imposed by the Singapore Government).

The Professor stated that the Singapore Government takes the position that '*the economic climate is so bad that they (the Government) just do not want anything else to go wrong.*'

Other websites in the city state have been forced to close down because it is well known that one cannot fight the Government of the Senior Minister and his son.

## **The Revolution**

The wireless revolution is here, today, and it will, in due course, change the way that man effects connectivity with his fellow, be it via telephony or the WorldWideWeb.

Wireless communication/Internet is the easiest available method of execution of connectivity; it is the cheapest, too.

The vast distances in the PRC, for instance, beg for wireless communication to be the standard: How else can the country cover the required distances, using land-locked lines of communication?

But reliable wireless technology is still in its infancy; it may well take all of one year to come to the fore.

The advent of Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) or Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) technology is a strong competitor to fixed (land) line communication connections, both for telephony and the Internet.

The slow transfer rate, about which there have been many complaints, will, within a very short time, evaporate as technology solves today's problems and looks to try to solve those problems, which are bound to swing from the wider use of WAP and CDMA.

New 3G technology, now being tested in Japan, will resolve many of the problems, relating to access speeds, content integrity, reliability and application features.

In Japan, more than 30 million people are, already, making use of wireless Internet access, thanks to the innovation of NTT DoCoMo Incorporated and its i-mode service.

And this is just the beginning of the revolution.

Asian countries, as a matter of necessity, will have to resort to industrial policies in order to promote specific IT sectors.

A number of countries have, already, embarked on plans to beef up manufacturing high-tech hardware, thus laying down the foundations for the future.

Some Asian countries, seeing a chasm opening up, have sought to emphasise software production, and have offered incentives to entrepreneurs to come to join in the fun.

Such incentives will, eventually, lead to a rapid growth in the Gross Domestic Products of these territories.

This was most notably seen in California when, only a few short years ago, Silicon Valley was the keynote to advances in both computer software and hardware.

The number of jobs, created in California, up to the middle of 1999, was unseen in its history.

California is, today, the sixth largest economy of the world, a factor that was brought about, in part, by the emergence of IT and its ancillary services.

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