

Facebook builds censorship tool to get back into china

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Facebook Inc. has quietly developed a censorship tool that could persuade China to allow the world's biggest social media network to re-enter the world's second largest economy after a seven-year ban, the *New York Times* reported on Tuesday.

Facebook developed the software, which suppresses posts from appearing in people's news feeds in specific geographies, with the support of Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg, the newspaper said, citing unnamed current and former employees.

Zuckerberg in March met China's propaganda chief Liu Yunshan who said he hoped Facebook could strengthen exchanges and improve mutual understanding with China's internet companies, according to state news agency Xinhua.

" We have long said that we are interested in China, and are spending time understanding and learning more about the country," Facebook spokeswoman Arielle Aryah said in an emailed statement to *Reuters* .

" However, we have not made any decision on our approach to China. Our focus right now is on helping Chinese businesses and developers expand to new markets outside China by using our ad platform."

The Cybersecurity Administration of China, the country's internet regulator, did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment. China's foreign ministry declined to comment.

Foreign companies in China, especially in media, face political pressure from a range of regulations. The country's military newspaper calls the internet the most important front in an ideological battle against "Western anti-China forces".

China, which has the world's largest population of internet users, banned the website following the Urumqi riots in July 2009 in an effort to stem the flow of information about ethnic unrest which left 140 people dead.

Though Facebook has developed the new tool, it does not intend to suppress the posts itself, *NYT* said.

Facebook would instead offer the software to enable a third party to monitor popular stories and topics that gain visibility as users share them across the network, according to the *Times*. The third-party partner would have full control to decide whether those posts should show up in users' feeds.

There is no indication Facebook has offered the software to the authorities in China, the *Times* said. It is one of many ideas Facebook has discussed with respect to entering China and it may never see the light of day, it added.

Facebook, which has struggled in recent months to combat allegations that it unfairly removes certain content on its service, aims to continue to grow in developing nations where it currently has smaller penetration rates.

(Reporting by Ismail Shakil in Bengaluru; Editing by Andrew Hay and Muralikumar Anantharaman)