Zimbabwe to seize control of email
Correspondents in Harare
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ZIMBABWE’S government has proposed new contracts for all internet service providers that will force them to block content or report "malicious messages" to the authorities. The proposed contract obliges internet service providers (ISPs) to "take all necessary measures to prevent" any content inconsistent with Zimbabwe laws to be carried on its network.

"The provider shall ensure that objectionable, obscene, unauthorised or any other content, message or communications infringing copyright, intellectual property right and international and domestic cyber laws... inconsistent with the laws of Zimbabwe are not carried in his network."

The contract also obliges ISPs to "provide, without delay, all the tracing facilities of the nuisance or malicious messages or communications transported through his equipment and network, to authorised officers of... the government of Zimbabwe, when such information is required for investigations of crimes or in the interests of national security."

Police in Zimbabwe last year arrested 14 people accused of circulating a subversive electronic mail message calling for "violent demonstrations and strikes to push Robert Mugabe out of office".

In December Mr Mugabe lashed out at the "hegemony" of the north, attacking rich nations at a UN-sponsored information summit for imposing their views on access to information and freedom of the press on Zimbabwe.

He vowed his country would control the means to get information to its citizens, and stressed Zimbabwe's sovereignty.

But in March, the Supreme Court outlawed as unconstitutional legal provisions that gave the president powers to eavesdrop or intercept emails or telephone conversation.

"Violent propaganda and misinformation are peddled to delegitimise our just struggles against vestigial colonialism, indeed to weaken national cohesion," Mr Mugabe said in December.

"(They are) efforts at thwarting a broad Third World front against what is a dangerous imperial world order laid by warrior states and people," he said.

"My country continues to be the victim of such aggression with both the United Kingdom and the US using the (information technology) superiority to challenge our sovereignty through hostile and malicious broadcasts calculated to foment instability and destroy the state through divisions."

Officials at the country's telecommunications company, Tel-One, were not immediately available for comment on the new contract.

An official at one ISP raised questions as to whether the contract was legal and also said that it would be "practically impossible to monitor and check on all emails communicated through our network".

Agence France-Presse

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