

Lingua Inglese - Scientifica/Informatica

ESEMPIO DI COMPrensIONE SCRITTA

Livello B2

Argomento: **Internet and authoritarian countries. (Internet e i paesi autoritari)**

New communication technologies have long been thought of as unequivocally on the side of political freedom. "Technology will make it increasingly difficult for the state to control the information its people receive," said Ronald Reagan the former America's president: "The Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip."

But so far the Internet has not proved as subversive to authoritarian regimes as expected. A recent report about the impact of the Internet on repressive regimes, looked at the Internet in a range of countries from China to Saudi Arabia and concluded that the conventional wisdom was wrong and that "rather than being the death of authoritarianism, the global diffusion of the Internet was both an opportunity and a challenge for authoritarian regimes.

For many authoritarian countries the Internet presents a dilemma. They are desperate to exploit its enormous economic potential. The biggest obstacle to development in poor countries is isolation from the world economy, and even the very poor sometimes benefit from an Internet connection. Fishermen gain access to weather forecasts, farmers to the latest prices paid for produce in distant urban markets. Connecting a poor country to the Internet could help its economy take off, which would tempt any government. At the same time repressive regimes are determined to limit the Internet's threat to their political control. Can they do both?

The most interesting example is China, which with 46m users already has the world's third-largest number of Internet connections after the United States and Japan. Rapid growth in usage has been actively encouraged by the Chinese government, which sees electronic commerce as a way to modernise the economy and maintain economic growth. At the same time, it uses a variety of techniques to limit the Internet's political effects. In the past China blocked Google and Altavista, two popular search engines, though after protests inside and outside China it partially restored the service. In addition to blocking sites, the Chinese government has deployed a range of other technical tools, from sophisticated monitoring of e-mail traffic and chatrooms to hacking attacks and viruses aimed at hostile websites. But its encouragement of self-censorship among Internet service providers, content companies and users has been even more effective.

China also punishes any firms that do not follow the rules. Likewise, by occasionally cracking down harshly on individuals, the authorities have intimidated most Chinese into staying within accepted boundaries on the Internet. Chinese users never know who might be watching the way they use it, or when the axe might fall.

So far, this approach has been highly successful. The Falun Gong, the only direct challenger to the government's domination of public life in recent years, won a large following in the late 1990s by using e-mail and websites.

Today, however the group's diminishing number of members in China communicates mostly by payphone, which is harder to trace than e-mail.

A. According to the article, a recent report

1. claims that the Internet does not pose as great a danger for repressive regimes as usually supposed.
2. states that the political influence of the Internet may eventually lead to the downfall of some dictatorships.
3. denies that social and economic factors will have a great effect on the diffusion of the Internet.
4. demonstrates that Ronald Reagan's prophecy has already come true.

B. With regard to Internet, autocratic regimes

1. allow unlimited Internet access to farmers and fishermen.
2. deny access to everyone except government officials.
3. wish to boost their economies using modern communication technologies.
4. consider that the political disadvantages outweigh the possible economic benefits.

C. Which statement regarding China is true according to the article?

1. China is the Asian nation with the highest number of Internet users.
2. The Chinese government is trying to limit the number of Internet users.
3. The Chinese government manages to limit the political use of the Internet.
4. China has permanently denied users access to two major search engines.

D. Which of the following methods of ensuring political control is NOT mentioned in the text?

1. Checking up on electronic post and the use of certain websites.
2. Punishing users who use the Internet for inappropriate purposes.
3. Permitting only certain companies to make use of Internet.
4. Putting unwanted websites out of action in various ways.

E. With reference to the last paragraph, which statement is TRUE?

1. The Chinese government's methods proved ineffective against the Falun Gong.
2. Opposition to the government through the Falun Gong movement is gradually increasing.
3. Falun Gong members prefer to use public phones as they are more readily available and cheaper.
4. The Falun Gong changed their methods of communication to safeguard their privacy.

ANSWER KEY:

A-1

B-3

C-3

D-3

E-4