

Google admits to secretly working on a search engine for China with built-in censorship

This illustration picture taken on April 29, 2018, shows the Google logo displayed on a screen and reflected on a tablet.
(LIONEL BONAVENTURE/AFP/Getty Images)

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Teri Webster

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Amid growing concerns about online censorship, Google is secretly working on a search engine product for China with built-in censorship features.

What is going on?

Google CEO Sundar Pichai told employees on Thursday that the company is working on a censorship called Dragonfly and it is still in an “exploratory” stage, [The Intercept reported](#).

Special: [Anyone who says, "you're too late for Bitcoin" has no idea this is going on](#)

The revelation has stunned many people, including the majority of Google’s 88,000 employees. Only about several hundred of them were aware of the project, the report stated.

Pichai pledged to be more transparent with employees as plans are closer to being finalized, the news outlet reported.

But Pichai’s characterization of Dragonfly as an “exploratory” project is contrary to internal Google documents and statements by senior Google officials. The Intercept has seen copies of the documents, it reported.

Google previously launched a censored search engine project in China in 2006. But in March of 2010, Google pulled the service out of

country due to the Chinese government's growing "efforts to limit free speech, block websites, and hack Google's computer systems," the report stated.

Last month, Google search engine chief Ben Gomes told select staffers working on the project that they should get complete Dragonfly and have it ready to be deployed as quickly as possible, according to the report.

The project is reportedly facing barriers due to the ongoing trade war between the U.S. and China. The trade war has hindered Google's negotiations with Beijing officials, who must sign off on the "censored search platform."

Meanwhile, Pichai has made repeated trips to China to discuss the project with some of the country's top Communist leaders.

"Dragonfly was well beyond the 'exploratory' stage," Intercept reporter Ryan Gallagher wrote.

Google's internal confirmation of the project comes at a time of growing concerns about censorship of selected accounts on social media platforms. Primarily, conservative voices are being excluded.

Several human rights groups are asking Google to cancel Dragonfly project. And a bipartisan group of six U.S. senators are calling it "[deeply troubling](#)."

The Internet giant's employees aren't happy about it, either. They want an ombudsperson to oversee "urgent moral and ethical issues" raised

by the censorship project.

Google has yet to publicly issue a statement about Dragonfly and has not responded to questions from The Intercept, the news outlet stated.

What questions need to be answered?

The Intercept's report includes a list of 13 more questions it wants Google to answer.

Two of the extended questions on the list are:

Companies operating in China are required by law to turn over data to security agencies upon request. How will Google safeguard its Chinese users' data from the Communist Party regime, which routinely targets people — including human rights activists and journalists — who express criticism of its orthodoxies? How will Google ensure that information about people's search queries are not monitored by the Chinese state?

Google's stated central mission is to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." The company's informal motto is "don't be evil." Google has since its early years maintained a list of "10 things" that represent foundational values for the company. One of these values is: "You can make money without doing evil." Another is: "Democracy on the web works." Can Google explain how these values are consistent with its plan to launch a censored search engine in China, which will limit people's access to information about subjects such as human rights, democracy, and peaceful protest?