

New Hong Kong government plans to roll back freedoms

Nation/World

From the Associated Press

Social Security web site pulled for privacy reasons

WASHINGTON—Accused of putting Americans' privacy at risk, the Social Security Administration on Wednesday suspended an Internet service that gave taxpayers access to their earnings and benefits records.

Acting Social Security Commissioner John J. Callahan said the online service will be disabled for at least 60 days while he holds a series of forums across the country with privacy and computer security experts and the public about how to ease fears.

Advice also will be sought from banks that provide electronic financial services.

Callahan said requests from lawmakers earlier this week, questions raised by computer experts interviewed in news reports and phone calls from the public all convinced him to pull the service.

Blocking cell protein may protect against AIDS

WASHINGTON (AP)—Researchers say they have found a way to genetically prevent the formation of a key protein that allows the AIDS virus to infect some cells, offering promise for a radically new treatment.

Recent studies have shown that the HIV virus must link with specific proteins on the surface of cells before it can infect the cell. These surface proteins are called receptors.

One of the receptors, CD4, has long been known. Studies last year showed that the virus must also link with one of two other cell receptors, CCR5 or CXCR4.

Generally, the virus uses the CCR5 receptor to invade cells early in the infection. After the virus mutates, it also uses CXCR4.

Scientists at the Naval Medical Research Institute in Bethesda, Md., announced this week that in laboratory experiments they are now able to prevent T-cells, the primary HIV target, from making the surface protein CCR5. This, in effect, shuts down the ability of the virus to infect the T-cells, said Dr. Carl H. June of the institute.

HONG KONG (AP)—In the most detailed blueprint yet of the limits that could be put on Hong Kong's freedoms, the government-in-waiting unveiled plans Wednesday to require police approval for protests and allow political parties to be banned.

Hong Kong's future government said it wanted to "strike a balance between civil liberties and social stability." But Hong Kong's current Democratic Party, which is often critical of China, called the proposals "flagrant violations of basic human rights."

Outgoing British Gov. Chris Patten said they would "undoubtedly tighten the screw on Hong Kong's civil liberties."

The proposed changes, outlined in a document released for public comment, stem from recent moves by a China-appointed committee to roll back Hong Kong's civil liberties.

The incoming government, which assumes power when the British colony returns to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, defends the moves needed to bring Hong Kong's freedoms into

line with the constitution China has written for it.

The important test that lies ahead, however, is whether the future government is willing to compromise on the extent of the proposed rollbacks after the public consultation it has promised.

Patten told reporters that the case for amending the laws "has not been demonstrated and cannot be demonstrated."

People wanting to hold demonstrations after July 1 must seek police permission seven days beforehand, or 48 hours in special circumstances, said Michael Suen, policy coordinator for the future government.

Demonstrators now must notify the police, but do not have to apply for permission.

Another change would prohibit political groups from forming links with foreign political organizations.

Political parties would be barred from soliciting overseas donations, and could be banned altogether "in the interests of national security or public

safety, public order or the protection of public morals."

Coupled with China's determination to disband the elected legislature, such changes would set back Hong Kong's democratic development to the beginning of the decade, when the British governor had sweeping powers to silence critics.

Tung Chee-hwa, Hong Kong's leader-in-waiting, says the changes are necessary to prevent Hong Kong from becoming a base for destabilizing China.

The concept of "political organizations" and "political links" is "so wide that it will simply catch a lot of people in its net," said Democratic Party vice chairman Yeung Sum.

Mindful of the Democrats' strong following in Hong Kong, and their ability to mobilize foreign opinion, Tung met with their representatives immediately after the proposals were published.

Democrat Albert Ho said Tung "made positive responses" to their objections, but declined to reveal details of the one-hour meeting.

New tests on King rifle OK'd

James Earl Ray could get a new trial based on the results.

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP)—A state appeals court Wednesday allowed for new tests on the rifle and bullet believed used to kill the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., keeping alive James Earl Ray's quest for a trial.

The State Court of Criminal Appeals said a judge has the authority to order new tests on the bullet and the .30-06 hunting rifle found with Ray's fingerprints on it near the Memphis hotel where King was slain in 1968.

Ray, who is 69 and suffering from liver disease, wants the tests to further his decades-old attempt to reverse his guilty plea in the assassination. He

contends the rifle in court custody since the 1960s is not the murder weapon.

Memphis Judge Joe Brown ruled in February that new technology exists to prove once and for all if Ray's rifle killed King. Ray's lawyers must now formally ask the judge for permission to conduct the tests. Brown tried to give that permission in 1994, but was overruled by the appeals court.

If tests prove Ray's rifle was not the murder weapon, he can ask the court for a hearing on his claim of innocence.

The FBI and the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations tested the rifle in the 1970s, but could not establish beyond a scientific doubt that it was the murder weapon. The

tests showed King was killed by the same kind of weapon.

Ray contends the rifle found near the murder scene was put there by conspirators trying to frame him. Ray said he brought the rifle to Memphis on instructions from a shadowy gun runner he knew only as Raoul. Authorities have never established Raoul existed.

Ray's attorney, William Pepper, was in England Wednesday and not immediately available for comment. Prosecutors were skeptical about the ruling's effect.

"Other than the fact that it's going to continue the circus atmosphere, whether this is going to produce anything, who knows," prosecutor John Campbell said.

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