

US shuts down popular file-sharing website

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By Agencies

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The US justice department has shut down one of the world's most popular file-sharing websites for allegedly violating piracy laws, as police arrested MegaUpload.com's co-founders and two other staff members in New Zealand.

Working with US authorities, police in the New Zealand's city of Auckland detained co-founders Kim Dotcom, also known as Kim Shmitz, and Mathias Ortmann, as well as the website's chief marketing officer, Finn Batato, after a raid on a luxury mansion.

Bram Van der Kolk, a Dutch national, was also arrested.

The four appeared in Auckland's North Shore District Court on Friday and made applications for bail, but Judge David McNaughton remanded them in custody until Monday.

Grant Wormald, New Zealand detective inspector, said that after about 70 police raided 10 properties connected to those arrested, they "seized in excess of \$6mn worth of top end motor vehicles and over \$10mn in cash from several New Zealand finance companies."

Wormald also said that Dotcom, a 37-year-old German national, has been held on "warrants relating to breach of copyright offences in the US, money laundering and racketeering".

Rick Shera, a property lawyer, said that was the first time New Zealand had taken action to extradite an overseas person to the US for internet copyright infringement.

Mega conspiracy

The group, dubbed by prosecutors as Mega Conspiracy, was accused of engaging in a scheme that cost copyright holders more than \$500mn in lost revenue and of generating over \$175m in proceeds from subscriptions and advertising, according to the indictment unsealed on Thursday.

US justice department officials said that the estimate of \$500mn in economic harm to copyright holders was on the low end, and probably significantly more.

If convicted, the maximum penalties are 20 years in prison for conspiracy to commit racketeering and money laundering, five years for each count of copyright infringement and five years for conspiracy to commit copyright infringement.

Critics of the US Stop Online Piracy Act, or SOPA, and Protect IP Act, quickly showed their opposition to the shutdown of Megaupload.com, with hackers attacking the public websites of the US justice department, the world's largest music company Universal Music, and the two big trade groups that represent the music and film industries.

The film and music industries want the US congress to crack down on internet piracy and content theft.

But major internet companies such as Google and Facebook have complained that current drafts of the legislation would lead to censorship.

Many US celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Alicia Keys have publicly voiced support for MegaUpload.com without getting paid to do so.

Pavan Duggal, an expert on cyber and e-commerce law in India's capital New Delhi, said that the celebrities believed file-sharing websites were "absolutely necessary" to spread their content to the general public and support the free exchange of information.



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Syria: A Country Divided

After four years of a brutal civil war that has killed more than 220,000 people and displaced half of the population, Syria remains a country divided.

A variety of actors are locked in a power struggle, including President Bashar al-Assad's troops, Kurdish forces, the Nusra Front, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other armed factions.

ISIL has expanded its territory further in recent weeks, taking the ancient city of Palmyra in central Syria on May 20. Weakened by years of war, Assad's government now controls an estimated 20-30% of Syrian territory.

Source: Institute for the Study of War

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Americans on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Key findings from a survey of American public opinion

Perceptions of the conflict's solution

The percentage of Americans who want the U.S. government to push for a two-state solution remains constant from last year (24 percent), but the percentage of those who want the United States to push for one state with equal citizenship increases (from 34 to 34 percent).

If two states are no longer possible, 71 percent of Americans (34 percent of Democrats and 60 percent of Republicans) favor Israel's democracy more than Jewlessness.

Percent who favor Israel's democracy or Jewlessness

Solution	Percentage
Two states	24
Democracy	71
Jewlessness	24
Other	14

Percent of preferred solution to the conflict

Solution	Percentage
Two states	24
Democracy	71
Jewlessness	24
Other	14

Three US presidents and Israeli settlements

Israel-US relations have hit an all-time low under Barack Obama and Benjamin Netanyahu, many observers say, but on settlements - the most contentious issue - little has changed. Our chart tracks their growth.

400,000 settlers now live in the West Bank.

US vetoes UN draft resolution condemning settlements.

International Court of Justice declares East Jerusalem settlements illegal.

Timeline of US Presidents and Israeli Leaders:

- 1967: Lyndon B. Johnson, David Ben-Gurion
- 1969-1974: Richard Nixon, Golda Meir
- 1977-1981: Jimmy Carter, Menachem Begin
- 1981-1989: Ronald Reagan, Yitzhak Rabin
- 1989-1993: George H. W. Bush, Yitzhak Rabin
- 1993-2001: Bill Clinton, Benjamin Netanyahu
- 2001-2009: George W. Bush, Benjamin Netanyahu
- 2009-2017: Barack Obama, Benjamin Netanyahu

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