



The Citizen Lab

Southeast Asia CyberWatch: June 2012

A monthly report on trends in online censorship, information operations,
and Internet use in Southeast Asia

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BURMA

Sectarian rift spills onto the Internet

[Recent unrest](#) between the majority Buddhists and Muslim Rohingyas in Western Burma has been playing out online, with inflammatory comments being posted to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The [online posts refer to them](#) as "invaders" and "terrorists", and include explicit images and illustrations calling for [the expulsion or killing of "Kalars"](#), a derogatory term derived from Sanskrit which means "black". Some commentators have gone so far as to [call the online content](#) genocidal or a call to ethnic cleansing. The [Democratic Voice of Burma](#) (DVB) was caught in the crossfire of this online battle, apparently for being too pro-Rohingya in their reporting on the crisis.

DVB's Burmese and English sites were hit by a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack for which the hacker group Blink claimed responsibility.

Some [reports](#) have cited the recent loosening of Internet controls by the current government as a reason for the spread of the sectarian rift online, and possibly even the offline violence. Internet penetration rates in the country, however, remain very low and much of the inflammatory content appears to be originating from outside of the country. Nonetheless, there is fear that the government will revert back to its previous censorship practices as the government has already [said](#) that all news related to the conflict must go through the censorship board.

INDONESIA

Indonesian sentenced to 2.5 years in prison over Facebook comment

Alexander Aan, an Indonesian civil servant, was [sentenced to](#) two years and six months' imprisonment and a Rp. 100 million (US\$10,600) fine after declaring his atheism on Facebook and posting links to explicit cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. He was [arrested in January](#) and charged with committing "blasphemy", a crime under Article 156a of the Indonesian Criminal Code, because he had used passages from the Koran to denounce the existence of God. Presiding judge Eka Prasetya Budi Dharma [convicted](#) Aan under Article 28 of the Information and Electronic Transaction law for "spreading racial and religious hatred". Even before this ruling, [human rights activists](#) have [expressed concerns](#) that blasphemy laws combined with the rising religious intolerance were major threats [to free speech](#) and Indonesia's [pluralistic democracy](#).

MALAYSIA

Information, Communications and Culture Minister proposed uniform ICT security system

The Information, Communications and Culture Minister Rais Yatim [has proposed that](#) "the security systems and ICT offences prevention methods be made uniform to ensure effective implementation of laws related to ICT". He issued this statement during the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Forum on ICT due to concerns with the public's assumption "that the Internet, computers and online telecommunications technology are not governed by law or linked to the security of the respective countries".

"ASEAN must tackle cyber security threats": Defence Minister

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid [Hamidi said that Southeast Asian countries must respond to the increasing cyber security threats in the region](#). "Studies show that losses incurred from cyber security crimes amounted to a staggering RM388 billion worldwide last year. Thus, it is crucial for us to work together in restraining threats like these, for the sake of peace and stability of our region," he said at the conclusion of the Sixth ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM).

PHILIPPINES

Controversy surrounding the Cybercrime Prevention Act

Senator Edgardo J. Angara wrote [an Op-Ed in the Manila Bulletin](#) regarding the recent passage of the Data Privacy Act and Cybercrime Prevention Act. He “emphasized that the Data Privacy Act was not conceived with repression of press freedom in mind”, but it was “to promote confidence in our booming IT-BPO (business process outsourcing) industry.” This statement was echoed by Benedict Hernandez, president and CEO of the Business Processing Association of the Philippines (BPAP), [who said that](#) the “data privacy law will bring the Philippines to international standards of privacy protection”. Angara also [said that](#) despite allegations that the government is curtailing freedom of expression and encroaching on privacy, the Act was drafted to mitigate the "dangers to expression and privacy such as hacking, identity theft, fraud, and child pornography.”

A group of hackers who call themselves “PrivateX” [hacked seven government websites](#) on Philippines’ Independence Day to protest against certain provisions in the [Cybercrime Prevention Act](#). The bill seeks to establish a legal framework over Internet-related crimes, however, the group [opposes the legislation](#) because it "can be used as a tool of censorship".

Government urged to upgrade its cybersecurity measures

Vice President Jejomar Binay [urged the government](#) to upgrade its cybersecurity measures due in part to the recent defacement of several government websites by Chinese hackers. The Philippines and China have been involved in [a standoff](#) over a South China Sea shoal since April. After news of the standoff broke out, [hackers believed to be from China](#) attacked the University of the Philippines website. A number of [pro-Philippine hackers](#) subsequently retaliated by launching similar attacks against Chinese websites.

SINGAPORE

Government loosening its grip on dissent

Social media and a number of local Web sites have [provided a platform](#) for Singaporeans to criticize their government openly. Activists say that changes to the restrictive media environment were first carried out in the late 1990s, but they were not apparent until last year, when support for the governing People’s Action Party dropped to a historic low. “Since the general elections, the government has been feeling its way,” said Terence Chong, a senior fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. “They want to be seen as engaging civil society groups, but they also fear being seen as weak and bowing to public pressure.”

Cyber attacks becoming real danger

Minister of State for Defence and Education Lawrence Wong [said that](#) “With the increase in malicious cyber-attacks and the nation's deep reliance on Internet services, Singapore needs to boost its cyber security”. He made this statement during a visit to the [inaugural Cyber Defenders Discovery Camp](#) where more than 100 students attended the four-day camp to “learn about the strategies and

methodologies to tackle cyber threats from experts from the defence community”. Wong also [shared several measures](#) that Singapore has taken to defend against cyber threats, such as [establishing The Singapore Infocomm Technology Security Authority](#) (SITSA) to “work with various industry regulators to assess cyber security vulnerabilities” and [setting up the National Cyber Security Centre](#) to “boost [the country’s] national capability to counter security threats”.

THAILAND

Government rejects proposed lèse-majesté amendment

The government of Thailand has [rejected a bill](#) proposing an amendment to Article 112 of the Criminal Code, which contains the draconian lese-majeste laws. The anger surrounding the death of 61-year-old Ampon Tangnoppakul in a Thai prison [last month](#), who had been sentenced to 20 years for sending four text messages deemed to be defamatory to the monarchy, [increased the number of the petition's signatures](#) to almost 30,000. The proposal sought to reduce the maximum penalty for these crimes to three years for a violation against the king and two years for a violation against the queen, heir apparent, and regent, and to remove the right of any citizen to bring a charge forward. It also proposed adding an exception of crime for truthful, decent or "good faith" criticisms. All but three of the 500 House of Representatives members rejected the amendment. An estimated 30,000 supporters of the "Red Shirt" protest movement [took to the streets of Bangkok](#) on 25 June to protest, among other things, the government's refusal to heed the calls to amend lèse-majesté laws.

VIETNAM

Crackdown on bloggers continues

Vietnam's [crackdown of the Internet](#) continues as the government prepares for its troubling [Internet decree](#) to become law. Nguyen Xuan Dien, a Vietnamese activist who reports on land disputes in the country, claims that his site has been hacked and authorities have forced him to shut down his blog. Other blogs containing content critical of the government or "politically sensitive" material, have been blocked, as have blogs providing information on how to bypass government firewalls. The *Decree on the Management, Provision, Use of Internet Services and Information Content Online* [is anticipated to be released later this month](#). The [US government has called the proposal](#) “unworkable” and “a threat to freedom of expression in the country”. Some of the harsh measures included in the decree evidently have already been adopted as Vietnam has [imprisoned 18 bloggers](#) over the past few years.

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