



The Citizen Lab

Southeast Asia CyberWatch: May 2012

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

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CAMBODIA

Government drafting the first ever cyber law

Cambodia's Ministry of Information is currently [drafting a law](#) that will make it illegal for "ill-willed groups or individuals" to publish false information online. The Press and Quick Reaction Unit spokesman Ek Tha [argued that such a law is necessary](#) "given the mushrooming of...modern technology like Twitter and You Tube and email and all sorts of technology activity". Cambodian Center for Human Rights president Ou Virak [told the Phnom Penh Post](#) that the government had been working on Internet censorship laws for some time, but no draft had been produced.

MALAYSIA

Threats to Internet freedom

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's [said in an interview recently](#) that "countries should implement some form of regulatory control on the Internet to block 'filth' and punish those who

corrupt people's minds". Mahathir, who was prime minister for 22 years until 2003, had previously promised that Malaysia would never censor the Internet in any way. He [acknowledged](#) that at the time, he "did not realize the power of the Internet". The Information, Communications and Culture minister, Datuk Seri Utama Dr Rais Yatim, subsequently [expressed agreement](#) with this view and stated that the "cyberworld should now be subjected to perusal by society". Similarly, Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission chairman Datuk Mohamed Sharil Tarmizi argued that "what constitutes as an offence offline, should also be made illegal online". Citing [the decision to block 10 file-sharing websites](#) found to have violated the Copyright Act 1987 as an example, he added that "if stealing is illegal offline, than downloading of pirated contents is also an offence". There have also been [concerns regarding recent amendments](#) to the Malaysian Evidence Act 1950, which in short, stipulate that you are liable for content posted on your webpage, computer or Internet network. Internet Society Malaysian Chapter Chairman Julian Vincent has pointed out that [these changes could open the door to abuse](#). "In the internet environment where the websites even of the largest organisations are susceptible to hacking and manipulation, it is dangerous to have this presumption (of guilt) in place," he said. The Centre for Independent Journalism has embarked on [an online campaign against the amendments](#) and will submit the petition to Dato Seri Nazri Aziz, a Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of parliamentary affairs, once it has collected 5,000 signatures.

THAILAND

Lèse majesté laws silence Thai netizens

The criminal court has sentenced Chiranuch "Jiew" Premchaiporn, the manager of Thai online news site Prachatai, to a one-year suspended prison term. She was found guilty of [neglecting her role as an "intermediary"](#) by failing to delete apparently anti-monarchic comments in a timely fashion. This oversight was in violation of the notorious *lèse majesté* law, which penalizes those who publish comments deemed insulting to the royal family. In the past, the law has typically been used to censor authors of scholarly books. However, in justifying the May 30 verdict, the presiding judge used an interpretation of Thailand's Computer Crimes Act, which [criminalizes the hosting of offensive content created by a third party](#), to emphasize that managers of online sites are responsible for immediately censoring "prohibited" comments. The Internet giant, Google, was [critical of the verdict](#), calling it "a serious threat to the future of the Internet in Thailand." Earlier in May, 61-year-old Ampon Tangnoppakul, also known as Uncle SMS, [died in a prison hospital](#) in Bangkok while serving a 20-year sentence for sending four [text messages deemed insulting](#) to the Queen of Thailand. His death renewed calls to amend the law as critics argue it is primarily used as tool to stifle free speech. [A petition calling for amendments](#) was submitted recently to parliament, signed by more than 27,000 names. Nevertheless, the government is not obliged to deliberate the petition and has [continued to resist reform](#).

VIETNAM

Bloggers fight against tightening Internet censorship

Vietnam is drafting a new decree to impose control on the country's increasingly bold blogosphere. The 60-article [draft law would force bloggers](#) "to post real names and contact details, make news Web sites obtain government approval to publish and compel site administrators to report any banned online

activity to the authorities”. The [decree also](#) “seeks to make foreign companies that provide online services in Vietnam — like Facebook and Google — cooperate with the government and could force them to locate data centers and offices in the country”. [Local businesses have criticized](#) the decree for “favouring foreign enterprises”. The [Global Network Initiative \(GNI\) has also expressed concern](#) over the free speech and privacy implications of the draft legislation. It urges the government to address these issues as it finalizes the decree over the next few weeks.

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