The Citizen Lab

Southeast Asia CyberWatch: August 2012

A monthly report on trends in online censorship, information operations,

and Internet use in Southeast Asia

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CAMBODIA

Government increasing Internet surveillance
Cambodia has significantly stepped up its Internet surveillance policies in the past year, according to Asian Correspondent. In February, the government adopted an "inter-ministerial circular", which dictates that Internet cafes and telephone shops must monitor and register their customers in order to "promote protection of national security, safety and social order for the country". The document further claims that criminals have typically used telecommunications technologies like mobile phones and the Internet to commit acts of terrorism, engage in serious crimes, and offend national customs and moral

values. While only 3% of Cambodia's population is online, the country has one of the fastest rates of growth in Internet use in the region.

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INDONESIA

Islamic Facebook to be launched soon
An Islamic version of Facebook called Salamworld will be launched in the country in November. The website will provide an option that allows users to ensure that the content they view is *Halal*, or permitted under Islamic law, and will filter out indecent subject matter such as pornography or illegal drugs. Although the website is described as a "cleaner version of Facebook", Salamworld chairman Abdulvahit Niyazov has said that it was not designed to replace the social media giant. Instead, it will allow users to link to their Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Ministry: Government will collaborate with Google and YouTube to block pornographic websites
Azhar Hasyim, the business director of the Communications and Information Ministry's directorate general for applications and information, said that the ministry had talked with YouTube about the plan to block pornographic websites and expected to include Google. The ministry previously reported that more than two million pornographic websites could be accessed inside Indonesia and that it had received "100 million" public complaints on Internet pornography.

Nawala to partner with the Association of Indonesia Internet Service Provider to block more websites
Nawala Nusantara, a foundation providing Internet filtering services, announced a partnership with the Association of Indonesia Internet Service Provider (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII)) to block more websites containing unsavory content such as pornography, hate speech and piracy. Its filtering system will be placed in Indonesia Internet Exchange (IIX) servers owned by APJII. There are 250 ISPs registered as APJII member and at least 800,000 websites have been blocked by Nawala to date.

MALAYSIA

Internet Blackout Day
On August 14, more than 60 prominent websites and blogs in Malaysia participated in a Web blackout to protest the amendment to Section 114A of the Evidence Act, which was revised in April. The amendment came into effect on July 31 and makes service providers such as ISPs and publishers liable for defamatory content. James Chin, a professor of political science at Monash University in Kuala Lumpur said that web users accused of violating the act must prove that they were not responsible for the offensive content, a marked shift in the burden of proof. Critics believe that the amendment is aimed at opposition media and social networking sites ahead of the 13th general election that is expected to be called prior to June 2013, when the current government's term will end.

Blogger Amizudin Ahmat given three-month sentence for contempt
The High Court sentenced blogger Amizudin Ahmat to three months in jail after finding him guilty of contempt of court by further publishing 11 articles defaming Information, Communications and Culture Minister Rais Yatim. In her ruling, Judge Datin Zabariah Mohd Yusof said that Ahmat had breached a court order that prohibited him from publishing disparaging articles on Rais in his blog. A Malaysian human rights and law reform NGO, Lawyers for Liberty, condemned the court's decision as "harsh and disproportionate" and said that the court "has failed to look into the wider circumstances and context the articles were published."

Government looking to register content on social media websites
The Malaysian Information, Communications and Culture Ministry is considering a proposal to register content published in social websites in an effort to resolve issues that have arisen due to the sharing of news online. Bloggers reacted angrily to this news and told the news website Bikyamasr.com that they believe this is part of the government's effort to crackdown on freedom of speech and to curtail criticism of the government ahead of elections.

MYANMAR

Defacement of Information Ministry website
On August 8, the website of Myanmar's Information Ministry was defaced with a warning for the government to "stop the killing of Muslims." The message also warned of attacks on "the worshipers of Buddha" should anti-Muslim violence in the country continue. Inter-religious violence between Buddhists and the Muslim Rohingya people have been ongoing in Rakhine state since May 2012.

Government formally abolishes press censorship
The requirement that any publication of political and religious news must be vetted by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Department has been abolished. The announcement has been seen by some commentators as part of the government's move towards political reform. Many restrictions on online publications remain in place, however, including the 2004 Electronic Transaction Law which prohibits any online activity seen as "detrimental to the security of the State or prevalence of law and order or community peace and tranquility."

SINGAPORE

MLC chief: Internet Code of conduct "within the realm of possibilities"
The chairman of the Media Literacy Council (MLC), Tan Cheng Han, said that although its members have not had any discussion on a code of conduct (COC) for the Internet, such a code "is within the realm of possibilities". In a previous position as the Deputy Chairman of the Advisory Council on the Impact of New Media on Society (AIMS), Tan and then Chairman Cheong Yip Seng made significant

efforts to engage bloggers and members of the public to come up with a set of recommendations on media regulation. However, a few key substantive AIMS recommendations were not accepted by the Government, such as a proposal to implement immunity for online intermediaries from defamation charges. Many in the online community have interpreted the formation of the MLC as yet another attempt by the government to regulate the Internet.

THAILAND

Creation of new cyber security panel
On August 14, more than 60 prominent websites and blogs in Malaysia participated in a Web blackout to protest the amendment to Section 114A of the Evidence Act, which was revised in April. The amendment came into effect on July 31 and makes service providers such as ISPs and publishers liable for defamatory content. James Chin, a professor of political science at Monash University in Kuala Lumpur said that web users accused of violating the act must prove that they were not responsible for the offensive content, a marked shift in the burden of proof. Critics believe that the amendment is aimed at opposition media and social networking sites ahead of the 13th general election that is expected to be called prior to June 2013, when the current government's term will end.

Condemnation of brutal treatment of website designer convicted of lèse-majesté crimes
Reporters Without Borders has condemned the brutal treatment by prison guards of website designer Thantawut Thaweewarodomkul, convicted in April 2012 for posting messages deemed critical of the king on the Internet. Prisoners convicted of insulting the Thai monarchy are often targeted for more brutal treatment by guards and prisoners for their crimes. As previously reported, activists have been frequently penalized for online activities in violation of Thailand's strict lèse-majesté laws.

VIETNAM

Vietnamese dissident blogger sentences to six years in jail
On August 9, a Vietnamese court sentenced Dinh Dang Dinh to six years imprisonment for "conducting propaganda" against the regime. The sentence was handed down under Article 88 of the Criminal Code, which criminalizes "making, storing and/or circulating documents and/or cultural products with contents against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam." Dinh was arrested in October 2011 after posting blog entries on freedom of speech and democracy, as well as criticizing the government's corruption and business dealings. In the past three years, the Vietnamese government has jailed over a dozen bloggers and online activists under Article 88.

Vietnam ranks among the top 20 nations by Internet use
Vietnam currently ranks 18th in the world in terms of Internet use, as well as eighth in Asia and third among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), behind Indonesia and the Philippines. The Viet Nam Internet Network Information Center, an affiliate of the Ministry of Information and Communication, reported that approximately 35 percent of the population (31 million

people) were connected to the Internet as of June 2012. Internet use is expected to increase to 45-50 percent of the population by 2020.

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