The Citizen Lab

Southeast Asia CyberWatch: September 2012

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

and Internet use in Southeast Asia

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SOUTHEAST ASIA

Freedom House assesses Internet freedom in Southeast Asia

Freedom House released its annual *Freedom on the Net* [PDF] report on September 24. The report, an annual analysis on global trends regarding information and communications technology (ICT) freedom, was mixed in its assessment of Internet freedom in Southeast Asia. Since 2011, Burma and Indonesia have improved their Internet freedom scores by 13 and four points, respectively. Vietnam, Thailand, and Burma, however, still rank among the least free countries in the region. Malaysia was

singled out as a "country at risk" due to a number of developments over the past year, including blogger arrests and cyber attacks against news outlets and websites expressing views critical of the regime. Freedom House expects Internet controls in Malaysia to tighten ahead of the April 2013 general elections. The Philippines was ranked as "free" in the report. However, while Freedom House commended the country for providing Filipino users with unfiltered Internet access, it raised concerns over "weak regulations" governing cyber crime, gambling, and child pornography: ambiguities which could potentially be used to legally justify filtration in future.

"Innocence of Muslims" blocked in several Southeast Asian countries upon governmental request

YouTube has blocked access to trailers of the controversial anti-Islamic film *Innocence of Muslims* in several countries in Southeast Asia, including Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. In all three cases, requests had been made to Google, which owns the video sharing site, to block access to the trailers. These actions have followed a trend whereby the corporation has acquiesced to specific complaints from several countries worldwide. While the Philippines has banned public showings of the video, no formal request has been made to YouTube to block Filipino users from accessing the videos.

CAMBODIA

Websites targeted by hacker group

A hacker group called NullCrew has recently attacked Cambodian websites in protest of Internet censorship and the arrest of Gottfrid Svartholm Warg, the 27-year old co-founder of torrent sharing site The Pirate Bay. Cambodian police detained Warg in Phnom Penh on September 2 for evading a one-year jail sentence for copyright violation. Warg was later extradited to Sweden on September 11. NullCrew announced that its campaign, nicknamed #OpTPB (Operation The Pirate Bay), would target the websites of Cambodian businesses and government organizations, including the armed forces, and posted a number of passwords for other hacktivist groups to use. Telecom Cambodia stated that government officials were working with Internet service providers to identify those responsible for the attacks.

Journalist murdered

On September 11, the body of Hang Serei Oudom, a reporter for Vorakchun Khmer Daily, was found in the trunk of his car. Oudom was known for writing about deforestation, illegal logging activity, and corruption among those involved with the timber industry. His last story before his death accused the son of a powerful figure in the armed forces of using military vehicles to smuggle timber and extorting money from legitimate loggers. Both UNESCO and Reporters Without Borders have condemned Oudom's murder and called for an investigation into its motives. Earlier this year, Chut Wutty, a prominent environmentalist and online activist known for his criticisms of illegal logging in Cambodia, was killed by military police.

Telecoms regulator established
On September 20, Cambodia announced the launch of the Telecommunication Regulator of Cambodia (TRC). The TRC is responsible for determining the rules and regulations of the telecommunications sector, ensuring fair pricing and wireless spectrum distribution among operators, and overseeing the country's information infrastructure. Cambodia's telecommunications sector, which currently includes eight cellular phone operators and 30 Internet service providers, holds high potential for economic growth in the region.

New law requiring surveillance cameras in Internet cafes
In keeping with its drive toward increasing Internet surveillance, the Cambodian government has mandated that all Internet cafes and telephone centres install surveillance cameras and retain footage for at least three months. The legal circular, an unofficial translation of which may be read here, was drafted several months ago, allegedly in an effort to protect against the "rising number of cyber crimes in the country." Global Voices Online has opined that these measures may foreshadow the adoption of "a more comprehensive cyber legislation" later this year.

INDONESIA

Social media in the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election
Social media played a prominent role in the candidates' campaigns for the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election. Data obtained by The Jakarta Globe from salingsilang.com, which monitors Indonesian social media trends, showed that tweets about both candidates, incumbent governor Fauzi Bowo and Solo Mayor Joko Widodo, exceeded 500,000 in total in July and August. The majority of the tweets, however, were derogatory comments, such as racial or religious insults, about the candidate. The Jakarta General Elections Commission (KPUD) said that it was powerless to act against those who cast such slurs, citing the lack of laws regulating what people say on social media.

MALAYSIA

Man arrested for Facebook post
Klang South district police arrested a 25-year-old man on September 26 due to offensive comments on Islam and Prophet Muhammad that appeared on his Facebook account recently. District police chief, ACP Mohamad Mat Yusop, said the suspect was arrested under Section 4(1) of the Sedition Act and Section 298A of the Penal Code for "causing disharmony, disunity, enmity, hatred or ill-will on grounds of religion".

Controversy over amendment to Evidence Act continues
Controversy over the amendment to Section 114A of the Evidence Act continues as different segments of society interpret the legislation differently. Last month, more than 60 prominent websites and blogs in Malaysia participated in a Web blackout to protest the revision. PM Najib Razak argued that the

amendment is "a modern and forward-looking legislation aimed at protecting the people from Internet-based crimes such as cyber bullying" and a number of legal experts maintained that it "will encourage public to be more responsible". Meanwhile, MP Gobind Singh Deo from the Democratic Action Party contended that the Attorney-General's explanation "that the prosecution was still responsible for carrying out a comprehensive investigation before making charges" provided "all the more reason" for it to be repealed. In addition, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) said that the controversial section law "violates the human rights principles of freedom of expression as enshrined in Article 19 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)".

MYANMAR

Internet access still limited despite recent reforms

According to Freedom House's *Freedom on the Net 2012* report, Internet freedom has improved in Myanmar since 2011. This positive ranking has been attributed to greater political freedoms in the country. Information and communications technology is still out of reach for most citizens, with less than one percent of the population having access to the Internet, and only one in 100 citizens owning a cell phone. While costs for mobile and Internet access have decreased in the country, they remain high relative to the region. Some commentators have suggested that the government's support of freer, more accessible information technology is part of a strategy to monitor citizens through digital means.

PHILIPPINES

Defacement attacks over new cyber crime law

A group identifying itself as Anonymous Philippines has attacked the websites of several prominent commercial entities, civil society organizations, and government agencies in protest over the country's Cybercrime Prevention Act [PDF], which the group describes as "the most notorious act ever witnessed in the cyber-history of the Philippines." As previously reported, the act has been severely criticized by government officials and businesspeople in the past. Legal experts have recently voiced their opposition as well, criticizing what they see as the law's "chilling effect" on free expression. Other lawyers have criticized the law on the grounds that it allows for "subtle but pervasive State monitoring and control."

THAILAND

Clashes over *lèse majesté* laws

Supporters of Thailand's Red Shirt movement have clashed with police over the questioning of a Red Shirt supporter accused of defaming the monarchy. The court hearing of another activist accused of insulting the monarchy, Somyot Prueksakasemsuk, was cancelled on September 19 by the Thai

Criminal Court. A vigil was held outside the Court after the cancellation announcement. The Criminal Court has also laid charges against Surapak Phuchaisaeng, a computer programmer, accused of being associated with a Facebook page used to post anti-monarchist messages, a charge he has denied despite the statements of a computer expert who testified that evidence linking Surapak to the page has been found on seized laptops belonging to the defendant. As previously reported, citizens accused of violations of Thailand's *lèse majesté* laws have been targeted for often brutal treatment by authorities, with commentators noting that bail rights for *lèse majesté* prisoners are frequently denied in comparison to prisoners accused of far more violent crimes.

VIETNAM

Vietnamese government cracks down on several blogs

In an attempt to crack down on three particularly popular dissident blogs, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung ordered police to arrest their owners and barred public employees from visiting websites that publish "distorted and fabricated articles." One of the blogs, Danlambao [Vietnamese], recently gained prominence after speculating on power struggles among the country's rulers. Another, Quanlambao [Vietnamese], regularly criticizes the Prime Minister. Ironically, the government's pronouncements only drew further attention to the blogs, which have not yet been filtered, and caused their page views to skyrocket. As recently documented by the OpenNet Initiative, Vietnam has drafted new regulations in 2012 intended to impose "stricter rules against the posting of slanderous or critical content online."

Three dissident bloggers jailed

On September 24, Vietnamese authorities sentenced three bloggers to jail for "conducting propaganda against the state" according to Article 88 of the penal code. The courts handed Nguyen Van Hai (also known as Dieu Cay), Ta Phong Tan, and Phan Thanh Hai terms of 12, ten, and four years respectively, all with periods of house arrest to follow. The President of the Court explained that the accused had "abused the popularity of the Internet to post articles which undermined and blackened (Vietnam's) leaders, criticising the (Communist) party, (and) destroying people's trust in the state." Freedom House was quick to condemn the sentences, noting that the bloggers' writings played an important role in challenging the lack of free expression under Vietnam's penal code.

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