



The Citizen Lab

Southeast Asia CyberWatch: November 2012

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

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SOUTHEAST ASIA

ASEAN approves contentious human rights declaration

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders signed a controversial human rights declaration on November 17 during an annual summit in Cambodia. The pact on human rights is branded as a landmark agreement that [would help protect](#) the region's 600 million people. The ASEAN

document references the United Nations' (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action that was adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. Criticism against the declaration have emerge, however, due to the [lack of transparency](#) during the drafting period. In addition, it imposes all sorts of limitations on the protection of human rights. For example, human rights [can be restricted](#) "if they endanger public security, public morals, or public order". The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, has [expressed disappointment](#), saying that "Restrictions on rights should not be applied through a blanket clause or in the name of regional or national particularities."

CAMBODIA

Civil society groups accused state of crackdown ahead of ASEAN meeting

Cambodian activists [accused](#) the government of stifling free speech in anticipation of the East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh, attended by leaders from the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, and India. Civil-society groups reported a number of problems when they tried to hold meetings and demonstrations, including venues cutting off electricity and cancelling reservations. Cambodian officials banned public demonstrations due to "security and safety concerns," but denied any censorship of free speech.

Cambodia holds conference for Asian bloggers

Over 100 bloggers from across Asia [gathered](#) in Siem Reap earlier this month for [Blogfest Asia](#), a conference on blogging, technology, and Internet freedom. During one session, attendants from each nation stood and spoke on the state of Internet freedom in their individual countries. Indonesian representative Chihi N. Utami opined that "maybe the [Indonesian] government is panicking a little about blogging, and the opinion of bloggers and social media users." Yatnar Htun, admin and logistics manager for Myanmar ICT for Development Organization, argued that the Burmese government has experienced an "Internet revolution" over the past year, lifting censorship, releasing imprisoned bloggers, and expanding Internet access. Cambodians, however, expressed alarm over the country's upcoming [cyber law](#), which would increase Internet surveillance under the pretext of combating crime and terrorism.

MALAYSIA

Government shuts down Al-Qaeda's online library

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has [shut down](#) a terrorist web portal, Tawhed.net, that is said to be Al-Qaeda's largest online library. This does not necessarily signal the demise of the website, however, as counter terrorism experts say that it is part of Al-Qaeda's strategy to have its websites and forums hosted in one country and [move to another](#) when detected.

Government urged to embrace social media

Malaysia is expected to hold a general election in six months and many observers are wondering if there will be a “political ‘tsunami’” [against the ruling coalition](#), Barisan Nasional, akin to what happened at the 2008 polls. The proliferation of independent media online such as Malaysia Today and Malaysiakini has made the coalition’s [grip on dissent](#) less effective. Khairy Jamaluddin, the Youth Chairman for Barisan Nasional, said that the government [should embrace social media](#) and use it to its advantage. He argued that social media has grown powerful over the years as a tool to disseminate news and information and therefore, to censor it would be impossible.

Increasing losses through cyber crime

The Malaysian police have recorded [24 cases of electronic hacking](#) between January and September this year, with total losses amounting to RM3.3 million (roughly US\$1.1 million). Datuk Syed Ismail Syed Azizan, the director of Bukit Aman Commercial CID, cautioned government officers and personnel who are using smartphones in their work to remain vigilant in order to protect state secrets or they will be charged under the Official Secrets Act 1972.

MYANMAR

New bill outlaws social media

Myanmar has [released](#) a new telecommunications bill that may prohibit social media and “unregistered gadgets” in the country. The bill also allows for government authorization to intercept data transmissions and suspend telecommunications services. Critics of the bill have [accused](#) it of being oppressive, lacking clear definitions for social media, and for potentially outlawing many commonly used communication devices, such as unlicensed cellular phones.

Myanmar to host ICT summit in December

Rangoon will be the site for a global [ICT summit](#) in December. Foreign and domestic investors have been invited to the summit to network with local representatives from the country’s telecommunication’s industry. Myanmar has been [described](#) as “poised for significant investment in telecom and internet infrastructure” at this point in its domestic technological development, with the government having also recently created a [separate, cabinet-level ICT](#) department.

PHILIPPINES

Anti-pornography protests in Mandaue City

On November 13, demonstrators [convened](#) a regional dialogue at the Dohera hotel in Mandaue City to discuss possible measures for combatting Internet pornography and prostitution in the Philippines. The Department of Social Welfare and Development joined activists and stakeholders and calling for consistent policies and laws in countries across the ASEAN region, including “definitions, penalties,

extraditions and extraterritoriality and trial of perpetrators.” According to a recommendation agreed upon at the ASEAN [Conference](#) on Working Toward a Cyber Pornography and Cyber Prostitution-Free Southeast Asia in June, each member state is to host a meeting to assess the local situation and brainstorm policy measures. A similar ASEAN-wide conference will take place in 2013.

SINGAPORE

Amendment to Computer Misuse Act proposed

In early November, a bill was put forward in Parliament [to amend section 15A](#) of the Computer Misuse Act “to allow for effective and timely measures against cyber threats that may endanger national interests or national security”, such as threats to the telecommunication networks, banking infrastructure, water, electricity, gas and public transportation systems. The government is proposing to include the word “cybersecurity” and include pre-emptive actions. For instance, the Minister for Home Affairs [may ask for](#) information on “the design, configuration, operation or security of any computer, computer program or computer service”.

THAILAND

Changes to lese majeste laws defeated

Somsak Kiatsuranond, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Thailand, has [rejected](#) any debate on a proposed bill to amend Thailand’s *lèse majesté* laws. According to a spokesperson for the Speaker, Kiatsuranond was in no position to [open the debate](#) to any amendment as Thailand’s charter did not allow for any changes to laws relating to the monarchy. As [previously reported](#), efforts to undermine Thailand’s *lèse majesté* laws have met with considerable opposition from Thai courts in the past.