



The Citizen Lab

Southeast Asia CyberWatch:

April 2013

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

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FEATURED NEWS

MALAYSIA

Upcoming general elections

Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak [dissolved parliament](#) on April 3 and the 13th general election (also known as GE13) is scheduled to take place on 5 May 2013. The election is significant -- dubbed by the media as the "mother of all elections" -- as analysts forecast a tight race between the Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition, led by PM Najib Razak from the UMNO party, and the Pakatan

Rakyat (People's Pact) opposition alliance, led by former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. In the last election, [the UMNO-led coalition lost](#) its two-thirds parliamentary majority for the first time in more than 50 years.

Nearly 2,500,000 new voters [have registered](#) for the 2013 election with most of them set to vote for the first time. With a ban on political activity in Malaysian universities still in effect, the tech-savvy younger generation has been using social media to express their opinions. Malaysian Facebook users have surged from 800,000 during the 2008 polls to 13 million, nearly half of the country's population of 28 million, and they are prolific Twitter users. This trend has led [PM Razak to dub GE13](#) as Malaysia's "first social media election." A [preliminary report](#) [PDF] of a study jointly conducted by the University of Nottingham and Centre for Independent Journalism, which analyzed 26 media outlets, found that [online media delivers](#) the most "even-handed coverage of the elections" in the first week after the parliament was dissolved.

Attacks related to the election have ramped up, both offline and online. On April 25, [two petrol bombs](#) were thrown at an operations room of the governing Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition office outside of Kuala Lumpur, and just the day before, [a small explosion](#) disrupted a campaign event attended by BN supporters in northern Penang state. James Chin, a professor of political science at the Malaysian campus of Australia's Monash University, said that GE13 "is shaping up to be [the most violent election](#) in living memory."

In late March, a [pro-opposition alliance website](#) published a letter, signed by the secretary of the National Security Council and addressed to the Prime Minister, containing the opposition's campaign strategy, allegedly [obtained through email interception](#). In early April, the owner of alternative radio stations for Malaysian opposition -- Radio Free Malaysia, Radio Free Sarawak and the news portal Sarawak Report -- said that [they have been targeted by DDoS](#) (distributed-denial-of-service) attacks for weeks. Clare Rewcastle-Brown, the founder of all three news outlets, believes that the Malaysian government is behind the attacks. The alternative news websites Malaysiakini and HarakahDaily.net, have also [suffered from](#) DDoS attacks. In addition, Malaysiakini believes that Internet Service Providers may have been ordered to [limit or restrict access to its website](#) and has made an official complaint to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. In our latest report, "[For Their Eyes Only: The Commercialization of Digital Spying](#)," we have identified a FinSpy sample -- part of the remote intrusion and surveillance software, [FinFisher](#), distributed by the United Kingdom-based company, Gamma International -- that appears to be specifically targeting Malay language speakers, masquerading as a Word document discussing GE13 and as a Mozilla Firefox browser in both file properties and in manifest. [Click here](#) for a plain-language summary of our findings from Malaysia, as well as background on FinFisher.

CAMBODIA

Chinese and Taiwanese nationals arrested for online fraud

On April 26, 34 Chinese nationals and three Cambodians were [arrested](#) by the National Military Police in Phnom Penh for running an "international extortion ring." Recently, 24 Chinese and two Taiwanese nationals were arrested in Suong City for running a similar ring. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) equipment was said to be used by these rings to extort money from victims in the People's Republic of China by claiming to know various secrets about them or their families. Earlier in April, 17 Chinese nationals were [sentenced](#) to several years in prison for Internet fraud as well.

INDONESIA

Increase in the number of cyber crimes

The Indonesian Security Incident Response Team on Infrastructure or Coordination Center (id-SIRTII/CC) reported that the [number of cyber crimes in Indonesia has increased](#) from around 600 cases in 2010 to more than 700 in 2012. The Jakarta Police cyber crimes unit had a number of high-profile cases last year, including one involving a teenager in Depok, West Java, who was kidnapped and repeatedly raped, allegedly by a man she contacted on Facebook. The Associated Press reported that [as of October 2012](#), 27 of the 129 children reported missing to Indonesia's National Commission for Child Protection are believed to have been abducted after meeting their captors on Facebook. This is an increase from 18 similar cases [reported in all of 2011](#). The [losses incurred due to cyber crime](#) have also increased. Scams which involved losses of more than Rp 5 billion (approximately US\$514,405) have been reported and they accounted for at least 40 percent of 176 cyber crime cases recorded during the first four months of 2013.

MYANMAR

ICT technology and anti-Rohingya violence

Recent news reports have highlighted the role that ICT technologies play in creating a climate of hostility against Myanmar's minority Muslim Rohingya community. After the town of Meikhtila was [rocked](#) by communal strife starting in late March, [social media and mobile phone technology](#) helped spread the violence through the rapid dissemination of photos and videos. While ICT technology has been limited in the country, cyberspace has already been ["overwhelmed by hateful screeds against Muslims, Indians, Chinese, and other ethnic minorities."](#) A variety of civil society organizations met in April to discuss how Facebook users used the social media site to upset the country's ["tranquility"](#) through spreading false or inaccurate information, and plan to set up their own multi-stakeholder Facebook page to counter this hostile rhetoric. As [previously reported](#), the plight of the Rohingya people has been brought to the attention of social media users by the hacktivist group Anonymous through Twitter hashtag campaigns.

Google adds new support for users in Myanmar

As follow up to Google Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt's [visit](#) to Myanmar as a means of promoting Internet freedom, Google has introduced [support in Burmese](#) as well as six other local languages on

its [recently introduced search portal](#) for the country. Despite this gesture of support, Schmidt voiced [concerns](#) over the future of the Internet in Myanmar as tensions between ethnic groups have flared up on social media, which in turn may result in a backlash against online freedom.

PHILIPPINES

Taiwan and the Philippines sign “crime-fighting” agreement

After a series of Internet fraud cases involving Taiwanese citizens surfaced, the Philippines and Taiwan have signed a mutual ["crime-fighting" agreement](#) designed to help both countries in gathering evidence, freezing assets, and aiding in the deportation process of cyber criminals. The agreement came as a result of a contentious diplomatic row in 2011 over the arrest of several Taiwanese citizens using the Philippines as a base of operations to target victims in mainland China. In April, Filipino authorities [arrested 16 Taiwanese nationals](#) for an Internet scam aimed at retirees in China and Taiwan. Combating online fraud is part of the motivation behind the creation of the [controversial "Cybercrime Prevention Act"](#), which has been under a [federal restraining order](#), delaying its official enforcement.

SINGAPORE

State prosecution demands apology from online community over court-case backlash

In 2012, Yuan Zhenghua was sentenced to 25 months in jail for hijacking and crashing a taxi, resulting in the death of an airport worker. Comments on websites and Facebook pages accused the court of giving a lenient sentence because Zhenghua is a Chinese national. This prompted Singapore's Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) to demand an [apology](#) from those who made such statements. It is unknown how many sites received letters demanding an apology, although a Facebook page titled "EDMW Loves Singapore" has posted an official [statement](#). Bloggers have [criticized](#) the AGC's demand as a means of stifling "online dissent."

THAILAND

Rights organizations demand bail for magazine editor

The Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Geneva-based World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) have asked the Thai Court of Appeal to review the case of magazine editor [Somyot Prueksakasemsuk](#) and to grant him bail. As [previously reported](#), Somyot had been arrested by Thai authorities for allegedly insulting the Thai monarchy and was subsequently [sentenced](#) to 11 years in jail. FIDH and OMCT argued that Somyot's actions fell within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) definition of what constitutes [protected speech](#).

VIETNAM

Online “gay sitcom” breaking taboos

"My Best Gay Friends," an online YouTube series, has [gone viral](#) as the debate towards legalizing gay marriage in the country is underway. Each online episode has received approximately [one million views each](#). According to the show's creator, [the series will only be available online](#) as the "sensitive" subject matter did not "appeal to networks or their advertisers."

Blogger targeted for criticism of state

Vietnamese blogger Huynh Ngoc Tuan and his family have been repeatedly harassed for blog posts critical of the state, and has been fined for what the authorities say is "[propaganda against the Communist party and the state](#)." Recently, Huynh had his house [vandalized](#) with "rank liquid" consisting of human excrement, fish heads, and organs in an attack blamed on local security forces.

[Read previous editions](#) of the SEA Cyber Watch.