

BURMA

INTERNET ENEMY

Domain name: .mm

Population: 53 414 374

Internet-users: 300 000

Average charge for one hour's connection at a cybercafé: about 0,55 US\$

Average monthly salary: about 27,32 US\$

Number of imprisoned netizens: 2

Burma took drastic measures in 2010 to reorganise the country's Internet and to arm itself with the means, at the next sign of a crisis, to cut off its population's Web access without affecting official connections. Prior to the November 2010 elections – the first in twenty years – censors resorted to massive crackdowns, intimidation and cyberattacks to reduce the risk of any negative coverage. Tampering is now at its height.

WIDESPREAD NET CENSORSHIP IN BURMA

The regime is enforcing harsh and widespread Internet censorship. The Burmese firewall restricts users to an intranet purged of any anti-government content. Blocked websites include exiled Burmese media, proxies and other censorship circumvention tools, certain international media, and blogs and sites offering scholarships abroad.

In an interview granted to Rolling Stone magazine, American hacker and WikiLeaks member Jacob Applebaum, exposed the scope of the censorship by showing that only 118 of the country's 12,284 IP addresses are not blocked by the regime and have access to the World Wide Web. He also showed how vulnerable the network is the event of attacks.

Censors may also be counting on the complicity of Western companies. Some Burmese Internet service provi-

ders acquired censorship equipment and hardware from the Chinese subsidiary of the Franco-American company Alcatel-Lucent. On March 24, 2010, Reporters Without Borders and the Sherpa Association sent a letter to Alcatel-Lucent's management to ask for explanations, notably about the sale in Burma Lawful Interception Integrated hardware. The company denied this claim, insisting that it merely supplied telecom infrastructures within the framework of a Chinese-funded project.

Yet in an article appearing in the May 19-25, 2008 issue of the newspaper Myanmar Times, a spokesman for the state-controlled ISP Hanthawaddy confirmed that the Alcatel's Chinese subsidiary did indeed provide a website filtering and surveillance system.

OUTSTANDING BLOGGERS

Despite the regime's iron grip on the Internet, the number of bloggers keeps rising: there are now 1,500 of them, 500 of whom blog regularly. When Burmese bloggers based

veral days. They continued to occur until the elections were over, which made it extremely difficult for journalists and netizens to transmit videos and photos and to do their jobs.

The government shifted the blame to hackers whom they claimed launched the DDoS attacks on the country, but according to Burmese sources contacted by Reporters Without Borders, most of the attacks were allegedly launched by government agents to justify cutting off the Internet. The DDoS's were aimed at Internet service provider Myanmar Post and Telecommunications and constituted – according to the American IT security firm Arbor Networks – an onslaught “several hundred times” more than enough to overwhelm the country’s terrestrial and satellite network. They reportedly reached 10 to 15 GB of data per second, a magnitude much greater than in the highly publicised 2007 attacks against Georgia and Estonia.

During the 2007 Safran Revolution, Burmese netizens had circulated news and videos on the authorities’ bloody crackdown on monks and demonstrators. The regime subsequently cut off Internet access for several days. Connections are also slowed on key dates such as 8 August – the anniversary of the 1988 political uprising – and during the 2009 trial of dissident Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. After being released on 13 November 2010, the latter announced that she intends to set up a website to showcase her views and those of her political party, the National League for Democracy (NLD)

DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI: FREE AND CONNECTED?

The well-known Burmese dissident and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, who was cut off from all means of communication during her years under house arrest, now has an Internet connection in her home via the state-run ISP, Yatanarpon Teleport. She has declared that she intends to make full use of the Internet and social networks, particularly the Twitter micro-blogging site, in order to more effectively reach Burmese youths in the country and abroad and to hold online discussions. This latter initiative may prove challenging to achieve right now due to the poor quality of the Internet infrastructure. As for the dissident’s collaborators, they remain discreet about their role in developing the NLD’s online network, as they are subject to a severe penalty under the Electronics Act.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is aware that her communications will be closely monitored and that the regime may decide at any time to suspend her Internet access. She has allegedly stated that she has nothing to hide.