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Vietnam Blocks Facebook

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Writer Caroline Finlay has written for China Beat in the past about Southeast Asian news stories that have a China angle. Here, she draws parallels between Internet controls in Vietnam and those in China. She’s written about speech issues in Vietnam before, for instance see "Vietnam Youth Given Rare Chance to Protest–Against China” from May 2008.

By Caroline Finlay

Facebook users have begun having difficulty logging on to the social networking site, the Associated Press and the Inter Press Service reported on November 17th.

News agencies are citing an unverified document that says it’s from Vietnam’s Ministry of Public Security and states, "For security reasons and to fight against propagative activities that oppose the Party and the government, Department of Professional Technology – Office of Security Administration – Ministry of Public Security suggests that the addressed companies to apply technical methods to block thoroughly these following websites:” followed by a list of eight websites including two Facebook addresses.

Of the web sites listed, Facebook has gotten the most attention from the press and from Vietnam’s blogging community, many of whom had set up shop there after social networking site Yahoo! 360 was shut down this August. Almost five years of content was removed and many users lost friend lists and comments. Yahoo offered replacement services Yahoo! 360Plus and Yahoo! Profile, which have less functionality.

In an article on Vietnam news website Vietnamnet, Yahoo’s managing director said,

“Nhằm mục đích bảo vệ an toàn cho người dùng, Yahoo!360Plus không cho chuyển Quick Comment từ Yahoo!360 sang Yahoo!plus là nhằm ngăn chặn tình trạng AutoSpam. Với Yahoo!plus, Nếu phát hiện blog có nội dung xấu, Yahoo sẽ xử lý ngay blogger đó”.

“In reaching the goal of protecting the safety of all those using Yahoo!360Plus, there will not be a transfer of Quick Comment service from Yahoo!360 to Yahoo!Plus; the goal is to stop the problem of AutoSpam with Yahoo!Plus if bad content is discovered. Yahoo will immediately handle such bloggers.”

Most expatriates in Vietnam have used Facebook for longer than their Vietnamese counterparts and are upset because many use it to communicate with family and friends back home or to plan gatherings and charity events in Vietnam.

Many Facebook users are using workarounds and proxies and can still access the beloved social networking sight. The use of proxies and encryption is illegal in Vietnam.

The other six websites ordered blocked in the unverified document are:

THE VIETNAMESE DEMOCRATIC PARTY WEBSITE, WHICH HAS REPORTED PRIOR CENSORSHIP:

Ngày 6 tháng 8 năm 2009, trang web của Đảng Dân Chủ Việt Nam bị kẻ gian tại Việt Nam tấn công, chiếm lấy tên miền ddcvn.org và các tên miền khác. Trong thời gian phục hồi lại tên miền cũ, trang web chính thức của Đảng Dân Chủ Việt Nam, kể từ hôm nay, 24 tháng 8 năm 2009. Việc lấy cắp mật mã email, phá hoại các trang mạng thông tin, cài virus trên mạng internet là hành vi vi phạm pháp luật. Đảng Dân Chủ yêu cầu Nhà nước Việt Nam hợp tác ngăn chặn tình trạng tin tặc lộng hành này.

On August 6th, 2009, the Vietnamese Democratic Party’s website was attacked by evil doers in Vietnam, who seized the domain name ddcvn.org and all other domain names. While recovering that
website, the page www.ddcvn.info has served as the principal web page of the Vietnamese Democratic Party as of today, August 24th, 2009. The theft of the email cipher, the sabotage of the web news pages and the implantation of an internet virus were deeds in violation of the law. This is a crime. The Democratic Party demands the government of Vietnam cooperate and prevent this hacking and abuse of power.

**PRAJNA BUDDHIST MONETARY**

Posts articles citing the persecution and harassment of monks and nuns.

**THE VOICE OF THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE**

Has sections reporting on the Paracel and Spratly Islands, Sino-Viet and Viet-U.S. relations, and on striking and demonstration.

**RALLYING FOR DEMOCRACY**


**SAVE OUR COUNTRY**

Posts a scathing criticism of Vietnam’s founding father, Ho Chi Minh, on its front page.

**BRANDISHING THE SWORD OF KNOWLEDGE**

Một điều ai cũng phải công nhận rằng, muốn xây dựng một Cộng Đồng Người Việt Quốc Gia tại Hải Ngoại này thật vững mạnh là phải có sự yểm trợ thật hữu hiệu của hệ thống báo chí truyền thông. Không có sự tiếp tay nầy thì sinh hoạt của các Cộng Đồng tại địa phương sẽ bị giới hạn, mọi việc sẽ gặp rất nhiều khó khăn khi chuyên tải những thông tin cần phổ biến cho toàn thể đồng hương trong vùng.

One thing everyone needs to admit if they desire to create a truly powerful community of overseas Vietnamese is the need to have a truly effective and powerful press and free communication. Without that joining of hands, the life of all those in communities in all areas will be restricted and every activity will run into much hardship when carrying common news to their countrymen in the area.

The new restrictions on internet access are another step in the tightening of Vietnam’s media following its comparatively freer policy in the run-up to gaining entry into the World Trade Organization in January 2007. In 2005 and 2006 a number of stories reporting corruption featured prominently in the press, most notably the PMU 18 scandal, but in late 2008, political discussion in blogs was banned and users were told to post personal content only. Many Vietnamese language websites that directly and indirectly criticize the government have been blocked.

Vietnam may have taken to heart the example of its biggest trade partner, China, by blocking dissident and social networking websites, but unlike their northern neighbors Vietnamese users have access to Twitter and YouTube. Vietnamese bloggers writing on Sino-Viet relations are often censored for implying that the Chinese government influences Vietnam’s policy.

Vietnamese government officials have denied blocking Facebook according to a November 20th BBC report.