INTERNET ENEMIES

Internet Ennemies

The Internet represents freedom, but not everywhere. Under the pretext of protecting morals, national security, religion and ethnic minorities, even the "spiritual cultural and scientific potential of the country", many countries resort to filtering the Web in order to block some content. Governments have no hesitation in allowing their citizens only partial connections. Use of the Internet can rest on a tacit agreement: Governments do not make websites inaccessible in exchange for self-discipline on the part of Internet users.

The 12 "Internet Enemies" presented in this report (**Saudi Arabia, Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam**) have all transformed the network into an intranet, preventing Internet users from obtaining news seen as "undesirable". All of these countries mark themselves out not just for their capacity to censor news and information online but also for their almost systematic repression of Internet users.

Ten governments which Reporters Without Borders has placed under its own "surveillance", still alternate between censorship and harassment of Internet users.

But is blocking of news online still effective? Through experience and thanks to their technical knowledge, Internet users have learned to get round some censorship installed on the Web by their governments. In countries where access to news is prized, it is not unusual to find software to defeat online censorship installed on computers in cybercafés, and also managers willing to put them to use if need be. Internet experts belonging to some of the most recognised institutions constantly create and fine-tune software versions so as to adapt them to the reality of the virtual world and to ensure that news is accessible to all.

Even major Internet sector companies, who cooperate either willingly or unwillingly with censorship within the countries of the "Internet enemies", agreed a compromise at the end of 2008. By signing the Global Network Initiative, the US firms Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft publicly said that they wanted to respect their customers' freedom of expression worldwide. How much they may in reality defy the demands of authorities in countries to which they provide services remains to be seen. But it will no longer be as easy for governments of these countries to obtain confidential information about their citizens.

But for now, at least 69 people are behind bars for having expressed themselves freely online.

Australia and South Korea: democracies "under surveillance".

The Australian parliament in January 2008 examined a draft law requiring service providers to systematically provide two connections per household, one for adults and the other for children, both of them submitted to strict, and above all secret, filtering. This draft was put forward against a background in which anti-terror legislation is already allowing serious inroads into the confidentiality of private correspondence. Since 2001, the law has allowed an agency independent of the government to intercept all suspect email and to carry out independent investigations, including in the absence of any prior judicial authorisation.

South Korea, one of the world's most connected countries, also has recourse to some disproportionate measures to regulate the Net. A blogger was arrested on 7 January 2009 for having affected "financial exchanges in the markets" as well as the "credibility of the nation" because of articles he posted on one of the country's biggest discussion forums. He is still being held in detention.

A participatory censorship

The most technically advanced repressive regimes know it well: playing the online censorship card means taking the risk of coming up against experts determined to develop the tools to guarantee access to news despite everything. Most of the regions do not have the means to join an endless technological struggle.
So, in the face of the fad for social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and other online exchange platforms like the Arabic-language Maktoob and the Russian language LiveJournal, censorship operates through a battle of comments.

For example, in a bid to limit online criticism during the Beijing Olympics in August 2008, the government paid some Internet users to leave pro-government comments on the spaces reserved for online discussion where debates were being held. Called the "Five cents" – an ironic reference to the money paid for non spontaneous comments, they contributed to the manipulation of news and information. But there are other ways of manipulating online information.

During the Israeli offensive in Gaza in January 2009, hackers, chiefly Moroccans, Lebanese, Turks and Iranians launched hundreds of attacks against Israeli websites, targeting nearly Web 10,000 pages with the domain name ".co.il". Since the conflict ended, Israelis have hit back. An army of bloggers have been bombarding the Net with the views of the Jewish state.

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Burma

Domain name : .mm
Population : 47, 758,181
Internet-users : 40,000
Population : 27,601,038
Internet-users : 6,200,000
Average cost of one hour's connection in a cybercafé : 20 centimes (euro)
Average monthly salary : about 40 euros
Number of private service providers : 0
Number of public service providers : 2
Number of imprisoned bloggers : 2

Burma has one of the lowest Internet penetration rates in the world. However, its users are among the most threatened. Going on line is itself seen as a dissident act.

Only 40,000 people connect to the Internet, mostly in cybercafés in the cities. For most of the country, the bandwidth is barely higher than an individual ADSL connection in Europe. Downloading a single text can take an hour. With fewer than two users for 1,000 residents, Burma is probably one of the least connected countries in the world. In addition, service providers offer prohibitive prices for membership (an average of 25 euros a month).

Despite all this, Internet access has expanded since 2003 with the opening of the first cybercafés in Rangoon. Today, there are more than 200 in the capital. Moreover, the Burmese alphabet sits ill with the most recent software adaptations and it is often necessary to understand English to go online. Added to all this is the fact that laws relating to electronic communications and the dissemination of news online are among the most dissuasive in the world, exposing Internet-users to very harsh prison sentences. In the light of the narrowness of the network and the absence of any private service provider, the military regime has no difficulty in imposing restrictions.

Burma's media landscape is monolithic: it is entirely controlled by the state. The only independent sources of news are exiled media and the Burmese services of the *BBC*, *Radio Free Asia, Voice of America* and the *Democratic Voice of Burma.*

The Internet was introduced in Burma in 1997, but access to the network by individuals was only permitted   in 2000. The government feared losing its total control of this space. There are two service providers, MPT and Bagan Cybertech. The first of these belongs to the state and the second is hosted by the services of the Prime Minister.

Internet-users are officially banned from using messaging services apart from those provided by the government. However, computers in cybercafés frequently boast proxies for getting round censorship and to allow use of Yahoo!, Gmail and Hotmail. Currently, 0.1% of Burmese connect to the Internet inside the country. Government authorisation is required to get an Internet connection at home.

Rules that thwart freedom of expression

The Internet is regulated by the law on television and video and the Electronic Act, dating from 1996, that bans the import, possession and use of a modem without official permission, under threat of a 15-year prison sentence for "damaging state security, national unity, culture, the national economy and law and order".

A total of 14 journalists and two bloggers are currently in prison in Burma. The owner of two Rangoon cybercafés, **Nay Phone Latt** (http://www.nayphonelatt.net/), aged 28, who was arrested on 29 January 2008, is due to leave prison in 2020. He was sentenced under the Electronic Act for possessing a film viewed as "subversive". The comedian **Zarganar** was sentenced to 35 years in prison under the Electronic Act, after posting articles on the Internet criticising the authorities' management of humanitarian aid donated by the international community following Cyclone Nargis. His blog (http://zarganar-windoor.blogspot.com/) is one of Burma's most popular websites in terms of hits from within the country.

Since 2006, cybercafés have had to be approved as "public Internet access points". This obliges managers of cybercafés to carry out screen captures of each computer every five minutes. They must also be able to provide the identity card number of each user, along with their telephone number and their address each time they connect, if the regime requires it.

Since February 2008, the Censorship Bureau has ordered a score of newspapers to ensure the front page of their printed edition is exactly

the same as that on their website. They can only post online what has already appeared in the paper version, under threat of closure of the website. These steps have been taken against the weeklies *Weekly Eleven* (http://www.week-lyeleven.com/), *7 Days News* (http://www.planet.com.mm/news/), *Myanmar Times* (http://www.myanmar.com/myanmar-times/), *Flower News* (http://www.myanmar-visa.com/flowernews/index.htm), *Yangon Times* (http://www.theyangontimes.com/), and the monthlies *Popular, Action Times, Snapshot, Yati, Tharapu* and *Fashion Image*.

No news must be sent abroad

The harsh jail sentence against Zarganar was chiefly due to the fact that he had spoken to foreign media, particularly the *BBC* World Service, about delays on the part of the military authorities in providing assistance to the victims of cyclone Nargis. The regime takes good care to shut down any source of information when Burma is at the centre of the news, as happened in September 2007, for the first since 1988, when Buddhist monks withdrew their support form the regime and demonstrated against the dictatorship of General Than Shwe. The authorities then cracked down, isolating the country from the international scene by making it impossible for information to be sent abroad online.

As the first anniversary of the "Saffron Revolution" approached, four news websites based abroad were regularly targeted in denial-of-service attacks. These attacks consist of simultaneously sending thousands of requests to a server in order to block it. The magazine *The Irrawaddy* (http://www.irrawaddy.org), as well as the online daily *The New Era* (http://www.khit-pyaing.org), whose websites are hosted in Thailand, were targets of cyber-attack in September 2008, preventing them from putting out news. Despite the creation of a mirror site (http://their-rawaddy.blogspot.com), The Irrawaddy saw its hits reduced by half in three months.

The exiled media website the *Democratic Voice of Burma*, as well as *Mizzima*, devoted to news on Burma suffered the same type of attacks since August 2008. These were stepped up between 15 and 22 September, during which time both sites were equally inaccessible outside the country.

At the start of October 2008, the capital's cyber-cafés were inspected by soldiers who questioned clients about the sites they were looking at as well as the people with whom they were in contact online. According to their owners, the connections speeds were considerably reduced, making downloading photos and videos virtually impossible.

More information :

http://www.dvb.no/ (*Democratic Voice of Burma*): Burmese media based in Norway.
http://www.bma-online.org/ (Burma media association): independent organisation founded by Burmese journalists and writers in January 2001 to defend freedom of expression in Burma, member of a network of partner organisations of Reporters Without Borders.
http://www.burmanet.org: Burmanet News
http://www.irrawaddy.org: website of exiled opposition magazine *The Irrawaddy*.
http://jotman.blogspot.com/: news blog on the country and international news.
http://www.blc-burma.org/html/myan-mar%20law/lr_e_ml96_08.html : the 1996 law regulating the Burmese Internet.

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China

Domain name : .cn
Population : 1,321,290 000
Internet users : 300,000,000
Average cost of an hour's connection in a cybercafé : about 1.50 euros
Average monthly salary : about 170 euros (People's Bank of China)
Number of private access providers : figure not available
Number of public service providers : figure not available
Number of cyber-dissidents imprisoned : 49

The Chinese government has the sorry distinction of leading the world in repression of the Internet. With the world's largest number of Internet users, its censorship mechanisms are among the world's most blatant. However, the authorities are rarely caught napping on the content of articles posted online.

The Beijing Olympics were the occasion, under pressure from the media, for websites to be unblocked so that journalists could have access to news worldwide. However, it was especially the English versions of Wikipedia, YouTube and Blogspot that were made accessible. The Chinese versions of these sites remained blocked and most foreign-based Chinese news websites are still inaccessible.

Nearly 40,000 employees of the state and the party monitor files circulating on the Internet. Since it was introduced into the country in 1987, the authorities have controlled the information available through their expertise on the Web. For example, the largest blog platform used in the country is monitored by the information ministry. Since all the blogs on this platform are hosted in China, the government can easily control them if they consider their content to be contrary to the Party's principles. In 2008, nearly 3,000 news websites were made inaccessible within the country.

The censorship system is highly organised. The Information Bureau of the Council of State and the Publicity Department (formerly the Propaganda Department) are the main instruments of censorship. They tirelessly send instructions to websites. One such example: "The newspaper *Minzhu yu Fazhi Shibao* (Democracy and Legal Times) is using unregulated sources of information. We ask you therefore not to use articles originating with this newspaper. Websites which have reproduced them are asked to delete them immediately. Please reply to this message". This order was sent to websites on 8 May 2006 by Fan Tao, deputy director of the Internet news management bureau in Beijing.

The government filters news through the use of key words. These "banned" words can sometimes be replaced by asterisks and controlled by moderators before they are posted online. For example, all the words associated with the pro-democracy movement, bloodily suppressed by the authorities, on Tiananmen Square in 1989 are prohibited on the network: "1989.6.4", "student wave of 89", "student movement of 89", "unrest", "riots", "massacres", "rebellion" and so on. Internet users tend to use signs such as " ", " / ", " \ ", between the words to avoid censorship, but websites have installed new filters that can detect these codes. Websites even pick up homonyms and synonyms. There are today around 400-500 banned key words relating to the events of 4 June 1989.

The information ministry launched a major filtering campaign on 5 January 2009, in a bid to counter pornography. The minister urged all Internet actors to redouble their vigilance on content of websites to which they allowed access. The authorities particularly asked hosts and access providers to regulate online publications themselves, which the state enterprises did. But among the blocked websites were the *New York Time*s and the political blog portal Bullog (http://www.bullog.cn), because this one "posts a huge amount of negative news in the political field", the information ministry said.

A "Made in China" Internet that mistrusts all competition

Control exercised by the Chinese Communist Party is eased greatly by the fact that it is services provided by Chinese companies that attract the use, ahead of Yahoo! and Google, the most-used search engine is Baidu.cn, which makes up 60% of searches (20% for Google) and scrupulously filters "subversive" content. On subjects such as the "Tiananmen massacre" or "Charter 08" the following message appears: "Some results are not displayed according to laws, rules and politics".

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The most used blog platform is Sina, which was the first to obtain a government licence to post news. It is subjected to a self-discipline pact imposed by the Internet Society of China (ISC), affiliated to the Chinese ministry of industry and information, in August 2007. The pact "encourages" registration of the identity of clients before posting their articles and keeping their personal information. The judicial authorities effectively have a monopoly on the closure of certain websites.

Far from easing the pressure, the government has issued new regulations that came into force in January 2008, forcing websites to obtain advance permission from the government.

Foreign Internet sector companies are also being brought to heel. The Google search engine google.cn, has been censored since 2004. Yahoo! was pushed into denunciation during the riots that shook Tibet in March 2008 and it posted portraits of four Tibetan demonstrators alongside an appeal for witnesses. Shortly afterwards, one of the demonstrators gave himself up and another was arrested after being denounced. The same goes for the company Skype which, following an agreement with Chinese firm TOM, allows the authorities to intercept its communications.

Online information in defiance of the authorities

According to the China Internet Network Information Center (Cnnic), the symbolic bar of 300 million Internet users was passed in January 2009. One quarter of these have their own blog. Despite "preventive" control of the flow of information, a space for expression does exist for Chinese Internet users. Individuals have achieved prominence thanks to their online work as "citizen journalists". The blogger **Zhou Shuguang**, nicknamed **Zola**, has won the confidence of his readers by covering social issues. His website, which is not censored inside the country, has become a reference in China. The blogger, who has become the spokesman for the conditions of Chinese workers, is however watched by the local authorities who, for example, banned him from going to Beijing during the Olympics. He is also unable to leave the country.

Currently, 49 cyber-dissidents and bloggers are behind bars, most of them for "revealing state secrets abroad". And 2009 is a test year for the circulation of news online. Two historic anniversaries are coming up this year: the 50th anniversary of the uprising of the Tibetan people and the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen revolt. A crackdown has already begun to prevent things getting out of hand. The renowned human rights defender **Liu Xiaobo** was arrested on 8 December 2008 for posting an article online based on the 1977 Charter of Czechoslovak dissidents. More than 300 intellectuals and human rights activists were the original signatories of "Charter 08", which calls for democratic reform and respect for basic freedoms. Liu Xiaobo is still awaiting trial.

Three subjects were widely followed and discussed by Internet users in 2008 and 2009: the organisation of the Beijing Olympics in August 2008, the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008 and the scandal of the contaminated milk sold by the Sanlu factory, which sickened 12,900 babies, two of whom died.

The Beijing Olympics in August 2008, focused international attention on China. Militants took advantage of the opportunity to repeat their demands. **Hu Jia** was one of these, calling for democratic reform. He was arrested in December 2007 and sentenced to three and a half years in prison for "incitement to subversion of state power" on 3 April 2008. The Internet activist used his blog to condemn repression of human rights defenders by the Chinese regime.

Internet users criticised the distribution of aid after the Sichuan earthquake and called for a national mobilisation. One of them, **Huang Qi**, has been held since 10 June 2008 in the Sichuan capital of Chengdu for posting articles on his website www.64tianwang.com condemning the poor management of international aid by the local authorities.

The scandal of the contaminated milk at the Sanlu factory, broke on 14 September 2008. However, a journalist on the magazine *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekly) turned out to have had most of the information about it since July 2008. If he had been authorised to reveal the information as soon as it was known, the catastrophic health consequences of this food poisoning – nearly 13,000 children affected and at least two deaths – could have been very much reduced. But for reasons connected with China's image, the information was officially cen-

-sored before and during the Olympic Games. The government sent the media written censorship instructions, including Article 8 that said "any subject linked to food safety, such as mineral water being a source of cancer cannot be published".

More information :

http://cmp.hku.hk/: website of the Study centre for Journalism and Media at Hong Kong University (English).

http://boxun.us/news/publish/ (Boxun): news website on China (English and Mandarin).
http://crd-net.org: website of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (English and Mandarin).
http://www.hrichina.org/: website of Human Rights in China (English).
http://www.xinhuanet.com : official Xinhua news agency (English, Mandarin).
http://sirc.blogspot.com : blog on the Internet in Asia (English).
http://blog.sina.com.cn/xujinglei : blog of Chinese star Xu Jinglei, the most popular in the country (Mandarin).

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Cuba

Domain name : .cu
Population : 11,200,000
Internet users : 1,310,000
Average cost of one hour's connection in a cybercafé : 1.20 euro for the national network - 4 euros for international.
Average monthly salary : 13 euros
Number of private access providers : 0
Number of public access providers : 2
Number of cyber-dissidents imprisoned : 0

Cuban Internet users can now connect to the international network but at a crippling price. The Raul Castro government's promise in 2008 to put an end to "excessive prohibitions" has very far from been kept.

Since May 2008, Cuban citizens have been allowed to use Internet connections in tourist hotels. They can look at foreign websites that are not filtered by the authorities. But, for the minister of information science and communications, Boris Moreno, "The use of the Internet [must serve] to defend the Revolution and the principles in which [Cuba] has believed for years".

The network is in fact closely monitored by the Cuban Supervision and Control Agency which comes under the information ministry. This body awards licences, fixes prices and connection possibilities. In addition, the island only has one Internet service provider, ETEC SA, that offers one of the world's most restricted networks. Cybercafés are few and far between.

The island should be connected to the network between now and 2010 thanks to a fibre optic cable via Venezuela, to get round the embargo imposed by the USA since 1962. Chinese company Huawei has financed the connection for the west of the island at a level of 40% but these works will not allow very significant web access.

The island with two networks

The Cuban Internet is divided into two networks. The "national" network only allows access to government websites and a .cu email address, carefully controlled by the authorities so that no "subversive" message gets on to it. This "collective" connection is provided free to universities and doctors for example. For others, a connection is three times cheaper than the international network.

Until May, the international network was reserved for foreigners in Cuba, who could get access to it from hotels to which Cubans were denied access. The international network however remains one of the most difficult to access, failing any means of getting round censorship. Search engines Yahoo! and Google are for example inaccessible because of the US embargo on the island. If one types "google.fr", one is redirected to the pages of the official Cuban newspaper (*Granma*) or of the state news agency Prensa Latina. But the information available on this network has also been selected by the Cuban government, which block access to websites such as the *BBC*, *Le Monde*, and *Nuevo Herald* (Miami-based Spanish-language daily).

Government administrative staff are among the very few privileged people whom the regime allows to connect at no charge to the international network using access codes they are provided with. Others have to pay from 6 to 12 dollars an hour, which is a considerable sum for a Cuban citizen.

Profile of a blogger

Despite the access problems, Cuba's few bloggers are very active, their posts relayed by the Cuban community in the United States, chiefly putting out news about the situation on the island.

Since Raul Castro took power on 24 February, it is no longer an offence to own a laptop computer or a mobile telephone. However the market price is a deterrent, often equivalent to several months' salary. Some Cuban bloggers share access codes and computers to get themselves heard but they know they are running risks.

In fact, Cuban Internet users face up to 20 years in prison if they post an article considered to be "counter-revolutionary" on a foreign-hosted website, and five years if they connect illegally to the international network. In one such case, in 2007, journalist **Oscar Sanchez Madan**, correspondent for Cubanet in Matanzas province, was sentenced to four years in prison "for tendency to social dangerousness". Under this pro-

-vision of Cuban criminal law, any citizen, even if he has committed no offence, is liable for imprisonment in the name of the threat he could pose to society. Despite this, a score of citizens regularly post blogs from Cuba, even if they are inaccessible on the island. They are often not their own administrators because the network is too restricted and often too slow.

Since 20 March 2008, the platform Desdecuba.com (www.desdecuba.com), which includes an online magazine, Consenso, and six blogs, has been inaccessible from public connection points, although it can be accessed from cybercafés and hotels. The few private connections used for professional reasons or in secret, take at least 20 minutes to upload a welcome page, making it impossible to edit comments or to moderate them.

Some dissident voices have been targeted by the authorities. The blogger **Yoani Sanchez** (www.desdecuba/generacionY), laureate of the Ortega y Gasset prize in the "digital journalism" category, cannot leave Cuba since the authorities refuse to give her a passport. The authorities have also used their power of dissuasion to cancel a meeting she tried to organise between the island's bloggers in December 2008. Her blog is one of the rare breaches in the information control dam, and has led to her being accused of "illegal activity".

More information :

http://www.cubanet.org : website of an independent journalist in Cuba (English and Spanish).
http://www.desdecuba.com/generaciony:
 (Generacion Y): Yoani Sanchez's blog in Havana (Spanish).
http://www.granma.cu : website of official daily *Granma* (French, English, Spanish).
http://www.prensa-latina.cu : website of government news agency (English, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, Italian, Portuguese).

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Egypt

Domain name : .eg
Population : 81,713,517
Internet users : 10,532,400
Average cost of an hours connection in a cybercafé : about 0.15 centimes (euro)
Average monthly salary : about 40 euros
Number of private service providers : 208
Number of public service providers : 1
Number of imprisoned bloggers : 2

The vitality of the Egyptian blogosphere on the international scene is far from being an advantage for the bloggers involved, who are among the most hounded in the world.

Three bodies run the Egyptian Internet: The Information and Decision Support Centre – which also advises the authorities in the socio-economic and political field; The Supreme Council of Universities – because the network was initially developed to ease exchange of information in the academic world - ;as well as Telecom Egypt, which owns one of the country's biggest service providers, TEData.

There are more than 200 private service providers. Each public Internet access point can provide the user with a telephone number to go online via a modem. Despite the government's efforts to make computers more affordable, the Internet penetration rate remains low at 12.9%. But ADSL, launched in 2004, is attracting more and more users; there were 427,100 in December 2008, twice as many as in 2007.

Since the beginning of 2007, the government has stepped up its surveillance of the Web in the name of the fight against terrorism. Officials monitor information exchanged online and cybercafés have to obtain a licence from the telecommunications ministry under threat of closure. Some cybercafé owners have said that they had been ordered to note and file all their customers' identity card numbers. Large numbers of people use these cybercafés that are under surveillance because the charges are so much lower than that of individual subscriptions, sometimes shared between several users. The authorities have since last summer applied regulations to access to the WiFi network, which is having a direct impact on freedom of expression. To connect to the wireless network, a customer has to provide a mobile phone number and some personal data such as identity card numbers, address and so on, which gives rise to concerns about freedom of speech.

The banner of the state of emergency law

Unlike its Saudi and Syrian neighbours, Egypt is a country in which freedom of speech does still exist. An independent press has developed and criticism is permitted.

More than a space for expression, the Web has become a space for action, particularly through social networks, which little by little have started taking on the role of trade unions, which were banned under the state of emergency law. In force since 1981, the emergency legislation banned trade unions from political activities. But the most active Internet users call virtual rallies that can give rise to genuine political demands. One group, created on the social networking site Facebook, and boasting more than 65,000 members, was used to channel protests in April 2008. Calling on Egyptians to "stay home", it contributed to a general strike and one of the largest expressions of unrest in several years. Since no law regulated this space, the interior ministry in 2002 set up a department responsible for investigating online offences. As a result, security forces arrested around 100 bloggers in 2008 for "damaging national security" .

One of the members of the 6 April Facebook group, **Esraa Abdel Fattah Ahmed** spent two weeks in prison for being a member of this group. Its creator, **Ahmed Maher**, a 27-year-old engineer, was detained and beaten for 12 hours by police in Mahalla, north of Cairo, who wanted to identify the rest of the group. Shortly afterwards, another blogger, **Kareem El-Beheiri**, spent 73 days in custody in connection with articles posted on his blog (http://egyworkers.blogspot.com/), dealing with workers' rights and official corruption.

Currently, two cyber-dissidents are behind bars because of the opinions they have posted online. **Dia'Eddin Gad**, aged 22, was arrested at his home in Kattour, in Gharbiyah province, in the Nile delta on 6 February 2009. He started a blog in January 2009, "A voice in anger" (http://soutgadeb.blogspot.com), on which he

posted articles criticising the Egyptian government's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where he presented himself as "an Egyptian citizen who loves his country and wishes it long life along with its courageous people". He is being held in an unknown detention centre and the authorities have not provided any explanation.

On 22 February 2007, **Abdel Kareem Nabil Suleiman**, aka "**Kareem Amer**", was sentenced to three years in prison for "insulting the president" and one year for "incitement to hatred of Islam", because of his comments on an Internet forum seen as overly critical of the government. He used his blog to regularly condemn abuses on the part of President Hosni Mubarak's government and the country's highest religious authorities, in particular the Sunni university of al-Azhar, where he was studying law. He has become a symbol of political re-

pression by the authorities against bloggers in the Arab world. He was the laureate in the cyber-freedoms category of the 2007 Reporters Without Borders – Fondation de France prize.

More information :

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/ : site du Centre d'information et de décision (anglais et arabe).
http://www.hrinfo.net : site de l'association HRInfo, défenseur des droits de l'homme dans le monde arabe (anglais et arabe), membre du réseau des organisations partenaires de Reporters sans frontières.
http://www.ise.org.eg : site de la « société égyptienne de l'Internet » (anglais et arabe).
http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com/ : blog de Wael Abbas (arabe principalement. Quelques articles en anglais).
http://www.karam903.blogspot.com : blog de Kareem Amer (arabe).

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Iran

Domain name : .ir
Population : 72,769,694
Internet users : 23,000,000
Average cost of an hour's connection in a cybercafé : 70 centimes (euro)
Average monthly salary : 200 to 300 euros
Number of private service providers : more than 50
Number of public service providers : 1
Number of imprisoned cyber-dissidents : 4

Iran leads the way in the Middle East in repression of the Internet. According to the Tehran prosecutor general's adviser, the authorities blocked five million websites in 2008. However the country has the region's most militant bloggers, four of whom are currently in prison.

Internet penetration is above average in the region and in the run-up to presidential elections due on 12 June, the authorities appear to be stepping up their control. The main service providers rely on the state-run Iranian Telecommunications Company (ITC). Despite the existence of private companies, the state remains the main actor in the market and instructions given by the Minister of Culture and Islamic Orientation, Mohammed Saffar Harandi, are quickly applied.

The Iranian parliament's justice commission on 3 November 2008, decided to set up a new filtering committee ratifying some articles in the draft law on "Internet offences". However, since 2003, the government has already had in place a commission dedicated to establishing a blacklist of websites seen as "illegal", including YouTube, Facebook and Orkut. Moreover, a draft law dating from 2 July 2008, is in the process of being adopted, that punishes with the death penalty "the creation of blogs and websites promoting corruption, prostitution and apostasy".

A special prosecutor's office makes decisions on censorship and is made up of a team of computer specialists. Tehran's Prosecutor General of Tehran, Said Mortazavi, said that it was planned that "two special inspectors will work together with the security services". "This prosecutor's office has already dismantled two groups working against the government on the

Internet," he added in an interview with the official news agency Fars. In this way, "The Internet will be made safe because anti-religious and immoral activities will be tried there". The commander of the "special forces for moral security" said on 8 February 2009 that "identifying banned websites and arresting Internet users that go on them is one of [its] responsibilities". It was the first time that the police raised this subject.

Crackdown on political bloggers increases in run-up to presidential elections

The pro-government press considers the Internet to be "subversive". The authorities in 2008, arrested or questioned 17 bloggers, seven more than in 2007. More than 38 news websites were censored and in the run-up to presidential elections, foreign news websites are also being censored.

The Persian-language website of the German media *Deutsche Welle* (www.dw-world.de/dw/0,,641,00.html) has been inaccessible since 26 January, as has the Persian-language site of Radio France International (http://www.rfi.fr/actufa/pages/001/accueil.asp) and the Arabic-language site of *al-Arabiya* television (http://www.alarabiya.net/persian/). Reporters Without Borders' tests carried out on 26 and 27 January, found the blocking was affecting the cities of Tehran, Qom, Ahvaz, Karaj, Tabriz, Bousher, Meched and Chiraz. Against this background, **Esmail Jafari**, editor of the blog Rah Mardom (Voice of the People - http://www.poutin.blogfa.com), was sentenced on 6 December to five months in prison for having covered a demonstration in front of the city prefecture by around 20 workers in Bushehr, south-west Iran, in protest at being sacked, in April. He was sentenced for "publicity against the regime" and "revealing information abroad".

Since 24 January 2009, several news websites criticising government policy or belonging to potential opponents of the president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, have also been made inaccessible by various service providers. Farda News (www.fardanews.com) and Parsine (www.parsine.com), both close to Tehran mayor, Mohammed Baqer Qalibaf, a rival of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, have been closed down. Likewise, on 22 February two sites were blocked that supported the candidacy of the reforming ex-president Mohammad Khatami to the 12 June

presidential elections. They were Yarinews, an information portal for Khatami supporters and the website Yaari, which collects messages of support for the former president.

Repression not only affects the authors of critical comments about the outgoing president, who is determined to protect his political image ahead of 12 June, Journalist Mojtaba Lotfi was arrested on 8 October for posting online remarks by the ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, a renowned opponent of the Supreme Guide of the Islamic Revolution, as well as remarks by the ayatollah Ali Khamenei, critical of a statement by President Ahmadinejad that Iran was the "world's freest country" (http://www.amontazeri.com/farsi/default.asp). He was sentenced on 29 November 2008 to four years in prison and five years banishment by a special cleric court in the city of Qom, in the central-north of the country.

The blogger **Hossein Derakhshan**, who is often invited to speak about the state of the Internet at international conferences, was arrested on 1st November 2008. One of the reasons for his arrest was posting articles about key figures of the Shiite faith on his blog (http://www.hoder.com). According to his family, he is still being detained, while an investigation into his case is being held.

Women continue to be targeted for harassment by the authorities

Crackdowns on Internet users and the Internet are all the more significant since they are recognised internationally for their criticism of the policies of President Ahmadinejad.

The Iranian women's collective behind the campaign, "One million signatures for the abolition of discriminatory laws against women", launched in 2005, won the Simone de Beauvoir prize for the freedom of women on 9 January 2009, securing themselves a major role in this struggle. Posting the collective's message online ensured high visibility on the international scene. But on the other side of the coin, it also ensured unprecedented hounding by the authorities. Women bloggers who took part in this campaign were summoned to a revolutionary tribunal at least three times in 2009. Five of them (**Parvin Ardalan, Jelveh Javaheri, Maryam**

Hosseinkhah and **Nahid Keshavarz**) were sentenced to six months in prison for "publishing news against the regime". The authorities' accusations centre on their contributions to the online newspaper Zanestan (The City of women - http://herlandmag.net/) and Tagir Bary Barbary (Change for equality - http://we-change.org/).

At the end of 2008, Tagir Bary Barbary suffered its 18th incident of blocking in two years and http://www.feministschool.com its eighth. The blog http://www.zhila.net, run by **Jila Bani Yaghoub**, lawyer and director of womeniran.com who regularly defends rights for women in Iran, is also inaccessible. Blogger Shahnaz Gholami, a member of the Association of Women Journalists (ARZ), who has been particularly involved in the women's rights struggle, spent 69 days in custody. This editor of the blog Azar Zan (http://azarwomen.blogfa.com) was arrested because the authorities considered that "the articles were damaging to national security" and that "the accused clearly said that she had posted these articles on her weblog".

Another sign of deteriorating freedom of expression in Iran came on 21 December when the Circle of Human Rights Defenders, providing free legal aid to Iran's journalists and human rights activists, founded in Tehran in 2002 by lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize winner, **Shirin Ebadi**, was closed on the order of the authorities.

More information :

http://www.advarnews.us/ : website of a student organisation on human rights in Iran (Farsi).
http://www.entekhab.org/ : news website of the conservative party (Farsi).
http://norooznews.ir/ : news website of the reformist party (Farsi).
http://www.farsnews.com/ : website of the official news agency (English and Farsi).
http://we-change.org/ : Tagir Bary Barbary - (Change to equality - Farsi and English): feminist newspaper to which Maryam Hosseinkhah contributes.
http://irwomen.net/ : website of the Association of Iranian Women (Farsi).
http://www.feministschool.com/ : Iranian feminist website (Farsi).
http://www.humanrights-ir.org : website of the Circle of Human Rights Defenders (Farsi).

Internet Ennemies

North Korea

Domain name : .kp
Population : 23,479,089
Internet users : not available
Average price of an hour's connection in a cybercafé : 6 euros
Average monthly salary : 20 to 35 euros
Number of private service providers : 0
Number if public service providers : 1
Number of imprisoned bloggers : 0

North Korea is a model of control of news and information in a country where all forms of communication are at the service of the regime.

The North Korean Internet, which operates like an Intranet, has been available since 2000 and can provide email, a censored search engine, a browser and a few news sites that have been carefully selected by the government. The only available Web pages have been approved by the authorities and come from the data banks of the Democratic People's Republic's three biggest libraries (The Grand People's Study House and the Kim Il-sung and Kim Chaek universities).The information available is usually connected with science and is only accessible to a few handpicked people like academics and bureaucrats.

To get on the network, cybercafés owners must obtain permission from the official Korean Computer Center (KCC) which controls all online information and is the service provider. Cybercafés allow use of chat rooms and access to a restricted network. Police made several raids on places offering more open access during the summer of 2007. Since 2004, only foreigners and a few members of the government have been able to use a non filtered Internet through a satellite link with servers based in Germany.

An agreement signed in December 2007 on greater co-operation between the two Koreas allowed access from 7am and 10pm for South Korean employees on the Kaesung industrial complex north of the demilitarised zone and at the tourist site at Mont Kumgang-san (Diamond Mountain), in the east of the country, until 2008.

Internet at the service of the regime's propaganda

Only two websites are hosted under the domain name ".kp": the KCC (kcce.kp), which keeps the North Korean network under surveillance, and that of the governmental portal http://www.naenara.kp. But government propaganda is not limited to these two sites. The official news agency, the Korean Central New Agency, kcna.co.jp, is supplied by North Koreans producing propaganda from Japan. The headlines of the articles reflect Kim-Jong il's schedule and are put out in English, Russian and Spanish. The same goes for the website Uriminzokkiri.com, which is devoted to the glory of the "Dear Leader" Kim Il-sung, praising North Korea's "Juche" (self reliance) ideology and reporting on inaugurations and presents received by Kim-Jong il.

There are a total of 30 websites of this kind and South Korean police have identified 43 pro-North Korean sites based abroad and which they say are hostile to South Korea. Constantly vigilant about his image, Kim Jong-il has in fact set up websites addressed particularly to South Koreans. His government on 26 January 2008 even accused its southern neighbour of violating its citizens' right to information since sites reporting on Kim Jong-il's activities were inaccessible.

Even mobile phone use is regulated

The regime launched its first mobile phone service in November 2002 but soon banned citizens from using it, confining this privilege to the military elite. The regime interrupted the service in 2004 so as to "protect North Koreans from all foreign news" following a train accident in Ryongchun on the border with China, that left 161 people dead, but also because of the growing black market in mobile phones at the South Korean border. Since then, Pyongyang has retaken control of the phone network and on 1st February 2008, the government signed an agreement with an Egyptian company Orascom Telecom, allowing it to keep a grip on the network for 25 years, under KCC management. Since December 2008, it has cost almost the equivalent of 400 euros to open an account – equal to around ten month's salary. The black market therefore still thrives and Chinese mobile phones have reached the border, allowing North Korean Internet users to go online … on the Chinese Web.

More information ;

http://www.dailynk.com/english/ : independent North Korean daily produced by former North Korean journalists.

http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/ : Uriminzokkiri, website dedicated to Kim Jong-il, created by the government.English version:http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/Newspaper/English/main.php).

http://www.dprkorea.com/ : website promoting tourism.

http://www.kcna.co.jp/ : KCNA, official government news agency.

http://nkay.blogsome.com : collaborative human rights blog.

http://www.linkglobal.org/ : Liberty in North Korea, human rights organisation (English).

Internet Ennemies

Internet Ennemies

Saudi Arabia

Domain name : .sa
Population : 27,601,038
Internet-users : 6,200,000
Average cost of one hour's connection in a cybercafé : not available
Average salary : not available
Number of private service providers : 22 (official figure)
Number of public service providers : 1
Number of imprisoned bloggers : 0

The Saudi authorities have not made official their filtering of websites but they do crack down on bloggers who challenge their morality, whatever the nature of the demands. A highly dissuasive policy in a country which does not have a criminal code and which arrests authors of "content that is offensive or violates the principles of the Islamic religion and social norms".

In the first such move, Saudi authorities in 2008 imprisoned the blogger **Fouad al-Farhan** for more than four months for posting on his blog (http://www.alfarhan.org), an article describing the "advantages" and "disadvantages" of being a Muslim. Nicknamed "the godfather", Fouad al-Farhan is one of the kingdom's best known bloggers. His arrest was a message of intimidation to the blogosphere. Saudi authorities arrested the blogger **Hamoud Ben Saleh** on 13 January 2009 for having used his website to describe his conversion to Christianity. His site, http://christforsaudi.blogspot.com, was added to the list of more than 400,000 that are officially blocked to "protect Saudi society".

Net filtering was initially carried out by the Internet Service Unit, which comes under the Department of Science and Technology at the King Abdul Aziz University, but was entrusted in March 2007 to a specialised commission linked to the government. This commission stepped up filtering to combat terrorism, fraud, pornography, defamation and "violation of religious values". Steps in this regard were taken at the start of 2008 making legally responsible service providers or distributors of computer equipment who failed to observe the rules. So, a cybercafé owner is liable to a prison sentence for posting on his premises of an article contrary to these "religious values".

Easy export of censorship

The reach of the Saudi Internet is such that censorship affecting the kingdom sometimes spills over to other countries using the same networks to get connected. Since the end of 2008, the Saudi Communications Authority has ordered the blocking of some websites, because of their content dealing with religious matters or morals, making access to them impossible.

As a result, the hosting and web design site Onix.com has been inaccessible since December in Saudi Arabia and in the United Arab Emirates, along with the blog of Eve, a Saudi woman who deals with the rights of women and religious affairs in the country. Onix.com hosts blogs including that of Ali al-Omary, the first blind Arab blogger, whose site is highly popular in the region.

But the Saudis also protect their "friends" in the region. In January 2008, a Syrian organisation got a site on the Saudi network that was criticising Syria shut down. This very popular website, Elaph, has however been accessible again in Saudi Arabia since 19 February 2009, without any explanation from the authorities. The wide-ranging website al-hora (http://al-hora.com/) has been inaccessible since 25 December 2007. It deals with all subjects, from politics to culture and allows Internet users to post their own comments.

Online exchanges are considered to be a factor in immorality. Posting a comment on a website deemed "immoral" by the authorities can lead to arrest. This is all the easier since the kingdom does not have a written criminal code. Security services and courts base judgements on vague and extremely broad notions of criminal law.

Social networks lead to immorality

Because of this, websites that promote exchanges between bloggers, such as virtual social networking sites, MySpace and Tagged, are inaccessible in the kingdom. Certain sites allowing users to get round online censorship are also blocked, as is the Arabic version of the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. Censorship is very broad, going from websites of political organisations to those of non-recognised Islamist movements, and including any publication with

anything to do with sexuality, so as to "protect citizens from content that is offensive or violates the principles of the Islamic religion and social norms".

In fact, Saudi women, who are not allowed to work in shops or to drive cars, have enthusiastically taken to the Internet, making up two-thirds of users in 2000. The appearance of blogs has allowed them to express themselves freely about their daily lives. That is why sites dealing with the feminine condition are very widely filtered. For example, the site "The voice of women" (http://www.saudiwomen.net) has been blocked since 15 October 2008 by the Saudi Communications Authority, which considers it to be contrary to official policy. But censorship also bars any consultation of health advice (breast cancer checks for example), because of the use of key words.

The blogger **Hamoud Ben Saleh** is not the only victim of online religious censorship. The blogger and poet **Rushdie al-Ghadir** was arrested by the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) on 4 No-vember 2008. He was accused of blasphemy over poems posted on his website (http://rushdie.mkatoobblog.com). Al-Ghadir was interrogated for eight hours by police in Dammam in the east of the country and was forced to promise not to write any more such poems. The blogger laid a complaint against the CPVPV the next day.

More information :

http://www.saudihr.org/ : human rights website in Saudi Arabia (English and Arabic).
http://www.gulfissues.net/ : news website on Gulf countries (English).
http://saudijeans.org/ : blog by a student in Riyadh (English).
http://arabictadwin.maktoobblog.com/ : web-site of the Saudi Union of bloggers (Arabic).
http://www.saudiblogs.org : aggregator of Saudi blogs (English).
http://www.elaph.com : news website on the Arab world (Arabic).
http://www.menber-alhewar.com : website dis-cussing human rights in Saudi Arabia (censored in the kingdom).

Internet Ennemies

Internet Ennemies

Syria

Domain name : .sy
Population : 19,747,586
Internet users : 2,132,000
Average price of an hour's connection in a cybercafé : de 50 centimes (euro)
Average monthly salary : about 140 euros in the public sector
Number of private access providers : 4
Number of public access providers : 2
Number of imprisoned bloggers : 1

After China and Vietnam, the Syrian Arab Republic is one of the world's most repressive countries towards Internet users. Five cyber-dissidents are behind bars for having gone online.

At the outset, the government allowed the market to develop, using rivalry among access provider competitors to help Syrians to get online more easily. Six operators have shared the market since 2005, STE (The Ministry of Telecommunications), the state-owned Syrian Computer Society (SCS) and four private access providers Aya, Cec-Sy, ZAD and SyriaTech. It is no longer necessary to have a particular professional reason to get an Internet connection, just a matter of producing an identity card or a passport.

Internet use continues to rise in Syria, even if only 10% of the population use it. The price of connection has gone down and Internet cafés have flourished in poor neighbourhoods, often connected through broadband. There are 40 times more users now than in 2004, an upsurge that has prompted the authorities to control news put out online. Surveillance and censorship are commonplace on the Syrian Web. The Syrian Computer Society, the country's leading access provider, can intercept emails and therefore monitor dissidents.

However, under the Syrian constitution adopted in 1973, "every citizen has the right to freely and openly express opinions, orally, in writing or by any other means of expression [...].The state guarantees freedom of the press [...] under the law" (Article 38).

The Syrian "café"

Arrests linked to online activities are becoming ever more frequent – a practice which has even entered everyday language. Before arresting an Internet user, police officers say they are going to "drink a coffee", meaning to interrogate someone about their online activities.

At least five cyber-dissidents have been sentenced to prison terms of six months to four years since 2000. Some, like **Mohammad Badi Dak al Bab** and **Homam Hassan Haddad**, have been harassed by the authorities for contributing to online publications "damaging state prestige", under Article 287 of the Syrian criminal code. The first of them was held in prison in Adra (about 20 kilometres north-east of Damascus) for six months, from 2 March to 17 September 2008. The second, a sociology student at Damascus University, was arrested by the intelligence services on 27 January 2009. Nothing has been heard of him since. He previously served three months in detention after being arrested on 4 May 2008 because of his online activities. He is in trouble over contributions to several editions of the magazine Boursates wa Aswak (Stock exchanges and markets) and several online publications.

Others, such as **Kareem Arabji**, an accountancy graduate from Damascus University and **Habib Saleh**, a contributor to the censored website Elaph.com (http://www.elaph.com), have been held for more than a year without trial.

Writer and poet Firas Saad was sentenced to four years in jail on 9 April 2008 for posting "false information" online. He is currently being held in Saydnaya prison, north of the capital, accused of damaging "state integrity" and weakening "national feeling". Saad was arrested in November 2006 for articles he posted on Syrian websites, many of them banned within the country. In them, he criticised the "defeatism" of the Syrian regime in the Lebanon war of July 2006 and called government officials as "thoroughly corrupt, keeping down rather than defending Lebanon".

Security before service

Telecommunications minister, Amr Salem, decreed on 25 July 2007 that website owners should keep personal details of authors of articles and comments. The following month he sent a circular to the same people telling them to make public the names of authors and commentators contributing to their sites, under threat of closure of their site. He added that

"there is no need for proof to know that some articles and comments are false and that some expressions conflict with freedom of speech. Those who publicise them are guilty of defamation or violating public morals".

These measures allowed the authorities to arrest the blogger **Tariq Biass**i (http://alzohaly.ektob.com/), on 7 July 2007, for posting an article criticising the Syrian security services on an Internet forum. He was sentenced on 11 May 2008, to three years in prison, after being found guilty of "publishing false information" and "weakening national sentiment" under Articles 285 and 286 of the Syrian criminal code.

The government also does its utmost to limit exchanges between Internet users. Since then, the authorities have blocked more than 160 websites that are critical of the government. They use a filter system called "Thundercache" to control content, get rid of viruses and prevent downloading of videos. This is why Skype is censored. The social networking site Facebook is banned on the Syrian Web, along with YouTube and Amazon, officially for fear that Israeli secret agents might infiltrate it. It is also very difficult to set up a blog in Syria. One of the biggest blog platforms, Blogspot, which is owned by Google, is inaccessible and the Arabic blog platform, Maktoob, is only partially available, some pages being blocked because of their content. Political and religious subjects are subjected to censorship and the Kurdish question is also very sensitive. Out of the 162 censored websites, almost a third of them relate to the Kurdish community.

However filters put in place by the authorities to block websites seen as "sensitive" are easy to get round. Internet users often use the "Lebanese server" – a connection via a long distance phone call to a Lebanese access provider not subjected to Syrian restrictions and at no extra cost. But there are also other solutions. One example is the website of human rights defender Mohammad al-Abdallah, Raye7 w mish RaJ3 (http://raye7wmishraj3.wordpress.com - I am going and not coming back) which has been inaccessible since 13 January 2009, but which is now readable on a "mirror site" that reproduces its content on the following address: http://rwmr.wordpress.com.

More information

http://www.All4syria.com (Arabic): news website on Syria, censored within the country.
http://www.arabnews.com (English): news website about Arab countries.
http://opennet.net/research/profiles/syria (English) : tests by the Open Net Initiative on the Syrian network.
http://www.ya-ashrafe-nnas.blogspot.com (English) : "Decentring Damascus", blog by Razan, Syrian defender of free expression online and one of those behind the campaign for the release of Tariq Biasi.
http://www.abufares.net/ (English): architect in Tartus. Blocked since April 2006.
http://tharwacommunity.typepad.com/whereto_syria/2007/05/post_10.html (Arabic) : article on Syrian filtering.

Internet Ennemies

Internet Ennemies

Tunisia

Domain name : .tn
Population : 10,383,577
Internet users : 2, 800,000
Average price of one hour's connection in a cybercafé : between 50 centimes and 1 euro
Average monthly salary : 310 euros
Number of private access providers : 5
Number of public access providers : 7
Number of imprisoned bloggers : 0

The Internet was the target of numbers of attacks in 2008 preventing all criticism of the regime from being widely broadcast. But ironically it is the telecommunications sector that is the motor of the Tunisian economy.

While there are now more than a score of access providers, the operator Planet.tn, owned by one of the daughters of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, still has the greatest share of the market. The president continues to runs a very strict policy on net filtering and self-censorship seems to be the rule among Tunisian bloggers. The Tunisian Internet Agency (ATI) is the public regulatory body, which rents out bandwidth to access providers.

The systematic filtering of opposition websites is also backed up by an arsenal of instructions. Cybercafés are under surveillance and under Tunisian law their managers are responsible for the activities of their customers and it is sometimes necessary to produce ID to go online in a café. It is not unusual either for owners to tell them not to browse some sites that are seen as "subversive". Instructions to this effect are displayed on cybercafé walls.

Filtering websites is a widespread practice given the popularity of cyberspace with the Tunisian people. The 281 'Publinets' – public Internet access spots – are very popular with 18-25 year olds. The best known human rights websites as well as the main proxies like Anonymizer (http://www.anonymizer.com/) and Guardster (http://www.guardster.com/) are inaccessible.

Filtering is an everyday problem for Tunisian bloggers, who held a "day against blog censorship" on 4 November 2008. Since the country of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali is one of the most draconian on the Internet., community information sharing websites like Dailymotion, YouTube or Facebook are regularly blocked because of content critical of the president's policies. Emails of some human rights activists are also filtered.

A success which has its downside

Tunisia is one of North Africa's most connected countries and the success of the Web eases access to news and information. But some websites are the targets of computer attacks. Footage posted on the Web on 10 April 2008, showed the seriousness of clashes in the mining basin of Gafsa, in the south of the country when the authorities put down a demonstration in the cities of Redeyef and Aïn Moulares and were one of the rare sources of information about the events there. On 11 June 2008, the blogs samsoum-us (http://samsoum-us.blogspot.com/2008/06/2eme-mort-virtuelle-je-mhabitue.html), romdhane (http://romdhane.maktoobblog.com) and RoufRouf (http://roufrouf.blogspot.com) were made inaccessible over posts about clashes in Redeyef in April between the army and workers angry at unemployment and food price rises, in which one demonstrator was shot dead.

In two years, the news website Tunisnews (http://www.tunisnews.net) suffered two computer attacks and its list of articles was destroyed in 2003 and 2006. Although Tunisnews does not know who was behind the attacks, it noted that they coincided with the publication of articles critical of the regime.

The year 2008 was one of the blackest in Tunisia with more than a score of anti-establishment websites hacked into or blocked. The blog of Tunisian journalist Zied el-Heni http://journaliste-tunisien.blogspot.com was blocked in October 2008 following the release of Reporters Without Borders' 2008 press freedom index (http://journaliste-tunisien.blogspot.com/2008/10/rsf-classement-mondial-de-la-libert-de.html), in which Tunisia was ranked 143 out of 173 countries surveyed. It is however available on the following address: http://journaliste-tunisien-2.blogspot.com/.

The news website, Nawaat.org suffered its worst cyber-attack since it was founded, on 16 June 2008. Its database was wiped and its home page changed. The blogs of human rights defenders Sami Ben Gharbia (http://www.kitab.nl/) and Astrubal (http://astrubal.nawaat.org/) were also affected. Their blogs are still inaccessible because parts of their databases were destroyed. The websites have been partially restored since then.

The website of the magazine *Kalima* (http://www.kalimatunisie.com/) has been inaccessible since 8 October 2008. It posted a report on

violent incidents in front of the Tunisian palace of justice on 7 October, during which security forces beat defendants under the noses of the judges. The magazine's editor said she thought the attack was intended to censor this news.

Emails and personal connections under surveillance

Personal details of individuals with Internet subscriptions are transmitted monthly to ATI, which manages the entire email system in Tunisia. The law on Posts of 1998 authorises the interception of electronic mail that "threatens public order and national security".

Private connections belonging to some journalists and opposition figures are cut for "technical reasons" or the output is reduced so as to increase the time it takes to download web pages, restricting consultation of websites as a result. Such practices gradually have a discouraging effect on the blogosphere, which shows less zeal for criticising government policies. Some bloggers even give up altogether. But computer security experts argue that Internet connections should be individualised, so that two Internet users criticising the regime would not have the same connection or the time to look up the same websites. Moreover this connection would not be specific to a particular computer but to an individual account and the connection for an individual would remain the same at home as at the office.

It is not easy for human rights activists to access their emails. Such messages coming from human rights organisations like the International Association for the Support of Political Prisoners (AISPP), the news website Tunisnews or that of Reporters Without Borders are often unreadable. Several sources say that these emails arrive in their inboxes and it is possible to open them, but the messages are empty and once opened disappear from the inbox. "It appears to be badly-concealed filtering" one specialist said.

More information :

http://www.kalimatunisie.com : website of the online magazine Kalima, critical of the government (French and Arabic).
http://tn-blogs.com/ : aggregator of Tunisian blogs (French and Arabic).
http://tunisiawatch.rsfblog.org/ : "For a free and democratic Tunisia", website censored in Tunisia.
https://www.sesawe.net/ (English): for more information about "individual connections".

Internet Ennemies

Internet Ennemies

Turkmenistan

Domain name : .tm
Population : 5,136,262
Internet users : 70,000
Average price of one hour's connection in a cybercafé : officially about 6 euros, but 1.50 euros on the parallel exchange rate
Average monthly salary : about 150 euros
Number of private service providers : 0
Number of public service providers : 1
Number of imprisoned bloggers : 0

Two years after Gurbanguly Berdymukhame-dov came to power, on 14 February 2007, the spectre is fading of former president, Saparmurat Niyazov, the "Turkmenbashi" who turned the country into "Europe's North Korea". But the Internet remains one of the areas that the new government keeps under tightest control.

Turkmen generally keep themselves informed through satellite television. But the government in January 2008 decided to forbid satellite dishes and to close companies that sold them, making the Internet a vital source information in such an isolated country. The Turkmen service of *Radio Free Europe* is one of the very few sources of independent news, but its journalists are regularly threatened by the authorities.

Progress has been made in access to the network, with several cybercafés opening in the capital, Ashgabat, and in some provinces. Today, there are around 15 across the country, as promised by the new president when he took office. Moreover, access is no longer reserved for ministries, foreign embassies and international organisations with a presence in the country. Some businessmen and even ordinary individuals can get online.

Repression hidden behind technical obstacles Since June 2008, private connections are authorised by the country's sole access provider, Turkmen Telekom, which plans to connect 2,000 people mostly in the capital. But a private connection remains expensive, about 6 euros a month in a country in which the average salary is equivalent to around 150 euros. Also, the connection is slow and it can take an hour to check emails.

In addition, cybercafés are open during working hours and closed on weekends and public holidays. And a customer going into a cybercafé for the first time has to produce a passport and enter personal information on the customers' list.

A WiFi network became available in June 2008, provided by the biggest Russian access provider, MTS. It is available in Ashgabat, Balkanabat and Turkmenbashi, in the west of the country. However use of this network is sporadic because its existence is not well known in Turkmenistan where news and information is not readily available. The Internet is used by just over 1% of the population and Turkmen Telekom, under state control, operates very strict filtering.

As websites run by human rights organisations and those of many news agencies are blocked. Internet users try to get onto these sites by getting round censorship but are fearful of the consequences. A cybercafé in the Dashoguz region in the north of the country, was closed in May 2008 after a customer tried to get onto several websites that are banned by the government.

However, the government did raise hopes that there could be liberalisation, when on 10 October 2007, EU representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, and special central Asia representative Pierre Morel visited the country. It was even possible to leave comments on the official government website www.turkmenistan.gov.tm during their stay.

But Turkmen Telekom operates in the name of a special department linked to the National Security Committee, a government agency answerable to the interior ministry. It is this access provider that blocks sites and monitors messaging services. Turkmen Telekom says that no messaging account has been created in the country since 2002.

More information :

http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/turkmenistan.htm l: Turkmen service of Radio Free Europe (English).
http://www.eurasianet.org : central Asia news website (English and Russian).

-tive website on Turkmenistan. Neweurasia is a central Asia blog aggregator.
http://http://www.newscentralasia.net/ : US-based news website about Turkmenistan.

http://www.untuk.org : UN website on Turkmenistan, launched on 8 February 2008.
http://www.chrono-tm.org : website created by the "Turkmen initiative for human rights".

Internet Ennemies

Internet Ennemies

Uzbekistan

Domain name : .uz
Population : 27,780,059
Internet users : 2,400,000
Average price of an hour's connection in a cybercafé : not available
Average monthly salary : about 50 euros
Number of private access providers : 447
Number of imprisoned bloggers : 0

Until 2006, more citizens of Uzbekistan had Internet access than had mobile phones. This is how the political opposition gets out its messages, something that President Islam Karimov wants to prevent.

Islam Karimov, who was re-elected head of state on 23 December 2007, exercises very tight control over the Internet. Websites do not have to register with the authorities, but everything is centralised and the government blocks access to most independent sites that criticise its policies. State network, UzPak, has been the only one in the country since 2005 and all access providers have to connect via this network. However, a few of the 447 private companies that deal in access are intermittently connected to the Russian network.

However, for 17 years, the president has ceaselessly expressed his wish to see citizens expressing themselves freely. The network has therefore developed and the number of users never ceases to grow. But diversity of opinion is not to be expected. Russian blog platform Livejournal was blocked in February 2009 by Uzbek access providers because it posted photos of a local businessman. But LiveJournal is one of Uzbekistan's most popular sites and the access providers put an end to this censorship once the news appeared on the Russian Web, which boasts 38 million Internet users.

Opposition gradually eliminated

In 2005, the journalist and nephew to the president, Djamshid Karimov, was forcibly admitted to a psychiatric hospital after posting a series of articles on the website of the independent Uzbek news agency Ferghana.ru focusing on corruption of the local administration and the state of the peasantry in the Jizzak region. His admission took place, in October 2006, even though the doctors admitted that he was "a well-balanced man in good health, intelligent and educated". The same year, the editor of an independent news website Tribune-uz.info decided to suspend its online work after coming under pressure.

Since 2005, the stance of the foreign ministry has however been clear: "Uzbekistan does not have the capacity or the technical knowledge to block access to the Internet". However some websites figure on the list of "sources of information that provide destructive news" and threatening "security of information", of which the government acknowledges the existence but keeps secret. It generally concerns independent news websites and those which defend human rights. The website registan.net, which deals with political questions in central Asia, was blocked without any official reason being given, on 15 March 2007. In July 2006, the websites Neweurasia.net and Uzmetronom.org were also made inaccessible by the government.

Since the start of 2008, the website uzngo.info, which is not however seen by the authorities as an opposition site was also blocked. Its editor, Alexey Dobryin, described it as "provocation on the part of the authorities". "The blocking of the site came just after the victory of Islam Karimov although he has not ceased to claim for 17 years that the people want to be part of a real civil society. It is highly regrettable that the Communications and Information Agency of Uzbekistan, which a number of talented and competent people work for, is much like George Orwell's 'Ministry of Truth'", he said. The site was one of the most reliable sources of information about civil society.

The law on media freedom, adopted in 2003, imposes a series of restrictions on the circulation of news online. Article 4 lays down that "the freedom to inform the public can be limited in the name of the protection (...) of the community's moral values, national security and the country's spiritual, cultural and scientific potential". The vague formulation of these principles leaves wide scope for interpretation and for extensive and abusive censorship. The same is true of other articles that invoke the "preservation of cultural and historic values" or "social stability". An amendment was made to the law on 15 January 2007, defining websites as media, giving the government even greater control over this space.

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

More information :

http://uzbekistan.neweurasia.net : collaborative website on Uzbekistan. The website Neweurasia is a platform for central Asian blogs (English, Russian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Tajik, and Kirghiz).
http://ferghana.ru : independent news agency for countries of central Asia (Russian and English).
http://www.centrasia.ru : news website on central Asia (Russian).

http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=24840 : "Islam Karimov everywhere, elections nowhere!" Reporters Without Borders report on media coverage of the 2007 presidential campaign.
http://www.eurasianet.org : news website Eurasianet.
http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/uzbekistan.html : Uzbeck service of *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty.*
http://eng.bir.uz/news : National news agency (Russian, Uzbek, English).

Internet Ennemies

Internet Ennemies

Vietnam

Domain name : .vn
Population : 86,116,559
Internet users : 20,669,285
Average price for an hour's connection in a cybercafé : about 2 euros for tourists. Generally less expensive for Vietnamese nationals.
Average monthly salary : about 54 euros a month (US State Department)
Number of private access providers : 8
Number of public access providers : 2
Number of imprisoned bloggers : 7

Since it has found itself unable to control the content of blogs and online expression, Vietnam has adopted very harsh rules to crack down on dissident voices.

Since 2002, Vietnam has equipped itself with a cyber-police force that filters "subversive" content and keeps cyber-cafés under surveillance. Vietnam's young population has taken to the Internet with enthusiasm, whether for computer games or getting news. But the mastering of the network by pro-democrat militants disturbs the authorities and political content is regularly blocked under the auspices of the interior ministry.

"A blog is a personal news page. If a blogger uses it for general news like the press, he is breaking the law and will be punished", Deputy Minister for Information and Communications, Do Quy Doan, said in February 2009 .

Official control of Internet access began on 6 June 1996 through the General Direction of Posts and Telecommunications. Until 19 November 1997, the Internet was limited to email and local data bases. The state, shareholder in all access providers, follows to the letter Article 33 of the 1992 Constitution, under which "the state must suppress all activities in the fields of culture and information that harm national interests, destroy the personality, moral values and lifestyle of the Vietnamese people.

Foreign companies urged to co-operate

There are almost a million blogs in Vietnam in a population of 85 million. Unlike China, Vietnam has not created easily controllable blog platforms. More than 80% of Vietnam's Internet users are hooked up to the American companies Google and Yahoo!, thus with websites

hosted abroad, which the authorities can block but cannot shut down. In order to keep control, the government has strengthened already existing laws that ban all forms of online opposition. A decree on Internet management and electronic communications that came into force in September 2008 lays down that "opposition to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is forbidden" (Article 6).

The ministry of information and communications is also planning to put forward co-operation proposals to regulate the content of blogs using foreign companies' platforms, under which they would have to accept to provide information about their customers.

In fact, a government notice, Circular n°7, came into force on 20 January 2009, which is designed to control blogs and their content. It is now illegal for a blogger to post articles under another identity. Blogs can only carry strictly personal information (Article 1) and it is banned to "put out press articles, literary works or other publications banned by the press law" (Article 2). Moreover, every six months, at the request of the authorities, hosts must make a report on the activities of their customers including the number of blogs they run and their statistics as well as details of blogs that violate rules established by the host (Article 6).

For Deputy Minister of Information and Communications, Do Quy Doan, "Bloggers are supervised to prevent them from entering into illegality or putting out false information: criticising the fatherland, the work of constructing the country, denigrating and damaging the honour and human dignity of an individual, and organisation, dividing the unity of the nation…".

Seven cyber-dissidents behind bars

The Vietnamese authorities have a very intrusive surveillance system of people who are critical of the regime, the most common method being phone-tapping. But they have also been using filtering of emails and Internet accounts.

A few days before the Olympic torch was due to pass through Ho Chi Minh City, on 19 April 2008, the journalist and blogger, **Nguyen Van Dai**, better known as **Dieu Cay** (http://blog.360.yahoo.com/blog-Fqy69mcye-quwJv.MxrhJO_sXCZbkCw--?cq=1), was arrested in the city of Dalat, south Vietnam. Five

Internet Ennemies

days later he was charged with "tax fraud" and sentenced to two and a half years in prison, on 4 December. According to his son, Dieu Cay had been closely watched since his participation at the start of 2008 in demonstrations in Ho Chi Minh City in protest against Chinese policy in the Paracels and Spratley archipelago. Police have harassed his family and his property has been seized. Some of his colleagues have also regularly been threatened and arrested. One of them, who asked for anonymity, lost his job on government orders and fears arrest for "revealing information abroad with the aim of overthrowing the government" for having given interviews to foreign media.

Since August 2006, eight people have been arrested and sentenced because of their online posts, given Vietnam second place on the podium of online repression, after China. One of them, **Huyhn Nguyen Dao**, was released on 15 February 2009 after serving a two-and-a-half-year sentence for "propaganda against the regime". He has said that challenging rules imposed by the Hanoi Communist regime has been pursued above all on the Internet. On his release, he told Reporters Without Borders about his concerns about cyber-dissidents of "bloc 8406", who began a hunger strike on 19 February 2009 in protest at the prison conditions.

Founded in April 2006, "Bloc 8406" is a pro-democracy movement that launched an online petition in 2006 calling for government reforms. In October, the foreign ministry spokesman called this group "illegal" and the security services have relentlessly gone after its main movers. In May 2007, six of its members were arrested for "propaganda hostile to the government" because of remarks on the Web. **Huynh Nguyen Dao**, **Le Nguyen Sang** and **Nguyen Bac Truyen** were sentenced to three, four and two and a half years in prison and lawyers **Nguyen Van Dai** and **Le Thi Cong Nhan**, to four and three years. **Tran Quoc Hien**, aged 42, spokesman for the United Workers-Farmers Organisation (UWFO), was sentenced to five years in prison at the end of a four-hour trial. It was the worst crackdown in the country since 2002.

More information :

http://clbnbtd.com/ : news website of the "free journalists' club" founded by cyber-dissident Dieu Cay (in Vietnamese).
http://english.vietnamnet.vn : official daily (English).
http://www.bkav.com.vn : website of the Bach Koa Centre, the origin of the country's most used anti-virus software (Vietnamese).
http://www.rfa.org/english/vietnamese : *Radio Free Asia*, Vietnamese section.

Countries under surveillance

Australia

A draft law has been under discussion since 2006 that would force all service providers to filter private Internet connections in each home to remove all "inappropriate" content, in the name of the struggle against child pornography, defamation and authorship rights. Communications Minister, Stephen Conroy, confirmed in January 2008 that the law was still planned and that service providers would have to carry out tests before the end of June 2009. However, several points remain unclear as to how the law would be applied. The law does not say who would decide that websites were "inappropriate". It will not be users who will draw attention to content to be banned. This list is to remain secret. Neither does the law say how the lists will be drawn up of the websites to be blocked, that remain secret, or how a website could be taken off or added to this list.

The draft law was proposed against a background in which anti-terror legislation already allows serious inroads into confidentiality of private correspondence. Since 2001, the law has allowed the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to intercept any suspicious email and to carry out independent investigations, including in the absence of any prior judicial authorisation.

Australia is one of the democracies operating a strict filtering policy. In 1999, an amendment was put to the Broadcasting Services Act, creating the ACMA, responsible for regulating Internet content. This independent agency has the power to close websites that are the subject of complaints by citizens. Even if it cannot purge the Internet of all "sensitive" content, it can none the less initiate an investigation into the content of websites, without judicial permission. To date authority has blocked 1,300 sites and is targeting some 10,000 others.

Countries under surveillance

Bahrain

Bahrain has one of the region's highest levels of Internet penetration, alongside Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. However the struggle launched by the government against sectarianism has limited access to some websites. The information ministry, with which websites have had to register since 2005, on 14 January 2009 ordered the country's access providers to block some political and commercial content, specifying that it alone had the power to go back on the decision.

Since then, websites that provide help in getting round censorship have also been inaccessible. As a result, Internet users cannot go on to some pages on social networking sites such as Facebook, seen as critical of government policy, along with 66 other websites dealing with human rights or politics. The information ministry however conceded that some blocking did result in "technical errors".

In order to fight censorship, Bahraini bloggers have devised their own code of ethics, finalised on 14 August 2008. This code of conduct should help limit proliferation of incitement to hatred online. The code says, "We reject all writing or allusions containing a sectarian message, incitement to hatred, abuse of freedom of worship or belief".

While a new draft law is under discussion allowing the authorities to shut down websites without recourse to the courts, the government has decided to strengthen its policy of holding on to people's personal details in the name of national security. Bahrain's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) on 25 February 2009 launched a public charter for Internet regulation. Aimed at operators authorised to provide Internet, it will define technical methods needed to "guarantee national security". Under this charter, and also article 78 of the telecommunications law, operators must offer "legal and secure" Internet access. They also have the obligation to allow "security organs to access the network for national security reasons". They have until 26 March to make any representations to the authorities.

Countries under surveillance

Belarus

The government said on 2 June 2008 that it could resort to Chinese expertise to block access to foreign websites likely to have a "bad influence" in Belarus. There is no evidence that such a filtering system has been put in place for the time being, but the authorities nevertheless do censor some opposition and news websites. The website of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty came under some of the most serious cyber-attacks since its founding between 26 April and 5 May 2008. The site promotes "citizen journalism" allowing users to post their own photos, film and articles.

Head of the website's Belarus service, Alexander Lukashuk, said the attack was the result of its live coverage from Minsk of the 22nd anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, one of the major annual demonstrations. Human rights websites Charter 97 and Bieloruskii partisan

have also been the target of similar attacks of unknown origin.

From 10 February 2007, a decree adopted by the Council of Ministers has made Internet surveillance legal, forcing owners of cybercafés and computer clubs to denounce to police Internet users who go on to "sensitive" sites. It also forces them to register the browsing history on their computers over the previous 12 months, and to keep the information available for the security forces and the KGB.
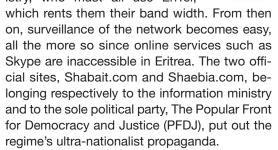
Further, President Alexander Lukashenko signed a new press law at the beginning of August that obliges media to comply with a new registration procedure. It will allow stricter state control of online publications and make it easier for the authorities to close media down.
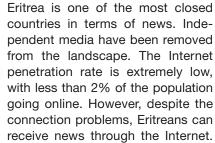
Countries under surveillance

Eritrea

Eritrea is one of the most recent countries to have connected to the Internet, which it did in 2000. Since then, 42 cybercafés have opened there, almost all in the capital Asmara and the port city of Massawa.

The company EriTel, which owns the network infrastructure in the country, works in direct co-operation with the ministries of information and national development. There are four access providers, licensed by the information ministry, who must all use EriTel, which rents them their band width. From then on, surveillance of the network becomes easy, all the more so since online services such as Skype are inaccessible in Eritrea. The two official sites, Shabait.com and Shaebia.com, belonging respectively to the information ministry and to the sole political party, The Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), put out the regime's ultra-nationalist propaganda.

The Eritrean government is known to block or to attempt to block numbers of foreign-hosted websites, which is an indication of the size of the expatriate community. Webmasters, who are the technical managers of the websites, are sometimes harassed by the authorities.

Eritrea is one of the most closed countries in terms of news. Independent media have been removed from the landscape. The Internet penetration rate is extremely low, with less than 2% of the population going online. However, despite the connection problems, Eritreans can receive news through the Internet. Security forces are however present around the cybercafés, as they are everywhere in the city, and have stepped up surveillance of the movements and activities of Internet users. Three of them were arrested in Asmara on 26 December 2008.

Malaysia

During his annual address to Parliament on 17 February, King Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin voiced his anxiety about blogs which he called "sources of confusion for citizens".
He also called on bloggers to adopt an "ethical" and "more responsible" approach online.

The country stepped up repression by applying the Internal Security Act (ISA), that provides for detention without trial for two years (Article. 8), a sanction that is indefinitely renewable. Renowned blogger **Raja Petra Kamaruddin**, nicknamed "**RPK**", was a victim of this judicial hounding over articles on his website, Malaysia Today (http://mt.m2day.org/2008/). He is currently under threat of the application of Article 8 of the ISA, on the personal orders of interior minister,

Syed Hamid Albar, who considers him "a threat to national security". RPK has already been imprisoned in 2008. This pressure is one of the means of intimidating critical voices that oppose the government and which it is not known how long it will remain in force.

The country has a long tradition of keeping the media under control. The network is not censored but bloggers are monitored. Almost 63% of the population is connected to the Internet and an "inappropriate" use of the Internet can be grounds for arrest. This happened to the lawyer, P. Uthayakumar, who has been held since 13 December 2007 in the Kamunting centre for posting a letter addressed to the British government condemning ill-treatment of the Hindu minority in Malaysian prisons.

Internet Ennemies

South Korea

Countries under surveillance

Unlike North Korea, South Korea has a highly developed Internet sector with 76.1% of South Koreans using the network. In the light of this success, the government resorts to disproportionate means of regulation. A blogger nicknamed Minerva was arrested on 7 January 2009 for affecting "financial exchanges on the market" as well as "the credibility of the nation" because of articles he posted on discussion forum Daum, one of the biggest portals in the country. One of his predictions was the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the fall of the currency, the won. This "president of the economy on the Internet" was charged with "spreading false information" and faces up to five years in prison and a fine of 50 million won (27,000 euros).

The "spreading of false information" is a phenomenon that exercises the authorities. Two South Korean celebrities committed suicide in 2007 after rumours about them circulated online. That same year, police recorded 10,000 cases of defamation online, against 3,600 in 2004. Kyong-won Na, a deputy in the Grand National Party (GNP) then proposed that blogs and websites offering discussion forums that had more than 300,000 hits a day should clearly identify people posting messages, asking them their names and social security numbers. This project which is still being studied, also seeks to limit the registration capacity of these portals to 100,000. Since October 2008, nearly 1,000 police officers have had the responsibility of inspecting the content of chat-rooms and online forums. The largest access portals, Daum and Naver, have decided to get together to resist government attempts to limit criticism.

Countries under surveillance

Sri Lanka

Since the escalation of fighting in the country at the end of 2008, news posted online has increasingly become the target of restrictions. The website of Human Rights Watch is regularly inaccessible, which has given rise to a general fear of Internet censorship, which until now principally hit websites seen as pro-Tamil Tigers. The defence ministry released a report on 11 December 2008, on its website, defence.lk, in which it called reports on the Sinhala service of the BBC World Service "diabolical lies". The BBC journalists are accused of being accomplices in Tamil Tiger propaganda, when they raise the plight of civilians living in combat zones.

The news website Lankadissent chose to cease operating on 10 January 2009 for fear of becoming the target of reprisals. The highly critical publication employed journalists who had lost their jobs after the closure of the newspaper *Mawbima*, under official pressure. The experience of the website TamilNet served as an example. In 2005, the website's editor Dharmeratnam Sivaram "Taraki" was murdered because his coverage of the political and military situation was seen as hostile by the government. His killers have not been found and the site is blocked inside the country. The editor of the site E-thalay.org (http://www.ethalaya.org), Kumudu Champika Jayawardana, was the target of an ambush in 2007 after he became the target for pro-government militia because of articles posted online.

Countries under surveillance

Thailand

As the end of King Bumibol Adulyadej's reign approaches, the monarchy has become an ever more sensitive issue. At the start of January 2009, the information and communications minister announced that the government was going to invest 500 million baht (1.1 million euros) to put in place a national filtering system to block websites hosted abroad that could damage the monarchy. Since December 2008, the ministry has decided to step up the fight against the crime of lese majeste online. More than 4,000 websites have been blocked since the start of 2009. However, official sources say that only 4,800 pages have been blocked for this reason since March 2008.

Under the Cyber Crime Act, adopted in 2007, police can seize computer equipment of people suspected of sending message containing insulting or pornographic content. The crime of lese-majeste did not appear in this law. But at the start of 2009, an amendment was added providing for prison sentences for anyone suspected of the crime of lese-majeste so as to increase sentences in cases of "defamation", "insult" or "threat to the monarchy".

Almost a score of people are currently facing charges of this crime because of their articles posted online. Internet user Suwicha Thakor was arrested on 14 January 2009 by the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), while he was visiting friends in the country. The IP address of his computer indicated that his home corresponded to the place from which comments about the king and his entourage had been posted. He is being held at the Klong Prem prison, even though he denies charges of the "crime of lese-majeste" against him. Two bail applications have been denied.

Blogger **Praya Pichai** spent two weeks in custody, facing proceedings under Article 14 for "defamation" and "damaging national security" at the end of August 2007 for making comments considered "critical of the monarchy" in an article posted on his blog (http://www.prachathai.com). The Thai authorities dropped charges against him for lack of proof. However, Praya Pichai has been put under surveillance for ten years and faces prison if he publishes any further comments about the monarchy.

The crime of lese-majese is punishable by 3 to 15 years in prison and any Thai citizen can ask for the opening of an investigation if he suspects one of his fellow citizens to be guilty of it.

Countries under surveillance

United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates is one of the best connected countries in the region, alongside Bahrain and Qatar.

The government generally blocks content that "harms Islam". Pornography, gambling and homosexuality are taboo subjects on the Internet, but it is not unusual to find websites made inaccessible for political reasons. Criticism of the government is also a very sensitive issue. The appeal court in Ras al Khaimah on 20 January 2008 quashed all charges against the owner of the website www.majan.net, Muhammad Rashed Shehhi, who was sued for "defamation" over an "offensive" comment posted on his site by an Internet user. Muhammad Rashed Shehhi had been sentenced on 8 August 2007 to one year in prison and a fine equivalent to 15,000 euros. During his appeal hearing in October, the prosecutor had called for a five-month prison sentence against him.

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has called on the national telecommunications company, Etisalat, to block access to all websites with an Israeli domain name (.il). But not all pro-Israel sites are censored. The Jerusalem Post (www.jpost.com) is, for example, accessible.

Social networking sites are also targeted for censorship, such as Hi5, Facebook, Friendster, and all those websites that host dating services such as Yahoo! Personals and Match.com.

Some websites are inaccessible because of Saudi Arabian censorship since the two countries share an information channel. Since the start of 2008, the Saudi communications authority has ordered the closure of some websites because of their content dealing with religious affairs or morals. The website on blog hosting and design Onix.com has been inaccessible since December. The blog of Eve, a Saudi woman who cover the rights of women and religious affairs in the country, has suffered the same fate.

Countries under surveillance

Yemen

New is very tightly controlled by the information ministry, which in addition to monitoring the Internet, bans several mobile phone news services, including those by Nass Mobile or Bela Qoyod mobile, on the grounds that text messages cannot be properly controlled. Service providers prevent some Internet users from getting access to local news sites. The website Marebpress realised that its provider was blocking access to users with a "dial-up" connection. Users with ADSL and ISDN subscriptions can get access.

TeleYemen (Y.Net), one of the country's main providers, reserves the right to "report to the competent authorities on any use or attempted use of Y.Net services breaking the law of the Republic of Yemen". The conditions of use of Y.Net also explain that "access to applications that allow transmission of video and audio files [...] represent an unreasonable use of the Internet network, that can affects its capacity, and is for this reason, banned".

Platforms such as Maktoobblog, Youtube, Facebook, Orkut, and Twitter, are however accessible because these rules only apply to websites hosted within the country. But, since 15 May 2008, some Yemeni news websites have not been accessible, such as that of al-Umma (The Nation), Yemen.net and al Tagheer (The Change). They have been accused of posting articles dealing with social unrest and challenging government policy. Opposition websites have also been made inaccessible, such as al-Shoura (http:// www.al-shoura.net) and forums of the Yemenite Council (http://www.al-yemen.org) and Yemen-Sound (http://www.yemen-sound.com), which are among the most popular in the country.

The website in support of Egyptian blogger, Kareem Amer, who has been imprisoned for more than a year for using his right of freedom of expression online, has also been inaccessible 28 January. The same applies to Yemen.net (http://www.yemenat.net/), after it posted a Human Rights Watch report and videos dealing with the plight of Yemeni emigrants who became casualties in a fire in Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, the government blocks access to softwa
re designed to get round censorship or "proxies", thus preventing Internet users from obtaining news. As in Bahrain, Yemen uses the US filtering software Websense to select news about the country.

Zimbabwe

Although it is tightly controlled, the Web is not the first concern of the government … except during elections. In August 2008, during the renewal of the mandate of President Robert Mugabe, who has been head of state since 1987, the Zimbabwean government levered its power over journalists, including by hacking into their email accounts.

Two months after the presidential elections, Justin Mutasa, editor of the publicly-owned newspaper group Zimpapers, revealed that he had authorised the hacking into his editors' private emails with the help of software that decrypts passwords. Six journalists were from 3 to 15 August subjected to this heightened surveillance to gauge their loyalty to the president's party during the election campaign. In May 2008, the editor of the Zimbabwean Broadcast Corporation (ZBC), Henry Muradzikwa, was ousted from the company, along with seven other journalists for not having sufficiently backed Robert Mugabe and his ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) during the campaign.

Moreover, the editor of the magazine Umthunywa, Bhekinkosi Ncube, was suspended from August to November for publishing a photo of the leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) of Morgan Tsvangirai, with the caption "Walile u Tsvangirai" (Tsvangirai refuses to sign) at a time when the two parties were discussing power-sharing after the defeat of ZANU-PF in 29 March 2008 general elections.

The government has since 2007 adopted the Interception of Communication Act that allows the state to intercept phone calls and email or faxes to "guarantee national security". The hacking into private information is not however authorised. Justin Mutasa justified his actions, saying that the "editorial lines are not set by the group editor but by the minister of information [...] At the start of each mandate, the new minister calls on editors and tells them what he expects. The editors have to obey".