

Bloggers may have to reveal identities
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The battle to control cyberspace in Malaysia intensified today as a minister said bloggers may be forced to register their names to avoid unjust claims being posted on the Internet.

Deputy Energy, Water and Communications Minister Shaziman Abu Mansor said his department was considering an option to make surfers identify themselves so that the government can track their activities.

"We might follow some other countries who register bloggers as well," he told AFP. "That's what Singapore is doing as well."

"It's much better if we can have a list of active bloggers ... We want to know who are the bloggers," he added.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and a number of other ministers have launched attacks on Malaysian bloggers and Internet surfers in recent months, accusing them of spreading lies about the government.

Two prominent bloggers, Jeff Ooi and Ahirudin Attan, are currently being sued for defamation by the government-linked New Straits Times Press newspaper group in an unprecedented case decried by rights activists as an attack on free expression.

No firm proposals

However, Shaziman denied he was floating the idea, first mentioned by him in parliament Wednesday, to curb comments published on the Internet.

"It's nice to have a list of bloggers, whoever they are," he said.

Ministry officials said there were no firm proposals to register blogs but that the option was being considered because of anonymous posts.

"For those bloggers who are anonymous, it's very hard for us to take action against them if they post on their blog," an official, who asked not to be named, told AFP.

"Some of the bloggers are anonymous, so they are using their blog to write wrong information about leaders and all those people who are in high positions," said the official.

Easy pickings

Writing on Wednesday, Ahirudin said politicians, including Shaziman, did not understand bloggers and were making the attacks out of fear.

"We have people like Shahziman who think they can bully bloggers because bloggers are small individuals and make easy pickings," he wrote.

Malaysia's media is kept under tight control with laws allowing the government to revoke or

suspend newspapers' publishing permits - a power that has been used several times in the last year.

Blogs have seen an increase in popularity as Malaysians take to cyberspace to discuss politics and social issues.

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