

M'sia upset with cyber-attacks, says minister

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Hackers have disrupted Malaysian government websites, authorities said today, following threats by anti-censorship Anonymous activists and a cyberattack on the CIA by an allied group.

The strike against 51 Malaysian government websites, which disrupted at least 41 of them according to Internet watchdog Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), came after the Anonymous group sabotaged Turkish sites last week to protest against Internet censorship.

In the United States, another shadowy group of hackers Lulz Security claimed credit for taking down the CIA website Wednesday, days after it said it breached the US Senate website and swiped internal data.

Consumer Affairs Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob denounced the attacks on the government sites and denied allegations the country was attempting to curb Internet freedom.

"As Malaysians, we should condemn the hackers," he told AFP. "We feel sad and upset by their actions."

"We are not like China. There are no restrictions. You can see people criticise the government on the Internet. We are very open," he said.

Authorities had Wednesday braced themselves for cyber attacks after Anonymous warned on a website that it would target the government portal www.malaysia.gov.my.

The action followed a decision last week by the MCMC to block 10 popular file-sharing websites in an effort to combat piracy.

Anonymous explained the rationale for the attack in a YouTube clip, saying that Malaysia's decision represented an erosion of human rights.

"We fear that if you make further decisions to take away human freedom, we are obligated to act fast and have no mercy," it said in the video.

Ban violates Internet freedom

The MCMC said the attacks on websites with the .gov.my domain started shortly before midnight yesterday and lasted several hours, but appeared to have caused little damage.

"We do not expect the overall recovery to these websites to take long as most websites have already recovered from the attack," it said.

The commission said it would work with enforcement agencies, security experts and service providers to monitor the situation.

Malaysia's media operate under strict censorship laws but websites have remained relatively free - despite occasional raids, bans and government criticism - due to an official pledge not to censor the Internet.

The government in 1996 promised to allow uncensored online content as part of a campaign to promote the growth of its information technology industry.

SM Mohamed Idris, president of the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), said that by banning the 10 websites, the authorities had violated the guarantee on Internet freedom.

"Using the Internet providers to block certain websites almost certainly constitutes censorship, which the government has expressly promised it will not do in the past," he said.

Recent waves of cyberattacks have exposed how poorly defended many networks are against global Internet marauders.

In just the past few weeks, Lulz Security has claimed to have cracked into Sony, Nintendo, the Public Broadcasting System news organisation, and an Infragard company that works with the FBI.

The group is flaunting its notoriety with a telephone hotline for people to call and suggest targets for cyberattacks.

Hacker group Anonymous, from which Lulz is believed to have formed, gained notoriety with cyberattacks in support of whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks.

- AFP

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