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Police Inspected Telecom Firms' Routers, Records

By Matt Blomberg, Joshua Wilwohl and Phann Ana

The Cambodia Daily, December 9, 2014

Police investigators in October visited the headquarters of mobile telephone and Internet service providers operating in Cambodia to examine their routers and other equipment, and to look at the companies' billing records and data logs, according to documents obtained last month and an interview with a senior police official.

In a letter dated October 7, Mao Chakrya, the director of the Telecommunication Regulator of Cambodia (TRC), ordered all phone and Internet providers to open their doors to investigators from the Interior Ministry's internal security department, so they could "study in detail the technical equipment of all the operators."

The letter instructed the providers to prepare documents in advance for the police investigator to examine, including billing information and data logs. Providers were also told to make their own technicians available for questioning by the internal security department, and to provide access to key components of their networks—through which private user information could be collected.

In some cases, the letter was accompanied by a 25-page questionnaire that requested detailed information about a company's network infrastructure.

Mr. Chakrya said Monday he was out of the country and declined to comment, but Chhay Sinarith, the director of the Interior Ministry's internal security department, confirmed last week that the inspections had taken place.

Lieutenant General Sinarith said the operation was launched to target scammers who use Voice over Internet Protocol, or VoIP, to carry out online fraud schemes. Scores of Chinese, Taiwanese and South Korean nationals have been arrested in Cambodia in recent years for running VoIP scams to defraud victims in their home countries.

"We checked VoIP because in previous instances, Internet crime was usually committed by Chinese nationals in order to extort money," he said. "We want to know the methods these groups are using."

Lt. Gen. Sinarith claimed the inspections were carried out to enforce a 2012 inter-ministerial directive, which notes the use of mobile phones, VoIP and the Internet by individuals

"committing terrorist activities, cross-border crimes, robberies, kidnappings, murders, drug trafficking, human trafficking" and "economic offenses."

He said the government had no intention of delving further into user data or other information that could potentially be retrieved from its inspection of company networks.

"What we do is based on the law. We cannot detect or listen to private conversations because it would violate the privacy of the individual," he said.

Executives at two telecommunications firms, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that government investigators had visited their headquarters in October to conduct the inspections, although they declined to go into detail about what equipment was examined.

The October 7 letter ordering companies to submit to inspections came just four days after Deputy Prime Minister Sok An signed into effect the Cyber War Team, a government unit tasked with monitoring the Internet and social media in order to "protect the government's stance and prestige."

Mark Rasch, the former head of the U.S. Department of Justice's computer crime unit and a vice president of U.S. intelligence contractor Science Applications International Corporation, said inspecting network equipment was a legitimate way to root out VoIP syndicates, but could also give the government the information needed to monitor a network.

These inspections, he said, are like probing the locks on a door. They could help make sure the locks are secure, but could also provide information that would allow the locks to be picked in the future.

"What makes this somewhat troubling is that the law enforcement or intelligence agencies can, and likely will, collect information on their own," he said. "What you need is assurances from the government that they're not."

"It's a delicate balance in the national security arena between the telcos to be secure from adversary attacks and for them to be vulnerable to attacks—even by their own government."

(Additional reporting by Van Roeun)

Teaching Kids to Code in Cambodia

By Joshua Wilwohl

The Open Standard, October 15, 2014

PHNOM PENH – Chinese-American Ming Horn says she developed her own website at age 11. "I started out using software to build websites but found coding to be easier," she said. Now, at 16, she's teaching Cambodians to do the same.

Horn earlier this year founded KhodeUp, a four-week intensive course designed to teach underprivileged children in impoverished countries website design and programming.

She developed the idea last November during a visit to an orphanage in Cambodia where she met a young woman who wanted to study computer science in the U.S., but had no experience.

"She really wanted to come to the U.S. to study computer science but had never had any experience with programming, so she ended up switching her intended major to business while applying," Horn said. "I've been a life-long tech addict and the fact that she never had the opportunity to explore programming or tech just killed me. I saw that I could help and began working on KhodeUp."

Indiegogo funding to get started

In May, Horn, who is a high school student from California, turned to the crowdfunding website Indiegogo and raised more than \$20,000, which allowed her to purchase 12 laptops and travel to Cambodia.

In August, she started her first course in Phnom Penh at the Future Light Orphanage of Worldmate (FLOW), where the students chosen to take the class were the oldest and most fluent in English.

"They all know how to type because FLOW concentrates on language and computer skills. So with the help of the computer science teacher here, Seiha, and the students' endless enthusiasm and perseverance, we can get past the language barrier," she said.

Horn said the first week of KhodeUp focuses on HTML, CSS and design basics; the second on JavaScript; and the third and fourth weeks are devoted to a final project in which the students – working in teams of two – have to design and code websites for imaginary businesses.

"I give each team a dossier containing client and market information and they have to do further research and make design decisions based on what the client wants and who their market is," she said about the last two weeks of the course. "The businesses are modeled after actual businesses that could be their clients in the future."

Horn said her own adoption from China and her brother's adoption from Cambodia helped solidify her decision to choose Cambodia as the start for KhodeUp.

"I've always been able to imagine what my life would have been like had I not been adopted, and although I'm not Cambodian, I've always had a really strong connection with the kids here. When I realized that I could have never had an opportunity to learn programming or tech, which is so much a huge part of my life and my passion, I wanted to give the kids here that opportunity," she said.

First class

Phonley Reth and Long Sophary, both 18, were two of her students during the inaugural KhodeUp course at FLOW, which sits off a small cement road on the outskirts of Phnom Penh in the city's Choam Chao commune.

In FLOW's Science classroom on the last Friday of August, Reth, Sophary and 22 other mostly teenagers sat attentively as the teams of two presented their final projects. One student presented the design of the website, while the other discussed its code.

"This is the first time for us to learn such things as designing and coding," said Reth. "We first learned how to design [a website] in Illustrator and Photoshop... and then were taught to code."

Reth, who said he prefers designing to coding, and his partner were tasked with creating a website for an international school.

"I designed it and gave it to my partner to code," he said.

Sophary said she also prefers designing to coding, but that she studied lessons offered by the W3Schools, an online tutorial service for web developers, and may turn to website design and programming as a career.

"I am not too good at coding. I am good at design. But I am doing research with the W3Schools to learn about coding," she said. "I can research and become a web developer in the future." Sophary and her partner created a website for a hotel.

Fearful of technology

Horn's program — if successful and if continued in Cambodia — could slightly help expand the country's poor Internet and technology education, but there still remains a culture of fear around such subjects, industry experts said.

"People are fearful of IT [information technology] here. They say it's a headache or too complex," said Javier Sola, director of Open Institute, an NGO dedicated to helping advance Cambodians' education and understanding of IT.

Sola said while KhodeUp may help locals understand the very basics of web design and programming, they are more in need of critical thinking skills to advance that knowledge.

"You can teach them this, but you won't get them a job because that requires human development. A lot lack basic concepts," he said.

Sola cited the lack of education among Cambodia's 15 million people as well as the lack of Khmer language in design and coding programs as the two biggest factors hindering the country's technological advancement.

"Only eight percent of university students study IT...and the fact there is no Khmer language for some computing [programs] makes this very challenging," he said.

Education among Cambodians remains low, and companies particularly struggle to find qualified candidates in the science and technology fields.

The Labor Force report released last November by the International Labor Organization states that of Cambodia's 7.2 million workers, less than half completed primary school; 35.5 percent completed secondary education; and just 3.8 percent graduated university.

But Horn sees potential among the country's younger generation and remains determined, hoping to begin her second KhodeUp soon.

"In four weeks I don't expect to get them to a 'professional' level or a marketable level, but I really hope that they love coding as much as I do and will continue learning.... I think that it's really just exposure to the Internet and technology that's going to grow these kinds of knowledge. There definitely are companies and startups here now though. I've communicated with quite a few and it's exciting to see that industry grow. There's definitely a lot of untapped potential in Cambodia in terms of tech," she said.

Smart Handed Injunction in Dispute With qb

By Joshua Wilwohl

The Cambodia Daily, May 23, 2014

Smart, Cambodia's second largest mobile operator by subscribers, has been accused of destroying the reputation and financial interest of the much-smaller operator qb, and has been given a court order to cease communication with qb customers and halt promotions luring customers away from qb, according to a court document obtained Thursday.

The court order paves the way for qb to file civil and criminal charges against Smart, which qb may pursue within the next two weeks, said a source with direct knowledge of the dispute.

On Monday, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court ordered Smart employees and its partners to cut off contact with qb customers, and to cease any advertising aiming to lure subscribers away from the operator, according to the order, dated May 19 and signed by Judge Pich Maren.

Smart is part of the Malaysia-based Axiata Group Berhad, while qb is the brand name of Cambodia Advance Communications Co., a 100 percent foreign-owned firm.

The decision, referred to as a preservative relief, orders Smart to "Prevent all staff, sale agents, retail and wholesale dealers, business partners and staff of the parent company of Smart Axiata Co. Ltd. from...making unsolicited calls or contacting by any means via SMS-MMS-website (social media and other promotions) or meeting, making false allegations and promotions luring customers of Cambodia Advance Communications Co. Ltd. with immediate effect."

It "orders Smart Axiata Co. Ltd. to immediately cease all forms of false promotion and allegation luring customers, which damages the reputation of Cambodia Advance Communications Co. Ltd. (CADCOMMS)."

The order follows a May 12 complaint filed by qb against Smart, accusing Smart of malicious business practices.

The complaint came after qb and Smart decided on April 25 to end a long-standing agreement that allowed qb customers to tap into Smart's network when they were roaming, states the order.

It says that before the termination agreement was carried out on May 2, qb began receiving calls from customers who asked for explanations as to why Smart was contacting them to switch to Smart's network.

"On April 28, 2014, CADCOMMS received many complaint calls from its customers to ask for an explanation and confirmation on a statement of Smart Customer Care Services staff who called to CADCOMMS's customers [and said that] CADCOMMS' customers will lose their service because Smart terminated the roaming agreement with CADCOMMS, and Smart will offer new Smart SIMs with the same number free of charge for special numbers to CADCOMMS customers," says the order.

"Smart also offers \$50 to customers of CADCOMMS if they come to swap to Smart SIMs at any sale store of Smart. Smart also did inform to all customers of CADCOMMS to swap SIMs quickly because CADCOMMS is going out of business," it continues.

The order goes on to say Smart's tactics resulted in a waste of financial and human resources for qb, as well as destruction of its business.

"This bad faith and malicious outbound call campaign of Smart has caused real and significant financial damage to [qb's] brand and value, the malicious act and bad act of Smart makes CADCOMMS concerned that Smart will never stop its bad action toward CADCOMMS, although CADCOMMS [gave] a chance to Smart to...stop such acts," states the order.

The order is likely to be followed by a civil complaint, and then a criminal complaint if there is enough supporting evidence, said the source with knowledge of the proceedings, who declined to be named because of the sensitivity of the matter.

"[Qb] can sue for damages and take criminal action for defamation," the source said, adding that qb has obtained signed statements from customers saying that they were contacted by Smart and told to switch networks.

Smart CEO Thomas Hundt said Thursday that he was not aware of the court order and declined to comment.

"I cannot comment on it because I am not aware of it," he said.

When asked if he was aware of the allegations made by qb, Mr. Hundt declined to comment.

Officials at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court also declined to comment on the matter.

Michael Fitzpatrick, qb's chief marketing officer, confirmed the court order.

"I can confirm the order has been issued. And the essence of it is to protect our customer base. It places us in a very difficult position if I were to comment further," he said.

Smart is one of Cambodia's largest mobile operators, trailing only Metfone in its customer base. Last year, it merged with Axiata-owned operator Hello and claims to have more than five million subscribers.

Qb is one of the smallest mobile operators with about half-a-million subscribers, and in July shuttered a number of its retail showrooms and, according to former employees, laid off nearly half of its workforce.

(Additional reporting by Ouch Sony)

Eight Detained, Then Freed Over 'SOS' Rooftop Protest

By Aun Pheap, Khy Sovuthy and Joshua Wilwohl

The Cambodia Daily, November 16, 2012

Local authorities detained eight residents living near Phnom Penh International Airport yesterday, holding them for about 12 hours after accusing them of threatening security by posting pictures of U.S. President Barack Obama on the roofs of their homes and spray painting SOS below the photographs.

The residents had adorned their roofs with messages to the U.S. president in a bid to prevent their eviction from Thmar Kaul village, where more than 180 families had been told to vacate their properties to make way for a security "buffer zone" around the airport ahead of next week's Asean and East Asia summits.

Police said the six women and two men were arrested for causing insecurity just days before the summits, which will be attended by Mr. Obama, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, among others.

"They caused insecurity.... This is not serious, but we need to provide safety for the summits," Choam Chao commune chief Sot Sath said.

At Thmar Kaul yesterday morning, dozens of municipal police officers and soldiers armed with AK-47 assault rifles guarded the roadway into the village. Municipal police officers were seen on the roofs of houses spray painting over the SOS messages after having removed the pictures of Mr. Obama.

"My wife was just washing dishes when 40 policemen came to my house, climbed up to the roof and then took President Obama's photo and spray painted over the SOS. They then came down and took my wife. The police said she committed terrorism, and they took her," said Kong Phalla, 47, the husband of detainee Khiev Sary.

"We didn't do anything wrong."

Soth Sovanrath, assistant to the commune chief Mr. Sath, said the residents were arrested for arguing with police officers.

"We came to check people's homes and instruct them to remove the posters. We arrested at least five people because when the authorities came to paint over the SOS, those people argued with them and prevented police from painting over the messages," he said.

Phuong Sopheap, 38, one of the eight arrested residents, said after her release at about 7:30 p.m. that police agreed to set them free only if they signed a contract saying they would not protest during the East Asia and Asean summits, which run concurrently from Sunday to Tuesday.

Ms. Sopheap said the eight signed the agreement.

"I think that authorities arrested us because they want [to] weaken our spirits and stop us protesting about our land. But I'm not scared. When the summits finish, we'll still protest," Ms. Sopheap said.

Vong Sereivuth, Pur Senchey deputy district police chief, declined to comment on the arrest of the eight or their release.

Moeun Tola, head of the Community Legal Education Center, a legal aid group, was among a group of NGOs and media waiting outside the police station yesterday afternoon for the eight to be released.

"What harm to security has this caused?" Mr. Tola asked.

"You can't even see it from a plane. The purpose is just to intimidate the community. It's a shame for Cambodia...because this should be a time for people to express their freedom," he said.

Local human rights group Adhoc also condemned the arrests.

"The arrests and detention of these community activists is yet another example of the Cambodian authorities' disregard for human rights. The Cambodian authorities have expressed a desire to show the 'good' face of Cambodia to the world, however, their intolerance of dissent and willingness to use the police to stifle freedom of expression instead demonstrates little more than the shrinking democratic space in the country," the group said in a statement.

The government has said the families constructed their homes illegally and they will be evicted without compensation. The families counter that claim, saying their ownership of the land and construction of their homes was recognized by local government officials, and they will not move without fair compensation.

Essex County Corrections Officer Killed

By Joshua Wilwohl

Patch.com, July 31, 2011

Debora Ferreira put aside her corrections officer uniform Saturday night in exchange for a red-and-white-flowered dress with red high heels, according to friends. As Ferreira pulled her black BMW from the driveway of her Robert Place home in Irvington around 10 p.m., her neighbor and friend Nikki told her she looked "beautiful" and waved goodbye.

That was the last time Nikki, who declined to give her last name, talked with Ferreira. Hours later, she'd receive the news that Ferreira, 32, an Essex County corrections officer and mother of a one-year-old daughter, was found shot to death in downtown Newark.

"She said she was going out...and she looked beautiful," said Nikki, as she held back tears. "She was fun-loving...and would comfort me in life."

Essex County Chief of Detectives Anthony Ambrose said Ferreira was off duty when she was shot in her car near the Maiden Lane and Halsey Street intersection around 2:55 a.m. Sunday. She later died at University Hospital shortly after 3 a.m. As of Sunday night, no arrests had been made.

Ambrose said Ferreira had been a block away at a "social club" on William Street before the shooting, but did not elaborate. He said police do not have a motive.

Nikki said she didn't know Ferreira's plans Saturday night, "All she said was she was going out...and she was happy."

The social club on William Street appears to be Club Mentors, a Bronze Shields club. Bronze Shields is the African-American police officers' association within the Newark Police Department. Locals on William Street Sunday said the club is the only one on the street and caters to law enforcement officers. Officials have not identified the club.

Records show Ferreira had been employed by the Essex County Corrections Department as an officer since July 2007. Anthony Puglisi, a county spokesman, said Ferreira worked at Essex County Correctional Facility on Doremus Avenue in the city.

Joe Amato, president of the local union that represents Essex County corrections officers, said the department is in "shock" and is sending counselors to the jail for fellow officers. He said the county employs roughly 540 corrections officers.

"She was a very dedicated officer," Amato said. "A good mother. She was the sweetest kid."

Amato said Ferreira had been waiting for results of a promotion test to see if she could become a sergeant.

Acting Newark Police Director Samuel DeMaio said his department is working with the county's homicide/major crimes task force "to bring closure to this horrific act of violence."

Ferreira is the second female corrections officer shot dead in Newark in less than a month. Katrina Owens, 37, was killed July 5 on Columbia Avenue in the city's West Ward. The South Brunswick woman was an officer employed at the New Jersey State Prison in Trenton. Owens' alleged killer and boyfriend, Allen Barron, 21, shot himself hours later at a Greyhound bus station in Virginia.

Ambrose said Essex County Crimestoppers is offering a \$10,000 reward for information about Ferreira's death. Jim Ryan, a spokesman for the New Jersey State Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, said the organization is offering an additional \$10,000.

Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo Jr., who oversees the corrections department, called the incident "a tragic loss for Essex County." "Our sympathies go out to her family," he said.

The scene Sunday morning around 10 a.m. showed little signs of an investigation hours before. A piece of yellow police tape that once cordoned off the streets was tied to a parking lot fence. The Maiden Lane-Halsey Street corner is a desolate area with two parking lots surrounded by commercial buildings.

On Robert Place in Irvington Sunday afternoon, an Essex County Prosecutor's Office van was parked outside Ferreira's house as investigators milled around inside her white duplex.

Tanya Idowu, 26, who lives three houses down from Ferreira, said she saw the corrections officer "dressed nice" Saturday night. She described Ferreira as a "good" neighbor, "She seemed like a nice lady. She didn't talk to too many people, except for (Nikki)."

Nikki said she used to peek through her window every morning when she woke up to see if Ferreira was home, "I did it this morning and she wasn't there."

Newark's Neediest Get Helping Hand

By Joshua Wilwohl

Patch.com, June 23, 2011

Brenda Dean said she spends her days at Newark Penn Station and her nights at Newark Liberty International Airport. The 56-year-old isn't a frequent traveler, she's homeless.

"Survive. You have to survive out here," she said while seated on a bench at Penn Station in the early morning hours Wednesday. She carried a bag of food and a copy of the day's newspaper. "You have to be able to learn how to cope with certain things that go on around you.... If you can't survive on the streets, you can end up losing your mind."

Dean was one of more than 75 homeless people surveyed this week as part of Newark 50, a project aimed to house 50 of the city's most vulnerable homeless men and women.

Tonya Bryan, Newark's policy adviser for homelessness, said the project is part of the larger 100,000 Homes Campaign headed by Common Ground to house 100,000 homeless nationwide by July 2013. The program has helped house roughly 9,100 people since its launch in 2010.

"Ending homelessness is not just bricks and mortar, but there are resources that are there for this chronic population," she said. "And, so, it's just a matter of tapping into it."

Bryan said the goal of Newark 50 is to find permanent housing for 25 people by December and another 25 by December 2012.

Linda Kaufman, eastern U.S. field organizer with the 100,000 Homes Campaign, said 50 is a good starting number for the city.

"There are more chronically homeless people than 50 (in the city), but what happens is that the volunteers really get their heads around housing the first 50 and then they recognize the community wants to help more," she said.

A January 2009 Point-in-Time report, which measures the county's homeless population, put the total number, including children, at roughly 1,738 in Essex County. Of those, 938 adults and 504 children were in Newark. A county report states, though, raw data from that survey, shows "a more accurate annualized estimate" of homeless residents in Essex County is between 3,700 and 3,900.

In order to identify Newark's most vulnerable, Bryan and 45 volunteers scoured the city's streets in the early morning hours Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday to conduct

questionnaires. The five-page Vulnerability Index Survey asked about housing history, medical needs, military service and income.

Chip Cliffe, 56, of Jersey City, led a team Wednesday to Penn Station, where they met Dean and roughly 10 other homeless men and women.

"In addition to helping people by finding food and clothing, we really want to be a part of finding long-term solutions to get people off the street," he said. "People are really desperate for help, so any help they might get, such as a hand off the street, they're willing to give it a chance."

Travis, 40, a volunteer who declined to give his full name, said he's currently homeless and walked two miles from Newark's South Ward to help the group at Penn Station.

"Over the past two years, I've met so many people living on the street and got to know their stories and I think there's a lot of work that can be done if you get out and touch the right people," he said. "I think this is something that can help raise awareness and awareness is always something that can help solve a problem. "

Dean, who said she's been homeless since 2004 after "trouble with the law," said she's willing to fill out the survey and await the help, "I lost my apartment and nobody wanted me to stay with them, so I ended up getting put in the streets. They come through and do this survey, which is nice. And lots of times, they...have clothes and food."

Those who participated in the survey received a \$5 food card.

Newark Mayor Cory Booker said the program is a start to housing more homeless in the city, "The plight of the homeless population of the city of Newark challenges us as a community and a society. We must address this continuing crisis, by manifesting our spiritual strength and compassion to empower these citizens with the tools they need to build productive lives."

Booker teamed up with Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo Jr. last year to launch a 10-year campaign to address homelessness in the county.

Bryan said the street surveys are the first step of the initiative. The next is surveying homeless people in shelters. Then, the answers received are entered in a database that ranks vulnerability, according to Bryan.

"This week, we find out who they are, where they are and what their needs are," she said. "So, now we go back to the table and lineup our resources in a more specific way so we can go back out and get these people off the street."

When asked if she thought she'd ever be off the streets, Dean said she's hopeful to have her own apartment in the future, "I'm going to be moving into, hopefully by September...a nice apartment."