Thai police charge man in hacking attacks on gov't sites

December 26 2016, by Kaweewit Kaewjinda

Natdanai Kongdee, third from right, is interviewed at the police headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, Monday, Dec 26, 2016. Police in Thailand have charged 19-year-old Kongdee in connection with a series of recent hacking attacks on government computers that were billed as a protest against a restrictive law governing internet use. (AP Photo/Tassanee Vejpongsa)

Police in Thailand on Monday charged a suspect with participating in recent hacking attacks on government computers that were billed as a protest against a restrictive law governing internet use.

Natdanai Kongdee, 19, was one of nine people arrested in connection with the [attacks](#) that blocked access to some websites and accessed non-public files, Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan said.

Police said he was a low-level hacker rather than a leader and had confessed to participating in the attacks. They said he belonged to several online groups specializing in hacking activities.

Natdanai was present at Monday's news conference but did not speak. He was charged with gaining unauthorized access to police data, along with illegal possession of firearms and marijuana, allegedly found when police searched his house.

The legal status of the other people arrested was not explained.

Groups promoting the attacks say they are in protest of passage of revisions to Thailand's Computer Crime Act, which would restrict freedom of speech and facilitate targeting political dissidents. The new law would allow Thai authorities to intercept private communication and to censor websites without a court order.

In addition to the leaking of documents, government sites have been subject to distributed denial of service, or DDoS, attacks, where access is denied by overloading the online server with requests. A Facebook group encouraged a simple version of such attacks by suggesting people repeatedly reload them by pressing the F5 key.

"He (Natdanai) was naive to believe the (Facebook) group and hack into the system," Siripong Timula of the police's technology department said.

The Facebook group, with the name Citizens Against Single Gateway, earlier this month called for a "cyberwar."

Its name reflects activists' concerns about plans for a single gateway through which all international internet traffic would pass. The government claims such a system is necessary for national security, but opposition from many sectors has made the government evasive about whether it plans to implement a single gateway.

The group on Dec. 19 claimed responsibility for temporarily bringing down the Thai defense ministry's website.

Since then, it has claimed to have brought down websites for Thailand's military, customs department, police, foreign affairs ministry and additional government websites. Other hackers, operating as part of the informal activist network Anonymous, have been posting data they say is from government computers.

Police said Monday that their systems are still "well protected" and that the attacks constitute minor hacks.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said, "If we do not have any laws or write it down to make it clearer and if they continue to do this, what can we do?" Should hackers simply be allowed to poke into personal data, he asked reporters rhetorically.

"We've talked about it many times. Everything is passed. Talk about something else," said Prayuth, who is noted for his brusque manner of speaking.