

Thai lawmakers approve controversial cybersecurity act

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Thailand's legislature passed a cybersecurity bill on Thursday that would allow authorities access to people's personal information without a court order.

The Cybersecurity Act addresses computer hacking crimes, but activists fear it will allow the government sweeping access to people's [personal information](#).

The act allows state officials to seize, search, infiltrate, and make copies of computers, computer systems and information in computers without a court warrant if an appointed committee sees it as a high-level security threat, and relevant courts can later be informed of such actions. It would also allow state officials to request "real-time" access to information related to those causing cyber threats.

The National Legislative Assembly, which passed the bill in its final reading by a vote of 133-0, was appointed by the junta that came to power after a 2014 coup. It becomes law after it is endorsed by the king and published in the Royal Gazette.

Thailand will have a [general election](#) on March 24, and activists have unsuccessfully urged that the assembly stop issuing new laws, and instead leave the job to future elected lawmakers.

Three earlier drafts of the cybersecurity bill had been withdrawn from parliament since the first draft was introduced in 2015 due to heavy objections from the public, said Yingcheep Atchanont, program manager of the legal monitoring group iLaw.

"Every draft was completely different from the others, but the important part, which allows [state officials](#) to request people's communications without a [court order](#), is still there," Yingcheep said. "This shows that this power is something that they want and must get in any way possible."

He said the assembly took advantage of the fact that many people's attention is focused on the [election campaign](#), so objections were more

muted than previously, facilitating passage of the bill.

The assembly also passed another bill earlier Thursday aimed at protecting people's personal information, but critics say it is not sufficient if authorities choose to exercise the powers they are granted.

"There are many measures that are good and with which I agree, and Thailand should have had this law a long time ago," Yingcheep said about the personal information bill. "But the important part is that in the personal information bill there is an exemption clause in cases where security officials want information. This means the bill does not protect citizens at all if the one requesting your [information](#) is from a state security department."

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