

Thailand backs down on Facebook ban over royal posts

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Thailand ferociously enforces a draconian lese majeste law which outlaws any criticism of the monarchy.

Since ultra-royalist generals seized power three years ago more than 100 people have been charged, many for comments made online, and some people have been jailed for decades.

The authorities have redoubled efforts to purge the Thai web following the October ascension of the country's new king Maha Vajiralongkorn.

Last week Thailand's telecom regulator, the NBTC, said it would file a police complaint against Facebook's Thailand office and shut down the

hugely popular site if it did not remove more than 130 "illegal" posts by Tuesday.

"Facebook is cooperating with Thailand," Takorn Tantasith, secretary general of the NBTC told reporters after the 10am deadline passed.

Takorn said some 97 web pages deemed critical of the monarchy remained on the platform but authorities were seeking court orders to send Facebook demanding their removal.

Thai authorities last week previously said Facebook had already removed some 170 posts.

The social network giant declined to comment on how many posts it had made unavailable in Thailand since the recent requests.

Under its published policies, Facebook says it will comply with a country's request to remove content if it receives a valid court order.

"When we receive such a request, we review it to determine if it puts us on notice of unlawful content," the company told AFP.

"If we determine that it does, then we make it unavailable in the relevant country or territory and notify people who try to access it why it is restricted."

According to its published data, Facebook made 50 posts unavailable to Thai users after requests from the government in 2016.

No items were restricted in 2015 and 35 items were removed in 2014, the year of the coup.

Vajiralongkorn, 64, became king following the death of his father King Bhumibol Adulyadej who reigned for seven decades.

He has yet to attain his father's widespread

popularity.

At least seven people are known to have been charged with lese majeste since he took the throne.

One, human rights lawyer Prawet Prapanukul, is facing up to 150-years in prison after being charged with a record ten separate counts if lese majeste.

Media inside Thailand must heavily self censor when reporting on the monarchy making it perilous to detail what content has angered the authorities.

Somsak Jeamteerasakul, an exiled Thai academic and monarchy critic, posted a letter from Facebook on his own account informing him that some of his posts were among those censored.

The posts included photographs and video footage taken of Vajiralongkorn in Germany where he spends much of the year.

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