

# Thailand to sue Google for insulting monarchy

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Information and Communications Technology Minister Sitthichai Pookaiyaudom said he will press a criminal lawsuit against Google Inc at the Bangkok criminal court on Friday.

The suit will charge that YouTube.com, owned by Google, hosted video clips offensive to the monarchy. It was not clear where Mr Sitthichai will charge the American company with lese majeste, defamation or a cyberlaw violation.

Google has no office in Thailand, although it does business with many Thai-based websites and businesses. The California company established an office in Singapore late last week to try to expand its advertising profile in Southeast Asia. YouTube.com has no offices in Thailand.

A ministry statement on Tuesday said the suit will take the form of “a petition to the criminal court for emergency protection,” according to official Thai News Agency.

Mr Sitthichai added that the ministry is studying the case to determine if the lawsuit can be filed in an international court.

YouTube has reportedly asked the Thai government “by e-mail” to send the controversial clips deemed insulting the King as evidence so it will remove them as requested by Thailand.

Sitthichai said the request showed that YouTube was “playing a game”.

Sitthichai has argued that Google had bowed to China’s requests to block certain topics deemed politically sensitive, such as all references to democracy, so he saw no reason why it could not act similarly over Thailand’s sensitivities over its revered monarch.

The ministry has attempted to block all access to YouTube from Thailand since April 4, shortly after the first offensive clip appeared on the popular website which relies on contributions from the public at large.

That clip has long since been removed, and the surfer who uploaded it has been banned by YouTube. But because of the high profile publicity of Mr Sitthichai’s censorship, at least a dozen other offensive video clips have been uploaded to YouTube.com.

Increasing government censorship of websites was cited as one of the reasons Thailand was downgraded earlier this month to 127<sup>th</sup> place out of 195 countries on the Freedom House ranking of press freedom.

Last year Thailand ranked 107<sup>th</sup> in the same listing.

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**P.S.**

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