THAILAND'S CYBER WAR

Social media continues to be used as a communication tool to battle opponents in the political 'war' currently going on.

The People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) has been using social media a lot to inform, to invite, and to connect with supporters and the public. They are active in posting information, news and updates many times a day. They do this via facebook.com/PDRCThailand and Twitter at @CMDThai.

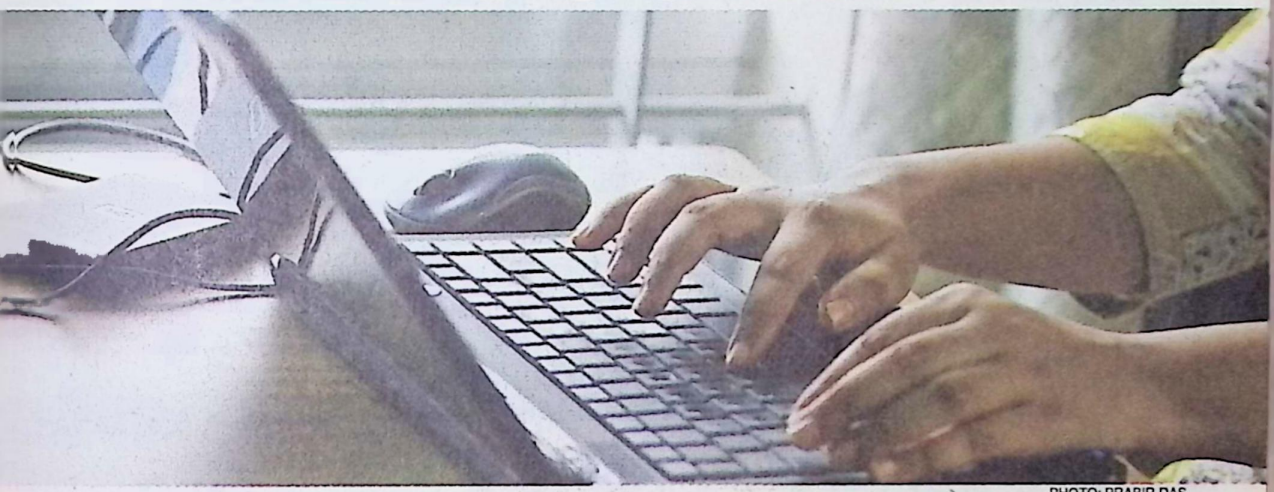


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The PRDC's Facebook page had 27,040 people talking about it and nearly 19,000 "friends" who liked it last week.

Meanwhile, the government, after the caretaker Cabinet imposed an emergency decree covering the capital and its outskirts for 60 days, also set up the Centre for Maintaining Peace and Order (CMPO), replacing the Centre for the Administration of Peace and Order, to oversee the state of emergency.

The centre also took action on social media by changing its twitter account from @capopolice to @cmpolive but it kept its Facebook page as CAPOpolice. It also tweeted to invite people to forward demonstration photos to the same Facebook page and new Twitter account (@cmpolive).

Many more than these two key organisations are using social media as the main communication channel to send messages and keep supporters updated. Different groups on both sides are active on social media doing the same things: promoting their position and attacking the rivals. Some messages are true but many are not true, with fake accounts set up on Twitter and fake pages on Facebook.

So it seems there is now a type of cyber war, embracing online political propaganda campaigns to attacks on opponents. Thailand now has over 22 million people on the Net, most of who check social media every day, and some of who monitor news and developments around the clock. They have their own media channels to instantly relay messages they like, love, and believe to many others. Not all of them are ethical about the information that they create and share over social media. Thus, there is the risk of all of us being misinformed or harmed via social media by others who may do this innocently, or with intent.

Lately, the White Shirt group has promoted their campaign to support an election on February 2. They have also urged the PDRC to stop their rally, saying it could cause conditions leading to violence. They have gathered for campaign activities, at which they light candles - and images of this are shown via social media outlets. They also used social media to keep people informed their key points, their requirements, and their desires. They do this in the same way as the PDRC and businessmen do, when the latter invited people to blow whistles in symbolic opposition to the government.

Meanwhile, a group of IT people, scientists, and engineers have also been using social media to invite other IT buffs, scientists, and engineers to get together tomorrow to show their support for reform in Thailand - before an election.

Other people have seen this crisis as an opportunity. For example, Skaer-Tshirt set up a Facebook page recently to sell Bangkok Shutdown T-shirts.

So, it's a chaotic situation on social media in Thailand right now. Remember to be careful when reading and posting on social media. It doesn't hurt to be sceptical.

– ASINA PORNWASIN
ANN/The Nation