

## **Google: Critics of Vietnam mine face online attack**

BEN STOCKING - Associated Press Writer - Associated Press

Google Inc. says malicious software has been used to spy on Vietnamese computer users opposed to a controversial bauxite mine in the Southeast Asian country. Computer security firm McAfee said the perpetrators may be linked to the communist government.

The "malware" has targeted "potentially tens of thousands" of people who downloaded software allowing users to type in Vietnamese, a posting on Google's online security blog said Tuesday. It said the malware has been used for "damaging purposes" — to attack blogs containing messages of political dissent.

"Specifically, these attacks have tried to squelch opposition to bauxite mining efforts in Vietnam, an important and emotionally charged issue in the country," Google engineer Neel Mehta wrote in the posting.

The Chinese-built mine is planned for Vietnam's Central Highlands and has attracted strong opposition — including from Vietnam's most famous military hero — because of fears it would cause major environmental problems and lead to Chinese workers flooding into the strategically sensitive region.

McAfee, which has investigated the malware, also discussed the attacks in a blog posting Tuesday.

"We believe that the perpetrators may have political motivations and may have some allegiance to the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," wrote George Kurtz, McAfee's chief technology officer.

Vietnamese officials could not immediately be reached for comment Wednesday.

Last week, Google shut down its search operations in China, Vietnam's northern neighbor, after complaints of cyberattacks and censorship there. Google redirected queries from China's mainland to the freer Chinese territory of Hong Kong.

Vietnam also tightly controls its flow of information and has said it reserved the right take "appropriate action" against Web sites it deems harmful to national security.

Last fall, the government detained several bloggers who had criticized the bauxite mine, and in December, a Web site called [bauxitevietnam.info](http://bauxitevietnam.info), which had drawn millions of visitors opposed to the mine, was hacked.

The malware apparently began circulating at about that time, according the McAfee

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blog. It said someone hacked into the Web site run by the California-based Vietnamese Professionals Society and replaced a keyboard program that can be downloaded from that site with a malicious program.

Google's blog said the incident underscored the need for Internet users to run regular antivirus checks, and for the international community to take cybersecurity seriously "to keep free opinion flowing."

Among the bauxite mine's opponents is the legendary 98-year-old Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, who led Vietnamese forces in victories against French and U.S. troops. Giap's photograph is prominently featured on the bauxite Web site.

Suspicion of China runs deep in Vietnam, which has a long history of conflict with its northern neighbor.

The two countries fought a bloody border war in 1979 and they have ongoing disputes about two archipelagoes in the South China Sea, the Spratlys and the Paracels.

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On the Web: <http://googleonlinesecurity.blogspot.com/2010/03/chilling-effects-of-malware.html>

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