

# Apple tells Thai activists they are targets of 'state-sponsored attackers'

Wednesday 5 January 2022, by [RATCLIFFE Rebecca](#), [SIRADAPUVADOL Navaon](#) (Date first published: 25 November 2021).

## **At least 17 people including protest leaders have received alerts about devices possibly being compromised**

Thai activists who have called for reform of the monarchy are among at least 17 people in [Thailand](#) who say they have been warned by Apple that they have been targeted by “state-sponsored” attackers.

Warnings were sent to the prominent activists Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul and Arnon Nampa, according to Panusaya’s sister May and the administrator of Arnon’s Facebook page. Panusaya and Arnon are in pre-trial detention after leading demonstrations calling for the power of the monarchy to be curbed.

Dechathorn Bamrungmuang, a rapper known as Hockhacker with the group Rap Against Dictatorship, said on Facebook he had also received an alert from [Apple](#), and posted a screengrab of the message. The group’s music has taken aim at the monarchy and the military-backed government, and Dechathorn faces charges of sedition.

The message posted by Dechathorn said: “Apple believes you are being targeted by state-sponsored attackers ... These attackers are likely targeting you individually because of who you are or what you do. If your device is compromised by a state-sponsored attacker, they may be able to remotely access your sensitive data, communications, or even the camera and microphone. While it’s possible this is a false alarm, please take this warning seriously.”

Less high-profile activists who have worked behind the scenes to support pro-democracy protests have reported receiving similar warnings, as have academics.

They include Prajak Kongkirati, a political scientist at Thammasat University; Puangthong Pawakapan, a political scientist at Chulalongkorn University; Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, an opposition figure and secretary general of the Progressive Movement; and Yingcheep Atchanont, of the legal rights non-profit iLaw.

It is not clear how many people were contacted by Apple. At least 17 people said on social media or told the Guardian directly that they had received similar messages.

Apple did not respond to a request for comment. It is not known how the alleged attack was carried out.

Separately, Apple announced this week that it had filed a lawsuit against NSO Group, stating that its Pegasus software had been used to “attack a small number of Apple users worldwide with malicious malware and spyware”.

The Pegasus project, an [investigation into NSO](#) by the Guardian and other media outlets coordinated by the French media group Forbidden Stories, has documented dozens of cases where NSO's spyware was used to attack iPhone users.

Thailand's digital ministry could not be reached for comment.

Elia Fofi, a Thai activist, said he received an email from Apple at 4am on Wednesday, followed by an SMS message at about 11pm. He said he did not consider himself to be a high-profile protester, but other pro-democracy activists who work behind the scenes had also been contacted by Apple.

The activists were not intimidated by the messages, Elia said. "We have nothing to fear. What we say, what we think, what we fight for is the most common thing ever. We are not doing a terrorist attack."

But he said an attack on their privacy was an attack on the public's privacy more broadly. "People will feel fear to talk about things that they want to talk about in private," he said.

Last year a [wave of youthful protests](#) broke a long-held taboo in calling for reforms of the monarchy, an institution previously considered off limits. Protesters called for the royal budget to be reduced and demanded that the king not interfere with politics. They also called for the resignation of the Thai prime minister, Prayuth Chan-ocha, a former general who first came to power in a coup.

At least 1,636 people have been charged in relation to their political activities or political expression since protests escalated in July 2020, according to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights. More than 150 people face lese-majesty charges, which can lead to up to 15 years in prison.

Nattacha Boonchaiinsawat, an MP with the opposition Move Forward party, called on Prayuth to clarify whether the government was involved in the attacks. "I also would like to ask the digital minister how the government is protecting Thai citizens and how it will take action against those behind the attacks. This is not a personal issue but it's national security where the government should take responsibility and protect the people."

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