



In Indonesia, Twitter takes on social watchdog role

JAKARTA, May 11 — When Indonesian Social Services Minister Salim Segaf Al-Jufrie was spotted driving his car in a dedicated bus lane in the capital Jakarta, he could scarcely have imagined the furore that would follow.

An eagle-eyed resident snapped a picture of his transgression and posted it on the social networking site Twitter, where it was viewed by more than 10,000 people — many of whom vented angrily at the blatant flouting of the law.

The chastened minister, however, proved as media-savvy as his detractors, using Twitter to respond and apologise.

“Thanks for all the responses and input on today’s incident,” he “tweeted”.

“It’s a valuable lesson for me and my staff. I would like to sincerely apologise ... as a leader, I take full responsibility.” And so he did. The following day, al-Jufrie filed a report of his own wrongdoing at a local police station and was fined 500,000 rupiah (RM176).

The incident shows just how powerful social media such as Facebook, Twitter and others have become in Indonesia, the world’s fourth-most populous country with 235 million people spread across an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands.

Earlier this year, a report by the social media monitoring firm Sysomos ranked Indonesia sixth, accounting for 2.4 per cent of Twitter users worldwide, after the United States, Brazil, Britain, Canada and Germany.

Thailand-based media consultant Jon Russell named Jakarta the “Twitter capital of Asia”.

“With a population of 230 million plus, Indonesia is a huge potential market for social networking just in numbers alone,” he said, adding that Twitter’s popularity is largely due to the low cost of mobile internet and increasing demand for smartphones.

No topic is unworthy of a tweet in Indonesia.

Last week, the resignation of Indonesian Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati beat Canadian teen heart throb Justin Bieber in a list of top ten subjects as scores of Twitterers debated the significance of her departure.

“Finally, Justin Bieber has found a successor: Sri Mulyani,” tweeted one Indonesian.

The medium has also caused some controversy.

Last year, Indonesian model and celebrity Luna Maya angrily lashed out on Twitter at paparazzi photographers after her partner's daughter was struck by a camera in a media scrum.

"Infotainment (journalists) are lower than commercial sex workers, murderers! May your soul burn in hell!" she told her 100,000 plus followers.

Kamsul Hasan, head of the Jakarta chapter of the Indonesian Journalists Association, reported Maya to the police for defamation. Maya tweeted an apology, and then closed her account. — Reuters