

Thailand: New attacks on freedom of press and information

Thursday 13 April 2017, by [PRACHATAI](#) (Date first published: 11 April 2017).

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New media bill threatens “unlicensed” journalists with imprisonment

Despite opposition from media groups, the junta is proposing a law to punish unlicensed journalists with two years in prison.

On 10 April 2017, Maj Gen Pisit Pao-In, chairman of the media subcommittee of the junta’s National Reform Steering Assembly (NRSA), announced that under the new Media Bill, media workers who do not possess official licenses could face two years’ imprisonment, or a fine of 60,000 baht, or both.

The current version of the bill proposes a National Professional Media Council (NPMC) to regulate and issue licenses to media organisations. The NPMC will consist of 13 members, including two members of the government. Pisit said it is crucial for media professionals to be licenced.

The NPMC will also monitor the adherence of all media to vaguely defined ‘media ethics’, to ensure they do not present news content in violation of ‘public morals’.

Pisit said that media organisations will be given a two-year transition period to adapt to the new law after it is enacted, adding that the NRSA will discuss the bill again on 11 April.

In January, 30 media organisations issued a joint statement against the controversial Media Bill. The organisations include the Thai Journalists Association, the National Press Council, the News Broadcasting Council of Thailand and the Online News Providers Association.

“The bill is not based on the principle of protecting media freedom, but on principles of controlling the media and allowing state authorities to intervene in the work of the media,” the joint statement concluded.

According to iLaw, a human rights advocacy group, the licensing system set up by the bill gives the state many opportunities to intervene in the work of the media.

* Prachatai. Tue, 11/04/2017 - 15:39:

<http://prachatai.org/english/node/7067>

Ban on critics shows brazen determination to silence dissent

Responding to a government warning that anyone who follows, contacts, or shares posts online with three prominent critics - historian Somsak Jeamteerasakul, journalist and author Andrew MacGregor Marshall, and former diplomat Pavin Chachavalpongpun - will be prosecuted under the Computer Crimes Act, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific Josef Benedict said:

"The Thai authorities have plunged to fresh depths in restricting people's freedoms of expression. After imprisoning people for what they say both online and offline, and hounding critics into exile, they want to cut people off from each other altogether.

"The move doesn't reveal strength, but a weakness and fear of criticism. In its determination to silence all dissent, the Thai authorities are resorting to extreme measures that brazenly flout international human rights law.

"In March, the UN Human Rights Committee raised concerns about the severe and arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression, including the Computer Crimes Act. Rather than drawing lessons from the criticism, they are pressing ahead with their repressive tactics."

* Prachatai. Thu, 13/04/2017 - 12:42:
<http://prachatai.org/english/node/7070?>

Voice TV back on air, forced into self-censorship

After a seven-day ban by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), Voice TV is back on air, but for the time being there will be no programmes critical of the authorities.

After the NBTC 7-day ban came to an end on 4 April 2017, Prateep Kongsib, Director of Voice TV's news programme, published a statement on the Voice TV website called 'The Return of Voice TV (Again)' .

Prateep said that Voice TV will air its news programmes as usual, including Wake Up News, Tonight Thailand, the Daily Dose and In Her View, known for their progressive and critical stand against the Thai junta.

The programmes, however, will not be run with the same critical vigour as before the NBTC ban, stated Prateep, adding that news analysis critical of the authorities will have to be excluded for the time being.

"Three years after of being forced off the air on 20 May 2014 [two days before the 2014 coup d'état],

I as a News Programme Director of Voice TV, would like to send you the message as we have once again returned,” reads part of the statement.

“It is as if [we] fell asleep on 20 May 2014 (or actually 19 September 2006) and woke up again on 4 April 2017 when Thailand’s political landscape still remains the same,” wrote Prateep.

The NBTC announced the decision to suspend Voice TV for seven days starting on 28 March 2017. It accused its programmes of being one-sided and misleading the public.

The ban was initially proposed by the junta’s media regulatory team. According to a petition sent by the junta to the NBTC, Voice TV published inaccurate stories between 15 and 20 March covering the junta’s operations at Wat Dhammakaya, its crackdown on the Kotee network, the summary killing of a Lahu activist and allegations that police are involved in a controversial casino located in a disputed Thai-Cambodian zone.

The Thai Journalists Association (TJA) and the Thai Broadcast Journalists Association (TBJA) condemned the ban, pointing out that it is against the constitution.

“The NBTC is an independent organisation with the authority and duty to prevent outside influences from intervening in the independence of the media ... [the ban] destroys the credibility of the NBTC and affects freedom of the press,” stated the joint letter of the two media organisations.

* Prachatai. Tue, 04/04/2017 - 10:44:

<http://prachatai.org/english/node/7052>

Voice TV ban unconstitutional: media associations

Thai media associations have voiced opposition to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission decision to temporarily ban Voice TV, saying it should safeguard media freedom rather than bow down to the junta.

On 28 March 2017, the Thai Journalists Association (TJA) and the Thai Broadcast Journalists Association (TBJA) issued a joint statement against the decision by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) to prohibit Voice TV from broadcasting for seven days.

The two media associations urged the NBTC to reconsider the ban, pointing out that the ban is against the constitution.

“The NBTC is an independent organisation with the authority and duty to prevent outside influences from intervening in the independence of the media ... [the ban] destroys the credibility of the NBTC and affects freedom of the press,” stated the joint letter.

If certain Voice TV programmes affect national security or the rights of individuals, the NBTC should consider them on a case by case basis. The Commission should not shut down the entire TV channel, which affects the livelihoods of many employees.

On 27 March, Lt Gen Peerapong Manakit, a member of the NBCT, announced the decision to temporarily suspend the broadcasting of Voice TV for seven days starting on 28 March 2017.

The ban was initially proposed by the junta's media regulatory team. According to a petition sent by the junta to the NBTC, Voice TV published inaccurate stories between 15 and 20 March covering the junta's operations at Wat Dhammakaya, its crackdown on the Kotee network, the summary killing of a Lahu activist and allegations that police are involved in a controversial casino located in a disputed Thai-Cambodian zone.

The petition accused the programmes of being one-sided and misleading the public. They were considered a breach of NCPO Announcement 97/2014 (the junta's media regulations), the related NCPO Announcement 103/2014, and the NBCT Act.

On 29 August 2016, the NBTC voted 3 to 1 to suspend for seven days the transmission of Wake Up News, a popular morning news programme on Voice TV.

The NBTC reasoned that the programme presenters had violated a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Voice TV and the NBTC. According to the authorities, the MoU banned content that could affect good public morals and national security.

Under NCPO Head Order No. 41/2016 enacted on 13 July 2016, the NBTC has the authority to summarily close down any media that fails to cooperate with the junta or that presents information deemed as a threat to national security.

* Prachatai. Tue, 28/03/2017 - 16:26:

<http://prachatai.org/english/node/7040>

Voice TV faces 7-day shutdown

The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has proposed a suspension of Voice TV's broadcasting license for 'unreasonable criticism' and 'biased content'.

On 27 March 2017, Lt Gen Peerapong Manakit, a member of the NBCT, said that it has proposed a temporary ban on Voice TV lasting seven days. The Commission will make a final decision this afternoon.

The ban was initially proposed by the junta's media regulatory team. According to a petition the junta sent to the NBTC, Voice TV published inaccurate stories during 15 to 20 March. These covered the junta's operations at Wat Dhammakaya, its crackdown on the Ko Tee network, the summary killing of a Lahu activist and allegations that police are involved in a controversial casino located in a disputed Thai-Cambodian zone.

The petition accused the programmes of being one-sided and of misleading the public. They were considered a breach of NCPO Announcement 97/2014 (the junta's media regulations), the related NCPO Announcement 103/2014, and the NBCT Act.

Peerapong added the sub-committee has investigated the petition and agreed that Voice TV has repeatedly violated regulations. Since the station has shown no attempt at improving, the NBTC proposed the temporary ban.

In response, Voice TV published a statement saying it has always followed journalist ethics and that the controversial stories are not a threat to national security as the junta claims. If suspended, the

station will continue to use its website and social media to cover stories.

* Prachatai. Mon, 27/03/2017 - 17:13:

<http://prachatai.org/english/node/7036>
