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Asia - Thailand

Mounting repression

Lèse-majesté charge used to crackdown on opposition media

2 May 2011

Reporters Without Borders is concerned about the fate of **Somyot Pruksakasemsuk**, editor of the magazine *Voice of Thaksin*, who was arrested by the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) on 30 April and was placed in pre-trial custody today by a Bangkok criminal court on a charge of lèse-majesté. A request for release on bail was rejected.

"This arrest confirms that a crackdown on the opposition media is under way," Reporters Without Borders said. "Once again it is a lèse-majesté charge that has been used to detain an opposition journalist and activist. This is not an isolated case but one that targets all media that are close to or support the opposition. In less than a month, about 20 opposition figures have been accused of lèse-majesté."

Somyos was arrested at the border in Aranyaprathet, in the eastern province of Sa Kaeo, as he was trying to cross into Cambodia. The *Bangkok Post* quoted a police officer as saying the court granted a request from the DSI to hold him for ten days so that he could not "tamper with the evidence against him."

The editor of the bi-monthly *Voice of Thaksin* (which was banned in 2010 and which was subsequently replaced by *Red Power*), Somyos was arrested in May 2010 following the final assault on the "Red Shirt" opposition demonstrators and was held for three weeks. He later gave Reporters Without Borders an [interview](#).

During the news conference he gave on 21 May 2010, he called for a halt to "any threatening act against all mass media." At the end of the news conference he turned himself in to the authorities.

Representatives of the Thai Journalists Association (TJA) and the Thai Broadcast Journalists Association (TBJA) announced on 30 April, the day of his arrest, that they were writing to Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva requesting his support for World Press Freedom Day tomorrow.

Police close a dozen community radio stations, carry out arrests

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Reporters Without Borders condemns the closure of a dozen community radio stations linked to the opposition "Red Shirts" in a major police operation yesterday in Bangkok and the surrounding provinces. An exact list of the radio stations raided by the police is not yet available.

"Coming just a few months before general elections, this crackdown is very disturbing," Reporters Without Borders said. "If opposition media are no longer allowed to operate, coverage of the elections will inevitably be very one-sided. Worse still, this wave of closures could indicate a desire to permanently censor the opposition."

The press freedom organization added: "The Thai government must end this kind of harassment,

which targets not just the Red Shirts but also all those who publicly express their views about Thailand's political system and monarchy. They are just exercising their right to free speech, which is necessary for a democracy to function properly."

Three people are known to have been arrested during yesterday's raids: **Lek Suphan**, a programme host on radio *FM 105.75 Ruam Jai Thai* (United Thais), the disk-jockey of a station that broadcasts on 105.40 MHz in Pathum Thani province and the manager of *Radio Red Skills* (96.35 MHz). The last two were later freed on bail.

The raids were covered by *Prachatai*, *Thai E-News* and other news websites, which said they were carried out by police and officials from various government departments. Some sources told Reporters Without Borders the raids were led by the government's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC).

Palot Chalermnan, an employee of radio *Lam Lukka FM 105.40*, was quoted by *Prachatai* as saying: "Between 20 and 30 officials from the Department of Special Investigation, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, the Crime Suppression Division and the local police came with a court order, confiscated equipment and took it away to Khu Khot police station."

Palot said the station had resumed broadcasting just a week before the raid, after being off the air for repairs. The police said they carried out the raids on official instructions and claimed that the stations targeted had been broadcasting illegally and had defamed the monarchy.

The authorities often use lèse-majesté charges under article 112 of the criminal code for political purposes, especially to silence dissent and criticism of the monarchy. One of the latest targets **Somsak Jeamteerasakul**, a history professor at Thammasat University's faculty of arts, was threatened by a government official on 22 April with a lèse-majesté prosecution in connection with a speech he gave last December proposing a reform of the monarchy.

In statement released on 24 April, Somsak said he had been followed by unidentified men on motorcycles during the past few days and had received an anonymous phone call in which he was told that security officials were keeping a close watch on him and were ready to arrest him at any moment.

Thailand is classified as a "country under surveillance" in the "Enemies of the Internet" report that Reporters Without Borders released on 11 March. A dozen people including bloggers, university academics and dissidents are currently being prosecuted on lèse-majesté charges.
