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<http://www.rsf.org/thailand-media-censorship-facilitates-thai-23-05-2014,46338.html>

Asia - Thailand

Coup d'Etat

Media censorship facilitates Thai military coup

23 May 2014

After the failure of talks between the opposing political factions, the Thai army announced in a nationally televised message yesterday that it was taking control of the government "in order for the country to return to normality quickly." The television networks are now limited to relaying news and information from the army (see video). Foreign network transmissions have been blocked nationwide. Thai Public Broadcasting Service (TPBS), a public network, tried to broadcast its programs via YouTube, but was shut down by military personnel, who then arrested the network's deputy director, **Wanchai Tantiwithayapitak**.

The announcement came after four more TV stations (including *Voice TV* and *Hot TV*) and six community radio stations yesterday joined the list of [10 TV stations previously closed by the military](#).

Political comments by analysts and academics have been partially banned, while programmes in which commentators participate cannot be broadcast live. At the end of the day, the soldiers stationed outside certain news media received orders to leave, but without giving these media permission to resume broadcasting freely.

In their eighth official communiqué, the armed forces told social networks that to avoid closure, they should remove "distorted" content or content liable to "cause misunderstanding or fuel conflicts."

Together with the Peace and Order Maintaining Command (POMC), a new entity created by the military, the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) invited Internet Service Providers to form a group with the job of censoring the Internet. The NBTC said only content affecting "public order and peace" would be censored, to avoid violating fundamental freedoms.

"We are outraged by the way the military took control of the media with what now turns out to have been the aim of misleading the public and facilitating its coup d'état," said Benjamin

Ismail, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk.

“After forcing TV stations to broadcast its press releases and saying it did not intend to seize power, the army is now trying to silence all criticism by suppressing independent reporting and unfavourable comments in the media and on the Internet. We call for the immediate end to these censorship policies and the lifting of all the repressive measures adopted since 20 May.”

Four media associations – the Thai Journalists Association, the Thai Broadcasting Journalists Association, the National Press Council of Thailand and the News Broadcasting Council of Thailand – issued a joint statement calling on the POMC to reconsider its censorship orders and urging journalists to be careful and responsible in their news coverage.

The announcement of the military takeover came two days after the declaration of martial law on 20 May, [when soldiers stormed into at least ten TV stations and ordered them to stop broadcasting to prevent “distorted” reports](#).

Amid turmoil and opposition protests often targeting news media last December, Reporters Without Borders did an [evaluation of the state of media freedom](#) in Thailand and the threats to its news providers. It concluded by urging the security forces and protesters not to target journalists and media workers, regardless of the political position of the media employing them.

Thailand is ranked 130th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

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