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Asia - Thailand

Media manipulation

## Journalists summoned and arrested as Thai army gets tough on media

26 May 2014

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Reporters Without Borders deplores the Thai army's moves to toughen restrictions and manipulate the media in the wake of this month's coup and declaration of martial law, as well as the interrogation and arrest of journalists.

Two journalists, **Thanapol Eawsakul** and **Pravit Rojanaphruk** were detained on 23 and 24 May after being summoned by the military. The army is continuing its efforts to halt the flow of news and information, imposing its editorial line on news organizations and ordering them not to publish anything that might "fan the conflict".

*"The military government, which claims it wants to restore peace and public order, cannot continue to trample freedom of information underfoot,"* said Lucie Morillon, the head of research at Reporters Without Borders.

*"News organizations must be able to continue collecting and disseminating news and information free from pressure and intimidation from any quarter. We call on General Prayuth Chan-ocha to immediately release Thanapol Eawsakul and Pravit Rojanaphruk."*

Rojanaphruk, a journalist with the daily *The Nation* well known for his critical views on Thailand's *lèse-majesté* law, was summoned by the army on 23 May. The next day he went to the headquarters of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), accompanied by a lawyer and UN representatives. He was questioned for five hours without his lawyer being present and was subsequently taken to an unidentified detention centre where he is still held.

Before answering the summons, Rojanaphruk told Thai media: "I hope people will not give up the spirit and that General Prayuth will be the last dictator of Thailand." He was reported to have added: "They can detain me, but can never detain my conscience."

He then taped his mouth shut and put his hands over his ears.

Eawsakul, the editor of the political news magazine *Fah Diew Gan*, which [had already been prosecuted for lèse-majesté](#), was arrested on 23 May for taking part in a peaceful demonstration in Bangkok against the coup.

Yesterday, 19 editors and publishers were summoned to a meeting called to discuss coverage of the news in an "abnormal situation", while General Prayuth, appointed by the king as head of the NCPO, today threatened news organizations with closure if they used Facebook pages to "fan the conflict" or to undermine peace and public order.

The following news organizations sent representatives to the meeting: *Bangkokbiznews*, *Khoasod*, *Khomchadluek*, *Daily News*, *Thai Rath*, *Thai Post*, *Naewna*, *Banmuang*, *Bangkok Post*, *Bangkok Today*, *Prachachat*, *Manager*, *Thansettakij*, *Post Today*, *Matichon*, *Dailyworldtoday* and *Siam Rath*.

The NCPO announced new measures concerning television stations that were [banned from broadcasting](#) after the [coup](#) and the declaration of martial law. Free-to-air stations resumed broadcasting yesterday, with the exception of *Thai PBS*, which did not receive permission.

Fourteen stations accused of broadcasting "biased" news reports will not be allowed back on air unless they undertake not to disturb the peace and public order. Unlicensed community

radio stations must apply for authorization from the NCPO before they can resume broadcasting.

Prayuth also announced yesterday that those accused of lèse-majesté and undermining national security will be tried in a military court instead of a criminal court.

These measures were introduced following the army coup on 22 May, a few days after martial law was declared. Thailand has been in the throes of a serious political crisis for more than six months. The country is in the grip of numerous restrictions on freedom of information and [attempts to manipulate the media](#).

Thailand is ranked 130th of 180 countries in the [2014 World Press Freedom Index](#) compiled by Reporters Without Borders.

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