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Asia - Burma

Jail term

Provincial court restricts media freedom, sentences reporter to a year in prison

10 April 2014

Reporters Without Borders is outraged by the one-year jail term that **Zaw Phay**, a reporter for *DVB Multimedia Group (DVB)*, received from a court in the northern city of Magway on 7 April on charges of trespassing on government property and disturbing a civil servant. He has already begun serving the sentence.

The case dates back to August 2012, when Zaw Phay went with the father of a student to the local education department in Magway to interview the official in charge of a Japanese-funded scholarship programme.

The official subsequently filed a complaint against both Zaw Phay and the student's father, Win Myint Hlaing, who has also been sentenced to a year in prison. Both intend to appeal.

DVB has condemned Zaw Phay's conviction, pointing out that he was just doing his job as a journalist by investigating a subject of general interest.

Zaw Phay's lawyer, Thein Tun, told Reporters Without Borders that Zaw Phay defied a ban – imposed in a completely illegal manner by the local authorities – on taking photos of government buildings.

The long delay between the incident and the trial may have been orchestrated deliberately by the local authorities in order to "teach Zaw Phay and Win Myint Hlaing a lesson," he said.

"I am going to prepare a petition about this sentence, in order to mobilize as much support as possible, especially of people likely to come to the help of Zaw Phay's family, who are now in need," Thein Tun added.

"We are not only worried about the impact this sentence could have on freedom of information in Burma but also about what it reveals about the situation in the country," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk.

"It is unacceptable that local officials can obstruct a journalist's work and have him sentenced to imprisonment just because they feel he disturbed them. We call on the local authorities to release Zaw Phay and we ask the government to ensure that media freedom is respected equally everywhere, without differences between Rangoon and the rest of the country."

Burma is ranked 145th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).
