

Unusual release

Myanmar Tribune editor freed, but Zarganar spends 50th birthday in prison

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Reporters Without Borders and the Burma Media Association hail the release of **Aung Kyaw San**, the editor of the now closed magazine *Myanmar Tribune*, from Taunggyi prison, in the eastern state of Shan, after his sentence was reduced from eight to two years.

Arrested on 15 June 2008 along with 16 other people near the city of Bogale for helping to bury the bodies of Cyclone Nargis victims, he was initially sentenced to eight years in prison by a court in Insein prison under section 7 of the Unlawful Association Act.

"I was sentenced to eight years in prison, but my sentence was reduced," Aung Kyaw San said to *Mizzima News*, after his release. "I served two years and seven months and 11 days, including the interrogation period. My detention during the interrogation was not counted. The junta seems flexible, but in fact they have become worse. Political prisoners did not get some rights which other prisoners got."

Reporters Without Borders and the Burma Media Association urge the Burmese junta to immediately release all the other journalists and free speech defenders who were jailed for helping the victims of Cyclone Nargis. Three bloggers and journalists – **Zarganar**, **Zaw Thet Htwe** and **Thant Zin Aung** – were given long jail terms for this reason in November 2008.

Zarganar, whose real name is Ko Thura, turned 50 in prison a week ago, on 27 January. A blogger and comedian known as the "Burmese Chaplin," he was arrested on 4 June 2008 after talking to the *BBC World Service* and other foreign news media about the military's mismanagement of relief operations after Cyclone Nargis and its refusal to address the subject. He is serving a 35-year jail sentence under the Electronics Act,

Zaw Thet Htwe, a freelance journalist and former editor of the sports magazine *First Eleven Journal* who was arrested on 13 June 2008, is serving a 11-year jail sentence in Taunggyi prison for gathering information about the cyclone's victims in the Irrawaddy delta and for taking photos of the May 2008 referendum.

Thant Zin Aung, an independent video journalist who was arrested as he was about to board a flight to Thailand with a video showing the destruction caused by the cyclone, is serving an 18-year sentence on a charge of "disobedience" in Pa-an prison, in the eastern state of Karen.
