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Asia - Burma

First-hand accounts

Interviews with two journalists and blogger freed from prison in Burma

23 January 2012

Reporters Without Borders, with help from its Partner organization Burma Media Association, is distributing video interviews with the journalists **U Zeya** and **Sithu Zeya** of the exile radio and TV station [Democratic Voice of Burma](#) (DVB) and the blogger **Nay Phone Latt**, all of whom were [released from prison on 13 January](#).

"Burma Media Association appreciates the release of all imprisoned *DVB* journalists, three other journalists and a blogger. We would like to encourage the government to unconditionally release all remaining journalists and to enact laws that would protect journalists, and enshrine press freedom in Burma," said **Maung Maung Myint**, president of the BMA.

[U Zeya](#) supervised a team of video journalists who provided *DVB* with news footage from inside Burma until his arrest in April 2010 while he was covering a deadly bomb attack near Rangoon. He was convicted of unlawful association as well as violating immigration laws and the Electronic Act, for which he received prison sentences of five years, one year and seven years respectively. He was held in Hsipaw prison in the northeast.

Here he talks about prison conditions, discusses his future plans and gives his views on the present government.

His son [Sithu Zeya](#) was arrested at the same time. Originally sentenced to eight years' imprisonment in May 2010 for, among other things, having contact with DVB, which is a banned organization in Burma, and for violating immigration laws.

On 14 September last year, he was sentenced to a further 10 years on a charge of circulating material online that could "damage tranquillity and unity in the government" under the Electronic Act. He was held in Henzada prison in the southwest.

In this clip he refers to the prison system, his political commitment, working conditions in the media as well as the issue of democracy

[Nay Phone Latt](#) was released from Hpa-an prison in Karen state. The owner of three Rangoon Internet cafés, He was sentenced on 10 November 2008 to a total of 20 years and six months in prison for writing in his blog (<http://www.nayphonelatt.net/>) about the difficulties that young Burmese have encountered in their efforts to express themselves freely, especially after a wave of protests in the fall of 2007.

His sentence was reduced to 12 years on appeal. Despite suffering from health problems, he received no medical treatment in prison.

He was joint winner of the Reporters Without Borders press freedom prize in the cyber-dissident category in December 2008.

Here he speaks of his experience in prison, the press freedom award and his vision of the future.

Free Burma VJ press release 01/17/2012

The Free Burma VJ campaign is delighted to confirm the release of all the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) video journalists (VJs) in an amnesty of political prisoners on 13 January 2012.

Seventeen VJs were in prison on highly arbitrary charges when the campaign began on 3 May 2011. For security reasons, only five of the VJs were named in the campaign. Four unnamed VJs had been freed during a separate amnesty on 16 May 2011. On Friday 13 January, the remaining 13 reporters for DVB, some of whom had been serving sentences of more than 60 years, were released.

The Friday amnesty saw around 300 political prisoners freed from lengthy spells in jail, including high-profile dissidents such as Min Ko Naing and Ashin Gambira. In addition, many ex-intelligence, customs and government employees, including former prime minister Khin Nyunt, was released.

Aye Chan Naing, DVB chief editor, said: " They had done great journalistic work in exchange for their freedom. We are very happy for them and their families. They are real heroes of DVB and we salute them."

Géraldine May, the campaign coordinator, said: "The Free Burma VJ campaign won't stop with the release of the VJs. We need to make sure they are safe and that their release is unconditional. For example, freed DVB reporter Sithu Zeya said conditions were attached to his release: if he commits any crime in the future, he will be forced to serve his full 18-year sentence. We also should keep in mind that more political prisoners remain behind bars."

In solidarity,

Democratic Voice of Burma and the Free Burma VJ campaign.
