



BNI Multimedia Group's Open Letter to the State Counsellor and President:

Request to dismiss the arrests and charges on members of the Myanmar Press Council and other chief editors of news organizations by using the Anti-Terrorism law

Date: April 2, 2020

The Sittwe No. 1 Myoma Police Station charged Khine Mrat Kyaw, the chief editor of Narinjara News, one of the member organizations of BNI, on March 31 with the anti-terrorism law. On the evening of the same day, a ten member team including members of Central Investigation Department, Special Branch of the police force and a member of General Administration Department came to the office of Narinjara at the Shwe Thar road in Sittwe and searched the premises for 30 minutes, seizing two laptops from the office and took three reporters to the police station.

Three staff from Narinjara office; senior reporters Thein Zaw (Thant Myat Khine), Aung Lin Tun and Tun Naing were released around 7:00 pm after interrogation. According to them, the charges were brought against Narinjara due to an online broadcasting of an interview piece with the spokesperson of Arakan Army, Khine Thukha.

Khine Mrat Kyaw, who was charged, is one of the members of the Myanmar Press Council as well as a reporter for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Burmese service. Furthermore, he is a member of the policy committee of the BNI, which is the independence network of 16 media organizations.

Furthermore, it was learnt that the Ministry of Home Affairs was planning to charge and arrest Tharlon Zaung Htet (Hlaing Thit Zin Wai), chief editor of Yangon Khit Thit media on the evening of March 31. Similarly, around 9:30 pm on March 30, Nay Myo Line (Nay Lin) chief editor of the Voice of Myanmar was arrested at his house and detained at a police station by Mandalay Region Special Branch of the police forces with charges based on the anti-terrorism act article 50(a) and 52(a).

The State owned newspaper Myanmar Alinn mentioned the Order number 1/2020 of the Ministry of Home Affairs, which stated that President of Myanmar announced the United League of Arakan (ULA), Arakan Army (AA) armed organization and organizations under it, were now illegal organizations according to illegal organization act article 15, sub article (2).

In Myanmar, for issues related to media violations, there is an established legal process to launch a complaint first to the Myanmar Press Council (MPC) for negotiation and then if necessary, a charge can be laid against a member of the media, with the Media Law which was adopted in 2014. However, in this above case, the MPC Secretary (2) and a member of the MPC themselves were charged with criminal acts by the government, an action which does not follow the media law.

On May 1, 2019, Aung Min Oo and other officials of the Development Media Group (DMG), also a member of BNI, were charged with "communicating with an illegal organization", act 17/2, by Sittwe Special Branch at No. 1 police Station in Sittwe. This happened almost one year ago.

Now, it is the crucial time of the pandemic coronavirus around the world and everyone is watching carefully about the news and information about COVID-19. We have seen the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also try to educate and give warnings about COVID-19 to the people.

The role of the media in our country is also critically important in providing important information, helping people control and contain the COVID-19

epidemic. Therefore, it is crucial to support the media by physically protecting them as well as mentally encouraging them, while they are informing and educating people with accurate and crucial information. Members of the media are not the criminals of our country.

For the reasons above, BNI is making the request to the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint to dismiss the charges against these chief editors with this anti-terrorism law and then work as a government to walk towards a federal democratic union and to prevent similar injustice in the future.

Respecting Human Rights and Justice,

Policy Affairs Committee

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