

# Thailand: Alert and Statement on the Coup

Thursday 29 May 2014, by [SEAPA](#) (Date first published: 26 May 2014).

Bangkok, 26 May – SEAPA is deeply distressed over the outright suppression of freedom of expression and press freedom in Thailand following the declaration of a military seizure of power on May 22, two days after martial law was declared on May 20.

The initial declaration was aimed at stemming the increasing likelihood of violence and ending the seven-month political crisis in Thailand. The military coup d'état has imposed a curfew, practically abolished the 2007 constitution (except for provisions relating to the monarchy), installed a junta to run the government, and dissolved the Senate—the only remaining national government body with elected members—taking on lawmaking powers.

The National Peace and Order Maintaining Council (NPOMC), which replaces martial law's Peace and Order Maintaining Command, issued an order yesterday saying those who commit crimes, face lese majeste charges, undermine security and defy the NPOMC orders will be taken to the military court. The order came as sporadic anti-coup protests emerged immediately after the martial law declaration and has been seemingly growing despite the ban on public assemblies.

An unknown number of protesters have been rounded up by soldiers who broke up the rallies. Among those arrested is Thanapol Ewsakul, editor of hard-hitting political magazine *Fa Diew Kan* (Same Sky).

[SEAPA quote:] “The junta has issued very broadly-defined orders and cast a wide net of summons to detain people. These include those who peacefully express their views differently from the military junta and the coup. SEAPA believes no one should be detained for expressing of their opinion.”

## Second journalist detained

Yesterday, senior reporter of *The Nation* Pravit Rojanaphruk [1] reported to the Army Conference Center after receiving summons broadcast on television the night before. According to *Bangkok Post* [2], Pravit was accompanied by a representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and a team of lawyers, who were present to witness his reporting to the NPOMC.

Pravit, who is known for being outspoken against the coup, and Thailand's lese majeste law, was subsequently detained and taken to an undisclosed location.

[SEAPA quote:] “We urge that he be released immediately. Pravit should not be targeted for doing his job as a reporter and for expressing his views against the martial law and the coup.”

Before going into the Army office, Pravit posed before the media to cover his response to the summons appearance with a sign saying: “You can detain me but you can never detain my conscience.” Several photos of Pravit with tape over his mouth was widely circulated over social media. Words of encouragement poured in over his Facebook page, and through Twitter messages soon after his name was read out on local television last night.

## Hundreds summoned

Yesterday, some 35 people, mostly prominent academics who spoke out about the monarchy and the reform of lese majeste law, and members of Pheu Thai Party were summoned to report to the army. The list included leader of People's Alliance for Democracy, and the owner of Manager Group media conglomerate, Sondhi Limthongkul.

The order is one of a continuing series of summons or invitations to hundreds people to report to the NPOMC. Among them are leaders of opposing political demonstrators, members of the Pheu Thai and Democrat parties, senior government officials, academics and activists. A number of them resisted the order by refusing to report, which is now a crime carrying a maximum prison term of two years and/or a 40,000 baht (USD1,300) fine.

At least one hundred persons who came for the summons were subsequently detained and taken to unknown locations. The exact number of detainees is impossible to determine - with some putting estimates at more than 200 - because public information about these arbitrary detentions are strictly controlled by the Army. The NPOMC spokesperson gave public assurance that those detained will not be mistreated and will be released within a week if they do not have any pending legal cases.

### **Media control**

Since martial law was declared, about 100 web pages have been blocked, 15 satellite and cable television and an undetermined number of community radio stations were closed for being deemed by the Army as propagating political partisanship.

The six free terrestrial and other satellite and cable were also closed down since Thursday, but have been allowed to resume operations as of Saturday, May 24. They are still under strict monitoring by soldiers and prohibited from news and content that foment violence, insult the monarchy, and criticize the coup and the NPOMC, among others [3].

All TV and radio stations are required to interrupt on-air broadcast whenever there is an announcement of NPOMC order and news about its operation.

International news channels including CNN, BBC and CNBC, NHK, CCTV are still blocked for cable TV subscribers. It is unknown when Thai viewers can access these channels again.

Nevertheless audience in Thailand can still access online services of these foreign news outlets.

The military has threatened to also clampdown on criticisms of the coup over social media. Internet service providers and social media networks have been ordered to monitor and censor prohibited content.

Daily newspapers have not been affected by any suspension orders but are subjected to censorship for the same types of contents.

In response, media professional groups in Thailand have urged [4] the NPOMC to review the strict measures against the media [5] and suggested the junta to work with the existing media regulatory body, the National Broadcasting and Telecom Commission (NBTC).

### **Taking a stand**

Several countries and international human rights organization including Human Rights Watch, Asian Human Right Commission (AHRC) and Amnesty International have expressed serious concern about the coup and the harsh measures imposed to restrict the media, freedom of expression, and

assembly.

SEAPA joins members of the international community who are alarmed about the coup. We state our unequivocal and fundamental disagreement with a military takeover as a means to resolve the political impasse.

We call for the release of all persons detained since the declaration of martial law, particularly those from the media. These detentions are arbitrary and illegal – they are being held in the absence of any judicial process, many are in secret locations, and most are not charged of any crime.

The junta must immediately return civil liberties to the Thai people, restore freedom of the press, and take concrete steps to return power to civilian authority based on a popular mandate.

### **Southeast Asian Press Alliance SEAPA**

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### **Footnotes**

[1] <https://twitter.com/PravitR>

[2] <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/411677/pravit-paiwong-reported-to-ncpo>

[3] <https://www.facebook.com/SoutheastAsianPressAlliance/photos/a.329364897153753.76198.247559542000956/629219777168262/?type=1>

[4] <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/Media-organisations-urge-junta-to-lift-coup-orders-30234516.html>

[5] <https://www.facebook.com/SoutheastAsianPressAlliance/photos/a.329364897153753.76198.247559542000956/629282997161940/?type=1>