

Terror charges framed against Arakanese editor



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Guwahati: Interviewing a leader of an armed outfit in Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) and publishing its substance through a portal can be termed as a serious offence against the concerned editor. The fate of Khaing Mrat Kyaw, chief editor of Narinjara news portal, based in Sittwe of Rakhine (also known as Arakan) province in western Myanmar indicates the state of media's freedom in the southeast Asian country. While the world is fighting against Covid-19 pandemic with over a hundred thousand casualties, the Myanmar authorities have framed charges of glorifying terrorism against the editor for uploading an interview with Khaing Thu Ka, spokesperson of Arakan Army, an ethnic revolutionary group, which Myanmar federal government in NayPieTaw recently denounced as a terrorist organization. The rebels are reportedly fighting for a homeland for Buddhist Rakhine people in the line of ancient Arakan Kingdom. Rich in natural resources, the Arakan province drew the attention of international media three years back with Rohingya Muslim issues. Myanmar military, known as Tatmadaw, launched a violent campaign against Rohingya people forcing over seven hundred thousand Muslim settlers to leave for Bangladesh. Presently the Arakanese editor is hiding to avoid impending arrest. The police on 31 March 2020 raided Narinjara's office in Sittwe and even temporarily detained three scribes namely Thein Zaw, Aung Lin Htun and Htun Khaing for questioning. Later on 7 April, they reached to the apartment belonged to KM Kyaw in Yangon and also interrogated his wife on his whereabouts.

Narinjara group that publishes news bulletins both in Burmese and English covers various issues particularly related to Rakhine including the ongoing armed conflicts between Myanmar security personnel and rebel ethnic outfits who remain active in Arakan and Chin provinces.

Various media rights bodies have criticized the NayPieTaw regime for charging KM Kyaw under the counter-terrorism laws and urged Myanmar's special branch to immediately withdraw the procedures. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) stated that if convicted, the editor would face at least 10 years of imprisonment with heavy fines.

CPJ representative Shawn Crispin commented that the authority should stop threatening journalists who were covering enduring armed conflict and rebel groups in Myanmar. Branding those journalists as terrorists is none other than assaulting the press freedom, she asserted. Earlier Myanmar Press Council also sent a letter to the President Win Myint along with State counselor Aung San Suu Kyi with an appeal to withdraw charges against KM Kyaw.

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BY NAVA THAKURIA

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