

Media groups warn govt

Leaked threat sparks fury over free speech

**MONGKOL BANGPRAPA
KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA**

Media organisations and academics have called on the government not to violate the freedom of the press after reports emerged that five online outlets face legal action for breaching the state of emergency.

The government is also said to be planning to block the Telegram messaging app as anti-government protesters switched to it after police moved to shut down their Facebook accounts.

Several local media organisations spoke out after the leaking yesterday of an order issued by the government's joint Centre for the Resolution of Emergency Situation (CRES).

They included the National Press Council of Thailand, the News Broadcasting Council of Thailand, the Thai Journalists Association, the Thai Broadcast Journalists Association, Online News Providers Association and the National Union of Journalists Thailand.

The CRES order had declared: "As it appears there are television broadcasts of contents deemed to threaten national security or good morals by presenting certain contents from Voice TV, Prachatai.com, The Reporters, The Standard and Free Youth movement, the national police chief, who is in charge of resolving the serious emergency situation thus orders the

National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) and the Digital Economy and Society (DES) Ministry to examine and suspend the broadcast or delete those contents from the computer system in line with their authority and responsibility."

In their joint statement, the local media organisations said they were opposed to any forms of media freedom suppression by any side and urged the government not to abuse the law by silencing the media.

They warned that restricting people's access to information could prompt more people to join the protests and make the political situation more delicate and susceptible to violence.

They condemned any use of media outlets to distort facts or provoke violence and urged their peers to make sure that their coverage of the political situation was comprehensive and without bias.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand (FCCT) also join the opposition, saying it was "deeply concerned" by the censorship threat, and that it "makes the government appear heavy-handed and unresponsive to criticism, and could stir up even more public anger".

"Bona fide journalists should be allowed to report important developments without the threat of bans, suspensions, censorship or prosecution hanging over them," the FCCT said.

Their concern was echoed by lecturers at Thammasat University's faculty of journalism and mass communications. It issued a statement opposing the government move, insisting that access to information was a basic right

INSIDE

- 8** > **Editorial:** Censorship a futile tactic
- 3** > Opposition moves to have decree rescinded
- 9** > **Commentary:** Clock ticking for Prayut
- B1** > TCT urges dialogue to end strife

and the government should let the media do its job independently.

DES Minister Buddhipongse Punnakanta said none of the named five media outlets had been banned or taken off the air following the order.

"Initially the NBTC or agencies concerned will ask them over for talks and urge them to be careful," he said. "But the messages [deemed inappropriate and still on the website] should be deleted."

He also explained that live-streaming of anti-government protests was not banned but that broadcasting controversial speeches and defamatory remarks should be avoided. Asked if they would face closure as penalty, he said any punitive action would be taken step by step.

Putchapong Nodthaisong, the DES Ministry deputy permanent secretary, said the ministry has monitored and examined social media posts from Oct 13-18 and it deemed that more than 324,000 items violated the computer crime law and state of emergency.

Mr Putchapong reportedly asked the



Anti-government protesters, mostly students, fill Ngam Wong Wan and Phahon Yothin roads at Kasetsart intersection in the capital, one of many locations in the country where they gathered yesterday. VARUTH HIRUNYATHEB

NBTC to order internet providers and mobile operators to stop disseminating any information which violated the emergency decree, and to delete it.

National police chief Pol Gen Suwat Jangyodsuk said the order to examine the media outlets was intended to target any content deemed to incite public disorder. He also stressed that no media outlets had so far been closed down or taken off air.

The five targeted media outlets yesterday issued statements insisting their reporting had honoured media ethics.

Thapanee Eadsrichai, a founder of The Reporters, said on Facebook the outlet was still operating.

Meanwhile, the Court of Appeal Region 1 yesterday awarded 200,000-baht bail to three protest leaders — Parit Chiwarak, Panusaya Sithijirawattanukul and Nutchanon Pairoj,

co-leaders of the Khana Ratsadorn (People's Group) — in connection with an anti-government rally at Thammasat University's Rangsit Campus in Pathum Thani on Aug 10.

Dusit Kwaeng Court yesterday granted 20,000-baht bail to 19 protesters including Jatupat "Pai Daodin" Boonpataraksa, following an anti-government protest at Democracy Monument on Oct 13.