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Myanmar court imprisons detained opposition official’s lawyer

By RFA Burmese

A secret court in Myanmar on Wednesday sentenced the lawyer representing a leader of the former ruling political party to 15 years in prison with hard labor, according to an attorney with knowledge of the country’s judicial proceedings.

The military tribunal in Mandalay’s Obo Prison sentenced Ywat Nu Aung, who represented Zaw Myint Maung, a vice chair of the National League for Democracy Party, on charges of aiding a terrorist organization, the attorney told Radio Free Asia, speaking on condition of anonymity, citing fear of reprisal.

The move is the latest by the military junta, which took control of the government in a February coup, to target political opponents and anyone representing them. At least six Mandalay lawyers representing NLD members have been arrested.

Ywat Nu Aung, 43, was arrested on April 27 and convicted of abetting terrorists after the chief of the Mandalay police brought a lawsuit against her, accusing her of providing 300,000 kyats, or about U.S.\$140, to the Mandalay People’s Defense Force, a regional anti-junta resistance group.

Prior to her arrest, Ywat Nu Aung, who is also a human rights lawyer, was handling the cases of regional government officials and NLD members.

She also represented the victim of the so-called Victoria case, a widely followed incident of child rape in the capital of Naypyidaw.

In July, sources close to the legal community told RFA that Tin Win Aung, U Thuta, and an unidentified person – three lawyers who were representing clients in anti-regime political cases – had been arrested in Mandalay on their return from working at Obo Prison’s court.

Arrests of lawyers have not been confined to Mandalay. In June, authorities in Sagaing region’s Monywa arrested Moe Zaw Htun, who was representing Myint Naing, the NLD government’s Chief Minister in the region.

The military council has not commented on the arrests of any of the lawyers. Calls to the military council spokesman by RFA went unanswered on Wednesday.

According to data compiled by RFA, 28 lawyers have been arrested since the February 2021 military coup, including several representing people arrested on political charges.

Youth activists sentenced

Ywat Nu Aung’s case concluded a day after a secret court in Yangon’s Insein Prison sentenced six pro-democracy youth activists to a dozen years in prison each and one of their associates to seven years behind bars, the parent of one of the defendants said Wednesday.

All seven were arrested in an August raid that left two activists dead and three injured as they leapt from an apartment building in downtown Yangon to flee authorities.

Activists Ye Min Oo, Min Thit Sar Aung and Wai Yan Htet, who were injured during the raid; and Thi Ha Kaung Set, Wai Phyo Aung and Poe Kyawt Kyawt Khant were sentenced for three counts of violating Myanmar’s Explosive Articles Act, said Ye Min Oo’s father, Tin Zaw.

Tin Zaw said that the seventh person, a taxi driver, was sentenced to seven years on one count of violating the same act.

“It has been one year and four months since my son was involved in this incident,” he said. “That one-year-and-four-month’s time has felt like fourteen years and four months of pain and suffering to our family.”

Tin Zaw told RFA that he had been permitted to meet with his son, whose leg was crippled in the jump from the Yangon apartment building, following Tuesday’s sentencing.

On Aug. 10, 2021, around 30 junta soldiers, commandos and officials in civilian clothes, blocked off 44th Street in Yangon and entered Building No. 38 to conduct a raid on an apartment inside the complex. Wai Wai Myint, also known as Pan Thee, and Wai Zaw Phyto were both killed as they leapt from the building.

A military press release at the time said authorities had recovered hand grenades and bomb-making materials during the raid.

During an interview following the incident, Wai Wai Myint’s husband, Soe Myat Thu, told RFA that the death of another young woman protesting the military coup had inspired his previously apolitical wife to join the anti-junta movement.

A total of 13,156 pro-democracy activists and citizens have been arrested and detained since the coup, and at least 1,820 of them have been sentenced to prison terms, according to Thai rights group the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma).

Translated by Myo Min Aung. Written by Josh Lipes. Edited by Malcolm Foster.

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