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Asia - Asia

Lèse-majesté

Long jail term for website editor critical of military coup

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Reporters Without Borders condemns a Bangkok military court's political use of Thailand's lèse-majesté legislation to sentence a journalist critical of the military, Thai E-News editor Somsak Pakdeedech, to nine years in prison on 24 November.

The court halved the nine-year term because **Somsak Pakdeedech**, detained since his arrest by soldiers three days after the 22 May military coup, pleaded guilty.

The pretext for Somsak's arrest was an article by an academic that he posted on the site in 2011. He was charged under criminal code article 112 on security offences, which says that any defamatory, insulting or threatening comments about the king, queen, crown prince or regent are punishable by three to 15 years in prison.

The offending article was written by **Giles Ji Ungpakorn**, a political science professor at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, who was forced to flee Thailand in February 2011 [after being charged with lèse-majesté](#) in connection with his book "[A coup for the rich](#)."

"*Somsak had been in the military's sights before their coup*," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk. "*We firmly condemn this sentence, which was a reprisal for his and his website's anti-military views, and we demand his immediate release.*"

Thai E-News, which aggregates political news from various online sources, has often been censored during periods of political tension. In July 2010, it was one of the so-called "pro-Red Shirt" websites that were blocked at the same time as the official Red Shirt party website, uddthailand.com.

It is currently being blocked again by the information and communications technology ministry but can be accessed from abroad.

Since seizing power on 22 May, the military seem to have been trying to bring online media and social networks under ever-closer control. **Kathawut Boonpitak**, the host of an online radio show, was sentenced to five years in prison on a lèse-majesté charge on 18 November. Reporters Without Borders condemns his sentences as disproportionate as well.

Thailand is ranked 130th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).
