

Vietnam forces anti-graft news website offline

HANOI, VIETNAM: The website of an outspoken Vietnamese newspaper has had its licence revoked after publishing articles that 'abuse freedom and democratic rights', authorities said this week....



A typical street in Hanoi.... corruption at the top detrimentally affects the lives of the citizens. (Image: Public Domain)

The move was seen as part of a growing crackdown on press freedom in the communist country.

The newspaper *Nguoi Cao Tuoi* - which means "Elderly" in Vietnamese - was ordered to take down its website and fire its editor-in-chief by the Ministry of Information and Communications.

The licence for the website and the press card of Editor-in-Chief Kim Quoc Hoa have been revoked, the ministry said in an online statement.

The website www.nguocaotui.org.vn had been taken offline by Monday afternoon. The print edition of the paper will apparently still be allowed to publish.

Vietnam's powerful Ministry of Public Security said in a statement posted on its website late Monday that it had started a criminal investigation into *Nguoi Cao Tuoi*.

The newspaper appeared to have "infringed on the benefits of the state," and would be investigated on this charge, which falls under Article 258 of the criminal code, the statement said.

Rights groups say Article 258 is one of several vaguely worded provisions in Vietnam's criminal code that is often used to persecute critics of the regime. Scores of bloggers have been charged under it.

All newspapers and television channels in authoritarian Vietnam are controlled by the state, but individual publications can decide how far to push - or not - against draconian censorship laws.

Sound familiar? Top officials implicated in corruption

The *Nguoi Cao Tuoi* newspaper was run by the communist party-linked Elderly Association of Vietnam and targeted older readers.

In recent years it had become a strident critic of government graft, breaking several stories that implicated senior officials in corruption scandals.

Other state-run papers had followed up on corruption scandals broken by the *Nguoi Cao Tuoi*.

The publication ran articles that showed "signs of revealing state secrets", the Ministry of Information and Communications said in the statement, explaining its decision.

The ministry did not specify which stories it objected to but said a file had been sent to police requesting a probe into 11 articles that could have broken the law.

The Communist Party, which has run the unified country since 1975, is sensitive to any public criticism of its rule.

The majority of state-run papers serve up a diet of bland non-controversial stories, and many citizens prefer to get their news online from blogs or social media that contain less propaganda.

The one-party state is regularly denounced by rights groups and Western governments for its hardline stance on any issues concerning press freedom or human rights.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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