

Journalist, Mratt Kyaw Thu wins 2017 AFP Kate Webb Prize

Mratt Kyaw Thu, 27, was recognised for a series of articles focused on ethnic and religious conflict in Myanmar's Shan and Rakhine states in 2016 - the latter a precursor to the exodus of nearly 650,000 Rohingya Muslims from Rakhine earlier this year.



Reporter Mratt Kyaw Thu. Image provided.

The stories were published in the weekly English-language news magazine *Frontier*, which has established a reputation for independent reporting in a country where rights groups say media freedoms have worsened, despite the installation of a civilian-led government last year.

"AFP is particularly pleased that a Myanmar journalist will receive the Kate Webb award for the first time since its inception in 2008," said AFP's Asia-Pacific regional director, Philippe Massonnet. "Journalists work in a tough environment in Myanmar, where press freedom is a constant battle in which Mratt Kyaw Thu is one of the regular combatants," Massonnet said.

Crusading AFP reporter

The prize, with a 3,000 euro purse, honours journalists working in perilous or difficult conditions in Asia, and is named after a crusading AFP reporter who died in 2007 at the age of 64, after a career covering the world's trouble spots – including Afghanistan.

"This award is recognition for me personally but also for the struggles of all Myanmar journalists, who are in a very difficult situation right now," Mratt Kyaw Thu said, after learning he was the winner of the 2017 prize. "Friends are being arrested for doing their job. Myanmar journalists are being watched closely by the military and government – it's worse than before," he said.

The prize will be formally presented at a ceremony in Yangon in the New Year.

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