

## Phones Cut at Myanmar Opposition HQ

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YANGON, Myanmar, Sep 13, 2007 (AP Online via COMTEX) -- The telephone line has been cut at the headquarters of Myanmar's top opposition party, the National League for Democracy, a party spokesman said Thursday.

The action, taken Wednesday, presumably at the behest of the military government, came as the junta has been facing the most sustained protests in a decade against its rule.

"We are a legal political party but we cannot perform legal party activities," said party spokesman Myint Thein.

Members of the party, headed by detained Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, have been active in the recent demonstrations.

The protests, triggered by a junta-ordered sharp increase in fuel prices, have continued since Aug. 19 despite the detention of more than 100 demonstrators and rough treatment of other participants.

The National League for Democracy is to hold its annual ceremony commemorating its founding on Sept. 27, but the current crackdown raises questions about whether it will be allowed to go ahead.

Several party members and pro-democracy activists still at large or in hiding have reported that their cell phone service has been cut since Monday in an attempt by the junta to curb the flow of information, Myint Thein said.

Several of the dissidents had given interviews over the past few weeks to opposition Myanmar media in exile, including the Democratic Voice of Burma, a shortwave radio station based in Norway, and Mizzima News, an online service based in India.

An official involved in telecommunications, speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to release such information, said more than 50 phones were affected by the security sweep.

Photos and videos of the recent demonstrations have been smuggled out to the exile media, which have sent their reports and images back by radio, satellite TV and the Internet.

Domestic media are tightly controlled by the junta and have little public credibility, so many people get their news from overseas.

The establishment of the foreign-based radio stations and use of the Internet have meant that information about the protests has flowed more widely and rapidly than during past challenges to the government.

Recently, however, Internet cafe operators have been ordered by authorities to report any customers who visit political Web sites.

On Tuesday, the junta arrested a man who staged a solo protest in Taunggok in the western state of Rakhine, according to Mizzima News and other exile media.

The man, Ko Soe Win, displayed a placard saying junta leader Senior Gen. Than Shwe should be excommunicated as a Buddhist and Suu Kyi should be released from house arrest, they said.

He was reportedly tried the same day and sentenced to four years in prison.

The junta is very sensitive to the possibility of the protests spreading among Buddhist monks.

In northern Myanmar last week, young monks - angry at being beaten for protesting economic conditions - temporarily took officials hostage, burned four vehicles and smashed a shop and a house belonging to junta supporters.

The government initially responded by tightening security around monasteries in major cities. But this week, in an evident attempt to improve its image, high-ranking officials have been making high-profile donations to Buddhist monasteries, according to the state-controlled press.

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