

Junta blocking news from trickling out of Myanmar

The military junta in Myanmar has launched a massive drive to restrict information on the ongoing crackdown on monks by jamming Internet connectivity and telephones, besides blocking blogs.

The only source of information for most Myanmarers is now the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), a dissident radio and television network from Oslo.

'Most of the telephone lines are either not working or jammed, while Internet connections are more or less paralysed since Wednesday night,' Kyaw Than, president of the All Burmese Students' League, told IANS at this town in India's northeastern state Manipur.

Than is in exile since the junta's crackdown on democracy activists in 1988. He now shuttles between Manipur capital Imphal and New Delhi.

Despite the curbs, however, undercover reporters working among the protestors are being able to send their reports and interviews to the DVB.

Video images, smuggled out of the country, are also being transmitted.

People in Myanmar are being able to watch DVB via satellite.

'All our journalists are working underground. They never expose themselves as DVB journalists. If they did they would be arrested on the spot,' Khin Muang Win, deputy Director of DVB, was quoted as saying.

Authorities Wednesday night blocked popular blogs <http://www.kohtike.blogspot.com>, <http://niknayman.blogspot.com> and <http://soneseyar.blogspot.com> that were responsible for sending out images and news of the ongoing protests against the fuel price hike and the subsequent military crackdown.

Five people were reportedly killed, including four monks, when government soldiers fired on monk-led protesters in capital Yangon Wednesday.

'These are nothing but attempts at gagging the freedom of expression by the people and restricting the free media. This is a gross rights violations,' Than said.

The blogs were the primary source of information for the international media with anti-government protestors posting photographs and speeches of monks and other civilian population leading the campaign. The junta also banned the popular 'You Tube' website where video clips of democratic movements were posted.

'Several leading politicians and leaders were out of touch as their phone lines were disconnected. Journalists of local and foreign media were also not spared with their communication gadgets jammed,' Than said.

Press freedom groups have urged the junta not to obstruct journalists covering protests in the military-ruled nation.

The Bangkok-based Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) said the junta had summoned reporters from local publications and warned them against joining protests.

SEAPA said it was acting on reports by the Burma Media Association, a group of exiled Myanmar journalists and writers.

Reporters Without Borders, a press freedom group based in France, also condemned any threats made against the media.

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