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£MYANMAR:@HUNDREDS MORE ARRESTED IN
CAMPAIGN TO "DESTROY" OPPOSITION

Amnesty International said today that the Myanmar authorities are running a self-declared campaign to "destroy" their opponents -- who face a constant risk of being thrown in jail sometimes simply for speaking the "wrong" language or flying the "wrong" flag.

The human rights organization said the ruling military council continues to step up its efforts to crush the non-violent opposition, passing new laws aimed at eliminating from political life people who won seats in last year's democratic elections.

In its latest report, the organization names some 200 people arbitrarily arrested in Myanmar (formerly Burma) in the first seven months of the year, who in some cases have been jailed for up to 25 years. Those names, gathered from Burmese official news media and during a month long investigation along the Thai border, bring to more than 1,500 the names Amnesty International has of political prisoners arrested since 1988.

The best known of those prisoners is Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. The leader of the National League for Democracy party, which won a convincing majority in last year's elections, she has been held under house arrest since July 1989.

The military authorities, who despite calling the elections have refused to transfer power to a civilian government, are trying "to eliminate non-violent opposition in the same way as support for armed insurrection," Amnesty International said.

The vague and sweeping provisions of the military's decrees have led to people being accused of treason simply for advocating a peaceful transfer of power or accused of assisting armed opposition groups when in fact they weren't advocating violence.

"Some political opponents have even faced dubious allegations of petty criminal offences as part of an orchestrated campaign to put an end to their opposition activities," Amnesty International said.

The authorities have warned political opposition groups and students that calls for political change will not be tolerated. Political leaders were told that the authorities "will smash any enemy who plans to attack us", and when universities reopened earlier this year students had to sign guarantees that there would be no recurrence of the 1988 campus protests.

Many of those arrested or tried in the first half of this year have been elected NLD members of parliament, members or supporters of other legal political parties, student activists and Buddhist monks -- often arrested simply for criticizing the military authorities, distributing party leaflets or talking about a provisional government.

Others have been detained for activities like putting up pictures of national heroes at a traditional festival, flying the NLD flag at the same height as the Myanmar flag, and for writing an exam in an ethnic minority language.

Almost 40 of those detained were sentenced to up to 25 years in prison, often on charges of high treason, after trials that Amnesty International suspects were blatantly unfair.

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