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Beaten in prison for marking Martyrs' Day, two Burmese inmates die

By RFA Burmese

Two Burmese political prisoners beaten by the ruling military junta's prison authorities for participating in a ceremony marking Martyrs' Day have died of their injuries, sources with knowledge of the situation said.

They were among four inmates authorities physically assaulted in Tharrawaddy Prison in Bago region on July 19 for marking the national holiday, RFA reported earlier.

The holiday marks the memory of renowned fallen figures within Burma's independence movement, including Gen. Aung San, father of deposed and jailed former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, seven other independence leaders, and one bodyguard who were gunned down by a group of armed men in uniform while holding a cabinet meeting in Yangon on July 19, 1947.

The holiday is marked annually by both pro-democracy groups and the military junta, which seized control of the elected government in a February 2021 coup and later sentenced Suu Kyi to 33 years in prison following trials that rights groups have condemned as shams.

The two inmates — Than Toe Aung, organizer of the National League for Democracy's youth group in Yangon's Thanlyin township, and Hla Soe from the town of Thone Sal in Bago's Tharrawaddy (Tharyarwady) district — died after they were taken to the prison hospital, sources close to the prison told RFA on Monday.

The other two beaten inmates also received treatment in the prison hospital.

They were among the inmates in the men's section of the detention center who held a saluting ceremony and discussion to commemorate

Martyrs' Day, while female prisoners in the women's section wore black ribbons.

Solitary confinement

Because of these activities, prison guards placed 16 male inmates and 15 females to solitary confinement. Four of them were severely tortured and had required medical treatment in prison since July 21.

Prison authorities have not notified the victims' families about their deaths, Nyo Tun, a former political prisoner and a friend of Than Toe Aung, told Radio Free Asia.

"The news that the two political prisoners have died came from not just one source, but from two or three from the prison," he said.

Than Toe Aung, serving six years in prison for violating the Explosive Substances Act, died on Aug. 5 from severe head injuries.

Hla Soe, serving 20 years for violating the Counter-terrorism Law, died on Aug. 8.

Thaik Tun Oo of the Myanmar Political Prisoners Network said he was able to confirm the death of the two prisoners.

RFA could not reach the spokesman of Myanmar's Prison Department for comment.

Prison guards have allowed some of the female inmates who participated in commemorating the holiday to return to their cells, while the situation of the men's section remains unknown, said people close to the prison.

As of Aug. 14, more than 19,700 pro-democracy activists and civilians had been detained by authorities under the military junta since the February 2021 coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a Thailand-based rights group.

Translated by Myo Min Aung for RFA Burmese. Edited by Roseanne Gerin and Malcolm Foster.

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