Dissident generals feared arrested

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TWO Burmese regional army commanders known for their sympathy towards anti-government demonstrators have gone missing and are believed to have been arrested, Rangoon-based diplomats reached from Bangkok told Agence-France Press on Thursday.

Brigadier General Nyan Lin, head of the Southeast Command based in Moulmein, and Brigadier General Tun Kyi, head of the Northwest Command based in Mandalay, would be the first senior officers arrested for sympathising with prodemocracy protesters, the diplomats

said.

According to unconfirmed reports, Brig Gen Nyan Lin prevented the army shooting at demonstrators during recent protests in Moulmein, Burma's third largest city 300 kilometres (190 miles) southeast of Rangoon.

He went missing on about August 28 and was believed to have been transferred to the Northern Command in Kachin State, the diplomats said. Latest unconfirmed reports said he had been hospitalised because of epilepsy.

But the diplomats quoted sources close to the general's family as saying he had no history of epilepsy. He is believed to have been arrested and placed in Yekyiaing, a secret political prison 24 kilometres (15 miles) north of Rangoon.

Brig Gen Tun Kyi left his headquarters at Mandalay, the second largest city in Burma 600 kilometres (370 miles) north of Rangoon, on September 8 by special air force plane, the diplomats said.

They said city residents that day heard anti-government slogans shouted over loudspeakers by soldiers at the command headquarters inside the walled Mandalay Palace.

Accoriding to unconfirmed reports, Gen Tun Kyi was dismissed from his command and arrested and is also at Yekyiaing prison, the diplomats said.

Brigadier Generals Nyan Lin and Tun Kyi were the first graduates of the Defence Service Academy, the only military academy in Burma, in Maymyo, 72 kilometres (45 miles) north of Mandalay.

Both were highly regarded as possible successors to the post of defence chief of staff, currently occupied by General Saw Maung.

Burma's 180,000-strong, highly disciplined army has nine regional commands.

There have been reports of tensions within the military in the face of anti-government protests since July but only about 1,000 low-ranking soldiers from the army, navy and air force have defected, according to witnesses.