

75-Year-Old 'Shut Off' Internet

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TBILISI, Georgia — An elderly Georgian woman who purportedly shut off Internet service in her country and neighboring Armenia while scavenging for copper cable is facing charges that could lead to three years in prison.

Authorities say 75-year-old Aiyastan Shakaryan severed a fiber-optic cable on March 28, shutting off the information highway in much of Georgia and all of Armenia for several hours. The cable ran parallel to a railroad track in eastern Georgia where she was purportedly scavenging.

Georgian Interior Ministry spokesman Zurab Gvenetadze said late last week that she has been charged with property destruction, which carries a sentence of up to three years, but it's probable she would get a lighter sentence because of her age.

Shakaryan told television channel Imedi that she wasn't guilty.

The 600-kilometer fiber-optic cable network that stretches through the country belongs to Georgian Railway Telecoms, an offshoot of the state railroad company, which is responsible for their security.

Railroad spokeswoman Irma Stepnadze told news web site Netgazeti.ge that the cables "are guarded at the highest level."

In Armenia, Anush Begloyan, a spokeswoman for the country's largest Internet service provider, Armentel, said "the incident forces our company to think about diversifying our channels."

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