

# Burma ruler rejects call for interim government

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Rangoon (Reuter) — Hundreds of thousands of anti-government demonstrators shouted "victory, victory, victory" through the streets of Rangoon yesterday but won few concessions from President Maung Maung.

Maung Maung rejected demonstrators' demands that his Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) turn over power to an interim government.

In a radio address to the nation, the president asked students and striking workers to put their weight behind a party congress set for September 12. He repeated that he would ask the congress to approve a referendum that would let people decide if Burma should be turned into a multi-party state.

"This is the most that we can concede," he said.

Maung Maung, who took power two weeks ago after military force failed to rid the streets of anti-government protesters, said he approved the "disciplined formation" of a long-banned student union. He said he would tell the government to construct a building quickly for the union.

On August 28 the students unilaterally declared their union re-established. The union was disbanded and its building destroyed shortly after Ne Win took power in 1962.

"Maung Maung didn't concede anything of substance," a Western diplomat in Rangoon said.

The president thanked the army for loyalty and said soldiers and students would be responsible for running the referendum and any election.

Yesterday's demonstration brought together monks and nuns, doctors and nurses, lawyers, students and striking workers who filled four routes converging on Maha Bandula Square in the old colonial capital.

Western diplomats cited reports that the central executive committee, or politburo, of the ruling party had held a crisis meeting.

The reports said its members had then met veteran leader Ne Win who resigned in July after 26 years of iron rule following demonstrations. There was no official confirmation of the meeting of the BSPP leaders.

A government order issued on Wednesday that people's committees end their occupation of government offices or "face the consequences" went ignored.

Monks and students, who have taken over responsibility for security and administration from BSPP officials in many places, were seen taking down official signs from some municipal buildings and raising a Buddhist flag.

In response to a national strike call, the only activity in the city centre appeared connected with the demonstration. Trains, idle for more than a week, began running just to bring jubilant marchers and their banners into the centre.

Airport officials said all flights into the capital were cancelled, including two flights to Bangkok.

Britain, chanting and waving their fists.

The city was buzzing with rumours of troop movements overnight but the army kept a low profile.

Nominally-official newspapers, mouthpieces of the military-led BSPP for a generation, reflected the dramatic erosion of government influence by publishing independent reports unthinkable even a week ago.

The English-language *Guardian*, the most outspoken, led its front page with a statement by the staff of the Foreign Ministry denouncing the BSPP for ruining Burma's image abroad.

It said the staff "demand a true people's interim government" to implement elections under a multi-party system, the rallying cry of demonstrators across the country.

It is also the common goal of independent associations that have sprung up in defiance of the BSPP including the All-Burma Students Union to the League for Democracy and Peace set up by 21 elder statesmen.

Diplomats said municipal districts of Rangoon and up to 40 towns in other parts of the country, including Mandalay, had been taken over by people's committees as BSPP officials, the instruments of day-to-day party control, went underground.

"It really is turning into a people's democracy," a Western diplomat said.

Monks have turned one Rangoon cinema hall into a makeshift court and are dealing with cases of people charged with theft, burglary, prostitution, and the brewing of illicit alcoholic beverages, according to UPI.

The *Guardian* reported the formation of independent unions by dockworkers and seamen, and Burmese sources said teachers and many other groups were creating their own associations.

U Nu, premier of Burma's last democratically elected government and chairman of the League for Peace and Democracy, said yesterday he would not take any post in an interim government demanded by demonstrators.

"It is my final decision. I took a vow not to take any political office and for the remainder of my life I will devote myself to religious activities," U Nu, 82, told reporters.

Vum Ko Hau, former ambassador and league member, told reporters the group had petitioned BSPP chief Maung Maung to announce a decision on an interim government by September 13, the date of a scheduled parliamentary meeting.

The petition also asked Maung Maung to meet a three-member team of emissaries from the league.

For the first time since anti-government street rallies began last month, workers of the Ministry of Defence — identifying themselves by banners — took part in yesterday's

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