

12 looters killed at Rangoon port TN 880930

Old BSPP guard assume top posts

RANGOON — State radio announced yesterday the ruling National Unity Party has named 15 leaders of the former Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) to its new central executive committee.

Party leaders appointed U Tha Kyaw as chairman of the new grouping, the broadcast said. U Tun Yee was named general secretary and U Than Tin joint general secretary. All three were in the top echelons of the BSPP, Burma's sole political party since 1962.

The organization earlier renamed itself the National Unity Party. Western analysts say Gen Saw Maung, who led a Sept 18 coup that toppled the country's first civilian leader in 26 years, is behind the party.

Also yesterday, government troops killed 18 people in three looting incidents, state radio said. Eight people were wounded and three others arrested.

Twelve people were killed when troops opened fire on a group of about 200 people looting a warehouse at the Rangoon port, the broadcast said. Four died and three were arrested after 100 people tried to loot a Construction Ministry facility in Kaba Aye, north of the capital. The other two casualties were from a looting incident in Thamaing, also north of Rangoon.

The military government claimed yesterday that more than half the employees of five ministries have returned to work from a crippling pro-democracy strike.

But a Western diplomat said the workers only planned to pick up their paychecks and were doing little constructive work within a government apparatus that had all but been extinguished in recent weeks.

The general strike that began Aug 8 has become the most effective form of protest since Gen Saw Maung led the Sept 18 coup and brutally suppressed the almost daily anti-government street demonstrations.

The government has ordered all government workers to return to their jobs by Monday.

Although diplomats in Rangoon and some sources in the opposition ranks regard Monday's turnout as a barometer of how much strength is still left in anti-government ranks, a number of analysts in recent days have said that at least for the time being, the government has won the upper hand.

"I think they have won for now. There is not much the opposition can really do right now," one Bangkok-based diplomat said.

The National League for Democracy, the main opposition alliance seeking an end to 26 years of rule by military autocracy, has urged workers to remain on strike until democracy is won.

State radio said Wednesday that 74 per cent of the Ministry of Planning and Finance employees were at work. Other departments with more than half the workforce at work were the ministries of health, home and religious affairs, culture and trade, it said.

"A lot of people are going back to work now so they can pick up their paycheque," said a Western diplomat in Bangkok, who noted that payday comes at the end of the month in Burma. "We've had reports of people sitting around drinking tea." — AP

001/1988/96/0009