

# U Nu says Burma must return to democracy BPS30904

Rangoon (AFP) — Former premier U Nu, toppled in a coup in 1962 that led to one-party rule, says Burma must return to democracy to avoid further strife and that many in the army are sympathetic to anti-government protesters.

He also denied there was a split among protest leaders.

The 81-year-old former premier said the absence from his League for Democracy and Peace of such key figures as former Brig-Gen Aung Gyi, 70, and Aung San Suu Kyi, 42, daughter of Burma's founding father Aung San, did not mean they disagreed.

U Nu said the group he set up on Monday with 20 elder statesmen was aimed at assuring a peaceful transition to democracy after 26 years of rigid rule by the only legal political grouping, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP).

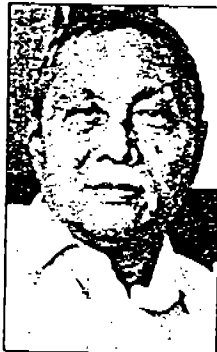
"Aung Gyi is not against this league. Neither is Aung San Suu Kyi. They are for it in principle," U Nu said in an interview with the AFP at his home here on Thursday. "Since we've had no criticism from them, how can there be a split."

"Of course each of them may have his or her own idea about how to go about things," he added.

U Nu said the league was formed to "address immediate, everyday problems" brought about by a month of protests which have seen the authority of the BSPP collapse in most of the country.

But he said it was too early to comment on whether he would form an interim government if the BSPP regime steps down. "The authorities have not even said that they would form one ... must wait to see what comes first," he said.

Citing a pledge he said he made to the Buddha after returning home from 11 years of exile in



U NU — urges restraint

1980, U Nu has said he would not re-enter politics. But he enjoys great respect in Burma and his name has cropped up as candidate for transitional leader if the BSPP steps down for an interim government.

U Nu urged restraint in the current situation, in which protesters nationwide have taken over many BSPP offices, including local administrations.

## HOPES

"People are doing all sorts of things like forcibly taking over party offices, stopping cars on the roads for rides, and other disruptive acts," said U Nu, Burma's first premier after independence from Britain in 1948.

"These are the immediate problems we're facing. Communications have been cut off, transportation halted, resulting in food shortages. Since there is no movement of food, prices are getting high."

"The league hopes to be able to solve all these

problems while trying to attain democracy smoothly and without destruction," said U Nu, whose elected government was overthrown by his then chief-of-staff Gen Ne Win in 1962.

Asked about possible army intervention, U Nu said: "We can't hope for the army as a whole to remain neutral. Some will stay so and some won't."

"However I've heard that a lot of those within the army are sympathetic towards the protesters," he said.

He said his faith in a multi-party system was unshaken despite Ne Win's claim in toppling him in 1962 that parliamentary democracy had failed in Burma.

"There is no other alternative. We must go for a multi-party system."

U Nu said that democracy entailed making compromises but cautioned that "not all of the protesters may be willing to do this."

Of an offer by President Maung Maung to hold a referendum on switching to a multi-party system, he said: "Some say it is not needed. They are questioning this step at a time when the country is in turmoil clamouring for democracy."

"Others seem to accept it. They feel things should be done in an orderly manner as long as democracy is ultimately achieved," the former premier said.

U Nu, who has spent most of his time since returning to Burma translating Buddhist texts and manuscripts, said his "health is good in general" but that he was not "overly healthy."

CA/1988/01/10001