

Aung Gyi says interim govt within grasp

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Rangoon (UPI) — Opposition leaders and government negotiators are nearing agreement on an interim government to replace the authoritarian regime that has ruled Burma since 1962, anti-government leader Brigadier General Aung Gyi said yesterday.

The pace of anti-government demonstrations slowed yesterday, but tens of thousands of protesters, including monks, policemen, navy officers in uniform, students and workers again braved a broiling sun to march through the streets of the capital.

"An interim government is now only an arm's length away," said Aung Gyi, 70, one of four leaders of the nationwide protests that have undermined the one-party government.

"Unity (of the opposition) is the only thing needed now for the realization of an interim government," Aung Gyi said.

He said the Burma Socialist Programme Party government was dying and no axe was necessary to despatch it, but only "prayers for its peaceful departure."

Another opposition

leader, Aung San Suu Gyi, said "extreme discretion and patience" was required as the ruling one-party government edged closer to a decision to resign.

But diplomats said that key differences remained between the opposition and the government of President Maung Maung.

"The government is insisting on naming three members of the interim government," said a Western diplomat who asked not to be identified. "That demand will probably not be accepted."

The diplomat said there were more calls — including one from the "Burmese Muslim Strike Centre" — for the top four opposition leaders to form their own unilateral interim government.

The "Big Four", a loose alliance of top opposition leaders, includes former Prime Minister U Nu, for-

mer defence minister General Tin Oo, as well as Aung Gyi, and Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of independence hero General Aung San.

Burmese political sources reported a rash of resignations from the ruling party, including the chairman of the people's council, equivalent to the mayor, of Mandalay, and 66 doctors from Rangoon Medical College.

Diplomats contacted by telephone from Bangkok reported that a captain from the tough 22nd Light Infantry Division held a press conference to call on army officers to resign en masse from the party.

The 22nd Division is considered the unit most loyal to the top party leaders and the retired General Ne Win.

Troops from the division opened fire on unarmed demonstrators in

Rangoon last month.

"We have unconfirmed reports that (President) Dr Maung Maung has consulted with Ne Win for periods of two hours on various days this week," said a diplomat.

Diplomats said at least three of the five members of the government-appointed election commission which met opposition leaders on Tuesday have since resigned. The commission, which has been charged with holding elections within three months, had earlier told government leaders they did not have the necessary public support to hold peaceful elections.

Rallies and marches by tens of thousands of protesters took place across the city. The US Embassy remained one of the favourite rallying points in the capital.

"Twelve students began a hunger strike in front of the US Embassy and rock groups have made tapes of songs calling for democracy which are being played between speeches at the embassy," said one diplomat.

"The music is not bad — its better than the shouting we usually get," he said

● Two former Ne Win advisers were called in by the authorities for talks overnight, sources close to the two men told AFP yesterday.

There was speculation they might be used as intermediaries between the government and protest leaders calling for the government to resign. Rangoon-based diplomats reached from Bangkok said.

Bo Ye Htut, who was a member with Ne Win in the "30 comrades" group which fought Britain's colonial rule before independence in 1948, was taken by security men at midnight on Thursday, the sources said.

Thakhin Tin Mya, a former member of the Communist Party and the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League was called in four hours later, the sources said.

The security forces told them some government leaders wanted to talk to them, the sources said.

Bo Ye Htut is an ally of Bo Yan Naing, who speaks for nine of the 11 "30 comrades" still living.

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