

Burmese retain sense of humour in their struggle

STUDENTS fighting for democracy in Burma call their saffron-robed monk allies "the yellow army" and giggle delightedly at the irony.

Decades of political repression and months of struggle, sometimes accompanied by violent deaths, have not robbed the Burmese people of a sense of humour about the ways of their country, students there and recent emigres in Bangkok told Reuters.

The most frequent target of humour in Rangoon these days is the Burma Broadcasting Service,

which runs Radio Rangoon and the country's television station.

"When BBS says 'no' we hear 'yes'," a man who recently left Burma said. "When BBS says 'five' we multiply by two."

Radio Rangoon and the television station are virtually the only civilian state organs firmly in the control of the government.

The leaders of the Burma Socialist Programme

Party, which has ruled for a quarter century, are frequent targets of cartoonists' pens in the free press that has arisen since party control of society collapsed.

Long-time leader Ne Win, who stepped down in July, is often shown wearing a bandit's mask.

In one cartoon he was shown as a puppeteer pulling the strings of a puppet labelled President Maung Maung — current

head of state.

One joke that circulated about Ne Win had him trying to join Reagan-Gorbachev disarmament talks to win a worldwide ban on jinglees, the sharpened bicycle spokes shot from catapults and slingshots that people have been arming themselves with in Rangoon.

Students find it amusing that they themselves and striking workers know how to stage a disciplined mass demonstration.

"We had years of practice for party organisation rallies," one said.

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