



Members of the police and military join a demonstration in Rangoon earlier this month. However, the army has remained basically united to date, staging a coup last weekend and firing on unarmed protesters on Monday. — AP

BP 880921

## Burmese escapees to be given temporary refuge

BURMESE who have fled to Thailand will be allowed to stay temporarily for humanitarian reasons, Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila said yesterday.

ACM Siddhi said it was unavoidable that Burmese students and others would flee across the common border.

"There has been some violence in Burma and all

we can do is watch with concern," he said. "We hope the situation settles as soon as possible."

ACM Siddhi said there are 13 Thai Embassy staff remaining in Rangoon and that the envoy would decide if they stay or not.

In the wake of Sunday's power seizure by Defence Minister Saw Maung, hundreds of Burmese have fled to Thailand.

In Muang district of Ranong province, tents have been erected at the Chokechai pier to house 108 students who arrived on Monday morning, while residents have supplied them with food and clothing.

Student leaders Win Ryowt Hmoo, 25, and Maung Maung Theing, 25, said the group was waiting to hear from Victoria Point, or Kawthung, if their help was needed in demonstrations.

Sources said the troops who took over the township on Sunday barred Burmese traders from crossing to Ranong on Monday but let Thai merchants in yesterday.

The Thai traders said 20 troops were guarding the Victoria Point pier, where every arriving ves-

sel was searched for weapons.

Burmese troops told the traders they would have to leave Victoria Point at 5.00 p.m. each day. More than 300 soldiers, mostly Kachins who do not speak Burmese, were deployed in the town.

In Chiang Rai, Mae Sai district, Officer Chai Chaiyand said the situation at the border trading town of Tachilek in Burma appeared normal.

### ARREST

Mr Chai said Burmese troops had been manning immigration and revenue offices at the border checkpoint since Sunday, whereas they remained in their camp before.

The district officer said he had maintained close contact with the chief administrator of Tachilek in order to keep informed of developments.

There were unconfirmed reports that more than 20 Burmese students who were the core of demonstrations at Tachilek were arrested by soldiers on Sunday night, he said.

A source said 30 people, including 11 students, one monk and traders who backed the protests, were arrested by troops in Tachilek.

In Tak province, 72 Burmese, mostly students, returned after taking overnight refuge in Mae Sot district.

Police told AFP that 72 went back after Burmese troops gave Thai officials a letter on Monday saying members of the group would not be persecuted if they returned voluntarily.

The letter said the students, who were housed at a temple after crossing the border on Monday, would "not be blamed for any wrongdoings", and that the situation in Burma had become "peaceful".

Police quoted the students as saying yesterday they had fled from troops of the 97th Fast Mobile Division in control of their hometown of Myawadi, 140 km from Rangoon.

The students said there had been no trouble but that they feared the army would take "severe action" against them and demonstrators, police said.

### 61 die as ferry sinks

Peking (AP) — An overloaded ferry sank on a south China river, killing 61 people and leaving one missing, an official Xinhua news agency said yesterday.

It was the eighth major boat accident since July, and brought the total killed to more than 320, according to official figures. Investigators have said most of the previous accidents were caused by human error.

Xinhua said more than 80 passengers were on the ferry that sank on Sunday in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region that borders Vietnam. It said the boat was overloaded but did not say by how many people, nor did it say if that caused the ferry to sink.