

# Bid to set up 'United States of Burma'

A LITTLE-known underground political group that claims a wide following in Burma has called for "peaceful coexistence in a rebel-free United States of Burma."

Kyaw Min, president of the National Unity Party, told the *Bangkok Post* that the NUP — "a secret underground party" founded some six years ago to represent all of the country's nationalities — had been in contact with minority rebel and major opposition leaders seeking the ouster of the ruling party of Gen Ne Win.

"We pledge our moral support to Gen Aung Gyi, Gen Tin Oo and Aung San Suu Kyi — the leading opponents of the Burma Socialist Programme Party — to form an interim government and to ensure that truly democratic elections will be carried out throughout the nation," he said.

The 48-year-old leader called upon Burma's armed forces to resign from the BSPP and join with the people in support of democracy.

He said the duty of the armed forces is to protect the people from foreign aggressors, not to take up arms against the people.

He had sent the NUP's views on how Burma could be reconstructed to Gen Aung Gyi and other Ne Win foes.

Kyaw Min, a US-educated Kachin, said minority rebel leaders are beginning to accept that independence for each ethnic group would be impossible, and that it would be more practical to strive for a kind of "United States of Burma", with each state being semi-autonomous.

However, he said, the Karen National Union still wants independence.

Over its 26 years in power, the BSPP has forfeited any right to govern the country, he said. "In all that time, they could have done much for the country, but instead have taken it to the bottom."

He described former

president Ne Win as "a leader who was not a leader, the only man in all of Burma with money in foreign banks."

More and more people in Burma realise the need for national unity. The government must be for the people, not in confrontation with them, he said.

While welcoming cooperation with rebel ethnic groups, Kyaw Min said his party rejects the Bur-

mese Communist Party: "Socialism under Ne Win was bad enough, and communism would be worse."

His party would focus on the political struggle and would resort to arms only if all else fails, he vowed: "In an armed struggle, Burmese would be killing Burmese, and that is the last thing we want."

And if a new government is set up?

"We would not want posts in the new government," he said, "We are all businessmen with good incomes. All we would ask for would be freedom and the right to pursue our businesses."

The other leaders of the NUP are Hmuay Kyaing, a Karen, vice president and coordinator; Soe Aung, a Mon, secretary general; and Kyaw Lin, a Shan.



Burmese youths drive around the Sule Pagoda (background) earlier this month to protest authoritarian rule. — AP