

Relatives mourning for victims of ^{BP 880924} bloody coup

"WE think he is dead but we have no one to ask," says the distraught brother of a print shop owner gunned down in the street in the days following last Sunday's coup that has led to strongarm military repression and hundreds of deaths.

Only a lone sandal remained to mark the spot where the hapless printer fell.

Makeshift shrines have been erected throughout the city to those who have died and to honour the spirits of well-being and prosperity that appear to have deserted this most tragically isolated of Southeast Asian capitals.

While a few citizens continue to go about their daily chores — including the siphoning of precious trickles of black market petrol through rubber hoses — many have opted for a lower profile, cowed by the new government's policy of search, seize and shoot if necessary.

Confidence in the new government appears low.

"We had a brief moment of democracy before the generals took over," says a 22-year-old student. "Now, no one dares to speak up."

He walks across the campus of Rangoon University dressed only in his longyi, the traditional skirt-like attire still worn by most Burmese.

At Rangoon General Hospital, his friend has had both legs amputated, and young corpses lie in the morgue, some with serious head wounds.

The coup and its aftermath have, for the time being at least, brought to an end the mass open-air opposition rallies and charged speeches that many believed would spur the impoverished country into a new era of freedom and openness.

"The first thing they must do is stop the shootings," declared leading opposition figure Aung San Suu Kyi during an interview at a lakeside villa kept under tight student protection at all times.

Married to British academic Michael Aris, the charismatic female leader and daughter of assassinated wartime independence hero Aung San admits to being discouraged by recent developments.

"Everything was beginning to improve, but now they are killing all of us," bemoans one of her young countrymen, clearly apprehensive about speaking with a foreigner.

He fears for the future of the recently restored Students Union, which spearheaded the struggle for multi-party democracy, and miserably recalls friends being cut down in the latest wave of shootings.

"I ran away as they died — their lives were wasted," he says, head bowed.

"Ne Win is trying to kill our generation — that is his plan," he says, referring to the strong-

man who ran the country with an iron hand for 26 years and is widely believed to be still at the helm.

A foreign observer in Rangoon describes the tumble-down former British colonial jewel as "a city under siege and gripped by fear".

Troops have swept through neighbourhoods seizing a plethora of crudely fashioned weapons and arresting anyone who appears to resist the officially-proclaimed drive to restore law and order.

There is nevertheless pessimism about "law and order" being reestablished any time soon.

Military intelligence units, abetted by civilian spies, are again working the streets, on the lookout for gatherings of more than five people.

One of the old government mouthpieces, the *Working Peoples* daily newspaper, is again routinely playing down the violence and extent of casualties.

Calling for peace, the freshly restored government organ had in recent weeks shown some willingness to present news about the mass opposition movement more realistically.

by Philip Smucker
in Rangoon

Amid the desperation in the capital, there are reports of a brisk underground trade in home-made weapons, including small grenades that can be launched from a sling-shot — still the most popular weapon on the street.

Larger hand-grenades have also filtered on to the black market and official media accounts have conceded that M-79 rocket launchers were used in some of the assaults on government buildings that preceded last Sunday's coup.

Although most of the regular weapons were captured in recent clashes with police and military units, some observers here suspect that a limited supply of weapons may have found their way here from northern Burma.

"The government has cut supplies, information and co-operation but we outnumber them," said one Burman defiantly. "They stand no chance."

Nevertheless, few dared venture out on the streets on Thursday, and fear of drinking water poisoned by government agents was widespread.

"These rumours indicate that the people have no faith in the government," said one Western diplomat.

Many diplomats here doubt that people believe the new junta will keep its pledge to hold "free and fair elections".

Said one political attache said: "It is just a question of what the people are prepared to do about it."

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