

Burmese Opposition in move to form new front

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Rangoon (Agencies) — Opposition leaders announced yesterday they would form a united front of all groups struggling for democracy against the new military government of General Saw Maung.

It was the first significant attempt by Aung Gyi, Tin Oo, and Aung San Suu Kyi to forge a new opposition strategy after a bloody crackdown by Saw Maung after Sunday's coup.

A spokesman for the three, Tun Shwe, said: "Many organisations including the students have requested them to form a front as an umbrella organisation of all groups striving for democracy. The leaders have now consented. Formal announcement of the formation of the front will follow soon."

Tin Oo said within two or three days he would announce tactics to counter the army's force of arms. "After that we will take concerted action against the military junta," he told Reuters.

Tin Oo also welcomed the US decision to suspend aid to Burma and said the Burmese people were "encouraged by foreign governments use of strong diplomatic terms against the military government."

"It is despicable to see people who have guns shoot those who don't have any," Tin Oo told United Press International. He said he doubted the military would arrest top opposition leaders.

"But certainly they are out looking for student and worker leaders and quite a few of them are in hiding," Tin Oo said.

Also yesterday, a military attaché at a foreign embassy told the Associated Press he and his colleagues were told by the military intelligence chief, Brigadier General Khin Nyunt, that as of Wednesday 263 people, including 238 civilians, had been killed since the coup.

Khin Nyunt told the attachés invited to a briefing on Thursday that 188 civilians were killed in Rangoon, the capital, and 50 others in other towns. The government described those casualties as looters.

The others killed were security forces in the capital and two other towns, he said.

State-run Radio Rangoon had earlier given a death toll of about 150. A Western ambassador said accounts from witnesses and doctors indicated as many as 400 people, many of them unarmed, peaceful demonstrators, were killed in Rangoon alone.

Opposition leaders said yesterday pamphlets distributed in Rangoon under their signature urging an end to a civil servants' strike were bo-



Buddhist monks join protesters in Rangoon on September 17, one day before the military staged a coup. — Reuters

and that a train was able to leave Burma's second city for Pyinmana in the north on Thursday afternoon.

In a radio address to the nation for the first time since the coup, Saw Maung told the opposition yesterday not to make any further demands on his government.

"I would like to request the respective leaders that for the time being they not make any other demands and try to control the situation," he said.

Tin Oo and Aung San Suu Kyi and Brigadier Aung Gyi have called on the military government to give an accounting of civilians killed by the army, release jailed pro-democracy campaigners and negotiate immediately on the formation of an interim government to lead Burma back to democracy.

'NO PLANS'

Brigadier General Khin Nyunt told the foreign military attachés on Thursday: "We are just restoring the peace and at this time we have no plans to negotiate."

"As soon as there is peace and tranquillity and law and order in the country, democratic multi-party general elections will be held," he said.

"The defence forces have no wish whatsoever to take control of state power," he was quoted as saying by the official radio.

"What they have done

Saw Maung also said in his radio address his government would go ahead with multi-party general elections despite the opposition's refusal to participate and said power would be handed over to whichever party won the elections.

No date has been set for the polls.

Aung San Suu Kyi said on Thursday the opposition would not even think about participating in elections until the shooting stopped.

An aide to former prime minister U Nu, Burma's last democratically elected head of government, said he also would refuse to join in the elections.

The 82-year-old U Nu was ailing and under doctors' care, the aide said.

U Nu has renewed calls to other opposition leaders to join forces with his alternative government

— a revived version of the government that was toppled in 1962. He said the surviving members of his 26-year-old Parliament would meet in November.

"We do not cooperate with U Nu," said Tin Oo. "These former members of parliament were elected before the military coup of 1962 and are now in their 70s."

The army continued to search homes and arrest dissidents, witnesses and diplomats said. Searches were sometimes accompanied by beatings if pro-democracy literature was found, they said.

No reliable estimates are available on how many people have been arrested.

A Western diplomat

at demonstrations for democracy that filled Rangoon's streets before the military takeover.

He said soldiers were searching for a Buddhist monk known as "the Red Eagle", a well-known leader of pro-democracy strikes that have paralysed the country.

A doctor at Rangoon General Hospital told Reuters 500 people were being treated there for army-inflicted wounds. Many had been shot in the chest or back.

The hospital was critically short of medicine and other supplies, the doctor said.

Minor surgery was being performed without anaesthetics. Many wounded were lying on mats in corridors because there were not enough beds.

"This is a true emergency situation, hospitals are practically empty of supplies," a foreign aid administrator said.

Reports of fighting between students and soldiers continued to be received here from Mandalay, which was totally under the control of monks and students for weeks before the army moved.

Mandalay residents told Agence France-Press troops had surrounded a monastery there in a face-off with hundreds of armed monks and people inside and in the adjoining cemetery. Five or six people were killed at Ma-soyoin Monastery but troops had not tried to overrun the site, apparently because they realised it would result in

from fighting ethnic insurgents in the north and east and had been told they were being sent to fight Burma Communist Party members. The troops were surprised to find themselves facing students and monks, the residents said.

Tin Oo said the heavy concentration of troops in the capital exposed the army to attack by ethnic guerrillas.

"They will not be in a position to reinforce their hardpressed troops in the rebel areas," the former general said. "This is certainly making their position very difficult."

Official radio has admitted that demonstrators have captured at least 66 weapons including hand grenades and sub-machine guns. It said searches were turning up illegal weapons all over the country.

Protesters vowed to fight on and there were rumours of quantities of military weapons being smuggled into the city for the next round of clashes.

There were also unconfirmed reports that the communists are supplying Chinese-made arms

in the capital. The BCP operate mostly in the north and northeast on the border with China.

"I believe fighting will continue, but with the students outnumbered and outgunned we may see a period of guerrilla war and terrorism," one western diplomat told Reuters.

Rangoon residents told AFP that food has been plentiful, with anti-government demonstrators organising special shipments to keep the capital supplied.

The US Embassy evacuated five staff members yesterday in a precautionary move. More staff members are to be flown out in coming days but the embassy will stay open, according to Ross Petting, spokesman of the US Embassy in Bangkok. On Thursday a special aircraft of the Bangladesh airline carried some 53 people, mostly Bangladeshi nationals and families of embassy staff to Dhaka.

The plane also carried foreign nationals of Australia, Nepal, Egypt and the Netherlands, officials at Dhaka airport said.



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