

Burma student leaders getting secret training at Karen rebel base

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MORE than 60 leaders of Burma's protest movement are undergoing secret training in explosives at a Karen rebel base as part of a planned guerrilla campaign against the Burmese military.

The protest leaders, described as "hardcore" by a Karen spokesman, joined the rebels in two batches after seeking political asylum in Thailand and being forced back into Burma by Thai authorities.

More than 200 Burmese, mostly students, have fled to Karen camps or crossed the border into Thailand since Thursday.

Karen National Union (KNU) vice president Than Aung told Chuchart Kangwaan, a correspondent for the *Bangkok Post*, that 34 Burmese students joined Karen forces last week — before Sunday's military coup.

"We plan to give them training, short-term demolition training," he said in an interview at the Karen headquarters in Maw Po Kay, south-eastern Burma.

At the same time, Burmese and Thai officials say that another 32 students who had been repatriated after fleeing to Thailand on Monday were now believed to be undergoing similar training.

"They were sent back to Burma after fleeing to Thailand and were picked up by the Karens. They're now in Karen bases," one official said.

Burmese troops are hunting for the students, according to residents of the area, who quoted the local garrison commander, Thein Aung, as saying all were on a wanted list.

Than Aung said the Karens had not yet decided whether the students would be armed to fight the government, "because we are still screening

Reports: Page 6

them for agents of Ne Win.

"We believe the students will continue their protests for another month or so, and then if they don't win they will go underground to fight the government," he said.

Asked whether there had been an agreement between opposition leaders and the Karens to join forces in an armed struggle, Than Aung said:

"The Karens have reached an understanding with the opposition and students — not an alliance, but an understanding — that we will help them politically and militarily if necessary."

KNU leader Gen Bo Mya announced yesterday that the rebels have "definite plans" to coordinate with students, monks and other people to fight the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) until full democracy is achieved.

In a statement signed by the general, the Karens urged "those fighting for democracy not to get discouraged but to continue fighting with more intensity until the downfall of the BSPP government."

"If we give up now the lives of the students, monks and children sacrificed for democracy would be in vain," Bo Mya said.

He repeated the KNU's condemnation of the BSPP government and announced that it had "definite plans and ar-

Burma

rangements to coordinate with the students, monks and general public in their fight against the BSPP government."

The Karen leader also urged foreign countries to freeze aid to Burma, adding that continued assistance would encourage the continued killing of innocent people.

Burmese students arriving in Thailand have said that a volunteer guerrilla army of 20,000 students and other protesters was being formed to fight the government in Rangoon.

"They asked us for 20,000 volunteers and got

50,000 applicants," one student said.

However, Bangkok-based diplomats were highly sceptical of the report, noting that none of the rebel forces could arm that many protesters.

Karen rebel sources told the *Bangkok Post* that 44 students arrived on Thursday at Wangkha camp, opposite Mae Sot District, and asked for weapons to fight Rangoon.

Karen commanders feel it would be useless to give the students weapons because they had no military training, the sources said, adding that Karen fighters already face an arms shortage.

The students were told

the Karens would be happy if they joined the rebel group and underwent military training.

The sources said the students would be escorted back to the interior of Burma by Karen troops when they are ready to return.

Meanwhile, another 67 Burmese students, teachers and civilians from Myawaddy township arrived in Mae Sot yesterday, Thai authorities said.

Officials said about 13 of the fugitives swam across the Moei River and six of them crossed the border on foot from Phalu Karen rebel camp.

They include five female teachers, officials said, adding that the fugitives are all being housed at Wat Thai Wattanaram in Mae Sot.

Hla Han, 23, who identified himself as secretary-general of the Burma Youth Liberation Front, said he had gone to Myawaddy to organise protests in the border trading town.

He said the 67 decided to flee when Burmese troops started house-to-house searches.

Also yesterday, more

than 100 university students from Rangoon and Moulmein arrived at the border opposite Mae Hong Son Province.

National Democratic Front (NDF) spokesman Dr Tu Ja said the students are seeking help from Thai university students.

Among the fleeing students is Ko Aung Naing,

a fifth year medical student from Rangoon University and the joint general-secretary of the Students Union of Burma, Dr Tu Ja said.

Many of the students headed for the Thai border after Sunday's military coup, fearing a massacre, and are now living with NDF members, he said.