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A truck loaded with troops moves through the streets of Rangoon on September 19, a day of bloody suppression of anti-government protest. — AP

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Rangoon troops brace for new round of protests

Rangoon (UPI, AFP) — The military regime yesterday beefed up its forces in Rangoon and put them on special alert to halt reported plans by students to defy a ban on public demonstrations, witnesses and opposition sources said yesterday.

Official Rangoon radio on Sunday night reported troops killed 22 more people, 12 of them on Sunday and the others earlier.

Soldiers strung rolls of barbed wire across some streets yesterday, witnesses said. Armoured trucks packed with troops patrolled the city. People entering the city were stopped and searched at military checkpoints.

"I think the army is on maximum alert," said Win Htin, a spokesman for opposition leader and former defence minister Gen Tin Oo. "We are expecting trouble."

Ma Thane Gi, secretary and spokeswoman for opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, said additional troops have been brought into the capital, but she did not know the numbers.

Earlier student groups said they would defy a ban on public demonstrations declared by the military government.

Diplomats estimate troops killed up to 1,000 people when they crushed anti-government demonstrations last week. The government itself admits more than 250 civilians were killed.

Win Htin said moderate opposition leaders believe it is too dangerous to challenge the military on the streets.

"We plan for sit-ins or non-cooperation, not demonstrations," he said. He denied reports on government radio that large numbers of workers were heeding a government call to return to their jobs.

He said armed opposition to the government, whether in the cities or in the rural areas with ethnic rebel groups was not practical.

tical.

He noted that massive protests have forced the fall of three heads of state in the past two months.

Meanwhile, witnesses said security forces were searching buses heading into central Rangoon yesterday, refusing to allow some state employees without their office identity cards to continue their journey.

More state employees were seen entering government offices yesterday than in recent weeks, they said.

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The military government has ordered all civil servants to return to work by October 3 or face dismissal.

Some non-government workers were also prevented from continuing their journey as security forces searched both passengers and vehicles, the witnesses said.

Soldiers have been tearing down anti-government posters but new ones reappear regularly, urging government workers to pursue their strike even if the transport situation improves, witnesses said.

Several times in recent days, state radio has read lists of high percentages of people returning to work in various townships across the country.

The posters claim this is only propaganda.

During a state radio broadcast monitored in Bangkok late Sunday, a voice could be heard shouting "don't believe it" and "it's a lie" as the announcer read a list of areas where people had returned to work.

It was not clear where the interference came from. Similar interruptions occurred in broadcasts of a speech by the head of the military government, Gen Saw Maung, on Friday and Saturday.

A student group has sent a letter to Saw Maung demanding an end to the shootings and the handing over of power to an interim government, the first such message from the students to the military leadership.

"We call on the army to stay neutral in the struggle and we will be ready to cooperate with the true armed forces serving the interests of the people and the state," the letter said.

It said democracy was just around the corner in Burma when the military stepped in.