

Students to await result of Burma elections

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BURMESE students will hold off an armed struggle against the military government to see if promised general elections towards a democratic regime turn out to be fair, two student leaders told AFP on Monday.

Win Moe, 23, and Aung Naing, 24, joint secretaries of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU), said they realised Burmese opposition leaders might seek a political solution by participating in elections promised by the military junta which seized power on September 18.

A date for the ballot has not been set.

"But we believe that if the military government holds elections, the elections will not be fair," said Mr Win Moe, first joint secretary of the federation which he said comprised some 50,000 students seeking democracy.

He said students would wait until the ballot before deciding whether to begin armed struggle and use this as a "waiting period to prepare and get ready."

The two student leaders, who asked that their location not be revealed, have fled from government-held territory in Burma to jungle regions on the border with Thailand under the control of ethnic Karen guerrillas fighting Rangoon.

Key Burmese opposition figures have not said whether they would participate in the polls while student leaders in the forefront of protest

marches have gone underground since the coup fearing arrest and to organise armed resistance. They say peaceful demonstrations have failed to win democracy.

The government has offered a bounty of 50,000 kyats (about \$8,000 at official rates) for each of 180 student leaders, Mr Win Moe said.

He and Mr Aung Naing said they had asked the National Democratic Front (NDF), joining 10 ethnic groups fighting Rangoon for regional autonomy for the past 40 years, to supply some 300 students now in Karen territory with separate military bases to mount an armed struggle against the junta government.

Po Tun, an ethnic Arakan and member of the NDF presidium, said on Sunday in Mae Sot, Tak that it was difficult for the NDF to give "full material" support to the Burmese students.

Mr Po Tun said the Karen's lucrative cross-border trade with Thailand had been disrupted by the turmoil in Burma and they lacked cash.

He said NDF leaders would discuss "how they could render assistance" to the students in a meeting scheduled for the first week of October.

Senior NDF official Tu Ja, a member of the Kachin tribe, said by phone from Chiang Mai that the students should not join with any of the ethnic groups.

"Their group is a different force," he said, adding that the NDF stand would be finalised when it met in October.

He said he was concerned that some political groups might use the students for their own ends. He did not elaborate.

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