

1,000 protesters at Karen camps

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ABOUT 1,000 Burmese students and protesters have arrived at the Thai border and are now housed at three Karen rebel camps, an executive committee member of the Karen National Union, Saw Soe Aung, said yesterday.

Saw Soe Maung said there are now about 600 students and protesters at the They Baw Bo camp, located opposite Pop Phra district of Tak province.

The number of protesters arriving at the camp swelled from about 200 on Saturday to 400 yesterday, he said, adding that more had arrived from other Karen camps.

The Karen leader also said there are over 300 students and protesters in Kle Day camp opposite Mae Salit, and over 70 new arrivals at the Karen base of Wang Kha.

Saw Soe Aung said

there are another 200 students and protesters housed in a Karen-controlled area in the Dawna Range, about two days walk from Kle Day.

The area is under the responsibility of Lt-Col La Mu, he said, adding that when conditions are right the group will be sent to They Baw Bo camp.

Saw Soe Aung said the Karens want to gather the students and protesters into one area to make organisation and coordination easier.

Col Gladstone, chairman of the border relations committee, said the students are likely to be trained in the use of G-2, G-3 and G-4 automatic rifles — weapons predominantly used by Burmese troops.

He said rifle training could be completed within two weeks, but explosives

and sabotage training could take longer. He said the students could be trained to handle explosives within a month.

The Karen colonel said some of the students, particularly science students, would have an advantage in explosives training.

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In Kle Day, the first batch of about 100 Burmese students began military training at a Karen guerrilla base here yesterday and vowed to wage an armed struggle against Rangoon authorities to establish a multi-party democratic system.

The students, including seven women, were taught how to use rifles and mortars under close supervision of Karen guerrillas.

Ngwe Win, 28, leader of a group calling themselves the Burma Students Democratic Front, said the military training marked the beginning of a violent struggle against the Rangoon regime following the apparent failure of their peaceful call for democracy.

He said his group would give support to any Burmese pro-democracy movement and cooperate in toppling the Rangoon government.

The students will not return to Rangoon until a multi-party political system is established, he said.

"The people have been stripped of their basic rights during the 26 years of rule by the Ne Win regime. The students will go back to classes, and workers will go back to work, only when we have democracy," he said.

Karen leaders said they had decided to provide training for the students because they shared a common goal of establishing democracy in Burma.

"Only 100 out of more than 300 students were chosen for the training because we have to find capable persons...because this will be real fighting. If they fail in the war, they will not only lose their lives, but their mission will also fail," one Karen leader said.

Meanwhile, Burmese government authorities announced in Myawaddy opposite Mae Sot district of Tak yesterday that students had until October 4 to surrender.

Burmese authorities promised that the students would not be punished if they surrendered within the deadline. Otherwise they would be considered rebels.

CP 1988/64/10001