

Burmes Opposition move to form new front

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



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

and that a train was able to leave Burma's second city for Pymnana 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.

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

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 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

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 Petzing, spokesman of the US Embassy in Bangkok. On Thursday a special aircraft of the Bangladesh airline carried some 53 people, mostly Bangladeshi nationals and fam-

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