

# Burmese opposition ridicules promises

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RANGOON — Burma's leading opposition party yesterday ridiculed the military's promises of free and fair multi-party elections and said the people would hate the military for years because of atrocities the army had inflicted on them.

"The army has blatantly and indiscriminately killed students, firing on peaceful demonstrators — and student leaders are being arrested still," said former defence minister Gen Tin Oo, now vice president of the National League for Democracy.

Tin Oo told United Press International the atrocities had caused deep bitterness and hostility towards the military.

"This hostility and hatred will take many years to reconcile among the people," the retired general

said.

A government spokesman Tuesday said 348 people have been killed since the military coup on Sept 18, widely seen as a measure to stop the strikes and demonstrations that had nearly toppled the authoritarian government.

Diplomats put the death toll at about 1,000.

Soon after taking power the military promised "free and fair" multi-party elections.

"That is very doubtful," Tin Oo said.

He said the league was still considering whether to register the party under bylaws announced late Wednesday and whether to contest the polls.

"If they have the will to begin democracy, first they must show it through deeds such as (allowing) freedom of association, assembly, speech, and the press," he said. "The military junta has not shown the slightest freedoms."

He said many students were being arrested nationwide, tortured and illegally detained for long periods without trial.

"No trials are being held, there is still sporadic and random gunfire at innocent persons, and the press and mass media are stopped and not allowed to function properly," the retired general said.

He predicted "great progress" would be made in Burma if democratic elections take place. He said he expected a reverse "brain drain" with many of the country's highly qualified professionals returning to help rebuild their homeland.

Rangoon radio Wednesday evening announced the government's election commission had drawn up bylaws to govern registration of parties.

Among the four chapters of the bylaws is one giving the government the right to "annul" a party's registration if it is found to violate any of five broadly worded clauses contained in the bylaws.

The bylaws said that the commission has the right to summon witnesses, inspect documents, and scrutinize all party applications before they can be registered.

A spokesman for Tin Oo said the military had been forced to reduce its presence in Rangoon because of a sharp increase in attacks by ethnic minority guerrillas in border areas.

"The 22nd and 33rd Light Infantry Divisions are withdrawing now and the Rangoon command is only 6,000 (men)," he said.

Other Burmese sources, however, said many troops were being hidden in Rangoon parks, stadiums, and cinema halls and estimated the total troop strength in the capital to be 10,000-15,000. — UPI

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