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# Burma — who's in charge?

By THOMAS THOMSON

**B**URMA'S army and ruling party are making plans to resume normal control over the vast Irrawaddy Delta where the nation's rice crop is about to be harvested, Rangoon Radio said.

The announcement, broadcast by the official station on Friday night, said Brigadier General Myint Aung, party head and military commander of the Irrawaddy Division, which borders the capital Rangoon to the south and west, met all of the region's leading military, party and government officials on Friday.

They discussed "the resumption of normal operations, the harvest and sale of paddy, the procurement and sale of paddy which will soon be harvested," the broadcast said.

The Irrawaddy Delta, where the great river breaks up into nine channels to flow into the Andaman Sea, is in effect one vast rice paddy, 240 kilometres wide and 290 kilometres long.

Its fertility had once made Burma the world's top rice exporter, but 26 years of rule by the Burma Socialist Programme Party broke down farmers' motivation and the transportation and distribution system. Even Rangoon has been

short of rice at times this year.

The Irrawaddy meeting also discussed the "observance of the state constitution, looting and destruction of public, cooperative, and private property, lawless acts and use of force" during a nationwide revolt that has driven long-time ruler Ne Win from power and forced his successor Sein Lwin out of office after only 18 days of mayhem and bloodshed.

A veteran analyst of Burmese affairs said the Irrawaddy meeting was one of several tentative steps taken by the party to reassert itself after losing control of many cities and towns and of essential national services such as the railway and oil refining.

He said the lack of concessions in a national address on Thursday night by President Maung Maung, who followed Sein Lwin as party chief on August 19, showed the party was not about to give in to the demands of demonstrators.

The protesters want power to be handed over to an interim government that would move Burma towards a multi-party political system.

"The party is trying to reassert its authority as quickly as possible," he said, also citing warnings to student protesters to vacate government

offices they had seized and pleas to government workers to go back to their jobs.

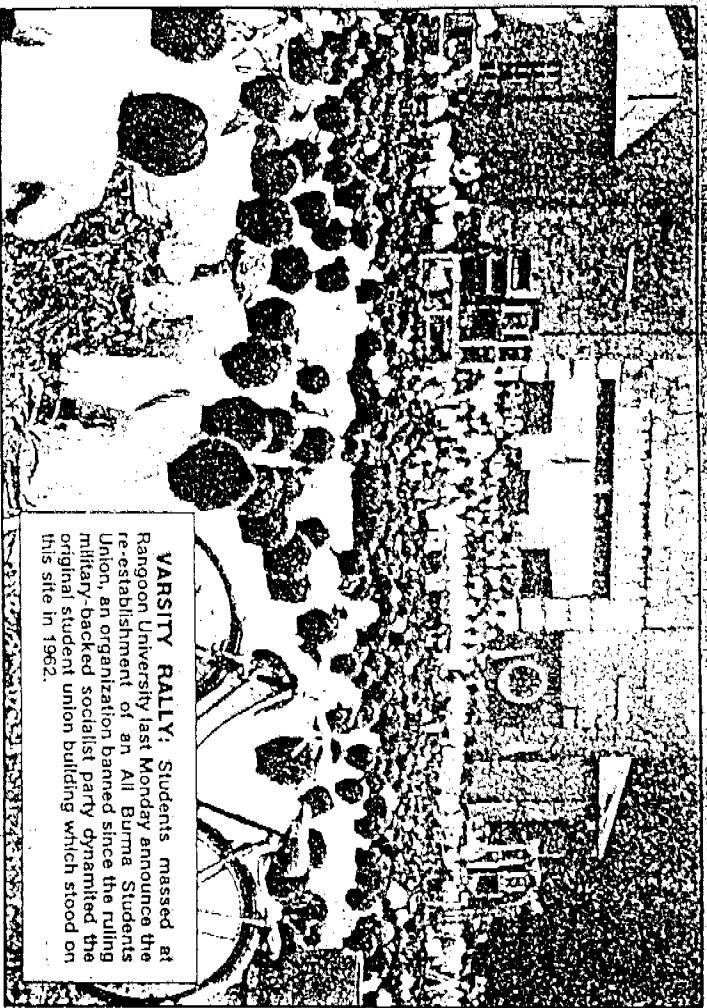
Protest organizers called no major demonstrations for yesterday, but thousands of students and striking workers streamed through the streets of the capital chanting anti-government slogans.

Striking railway workers vowed not to go back to work.

The next major push by anti-government forces is scheduled for Thursday. They have promised to begin an indefinite general strike on that day and stage a massive demonstration if the party has not handed over control.

A one-day general strike last Thursday stopped all economic activity in the impoverished country and sent hundreds of thousands of anti-government demonstrators onto the streets of Rangoon and other cities and towns. Maung Maung has asked for patience until the party holds an emergency congress on September 12. He has promised to push the congress into approving a referendum that would let the people decide whether or not to adopt a multi-party system.

Opposition leaders say this issue has already been decided in the streets. — Reuter



**VARSITY RALLY:** Students massed at Rangoon University last Monday announce the re-establishment of an All Burma Students Union, an organization banned since the ruling military-backed socialist party dynamited the original student union building which stood on this site in 1962.